

EDITORIAL

Research notes: communication design

This second issue of volume three continues to set out potential directions for how we might address communication design research through a range of topics and perspectives offered by our contributors. Their articles provide insights into how designers look, see and represent the world, and demonstrate how research into the ‘visual’ remains a core component of communication design: for example, the surprisingly complex semiology of children’s drawings, the visual messaging strategies of posters, to the multiple ways in which data and information have been visualized at different points in history.

What better way to begin this issue than by exploring the ways in which children’s drawings might aid in our understanding of safety signs in public spaces. Kin Wai Michael Siu, Mei Seung Lam and Yi Lin Wong, undertook a study with 65 primary school children (7- to 12-years-old) in different districts in Hong Kong (‘Designing signs for children: a study for children’s drawings for safety signs’). Through a systematic analysis of the drawings produced by their focus groups, the authors were able to hypothesize different ways in which children read and understand pictograms.

The role of the poster in conveying public health messages historically in the US is the focus of Dori Griffin’s insightful article ‘Posters for public health: WPA posters and national dialogues about health care in the United States’. Griffin methodically examines the visual messaging found within a selection of posters from the Library of Congress’s Work Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Art Project collection procured in the 1940s. Her article shows how a collection might provide a rich resource for an analysis of graphic artefacts, revealing cultural and ideological positions as well as assumptions about the viewing audience. She shows the ways in which the government opted for a graphic simplicity which reduced complex issues down to a set of core American values (e.g. home life, cleanliness, and healthy futures).

Communicating the complexity of data is also addressed through the narratives of information visualization. Leslie Atzmon delves into the ‘revolutionary world’ of Charles Darwin arguing that his use of the ‘tree-of-life’ sketches informed his understanding of the complexities of evolution. Atzmon proposes that these sketches, and the diagrams they generated, published in Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, reflect a process of ‘visual ideation’ resulting in an ‘infographic’ which serves as a way of thinking through ideas, but also a way to communicate those ideas to others.

Jonathan Lukens, argues in his article, ‘Fresh paradoxes in food data’, that the process of ‘traceability’ of food items in moving from the ‘farm to table’, opens up questions around design which promotes an advertising agenda (e.g. packaging) as opposed to design that reveals (e.g. supply chain). Lukens navigates the complexity of wicked problems and draws from Kees Dorst’s concepts of design paradoxes to address issues surrounding traceability and the communication designer’s role in this process. His conclusion: designers must be made aware of the ambiguity, ephemerality and often contradictory nature of information made possible by food data and tracking systems.

Whilst the visual is key to representing ideas, the journal is also interested in how different senses can be employed in conjunction with the visual as a way to share new insights into a subject. A case in point would be Kate McLean’s intriguing method of ‘smellwalks’ to illicit participants’ perspectives on smells in an urban space. She explores the role of olfactory sense in



The role of the visual in communication is exemplified by this platform signage, Flinders Street Railway Station, Melbourne, Australia. Source: Author 2016.

her visual essay, 'Ex-formation: Urban Smellscapes & Mapping', and evidences through her own practice how this might contribute to our understanding of place.

Thereafter, we continue with our series which explores the nature and potential role of archives in shaping history, but also for informing the future of communication design. Wibo Bakker takes as his case study the fascinating inventory of the design agency Total Design, in order to explore the value of Dutch archival practices for designers, researchers as well as a broader public audience. Not surprisingly, this leads Bakker to question archival practices in a digital age; especially where design work is created in software programmes which may or may not be available in the future.

The plethora of recent design exhibitions and conferences provide another indicator of the increased interest in the history and theory of communication design. Yet, it could be argued that such forums have also been central to informing the 'who, what, where, why and how' of communication design research and professional practice more generally. With this in mind, the journal wanted to increase the column inches devoted to reviews in order to explore design education internationally - specifically in Latin America, South Africa, USA and UK, as well as interrogating alternative histories of graphic design through the lens of designers as curators. We also wanted to engage with what policy might bring to our understanding of the profession by featuring an analysis of the recently published 'Diagnostic Review of Design in Brazil'. It is clear that such a broad range of reviews and positions indicate just how far our profession has come.

Our cover for this issue is by the celebrated South Korean designer Ahn Sang-Soo. As founder of the Paju Typography Institute (PaTI) and past Vice-President for Icograda (1997–2001), his contribution to defining the future of design education and the profession continues to inspire.

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