The Institutionalisation of Graphic Design:
Investigating an Extended Contemporary Practice

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Abstract

Graphic design is an institutionalised discipline, afflicted by restrictive expectations of contemporary practice which operate under the guise of standards for "good design." This thesis investigates the institutionalisation of the discipline, identifies restrictions institutionalisation places on contemporary practice, and explores the implications of "wilfully contradicting expectations"[1] in graphic design.

  Within this research, institutionalisation is defined as the establishment of norms within a discipline, especially as said norms relate to expectations of a discipline's production. Such expectations of graphic design's limits on practice include utility, beauty, financial restrictions, multiples or mass production, media, audience, and legibility. Expectations regarding each of these areas shape — and limit — thought within disciplinary discourse and contemporary practice.

  Drawing on methodologies from visual arts' institutional critique, Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* and Geoffrey Galt Harpham's *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, this thesis critiques the defined parameters of graphic design through investigative and experimental studio practices.

Keywords: graphic design, institutionalisation, criticism, studio practice, modernity, disciplinary conflict.

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Introduction — Limitations on contemporary practice

The primary concern of this research is to identify aspects of graphic design's institutionalisation, to analyse their implications for contemporary practice, and to explore the potential of a contemporary graphic design practice which operates outside, or contradicts, these conditions. For this research, institutionalisation refers to the establishment of norms within a discipline, especially as said norms relate to expectations of a discipline's production. How might the examination of institutionalising practices expose the systems by which graphic design is defined and present opportunities for an extended practice?

Seven aspects of institutionalisation or expectations of practice have been identified by this research. "Utility" refers to the expectation that graphic design must serve a functional purpose. "Beauty" refers to the expectation that graphic design must have an aspect of aesthetic appeal or intrigue. "Financial restriction" indicates the expectation that scope of work is determined by a budget for labour and production. "Multiples" or "mass production" refer to the expectation that graphic design is mass produced and distributed as public visual communication. "Media" refers to the specific forms of production expected from the discipline, such as websites, posters, books, et cetera. "Audience" indicates the expectation that graphic design is distributed to an audience — users — and operates in relationship to said audiences. Finally, "legibility" refers to the expectation that graphic design must clearly communicate a message.

This research sits within the context of a disciplinary conflict concerning a spectrum of conventions within graphic design. At one end of the spectrum, graphic design is described as a service or tool for visual communication, and at the other, it exists as a critical discipline and site of cultural production. Both perspectives present limitations to practice, though it is the framing of graphic design as a service which is deeply implicated in the institutionalisation of the discipline. It is this perspective to which Andrew Blauvelt refers in his description of the reduction of graphic design to its "commodity form."[2] Aspects of institutionalisation (including financial restraint and audience), together with the commodification of practice, limit opportunity for disciplinary criticism and research in favour of "commercial accessibility."[3]

Current graphic design pedagogy remains largely based on the Bauhaus model, which not only perpetuates modernist ideals but prioritises technical skill and production over theory and criticism.[4] Dietmar Winkler describes this as the imposition of an "anti-intellectual bias on […] studio

2. Andrew Blauvelt, "Towards Critical Autonomy or Can Graphic Design Save Itself," *Emigre*, no. 64 (2003): 39.

3. Keedy, "Graphic Design in the Postmodern Era."

4. Jacob Lindgren, "Graphic Design's Factory Settings," *The Gradient* (blog), 2 January 2020, https://walkerart.org/magazine/jacob-lindgren-graphic-designs-factory-settings.

education,"[5] preventing the development of disciplinary research and criticism. This approach to education teaches designers to be service providers, working under the authority of the client, rather than instigators of a critical or investigative practice.

Architecture was similarly framed as a service, until its late acceptance into the academy in the mid-20th century — concurrent with the establishment of the first doctoral programs in architecture. It was the discursive development of history, theory, and criticism within the discipline which legitimised architectural practice as an "intellectual endeavour."[6] Through identifying the aspects of institutionalisation which place limitations on contemporary graphic design practice, this research seeks to expose the discipline's institutionalised status and instigate critical discourse toward an extended practice.

5. Dietmar R. Winkler, "Morality and Myth: The Bauhaus Reassessed," in *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design,* ed. Michael Bierut (New York: Allworth Press, 1994), 40.

6. John Harwood, "How Useful? The Stakes of Architectural History, Theory, and Criticism at MIT, 1945–1976," in *A Second Modernism: MIT, Architecture, and the "Techno-Social" Moment*, ed. Arindam Dutta (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2013), 138–139.

Disciplinary Context

The perpetuation of modernist ideals within graphic design has played a role in enacting the institutionalisation of the discipline and ensuring a moralistic commitment to certain tenets of modernism: utility, universality, and simplicity. Despite the emergence of postmodernism as a reaction to the limitations of Modernism, graphic design has predominantly "retreated" from postmodernism's experimentation and self-expression, towards systematised style.[7] Stylistic Modernism's International Style — the "universal visual language that became the default style of corporate capitalism" — has, according to Keedy, been "upgraded to a bigger and better (or at least easier) Global Style."[8] Global Style is similarly prescriptive to International Style, based on specific rules about formal composition and aesthetics, steering designers towards well defined outcomes. The continued systematisation of graphic design practice is at the core of its institutionalisation, prioritising the reassuring consistency of established methodologies over the relative risk of employing new methods of practice.[9] New methods lack the proven performance record favoured by the commercial realm and are therefore considered a risk.

There is significant cause to challenge the institutionalisation of graphic design. David Cabianca argues that designers' "thought has been so organized, or disciplined, by the appeal to positivist affirmation, that we suffer from an inability to see beyond immediate constraints to possibilities for investigation."[10] The institutionalisation of the discipline shapes thought in such a way that designers are unable to imagine an extended practice, nor question the validity of the restrictions placed on their own practice. Not only does a standardised approach to graphic design practice present a highly restrictive view of what the discipline is capable of producing, the notion that a universal approach to design can best serve all audiences is false.[11] Keedy makes a similar argument in his essay "Modernism 8.0."

> The myth of objectivity and faith in abstraction are cultural constructs that designers use to perpetuate an illusion of consensus and certainty, recasting personal bias (style) as universally accepted principles.[12]

The perpetuation of this illusion bolsters aspects of institutionalisation and prevents the exploration of an extended practice. A further example of bias entering the graphic design canon and shaping expectations of practice is early-modernist Adolf Loos' 1908 essay "Ornament and Crime," in which Loos equates ornament with degeneracy.[13] The bias against ornamentation, held by Loos and other Modernists, entered into the graphic design canon

7. Jeffrey Keedy, "Design Modernism 8.0," *Emigre*, no. 64 (Winter 2003): 59.

8. Jeffrey Keedy, "The Global Style," *Slanted*, no. 22 (2013): 191.

9. Jeffrey Keedy, "Keedy Sans Back and Forth, or Postmodernism,—, An Incomplete Project with Mr. Keedy" (Typographics 2018, The Cooper Union, 4 November 2018), https://vimeo.com/298879790.

10. David Cabianca, "Designers Behaving Badly: Practicing without Discipline" (paper presented at College Art Association 104th Annual Conference, Washington DC, 2016).

11. This point is underscored by Katherine McCoy in "Countering the Tradition of the Apolitical Designer," in *Looking Closer 2: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, ed. Michael Bierut et al. (New York: Allworth Press, 1997), 214-15.

12. Keedy, "Design Modernism 8.0," 61.

13. Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime," in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), 19.

and became an expectation of practice — an institutional limitation. George Hersey notes that early 20th century aversion to ornamentation stemmed from contemporary fears that the human race was in, or at risk of, decline and that ornamentation — as a reference to the past — would contribute to such a decline. Hersey states that, "the belief in modernism as a scientific cure for architectural atavism gave the movement its force."[14] Loos believed the comparatively progressive qualities of Modernist architecture (flat surfaces, clean lines, lack of decoration) symbolised progress, acting as the antithesis to the decline he feared.

Use of ornamentation is not the only contentious discussion within architecture, or design in general. Jennifer Bloomer recalls disregarding a competition seeking beauty in architecture as "ideologically offensive,"[15] believing beauty to be inferior to other disciplinary concerns. However, Bloomer goes on to note that beauty is one of the principles of the Vitruvian Triad of qualities upon which architecture was founded, showing how institutional expectations of practice change over time.[16] Noting this shift, Bloomer wonders how "a re-placing of beauty... may constitute a resistance to a certain status quo."[17] Though architecture has a longer and more established history than graphic design, architecture's changing relationship with beauty indicates the possibility for similar changes in graphic design, through resistance to institutional limitations and the embracing of prohibited practices (such as ugliness, illegibility, and other opposites to the aforementioned expectations of practice).

Disciplinary Ideology

There is an almost religious commitment to beliefs about design within the discipline. In 1995, Carel Kuitenbrouwer compared the emerging "morality of frugality, restraint, and unpretentiousness" in Dutch design to "Dutch Calvinism,"[18] while Keedy aligned the commitment of "Modernism's true believers" with Fundamentalism[19] and Beatrice Ward described the virtue of modernist, "transparent or invisible typography."[20] This language is indicative of how effective the discipline's institutionalisation has been at convincing designers of its authority and forming a dominant ideology to which graphic designers subscribe and under which their work is controlled. The institutionalisation of graphic design upholds described limitations on practice as normative, presenting stylistic Modernism as the ultimate standard towards which designers must work, without outlining objective justification for doing so. Modernism serves institutionalisation similarly to an Ideological

14. George Hersey, "Why Should Women But Not Buildings Be Ornamented? Reflections on Adolph Loos," *ANY: Architecture New York*, no. 4 (February 1994): 31.

15. Jennifer Bloomer, "... And 'Venustas,'" *AA Files*, no. 25 (Summer 1993): 3.

16. Bloomer, 3. The full triad, *firmitatis*, *utilitatis*, and *venustatis*, translates as "stability, utility, and beauty."

17. Bloomer, 5.

18. Karel Kuitenbrouwer, "The New Sobriety," *Eye*, vol. 5, no. 17 (Summer 1995): 54.

19. Keedy, "Design Modernism 8.0," 60.

20. Beatrice Warde, "The Crystal Goblet or Printing Should Be Invisible," in *Design: Critical and Primary Sources, Volume 1: Design Reform, Modernism, and Modernization*, ed. D. J. Huppatz (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 107.

State Apparatus,[21] convincing those who work within the discipline that these limitations are not only necessary but a measure of "good design."

As previously stated, the institutionalisation of graphic design as a commodity-providing service limits its freedom to deviate from expected practice or engage in critical discourse. By contradicting expectations of practice and finding space in which to produce "original, or at least unique"[22] work, graphic design can defy its service model. Only then can the discipline establish itself as a site of cultural production. Blauvelt states that "autonomy also gives coherency to graphic design in order to resist the dispersal it currently suffers by defining the conditions and terms under which it seeks to operate."[23] By challenging aspects of institutionalisation, graphic design might be able to define its own conditions of production. In doing so, graphic design has a chance of being seen as capable of "generating meaning on its own terms"[24] and gradually dismantling the restrictive structures that define its future.

Contemporary Practice

There are contemporary graphic designers and studios which successfully challenge institutional limitations through their work. Metahaven (Vinca Kruk and Daniel van der Velden), Sulki and Min Choi, and M/M Paris (Mathias Augustyniak and Michael Amzalag) are among those whose production also exists outside of the realm of expectation (Fig. 1–3). This work does not belong in the mainstream — usually this work is either self-published, in an interdisciplinary space between graphic design and fine art, or in the service of a cultural or academic institution. Similarly, the work produced by graduate graphic design students at both the Royal College of Art, London,[25] and the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan[26] at their 2019 end of year exhibitions seems to disregard conventional expectations of the discipline entirely, particularly with regard to media or mass production (Fig. 4, 5). However, the academic environments in which these works were produced afford their designers a significantly greater level of autonomy than the commercial realm.

The practice of designer Daniel Eatock appears to balance the highly conceptual and functionally commercial. Eatock is known for his "conceptual approach"[27] to projects, seeking to produce work which questions boundaries of practice and relies on conceptual originality over stimulating visual style. Examples of his work range from the more conventional (such as the brand identity for the British television series *Big Brother* (Fig. 6)) to the highly conceptual (such as a concept where "a string connecting a pair of socks goes up one trouser leg and down the other in reference to children's

21. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *"Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (Monthly Review Press, 1971), sec. The State Ideological Apparatuses.

22. Keedy, "Graphic Design in the Postmodern Era."

23. Blauvelt, "Towards Critical Autonomy," 43. The question of autonomy has its own problems that the author acknowledges, but will not be dealt with in this thesis.

24. Blauvelt, "Towards Critical Autonomy," 41.

25. Royal College of Art, *Graduate Show* (Royal College of Art, 29 July 2019).

26. Cranbrook Academy of Art, *Graduate Degree Exhibition* (Cranbrook Academy of Art, 13 May 2019).

27. "Daniel Eatock," Walker Art Center, 2007, https://walkerart.org/calendar/2007/daniel-eatock.

Fig. 1. Metahaven, Installation view of *Facestate* in *Graphic Design: Now in Production*, 2011, Minneapolis, Walker Art Center.

Facestate is a conceptual research project, commissioned by the Walker Art Center. It is both a critique of social media data harvesting and a commentary on state surveillance, imagining a world in which government has access to social media data on individuals. This project doesn't respond to a client brief but rather instigates a discussion about social media use, through an exploratory practice.

Fig. 2. Sulki and Min, *Cosmos, 3rd Korean Edition, 1981*, 2017, book.

This book is an exact reproduction of the original *Cosmos* book, aside from Sulki and Min's intervention, which blurs the content of each page beyond recognition. It includes all of the content from the original book yet its illegibility renders it useless.

Fig. 3. M/M Paris, *Marion de Lorme*, 1998, poster, Paris, Théâtre de Lorient.

M/M Paris have designed a lengthy series of posters for Théâtre de Lorient, each time testing the boundaries of expected practice. The above example obscures the faces of the models, uses a photograph of the original photographs (rather than a copy of the image itself) and layers complex, ornate type across the width of the poster.
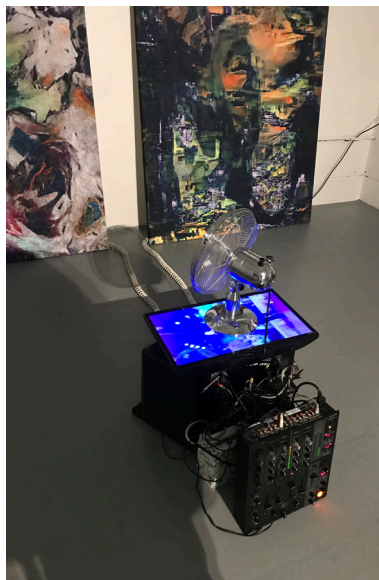
Fig. 4. Installation view of *RCA Graduate Exhibition*, 2019, London, Royal College of Art.

Graphic design work included the above installation, challenging expectations of media through combining the use of electronics, a fan, and painting.

Fig. 5. Installation view of *Graduate Degree Exhibition*, 2019, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, Cranbrook Academy of Art.

2D work included the above structure, part of a performance art work, which is a significant departure from the limitations and expectations of two-dimensional work.

mittens"(Fig. 7)).[28] Eatock's conceptually focused work is interesting if only for the fact that he seems to execute projects to the minimum level required to communicate the idea — the work's value lies entirely in the existence of the idea, not the execution or production of it (though the physical form facilitates its communication to an audience). The connected sock concept appears in *Imprint* simply as a low-resolution image of a pair of socks, with a crudely drawn line representing the connecting string. Yet this enough for the viewer to understand: the concept is the complete work.

A work's audience is a critical variable in terms of how far the work can deviate from institutionalised practice. The above designers are able to maintain marginal practices because they choose to engage niche, rather than general, audiences (or in the case of Eatock, both niche and general audiences, depending on the project). Mainstream graphic design, that which reaches mass audiences or serves clients in a commercial arena, largely remains under the influence of institutionalisation.
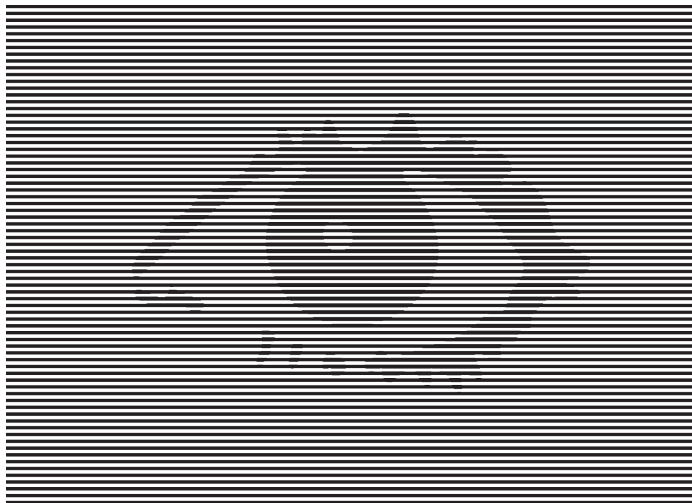
Fig. 6. Daniel Eatock, *Big Brother*, 2001, graphic identity, London, Channel Four Television, http://eatock.com.

Fig. 7. Daniel Eatock, *Sock Concept* in *Imprint* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 210.

Institutional Critique

The methodology employed in this research draws from institutional critique, an approach to practice which uses the tools of a discipline to self-critique the practices of said discipline.[29] Hans Haacke is one of a series of artists who (from the late 1960s, into the 1970s) produced conceptual visual art works which critiqued institutional practices, such as the role of museums and galleries in the art market. *Manet–PROJECT '74* (Fig. 8) is a work Haacke proposed to the Ludwig Museum, consisting of a series of documents which made "visible the social and financial ties between the art institution and the outside interests that it is allied to, with a particular focus on the objectionable acquisition of art works."[30] More specifically, the work "revealed the Nazi-era career" of the donor of a Manet painting which had been permanently loaned to the Ludwig Museum.[31] Works of institutional critique are self-reflexive, in that they instigate discussion about the conditions of their own production and critique institutional practices.[32] Similarly, this research critiques the institutionalisation of graphic design through the production of graphic design centred works, as part of a wider investigation into disciplinary conflict.

Buchloh describes how artists used institutional critique as a tool to entirely re-imagine relationships within both the production and reception of art works (Fig. 9–11):

> All of the works mentioned [Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube*, 1963–5; Lawrence Weiner's *A 36″ × 36″ Square Removal to the Wallboard or Lathing from a Wall*, 1968; Daniel Buren's *Installation at the Guggenheim International Exhibition*, 1971; and Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni's *Manifestation Number Four*, 1967] coincide, however, in their rigorous redefinition of relationships between audience, object, and author. And all are concerted in the attempt to replace a traditional, hierarchical model of privileged experience based on authorial skills.[33]

Both art and graphic design share concerns about the audience, object, and author. Graphic design, however, has lagged behind art in scrutinising these relationships, instead allowing them to operate unchallenged as the "natural order" or "good practice."

This thesis seeks to indict institutional practices in graphic design by questioning the validity and necessity of the limitations which have been placed on practice. The production of artifacts which break from disciplinary conventions seeks to raise questions: what are the limits to the discipline? How far can a work be removed from institutionalised practice? Is a work still graphic design if —?

29. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962—1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (1990): 105–43.

30. Hans Haacke, "Touching Institutional Nerves," interview by Stian Gabrielsen, *Kunstkritikk Nordic Art Review*, 22 December 2015, https://kunstkritikk.com/touching-institutional-nerves.

31. Manfred Hermes, "Hans Haacke," *Frieze*, no. 106 (April 2007), https://frieze.com/article/hans-haacke.

32. Tate, "Institutional Critique — Art Term," Tate, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/institutional-critique, accessed 26 July 2019.

33. Buchloh, 140.

Fig. 8. Hans Haacke, *Manet–PROJEKT '74*, 1974, ten panels in black frames under glass, one color photo reproduction of Manet's *Une botte d'asperges* (Bunch of Asparagus) in its museum frame. Photo: Rolf Lillig. Installation view at Paul Maenz Gallery, Cologne.
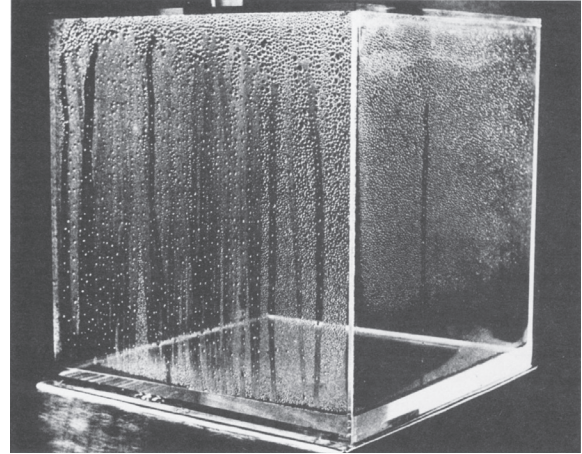
Fig.9. Hans Haacke, *Condensation Cube*, 1963-65, in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962—1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October*, vol. 55 (1990): 133.

Fig. 10. Lawrence Weiner, *A 36″ × 36″ Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall*, 1968, http://moma.org/collection/works/137437

Fig. 11. Lawrence Weiner, Photograph of *A 36″ x 36″ Square Removal to the Wallboard or Lathing from a Wall*, 1968, in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962—1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October*, vol. 55 (1990): 134.
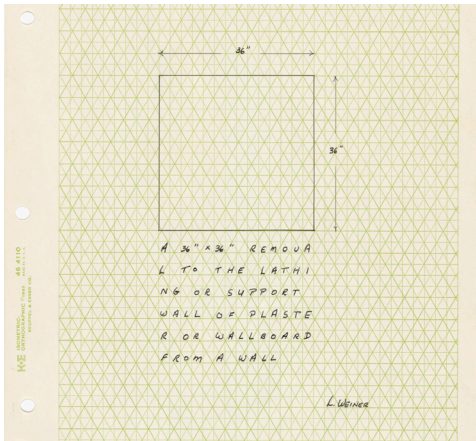

Fig. 12. Liam Gillick, *Discussion Island: Projected Think Tank*, 1997, anodised aluminium, plexiglass, http://liamgilick.info

Fig. 13. Liam Gillick, *Leaning Corner Rail (White)*, 1989, plastic, steel, http://liamgilick.info

Reflecting on institutional critique, Lucy Lippard discusses the dematerialisation of art and its "deemphasis on [the] material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)"[34] of a work. The act of dematerialisation critiqued the expectation that a work of art must be a material object, instead presenting an *idea* or *concept* as the work of art. The intent of such work disrupted institutional practices — specifically the commodification of artistic production. Though the art market found ways in which these conceptual works could be sold, dematerialisation caused a major shift in how works were produced, as Lippard describes:

> As the object becomes merely the end product, a number of artists are losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art. The studio is becoming a study. Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialisation of art, especially of art as object.[35]

Lippard notes that this type of "highly conceptual art" which presents "art as idea"[36] (see Fig. 10, 11) rather than physical artifact met criticism from audiences who expected to see more traditional artifacts.[37] Similarly, the artifacts produced in this research question the expectations of graphic design practice and seek to address the aforementioned disciplinary conflict — whether graphic design is a producer of an institutionalised, commercial service, or a site of cultural production and critical discourse. The exact output of "cultural production" remains undefined, allowing flexibility to explore through production.

Further to dematerialisation, Nicolas Bourriaud discusses relational art in which the art object is replaced by constructed experiences, reliant on the conditions of their context, and beauty is relocated from the object to the process. Bourriaud points to the agency of the producer of a work to determine how the work is to be received:

> Art represents a barter activity... whose form is defined by that of the object itself, before being so defined by definitions foreign to it. The artist's practice, and his behaviour as producer, determines the relationship that will be struck up with his work.[38]

For Bourriaud, the producer of a work (artist, designer) controls the relations between the audience and a work. The answer to the question "is a work still graphic design if —?" is *yes* when according to Bourriaud, the designer (producer of the work) declares it so: the producer of a work has control over the work's conditions, regardless of its adherence to institutional limitations.

But in "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," Claire Bishop warns that relational art is in some ways "institutionalised studio activity,"[39] from which the institution will ultimately take credit and gain cultural

34. Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 5.

35. Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialisation of Art," in *Changing Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), 255.

36. Lippard and Chandler, 256.

37. Lippard and Chandler, 257.

38. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods, and Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002), 42.

39. Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 52.

capital.[40] Despite such work being produced in part as an institutional protest, institutional forces are powerful enough to absorb and overcome any resistance. Buchloh describes institutions as sites where "artistic production is transformed into a tool of ideological control and cultural legitimation."[41] Though the producer of a work may determine object-audience relationships, these relationships exist in the context of an institutionally determined space.

Similar forces exist in graphic design — new methods of practice are simply absorbed by institutionalised forces. Even if this is the case, new methodologies will still have successfully expanded the field, setting the stage for the next opportunity to challenge normative limits.

Bishop highlights the work of artist Liam Gillick, (Fig. 12, 13) who discusses his desire not to actively critique the status quo through his work, but to "examine the extent to which critical access is possible at all."[42] Whereas this research does seek to critique current institutional limitations. It also seeks to examine the possibility of an extended practice. In doing so, the works produced through this research begin to challenge or rework expectations of contemporary practice. In the same manner that relational art reassesses what the output of artistic production may be (object, experience, process), challenging institutionalised practices in graphic design opens the discipline to position itself as a site of cultural production, rather than merely a tool subservient to commercial service.

Post-Structuralism

Umberto Eco's text *The Open Work* provides critical insight for this research. Eco provides insight into how graphic design (both as individual works and as a discipline) can be read and perceived by its audiences and how a work's openness to a range of readings brings vitality to the work. It has been well outlined by this point that institutionalisation declares there to be "correct" ways in which to read and define the discipline of graphic design — what the discipline produces, what is good work, which works display utility, beauty, legibility, et cetera.

Following Eco, most perceptions of graphic design belong in a realm of expectation, or a reasonable limit on interpretation. Through Eco's post-structuralist methodology, ideas outside of this "realm of reasonable expectation" can be explored and used to inform an extended practice. A discipline informed by a post-structuralist approach to self-definition creates opportunities for many ways of working, some of which may successfully resist institutional limitations.

40. Bishop, 53.

41. Buchloh, 143.

42. Liam Gillick, "A Guide to Video Conferencing Systems and the Role of the Building Worker in Relation to the Contemporary Art Exhibition (Backstage)," in *Five or Six* (New York: Lukas and Steinberg, 2000), 9.

The Open Work also suggests a fluidity to defining works: whereas a work may be complete when presented by its author, "every reception of a work of art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perception for itself."[43] Examining graphic design from this post-structuralist perspective suggests that despite institutionalisation's attempts to enforce limiting conditions on graphic design, the discipline can be "read" in many different ways, as it remains a continually interpreted and performed work. New works of graphic design produced from peripheral ideas from outside of the realm of expectation must also be continually performed and interpreted, as graphic design or other, in a fluid cycle of reassessing meaning and definition.

43. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4.

44. Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Formation, Deformation, and Reformation: An Introduction to the Grotesque," in *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 9.

On the Grotesque

Geoffrey Galt Harpham's *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* provides another theoretical perspective with which to frame this research. In this context, "grotesque" refers to more than ugliness — it is that which cannot be categorised, the combining of elements which do not belong together. The grotesque causes feelings of discomfort and repulsion as the viewer tries to understand and categorise the grotesquery before them.[44]

Fig. 14. Francis Bedford, detail from "Plate LXXXVI," in *The Grammar of Ornament,* Owen Jones (London: Day & Son, 1856).

Figure 14 depicts two creatures which appear to be formed from parts of other beings, including unicorn, lion, bird, and serpent. These creatures embody Harpham's definition of the grotesque through their inability to fit into an established taxonomy, causing them to seem surreal or bizarre to the viewer.

Just as expectations of practice play a role in the institutionalisation of graphic design, "prejudice, assumptions, and expectations play such a crucial role in creating the sense of the grotesque."[45] Without the viewer's expectations and knowledge of a "natural order," or how objects should be categorised, the grotesque could not present such an uncomfortable disparity. Examples of supposed "natural order" in graphic design include what are now modernist tropes: "ornament is crime"; "less is more"; "form follows function."[46] Harpham also indicates the grotesque as a struggle between form and content, which has particular relevance for graphic design and suggests a potential methodology for producing work which contradicts expectations of practice.

The potential of the grotesque is not simply the creation of uncomfortable or upsetting works but the creation of transitional, liminal works which lead to something other. Harpham compares the grotesque to the confusion scientists may experience between disproving one theory and proving another — the "paradigm crisis," an uncomfortable struggle which precedes new knowledge.[47]

"The grotesque is often, like the experience of 'para,' an augury, rather than a negation of a new, even 'sublime' awareness."[48] Harpham claims that the grotesque is an omen of the sublime — that it is through ideological struggle that new knowledge can be formed. The implication for graphic design is that the critique and rejection of institutionalised limitations on graphic design could lead to an extended practice which offers the potential to create unique and original work.[49] Harpham claims that "serious attention to the grotesque might unlock many secrets"[50] — perhaps such as how the act of embracing the grotesque could lead the discipline to an extended practice. As a practice-based discipline, such ideas must be tested through studio production.

45. Harpham, 14.
46. Winkler, 42.
47. Harpham, 17.
48. Harpham, 20.
49. Keedy, "Graphic Design in the Postmodern Era."
50. Harpham, 21.

Artifact Production

51. Harpham, 20.

A series of artifacts has been made to form the thesis for this research, in conjunction with this written support paper. The artifacts are categorised by the following divisions: initial experiments which seek to challenge the aforementioned institutional limitations, an in-depth investigation of the functions of institutionalised practice through the vehicle of the exhibition catalogue object, and finally two exhibition catalogue artifacts which encapsulate the previous investigations and seek to achieve Harpham's "sublime."[51]

Phase One — Initial experiments

The first phase of studio production seeks to address some of the seven aspects of institutionalisation previously identified: utility, beauty, legibility, media, financial restraint, mass production or multiples, audience. Because of limitations on time and budget for the completion of these artifacts, they primarily address beauty, legibility, utility, and media.

The posters in Figures 15–17 address concepts of beauty and utility through the analysis and deconstruction of the accepted standards of beauty in institutionalised graphic design. The use of heavy and seemingly chaotic ornament contrasts modernist virtues of clarity and simplicity and presents a visually tumultuous experience. These images utilise the three primary elements of graphic design: typography, image, and additional graphic elements, though are composed in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish their individual parts. The colours chosen are discordant, and do not conform to any perceivable scheme or system. Though there are interesting textural moments in this artifact, the overall lack of conventional beauty is jarring — as is the layered and illegible text.

The text in the posters in Figure 18 also challenges legibility, though these letters are themselves stretched and distorted, in addition to their heavy layering. Printed text was moved across the surface of a flatbed scanner to create these distorted forms, in an act which combined human and machine intervention in form. The colours are fewer than the artifact in Figures 15–17, yet still lack harmony, and the lack of legible content in these works leaves the viewer unsure of how to engage or what level of utility these works maintain.

Another outcome from experimentation with scanning and distorting text is the poster in Figure 19. This large-scale poster was printed by tiling tabloid size paper, which was rearranged and presented out of order from the original design. Because of the multiple, disconnected parts, the poster must be displayed on a flat, horizontal surface, and would not meet expectations of a poster's utility (to hang on a wall), even if it had legible content.

Fig. 15–17. Lucy Bilson, *Investigation of Beauty*, 2019, poster, 17 × 35 in.

Fig. 18. Lucy Bilson, *Investigation of Legibility*, 2019, posters, 17 × 25 in.

Fig. 19. Lucy Bilson, *Investigation of Utility*, 2019, tiled poster, 34 × 55 in.
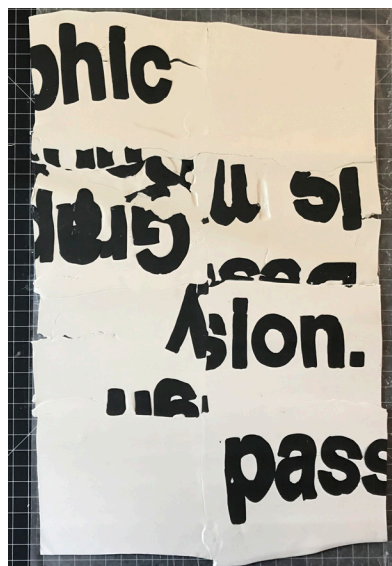
Fig. 20–22. Lucy Bilson, *Default Design*, 2019, modelling clay, 11 × 17 in.

The artifact in Figures 20–22 also addresses the expected form of the poster, deviating from typical choice of medium (paper) in favour of black and white modelling clay. The text "Graphic Design is My Passion" is a reference to an internet meme (Fig. 23) which parodies the clichéd use

Fig. 23. *Graphic Design is My Passion.* Meme. Graphic Library.
http://www.graphiclibrary.com/graphic-design-is-my-passion/

of the phrase by designers and is often accompanied with clipart and low fidelity graphic elements.[52] The clay is cut into black letters using the typeface *Helvetica* and positioned on a rectangular slab of white clay in a reference to default design — a form of graphic design which explores the systematisation of the design process and style, in opposition to personal expression.[53] This artifact combines highly institutionalised elements — systematised design and industry cliché — with a physical material which is not customarily used in contemporary graphic design practice, if at all. The images show the evolution of this piece through the stages from clay poster, to various abstract, three-dimensional forms, the extent of the object's utility and legibility also changing with each transition.

Each of these artifacts addresses one or more institutional limitation and through visual and material experimentation, questions disciplinary conventions. These works again return to the question "is a work still graphic design if —?" — it is ugly, illegible, has no utility, uses non-conventional media? As had been determined, by Bourriaud's school of thought, these artifacts may be declared works of graphic design by the producer, despite defying institutional conventions.

Phase Two — The art catalogue
Following these experiments, in order to concentrate further attempts to challenge institutional limitations within a singular artifact, an exhibition catalogue has been designed using content from an exhibition titled *The Perennials*, which was shown at the Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery from 21st June to 6th October 2019, curated by Crystal Mowry (Fig. 24–26).[54] Core expectations of an exhibition catalogue are that it must show images of works

52. "Graphic Design Is My Passion," *Graphic Library* (blog), 18 August 2019, https://www.graphiclibrary.com/graphic-design-is-my-passion/.

53. Rudy VanderLans and Rob Giampietro, "Default Systems in Graphic Design," *Emigre*, no. 65 (2003): 52–60.

54. Crystal Mowry, *The Perennials: Works from the Permanent Collection*, 2019, https://kwag.ca/content/perennials-works-permanent-collection.

Fig. 24–26. Lucy Bilson, *The Perennials Catalogue*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

1. The catalogue as a structured list without images — the catalogue in its pure form.

2. The catalogue as a structured list with images — the enumeration.

3. The catalogue with a "framed" image on the right-hand page. The left-hand page is reserved for a caption or descriptive text.

4. The catalogue with a row of images at "eye level."

5. The catalogue in which some images are rotated to maintain the original proportions of the images in relation to each other.

6. The catalogue as an atlas.

7. The catalogue as a dynamic arrangement of images and captions (1950s).

8. The catalogue as an architectural structure (columns).

9. The catalogue with enlarged details of the images.

10. The catalogue as a visual representation of the exhibition space (1990s).

Fig. 27. Walter Nikkels, "Basic Rules for the Design of a Catalogue," in *Walter Nikkels: Depicted Abgebildet Afgebeeld* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013), 332.

from the exhibition, alongside information about the works and artists who produced them.

This post-factual catalogue defies such expectations by showing green stroke outlines of the works in place of photographs of the works. All works by each artist are confined to a double page spread, regardless of the number, causing content to overlap. The only photographs that appear in the catalogue show the exhibition's spatial context, rather than individual works, and are reserved for end pages and the centrefold. The names of the artists are displayed at a size too large for the page, leading to awkward breaks in the text. These choices entirely change the reader's relationship with the works. By removing photographic representation, the audience is forced to imagine the works from their drawn outlines and written content. The catalogue offers unusual perspectives, such as the visual overview of how many works each artist has in the exhibition — a depiction of the exhibit evident from each double page spread.

Though this catalogue begins to challenge institutional limitations through changes to an expected format, a more rigorous investigation was necessary to properly dissect catalogue design conventions. Dutch graphic designer Walter Nikkels provides a taxonomy of various formats for the exhibition catalogue design in his monograph, *Walter Nikkels: Depicted Abgebildet Afgebeeld*.[55] Figure 27 depicts Nikkels' categorisations, which vary from the most basic — "1. the catalogue as a structured list without images — the catalogue in its pure form" — to the more complex, such as "10. the catalogue as a visual representation of the exhibition space."[56] The categorisation of catalogue design speaks to the systematisation and institutionalisation of design, by presenting options from which designers may choose and into which existing catalogue designs may (likely) fit.

Using content from *The Perennials* exhibition, ten catalogues were produced according to Nikkels' specifications (see Fig. 28–37). It is apparent from reviewing these designs — each of which draw from identical content — that the design of the catalogue has significant impact on how the audience interprets the works. The catalogue as a list of works is pure data, providing information as to the media, size, ownership, et cetera, of the work. Yet no sense of what each work looks like — a fundamental aspect of visual art — is present. The catalogue as a visual representation of the exhibition space may give less quantitative information but allows the viewer to see the works and how they are displayed in relation to one another; this second example gives the audience a much greater sense of the curatorial narrative of the exhibition than a structured list, even if not all works are shown. It is clear that the design of a catalogue (and, by extension, the designer) plays an influential intermediary role between the art object and its audience.
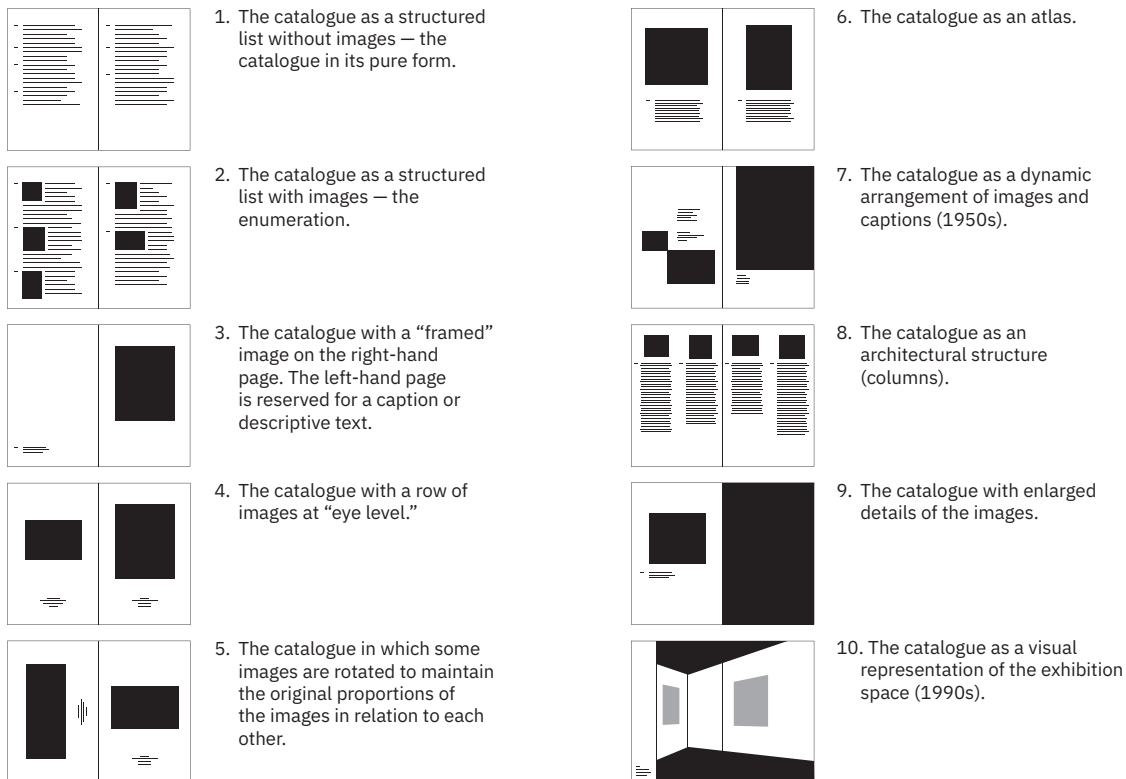
55. Walter Nikkels, "Basic Rules for the Design of a Catalogue," in *Walter Nikkels: Depicted Abgebildet Afgebeeld* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013), 332.

56. Nikkels, 332.
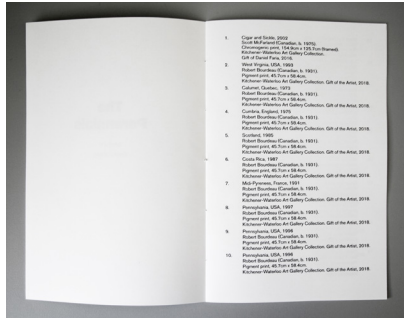
Fig. 28. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #1) The Catalogue as a List without Images*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 29. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #2) The Catalogue as a Structured List with Images*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 30. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #3) The Catalogue with a Framed Image on the Right Page*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.
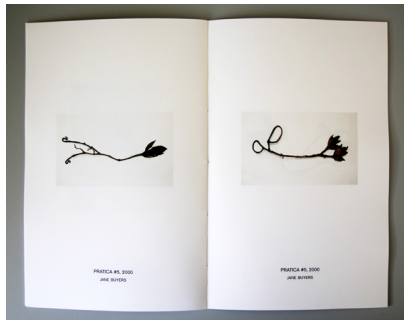
Fig. 31. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #4) The Catalogue with a Row of Images at "Eye Level,"* 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 32. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #5) The Catalogue with Images at Original Proportions*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 33. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #6) The Catalogue as an Atlas*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 34. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #7) The Catalogue as a Dynamic Arrangement*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 35. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #8) The Catalogue as an Architectural Structure*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 36. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #9) The Catalogue with Enlarged Details of the Images*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 37. Lucy Bilson, (*Nikkels #10) The Catalogue as a Visual Representation of the Space*, 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

57. Harpham, 14.

In response to Nikkels' conventions of catalogue design, further catalogues were made to challenge said conventions, among other institutional limitations. Harpham quotes Alfred Jarry on combining the parts of different wholes: "it is common usage to call 'monster' an unfamiliar concord of dissonant elements."[57] Harpham suggests that by combining various parts together into one new object, the grotesque ("monsters") can be formed.

Fig. 38, 39. Lucy Bilson, *Monster #1,* 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

For the next set of artifacts, five catalogues were created by physically combining different parts of the ten catalogues from Nikkels' system, to form new hybrids. Each of these catalogues draws parts — from single lines of text to entire spreads — from the set of standardised catalogues to create five unique "monsters." The first monster (Fig. 38, 39) uses a single printed sheet from each of the ten types of catalogues, bound into a single book. It functions as any other, with its title on the front cover and images and text inside, however the system of information organisation changes with each page, interrupting the reading. On closer viewing, captions are missing, text does not always match image, and content repeats throughout.

The second monster (Fig. 40, 41) further breaks from the typical structure, using a cropped front cover, tipped-in pages, and folded bound pages, requiring the reader to rotate and unfold parts of the book to find information. The utility of this catalogue is called into question owing to difficulties the format imposes on accessing content, though these difficulties also layer a sense of intrigue and discovery into the book.

The third monster (Fig. 42, 43) breaks through the surface of the page, cutting the original pages into sections, removing margins and moving images and text between pages. This catalogue also layers text and image to create interesting juxtapositions, privileging the construction of a narrative over the truthful representation of the art works. In a 1996 article for *Eye,*

Fig. 40, 41. Lucy Bilson, *Monster #2,* 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 42, 43. Lucy Bilson, *Monster #3,* 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Anne Burdick describes the art catalogue as a "specific site... a distinct and by no means diminished art experience."[58] This third monster significantly departs from Nikkels' categorisations, positioning the catalogue as a site of investigation, separate and further to that of the original exhibition.

The fourth monster (Fig. 44, 45) distorts the actual content of the original catalogues through photocopying experiments similar to those in Figures 18 and 19. Though text has been difficult to read in some of the previous monsters, legibility is challenged to the greatest extent in this example with stretched, distorted text often printed over images. The act of printing text directly onto the images (rather than layering over additional sections of paper or placing text beside the image) suggests a more direct and aggressive connection between the words and image, which is not explored by any of Nikkels' conventional catalogue designs.

58. Anne Burdick, "The Portable Art Space," *Eye*, vol. 6, no. 22 (Autumn 1996): 28.
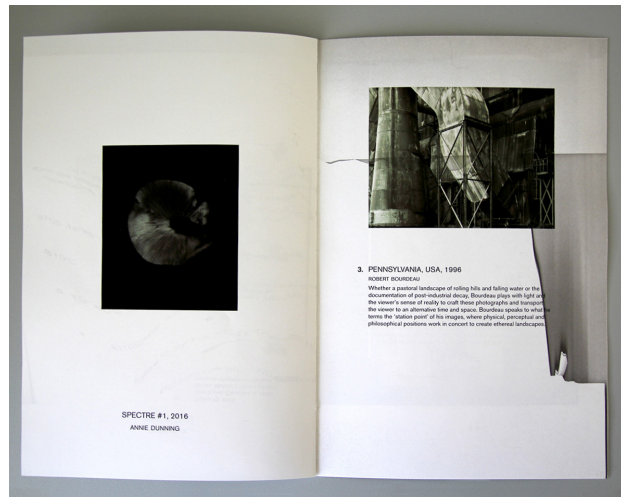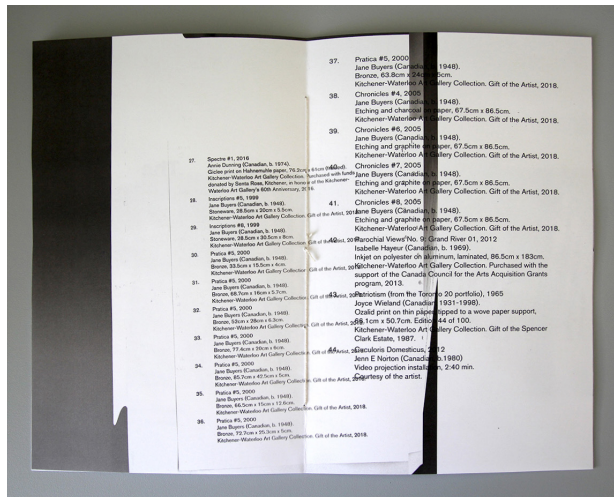
Fig. 44, 45. Lucy Bilson, *Monster #4,* 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.
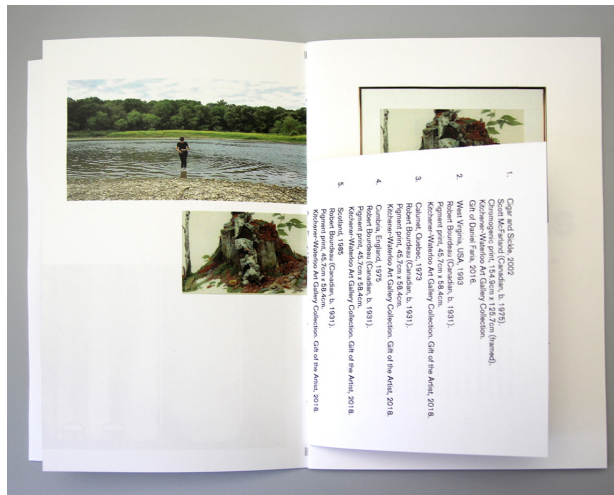
Fig. 46, 47. Lucy Bilson, *Monster #5,* 2019, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

The fifth monster (Fig. 46, 47) combines aspects of the previous four catalogues, such as distorted images, tipped-in pages, and a disrupted ordering of content. This catalogue collates all of the image captions onto the centrefold, separate from their works. The title of the exhibition also does not appear until the page directly preceding the centrefold, leaving the reader to interact with a series of spreads that display the work before being introduced to the curatorial narrative. The experience the viewer has with the works in each of these monsters differs greatly from that of the ten catalogues produced from Nikkels' taxonomy and gives some indication as to what an extended practice might offer. Though much of the artifact production in this research has focused on book design, catalogue design functions as a microcosm for the aforementioned institutional issues.

Phase Three — In search of an extended practice
An analysis of the monster catalogues identified eighteen design methods which challenge institutionalised practice (see Fig. 48), as follows:

1. Full image, no text cover
2. Cropped cover pages
3. Content over cover spine
4. Varying page sizes
5. Tipped-in pages (folded/across spine)
6. Folded bound pages
7. Multiple organisational systems
8. Rotated content
9. Collated content
10. Centrefold title page
11. Content across margins
12. Text layered over image
13. Image bleed over sheet, across spine
14. Touching/interacting images
15. Layered images
16. Page cut through
17. Distorted text and image
18. Repeated content

The above design methods have been thematically grouped into five categories that reflect design metaphors for implementation in further catalogue design: decentralised commentary, spatial context, interactive reading, works in conversation, and privileging reader experience.

Decentralised commentary addresses the standard practice that the curatorial voice of the exhibition be the most prevalent text throughout a catalogue, as the context in which to view the works. By breaking from conventional placement of text, space can be made for commentary and discussion from outside of the institution, whether from critics, artists, or others. The benefit of doing so would be to position the catalogue as an artifact with relevance to contemporary discussions about the works, independent of the exhibition itself. This approach explores the possibility of the catalogue as an autonomous work, engaging readers with its own content, rather than acting as an exhibition-specific souvenir. This approach employs such moves as layering text over image, placing content across margins and spines, and other non-conventional placement of text.

Spatial context refers to the presentation of works in view of one another, as though seeing multiple works in a physical space, across a room or through a doorway. Through cropped pages, varying page sizes, and page cut throughs, the catalogue can present moments of contrast and comparison between works in a more complex manner than presenting them side by side across a double page spread. The intent is not to replicate the gallery experience, but to create a thematic narrative unique to the catalogue, which becomes apparent as the reader turns through the book's pages.

Interactive reading encourages an active consumption of the art works, in contrast to the passive and indiscriminate consumption of browsing a conventional catalogue. Continual changes in layout, tipped-in pages, and

1. Full image, no text cover.

2. Cropped cover pages.

3. Content over cover spine.

4. Varying page sizes.

5. Tipped-in pages (folded/across spine).

6. Folded bound pages.

7. Multiple organisational systems.

8. Rotated content.

9. Collated Content.

10. Centrefold title page.

11. Content across margins.

12. Text layered over image.

13. Image bleed over sheet, across spine.

14. Touching/interacting images.

15. Layered images.

16. Page cut through.

17. Distorted text and image.

18. Repeated content.

Fig. 48. Lucy Bilson, *Diagram of design techniques used in monster catalogues*, 2020.

folds force an increased interaction with the catalogue. Readers must work to find hidden or additional content, moving back and forth between pages, fore fronting an experience of discovery. Through this format, a reader may have multiple, varying experiences of the catalogue, depending on what parts they discover or engage with on each reading.

Works in conversation uses touching or layered images and repeated content to draw direct visual contrast and comparison between works, without using text. This approach treats artworks not as singular objects but as visual elements which combine to form a new object. It is a bold choice, considering the typical convention of presenting works as accurately as possible and with minimal editing or interference — usually at the insistence of the artist. However, privileging conceptual discussion over accurate representation of works positions the catalogue as a potential site of thought provoking discussion.

Privileging reader experience delays introducing the curatorial narrative of the exhibition until later in the catalogue, allowing readers to experience the works and form their own thoughts before being told those of the curator. Collating all text towards the back of the catalogue, rather than dispersing it throughout, and removing titles from the cover facilitates a reader-led experience of the works. This approach speaks to the recent curatorial trend to facilitate self-led learning and interaction in museum and gallery spaces.[59]

59. Vera L. Zolberg, "'An Elite Experience for Everyone': Art Museums, the Public, and Cultural Literacy," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (London: Routledge, 1994), 49–65.

60. Royal Academy, *Summer Exhibition Illustrated* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005).

Fig. 49. Royal Academy, *Summer Exhibition Illustrated* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005).
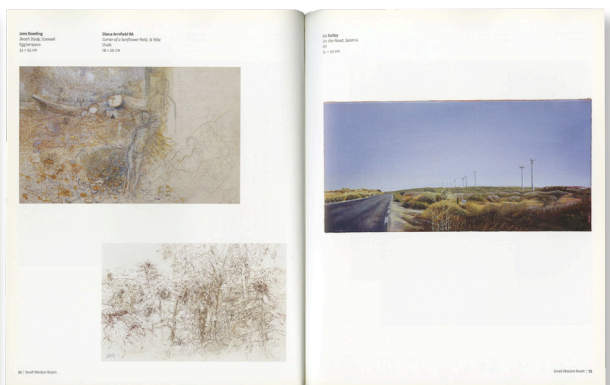
Fig. 50. Royal Academy, *Summer Exhibition Illustrated* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005).

The final artifacts produced for this research are two exhibition catalogues which draw content from the 2005 *Summer Exhibition* at the Royal Academy, London (original catalogue shown in Fig. 49, 50).[60] The first of these final catalogues — *Sublime #1* (Fig. 51–57) — employs the metaphors of interactive reading and spatial context; the second catalogue — *Sublime #2* (Fig. 58–62) — uses the metaphors of interactive reading and works in conversation.

Fig. 51. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #1,* 2020, book, 6.75 × 9.5 in.

Fig. 52. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #1,* 2020, book, 6.75 × 9.5 in.

Fig. 53. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #1,* 2020, book, 6.75 × 9.5 in.

Fig. 54. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #1,* 2020, book, 6.75 × 9.5 in.
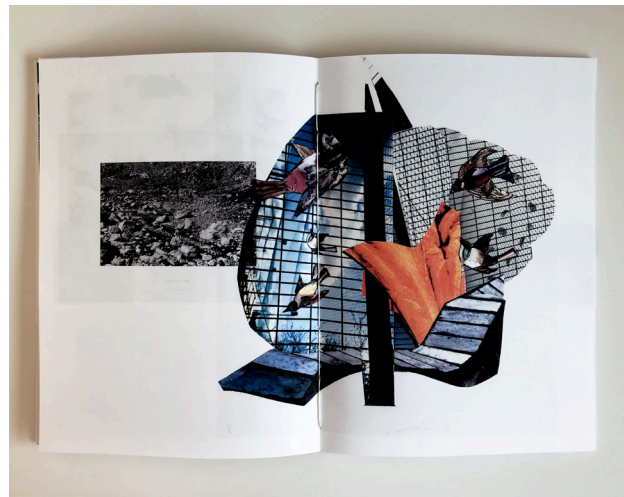
Fig. 55. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #1,* 2020, book, 6.75 × 9.5 in.

Fig. 56. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #1,* 2020, book, 6.75 × 9.5 in.

London, especially Chris Prater and Christopher Betambeau, was also a crucial factor.) Many of the Pop Art generation continue to employ the medium, as can be seen in examples of work by Peter Blake, Allen Jones and Joe Tilson in this exhibition.

Of course, printmaking has moved on since the arrival of silkscreen. Today, the artist is offered the huge (and still largely unexploited) potential of technology and digitisation. Bewildering to the layman, probably threatening to older generations of artists, it is taken in their stride by the young, to whom the art-school computer room was as familiar as the studio, perhaps even more so.

For all the emphasis on such modern and relatively modern techniques as inkjet, giclee and digitisation in this exhibition, traditional print media have not been neglected at all. Like its predecessors, this Summer Exhibition demonstrates that there is still abundant life in the woodcut, the lithograph and the etching. Among this year's invited artists is one of the greatest living etchers working today, Lucian Freud, whose Painter's Garden somehow succeeds in emulating the physicality of his oils. Avigdor Arikha's superb small drypoints of people are one of the outstanding features of Gallery

Fig. 57. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #1,* 2020, book, 6.75 × 9.5 in.

Though the *Sublime* catalogues may appear to sit between Nikkels' categorisations and the highly experimental "monster" catalogues, these concepts extend beyond that of the monsters. Harpham describes the sublime as new knowledge which can only be found after struggling through the grotesque, and so these catalogues draw metaphorically from the monster experiments to achieve the sublime.

All of the text in *Sublime #1* (curatorial narrative, captions, essays) is isolated on tipped-in pages, separate from the art works. These tipped-in pages can be removed from and read alongside the main catalogue like a gallery guide. The catalogue also uses folded bound pages, cropped pages, and rotated content to encourage the reader to actively engage with the book.

Fig. 58. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #2,* 2020, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 59. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #2,* 2020, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 60. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #2,* 2020, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Fig. 61. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #2,* 2020, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Yet their status remained low. P
with wax modellers and animal
remained the poor relations at
It is not widely known that an A
into a particular category of arti
being those of architect, painte
category of engraver did not ex
Academy was founded, and wh
against this discrimination, they
that the best they could hope fo
According to the existing dogm
for all time to be inferior. In 18
Council of the Academy made t
clear: "The relative pre-eminen
estimated... as they... abound i
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Painting, Sculpture and Archite
possess, but of which Engravin
greatest praise consisting in tra
loss as possible the beauties of
Design." Engraving, in other wo
form was low on original conter

This view of engravers as mere
ensure their exclusion from full
Academy for four more decade
formal status of Academician i

Ed Ruscha HON RA
Parking Lots, 1967-99
Silver-gelatin prints

Sasa Marinkov
In Shadow
Linocut
38 × 55 cm

Richard Long RA
Parnassus Line
Photograph
47 × 70 cm

Ed Ruscha HON RA
Parking Lots, 1967-99
Silver-gelatin prints

and digitisation. Bewildering to the layman, probably
threatening to older generations of artists, it is taken
in their stride by the young, to whom the art-school
computer room was as familiar as the studio, perhaps
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Summer Exhibition demonstrates that there is still
abundant life in the woodcut, the lithograph and
the etching. Among this year's invited artists is one
of the greatest living etchers working today, Lucian
Freud, whose Painter's Garden somehow succeeds in
emulating the physicality of his oils. Avigdor Arikha's
superb small drypoints of people are one of the
outstanding features of Gallery II. There, too, are
drypoints of shamelessly sexy but also sinister cats by
Louise Bourgeois. The traditional and time-honoured
together with the progressive and experimental: this
is the mixture that every *Summer Exhibition* strives for.
Perhaps this year's exhibition also manages to realise
Chris Orr's ambition of showing that "printmaking is
today at the centre of all artistic creativity."

Fig. 62. Lucy Bilson, *Sublime Catalogue #2,* 2020, book, 5.5 × 8.5 in.

Sublime #2 uses slim bound French folds which hide and reveal captions and partial elements of the works as the reader turns through them. Each of the works is presented in black and white, allowing them to merge into a singular composition which spreads throughout the book. The works are indistinguishable at points, contributing to a collective narrative rather than a conventional presentation. This collective narrative, with its layering and comparing of works, could not be achieved in an exhibition context because of the physical limitations of the art works. This approach is unique to the format of the catalogue and offers an experience beyond that which an exhibition is capable of producing.

How do these catalogues critique established methods of practice? The production of these artifacts with very limited adherence to institutionalised expectations of practice is in itself a critique of the discipline's limitations, and shows the value of challenging normative ideas of practice.

Fig. 63. Karel Martens, Zwischenraum-gespenster, *OASE*, no. 43 (1995): front cover.

Fig. 64. Karel Martens, Gentrification, *OASE*, no. 73 (2007): front cover.
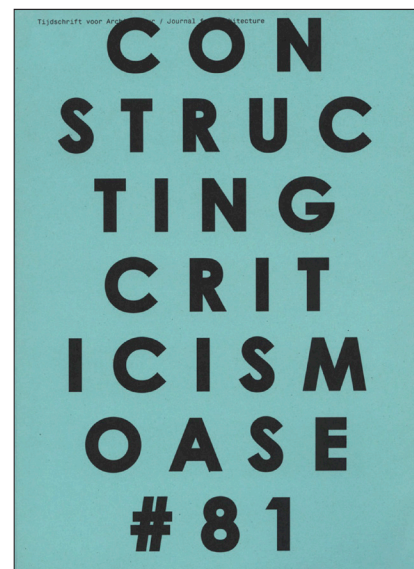
Fig. 65. Karel Martens, Constructing Criticism, *OASE*, no. 81 (2010): front cover.

Designer Karel Martens has designed the Dutch architecture journal *OASE* from issue 28 (1991) onwards, building a model in which the layout changes between issues (Fig. 63–65). In the 100th issue of the journal (2018), Ayham Ghraowi describes Martens' approach to design: "Unlike the standardised format, the typography of *OASE* is anything but fixed: each issue's cover is drastically unique, and its grid and interior layout are continually adjusted."[61]

The modernist impulse to standardise and create a system for the journal is apparent, yet Martens has designed the system in such a way which allows for his constant interference. This "uniquely iterative approach to graphic design critiques a contemporary landscape dominated by templates

and style-guides,"[62] creating a unique experience for the reader and allowing Martens to respond to the content of the articles. The execution of this resistance is quiet, but visible and highlights the importance of the designer to determine how content is experienced by the reader.

Similarly, the *Sublime* catalogues seek to resist institutional limitations and systematised design. They offer the reader a unique and original experience of the exhibition content that privileges a sense of discovery and draws interesting connections between the various works of art. Through this approach, the *Sublime* catalogues position the art catalogue as a distinct and specific site — an original work.

62. Ghraowi, 171.

Concluding Remarks

63. Stuart Bailey, "Final Words," *Dot Dot Dot*, no. 20 (2010): 143.

64. Harpham, 17.

65. McCoy, 214.

This thesis investigates the institutionalisation of graphic design, the limitations institutionalisation places on contemporary practice, and the implications this has for disciplinary conflict. Institutionalisation as it currently exists plays a significant role in the framing of graphic design as a service or tool, rather than as a critical discourse or site of cultural production. It is through the challenging of institutional limitations that an expanded, critical discipline may be formed.

This research has identified seven institutional limitations — utility, beauty, legibility, media, mass production or multiples, financial restriction, and audience. As Stuart Bailey describes, it has attempted "to find a way to break the usual thing — the most obvious being to attempt the opposite,"[63] through studio based explorations of ugliness, illegibility, and lack of utility, in an attempt to challenge the boundaries of practice.

The discipline's commitment to stylistic Modernism must also be challenged in order to explore other possibilities for contemporary practice. The act of identifying what common ideas or understandings about the discipline (such as the elevation of utility, simplicity, and universality) are tied to the perpetuation of Modernism is a step towards reassessing their validity and redefining disciplinary priorities.

Though it has been noted that experimental and conceptual practices primarily reach niche audiences, Harpham describes how one must be willing to wrestle through liminal phases (the grotesque) in order to reach new knowledge (the sublime).[64] Though universality and systematisation may be exalted in Modernism, these are not qualities which will best serve the discipline in the 21st century's hyper-globalised context.[65] Designers must wrestle through the departure from institutionalised practice, in order to reach a sublime, extended practice which offers a multiplicity of greater possibilities for contemporary practice.

Freedom to expand disciplinary practice is the freedom to critique and build a disciplinary discourse. In doing so, graphic design further positions itself towards a site of cultural production, released from its obligations to professional practice and its instrumental nature as a service. Graphic design will continue to serve commercial practice, but through the development of new methodologies and knowledge, it will also serve as a site of cultural production.

Epilogue

66. Crystal Mowry, email communication to author, 11 April 2020.

The series of catalogues produced through this research were shown to Crystal Mowry, curator of *The Perennials* exhibition, upon their completion. The following is a summary of Mowry's response to these works, as they relate to her work at the Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery (KWAG).[66]

Mowry describes a shift at KWAG over the last several years, from the production of catalogues as exhibition documentation to the development of a "more porous and collaborative" working relationship with designers. This approach to the curator–designer relationship positions Mowry as potentially more receptive to this research than curators at more traditional institutions.

Monster #3 is described by Mowry as having "the most promise as an option that is in-line with KWAG's approach to publishing" because of the way in which the typography creates visual interest without significantly disrupting legibility. Mowry suggests that the addition of a folio with full colour images to *Monster #3* could "assert the importance of artworks that represent the exhibition's key themes." This suggestion highlights the necessary negotiation between designer and curator in the production of the art catalogue and the potential product of that relationship.

Mowry indicates that though *Monster #2* is less legible, the cropped and folded pages give the "impression of an evolving form," situating it between an "experimental artist book" and an interpretation of the exhibition in dimensional form. Overall, Mowry notes the multitude of options for catalogue design that these works present, whilst indicating her preference for "an approach that conceptually honours the themes of the exhibition."

With reference to *Sublime #1*, Mowry states that the use of tipped-in pages to hold the text is a "sophisticated choice that balances the often-experimental nature of contemporary art with the logic and legibility expected of an institutional voice." It is clear that the experience of the catalogue must be considered from many angles — not only from the designer's perspective, or that of the curator and audience, but from the perspective of the institution.

Though Mowry notes that curators may not necessarily favour catalogues which "synthesise" their exhibitions, it is clear that the curator–designer relationship is a site of negotiation. Mowry understandably describes aspects of institutional need, while acknowledging that the work produced through this research is both "promising and intriguing." Balancing a variety of needs and navigating relationships within the gallery setting is an area for further exploration — the success of which will create space for an approach to catalogue design which serves the needs of the gallery while creating a unique and original experience for the reader.

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