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EXPLORING EXPERIMENTATION IN DESIGN THEORY TO FIND NEW WAYS
OF WORKING, UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

Michael Fan

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the nature of experimentation in graphic design in order to understand how a designer might uncover new ways of working apart from the conventional solution-based approach in professional practice. It is informed by practices in graphic design, animated films, and art. Particular attention is focused on alternative design experimentation. The thesis opens up a debate about the relationship of process and professionalism in design practice.

In contemporary practice, designers learn to embrace the mistakes which occur during the design process. These mistakes or 'failures' have guided designers to definite solutions using effective and efficient strategies and techniques, and have also offered spaces for alternative approaches to emerge when a designer emphasizes his own creative purposes.

The paper proposes failure and an adaptation of ideas by theorist Judith Halberstam, for designers to consider as a new approach to creative design that provides not only a new methodology, but also a new way of understanding how experimentation works. Halberstam's treatise, *The Queer Art of Failure,* examines the traditional concept of failure as a way to explore, detour, and 'lose oneself' in order to offer more creative ways of being in the world.

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Introduction

The blank page can lead to an exciting and creative journey for the designer, but can also be a daunting and intimidating endeavour. For some, an instinctual response is to 'go and experiment' in order to tackle the blank canvas. This expression sparked my curiosity and led to this paper: How and where does one begin to truly experiment using the tools of design? Design process has focused primarily on finding solutions for business challenges and social issues. This traditional process includes practices and methods which are logical, objective and guided to a definite solution. In this paper, I argue that by taking a leap of faith and risking the chance of failing and making mistakes, a designer has the opportunity to engage in a full experimental process.

'Go and experiment'

A recent encounter with this directive occurred during my first year of the Masters of Design Program at York University. I participated in a workshop where each student was given an object, such as a hair elastic. The aim of the project was to *go and experiment* with the object to find its essence. Throughout the workshop, I was uncomfortable; I struggled with this open-ended exploration to discover the object's properties and potential. Eventually, I had to let go of a design convention that *form follows function,* a principle I most frequently use in my own design practice. In failing to find graphic form from the function of the object, I generated new ideas of how an elastic band could work, look, and sound. The end product was a type design based on the object's unique visual qualities. This workshop pushed me to take a risk, to make first and think after, which led me to ask questions of design exploration: how does a designer set out to experiment, and how can a designer leverage experimentation to discover/uncover new ways of working?

The purpose of this paper is to explore ways in which a designer can use a theoretical approach to develop and understand their own practice. How can designers leverage experimentation to include failure to discover/uncover new ways of working? In order to explore failure, this paper turns to a treatise by Judith Halberstam entitled *The Queer Art of Failure*. Her treatise is about finding alternatives to conventional understandings of success in a heteronormative and capitalist society, to academic disciplines that confirm

what is already known according to approved methods of knowing, and to cultural criticism that claims to break new ground but cleaves to conventional practices. Halberstam proposes that failure can offer more creative, cooperative, and surprising ways of being in the world, supporting her claims with examples from the fields of film and art. Halberstam discusses ways of failing called *modes of unbecoming*. I posit that Halberstam's modes–*losing, looping and forgetting*–can be adopted as approaches for design experimentation. These modes are performances that allow a person to explore, detour, and lose oneself (thus, unbecome) in order to map out the different relationships failure has to knowledge, and to lead to alternative forms of embodiment.

This thesis paper was an opportunity for me to expand thoughts about practice beyond what might happen in a professional context. The profession of graphic design is commonly defined as a practice carrying an attitude focused on solving a problem to satisfy particular criteria. The thesis paper is structured to provide the reader with an examination and adaptation of *The Queer Art of Failure* to serve as a design practice model, seeking new ways of working. This paper guides the reader through a critical analysis of various design practices, and examines the relationships failed results have to the creative process. After introducing these connections, the paper explains how *The Queer Art of Failure* can contribute to graphic design and how a designer can uncover new ways of working through failing. Though graphic design is often discussed in relation to other kinds of design such as product design, examples from the genres of film and art also prove useful for my investigation because both these media have a history of finding alternative rewards through failure.

The Queer Art of Failure

Failure, Failing and Hegemonic Systems

Although there are criteria that correspond to the notions of success and failure, these categories exist on a continuum. Even if we accept the logics of 'winning or losing' as true and natural, there are infinite points between the extremes where achievements can reside. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam asks us to reconsider the conventional understandings of success and failure altogether. By dismantling the logics of success and failure with which we currently live, Halberstam suggests that failure can offer its own types of rewards. "Under certain circumstances failing… may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (Halberstam 2). The current notions of success and failure are determined by hegemony. As defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *hegemony* is the leadership or dominance by a country or a social group over others. Culturally, hegemony is established by means of language through mass communication of media that continually transmits information and ideas to the public to reinforce economic, capitalist power. Along with the power that the hegemonic system provides for capitalism, failure is identified as such when one does not conform to the ideals of the dominant.

A hegemonic system and the notion of 'common sense' are key ideas to understanding and describing professionalism. A hegemonic system, as Halberstam explains is:

> a multilayered system by which a dominant group achieves power not through coercion but through the production of an interlocking system of ideas which persuades people of the rightness of any given set of often contradictory ideas and perspectives. (17)

Common sense, as Halberstam describes it, is similarly, "a set of beliefs that are persuasive because they do not present themselves as ideology or try to win consent" (ibid.). It is triggered when we engage in 'traditional intellectual activity,' and so participate in the construction of the hegemonic (ibid.). In contrast, the alternative to the traditional, as Halberstam asserts, is an organic intellectual activity that occurs when one works with others to sort through the contradictions of capitalism to illuminate oppressive forms (ibid). In understanding failure in this way, professional design practice contributes to the perpetuation and construction of a hegemonic system through its commercial use and is, itself one because designers seeks to produce acceptable messages and solutions for mass communication. In contrast, the alternative to this hegemony would be for a designer to create work that focuses on the his/

her own process and redefines what is valuable in what is being communicated, but may not be the dominant or accepted stance.

Graphic Design and the Construction of the Hegemonic System

In professional practice, designers employ a creative process to address social problems and business challenges. Acknowledging graphic design as a visual tool for mass production and communication to a large audience allows us to consider how the design process functions not only to solve problems but also to reinforce the ideological underpinnings of capitalism. The use of the design process to produce solutions can be seen in contemporary graphic design practice. In her book *Graphic Design Thinking: Beyond Brainstorming*, graphic designer Ellen Lupton explains how the design process helps expand a designer's creative voice and also produce solutions. Here she describes, "*the design process* is a mix of intuitive and deliberate actions that can include personal rituals such as taking a long walk or a hot shower, or structured endeavours like interviewing the client or, distributing a questionnaire" (Lupton 2011, 4). The phases of the design process help to facilitate the dissemination of graphic design as a dominant form of selling consumables, goods or services. Lupton organized the design process and its methods around three main phases: *How to Define Problems, How to Get Ideas,* and *How to Create Form* (Table 1). Lupton's book features exercises, including team-based approaches and techniques to "help designers expand their individual and collective creative voices" (ibid.); the design process is continually constructed around finding definite solutions for particular criteria. Lupton explains that the

How to Define Problems	How to Get Ideas	How to Create Form
Brainstorming	Visual Brain Dumping	Sprinting
Mind Mapping	Forced Connections	Alternative Grids
Interviewing	Action Verbs	Kit of Parts
Focus Groups	Everything from Everywhere	Brand Languages
Visual Research	Rhetorical Figures	Mock-Ups
Brand Matrix	Icon, Index, Symbol	Physical Thinking
Brand Books	Collboration	Take the Matter Outside
Site Research	Co-design	Unconventional Tools
Creative Brief	Visual Diary	Regurgitation
	Lost in Translation	Reconstruction
	Concept Presentations	

Table 1. Ellen Lupton, *The Design Process break-down.*

design process can aid designers to search for useful and inspiring ideas by providing methods that have previously worked for other designers.

> […] the creative process tends to follow predictable pathways. By breaking down this process into steps and implementing conscious methods of thinking and doing, designers can open their minds to vibrant solutions that satisfy clients, users, and themselves. (ibid.)

As an example, graphic designers Paula Scher and Daniel Weil, in the book *Design Diaries: Creative Process in Graphic Design* by Lucienne Roberts and Rebecca Wright, collaborated on a project that follows the three phases of Lupton's process. The project was to design the brand identity and packaging for a new zero calorie natural sweetener vetted by a number of people in The Coca-Cola Company (Roberts 177). Scher and Weil were given a brief, researched information, and a wish list of things to include in the final product. The objective was to make the *Truvia* identity distinctive from its brand competitors such as *Sweet 'N Low, EquaL,* and *Splenda.* Scher and Weil developed ideas through a collaborated process which included multiple redesigns of the logo and the package design. Their process challenged the conventional aesthetic of sweetener packaging. The final product (Fig 1.), when compared to the other brands, is, "shocking when you see it in the grocery store" (191). What is created in the end is a successful product that functions well in consumer culture. Moreover, Scher and Weil did so by using an established process which defined the problem, generated ideas and created a form.

Due to copyright protection, this image has been removed.

Source Material: *Design Diaries: Creative Process in Graphic Design*
by Lucienne Roberts and Rebecca Wright, page 191.

Fig. 1 Paula Scher and Daniel Weil. This is the redesign of the Truvia product, which Scher and Weil created through using the design process.

This example demonstrates how the design process is used to underline the importance of finding definite solutions. Since its beginning, graphic design–and the creative process–has been a tool linked to advertising commodities and attempting to make products more memorable and identifiable for public consumption. The production of consumable goods and the competitive landscape of capitalism necessitated a means for competing companies to employ effective visual techniques to promote their products, thus contributing and perpetuating capitalism and a hegemonic system.

Alternatives to Hegemonic Systems

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam's examination of animated films are key to her investigation of failure as a positive force to hegemonic systems. Halberstam uses film representation of the 'queer' character which helps us recognize the characteristics and rewards from failing.

The Construction of Failing Through Film Representation

Animated films for children have contributed to understanding the ways in which failing is constructed. Although animated films run the risk of not being taken seriously, Halberstam states that this suits her purposes because the genre revels in the domain of failure and cannot deliver only in the realms of success, triumph, and perfection.

> Childhood[…] is a long lesson in humility, awkwardness, limitation and growing sideways […] If you believe that children need training, you assume and allow for the fact that they are always already anarchic and rebellious, out of order, and out of time. Animated films nowadays succeed[…] to the extent to which they are able to address the disorderly child, the child who sees his or her family and parents as the problem, the child who knows there is a bigger world out there beyond the family, if only he or she could reach it. (Halberstam 27)

Animated films often present characters who fail to act according to societal conventions. The characters, as Halberstam describes, act in ways that are bizarre, or queer in the broadest sense, in such a way as to place them outside of the norm. Characters include Dory from *Finding Nemo*, Gromit from *Wallace and Gromit*, Babs from *Chicken Run,* and Spongebob from *Spongebob Squarepants* who are deemed frivolous promiscuous and irrelevant in their films, but at the end, succeed because of their queerness. What these characters reveal are alternative rewards that failing can offer. Halberstam points out that failing is something queers do, and have always done, well. Halberstam contends that:

> […] failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour and manage human development […] Failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers. And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life. (2)

For example, the claymation film *Chicken Run* focuses on a group of chickens who are trapped and want to escape from their farm owners. The chickens are being exploited to meet a quota of produce or else the farmers will use them in meat pies. The film, as Halberstam explains, resembles 'class struggle' and offers

a number of scenarios of revolt and alternatives to the grim, mechanical, industrial cycles of production and consumption (29). In the narrative, the chickens work together to escape from the farm and from the punishing norms of their farmers that discipline their behaviour and manage their development with a goal of delivering them from wild chickens to orderly and predictable chickens. In doing so, the chickens expose their oppression. They search for an escape to a utopian future in a green meadow, where there are no farmers and no production schedules, and no one is in charge. When viewed in this way, one can see non-conformity, i.e. resistance to the farmers' prevailing ideology, as a moment in which failing to be productive can become more valuable to the chickens than successful compliance.

Subverting Professionalism

The concern around the hegemony of professionalism is quite familiar to the graphic design field itself. Graphic designer Katherine McCoy alerts her readers to a problem of design professionalism in her article, "Design as a Social and Political Force". Her article argues that designers have the talent and skills to encourage cultural diversity and personal freedom in a heterogenous society, but are also part of the problem. According to McCoy, "designers may never notice that they have an opportunity to play an active role in communicating public issues or potentially controversial content" (McCoy 1). More often than not, as McCoy explains, graphic designers are dedicated to an ideal of the rationally objective professional, having clarity and objectivity as the primary virtues. McCoy describes designers as professionals, who, like scientists, doctors, and lawyers, are impartial, dispassionate, and disinterested.

> How often do we hear, 'Act like a professional' or 'I'm a professional, I can handle it.' Being a professional means to put aside one's personal reactions regardless of the situation and to carry on. (McCoy 2)

McCoy further compares designers to prostitutes, practitioners of the so-called oldest profession, who "must maintain an extreme cool objectivity about this most intimate of human activities, highly disciplining their personal responses to deliver an impartial and consistent product to their clients" (ibid.). A designer acting as a professional, as McCoy explains it, is an idealism introduced in design education to train students to think of themselves as passive arbitrators of the message. McCoy ends her article by challenging designers to simultaneously achieve objectivity and consistency of professionalism alongside personal convictions.

McCoy's article brings to light the lack of discourse (political and activist) on the part of a designer. A designer carrying a serious, rational, and objective attitude in the creative process focuses on the value of producing a solution, a way of working that perpetuates capitalism. What McCoy's article provides is an opportunity to open up a discussion of alternatives to the rational and objective attitude emphasized in professionalism.

Alternative Practices

There are alternative practices to professionalism that emphasize a designer's creative process. *Style, Designer as Author,* and *Self-Initiated projects* are practices which exemplify an emphasis on creative process. The following section will show the alternatives practices as either a contribution to or a resistance to perpetuating a hegemonic system.

Style

In his article on the Design Observer Blog, "Style: An Inventory", graphic designer Michael Bierut categorizes types of styles by providing definitions or instances where style plays out in graphic design practice. The article demonstrates two ways to look at style: first, style as a natural or personal expression that comes from a substantial body of work that has a distinct and recognizable expression, and secondly, style as an appropriated expression or a surface treatment that is applied in very particular circumstances.

The key to understanding this article is that one can see style as an inherent aspect of graphic design or artistic practice. The second a mark has been made, a designer has made an appearance in the world. Bierut explains in the section *Style as Destiny*, "…within each of us is a unique voice that will reveal itself, but only through patience and practice" (Bierut 2012). In his article "Who Are You Calling Stylish?"*,* design journalist Rick Poynor similarly explains that style is always present in work: "Style did not leave town, of course. It just stopped talking about itself all the time" (Poynor 32). Although Bierut's article has no analysis and concludes with *style as style*, the concluding statement is an appropriate phrase to explain style as inherent. Style will always include the conventional tropes, identified by other

designers. Bierut's article is one example that illuminates the continuous flux between style as either a

natural or a personal expression that recurs, or an appropriated expression or surface treatment. In his

article, Bierut explains that the designer cannot help but to create style. He questions:

> Where does style come from? Put more broadly, why do people do what they do? Nature or nurture? Free will or intention? How much of our particular version of the design process is hardwired directly into our basic brain functions? The designer can't help it. (Bierut 2012)

What 'style as style' allows us to consider is the designer as his/her own agent. Simply put, the designer

makes his own marks using style as a natural or an appropriated expression. What is

problematic about this approach is that it does not necessarily challenge the designer to work outside their

usual expression.

> Every great designer has a default mode that provides a solution when original thinking, for whatever reason, is impossible. This default mode, deployed with regularity, becomes associated with that designer's unique personal style. (Bierut 2012)

In addition, designers who appropriate stylistic expression may be contributing to a hegemonic system. In

his article, Bierut explains that style resembles prostitution. "Who would the client like me to be today?

I'm a whore" (Bierut 2012). By satisfying particular criteria, style may simply serve to perpetuate current

modes of thinking.

Designer as Author

In his article, "Designer as Author", graphic designer Michael Rock examines the role of authorship in

graphic design. Authorship, as Rock defines, is ultimately the authority and agent of the message.

Authorship places the designer at the centre of his/her work in an attempt to garner respect, control,

agency and validation.

> While some claims for authorship may be simply an indication of a renewed sense of responsibility, at times they seem to be ploys to gain proper rights, attempts to exercise some kind of agency where there has traditionally been none. Ultimately the author equals authority. (Rock 2013, 54)

Similarly, Rock refers to these approaches as strategies to legitimize a designer's work, which

eventually reinforce the traditional notions of design production. One can see that these approaches

become new hegemonic systems in which a designer has to work to find a definite solution. These

approaches focus on how work is formatted, presented and received, whereas my investigation is

on a designer's own journey. In addition, each approach may change the way work is made. Rock explains that the primary concern of both the viewer and the critic, is not who made it, but rather what it does and how it does it (56). Although the following approaches may not necessarily challenge the designer to find new ways of working, each offers insight into new approaches to graphic design. The article includes such paradigms as *Auteur Theory, Artist's Book,* and *Political Activism*.

Auteur Theory, from film theory, establishes the author–or *auteur*– as the director who has ultimate control over the entire project, working collaboratively with a number of other creative people. Auteur theory, as Rock explains, can apply as well to design. The film director, like an art director or designer, has little control over the choice of the material, but the way the

Due to copyright protection, this image has been removed.

Source Material: "Morrissey: The Loneliest Monk" in *Ray Gun Magazine,* by David Carson, 1994.

Fig. 2. David Carson. This is an example of a stylistic signature and technical proficiency in graphic design.

material is treated is important to the status of the auteur. The article explains three requirements in order to demonstrate the status of auteur. First, one must demonstrate technical expertise; secondly, have a stylistic signature that is visible over the course of a body of work; and thirdly, show a vision, interior meaning or a specific, recognizable critical perspective. In his article, Rock explains that the technical proficiency coupled with a signature style, like Alfred Hitchcock in the film genre, is comparable to designers whose works are often published, awarded and praised (51). Rock cites graphic designer David Carson who meets the first two requirements. For example, *Ray Gun* magazine layouts by Carson feature distortions or mixes of typefaces and fractured imagery, rendering the visual communication almost illegible (Fig. 2). The third requirement, according to Rock, of auteur work is show an interior meaning (ibid.). In the context of graphic design, Rock cites graphic designer Jan van Toorn "who looks at a brief for a corporate annual report from a socioeconomic position" (ibid.). The third requirement, that is, showing an interior meaning narrows considerably the criteria for auteur status. What this requirement offers is an opportunity for designers to create significant and meaningful insight in his/her own work.

The process, however, is a collaborative one, even though the designer takes on responsibilities for content and control of designs.

The Artist's Book offers a pure form of authorship from which function has been fully exorcised. The artist's book, as Rock explains, is an exploration of the book form and uses words, images, structure and material to tell a story or invoke an emotion. The artist's book is "concrete, self-referential and allows for a range of visual experiments without the burden of fulfilling mundane commercial tasks" (52). While this may appear to offer a self-reflexive exploration of form, the artist's book is specifically an exploration of the book form and does not expand to include other graphic mediums, such as film or digital media.

Rock refers to political activism–*activist design*–as being self-motivated and self-authored proactive work, having a voice and a message of a political nature. The message advocates for a cause or a perspective of a unified community, alluding to forms of propaganda and advertising. In his earlier rendition of this article on the website *Eye Magazine*, Rock points out, "Whose voice is speaking? Not an individual, but some kind of unified community. Is this work open for interpretation or is its point the brutal transmission of a specific, [political] message?" (Rock 1996). While this approach initially offers a space for a personal 'perspective', it is heavily concerned with advocating for a cause, a perspective which may not be solely a designer's own voice.

To contrast *Auteur Theory, Artist's Book and Political Activism*, Rock briefly introduces three alternative models for design. Each alternative attempts to describe the activity as it exists and as it could evolve.

Designer as Translator discusses the act of design as the clarification of material or remodelling of content from one form to another. Using the example of Ezra Pound's translation of Chinese character poetry, Rock suggests that translation from one form to another is "neither scientific nor

ahistorical" (Rock 2013, 54). Rock asserts that Designer as Translator aims to express content in a form that reaches a new audience.

Designer as Performer discusses the designer as an actor. Without the actor, art cannot be realized. By imagining the interpretations of Shakespearean plays, Rock suggests that the performer brings a certain reading to the work. "No two actors play the same role in the same way" (55). In addition, he asserts that the designer brings life to work and becomes the physical manifestation of the content.

Designer as Director is an approach about arranging a large amount of material. Referencing examples of advertising campaigns and mass-distributed magazines, Rock suggests the designer as the conductor who orchestrates materials to shape meaning. Rock states that "the meaning of the work results from the entire project" (55).

These models offer a space where their value is accepted as multivalent activities that encompass what is possible without being described in full depth. Rock ends his article with *designer=designer*, much as Bierut ends his article *Style: An Inventory* with *style as style* . Acknowledging this formulaic explanation allows us to consider the designer as his/her own agent. Simply put, if one identifies himself as a designer, it is his decision how to undergo his own process and expand his own methods, with authorship being inherent in graphic design practice.

Self-Initiated Projects

Graphic designers create self-initiated projects to break away from the constraints of client-oriented projects. For instance, graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister "[found] it difficult to work on anything new while exposed to regular day-to-day pressure. It seems so much easier to let [his] brain slip into previously formed grooves and allow it to function in ways that have proved to work before" (Sagmeister 2008, *sec: Salt Publication*). Sagmeister had conducted a year of experimental design without client-based projects in which he discovered results very different from anything he had produced before.

Sagmeister's basis for his experimentation was influenced by a feature of American artist Robert

Rauschenberg in *The New York Times*.

> [Rauschenberg] stated that he never tried to come into the studio with an idea. If he has an idea, he goes for a walk to get rid of it. He said that if he does start with an idea, chances are he'll only come up with stuff that he or somebody else has done before him. He wants all his insecurities and doubts of the working process to become part of the final piece. (Sagmeister 2008, *sec: Salt Publication*)

What self-initiated projects offer is a space in which those insecurities and doubts, can be leveraged to

inform and become embodied within a designer's work. This brings me back to the notion of the blank

page: How might the process of graphic design be approached differently?

Failure

Failure is a term with a host of negative affects in both contemporary theory and popular discourse. The term is commonly associated with disappointment, disillusionment, and despair. The unofficial usage of failure has obscured the original meaning of the term. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, failure is defined as: 1. Lack of success: 2. The neglect or omission of expected or required action: and 3. The action or state of not functioning. Interestingly, these definitions imply both performance and function (or lack thereof) as sites where failure happens. In *The Queer Art of Failure,* both performance (in the form of the one's actions) and function (in the context of disciplinary institutions, such as school or government agencies) are the primary sites of theoretical investigations of failure.

Halberstam and Failure

Halberstam's concepts of the *undisciplined* and *stupidity* will aid in unpacking and understanding failure. Their potencies as tools for investigating the *modes of unbecoming* locate it at the centre of Halberstam's treatise. Theorists and philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Stefano Harney, Fred Moten and Avital Ronell have had considerable influence on Halberstam's discourse of the undisciplined and stupidity in her treatise.

Undisciplined

Terms such as 'serious' and 'rigorous', as Halberstam explains, refer to a disciplinary correctness. They signal a form of training and learning that confirms what is already known according to approved methods of knowing and do not allow for visionary insight or flights of fancy (Halberstam 6). *The Queer Art of Failure* offers an alternative way of thinking outside of the confines of conventional knowledge, and into the unregulated territories of failure, loss, and unbecoming. This approach makes a long detour around disciplines and conventional thought processes. In her description of *disciplinarity,* Halberstam cites Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish* which focuses on the social and theoretical mechanisms behind the massive changes that occurred in Western penal systems. Foucault defines disciplinarity as "a technique of modern power: it depends upon and deploys normalization, routines, convention, tradition, and regularity, and it produces experts and administrative forms of governance" (7). Halberstam asserts that academia signals a similar form of training and learning. She suggests that training of any kind, in fact, is a way of

refusing the journeys out of the confines of conventional knowledge. "Disciplines qualify and disqualify, legitimate, and delegitimate, reward and punish, most important, they statically reproduce themselves and hinder failure" (10). Halberstam claims that disciplinarity may actually get in the way of answers and theorems because they offer maps which have been previously travelled.

In contrast, the *undisciplined* travels into the unregulated territories, "a stroll down uncharted streets in the 'wrong' direction" (6), and complicates the perceived stable categories of success. This assertion is supported by the work *Seven Theses* by Moten and Harney. Their work argues that the critical academic is not the answer to encroaching professionalization and they prefer to engage with the subversive intellectual, outcast thinkers, who refuse, resist and renege knowledge production (10). Moten and Harney encourage the subversive intellectual to steal from the university, and abuse its hospitality and to be 'in but not of it' in order to refuse professionalization, forge a collectivity, and retreat to the external world beyond the campus walls (ibid.). Similarly, Halberstam includes two more activities. First, by resisting mastery, one invests in the counterintuitive modes of knowing (ibid.). Secondly, by privileging the naive or nonsensical, one can detour to a different set of knowledge practices (11). What Halberstam asserts is that being undisciplined offers a way to untrain oneself so that he/she can read the struggles and debates back into questions that seem settled and resolved.

Stupidity

Stupidity, as Halberstam explains, does not solely refer to a lack of knowledge, but also to the limits of certain forms of knowing and certain ways of inhabiting structures of knowing (12). In her description of stupidity, Halberstam cites the writings of the widely considered original thinker in contemporary academia and philosopher Avital Ronell, about stupidity as a productive strategy from her book *Stupidity*. Ronell writes:

> Stupidity exceeds and undercuts materiality, runs loose, wins a few rounds, recedes, gets carried home in the clutch of denial—and returns. Essentially linked to the inexhaustible, stupidity is also that which fatigues knowledge and wears down history. (Ronell 3)

Halberstam asserts that stupidity opens up other spaces of knowing in which it is a form of unknowing that "wears down history"(ibid.) and turns into a productive category. Halberstam cites Ronell's view that

stupidity is "a political problem hailing from the father" (6) and conforms with conservative desires for stability, comfort and authenticity.

Ultimately, Moten, Harney and Ronell's assertions provide common characteristics of performing failure. Failed performances, as Halberstam explains, remind people to take more chances, more risks in thinking, to turn away from the quarrels that seem so important to a discipline and to engage the ideas that circulate widely in other communities (24). *The Queer Art of Failure* outlines activities–described as *modes of unbecoming*–for a person to explore, detour, and lose oneself in order to map out the different relationships failure has to the production of knowledge. As a practice, the modes of unbecoming lead to alternative forms of embodiment. "In losing [one's way] we will find another way of making meaning" (25). Halberstam's references to queer artists offers insight into how a graphic designer could adopt these modes–*losing, looping and forgetting*–as a practice. Though the modes have not been specifically translated as working techniques in graphic design, failure itself has greatly enriched the realm of the creative arts.

The following section will explain the modes of unbecoming and their alternative rewards in the realm of art. Unpacking how the modes of unbecoming work in art will aid in understanding appropriate adaptations for graphic design practice and possible rewards. This focus on the modes is key to this investigation because it adopts the modes as a system of experimentation and, moreover, finds meaning in what can result from embracing failure.

Losing

Losing always happens in contrast to winning. "Winning is a multivalent event: in order for someone to win, someone else must fail to win" (Halberstam 93). Winning, as Halberstam describes, means the victors, successors, or ruling class tell their story of triumph. "[People] are given the history of winners all day, every day" (92). Losing, in contrast, means the defeated, the runners-up, and the misfits are not given the opportunity to tell their story since they reside as mere footnotes in the history of winners. Halberstam argues, however, that people miss the larger drama, the larger story which comes from a reconstruction of losers. "The act of losing has its own logic, its own complexity, its own aesthetic, but ultimately, also, its own beauty" (93). As an example, Halberstam references Tracy Moffat's work *Fourth*. Moffat was the official photographer for the Sydney 2000 Olympics and chose to photograph the losers in sporting events, specifically the fourth place finalists (Fig. 3). "By coming in fourth the athlete has just lost, just missed a medal, just found a (non)place outside of recorded history" (ibid.). In Moffat's series, the reconstruction phase comes from photographically capturing athletes who fall short of a podium placement. Moffat rebuilds the story of the Olympics by focusing on those who were left out of the first portrayal of medal winners. In omitting the winners and focusing on fourth place athletes, Moffat's photographs capture the brilliance, eloquence, and glory in defeat. Moffat's series, as Halberstam describes, captures the experiences of athletes' desperate disappointment, dramatic defeat and the cruelty of competition.

Due to copyright protection, this image has been removed.

Source Material: *The Queer Art of Failure* by Judith Halberstam, Plate 1 - 2.

Fig 3. Tracy Moffat, This photograph captures the moment when the highlighted athlete realizes he has placed fourth.

Looping

Looping is replaying a sequence over and over again. Looping involves a cyclical motion where the ending becomes the beginning and the beginning becomes the ending. As Halberstam describes, "loops mask a highly charged narrative in which cause and effect constantly switch places until causality ceases to produce the logic for narrative movement" (61). On cursory reading, looping appears to be a simple and repetitive action which never gets resolved. A person who replays a shuffled sequence over and over again, as Halberstam explains, becomes more and more unknowing in its eternally spiralling form.

In one's unknowing, as Halberstam argues, a person is potentially more open to the knowledge that comes from elsewhere, and reveals the architectures and the relations that the loops both block and make possible (58). Halberstam cites artist Judie Bamber's work (Fig 4a-c). Bamber's series of seascape horizons are the results of using the act of looping as a painting method. In each painting, Bamber repeats the basic set of relations between sea, sky, and horizon seen from her balcony in Malibu. Bamber recalls the view that presented itself was one that she had seen before rather than another unique display of colour and natural virtuosity (105). The paintings make a record of the subtle but finite shifts in mood, tone and visuality of sea and sky. "Bamber's horizons remind us that possibility and disappointment often live side by side" (ibid.). The possibility seen in Bamber's horizon is her attempt to replace the genius of nature with the virtuosity of the artist by eliminating brush strokes from the canvas to create the illusion of mechanical production. The seascapes draw the viewer over and over to the horizon, that sometimes shocks with its intensity and at other times disappears altogether. The disappointment Bamber paints then, as Halberstam explains, is the limit: "the limit of vision, the limit of nature, the limit of colour itself, the circumscribed imagination, and the lack of futurity" (116).

Due to copyright protection, these images have been removed.

Source Material: *The Queer Art of Failure* by Judith Halberstam, Plate 7 - 8.

Fig 4a-c. Judie Bamber. These paintings form a series documenting the same seascape horizon, exemplifying the act of looping as a painting method.

Forgetting

Forgetting is "the resistance and refusal to a straight and Oedipal logic for understanding the transmission of ideas" (69). *Oedipal logic*, as Halberstam explains, is "the logics of succession, progress, development, and tradition proper to hetero-familial development" (75). Resistance to and refusal of Oedipal logic is the accumulation of information where this information is never placed together in a coherent or logical sequence. Forgetting allows a person "to start from a new place and not a place where the old engenders the new, where the old makes a place for the new, but where the new begins afresh" (70).

This lack of sequence stalls knowledge and "makes discovery into a function of chance and random timing [and…] reveals alternatives to the inevitable and seemingly organic models used for marking progress and achievement" (ibid.). Halberstam's example is J. A. Nicholls's work *All of My Days* (Fig 6). Nicholls's work is Frankenstein-like, using a small collage of countless parts and materials of the figure she wanted to collage and then paint. In this instance, the method *Collage* aligns best with the act of forgetting and forgetfulness. Collage is an assemblage of different forms, which includes newspaper clippings, portions of other artwork or texts, photographs and other found objects, creating a new whole. "They are glued together, the sum of their parts, and they twist and turn in and out of wholeness, legibility, and sense" (141). What is revealed in Nicholls' collaged figure work is an alternative to gender representations since the figure becomes more gender-ambiguous and demonstrates the rebellious energy of gender variance.

Due to copyright protection, this image has been removed.

Source Material: *The Queer Art of Failure* by Judith Halberstam, page 141.
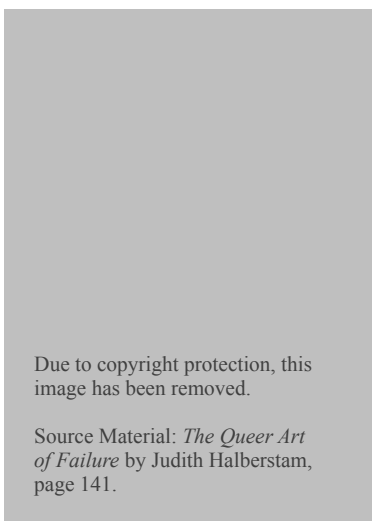
Fig 5. J. A. Nicholls. This painting of a collage uses parts and materials to assemble a figure with an ambiguous gender.

Graphic Design Parallels

In order to translate Halberstam's modes of unbecoming to a graphic design context, I draw parallels between Halberstam's modes and the strategies provided by Lupton in her book, *Graphic Design Thinking: Beyond Brainstorming*. Lupton includes three strategies (Reconstruction, Regurgitation and Kit of Parts) which particularly parallel Halberstam's modes. To illustrate the parallels, *Table 2* provides a chart review of the modes of unbecoming and their comparable design strategies.

	HALBERSTAM	LUPTON
	Losing	**Reconstruction**
Theory	Lost and Reconstruction of Logic	Dissecting and Reconstructing of Form
Method	Lose Find (Reconstruct)	Dissect (Lose Form) Reconstruct
	Looping	**Regurgitation**
Theory	Repetition Ceasing Logical Production	Turning moldy iconographies into something fresh
Method	Replay Shuffle Sequence Open to knowledge elsewhere	Compose and Recompose Reconsider
	Forgetting	**Kit of Parts**
Theory	Resisting and Refusing original purposes (Oedipal Logic)	Unlimited amount of reconfigurations of fixed elements.
Method	Accumulate information Place in illogical sequence	Create parts Reconfigure

Table 2. This chart draws parallels between Halberstams *Modes of Unbecoming* and design strategies featured in Lupton's book *Graphic Design Thinking: Beyond Brainstorming.*

Reconstruction : Losing

Graphic designer Christopher Clark's exercise *Reconstruction* is comparable to the mode *Losing.* The

steps in *Reconstruction* are to dissect, analyze, and reconstruct an object's form. The original form is the

dominant form, which people see all day, every day, and is comparable to Halberstam's story of winners.

"Things look the way they do because of thought processes buried within them" (Lupton 160). For

example, graphic designer Peter Maybury's artist's book *White Book* deconstructs the text in a book, only

to have the text be reconstructed back into a new book.

> Using text pages from a paperback, [Maybury] made alternative typographic compositions
> by stripping out all elements of the original text (with the exception of the word spaces)
> except one, for example a vowel or punctuation mark. [He] then scanned the resulting pages
> and compiled them as another book. (Triggs 145)

What Halberstam's mode Losing requires is not only the elimination of elements from a form, but also the

elimination of the form itself in order to create a new entity from what remains.

Due to copyright protection, these
images have been removed.

Source Material: *Radical Type Design*
by Teal Triggs, page 145.

Fig 6. Peter Maybury. In these pages of *White Book,* Maybury stripped elements and scanned the reconstructed pages to create a new book

Regurgitation : Looping

Graphic designer Elizabeth Anne Herrmann's strategy *Regurgitation* is comparable to the mode *Looping*. The steps in *Regurgitation* are: begin with an open-ended exploration and then compose, reconsider, and recompose a single artifact (Lupton 157). For example, film maker Patrick Bergeron's film *Loop Loop* (Fig 6) demonstrates *Regurgitation.* The single artifact is the film of a train's journey. The film begins with tiers of video frames which are obscured to the viewer of being the view from a train. Throughout the film, Bergeron uses animation, sound warping and time to shift the video backwards and forwards to represent the train's movement. As Herrmann explains, "if it has none, give it some. If it has too much, take some away. Mess around with the parts" (56). In his film, Bergeron manipulates the frames from the video to mimic a train cart's movements of stopping, reversing and proceeding. The film, according to Bergeron, was "looking for forgotten details, mimicking the way memories are replayed in the mind" (Bergeron 2009). Bergeron deliberately composes and recomposes the film to make clear a highly charged narrative. What Halberstam's approach asks of the performer is to undergo a continuous repetition that masks the narrative in order for a novel experience to unfold.

Due to copyright protection, these images have been removed.

Source Material: http://www.patrickbergeron.com/looploop/.

Fig 7. Patrick Bergeron, These stills from *Loop Loop,* illustrate Bergeron search for forgotten details in order to create memories.

Fig 8a. (Above) Andrew Blauvelt. Bluavelt defines elements from which he will build his open- ended system brand identity for the Walker Art Center.

Fig 8b. (Top and Bottom) Andrew Blauvelt. These are examples using the Walker Art Center's brand identity.

Kit of Parts : Forgetting

Kit of Parts is an engineering strategy adapted by graphic designer Andrew Blauvelt. The strategy includes two steps: create parts, and reconfigure parts. Kit of Parts instructs designers to create a collection of elements. These elements will act as the base elements, the genes, that can be built, drawn, photographed or sampled from existing cultures (Lupton 126). Blauvelt used this strategy to design the *Walker Art Center* identity. For his parts, Blauvelt devised a set of ornamental marks that are assigned to the keys on a keyboard, similar to glyphs which are assigned a position in a font (Fig 8a). This open-ended system created eclectic patterns and endless variations by combining, recombining and reconfiguring the fixed elements (Fig 8b). Likewise in the mode of *Forgetting,* Halberstam collects elements, but she requires the performer to resist their original purposes and to place them in a new sequence that is incoherent or illogical. As well, Halberstam asks the performer to walk into uncharted territory rather than to move towards something specific.

While Lupton's strategies function to find solutions, she does acknowledge that mistakes will appear in the design process, and reassures us that designers learn to embrace the mistakes.

Design is a messy endeavour. Designers generate countless ideas that don't get used. They often find themselves starting over, going backward, and making mistakes. Successful designers learn to embrace this back-and-forth, knowing that the first idea is rarely the last and that the problem itself can change as a project evolves. (4)

For example, Scher, co-designer of the *Truvia* project, also found that "the act of making discoveries comes from the freedom to fail" (Triggs 178). For instance, Scher's career began in the record business, doing record covers in the 1970s. "As an in-house art director at CBS Recording, she found herself having to produce so many album cover designs that she had the opportunity to do some 'really terrible ones'" (ibid.). Scher was able to hone her craft through past failures in her graphic design career. Interestingly, Scher asserts that few young designers take this opportunity to experiment *and* fail. "It's very hard to make discoveries when you have to be good. The act of making discoveries comes from the freedom to fail" (ibid.).

What Halberstam's treatise offers is a space where failing functions to produce rewards established by an optimism that does not rely solely on positive thinking, nor one that insists upon the bright side of life. Halberstam refers to an optimism that "is a little ray of sunshine that produces shade and light in equal measure and knows that the meaning of one always depends upon the meaning of the other" (Halberstam 5). Halberstam cites American feminist, democratic socialist and political activist Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Bright-sided* to assert the risks of positive thinking and the advantages of failing. In her book, Ehrenreich argues that:

> […] positive thinking is a North American affliction, 'a mass delusion' that emerges out of a combination of American exceptionalism and a desire to believe that success happens to good people and failure is just a consequence of a bad attitude rather than structural conditions (Halberstam 3).

In contrast to positive thinking, Halberstam states:

> For these negative thinkers, there are definite advantages to failing. Relieved of the obligation to keep smiling through chemotherapy or bankruptcy, the negative thinker can use the experience of failure to confront the gross inequalities of everyday life. (4)

Halberstam's perspective of failure, offers opportunities to re-examine mistakes, and in doing so possibly develop a new perspective. In translating this to a design practice, a designer would not amend their own mistakes, but instead diverges onto pathways where one puts value on the process, rather than a singular solution.

Typography

In order to examine how the modes of unbecoming would lend themselves to design practice, it would be wise to concentrate on just one area of graphic design. Typography is a dominant practice of graphic design operating within commercial parameters, which has also offered a space for contemporary graphic designers to embrace experimentation. Typographic work can be analyzed in terms of legibility and readability. Similarly, Halberstam uses the same term 'legibility' to apply to hegemonic systems. Her meaning of legibility, that is, standardization and uniformity, can be applied to typography to indicate where designers can divert to new directions of exploration.

More often than not, in professional practice the designer's goal is to produce designs that attempt to communicate a message effectively and efficiently. A designer uses type and its formal principles of legibility and readability to explore and express content. *Legibility* concerns the ease with which a letter or word can be recognized, such as an eye exam (Lupton, 2004). *Readability* concerns the ease with which a text can be understood, such as the mental processing of meaningful sentences (ibid.). In practice, typographers have expanded beyond the boundaries of legibility and readability. I conducted a visual analysis of type-based examples in order to comprehend the visual effects of type (See Appendix A). I examined forty typographic designs based on the formal principles of legibility and readability (Table 2), breaking down the examples into categories that indicated the principles at play in both rational and experimental approaches.

Principle	Rational	Experimental
Line Measure The length of a line of text	46 - 70 characters	Unlimited characters
Leading The distance between baselines	Consistent space between baselines; no overlap	Inconsistent or no space between baselines; overlap
Tracking The consistent degree of spacing between letters	Consistent degree of space between letters; no overlap	Inconsistent or no space between letters; overlap
Type Colour The density and visual tone of a body of text	Grey visual tone Minimal weight variation	Textural black and white ex. combination of difference bolds, thins, and tracking

Table 3. Compiled from Lindsey Marshall, Lester Meacham and Ellen Lutpon.
This table compiles principles of Legibility and Readability - Part 1.

Principle	Rational	Experimental
Typestyle The use of type and its style variations (ex. Upper and lower case, italics, roman, bold, thin, extended)	Single typeface, Minimal Combinations of styles ex. typewriter, essay format	Multiple typefaces and variations ex. collage, ransom note
Typeface The design of a family of characters	Machine driven Computer generated Detracts attention of type Attracts for content ex. Sans Serif - Helvetica	Hand driven Hand generated Attracts attention of type Detracts from content ex. Handwritting - Calligraphy
Grid A network of lines used to generate form, arrange images and organize information	Cartesian Structure Rectangular field Repetition of units ex. cartography, maps	No Structure No repetition of units ex. sketch books
White Space The relationship between the use of elements and the composition	Spacious; roomy Eyes have areas to rest	Crowded; Cluttered Eyes are constantly moving
Unity When all elements and principles are in agreement, a design is considered unified	Harmony Minimal conflict of space amongst elements	Discord Conflict of space amongst elements
Colour/Hue The use of colour in type or type on a coloured background	Achromatic Low saturation of colour	Full Chroma High saturation of colour
Balance Weight of one or more elements distributed evenly or proportionally in space	Even distribution of elements Symmetrical layout	Unequal distribution of elements
Contrast Relationships of type principles, colours, textures, shaped, and other elements	Low Static composition Similarities in qualities	High Dynamic composition Differences in qualities
Scale Contrast in size creating tension as well as a feeling of depth and movement	Proportional use of elements No tension	Disproportional use of elements Tension
Texture Optical appearance of a typeface	Virtual Optical Effect: Abstract	Physical Optical Effect: Representational
Hierarchy The order of importance within a body of text (such as the sections and subsections)	Clear marks of separation of information	Marks lack separation of information

Table 3. Compiled from Lindsey Marshall, Lester Meacham and Ellen Lutpon.
This table compiles principles of Legibility and Readability - Part 2.

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Source Material: http://www.grapheine.com/divers/graphic-designer-muller-brockmann

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Source Material: http://www.thisisdisplay.org/tag/Neue+Grafik

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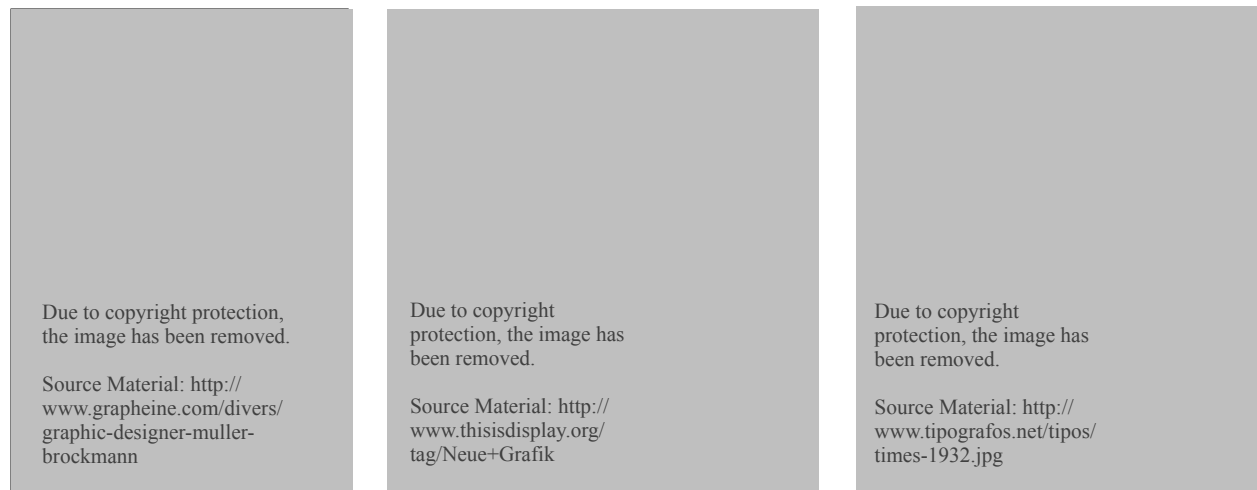Source Material: http://www.tipografos.net/tipos/times-1932.jpg

Fig 9a-c. Josef Müller-Brockmann, LMNV, and Stanley Morison. These are examples of 'rational' type. The principles of legibility and readability are used by the designers in a systematic structure with fixed rules. The type does not draw attention to itself but rather to the content.

What became apparent was that *rational type* can be described as being 'invisible'. Rational type was seen to use the principles of legibility and readability in a systematic structure with fixed rules for the purpose of clear and objective text. In *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art*, author Johanna Drucker describes the conventions and aims of unmarked–rational–typography. The aim of *unmarked typography* is "to make the text as uniform, as neutral, as accessible and seamless as possible... in which seriousness of purpose collapses with the authority of the writer, effacing both behind the implicit truth value of the words themselves" (Drucker 95). In my visual analysis, examples from graphic designers Josef Müller-Brockmann, LMNV[1], and Stanley Morison illustrate rational type (Fig 9a-c). In each example, the majority of the criteria for legible type are present. The letterforms were distinguishable from each other; the spacing of letterforms, words, sentences and line measures were consistent for a rhythmic structure for reading content; the information was organized by using a vertical and horizontal grid structure; the variation in type's visual density was minimal and appeared to be uniform; and the colour of type was of the highest contrast (black and white). The results make the type non-intrusive; it does not draw attention to itself, but rather to the content to be read.

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1 'LMNV' is an abbreviation for team of Zurich designers Richard Lohse, Josef Müller-Brockmann, Hans Neuburg and Carlo Vivarelli
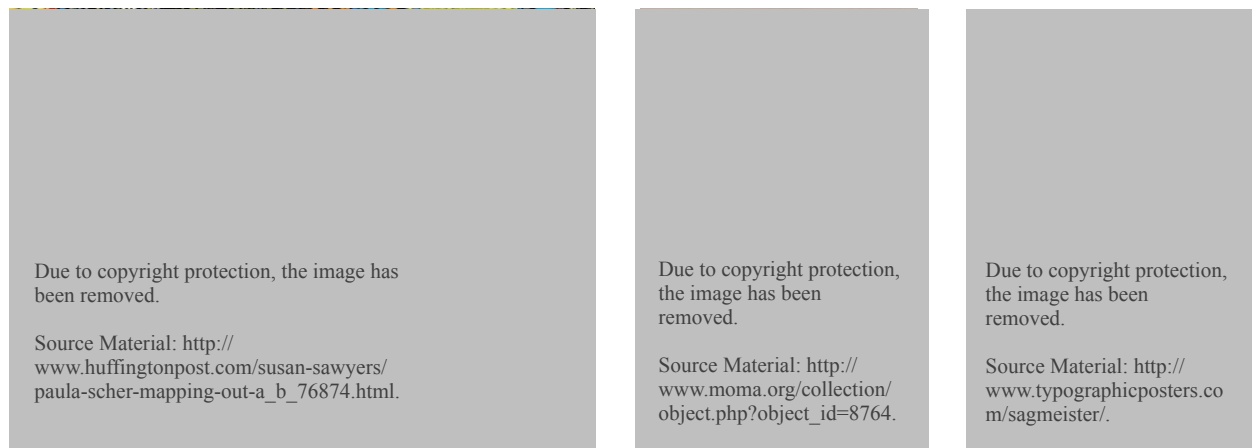
Fig 10a-c. Paula Scher, Ed Fella and Stefan Sagmeister. These are examples of 'experimental' type. The use of type in these examples draws attention to itself.

In contrast, *experimental type* can be described as being 'visible'. In my visual analysis, experimental type uses the principles of legibility and readability within a more open and flexible system. Drucker describes *marked–experimental–typography* as "decidedly more visual, acting on the seductive methods of shock effects, that could be generated by graphic variety" (97). In my visual analysis, works by graphic designers Paula Scher, Ed Fella and Stefan Sagmeister demonstrate the attributes of experimental type (Fig 10a-c). This included, as Drucker explains (96), the use of a wide range of typefaces, styles, and sizes with mixture and juxtapositions within the composition; the break-up of the composition into various zones of activity which received very distinct graphic treatments; the use of a circular, shaped, or diagonal elements across the normal horizontal page; and finally, the incorporation of several different typefaces and/or sizes within a single line or word. The results make the type more dynamic; it draws attention to itself, allowing for multiple interpretations of the content.

Interestingly, Halberstam introduces the notions of *legibility* and *illegibility* in the context of the modern state. She cites political science and anthropology professor James C. Scott's book *Seeing Like a State* which details the ways modern state has run customary and undisciplined forms of knowledge in order to rationalize and simplify social, agricultural and political practices that have profit as their primary motivation (Halberstam 9). For Halberstam, this became a study of the demand by the state for legibility through the imposition of methods of standardization and uniformity. Scott identifies:

> […]*legibility* as the favoured technique of high modernism for sorting, organizing and profiting from land and people and for abstracting systems of knowledge from lock knowledge

practices… *Illegibility* may in fact be one way of escaping the political manipulation to which all university fields and disciplines are subject. (Halberstam 9-10: emphasis added)

Although the context is the modern political state, Halberstam claims Scott's insight about illegibility has implications for all kinds of subjects who are manipulated. In adopting Halberstam's point of view, I contend that designers have an opportunity to explore beyond legible and readable type by venturing into the realm of experimentation and illegibility in order to discover creative ways of using type.

Creating a continuum of type, from rational to experimental, establishes a space where designers can approach type an infinite number of ways, such as as style and authorship, and encourage escapes from the discipline. For instance, the typographic work of graphic designer Marian Bantjes' in her book *I Wonder* demonstrates her writings and her personal design expression using multiple styles and ornamentation type. The type has a combination of rational and experimental type elements which visually engage a reader, but still "…[are] worthy of thought and contemplation beyond the surface treatment" (Bantjes 6). In her book, she explains that if her choices and combinations of type treatment "push a few buttons"(8) that is what she had intended for the reader. Her work and intention reflects Halberstam's notion of illegibility. Bantjes' treatment reflective of the content, that of being secretive and draws attention to itself, hiding the content.
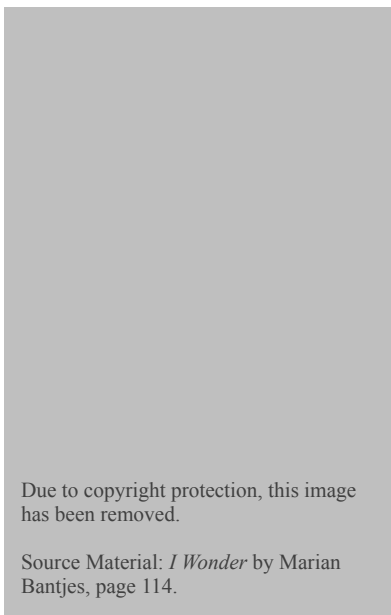
Due to copyright protection, this image has been removed.

Source Material: *I Wonder* by Marian Bantjes, page 114.

Fig 11. This is one of many styles Bantjes uses in her book *I Wonder*. The type reflects the concept of her writings about secrets.

Moreover, a designer who ultimately chooses a critical perspective, can approach type using it to reveal an interior meaning. This is exemplified in Sagmesiter *AIGA Detroit* lecture poster. In this poster, the type is scarred and cut into Sagmeister's body by one of his interns. His intention is to remind viewers of the visual pain associated with design projects (Sagmester 2012). While his type is legible and can be read, his critical perspective exposes and exploits the experiences and emotions in design projects.

Simply put, when a designer uses type to communicate a message, it is their decision how to use type in their process, encouraging their own methods and creative purposes. This reaffirms this investigation of exploring new ways of working with typography.

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Source Material:
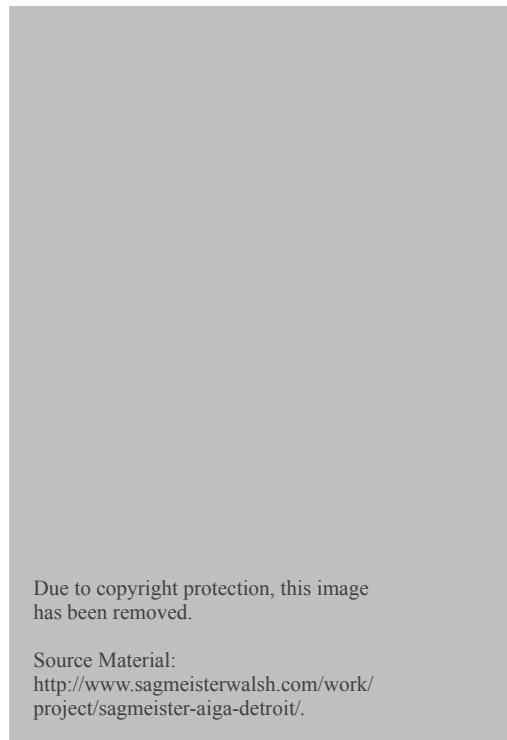http://www.sagmeisterwalsh.com/work/project/sagmeister-aiga-detroit/.

Fig 12. Stefan Sagmeister. This is an approach to type with a critical perspective. The type was purposely cut into the body to show the painful process in graphic design.

Conclusion

This thesis paper set out to uncover new ways that a designer might enlarge his/her experimentation process. It examined professionalism and practices which have emphasized a designer's creative process for practices that are goal-oriented. Some of the ways design provides opportunities for experimentation are:

- *Graphic Design Thinking: Beyond Brainstorming* by Lupton, offering strategies for designers to initiate the design process whether to develop one's own voice or to solve business challenges
- Style as a practice, which opens up a set of choices, an inventory of possible visual approaches for a designer to proceed with a design
- Designer as Author, places the designer at the centre of his/her work to become the ultimate authoritative figure of their creative processes
- and Self-Initiated projects, offering a space for a designer to break away from client-oriented projects, and an opportunity to emphasize experimentation.

The literature on design theory points to several opportunities and explored pathways for creative experimentation in design and particularly in typography. What this research paper proposes is another such opportunity. Judith Halberstam is a feminist researcher and theorist. Her modes of unbecoming are processes she has identified for a person to reconsider ways of working, understanding and interpreting outcomes. I have explored the possibility of translating her ideas and modes to design process. Ultimately, *The Queer Art of Failure* offers opportunities for a designer to explore new approaches to creative design, new awareness of process, and new ways of interpreting results. Halberstam encourages the performer, or in this case the designer, to view failure as 'success' and, thus, reinterpret the hegemony of graphic design. In other words, experimentation (which often involves failing along the way) plays a role in challenging the norms of graphic design.

Though commercial design has been the dominant force of contemporary design in market driven economies where graphic design has been used for commercial applications, leveraging experimentation

and focusing on the idea of 'failing as a valid outcome' emerge as forces for arriving at achievements outside the realm of professional practice. An adaptation of Halberstam's modes of unbecoming as an approach in design experimentation can translate to guiding principles for a designer's explorations. With typographic composition, the process may involve expanding beyond what happens in legible and readable type, and exploring content through experimentations with type. Using Halberstam's modes of unbecoming one is involved in becoming disoriented and disconnecting the text from an effective and objective reading in order to leverage experimentation. In allowing disorientation and wandering through uncharted territories, a designer can begin to recognize the results from failing, and gain insights about his/her own practice. For instance, results may emerge that would be different from those of following the tried-and-true pathways of commercial practice that is concerned with a practical application or definite solutions.

In contrast to the professional design practices discussed previously, adopting Halberstam's modes will not necessarily produce definite solutions, but may, in fact, function to reveal the hegemonic constructions of the way rewards are achieved in contemporary culture of professional design practice. What a designer may learn is to break out of the hegemonic constructs and thus to allow greater creative potential for graphic experimentation.

This thesis paper represents a new contribution to the experimental process in graphic design and can even challenge the practical and professional imperatives that commercial design is bound to. My hope is that readers of this paper will see that design is a practice that can incorporate losing one's way and embrace failure as a creative success. This undertaking has opened my own way to tackling the blank canvas. The rewards uncovered in this research have provided enough reassurance that to 'go and experiment' is an invitation to wander into uncharted territory.

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Appendix

VISUAL ANALYSIS: TYPOGRAPHY'S RANGE

I L R D T

INTRODUCTION

In graphic design, information can be commuicated through a range between rational and experimental type. This analysis investigates designers' use of type to better understand the range availbe for designers. Rational type communicates information through an optimal usage of the legibility and readability of type. Experimental type is less concerned with the optimal usage of type and is communicating information through a designer's moods and feelings. The structure of this investigation evaluates each typographic example based on the formal aspects of legible and readabe type to display the variety of typographic treatments.

Legibility is concerned with distinguishing the characters or glyphs in a given typeface for the purpose of recognition. Typesetting production aspects (such as leading, line measure, typeface, etc.) allow for type to become more legible.

Readability is the aesthetic pleasantness that makes the type inviting to read. The graphic design principles (such as hierarchy, contrast and balance) contribute to the overall appeal of a composition.

Further information is contained in this interactive PDF by hovering and clicking elements in this PDF. Enjoy.

DISPLAY TYPE
Designed to attract attention and pull the reader into the text. It can be more elaborate, expressive, and have a stylish look.

RATIONAL — 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 — EXPERIMENTAL

Line Measure · Leading · Tracking · Type Colour · Typestyle · Typeface · Grid · Hierarchy · Colour · Neg. Space · Contrast · Balance · Scale · Texture · Unity

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VISUAL ANALYSIS: TYPOGRAPHY'S RANGE

I L R D T

**Neue Grafik
New Graphic Design
Graphisme actuel**

1

RATIONAL — 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 — EXPERIMENTAL

Line Measure · Leading · Tracking · Type Colour · Typestyle · Typeface · Grid · Hierarchy · Colour · Neg. Space · Contrast · Balance · Scale · Texture · Unity

TEXT TYPE
is designed to be legible and readable across a variety of sizes.

TYPOGRAPHY'S RANGE

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RATIONAL		EXPERIMENTAL
90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10		

Line Measure — Line Measure
Leading — Leading
Tracking — Tracking
Type Colour — Type Colour
Typestyle — Typestyle
Typeface — Typeface

Grid — Grid
Hierarchy — Hierarchy
Colour — Colour
Neg. Space — Neg. Space
Contrast — Contrast
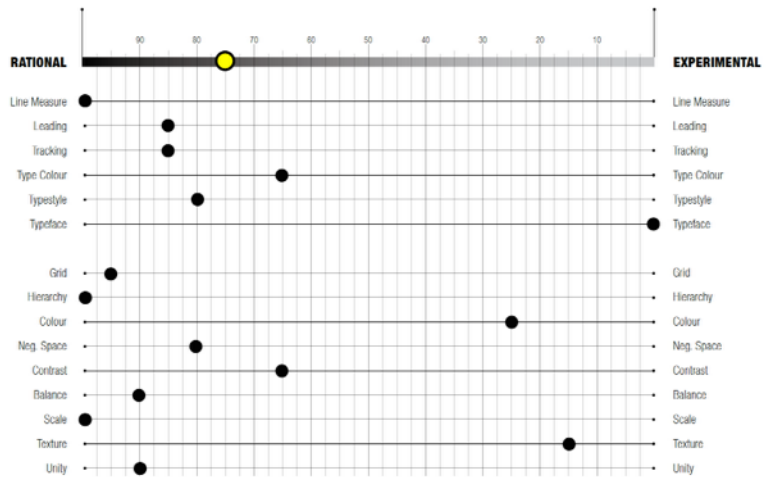Balance — Balance
Scale — Scale
Texture — Texture
Unity — Unity

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TYPOGRAPHY'S RANGE

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RATIONAL		EXPERIMENTAL
90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10		

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