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Symbolic speech
Beaziyt Worcou

I've recently become increasingly interested in political flags – not only what they look like but how they are used in various countercultural movements. I think the appeal, for me, comes from the idea that flags are a manifestation of this space between graphic design and political society.

In *Flags Through the Ages and Across The World*, Whitney Smith notes: "a flag often gains the same respect as is accorded to the person or thing it represents." [1] As a result, the use of the flag as an instrument for political resistance garners intense and passionate attention. The relationship between the flag and flag bearer becomes almost symbiotic. The flag speaks for and embodies the aspirations of its people and, in turn, the people, rooted in notions of patriotism or self-determination, display and protect the flag as if it has an innate connection to their identity.

Through my research I have stumbled upon a number of instances where flags have played a key role in the unfolding of political situations; here, I focus on four historical events that in some way demonstrate the subversive and emancipatory capacity of the flag.

1. Thích Quang Đuc
On June 11, 1963, a young Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist monk by the name of Thích Quang Đuc sat down on a small cushion in the middle of a busy street in Hue, South Saigon. Two of his fellow monks proceeded to douse Đuc's body in petrol as he sat still in a lotus position. Đuc then lit a match and set himself alight.

The events that led to the immolation of Đuc began earlier that year under the strict regime of Vietnam's first president, Ngô Đình Diem. Diem was a staunch Catholic, who had banned the flying of Buddhist flags just days before Vesak Day – the religious celebration and birthday of Gautama Buddha. The ban was implemented after Diem had labelled Buddhism an association not a religion, restricting its right to fly a flag. That summer amidst protests against the ban, nine civilians were shot and killed by government officials. Following these deaths mass protests erupted, student walkouts, mass fasting and strikes occurred. At the height of the political tension in Saigon, monks informed US journalists that something important would be happening the following morning outside of the Cambodian Embassy. It was here that Thích Quang Đuc lit a match and set himself alight in what became one of the most harrowing protests of the 1960s.

2. Texas v. Johnson
In 1984, during the Republican National Convention in Texas, Gregory Lee Johnson participated in a political demonstration against the policies of Ronald Reagan outside Dallas City Hall. Protesters carried banners, distributed flyers and shouted slogans such as, "Red, white and blue, we spit on you. You stand for plunder, you will go under." At one point during the protest, Johnson was handed an American flag that was taken from a flagpole, which he then set alight. He was later arrested and convicted with the desecration of a veneered object, sentenced to 12 months in prison and fined $2000. The Texas State Court of Criminal Appeals then reversed the conviction, after which the case was taken to the Supreme Court. The court held that Johnson, or any US citizen, could not be convicted for burning a US flag as it was considered an act of symbolic speech and therefore protected by the First Amendment. The case had a lasting impact, as it led to the invalidation of the prohibition of flag desecration as a criminal offence in 48 out of 50 states.

3. The Hungarian Revolution
In October 1956, during the Hungarian revolution against Soviet rule, thousands of protesters gathered around a statue of Józef Bem, a Polish engineer and national hero of Poland and Hungary. Situated at the centre of the crowd, a man named Peter Veres, who was president of the writers' union, led a reading from a manifesto. Among the demands, a call for Hungary to be independent from all foreign powers, that Hungary should join the United Nations and that Hungarian people should have freedom. The crowd later sang the National Song, which at the time was censored. During the protest, a member of the crowd took the Hungarian flag and cut out the Soviet coat of arms at its centre, with many others following suit. The Hungarian flag, now with the soviet coat of arms cut out of its centre, quickly became the symbol of the revolution.

4. A man was lynched yesterday
In the 1920s, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) began flying a flag outside of its Manhattan headquarters in New York. The black flag with capitalised white text read: A MAN WAS LYNCHED YESTERDAY. The flag appeared outside the headquarters every time a black person was lynched – which in the 1920s was not a rare occurence. The flag was a reminder to those living on the east coast of the ongoing racial violence that continued to take place in the Deep South. In 1938, after the threat of eviction from the landlord, the NAACP was forced to stop flying the flag.

Upon undertaking this research I've continued to think about flags and their significance, as well as why I was driven to write about them in the first place, and something perhaps quite obvious occurred to me. That is, flags are inherently concerned with making graphic symbols and ideas public. In a sense, to fly a flag can be viewed as an act of publishing. It is the publishing of the ideals and values of those it represents. To fly a flag harkens back to a primal way of seeing and communicating. Whitney Smith expresses the idea that: "to display a flag is to participate in a philosophy that spans time and distances; it is to express one's own views to others in a concise but dramatic form." [2]

Beaziyt Worcou is a Narrm-based graphic designer living and working on lands of the Wurundjeri people. She completed a Bachelor of Communication Design at Monash Art Design and Architecture in 2016. Beaziyt currently makes work with No Clients, a design studio founded with Samuel Heatley, Robert Janes and Ned Shannon. No Clients focus on commercial and non-commercial design projects, with a particular interest in publishing, modes of production, research and collaboration.

Footnotes

[1] Whitney Smith, *Flags through the ages and across the world* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976): 1–56.
[2] Ibid.: 1–56.
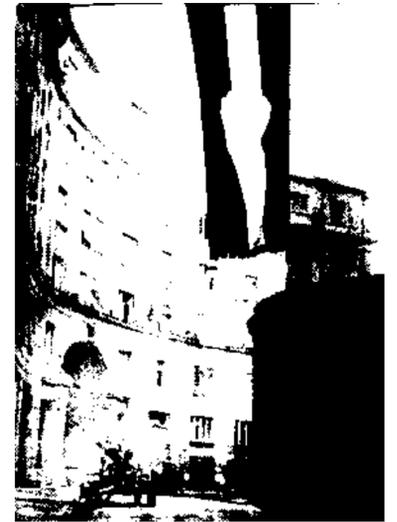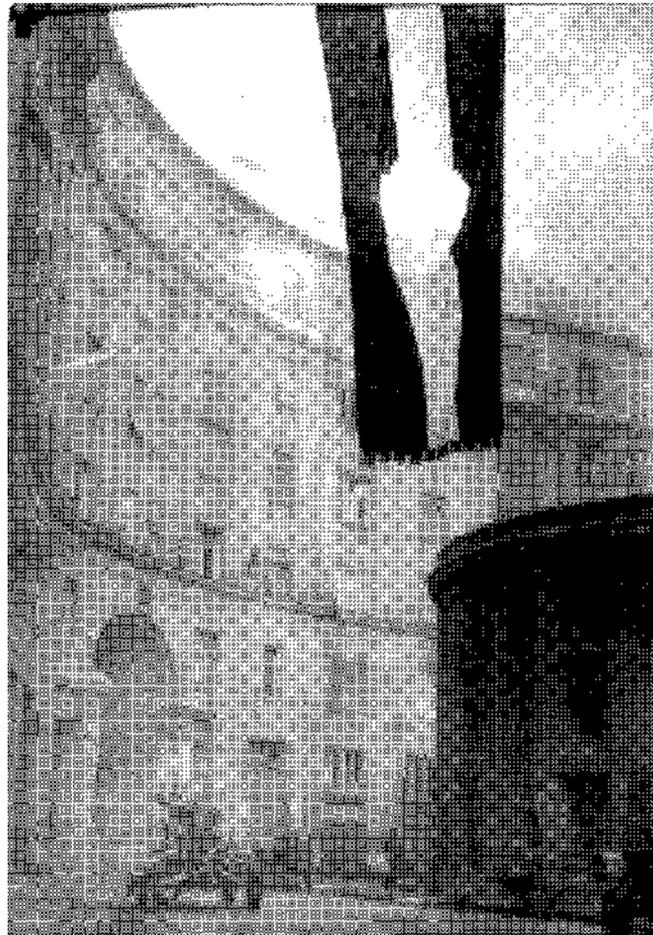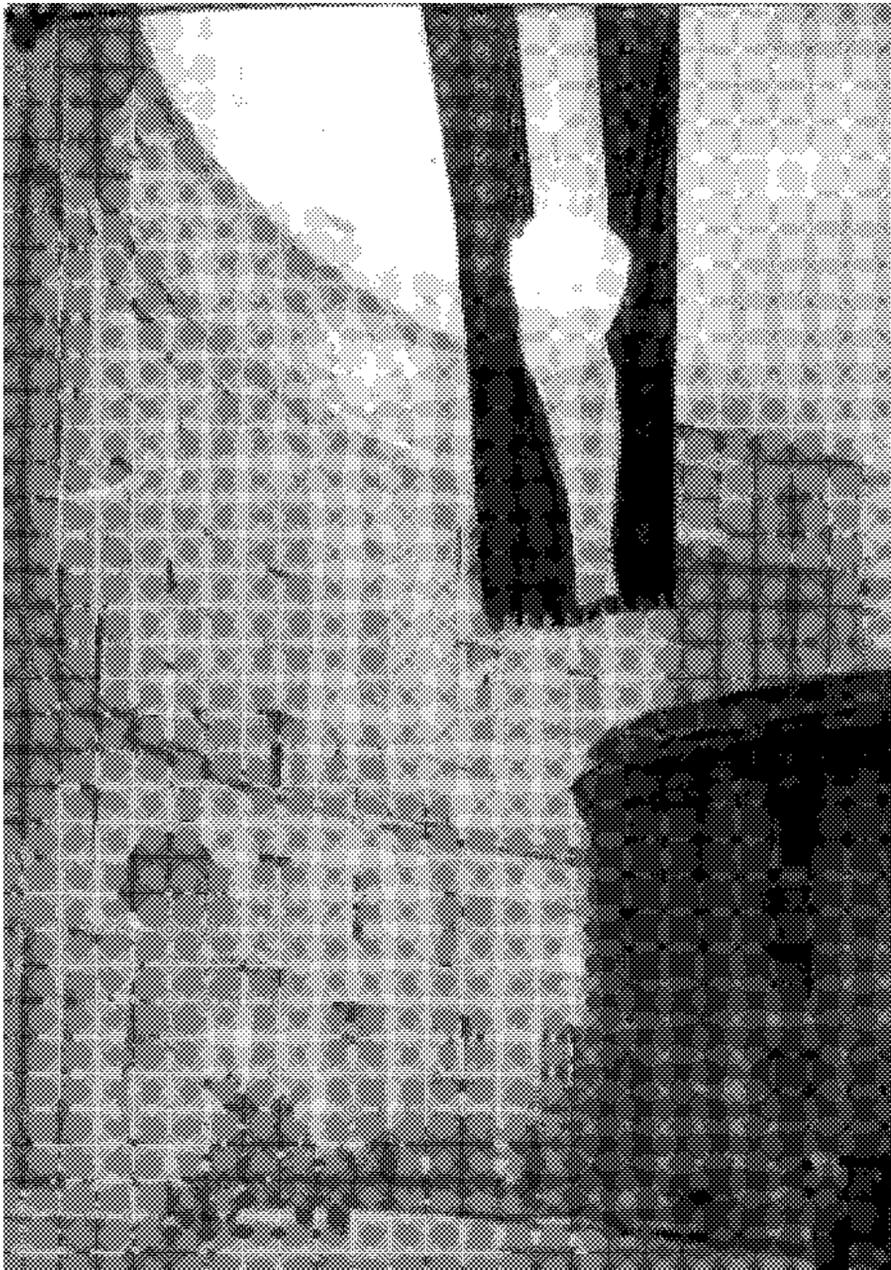
Image credit

Hungarian Flag with coat of arms cut out of centre, 1956. Image courtesy of The American Hungarian Federation Declaration http://www.americanhungarian federation.org/.

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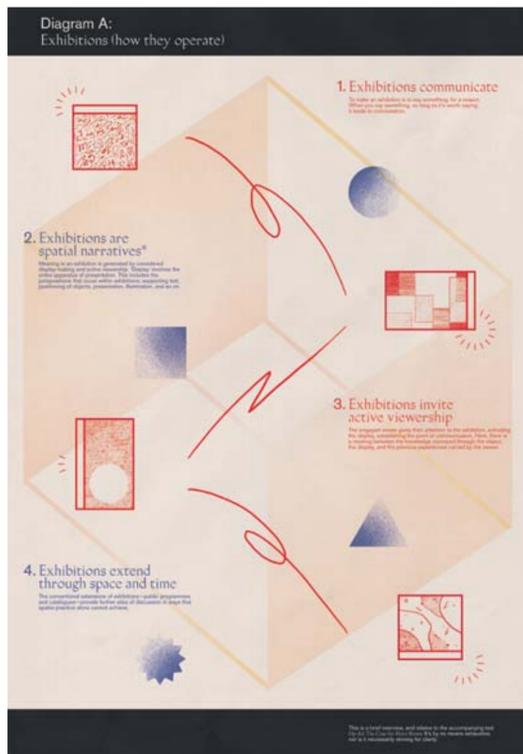
Op-Ed: A case for more shows
Hope Lumsden-Barry

Exhibitions communicate. To make an exhibition is to say something, for a reason. When you say something, it leads to conversation. Graphic design is too often a silent profession, obediently led by the forces of technology and dominant culture. Graphic designers are responsible, but rarely accountable, for large swathes of the visual environment. Not only that, reflective, critical discussions about our own industry are desperately infrequent. I'm writing this to advocate for more graphic design exhibitions – in Melbourne, in general.

That's not to say that graphic designers don't talk to each other. The Melbourne graphic design community is supported in a professional sense by a number of organisations, including the Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA), The Design Kids, General Assembly, etc. The events and talks put on by these groups have a strong emphasis on networking and professional development. In a competitive, insular, expensive place such as Australia, these events are necessary; yet, as an early-career practitioner, I believe there's a lack of critical discussion beyond university classrooms and lecture theatres.

Why advocate for exhibitions, specifically? Why not call for more public talks, blog posts, Twitter threads, Slack channels? I don't want to discount the importance of engaging on all fronts, but the specific dynamics of exhibition practice offer unique discursive opportunities.

Exhibitions provide an alternative space for conversation and development within the Melbourne graphic design community. A space that needn't be defined by the pursuit of individual career advancement, but by shared professional progress, through critical reflection and discussion.

Exhibitions are spatial narratives, in which meaning is generated through the processes of considered display and active viewership. When I speak of 'display', I speak of the entire apparatus of presentation. This includes the juxtapositions and explications that occur in exhibition spaces, the supporting text, positioning of objects, presentation, illumination and so on. The engaged viewer gives their attention to the exhibition, activating the display, establishing the point of communication. Here, there is a meeting between the knowledge conveyed through the display and the previous experiences carried by the viewer. The conventional extensions of exhibitions – public programs and catalogues – provide further sites of discussion in ways that spatial practice alone cannot achieve. Exhibitions derive their focused discursive weight from myriad forces, including narrative intent, social interaction and control over demarcated physical/virtual space. Exhibitions are purposeful, powerful sites for inciting discussion.

Globally, there is a turn towards critical exhibitions of design. *Design and Violence* (MoMA, 2013–2015; Science Gallery Dublin 2016–2017) [1] – a largely online 'curatorial experiment' – is an example of how to foster discourse through exhibition. It investigates the role of design in acts and systems of violence, with each work an accompanying essay post could also be publicly commented on. Further extensions of *Design and Violence* into other media include a book, published by MoMA, and three zines produced by the Science Gallery Dublin.

Two other useful examples of more conventional, specifically graphic design-focused exhibitions are *All Possible Futures* (SOMArts Cultural Centre, 2014) and *The Way Beyond Art: Wide White Space* (CCA Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art, 2011) – curated by designer/educator, Jon Sueda. *All Possible Futures* explored speculative graphic design work, whereas *Wide White Space* dealt with graphic design exhibition practice. Both shows continued the discourse through publications, public programming and, in the case of *Wide White Space*, a series of classes. These shows critically engaged with their subject matter, while actively grappling with the problems that arise when attempting to exhibit graphic design within a gallery context.

A common criticism levelled at graphic design exhibitions, particularly those in gallery spaces, is that they strip the life from the work on display. Defined by context, helpless artefacts of graphic design are yanked from their true homes and stuffed helplessly into vitrines, losing their meaning and their charm.

Graphic design, like most things, is rapidly dematerialising into the digital plane. Graphic design, which lives in the 'real world' of cereal boxes, train station signage, artist monographs, catalogues, posters and business cards, is being aggressively flattened. Regardless of whether work is encountered on Tumblr, Are.na, or Instagram, the result is the same: an irrevocable loss of context and materiality. Separated from its site of operation, a thoughtfully crafted object of intellectual heft is reduced to inspo. A momentarily appreciated blip in a sea of millions of beautiful, silent jpegs, all presented in the same-sized boxes, over and over again.

The physical, specific nature of exhibitions is a perfect antidote to this current climate. Of course, a boring show is unlikely to spark meaningful conversation. I argue that any graphic design exhibition suffering from dullness does so because of weak display methods. There is a temptation to borrow heavily from fine art exhibition practice, yet while a designer's poster may be materially similar to an artist's print, it demands different treatments. The opportunity of the exhibition is to provide space for considered, illuminating display. Purely digital works of graphic design shouldn't be excluded either, given how these increasingly impact our lives.

Yet, just as discourse on the internet is often tepid and pointless, how can we ensure that conversations sparked by/at exhibitions are useful? Anybody who's been to an exhibition opening can tell you that the conversations there are rarely about the work on display. And if they are, they're often brief. While they strengthen communities, they're more like parties than forums. It's the role of the exhibition-makers (curators, exhibitors, designers and so on) to ensure that there are enough opportunities to critically engage with the works.

These opportunities take the form of public programming, as well as supporting materials such as catalogues, didactics and online archives (all of which are usually, and not coincidentally, activated by graphic design themselves). Case in point, catalogues extend exhibitions through space and time, broadening their reach far beyond what is possible for exhibitions alone.

So, what can we, as members of the Melbourne graphic design community, do? How can we build a flourishing exhibition culture here and now? How can we encourage more critical conversations? It's important to acknowledge that critical practice – expressed through exhibitions, journals, symposiums, etc. – is often time-consuming and unprofitable. Unless independently wealthy, it is difficult for practitioners at all levels (including at the emerging stage) to devote themselves to non-commercial professional activities.

However, it's certainly possible. We live in a time in which the internet allows us to connect with and promote resources, work, and one another more widely than ever before. It also opens up a broad range of funding and distribution models. *All Possible Futures*, for example, was largely funded by a crowdfunding campaign. Or, as *Design and Violence* demonstrates, the site of the exhibition itself can be entirely online.

Beyond utilising digital channels, there's the opportunity to appropriate and reframe spaces and other resources; just as musicians turn sharehouses into venues, designers can turn garages into galleries.

The size of the design community in Melbourne, for better or for worse, is small. Like-minded people inevitably cross paths; conversations have the potential to lead to collaborations. And, once we build a precedent for exhibitions, they'll hopefully become part of the fabric of the community; like bar meetups and talks.

Ultimately, it's imperative that we make more space for critical conversations within our community. It's a matter of coming together, talking and doing.

Hope Lumsden-Barry is a Melbourne-based graphic designer. Her practice is concerned with design-led publishing, research and exhibition making. She completed the Bachelor of Communication Design at RMIT University and followed it up with an Honours year in which her research focus was display-making for graphic design exhibitions.

Recent design projects include the exhibition Making Space *(co-curated with Ryley Lawson);* Filmme Fatales *6–8 (issue 6 designed with Stuart Geddes); and the catalogues for the* Material Exchange *exhibition series, curated by Meredith Turnbull, at c3 Contemporary Art Space. Hope also presented a workshop on zine-making for creative practice as a part of* Material Exchange *and has convened panel discussions at RMIT and the NGV Art Book Fair.*

Footnote

[1] Curated by Paola Antonelli and Jamer Hunt.

Kiosk, Hope Lumsden-Barry

Image credits

Catalogues are one example of the exhibition format's ability to extend itself through time and space (shown here is an assortment of catalogues I designed in 2017; none were for graphic design exhibitions). Image courtesy of Hope Lumsden-Barry.

Material literacy
Jenny Grigg

Graphic languages have been created throughout history, enabling us to relate to and communicate about the space in which we exist, both by marking it and by making marks about it. We continually process what we see and look for ways to share our thoughts. Visual literacy is understood within the history of language. My interest lies in how materials contribute a literacy of their own.

A recent review of my practice revealed the extent to which I enhance ideas through materials. The more I examined my methods and design process [1], the more I considered the term 'material literacy'. Thinking through materials sharpens design perceptions. The use of materials helps to process and make a designer's perceptions tangible. To draw a parallel with written language, constructing designs through materials creates a syntax. That is, a set of elements, visual rather than linguistic, that when arranged in a particular way can be used to explore and signify meanings.

More often than not, at the beginning of a book cover design process I reach for a piece of paper. Not to sketch on, but to sketch with. To visualise a novelist's concepts, I think about their ideas as I handle the paper and observe its response. By allowing one to guide the other, thoughts about form and matter combine and eventually bring forward an unforeseen, materially realised concept.

Once I began to look into this design process, I found a history of illustrious designers who had also sought paper to catalyse ideas. This design history is much more than my playful and inexpensive survival tactic created while dealing with low-budget publishing commissions.

Since coming upon an image of Josef Albers teaching students (1928–29), I have pieced together an historical lineage of 'paper thinking' that connects the Bauhaus with contemporary Melbourne. It highlights that designers' explorations of the potential of paper have generated a language unfixed to a time or place because it is devised between a material and a mind. Invented to record written language, paper's transmutability is almost as ancient as language itself. [2]

Materiality was established as a foundation course in the Bauhaus curriculum in 1919. It was taught initially by Johannes Itten, later co-taught by Josef Albers and Lázló Moholy-Nagy, and lastly by Albers alone until the school's closure in 1933.[3] Albers found a way through paper to understand and to teach economy of means, his principle design objective. When Albers lectured that materials 'must be worked in such a way that there is no wastage' he set a challenge for others to understand his idea of beauty – a new object made by editing an existing object in its whole.

Albers' design ethics are well explained in a student's recollection of Albers walking into the classroom with a bundle of newspapers announcing:

Ladies and gentlemen, we are poor, not rich. We can't afford to waste materials or time. … All art starts with a material, and therefore we have first to investigate what our material can do. So, at the beginning we will experiment without aiming at making a product. At the moment we prefer cleverness to beauty. … Our studies should lead to constructive thinking. … I want you now to take the newspapers … and try to make something out of them that is more than you have now. I want you to respect the material and use it in a way that makes sense — preserve its inherent characteristics. If you can do without tools like knives and scissors, and without glue, [all] the better. [4]

Image credit

Josef Albers and students in group critique at the Bauhaus Dessau, 1928–29. Photograph by Otto Umbehr (Umbo). Copyright 2017 Galerie Kicken Berlin / Phylis Umbehr / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Jenny Grigg is an Australian graphic designer, lecturer in visual communication and a PhD candidate at RMIT University. After beginning editorial design practice in the 1990s in Sydney, Jenny has held positions including art director, Rolling Stone *magazine Australia; art director,* MTV Australia; *senior designer, Pentagram, London, and creative director, Harper Collins Publishing.*

In Melbourne, this concept of revealing ideas through paper can be found in the work of Gerard Herbst, a mentee of Moholy-Nagy. Fleeing the war, Herbst made it to Australia in 1939 and recovered his profession as the art director of Prestige Fabrics in Port Melbourne in 1946, before taking a 16-year appointment as head lecturer of industrial design at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (now RMIT University), retiring in 1976. [5] Bolstered by correspondence with Moholy-Nagy, Herbst continued his exploration of modern design principles in post-war Australia. [6] The title of an exhibition in 1969–1970, arranged by Herbst and his design students, frames paper as an instrument in three words – Design With Paper. In fact, Herbst's exhibition notes are headed by the mantra, 'With Paper, With Paper, With Paper'. The title of a board in the student group photograph, 'Designs performing', in keeping with the idea of language, attributes paper a voice. As had Albers, Herbst emphasised the value of paper's contributions to ideation:

The exhibition demonstrates some structural uses of paper and cardboard as an aid in the thought process of DESIGN. Besides some examples illustrating some old folk craft, and decorative uses of paper, it will also show stages in the workshop, which may even be more stimulating to the viewer than the accomplished object. [7]

David Lancashire studied art and design in northern England before moving to Melbourne in 1966. Lancashire's design archive held at RMIT holds an extensive range of paper inventions that David contributed to the Australian paper industry. Lancashire's designs have commercial origins and, as a result, are less abstract than Albers' and Herbst's studies, however, the design principles found in paper's form are evident.

The images below depict the language that I developed with paper while realising designs for Peter Carey's novel *My Life as a Fake* (2003), a novel based on the infamous Ern Malley literary hoax in Melbourne in 1943. As I thought about the embittered hoaxer Christopher Chubb, I moved fragments of paper to configure a design.

Commissioned by a publisher, I was designing a book cover for a novel written by an author who, in the novel, was commenting on truths about that same publishing world. Carey was writing about his peers and for his peers and I was designing for Carey and a related, global, publishing cohort. Carey, Chubb, myself, and the audience surrounding us, were all immersed in literature.

As I worked I realised that A4 Bond is a ubiquitous tool of book publishing. Carey's draft manuscript had arrived from the publisher printed on approximately 250 sheets of it. In the novel, the character Chubb bandied about poetry on it, or similar, and the female protagonist, Sarah Wode-Douglas, is the editor of a poetry journal. Paper pervaded both the factual and fictional circumstances of the project.

By shuffling and scanning rectangular pieces I developed a modular, paper-based, image system. Transferring four of these to a backlit window it became apparent that, as the composition changed, and different areas of intersection occurred, a different illusion of a face was expressed. The areas of overlap positioned two eyes, a nose and a mouth.

Working on a window pane proved awkward, but the misaligned arrangements assisted the communication of Chubb's creative maladjustment. The designs developed by arranging the paper pieces as a four-part syntax, later extending its vocabulary with a paper curl to contribute a downturned lip. When I look at these images 15 years after they were made, I can still hear Chubb muttering on behalf of Carey, that the literary hoax was 'Nearly bad enough to be genuine'.[9]

Each of these examples interpret paper differently. Typical of commercial work, my work and Lancashire's are figurative and typical of non-commercial work, Albers' and Herbst's studies are abstract. Whether folded, cut or layered, light becomes a part of the language that brings us closer to each designer's idea. David's experience of a desert sky at night and my portrait of the literary hoaxer Chubb in the material of his making are in tune with Albers' and Herbst's notions of invention.

Lancashire encouraged his client, Australian Paper, to introduce coloured papers to the Australian market in the 1980s, providing a handpainted swatch of colours to AP based on his experience of the Australian desert. To promote 'Celestial Black' by its most distinctive feature, David reasoned a way to render it as a desert night sky. The economy that interested Albers and Herbst is evident in the two edits that authored this transformation. One added to the paper and one subtracted from it. A low-lying hill stamped in copper foil placed beneath laser-etched depictions of the Southern Cross, milky way and the moon creates a paper metaphor for the southern sky. While he wasn't a student of Albers or Herbst, it was paper's transformability that guided Lancashire's design knowledge.[8]

Image credit

Students in *Designs Performing* exhibit, 1969. Photography by Gerhard Herbst. Copyright Daniel Herbst. Image courtesy RMIT Design Archives.

My research began in 2013, as I sought new ways to think about graphic design, in particular the significance of materiality in the design process. At the time, graphic design discourse surrounding this topic was laced with anachronism and nostalgia, and I was faced with the prospect that what I understood in design terms might be considered irrelevant. Today, only four years later, contemporary design discourse is referring to a New Materialism. [10] This coincides with commentary about digital detoxification [11] and anticipation of the Bauhaus' centenary in 2019. While material language may have been periodically eclipsed by alternate modes of graphic communications, such as corporate and digital design, there is little doubt that further research will better establish materials as true conductors of invention in the history of design.
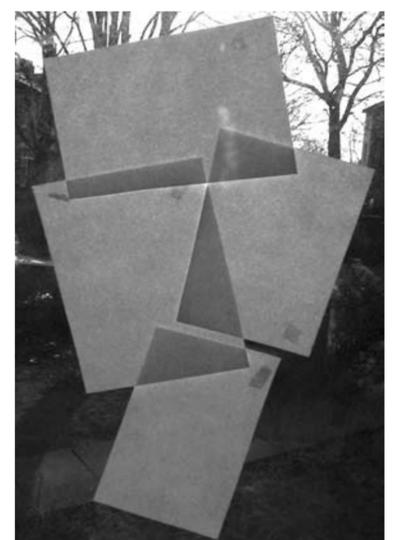

Image credit

Test design for the cover of Peter Carey's novel *My Life as a Fake* using my window as a light box, 2003. Image courtesy of Jenny Grigg.

Designing for authors such as Peter Carey, Australia's best-known contemporary novelist, and on behalf of clients such as Faber and Faber and Granta Portobello Books in London and the Lowy Institute in Sydney, her creative inception begins with an author's written word. Recognising that each author's voice is unique, Jenny's practice has evolved into a continuum of materially led creative renewal.

As a doctoral candidate, Jenny is conducting collective case study research into the significance of materiality in graphic design ideation. She is investigating areas such as the generative roles that materiality and repurposing play in the creative process.

Image credit

Three test designs for the cover of Peter Carey's novel *My Life as a Fake* using cut squares of paper, 2003. Images courtesy of Jenny Griggs.

Footnotes

[1] Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner : How professionals think in action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983): 78.
[2] Mark Kurlansky, *Paper: Paging through history* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016).
[3] Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919–1933* (Cologne: Taschen/Bauhaus-Archiv, 2015): 140.
[4] Ibid.: 141.
[5] Steve Martin, 'At the final count', University of Melbourne, Collections 15 (2014): 43–45.
[6] These ideas are explored in Veronica Bremer & Anne-Marie Van de Ven, 'The Bauhaus Link in the Life & Work of Émigré Artist Gerard Herbst', *emaj* (2016).

Accessed from URL: emajartjournal.com/2016/06/15/veronica-bremer-anne-marie-van-de-ven-the-bauhaus-link-in-the-life-and-work-of-emigre-artist-gerard-herbst/.
[7] These concepts are explored in *Josef Albers: Maximum Means, Minimum Effect*, catalogue, (Madrid: Fundacion Juan March, March 28–July 6, 2014).
[8] Gerard Herbst,1969 – excerpt from Herbst's notes for the exhibition *Design with Paper*.
[9] Peter Carey, *My Life as a Fake* (Sydney: Random House, 2003).
[10] Harriet Edquist, 'Editorial', *Design Archives Journal* 7, no. 1&2 (2017): 3.
[11] Heller, *Eye Magazine* 14, no. 93 (2016): 16.

Prototyping the future: 1999–2004
Lisa Grocott

We called it 'the game'. The single rule was an invitation to start your story anywhere but the beginning. The obtuse lead could be a description of a client's body language, an out-of-context comment, or a reflection on our emotions. The space between the client presentation and arriving back at the studio playfully became about imagining the best way to draw out the narrative of how others responded to work we had put hours into making. Walking back into studio I would lead with 'RB put his head in his hands and sighed' or 'FS said: that is never going to happen' before accounting a non-linear narrative of what had just unfolded. We liked oblique sentences and fragmented stories, appreciating the engagement required to piece together the ambiguous communication.

My studio memories come down to vignettes of conversations. For me, the legacy of those five years will not be the designs we created, but the family we became. Not family in a Kumbaya kind of way (although I guess you could say dancing at Bourgie on Friday nights could be the 2002 version of that), but family in a loveable-even-for-the-dysfunction kind of way. The Hardware Lane studio was the set for our becoming as designers and, like any coming-of-age narrative, the characters and the script illuminated the individual protagonist's life lessons. The intimacy of the studio environment allowed each of us to find ourselves by making sense of who we were to each other.

There was the evening DS poetically articulated the internal process he goes through before putting a mark on a page. 'You know how you start with a white room. You tentatively slap colours on the wall. Immediately you know that some aren't going to work but you keep exploring...' There was the day J couldn't articulate how much he hated some work until given permission to not find the right words 'I fuck'n hate it. It's derivative and I'd be embarrassed if we put it out there...' There was anticipation for DM's annual sports commentator Christmas party speech. 'We never saw it coming ... JE taking that unbelievable mark in the last minutes against HC to win the game…' Or simply, every other day when SG remarked, 'I'll need more time to think about it.'

These are more than idiosyncratic memories; they are how I began to understand intuition, critique, storytelling and deliberation. They were moments of learning.

We live in a world where incubators are synonymous with nurturing business models and accelerating profits. I'm interested in how we design incubators for learning; those Hardware Lane days modelled for me how messy learning thrives. The fact it often seemed like we were only role playing being professional forged an almost utopian learning environment. More so than what I learned doing two masters and a PhD. Today, my motivation to interrogate how we might disrupt higher education comes from recognising the learning that happened b'twixt and between the works that we made. It is the reason I say my research is about designing learning experiences and not educational programs. It is why I value learning as a commitment not a credential.

It is a cheap shot at higher education to say I learned more in my professional practice than I did in my masters, given that the studio's culture of exhibiting was forged by the masters I was doing when we first started and our speculative projects were the basis for my design masters that explored design-led research as an integral component of professional practice. DS's poetic description of an intuitive practice was shared to a packed room of RMIT colleagues using our studio as a pop-up classroom. I can trace a direct line between the 'No one is an Island' reconciliation badges and the 'Dear John' unelect-Howard website that came out of the RMIT masters program.

The learning culture of the studio wasn't incidental, it was an intentional move baked into who we were. This was the first and last time I have worked somewhere that was so deliberately invested in developing who I was as a person, not just an employee. I now see our years together as an open invitation / education in exploring what might be possible. Our commitment to always try something new over making a profit led to projects that went nowhere, yet took us everywhere.

Today, higher education is reckoning with the reality that graduates will need to repeatedly shapeshift careers. The degree that prepares you for a lifetime as a graphic designer is at best naive, at worst unethical. The world needs creative citizens who know how to unlearn habits and reinvent themselves with every new wave of technology and systemic disruption. An intentionally porous relationship between professional practice and the academy can nurture the culture of inquiry needed to be adaptive.

Whether in a research lab, a semester-long studio or a design consultancy, if our goal is to create environments that promote relentless inquisitiveness then what we learn is nowhere as important as how we learn. Learning how to be vulnerable yet assertive, resilient yet courageous, humble yet confident, could be the legacy of our engagement.

I find myself wanting to write of the memory we laugh over at every studio reunion. It is this incongruous image of SG walking into the studio one morning wearing a sequin cape. What is the relevance here? Surely this is one of those had-to-be-there jokes? But what if the scene is consistent with how we enjoyed playing 'the game'? There was a not-knowing built into our practice. We embraced the incomplete script, the obtuse interpretation, the serendipitous mark. Many of the tangents we explored made as much sense as the sequins or the cape. When SG walked in – so nonchalantly like no explanation was necessarily – maybe he was physically embodying the culture of the studio. Perhaps he just knew that in exploring unknown possibilities we stumble across more beautiful questions.

The researcher I am today would make sense of the way we practiced then as learning from the emergent future. A practice of letting go of old thinking to let come new thinking. The opposite of looking backwards to learn from the past so we might act with certainty in the future. So what might it look like to educate designers who are comfortable and critical enough to learn from the emergent future? Designers able to improvise in unfamiliar conditions. Designers confident to get back up after being dumped. In the complex, volatile, uncertain and oftentimes broken world we find ourselves in, learning from ideas as they emerge seems critical to finding new ways forward.

I am curious about how we tell the story of how designers make more than artefacts. I am curious about what it means to embody a practice of making sense, making tangible, making do and making possible? How do we educate the designer who proposes never-before-seen tomorrows in a dynamic world? How do we nurture the wily expertise needed to nudge our social imagination?

If graduation from a university was not about donning an academic robe to celebrate what you have come to know, but instead an invitation to put on a sequin cape to explore what you don't yet know we just might all be better prepared to prototype the future.

Lisa Grocott was once a communication designer (Studio Anybody), then design academic (RMIT University), then a transdisciplinary researcher (Parsons School of Design) and now a professor (Monash University), but mostly she tries to avoid finding a name for what she does. After being at Parsons in New York for the past 12 years she has returned to Melbourne as the Head of Design at Monash. She is most excited about WonderLab, a new co-design research lab that operates at the nexus between design, learning and play. In WonderLab her applied research takes a transdisciplinary approach to transforming behaviour as it applies to teacher change, academic mindsets and learning organisations.

Postscript
RB // Robert Buckingham
FS // Fiona Scanlan
HC // Hairy Canary
DS // Dave Smith
JE // Jason Evans
DM // Dean Millson
SG // Stuart Geddes

Image credits

*La Lala poster (detail), 2001.
Graphic design by Studio Anybody.*

La Lala La La

another studio anybody idea

A Pop Song
platform 2, march 1st – 30th

A Romantic Comedy
studioanybody.com, march updates

A Pick-up Line
cafés and bars, march distribution

Image credit

La Lala poster, 2001.
Graphic design by Studio Anybody.

The culture club
Michaela Webb

Throughout my career I've been lucky enough to gain exposure to many cultures and design practices. I've worked in New Zealand, London, Germany, and now Melbourne, with each new destination influencing me in a different way.

In September 2017, I attended AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale) Open Paris and spent four days listening to graphic design talks. Witnessing the different cultural nuances between the Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Danish, Dutch, French and Australian designers (amongst others) was fascinating. Their approach, their values and the relationships they had with their clients all seemed to come through in their work.

It made me wonder just how much of our culture we put into our design and, equally, what our culture enables us to achieve as designers. I questioned whether some places might empower designers to have a louder voice than others and what we might need to address in Australia to ensure that our work extends beyond a service and into a practice with real purpose.

To explore these questions I began a conversation with four international designers: Elise Santangelo of DesignStudio in London; Tin Nguyen and Ed Cutting of Tin & Ed (who have recently moved to New York from London); Paul Tisdell of Round in Melbourne; and Michael Lugmayr of Design by Toko in Sydney, each of whom has worked in multiple geographies and now reside away from their homeland.

With their help, I've been able to look from the outside, in.

Do you think culture and place influences a designer's work?

Michael Lugmayr: I think a designer's work should reflect their culture. I think this is what makes a great studio or a great designer, or a great artist – an acknowledgement or reflection of the context in which they're working.

Paul Tisdell: I would agree. It's not surprising that graphic designers are so malleable to culture. More often than not, our work is a direct cultural output. It can mirror the broader society and also the broader society's values as well. A great example is the work coming out of the 1960s and 70s, from designers like Robin Fior, David King and Richard Hollis in the UK, whose style was clearly defined by the political climate of the time.

Michael: I've seen differences nationally, particularly in my experience with American versus Dutch ways of working. Actually, once I arrived in Holland from the United States, I had this feeling that the design approach I had adopted in the US was no longer relevant. The American and even the Australian style seems to be much more about aesthetics, whereas in the Netherlands it's much more conceptual. I noticed it in the ways we talk about different projects and how we justify what we create. In the US, it's the story of 'how'. Whereas if you look

at Europe, it's much more about the 'why'.

Elise Santangelo: In my experience, the designers working at Fabrica in Italy or DesignStudio in London, all came from diverse cultural backgrounds, they had very strong references and anchor points to draw from, particularly the European designers. I've personally felt a lack of that, having come from the US and then Australia. I haven't felt like I had a significant cultural vantage point.

Is there a way to define an Australian philosophy?

Tin Nguyen and Ed Cutting: Being away from Australia really makes you appreciate the certain amount of freedom we have. There's a lightness reflected in our work. We think it has something to do with the very carefree and playful Australian attitude – it's self-reflexive, but not hugely self-aware.

Elise: It's hard to pinpoint because in a way, we act like cultural sponges, absorbing from everyone else. It can be quite liberating, the feeling that we have an empty bucket to draw from, while others may have this very defined history and influence.

Have you observed any cultural differences in how design is valued by clients and the outside world?

Michael: I think that European designers are likely to view themselves more as artists, being that they really

fight for their work and their point of view. If you look at Australian design practices, the tendency is for design to be seen as much more of a job or a service.

Tin & Ed: Culturally in Australia we are still determining the value of graphic design. What's exciting on the one hand is that right now it's so open, we are still trying to find a voice.

We feel that other cultures value design in a different way because art is so engrained in how people live and their concept of place. I feel that this may take some time in Australia.

Paul: I think how creative industries are valued by culture and society and how much we all decide to push creativity is really influenced by our political leaders and public spending. Fundamentally though, I feel like it's our responsibility to elevate what we do. If you look at architecture and fine art, these disciplines are very accustomed to a high level of critical thinking and are much more developed in writing, talking about and sharing their ideas. In Australia I think that critical thought in design is still very new, but that's what's really going to help to elevate the purpose of design.

Elise: Living and working in London I notice that what surrounds us is a culture that appreciates art and design and it's incredibly prevalent in the day-to-day for the mainstream consumer. Everyone is much more aware of the influences and this seems to trickle into client

relationships. Clients in the UK are acutely aware of the design process and there isn't a great amount of education required in delivering an idea. We don't have to spend as much time proving the value of design.

Can a studio have a specific voice and what do you perceive as the value in this?

Elise: At Fabrica I felt like each individual designer had a style and that diversity was compelling for clients. Our work really felt like a celebration of the individual designer; your name was on everything and your personal voice was very loud. Even when we worked on a collective brief for a commercial client, our voices all shone through. Clients came to us because they wanted a 'Fabrica' thing and that thing was a diverse collection of voices and perspectives responding to a brief. At DesignStudio, however, there is a sense that you leave your personal aesthetic at the door. Instead, the style here is a way of thinking, a way of strategising. In this way, we have a real opportunity to influence the business through a strategic design point of view, rather than just a stylistic one.

Tin & Ed: We think in America it's a very specialist culture. There's an opportunity for designers to really hone in on a personal style, which has certainly resonated with us. There's a very clear Tin & Ed voice.

How can you be more purposeful in your work?

Tin & Ed: At AGI we heard from people who are really passionate and involved in what they do. It's not just about making the work – it's about why we're making the work, what's important and what our social responsibility is.

Elise: I feel like as designers, sometimes we try to be the Trojan Horse, planting ideas into conversations that we have with our clients to change things for the better, having a greater, wider purpose to what we do. I think all designers have the ability to do that, we just have to find our way in.

How does design find its way in?

Elise: One of my favourite designers, Tibor Kalman (who helped start Fabrica) wrote a great manifesto called *Fuck Committees*, and it's all about finding the cracks in the wall and using other people's money to change the world. It's a really interesting sentiment about commercial design work and design as a commercial service, but also finding people who share your vision, and finding ways to influence things.

Paul: In the UK, music really allowed design to be more visible to the mainstream. In the 1960s the one thing that the British were able to export really well was music. The artwork of Peter Saville and Barney Bubbles, for example, meant that designers became household names and were seen as culturally influential and worthy of recognition.

These conversations highlight the complexity of the relationship between design and culture. Some of us work from a clear cultural vantage point, while some of us draw from a bucket of inspiration that seems empty and infinite all at once. Some of us exist in a culture that values design in the same way as the other esteemed arts, while others are still finding a place for it. In Australia, I feel there's a great sense of freedom in our work; the capacity to call on many diverse perspectives and influences that make up who we are, sometimes who we aren't, and to imbue that quintessential Australian sense of humour in what we do. The challenge is ensuring this voice translates in a way that builds the credibility of design within our culture.

While I began this project looking from the outside in, I end it by looking from the inside out. Only by critically reflecting on what we do, can we begin to create the discourse around design in Australia that emanates outward in the wider community.

In many ways it will be our repetitive questions of 'why', as much as other small waves of revolution that will strengthen our practice the most. It could be a moment in music or politics, it could be a client who sees as we do, a campaign that forces us to stop and take notice, or it could be one of us, finding our way in, and then shouting it from the rooftop.

Image credit

Joy Division, *Unknown Pleasures*, 1979. Graphic design by JD and Peter Saville.

Kiosk, Michaela Webb

Michaela Webb is creative director of Round, a studio she co-founded in 2002 in Melbourne.

Michaela has spent over three years as co-president of the Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA) and was recently elected to Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI), the world's leading association of graphic designers.

With over 20 years professional experience, Michaela has worked

for Wolff Olins and Spin in London. She has lectured full-time at RMIT (Melbourne), Mediarts (New Zealand) and has served as a judge at D&AD, AGDA and AWARD, where she was chair.

Michaela has also spoken at agIdeas (Melbourne), Sex, Drugs and Helvetica (Melbourne/Brisbane), Semi Permanent (Melbourne and Wellington), Responsive Projects (Brisbane), and has made contributions

to Desktop magazine, Studio magazine, Australian Creative and Process Journal.

Michaela's work has been featured in articles for IDEA magazine, IDN and Visuelle. Michaela currently sits on the Ian Potter Board and the Design Hub Advisory Network.

The Voices

Elise Santangelo grew up between California and Sydney. She's worked at Round in Melbourne and Fabrica in Italy, and is now based in London at DesignStudio.

Paul Tisdell grew up in the UK, has studied at the RCA and cofounded Europa in London. Paul is now based in Melbourne, where he works at Round.

Michael Lugmayr grew up in the Netherlands and later worked in the United States before returning home. Michael now lives in Sydney where he founded Design by Toko.

Tin Nguyen and Ed Cutting of duo Tin & Ed both grew up and studied in Melbourne. They now reside in New York City.

Unit of measure
Paul Marcus Fuog

In our studio, U–P, we spend most of the day in front of the computer, working towards outcomes that might resolve themselves tomorrow, the day after, next week, next month or next year. We conceived our studio project *Unit of Measure* as a way to get off our computers and get out in our surrounds. Out onto the streets of Collingwood and Fitzroy together, to talk, explore, observe, seek out an opportunity and be in the moment. *Unit of Measure* is a field trip where we, as a group, remove ourselves from our normal environment in order to have a different experience – a bit like a school excursion, where students visit a place outside of the classroom to see new sights and learn new things.

For *Unit of Measure* we take a universally sized object into the urban landscape and use it to survey. The idea came about as it connected to our continued research into appropriation in design – the use of space, objects, language or image by its user in a way not imagined by its designer – in other words, taking something and using it for a purpose it was not intended. For the first *Unit of Measure* series we used a standard-sized basketball.
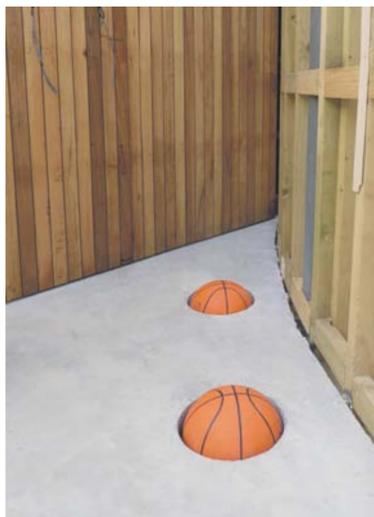

We were also interested in experimenting with the development of a universal measuring code. As designers who work on projects in Australia and the United States, jumping back and forth between the metric system and the imperial system can get confusing (what is 5/8 of an inch, anyway?!). By selecting an object that is the same size no matter where you are, whether that be Australia, Europe, the US or elsewhere, the measurement being recorded will always be the same, for example, see *Unit of Measure 11*, the door width is six standard size basketballs not 143.1 centimetres or 56.3 inches. Jumping between measuring systems causes problems for many professions, not just ours. In 1999, NASA lost the $125 million Mars Orbiter in outer space as a result of a miscalculation between measuring codes. [1]

While *Unit of Measure* has created many new conversations in our design studio, it has also helped us to understand our surrounding city in new ways. There is a lot to learn about space by measuring it, understanding the number of units that populate a space we can come to understand a complex array of things. In a podcast on Radiolab titled *Cities*, I was surprised to discover that the size of a city ('size' as in the number of people that are in that space) governs everything. The number of people within a space determines the speed that people talk and walk, crime rates, the average wage, the number of restaurants, cultural events, libraries, colleges, the total surface area of roads and how many AIDs cases there are.
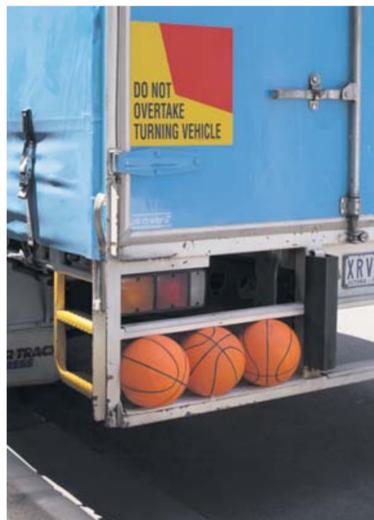
For *Unit of Measure*, we measure empty space, negative space, available space, non-built out space. In this way, the project is a commentary on density and urban development. This is especially relevant in Collingwood – an area in Melbourne experiencing rapid urban infill. I suspect that had we undertaken *Unit of Measure* 100 years ago in Collingwood we would have needed many more basketballs. I've also considered that if we were to undertake *Unit of Measure*, in say, Manila the amount of available space for basketballs in the urban landscape

would be far less than in Melbourne. *Unit of Measure*, while fun to produce, has the potential to tell us quite a lot about the urban environments we inhabit. Jane Jacobs, author of one of the most influential books about the inner-workings of cities, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), relied almost entirely on her observations as a way to read the city. Similarly, urbanist William Whyte, noted for his work in the study of human behaviour in urban settings, stated that the path to understanding a city starts with careful observation and the collection of data. Observation and measurement continue to be the indispensable tools for reading any city.

Unit of Measure enables us to go out into our city and observe and read it in a different way. In this way we are similar to skateboarders who look at the architecture of a city in a different way to everyone else, decoding it, reinterpreting it and finding new opportunities for it. For example, an everyday citizen looks at a handrail as a support; a skateboarder looks at a handrail as an object of thrill and something to conquer; we look at the handrail as a place of negative space that could occupy four basketballs. Each user views the same piece of architecture in a different way; it provides a very different purpose for each of us.

Although this project is a small part of the workings of the studio, it represents our overall philosophy to design. We avoid defining what we do as problem solving, which is a term often used to give clarity to what graphic designers do. Rather, we see design as a way to explore and express possibilities. I often think of Marcel Duchamp's comment: "There is no solution as there is no problem." This is certainly the case with *Unit of Measure* and often the case with a lot of our client work. I see our work as a commentary – it's an expression of thoughts that present themselves through opportunities that we've identified.
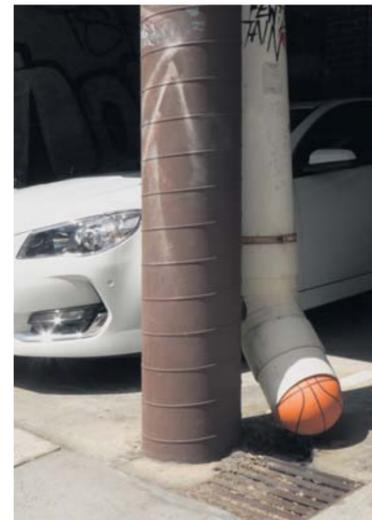
I accept that the world may never move to the universal measuring code of basketball units, but this project will continue to provide great value for the studio. It encourages us to get off the computer and get out of the studio. On these trips we converse in ways we wouldn't in the studio – more freely, more openly. *Unit of Measure* takes us outside to explore and observe our surrounds; to learn about them by measuring them. It invites us to look at the city in a different way and to find new opportunities within the built form. Through our work we are constantly considering the past and attempting to foresee the future, but sometimes it's necessary to pause and look at what is directly in front of us.

Paul Marcus Fuog founded the design studio U-P (formerly Coöp) in 2015. A member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI), Paul has taught at Monash University and RMIT University in Melbourne and led workshops at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York City and Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles. Paul is a founding member of Field Experiments, a nomadic collective that explores other cultures and people through design and collaborative making. In 2015, Paul's work for Field Experiments was nominated for the Design of the Year by the Design Museum in London. Paul's work has been shown at Fisher Parrish Gallery, New York, Design Museum, London, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Ventura Lambrate, Milan, Tokyo's Design Festa Gallery and at Breda's Graphic Design Festival.

Footnotes

[1] On September 23, 1999 NASA lost the $125 million Mars Orbiter spacecraft. Miscalculations due to the use of English units instead of metric units sent the craft off-course. Thrusters used for altitude and orbit control of the spacecraft had been fired incorrectly because the data used was calculated using incorrect units. A contractor for NASA, who was performing the calculations, was sending data in English units, while NASA's navigation team was expecting metric units. A $125 million dollar mishap that could have been avoided by using the universal measuring language of basketball units.
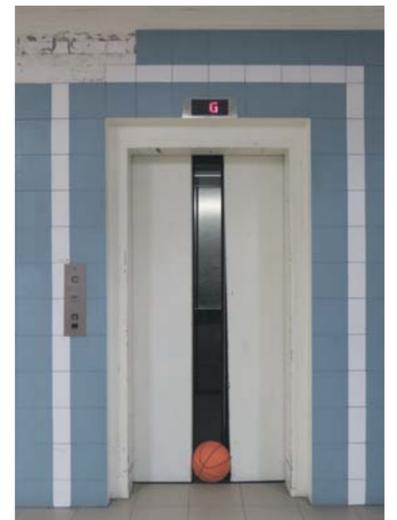

Image credits

From top to bottom:

Robert Street, Collingwood - 1bb w; Oxford Street, Collingwood - 1bb, 1bb; Gore Street, Fitzroy - 2bb w; Brown Street, Collingwood - 3bb w, 1bb h; Cambridge Street, Collingwood - 4bb h; Gertrude Street, Fitzroy - 2bb w x 1bb h; Rupert Street, Collingwood - 8bb w, 1bb h; Peel Street, Collingwood - 1bb; Cromwell Street, Collingwood - 4bb h; Oxford Street, Collingwood - 6bb w; George Street, Fitzroy - 1bb w.

Kiosk, Paul Marcus Fuog

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2
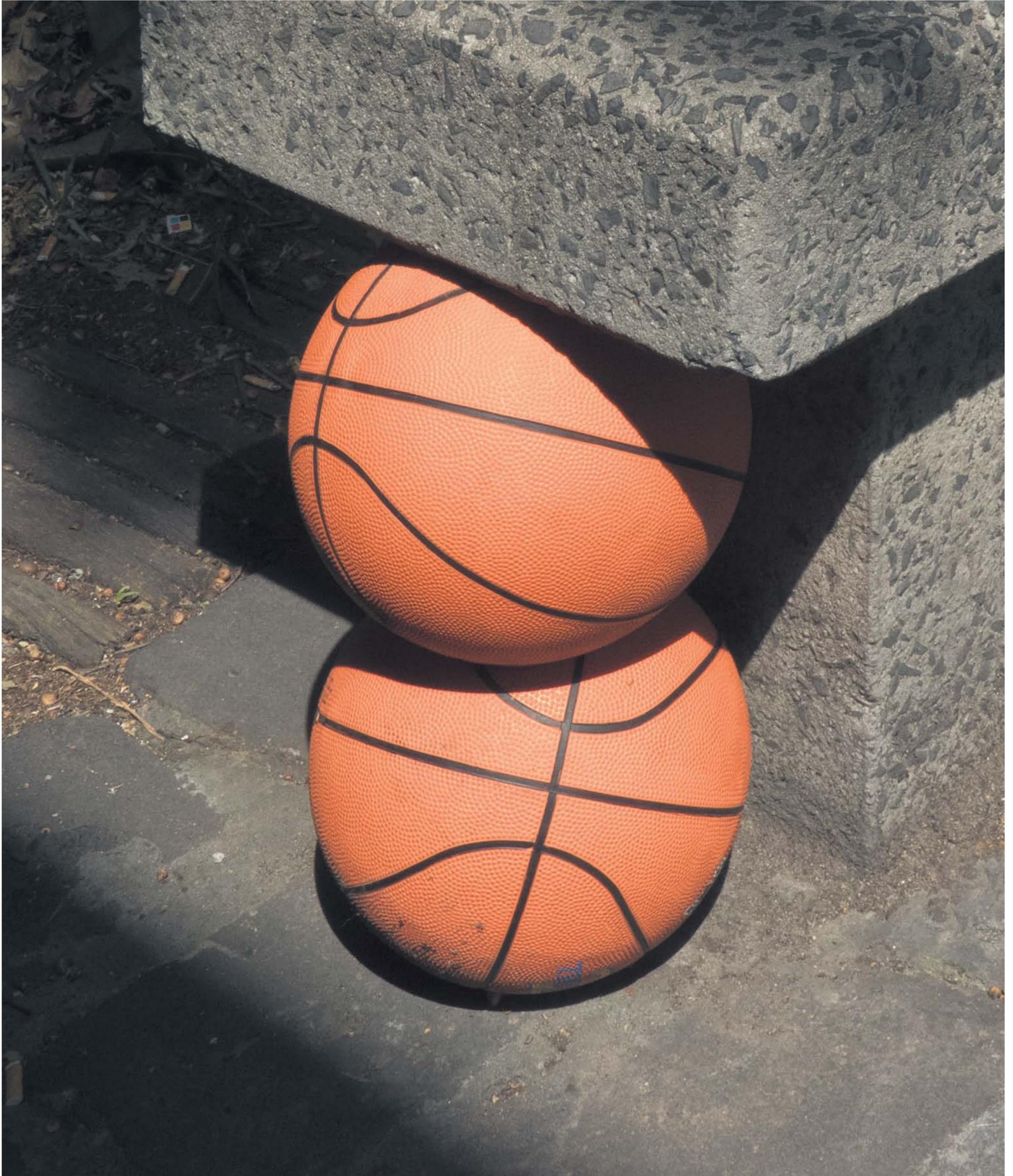
In making: A conversation with Harry Williamson
Stuart Geddes

I found a book last year that really blew my mind. It happened in a roundabout kind of way. I was visiting my friend Lisa Grocott, to meet visiting design writer Alice Twemlow and, it was Alice who was carrying this book, on loan from another friend of mine, Andrew Ashton. The book is large and heavy, and on the jacket it says *Australian Art and Artists: In the Making* – an odd sort of title. I only had a few minutes to look at it but I saw it was packed full of the most extraordinary collection of artists, designers, architects, musicians and writers from the Australian cultural scene some decades ago. And the design of this book! Really perfect typography and a kind of casual rhythm to the pages that I didn't think existed in Australian publishing.

I'd never heard of the book. Why had I never heard of this book? I looked at the colophon and found Harry Williamson had designed it – in fact he was the Williamson on the spine, a co-author. That made some sense – Harry is a key figure in Australian design, part of a small, pioneering generation whose work began to emerge in the late 1950s and who established graphic design as a profession here. But still, I'd not seen anything so adventurous in Australian publishing, particularly not from 50 years ago. The cross-disciplinary approach, the scale of the thing, the typography.

I took a picture of the cover so I could look it up later. I bought a copy through Abe Books. I loved it more when I got my copy in the post. When I was asked to write this text, I decided I wanted to talk with Harry about this book. As it turned out, my friend and colleague Jenny Grigg had been a student of Harry's. She gave me his email address and soon I was heading to the north coast of New South Wales for a chat.

Stuart: So, I've got a present for you.

Harry: Oh, this is the book you were telling me about?

Stuart: Yeah, *Some Posters from the NGV*. The essays in it were a starting point for me, for this, for us talking. We were interviewing David Sampietro, a designer who'd done a number of these posters. He studied at Swinburne, and got a job as a technical assistant at the NGV in 1973 or 74, and it was great to hear him talk about graphic design in Australia at that time.

I feel like graphic design, as a profession, is quite bad at doing history, at doing its own history (and Australia's bad at history as well). Part of this book was me, personally, trying to fill in some gaps. Thinking of the broad sweep of modernism, we have this sense of it being a progressive, revolutionary, utopian set of ideas. But in Australian commercial art, 'modernism' seemed to take hold, with a particularly commercial prerogative, through design studios and advertising agencies.

To contextualise all of this in relation to the *Experimental Jetset* show I think they see themselves as coming quite directly out of that lineage of politically and culturally progressive European movements. So what I'm trying to do with this conversation (and the poster book) is to connect myself, and my practice to a lineage, and to better understand the adolescence of graphic design in Australia. What we borrowed from Europe and America and elsewhere, how we fit into the picture. How I fit into the picture. Also, with a particular focus on publishing and bookmaking – hence my interest in your book, *In the Making*.

So, I wanted to ask you to set the scene a bit – your earlier education in the UK, coming here in 1959 and working for Gordon Andrews, who was kind of an outlier in Australia at that time.

Harry: He was, too. Well, I was very fortunate in the education I got. It was actually very similar to TAFE. I first went to the Christopher Wren College for Arts and Crafts. We did mainly artistic courses, but also maths, English, science and all that. It was a broad education but it specialised in, for me, artistic things.

From there I got a scholarship to go to the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts (now the London College of Communication). That was an incredibly old guild school, which became a school for printers. And then one bright guy set up a little design section. I had a tremendously good education in the technology of design – a thorough examination of modern typography, illustration and photography. We set type and we printed our stuff, you know. When I came out of that, I was quite accomplished as an entry level designer. When I worked for Gordon, he was delighted, because I did all the stuff he didn't want to do – I marked up the type, did the finished artwork, dealt with the printers…

Stuart: Interesting, there's mention in the poster book about there being a push, spearheaded by Robin Boyd and Richard Haughton James, to drive design forward in Australia through establishing the kinds of design schools that didn't really exist here.

Harry: No, they were non-existent when I came, so I was very employable because most of the other guys had learnt their stuff as juniors at advertising agencies and studios, so they'd never had the formal education that I had.

Although in Victoria when a lot of the suburban colleges like Prahran started up, they were very good. Ironically, though I worked for most of my life in Sydney, I had very few contacts with other designers there. Most of my friends and people I talked to about design were based in Melbourne… Brian Sadgrove and Mimmo Cozzolino and Les Mason. I think it's partly to do with sharing a similar basic education.

So that was my start, working for Gordon, although I only worked for him as an assistant for possibly a year. Later we reunited – myself, Gordon and David Moore, the photographer.

We had a studio together for 10 years or something. I'd worked for McCann Erickson [now McCann]; I could have gone along that route, but I didn't. I worked for *Vogue* for a while. I worked for a group of architects who were quite adventurous – George Clarke, Don Gazzard and Peter Yeomans. I met Peter because we shared this office with Gordon. That moved me into the architectural area, which was very good for me. My modernist tendencies suited a lot of the architectural companies. I worked with Harry Seidler on and off for 40 years.

Stuart: I've seen you talk about your work in mostly civic and cultural terms, which strikes me as being quite similar to the way architects talk and think about their work. It's unusual (now, at least) for graphic design firms, and, in particular, the more business-focused branding studios, to think about or talk about their work in that way. Is that how you've always thought about it?

Harry: I've always had a certain societal impulse to what I do. There are a couple of things that are a great help to someone like me: an intelligent, thoughtful, adventurous client with an interesting, worthwhile product. Nearly all of the work I've done that I feel quite *central* about, has come through working with people in those sorts of environments. I've been fortunate in understanding, too, that that is a requirement, if you're going to try and do interesting work. It's also happened that these things have congealed with my political leanings. All these people I work for have certainly had their own individual attitudes about things, but the work suited me.

Stuart: Can we talk about *In the Making*? I brought my copy.

Harry: Sure. Although I didn't design that jacket. When I was younger, I did a silly thing. I fell out, not with the publisher but with his production guy. I designed a jacket, which was a big poster that wrapped around the book with a mixture of typefaces and a few of those circus letters on it. Here, I've hunted down some

fragments of my initial but unresolved intentions for the cover.

He didn't like it and I fell out with him over it. It was the last thing to do and I said, 'Stuff it, do your own thing', which was the most stupid thing I've ever done in a graphic design sense. So the jacket you have is the later one, when it was republished as *Australian Art and Artists.*

Stuart: As opposed to *In the Making*? That's interesting, because a friend and I surmised that the jacket was different to the case because of a publisher freaking out at the last minute and going, 'It needs to say *Australian Art and Artists* on the cover!'

Harry: Exactly right. Exactly right! The subhead became the title.

Stuart: Funny. Can you tell me some more about it?

Harry: Well, we wanted to go straight into the book – no foreword or whatever. We wanted it to be quite a dynamic thing. I put this sequence together of Michael Johnson and I was really pleased with it. I included this, and this, just building things up, the things that he was interested in, the shapes he referenced in his work and things like that. Then this sequence about the colour, finding that palette of all his stuff; and then his final painting, but actually not the painting, a picture of him. It was so interesting.

The idea was to try to make these sequences. This page here, I always liked. I was really trying to get into the combination of images and words. I took this little statement of Fred Williams'.

I repaint other people's paintings. See that there? That's Bailed Up. You know, Tom Roberts. I've just taken the figures out and repainted the background. Now Robert Jacks has repainted my picture; he was around here the other night and had a good look at it.

I found all these bits that related to this idea. It's a lovely statement and we got

Image credits

1) Megan Patty and Stuart Geddes (eds), *Some Posters from the NGV.* Published by the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2016.

2/3) David Beale, Craig McGregor, David Moore, and Harry Williamson, *Australian Art and Artists: In the Making.* Published by Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1969. Dust jacket not designed by Harry Williamson.

4/5) Preliminary montage for dust jacket of *Australian Art and Artists: In the Making.* David Moore and Harry Williamson.

6) Part of the original dust jacket of *Australian Art and Artists: In the Making.* Designed by Gordon Andrews.

7–12) David Beale, Craig McGregor, David Moore, and Harry Williamson, *Australian Art and Artists: In the Making.* Published by Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1969. Dust jacket not designed by Harry Williamson.
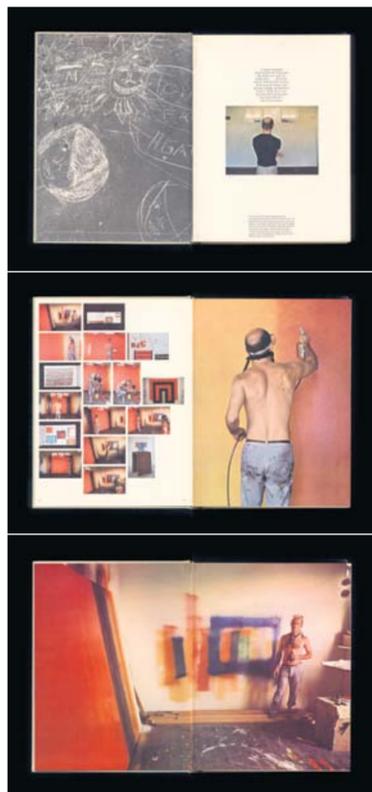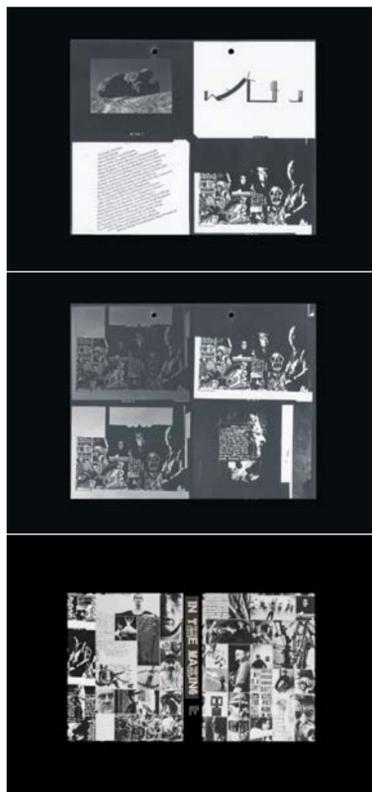
Bob Jacks' thing in right at the end; we go through the whole thing that he's talking about.

Stuart: That explains that idea so well.

Harry: This little sequence here I always liked. Robert Klippel – going from where he found all this machine stuff that he uses and then his more naturalistic work, and then finally him looking at his piece of sculpture.

My job in this was to structure the sequences. The layout is, as you can see, quite spontaneous. It was a lot to do with managing images, rather than some of the tighter, more modernist typographic things I'd done.

Stuart: Can you tell me a bit about it as a collaborative project? There were four of you. How did that work?

Harry: I'd just met Craig McGregor, the writer, and he'd been doing a series of articles for the *Herald* on designers and artists and architects. We talked about it and he had the idea that he'd like to turn it into a book. He was working with David Beal, who was a really good photographer and I'd worked with him at *Vogue*, but because the job was so vast, and I was working with David Moore, I said to Craig, "Well, you know, there's room for two photographers here." David Beal was quite happy about that, because he and David got on very well.

That's how the little group of us came together. Craig would write the text, but the photographers weren't necessarily guided by Craig's writing – they were more interested in their own interpretation of the situation. They'd come in with all their pictures and we'd look at them and talk about what we could do with the sequence. It was very much a collaboration.

Stuart: I like what it says in the back: "This is a book about art in Australia and how it is created. Its stance is pluralist." Such a strong positioning of what it is.

Harry: That's it, absolutely. A different

example, talking about good clients and good products, was Robert Goodman, the photographer, and the book *The Australians*. It was very different from the sort of picture books that had been produced at that time. That was the first big book I designed in Australia. I think it's about 50 years old or so – 1966. It was quite a breakthrough in many ways. It was an absolute top seller. It sold hundreds of thousands of copies.

Stuart: Wow, that many? And *In the Making* is 1969?

Harry: That came a few years after. It was a very different type of book.

Stuart: There's a sort of casualness, a spontaneity, an immediacy to *In the Making*. And there's a visual inventiveness to it, coupled with that collaborative experience of making it. Something that came to mind for me was Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore's collaboration. Was that an influence?

Harry: No, it wasn't. I'd read McLuhan's stuff, but I'd never seen that collaborative thing with the images. I didn't see that until years and years later.

Stuart: So it just naturally occurred for you guys?

Harry: Yeah, absolutely. Mind you, it was quite easy. I'd worked with David Moore for some years and we'd worked on lots of different projects together, so we had a sensitivity to each other. You were never walking on eggshells; everything was upfront. We learnt from each other. I learnt a tremendous amount about photography and he got much more interested in graphics and typography. It was an easy coming together. And I'd worked with David Beal earlier, when he was a fashion photographer and I was at *Vogue*, so there was no strangeness between us.

Stuart: You would have been in Australia for about 10 years when you

did *In the Making*? It really captures and discusses a great array of really good work that was happening at the time.

Harry: We were very confident that all this stuff around us was excellent. We were very much in awe of these people. It goes back to this thing about having an interesting product. That respect you have for it gives you a certain foundation. It makes for a good beginning.

Stuart: What was the reception for it like?

Harry: Oh, it wasn't. Ha! Amongst the artists and the designers it had a great success, but it didn't take off. It did sell, but it was never a big seller. Craig McGregor recently met the publisher, David Rosenberg. He bumped into him just six months ago and asked if he wanted to do another book like *In the Making*? Rosenberg sort of backed away, but he was fantastic. He let us go. We kept in touch with him, showing him what we were doing, but that was it. I was in charge of the production too – I did all the mechanicals and I went up to Hong Kong when it was being printed.

Stuart: I'm so interested in it as a book. It reminds me of some of the more interesting publishing that's happening now.

Harry: Well, it was an outrageous thing for the time. We hadn't seen anything like it ourselves. It was entirely new for all of us.

Some of the things didn't quite gel for me. Bits and pieces of it that just didn't come together, but in the main it was such a rush and we were all so excited about what we were doing. Pinning up David's photographs – they'd come back from somewhere and we'd all look at the contacts. In that sense it truly was collaborative. We all got a tremendous enjoyment out of each other's commitment.

Stuart: A thing that strikes me as being quite important also is the strength of the relationships that are evident in all of this…

Harry: Absolutely, that's so important. Like I had with Harry Seidler. He was a fantastically generous and involved client. Once he realised that your work was very considerate of his requirements, you became part of the team. And then whatever happened, you were the person who did the work. That type of relationship is incredibly important, because it means you don't have to start explaining things to people or arguing for them.

Stuart: You develop a bit of a shorthand, a trust. A generosity.

Harry: That's it. These are two books for Harry. This was a really early one. It was an interesting book, which was based on a very thorough three-column grid that went right through the book – from how the images were managed in the preliminary section right the way through the book. Then we did this other book.

Stuart: And you used the same grid?

Harry: We extended it into this little six column grid. It's a bit more sophisticated than the first book, which predates it by 20 years or so.

Stuart: We end up learning a lot from each other in those relationships, the long ones. I guess particularly in terms of someone like Seidler, who had such a clear vision…

Harry: Unrelenting, yeah, and which he never really grew out of, if you know what I mean. He experimented with it in his later work, where you see some earlier historical influences, like the Baroque. Although he would resent it, there was a certain postmodernist attitude – or *his* development of modernism. Although he was quite focused, he was constantly aware of his own desire to expand his philosophy. What you learn from someone like

Harry is the thoroughness – the dedication and responsibility to the history that he came from. He's constantly judging his own work against these standards and these values. And you start to do that yourself.

But Stuart, tell me, how are you going to use this material?

Stuart: Aside from the text for the exhibition, I thought I would self-publish a fuller account of the conversation, with more reproductions of the books that we've talked about. Just a little pocketbook. I want to chat to Alison Forbes, too. I met her last year at the AGDA awards, where she was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Harry: Inducted, was she? Oh very good. She and I were virtually contemporaries. She'd just designed a fantastic book – *A Continent Takes Shape* (1971) – about the history of the mapping of Australia, around the same time as *The Australians*. I was very aware of her work and I have great admiration for that book. Are you going to see her, did you say? If you do, give her my admiration. And fond memory of her work.
I think I might have met her, actually. I came down to Melbourne once to give a talk to a group, they were called the Fleuron Society or the Folio Society – they were publishers, designers and printers. I think I met her then, very briefly. I've still got that book somewhere. It was an excellent book. I can even remember the typeface, I think.

Stuart Geddes is a graphic designer and occasional publisher, mostly of books, and occasionally other kinds of projects (magazines and journals, exhibitions and websites). He is also an industry fellow, researcher and PhD candidate at RMIT University. Stuart's research interests converge around the form of the book, through collaborative practice, emerging histories and unconventional economies.

Image credits

13–20) David Beale, Craig McGregor, David Moore, and Harry Williamson, *Australian Art and Artists: In the Making*. Published by Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1969. Dust jacket not designed by Harry Williamson.

21) Robert B Goodman and George Johnston, *The Australians*. Published by Rigby, Adelaide, 1966. Designed by Harry Williamson.

22) Peter Blake, *Architecture for the new world: the work of Harry Seidler*. Published by Horwitz, Sydney, 1973. Designed by Harry Williamson.

23) Harry Seidler, *Harry Seidler: four decades of architecture*. Published by Thames & Hudson, 1992. Designed by Harry Williamson.

24) Egon & Elise Kunz, *A Continent Takes Shape*. Published by William Collins, Melbourne, 1971. Designed by Alison Forbes.
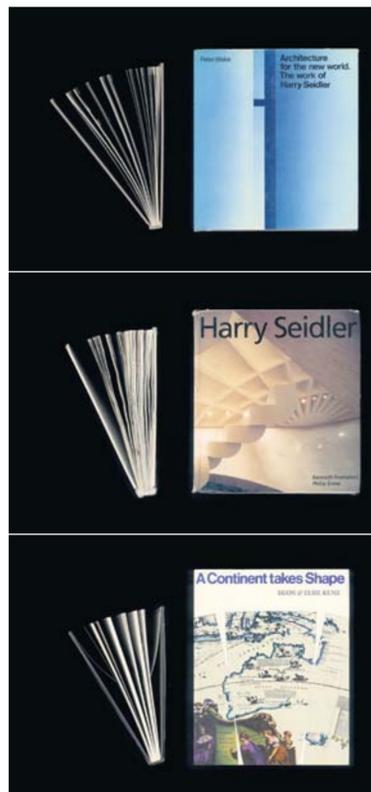
No, it isn't just music
Warren Taylor

'There must be a way to treat the textuality of a musical object (a piece, a set, a record etc.) in such a way as not to freeze it in some formalist vacuum, having it speak only of itself.' [1]

The deliberately unrefined cover for the Primitive Calculators' 1979 single *Do That Dance / I Can't Stop* It was, according to guitarist (and cover designer) Stuart Grant, symbolic of the Melbourne post-punk group's position "not to participate in the systems of exchange that existed in the music business". [2] The cover art, created using dry-transfer lettering, is a simple gesture on a geometrically sound format – indicative of the disposable ethos of punk's minimalist agenda. While the Primitive Calculators wore apathy on their sleeve (Grant also requested the label on the vinyl be printed solid black, rather than left blank), the DIY approach to recording, performing and publishing was critical in the evolution of independent music in Australia.

In the late 1970s, geographic isolation limited access to the most interesting pieces of contemporary culture coming from the UK and the US. Delayed dispatches of *NME* or *The Face* meant that the image of new wave and post-punk music evolved on the racks and communal poster walls of independent records stores and music venues. Although a conservative Liberal Party was in power, the legacy of the Whitlam government's free tertiary education and easily obtained unemployment benefits, saw art schools, such as the Preston Institute of Technology (PIT) in Melbourne's northern suburbs, become incubators for progressive and convergent approaches to music and art.

Emerging from the music department at La Trobe University, the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre (CHCMC) was setup in an old organ factory building on Page Street in Clifton Hill in 1976 by experimental composer Ron Nagorcka and musician Warren Burt. The artistic program was layered, diverse, intellectual and free of any economic exchange. A regular at the CHCMC was the group ⤥↑→ (often written tsk tsk tsk and spoken with three clicks of the tongue against the roof of the mouth). Led by multimedia artist, writer and composer Philip Brophy and operating somewhere between a music group and an art project, ⤥↑→ presented a theatrical discourse through live performances and recordings, often elaborated in detailed program notes, screen-printed gig posters, album covers and texts. Performances would often transcend the formality of the stage – such as 1981's *What is this Thing Called Disco?* (originally performed

at University of Melbourne's George Paton Gallery) and a four-hour performance of Andy Warhol's novel *a* (1968). Cultural critic Darren Tofts, who, like Brophy, grew up in Reservoir in Melbourne's northern suburbs, observed ⤥↑→ "was an incursion into the spaces of local consumption, an encoded performance of ideas to do with identification, recognition and cultural memory. It was a kind of poetic manifesto, an idea-kit for thinking about culture, sign systems and modes of understanding." [3]

Brophy had studied film theory and philosophy at Latrobe University and was cultivating an interest in conceptual art, cinema and experimental music. In 1979 he founded Innocent Records with David Chesworth, who had not only taken on management of the CHCMC in 1978, but was a member of the influential post-punk group Essendon Airport – who would often perform on the same bill as ⤥↑→. Between his art, music, performance and writing, Brophy had established a network of communication where he could espouse a cultural dialogue. A self-taught graphic artist, he also designed and printed a majority of the posters for the CHCMC and records sleeves for his and Chesworth's projects. He became aware of British graphic artists Barney Bubbles and Malcolm Garrett, principally, through his expanding music collection and his interest in Japanese animation, comics, pop art and American cinema materialised into a distinctive design aesthetic. Underpinned by a comic, pop sensibility, his word/image combinations elucidated a blend of high and low culture: "My aim for anything is to make it look like detergent packaging – that's really the ultimate. If someone says 'fuck that looks like a detergent package', it's like wow!". [4] Lettering for mechanical artwork was often sourced from second-hand type catalogues or resolved in numerous sketches on loose sheets of paper. For Brophy, the evolution of the image was not only evident in his approach to identity design (regularly presenting multiple variations for a single logo) but critical to his examination of the structure of music and aesthetics.

While more than 20 performers moved through the turnstile of ⤥↑→, the core group were Brophy, Ralph Traviato, Jane Stevenson and Maria Kozic – a visual artist who had studied screen printing at PIT. Brophy and Kozic had set up a screen printing studio above a shop on High Street, Northcote – a sample of Warhol's factory in inner-city Melbourne where they designed and printed artwork for record labels and venues across Melbourne, including the notorious Crystal Ballroom in St Kilda.

By 1982, live performances of ⤥↑→ were rare, with Brophy focusing on the organisation, presentation and distribution of its product, which included records, films, videos and written material. A catalogue of their output is best captured in *MADE BY* ⤥↑→ (1983) – a collage of media clippings, artists statements, interviews, program notes and graphic art.

Working under the name Autist Inc., Brophy continued to develop graphics for the alternative music scene in Melbourne, as well as occasional commissions for major labels (such as Mushroom Records). The heavy-handed tactics of street poster companies made it unfeasible for Brophy and Kozic to continue to print directly for the venues and, as with the trajectory of independent music, the industry started dictating terms again and many groups moved to a more palatable sound, disbanded or headed overseas. For Brophy, this didn't stifle his output as he continued to expand his creative practice and further interrogate cultural theory, music, art and cinema. His essay 'Post-Punk Graphic Design: The Displaced Present Perfectly Placed' in the self-published *Stuffing Art: Graphics* (1990) was not only the entry point for this author to a frenetic and brilliant mind, but a text that both Malcolm Garrett and Peter Saville have cited as the critical examination of post-punk graphic design.

In recent years, recordings of the Primitive Calculators, David Chesworth and ⤥↑→ have been reissued by independent Australian labels Chapter Music and Efficient Space. Whilst this kind of activity is admirable - as it speaks to a new generation - the threads that existed between art, music, graphics, printing and performance are somewhat lost in the representation.

Warren Taylor *is a graphic designer and lecturer in communication design at MADA (Monash Art Design and Architecture). He is the founder of The Narrows – a curatorial project interested in the convergence of art and design which has presented exhibitions by distinguished graphic designers such as Ronald Clyne, Experimental Jetset, John Melin, Rogerio Duarte, Peter Brotzmann and Karel Martens.*

Taylor is an occasional contributor to IDEA Magazine and part of the design collective Re:collection, which edit and publish an archive of Australian graphic design.

Footnotes

[1] Adrian Martin and Philip Brophy, 'Texts and Gestures', *Art Network*, no. 6 (1982): 28.
[2] Stuart Grant, in conversation with Warren Taylor, Melbourne, December 2017.
[3] Darren Tofts, 'Diacritics for local consumption', *Meanjin*, Vol. 60, no. 2 (2001): 104.
[4] Philip Brophy, in conversation with Warren Taylor, Melbourne, December 2017.
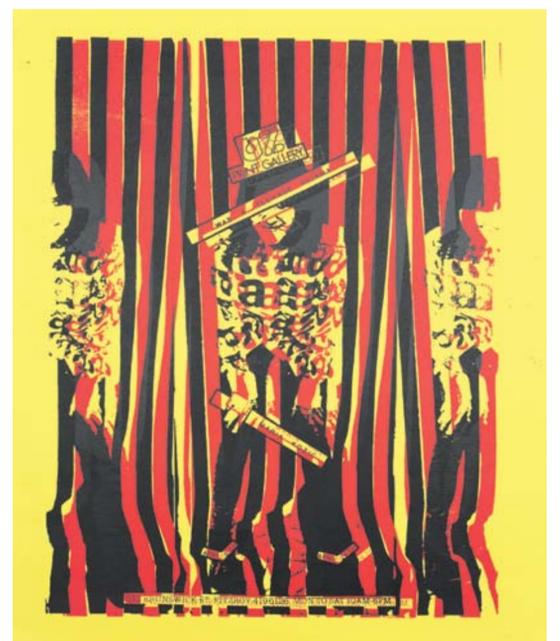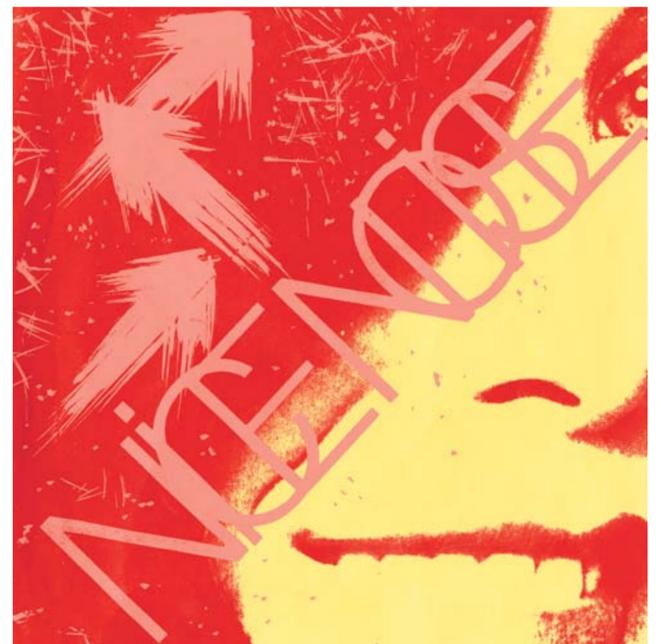

Image credits

⤥↑→ Nice Noise, 7", EP, 1979, front cover. Graphic design by Philip Brophy.

Maria Kozic: I was a Teenage Pyjama, screenprinted poster, 1981. Graphic design by Philip Brophy

Kiosk, Warren Taylor WT 2
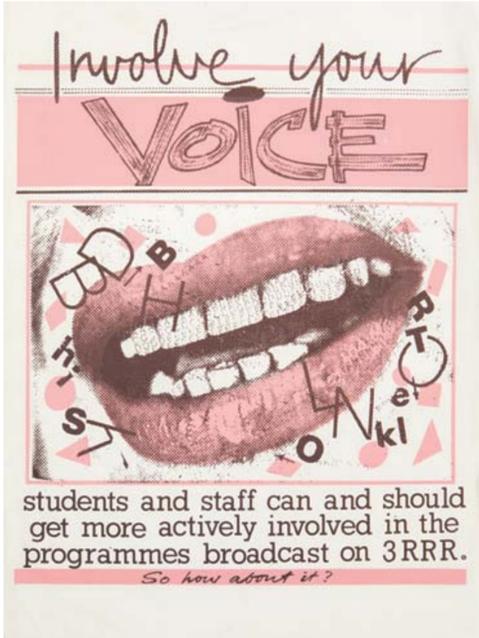
3RRRFM, screenprinted poster, 1979. Graphic design by Philip Brophy.

3RRRFM, mechanical artwork, 1979. Graphic design by Philip Brophy.

Au-go-go, flyer, 1987. Graphic design by Philip Brophy.
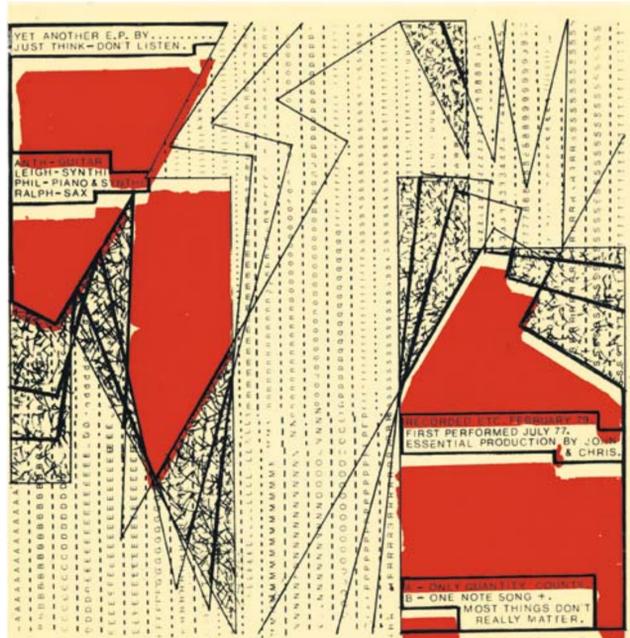
↘↑↗ vinyl, 7", EP, 1980, front cover. Graphic design by Philip Brophy.

↘↑↗ vinyl, 7", EP, 1980, back cover. Graphic design by Philip Brophy.

Boys Next Door, screenprinted poster, 1980. Graphic design by Philip Brophy.

Inner City Sound, book cover artwork, 1982. Graphic design by Philip Brophy.

The Primitive Calculators, Do That Dance / I Can't Stop It, Vinyl, 7", EP, 1979, front cover. Graphic design by Stuart Grant

The Primitive Calculators, Do That Dance / I Can't Stop It, Vinyl, 7", EP, 1979, back cover. Graphic design by Stuart Grant
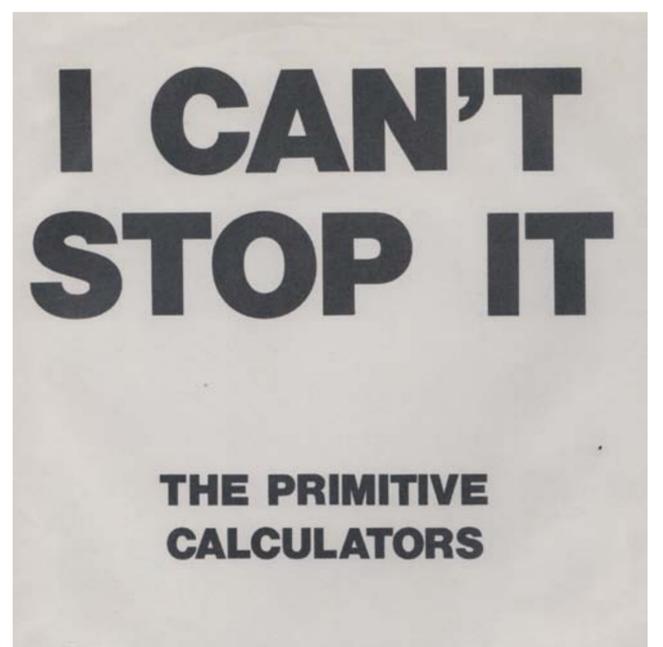
'So what you are really asking is…' The right answers to the wrong questions
Žiga Testen

I visited Canberra to interview Shirley Kral, the second wife of George Kral, an Australian graphic designer of Czech origin. Between 1956 and 1962 when George and Shirley lived together in Melbourne, Kral worked on some of his most formative and important works – or at least it is these works that have been preserved in the archives and memories of his associates, friends and family.

Shirley has kept a daily diary for most of her adult life that she still continues to this day on her laptop. When George's design material was donated to the RMIT Design Archives, she extracted all references to her years with George as a separate document, including a complete list of his work in that period, 1956 to 1963. When I visited the archives in order to find out more about Kral's work, it was her diary that intrigued me the most. The diary provided an unmediated, personal and sometimes unexpectedly honest snapshot of a graphic designer – an insight that is, as every design researcher or historian can probably confirm, remarkably rare in the field. In an essay titled 'The uses of failure', British design historian Robin Kinross wrote:

Where facts can be found, they should be brought to bear on the discussion of a work, particularly those that shed light on the designer's intentions. But as designers know, post-hoc analyses (case studies) of individual jobs are not necessarily intended to present a factual account, but are part of a public relations initiative; they are as useful as the general staff's report on a battle is to military historians. Discussing work with the designers who made it is productive when it focuses on the works itself. The rest is conjecture.

George Kral left us with very little record of his design intentions and – at least in a material and easily accessible form – very little PR either. However, it is Shirley's diary that provides some key information and insight into his character and aesthetic tendencies.

I was first introduced to George Kral when a colleague, working on an archive of Australian graphic design history, came across a photograph of Kral and pointed it out to me. Apparently we look a bit alike … at least in that photograph – glasses with a dark thick frame, a slightly slouchy, slim figure – even our outfits were similar despite the 60-year gap. The similarities don't end there. As I would later discover, we are both designers (Kral himself very much involved not only with graphic design, but also interior and product design) and of Slavic, Eastern European origin. And not unlike me now, at the time the photograph was taken, Kral was still fairly new to Melbourne and to the Australian graphic design community.

Shirley must have sensed when I visited her that my interest in George's work was not merely a professional interest in another designer's work. Just after I turned off the sound recorder and we sat down for some pumpkin soup, she asked me directly about the purpose of the interview and questioned if in fact I knew. After all, Harriet Edquist from the RMIT Design Archives had recently published a detailed article on Kral's life that, at the time of writing, is still the definitive outline of Kral's biography.

Shirley was correct – it wasn't clear, even to me what I went to Canberra looking for. And it's not the first time that I've done this. I've conducted hastily organised interviews with graphic designers I've been interested in (and their associates and families) many times before. Usually following a hunch after seeing a work with some unexpected design features not conforming to their context, following a rumour, seeing a photograph that intrigued me… Usually looking for something that shouldn't be there, something that seemed off, something or someone that didn't quite fit in.

Looking back, it was never graphic design alone that I was interested in, but rather what I can read and learn from and through graphic design about the people that make it and the people it was made for. And while the article published by Harriet Edquist does answer all the important questions about Kral's life and his career from the perspective of design history, I suppose in the end those are not the questions I have been asking myself.

When I first saw that photograph of George a year or so ago there was barely any of his work easily available. The photograph was included in his profile on a website called Re:Collection, 'Australian Graphic Design c.1960 – c.1990'. A project "established in 2009 by Dominic Hofstede as an online archive of Australian graphic design, with a focus on work created between the years 1960–1990. The project was created primarily to address the scarcity of reference material available related to this most significant period for the profession." [1]

Without much or any work by Kral to be found, I browsed through Re:Collection inspecting work by Kral's contemporaries. It's a remarkable archive in which one can clearly identify some major tendencies of Australian graphic design in that period – Swiss style or International typographic style in some form or another, elements of 'POPISM'… To the best of my knowledge it doesn't really seem much different to any other similar design archive of a developed western country.

I encountered advertisements, product packaging designs and an occasional book or two or a poster. 'GO WELL, GO SHELL', a slogan typeset in what appears to be Helvetica compressed, 'Milk' dully typeset in Gill Kayo, 'ONE LITRE HOMOGENISED PASTEURISED' in Helvetica regular, and 'DESIGN IS SO IMPORTANT, why not let your architect specify the office furniture' typeset in Trade Gothic condensed are just some examples of the material to be found in the archive. Removing the visual form and context of these works from their messages and copy does make them seem quite irrelevant [2] – a common problem with evaluating the historical importance of any cultural artefact. Nevertheless, when carefully

inspecting these works one notices a unity of form and content, as well as a precision of execution that elevates these works above many others I have seen from the same period. Being new to Australia, it's hard for me to tell whether these works are indicative of the overall quality of the works in that period or rather a reflection of the aesthetic preferences of the archive's authors. At first sight, these works do not appear to be significantly different to the works by Kral that I would later see in the RMIT Design Archives.

However, it appears that Kral's work must have been much more important for a generation of graphic designers than the fairly limited amount of available work can testify to, and specifically so for a generation working before the 1960s. According to a short text published by AGDA on the occasion of Kral's inclusion in its Hall of fame:

The Design Studio under George Kral created a stream of work unprecedented in quality and design awareness for those times. Managing to stay aloof from the sometimes crude commercial standards of the era, Kral's work was clearly the breath of new typography on the Australian scene. He was at the height of his creative powers when he died much too soon, in 1978 at the age of 51.

A further confirmation of Kral's typographic radicalism, at least in the Australian context, is provided in a short article by Brad Haylock briefly touching on Kral's studio stationery:

Kral's own stationery is an important demonstration of his graphic design prowess. This work is as sober as graphic design comes: one typeface, in one size, one weight, one colour, methodically organised on a strict grid. The hierarchy of the information on the page is determined only by the logic of our reading: left to right, top to bottom. Such sober typography epitomises European modernism, but this stationery would have been an unusual creature in Australian graphic design at the time. [3]

It has to be noted, at this point, that from all available information I could gather, Kral was not formally trained as a designer while living in Europe. While he must have been exposed to European modernism in some way or another while living there, his early 'career' was far from being anything like a formation of a contemporary designer. When the Design Institute of Australia posthumously nominated Kral to its Hall of Fame, Shirley prepared a speech where she wrote:

He had left post-war Czechoslovakia in 1947, spending some years in Paris as a displaced person. He emigrated to Australia in 1951, spending the first two years doing the many jobs that the authorities handed out to migrants. During that time he had to learn English as best he could. There were no supportive English classes in those days.

But Shirley confirms my assumption that Kral really was one of the designers who introduced European 'modernist' or 'new' typography to Australia – possibly due to his first-hand experience with it living in Europe, as she speculates, as well as self-educating himself later on via international press and literature available at the time:

All the magazines and books that we had and were subscribed to were about the Bauhaus, Mies van der Rohe … he loved that Bauhaus aesthetic of everything clean and minimal. And at the time there was nothing here [in Australia] like that. And he had so many clients that loved that.

These are crucial clues that require some unpacking. 'New Typography' and 'European modernism', in particular, are terms that I focus on. I have been in Australia long enough to have a general understanding of how mutable the use of the word 'modernism', 'modern' and 'new typography' can be here. I am reminded of a definition of modern typography by British typographer Anthony Froshaug: "Modern typography is not a mode, it consists in a reasoned assessment of what is needed and of what somehow then is done under certain constraints…".[4]

And even Shirley herself reiterates a similar concern when she describes the process of design as: "If there's a need, how does one answer to that need? … that's what design is."

As she later explains, her understanding of design was very much informed by her brother, the architect Derek Fuller Wrigley. Between the 1960s and 80s he was active in the field of sustainable design, concerned with the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. But what is concealed or hinted at in these statements is a very specific idea of what a 'need' is. While this is a complicated term that can evoke a lot of (Marxist) theory in relation to design, it is perhaps best summarised by Victor Papanek's distinction between a 'need' and a 'want:

Much design has satisfied only evanescent wants and desires while the genuine needs of man have often been neglected by the designers. The economic, psychological, spiritual, technological and intellectual needs of a human being are usually more difficult and less profitable to satisfy than the carefully engineered and manipulated 'wants' inculcated by fad and fashion. [5]

Coming to prominence mostly in the 1960s and 70s, Papanek was an Austrian–American designer and educator who became a strong advocate of the socially and ecologically responsible design of products, tools and community infrastructures. While Papanek belongs to a generation of designers working on the fringes of modernism, he is often seen as a designer that managed to sustain the ethos of modernist design even after the more politicised aspect of it was purged and replaced with the formalism of the international style – a condition I suspect Australian graphic design might have suffered from as well.

So I quiz Shirley about George's politics. I know he emigrated from a communist regime so I already anticipate an answer but still …

what were his politics like … was he interested in politics at all?

No, absolutely not. A lot of the Czech emigres here, they hated communism, they loathed it.

I expected such an answer, most Eastern European emigres in Australia do or did. Times were hard when they emigrated and they often did for political reasons. I rephrase my question: were there any causes or particular issues that Kral was concerned about? Was he somehow socially engaged?

So what you are really asking is was he an activist? No! He was absolutely blinkered. Loved his work and … but he did join the industrial design society and went to meetings but how much militating that was, I wouldn't think so.

I am curious, what about the other artists and designers Kral worked with? Especially Clement Meadmore and other artists orbiting 'Gallery A' that Kral co-founded – described on the Re:Collection website as "a combined showroom and art gallery which would become a fulcrum for Melbourne Modernism" in the 1950s and 60s. What were the concerns of these artists, were they somehow politically active or engaged?

No, not at all. Except perhaps to get funding. At the time Australia was all about the survival of the fittest. You had this large influx of so many migrants in a short period all of them struggling to make it.

On the other hand, Shirley definitely was an activist, especially after the divorce with Kral and her subsequent move to Canberra.

When I came to Canberra I was involved with the Women's Movement from the very beginning, right from Women's liberation and The Women's Electoral Lobby. Because of my divorce and the fact that I was really struggling, questioning how did I get to this point and allow this to happen to me, I was really ready for feminism.

Feminism: an -ism that seems to have influenced people's lives here in Australia much more significantly than that other one – modernism. Shirley often helped George with his design work, as well as managing his accounts and business matter. English was Kral's second language and he was very much reliant on her in dealing with his accounting matters, invoices etc. When I ask if there were any other female designers working at the time when she was living in Melbourne with George, she replies: "You know I can't recall any, no… The 50s and 60s were so incredibly sexist." [6]

Reflecting on my conversation with Shirley and my limited research into Kral's work I can't seem to shake off a feeling of a kind of (personal) failure. I have been trying to identify designers whose practices could serve as a model and inspiration for my own work, and whose worldviews corresponded with those I considered to be at the root of modernism and, with it, graphic design.

I started off my research to find out more about Australia's connection with

modernism and graphic designers and artists that introduced it to this country, looking for a modernist narrative akin to the one I am familiar with and have been taught or that I have perhaps constructed for myself. I ended up with a confirmed suspicion that modernism existed here (and perhaps everywhere?) in a less militant form – more as a term designating a particular aesthetic rather than a coherent movement. But on the other hand, I found a country that in the 1960s and 70s was ripe for radical politics, political engagement and even radical design. I discovered people who engaged with those topics fully like Shirley Kral and her brother – just not under the auspices of the word 'modernism'.

I am again reminded of Kinross and his article 'The uses of failure'. In conclusion he writes: "Yet, it is just where there are some cracks in the surface of what happened that one can get hold on *something*: cracks then revealed by a truthfulness in telling, by an account that includes the failures and the dead ends and the apparently meaningless episodes that don't fit into a wished-for narrative coherence."

I definitely found *something*, just not what I came looking for.

I would like to thank in particular Shirley Kral for generously dedicating her time to talk to me about George, for all her insights and for the delicious pumpkin soup.

Žiga Testen *is a Slovenian graphic designer living in Melbourne, whose activities include graphic design, editing, curatorial projects and collaborations with artists, curators, activists and theoreticians. His work relies heavily on language and typography with a specific interest in the relationship of aesthetics and politics.*

Footnotes

[1] See URL: recollection.com.au.
[2] Given the stringent image copyright requirements though, this is the easiest and most convenient way to actually reproduce them. Luckily nobody treats historical advertisement copy as copyrighted material akin to that of images.
[3] Brad Haylock, 'Centre Justified: Les Mason and the exhibition of graphic design', *Gallery*, Jan/Feb 2016.
[4] Anthony Froshaug, *Studio International*, no. 924 (1970): 60–61.
[5] Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World: Human ecology and social change* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985): 15.
[6] Later over email Shirley adds: 'I really should have recalled that on a visit to Sydney, probably in 1958, we made a special visit to the studio of Marion Hall Best in Woollahra. She was a very well-known interior designer and, at the time, was importing beautiful silk fabrics, and we purchased a few small pieces. We chose a length of green Thai silk and I made it up into a short cocktail dress, dyeing some silk shoes to match.'

Image credit

Photograph of Clement Meadmore (L) and George Kral (R), c.1958. Unknown photographer. Image courtesy of RMIT Design Archives.