BEYOND COMMERCIAL DESIGN:

A CRITIQUE OF DESIGN AND GRAPHIC DESIGN WRITINGS

IN *EMIGRE* AND *DOT DOT DOT* MAGAZINES

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DECLARATION

The dissertation is the result of my own independent work, except where otherwise stated.

Sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. A reference list is appended.

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ABSTRACT

Graphic design faces the contradictions of commercial intent and social relevance. This study explores the contribution of criticism, in two independent, seminal graphic design magazines, towards shifting the dominant preferences of graphic design from a purely commercial pursuit to a human-centred practice. *Emigre* magazine (c.1984 - 2005) and *Dot Dot Dot* magazine (c.2000 - 2010) are recognised for their critical intent and within them are emerging critical issues that suggest a potential niche for graphic design beyond consumerism and commerce. In the discipline of graphic design, designers define what it is to be human (and thus equally the realities of dehumanisation) in very particular ways (Rose, 2001:135; Freire, 1993:43). Graphic design has a history of commercial practice. This commercial history continues to define its identity and reinforce a particular body of knowledge. Graphic design criticism, however, is an inventive voice that has the potential to contribute to change. Both *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* were representative of a "constructive marginality" (Bennett, 1993:64), drawing from their own set of references and awareness of graphic design's potential to inform their identities, instead of looking to established definitions of practice to do so. This analysis explores how they anticipated a modern conception of graphic design that has become part of a recently adopted (2015) and more widely embedded discourse. This discourse involves critical design that interrogates multiculturalism, interdisciplinarity, environmental sustainability, social and political agency, and speculative futures. Graphic design engages social institutions and practices that denote social constructions of difference and inequality, and is never neutral. Any work, any representation of ideology, is at once individual and discursive at the level of social, cultural and political formations. The critical issues evident in *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot,* with the exception of an absence of speculative future*s,* anticipate a more humanising perspective in graphic design. They invite critique and the potential for change that is relevant to the surrounding world, as a counter to commercial self-interest.

Keywords: Graphic design criticism. *Dot Dot Dot. Emigre*. Critical design. Social design. Political design. Multiculturalism. Interdisciplinarity. Social and political agency. Environmental sustainability. Speculative futures.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIGA   American Institute of Graphic Arts

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Background to the field of study: the role of criticism in graphic design

It is the intention of this study to explore the contribution of criticism, in two independent, seminal graphic design magazines, towards shifting the dominant habitus of graphic design as a purely commercial endeavour. *Emigre* magazine (c.1984 - 2005) and *Dot Dot Dot* magazine (c.2000 - 2010) are recognised for their critical intent and within them are emerging critical issues that have potentially reflected a niche beyond consumerism and commerce in graphic design. As an introduction, this chapter explores the specific role of criticism in graphic design.

A critic of graphic design is a critic of everyday objects and images replete with social, cultural, economic and political meaning. The critic is evaluative. Evaluation involves interpretation. Interpretation can be defined as the process of offering a particular reading of meaning in graphic design (Poynor, 2005:par.4; Barnet, 1997:4). The design cannot, however, be fully understood in isolation. Beyond design communication is the existing power relations that surround it. Criticism plays a fundamental role in highlighting how graphic design is equivalent to ideas and thus is equivalent to a cultural (Kalman, Abbott Miller & Jacobs, 1991:31) and political landscape (McCoy, 1993:90).

The cultural and political landscape is never neutral, albeit that traditional graphic design has often attempted to express itself without questioning culturally and politically subjective histories and tensions. Criticism always proposes or defends a particular worldview alongside the object of its focus. In this sense, criticism may disrupt or confirm the status quo.

Graphic design, primarily concerned with an engagement with society through its persuasive commercial intent, is challenged in contemporary society to respond to an alternative call for humanisation. Inherently, the critic finds graphic design in a socially, culturally and politically uneven paradigm. The process of transforming the world corresponds to the process of humanising it (Freire, 1985:70), a shift towards criticism and agency that centres human needs and values.

The role of the critic is complex. The critic has an enduring role to introduce what is novel, to establish pathways of understanding between an audience and innovative (unfamiliar, new) graphic design directions (Poynor, 2006:par.4). When the majority of people are reticent to readily adopt new ideas, it is often the critic who creates a gateway to recognising change and transformation.

Enright (2008:314) comments on the critic's part in "looking, seeing, comprehending and composing" in the process of writing. Barnet (1997:10) suggests that the purpose of criticism is to observe, illuminate, provide insight and communicate, which is equivalent to the purpose of graphic design itself.

Criticism creates clarity and considers a particular response to graphic design that fascinates, stirs or antagonises (Barnet, 1997:4). The reader relies on the critic to introduce something that has not been considered before or to bring attention to elements of deeper interest. In effect, criticism may convince the reader that the ideas have been previously undervalued and potentially creates a fluid link with graphic design across ages and cultures. The critic, through the process of writing, infers that the work is worthy of evaluation. From a single work, the potential value of many works becomes possible. A growing body of criticism validates the discipline of graphic design (Heller, 1994:xiii).

Criticism is not limited to the textual. Poynor (2015b:77) comments "There is no reason why criticism has to follow set paths. Analysis of the designed world can, and should, take visual forms". If visual form is a valid form of knowledge, a means of articulating ideas (Swann, 2002:52), it can assume the role of criticism.

Criticism at times evaluates why the graphic designer chooses certain kinds of images and text to communicate a particular message. While the intention of graphic design is communication, postmodern theory has questioned the notion of single fixed meanings (Margolin, 1989:16). The idea of a single universal meaning has its roots in Modernism. McCoy (2004:41) highlights that the origins of Modernism's attraction to universality emerged from a desire to unify the world after the trauma of many years of European wars that lead up to World War 1. In a world that was in conflict over religious, cultural and language differences, the urge for universality made sense. The intention of the graphic designer, if successful, was invested with the final communication

Criticism, however, ultimately shifts between the perspective of the audience and the intention of the graphic designer (Heller, 1994:xv). With an interest in multiculturalism, postmodern theory introduced the concept of multiple meanings inherent in a single communication. It introduced the idea of multiple meanings that were received by a collective of individuals. If an image gives the viewer an "imaginary possession" of experience (Sontag, 1977:177) and it is not the image and text themselves that create meaning, but the way in which they express something seen or heard before (verbal and iconic forms of representation), the nuances of the design itself will always communicate with greater strength than any assumptions about the author's purposes.

The influence of a work thus does not have a singular point of origin, rather the viewers too are producers of meaning at the same time as they receive authored content (Lupton, 2004:par.9). Equally, the meaning always has a precedent. This idea draws from Barthes (1981:211) argument that while there is an intention to find the meaning of a work in the realm of the person who produced it,

> In reality a piece of writing is a "tissue of quotations" that owes everything to the mass of writing that preceded it… [A text is] not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.

The distinctions between graphic design criticism, graphic design theory and graphic design history are disintegrating (Margolin, 1989:10). Graphic design criticism affects design history because the ideological assumptions of present design choices influence what is favoured to be studied as design's past (Dilnot, 1989:235). Equally, as Kalman, Abbott Miller and Jacobs (1991:26) suggest "most graphic design history is not written, it is shown" and the way that graphic design history is captured affects the way the past is used. Design theory (how graphic design is understood) is sensitive to the complexity or limitations of its archival perspectives.

Graphic design has often avoided rigorous critical process, reverting regularly to light descriptive essays (Purcell, 2006b:par.1;Poynor, 1995:29; Heller, 1994:xiv). The difference is that criticism must invest the reader in a sense of graphic design's *particularity*, in what distinguishes it from other things or what renders it similar. Furthermore, design criticism, in contrast to the wider audience enjoyed by art criticism and architecture criticism, is read largely by graphic designers alone. Graphic designers, however, are intermediaries in the cultural domain (Soar, 2002:112), and they thus exert a measure of influence in wider society. The level of criticism, Poynor (1995:40) argues, is a reflection of graphic design's gravitas and relevance and will be instrumental in shifts of thinking, emphasis and orientation in the discipline and beyond.

While Heller (1994:xiv) suggests that graphic design needs to be critically evaluated through the filter of consumerism and commerce, he equally notes the relevance of social, environmental and humanitarian values of contemporary society. Graphic design needs to look beyond the aesthetic to the challenges of living in the world. Heller among others, however, does not clarify what potential challenges may be addressed in this pursuit. Criticism that deals with lived reality, for example, assumes an acknowledgement of inequalities; an acknowledgement of power, economics, politics, religious and cultural stereotypes at the heart of a Western colonial hegemony.

Criticism is, thus, never innocent (Eagleton,1976 cited in Armstrong, 2009:103). It is tempered by surrounding discourses, by societal and political influences, by its producer's and reader's background and by its discipline's preferred history.

> The moment when a material or intellectual practice begins to "think itself", to take itself as an object of intellectual inquiry, is clearly of dominant significance in the development of that practice, it will certainly never be the same again. What thrusts such a practice into self-reflexiveness is not merely an internal pressure, but the complex unity it forms with adjacent discourses (Eagleton in Armstrong, 2009:103).

Criticism thus demands a measure of self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity implies the opportunity to contemplate the content with an awareness of the assumptions, prejudices, tastes and interests, politics and subjective preferences of the critic (Schreyach, 2008:10).

Modernism still has a robust ideological grip over graphic design.

> Challenges to the tenets of Modernism are perceived as challenges to professional practice. Accordingly, the questioning of an unproblematic and conventional communications model (client with message problem, designer with message solution, audience as passive receiver) is perceived as an assault on communication itself and thus carries the seeds of social anarchy (Blauvelt, 1995b:39).

As an involuntary reflex, graphic design criticism thus tends to revert to depoliticised rhetoric (Heller, 2008:xiv). Graphic design is rarely situated culturally, historically or politically; it often appears without context. Graphic design textbooks and critical journalism in graphic design magazines generally ignores the existence of a dominant Westernised perspective of graphic design (Poynor, 2007:par.4; Campbell, 2009:42). It avoids a portrayal of unequal positions in society, a critical awareness of race, gender and class (Hooks, 1995:xi) that is unexceptional in other disciplines.

Visual politics, however, is always operational in graphic design. Mazé (in Laranjo, 2014a:par.5) notes three levels of criticality in design. Firstly, an *internal* questioning that introduces a reflexive, self-aware positioning in the designer's own practice. Secondly, a *meta-level* criticality looks at expanding and evolving the conventions of graphic design as a discipline. Thirdly, criticality is *contextual*, embracing the relationship between design and social and political realities. As Laranjo (2014a:par.5) asserts, "In practice, the three modes of criticality often overlap, intersect and influence each other".

Criticism, theory and practice benefit from each other, they "challenge and propel" each other as a result of a natural friction existing between them (Cabianca, 2004:67). They should, however, not be seen in isolation. Without critical theory, graphic design practice is reduced to a technical skill and without design practice, academia exists only as an abstraction.

As Cabianca (2003:125) posits: "Critical writing does not leave its object untouched". Criticism has the potential to locate and expand meaning. Well written criticism is inventive, it inevitably "creates – more than it conforms to – the subject it treats" (Schreyach, 2008:6). Effective criticism does not merely *reflect* ideas; it *creates* ideas at hand.

Twemlow (2007:par.4) confirms the idea that graphic design criticism can also be a creative vehicle; a critical reflection of an object or concept that introduces a new aspect which is itself subject to interpretation:

> People tend to think that criticism is critical. Understandably. And yet criticism can also be a creative force – a critic responds to an object or idea by creating something new that is itself open to re-interpretation. This chain of inspiration can contain many links and lead in unexpected directions.

The majority of graphic design publications typically present the portfolios of graphic designers and design. What sets *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines apart is their intellectual rigour in exploring how graphic design relates to the complex surrounding world. Cabianca (2003:127) in *Emigre* #65 points out that "Critical writing begins by reflecting upon the culture and society that produces the work under scrutiny". Criticism has a "connective potential" within society (Reichart, 2015:par.5), a bridge between the self and the other towards a more humanising discourse. Criticism equally may be transformative. Design criticism, viewed in context, is "eternally poised with the potential to effect change" (Twemlow, 2014:24).

1.2 Problem statement

Has graphic design criticism in *Emigre* (c.1985 – 2005) and *Dot Dot Dot* (2000 – 2007) magazines anticipated a role beyond consumerism and commerce in contemporary graphic design?

1.3 The aim and objectives of the study

The following objectives have been clarified in support of this aim:

1.2.1   To establish the role of graphic design criticism, so that it is possible to position criticism as a transformative influence in graphic design discourse.

1.2.2   To examine the ideological power of a consumerist society and the traditional role of the commercial graphic designer.

1.2.3   To validate *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* as magazines with critical voices.

1.2.4   To identify key critical issues in contemporary graphic design that reflect a more humanising and environmentally conscious perspective within the discipline.

1.2.5   To analyse evidence of these key critical issues in *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot*.

1.2.6   To determine if critique in *Emigre* magazine and *Dot Dot Dot* magazine anticipated a role for graphic design beyond consumerism and commerce.

1.4 Significance of the study

- This study seeks to contribute to a critique of graphic design as a narrowly defined, predominantly commercial practice.
- The findings of the study have the potential to provide original insights into key critical issues in contemporary graphic design and the significance of criticism in the future of graphic design.
- The study seeks to show that graphic design magazines with critical intent have been an authoritative voice in the changing landscape of graphic design practice and theory.
- The research highlights that graphic design criticism plays an essential and dominant role in everyday life and culture and thus critical reflection on graphic design illuminates the social, environmental, cultural and political preferences of the past, present and future.
- The significance of this research lies in the idea that graphic design criticism contributes to transformative ideas not only in the discipline of graphic design but also in the social, cultural and political realm of society.

1.5 Methodology

This study is based on a document study and discourse analysis of graphic design critical writings within two targeted publications. The study is qualitative in nature and is based on how critical issues of graphic design criticism in *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines may have anticipated a niche for graphic design beyond consumerism and commerce that is increasingly evident in contemporary graphic design. The methodological steps have the following sequence:

- Research the role of graphic design criticism from a study of criticism and how it informs graphic design in particular.
- Research the ideological power of a consumerist society, the traditional role of the commercial graphic designer and the emergence of a critical voice.
- Identify key critical issues that emerge in contemporary discourse that have expanded graphic design practice beyond commercial instrumentalism. These critical issues are determined by the strategic priorities for the American Institute of Graphic Arts' preferred Designer of 2015 (AIGA, 2014:par.1-13) and the emergence of critical design as a social, political and speculative futures platform (Dunne &

Raby, 2013; Tonkinwise, 2015a:par.5; Antonelli, 2015:02:11). The strategic priorities for the American Institute of Graphic Arts' preferred Designer of 2015 were drawn from extensive interviews with leading graphic designers and are referred to here to clarify issues circulating in current graphic design debate. They serve to confirm contemporary issues in graphic design.

- Apply Rose's (2001) and Machin and Mayr's (2012) discourse analysis framework to analyse examples of graphic design criticism in *Emigre* magazine and *Dot Dot Dot* magazine.

- Evaluate if these key critical issues, identified in bullet three above, appear in examples of discourse in *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines.

- Determine if *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines anticipated a niche for graphic design beyond consumerism and commerce.

1.6 Chapter division

In Chapter 1 the role of graphic design criticism as a background and context to the study is explored and the central problem statement as well as the aim and objectives to the study are formulated.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the ideological power of consumerist society and the role of graphic design as a professional commercial activity. This is contrasted with the germination of alternative critical perspectives, which *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* represent, regarding the possible role that graphic designers can play in society. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* are introduced and validated as critical sources in graphic design.

Chapter 3 introduces contemporary ideas based on the American Institute of Graphic Arts' preferred Designer of 2015 and the emergence of critical design as a social, political and speculative futures platform. Key critical issues are explored from these contemporary ideas, namely interdisciplinarity, multiculturalism, social and political agency, environmental sustainability and speculative futures that form part of graphic design as an evolving profession. These issues represent a position beyond consumerism and pure commerce for graphic design.

The content of Chapter 4 introduces the methodology for a concentrated analysis of the content of *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot.* The key critical issues identified in Chapter 3 reflect design's changing role in contemporary society and the potential visionary nature of the *Emigre* / *Dot Dot Dot* discursive space.

Chapter 5 is where the study is summarised, insights are offered and recommendations are made for further research.

CHAPTER 2
Graphic design and the introduction of critical authorship

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the ideological power of consumerist society and the role of the graphic designer in professional commercial activity through literature study. This status quo is contrasted with the germination of alternative critical perspectives, which *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* represent, regarding the possible role that graphic designers can play in society. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* are introduced and validated as critical sources in graphic design. These alternative critical perspectives were largely driven by the emergence of the concept of the designer as author. Critical authorship reflects the shift from the graphic designer as "unseen messenger" of the marketplace (Finn, 2009:par 20) to the graphic designer as an assertive critical voice in the world.

2.2 Graphic design as a commercial tool

The identity of graphic design has, until recently, been unremittingly commercial. The dominant habitus of graphic design is the design of visual communication to sell commercial goods (Soar, 2002:2). Guided largely by a profit motive, graphic design practice prefers to sidestep the exigencies of criticism and reinforce consumerism. Graphic design is often intimately associated with consumerism. In particular, marketing strategies, popularised in the decade when *Emigre* magazine was first published, initiated a shift from graphic design as method, to graphic design as commodity (Bierut, 1980:109). As graphic design succumbed to market forces, as it became a "commodified practice" (Valicenti in Bierut, 2007:41:54), it became indistinguishable from its commercial intent.

The habitus of commercial graphic design reveals particular inclinations. The client, concerned with a commercial solution, often assumes the graphic designer is a neutral disseminator of the communication. Poynor (1995:37) comments on how graphic designers, attentive primarily to 'graphic language' rather than content, contribute to this neutrality. Neutrality assumes a certain detachment, where graphic design is traditionally an "invisible profession", playing a supporting role (Heller, 2015:72; Viemeister, 2001:230). The lack of visibility is made more complex by the challenges of the profession. Graphic designers need to submerge their voice when developing brands. Given a brief, they are often trained reductively to focus on a product, to submissively pay attention to a particular object to sell. The graphic designer, in this sense, makes only an anonymous contribution to the world of commerce.

Van Toorn (2006:39) suggests that the profession of graphic design is inherently schizophrenic; graphic designers engage with the demands of a commercial world that distracts from the demands of complex lived reality. The traditional profession of graphic design serves the private interests of the client, at the expense of collective interests. Traditionally, graphic design as a practice and in training rarely concerns itself with social and political concerns (Purcell, 2011a:par.2; McCoy, 1993:87), despite political and social turmoil in the surrounding world. As Bernard (1991:103) confirms, graphic design is usually a collaboration between client and designer. The pressure from clients who are concerned with commercial gain at the expense of social engagement creates a powerful denial in graphic designers working for them (Kapitzki, 1993:139). At a personal level, the graphic designer may thus be required to accept the separation of his/her private convictions from the intentions of successful client work.

This separation developed further into the notion that graphic design should be objective. McCoy (1993:87) writes that the fallacy of *objectivity* in graphic design was a throwback of Modernist thinking, effectively separating the graphic designer from personal intention and a subjective investment. Not only has graphic design typically expressed itself as objective problem solving, but Modernist critique suggested that graphic design's sphere of influence conventionally was confined to the business sector (Blauvelt, 1995b:43).

It is in the interests of the business sector to smooth over inherent conflicts, legitimising the established status quo.

> To secure its existence, design, like other practical intellectual professions, must constantly strive to neutralise inherent conflicts of interest by developing a mediating concept aimed at consensus. This always comes down to a reconciliation with the present state of social relations; in other words, to accepting the world image of the established order as the context for its own action (van Toorn, 1994 cited in Armstrong, 2009:102).

Graphic designers, professionals in an established social order, are often pressured to abide by its norms.

Graphic design is still a young, developing profession. "Graphic design is not, in most cases, a thing-in-itself – it's a formal property, a rhetorical dimension, a communicative tissue of something else" (Poynor, 2004a:par.17). This aspect of graphic design, in part, is what has perpetuated the illusion that graphic design is a value-free discipline. Graphic designers, apparently removed from the pressures of social and political relevance, become engaged purely with the "thrill of creation" (Bierut, 1980:108), with issues of consumer desire rather than need (Baur, 1997:100), with aesthetic choices and stylistic fashions.

Graphic design, in its search for style, engages with the retrospective. History, however, requires context. It is rendered superficial when aspects of experience are treated as separate elements that are attached to, but do not integrate with, historical explanation. As Burdick (1993:par.3) confirms: "Graphic design has a tendency to view historical work for its interesting surfaces while overlooking the contributory elements that make those surfaces interesting".

The focus on surface reinforces a focus on the aesthetic. Aesthetic criteria, particularly from a Modernist perspective, tend to be viewed as classical and timeless. Gretton (1988:64) however, argues that "aesthetic criteria have no existence outside a specific historical situation". Antithetically, both criticism and graphic design history have tended to focus on form and on the aesthetic; reflecting and never disputing a dominant Western dogma. The legacy of graphic design emerged from the world of aesthetes, its history was told through visual representations and critics who analysed and classified designs as elements of style. This consciousness of the aesthetic is another aspect that has frustrated critical debate, dialogue and resistance of an apparently neutral status quo.

Graphic design, however, is more complex than an aesthetic distraction. Aesthetic form and meaning realistically exist in an inextricable relationship. Robin Kinross (in Burdick, Sandhaus & Vanderlans, 1995:52) notes: "It is worth trying a brutally simple attitude to design: judge it by its content…But, having announced the simple criterion of 'content', one then has to explore the ways in which content is mediated by, is inseparable from, the forms in which we find it". Mediation can be understood as exerting a profound influence, if not a determining one, over the original source.

Vanderlans (2005a:50) clarifies that "form does make a claim, but it rarely does so in a vacuum. Form is tied to context, or at least it should be". In reference to the apparently universal solutions of the popular Swiss International Style, Vanderlans proposes the need to resist the fact that "somewhere along the way" graphic design has become disconnected from context. He identifies the work of *Emigre* as a catalyst in the questioning and challenging of the status quo.

2.3 Critical perspective: an introduction to *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines

Rudy Vanderlans, editor and designer of *Emigre*, was born in the Netherlands in 1955. He studied graphic design at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. Upon graduation, he worked as an apprentice and junior designer in Dutch design agencies. In 1981 he moved to California to study photography in the graduate program at the University of California in Berkeley. He published *Emigre* in California for the first time in 1984.

The name *Emigre* was born of Vanderlans's experience of relocating from the Netherlands to America. While Bernard (1991:104) asserts that independent design is usually short-lived, *Emigre* managed to span twenty-one years. *Emigre* magazine was published in a variety of formats, developing from a tabloid fanzine to "pocket books filled with design criticism" over a total of 69 issues (Vanderlans, 2010:par 4) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Emigre* front covers, editions #19 (1991), #14 (1990) and #67 (2004)*.*

Emigre was essentially intended to market Vanderlans' partner Zuzano Licko's fonts, and the experimental design, content and critique were a form of 'soft marketing' that attracted graphic designers and typographers to its pages. Its impact, however, extends far beyond its original intention. In the later stages of its history – from 2003 to 2005 – it published small books of exclusively textual criticism. *Emigre* was "subversive and sophisticated" and its critique "assisted in elevating typography and graphic design to a serious and respected field of study" (Barness, 2011:par.1). As graphic designer and critic Steven Heller (in Cabianca, 2005:par.7) commented: "Perhaps *Emigre* will leave lasting contributions not only to design history but to our culture as a whole".

Vanderlans (1995:6) in *Emigre* #34 outlines the role of entrepreneurs, the overlooked intermediaries who support and bring new, radical ideas by creative individuals to an audience, in the development of any subculture, avante-garde or underground work. The role of largely unacknowledged publishers, whose intention was to make money, was a crucial element in the apparently 'untainted' alternative movements of Punk, Hip hop and Grunge. The role of the entrepreneur, according to Vanderlans (1995:7), is to produce and distribute "authentic creative work by individuals", to provide an opportunity for these radical new voices to develop and articulate themselves, and in the process to "help expand and sometimes even change what society as a whole considers important". Independent reviewers present the following comments:

Rudy Vanderlans is perhaps the purest of the entrepreneurial authors. *Emigre* is a project in which the content is the form – i.e. the formal exploration is as much the content of the magazine as the articles. The three actions blur into one contiguous whole. Vanderlans expresses his message through the selection of material (as an editor), the content of the writing (as a writer), and the form of the pages and typography (as a form-giver) (Rock, 1996:par.30).

I always think of *Emigre* as the magazine that dived into the pool of experimentation, with whatever advantage of being right up close to radical material that brings. *Emigre* expresses this commitment through its physical form: it is what it talks about (Poynor, 1995:29).

Emigre exerts a critique on both a visual and a textual level. In *Emigre #37*, Steven Farrell (in O'Neil, 1996:7) considers design that deepens the narrative, interweaving visual codes with verbal nuances, enriching "meaning by maybe adding contradiction, ambiguity, all the things that imagery can add; that presence, that immediacy". Gonzales Crisp (2012:196) suggests that "visual interpretations are rhetorical in the way they corroborate, expand and sometimes contradict the meaning of the content. The tactics are intentional, and learned". As Robin Kinross in *Emigre #34* (in Burdick, Sandhaus & Vanderlans, 1995:58) assumes, the visual form, far from simply reinforcing convention, has the propensity to critique the content.
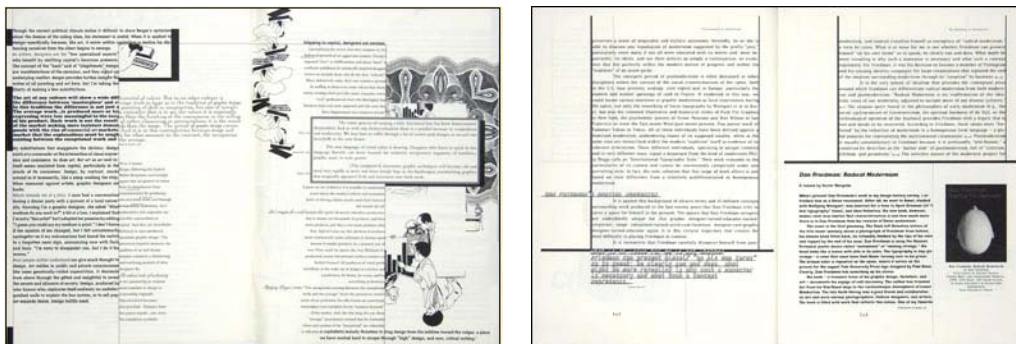
Figure 2. Pages 16-17 in Emigre #35 (1995) and pages 8-9 in Emigre #34 (1995).

Emigre was inherently experimental in response to the Modernist flavour of design at the time. The urge to experiment, according to Ed Fella in *Emigre #34*, is a reaction to the "conceit" of slick design; "In order to open things up again, you can't endlessly design one more legible typeface, even more legible than the rest. So at some point you have to take the conceit away" (Vanderlans, 1995:11). *Emigre* not only stretched the boundaries of legibility, it collapsed the hierarchy of texts, headlines, subheads, page numbers, pull quotes and captions (see figure 2). The outcome is that the viewer, accustomed to familiar conventions, is encouraged to explore the flow of content instinctively. The sensation is

similar to arriving at a place for the first time. The viewer searches the pages, pausing to read into the content and design, rather than simply reading through it. It presents the reader with a conspiratorial freedom to navigate independently (Vanderlans, 1995:14). The designer engages in a fusion of image and text that renders a "speaking surface" (O'Neil, 1996:2) as opposed to the typographic standardisation and apparent transparency of traditional graphic design. It may be argued that to become conscious of the design surface is to become aware of the page as a part of the world and to situate the world within the realm of the narrative (Tomasula in Burdick, 1996:24).

> At *Emigre*, by showing work that went against the grain, we encouraged designers to explore alternative possibilities and to make work that resonated with their intended audiences, as opposed to making work that appeased to the lowest common denominator. It wasn't easy to break out of the choke-hold of the Swiss International Style. Today you often hear that there are no prevailing movements or styles in graphic design, that anything is possible. That wasn't always the case (Vanderlans, 2009a:par.9).

In its time *Emigre* both won important design awards and received stark criticism. Vignelli (1991:par.49) referred to the magazine as "an aberration of culture" in 1991. Siegel (2004b:par.2) speaks about the "illegibility wars" that were both targeted at *Emigre* magazine and featured in articles within it. The very idea that *Emigre* magazine received both admiration and criticism, implies that it was significant (Bilak, 2005:133). *Emigre* was recognised four years later at the Chrysler Design Awards that "celebrate the achievements of individuals in innovative works of architecture and design that significantly influenced modern American culture" (Chrysler Design Award, 1994). Rudy Vanderlans and Zuzana Licko of *Emigre* were formally recognised again by the design community in 1997 with the influential annual AIGA award. *Emigre* succeeded as a design showcase of its time, finding its way into the art museum collections of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, among others. Rudy Vanderlans was the recipient of honorary doctoral degrees from both the Rhode Island School of Design (2005) and the California Institute of the Arts (2006).

Emigre was celebrated as "on the cutting edge of design" (Heller, 2009:par 3), the *avant garde* magazine "was the clarion for digital Post-modernism" (Heller, 2008:par 2), "one of the great graphic resources of our time" (Chronicle books, 2005) and "definitive of its time" (Potts, 2005:132). Vanderlans works on the premise that challenging critical ideas should be interpreted with challenging visual form. "My influence to break away from the mainstream ideas of what design should be, came from *Hard Werken* and Piet Schreuders." (Vanderlans in Heller, 2004b:par.23). As an influence, *Hard Werken* magazine viewed communication as "an aesthetic system and moral practice in one", a "reflexive and social strategy that aims to involve spectators in the communication in a recognisable and critical manner and thus to

offer them counter-images dealing with reality" (Laranjo, 2014a:par.9). *Emigre* expressed a gritty 'reality' through critical perspective, vernacular imagery and computer-inspired design, expanding the idea of design beyond "an institutionalised Modernism that had gone stale" (Vanderlans, 2012:par.2).

By privileging work from a particular perspective and presenting it as exemplary, *Emigre* and similar magazines such as *Eye* and *Print* contributed to reshaping the practice of graphic design (Heller, 2004a:par.27). *Emigre* was at the forefront of "a small revolution" of design criticism, a design rebirth in the pages of comparable magazines (Vanderlans, 1995:3). Cabianca (2005:par.7) confirms *Emigre's* influence, writing the following:

> While *Emigre* has always sought out graphic design's relationship with hard-edged theory and criticism, it has always been dynamic, open to change and challenge, and unafraid to venture into areas of risk. *Emigre* believed in an intelligent, adventuresome, and engaged audience, an audience ready to come to terms with understanding itself and its times, to question received wisdom and consider new possibilities. And, above all, it sought to thoughtfully enhance our profession.

The magazine in print, in a contemporary sense, has become "a product for connoisseurs" (Lombardo, 2011:53). The graphic designer is urged, through the presence of the digital web, to contrast and extend the unique qualities of print. The emergence of the majority of independent and niche magazines in print would not have been feasible without digitalization and self-publishing (Muller, 2011:69). The magazine has always been a conduit for experimental work. "Throughout the twentieth century, innovations in international avant-garde visual arts and design were often first expressed in the informal context of a magazine or journal" (Morrison & Senior, 2012:par.1). Magazines, particularly those published as alternative voices, are fertile ground for exploratory ideas and critique.

Dot Dot Dot approached critique in a different way. The intention to pose vexing questions about existing dogma, full of the wry contradictions and uncertainties of life, is part of an intellectual enquiry that distinguishes *Dot Dot Dot. A*n alternative indie magazine published in the Netherlands and later in New York, it benefited, but differed, from the precedent and strategies of *Emigre* (Bilak, personal communication, 2015). It nevertheless was celebrated alongside the earlier magazine. Poynor (2005:par.1) declares that *"Dot Dot Dot* is the most stimulating and original visual culture magazine produced by designers since *Emigre's* heyday"*.*

Figure 3. *Dot Dot Dot.*front covers, editions #7 (2004), #13 (2007) and #11 (2006)*.*

Originally edited by British-born Stuart Bailey and Czechoslovakian Peter Bilak, *Dot Dot Dot* magazine was founded in 2000. It was published twice a year with a limited print run of 3000 copies over a period of ten years (see Figure 3). The first edition, enabled through Dutch subsidy, described itself as "an independent, after-hours, graphic design magazine" with "inventive critical journalism" on a mix of topics related "both directly and indirectly to graphic design". The field of journalism – described as "inventive" and "critical" – involves a self-reflexive commentary on the genre.

> Journalistic genres constantly avoid neat categorizations and theorising, thriving on their dynamism, contradictions, paradoxes and complexities. And journalism's functions are diverse and ambiguous – being variously associated with democratic debate, education and entertainment as well as myth, fabrication, disinformation, polemic and propaganda (Keeble, 2007:2).

Bailey and Bilak are both intellectuals and allowed *Dot Dot Dot* to widen according to their own curiosity, analysis and interests. As Tselentis (2004:par.2) suggests: "The writers deliver work with a personal investment - genuine and rich".

> When we started *DDD,* we were very self-conscious, and did a lot of research into the history of design magazines, how they started, how they finished, which became the pilot issue. By the second issue we relaxed. If subjects as diverse as music, language, film, art, mathematics, literature occur in our work, where we have to become temporary experts on them, why not bring this variety to a magazine made by designers? It would not be a magazine showing visual outcomes of the design process, but presenting the recurring themes of our daily work. Changing the way of thinking from "what a design magazine should show" to what we are interested in as designers was quite liberating (Bilak in Thomson, 2010:par.22).

Blauvelt (in Poynor, 2012:par.6) describes *Dot Dot Dot* as "a different discursive space for design, one that encourages a network of designers to write not only about design but also

about other subjects". Meggs (1998:93) suggests that a juxtaposition between graphic design and philosophy is desirable. Alongside art, design, music, literature, architecture and mathematics, this desired juxtaposition materialises in *Dot Dot Dot*. The motive of the 'journal', while invested in deconstructing the 'truth', is blandly ironic:

> Since its conception in 2000 DDD has immatured into a jocuserious fanzine-journal-orphanage based on true stories deeply concerned with art-design-music-language-literature-architecture and uptight optipessimistic sloppy/revelatory ghostwriting by friendly spirits mapping b-sides and out-takes pushing for a resolution in bleak midwinter through late summer with local and general aesthetics wound on an ever tightening coil (*Dot Dot Dot*, 2010:par.1).

Acquainted with portfolio publications with little content that often focus on a self-consciously designed layout, Bilak and Bailey sought to render *Dot Dot Dot* as a "serious" content-driven publication. A "conceptual graphic design magazine" (Dot Dot Dot, 2010:par.7), *Dot Dot Dot* specialises in examining the detail, a passionate fascination with the ordinary, that contrasts with typical graphic design publications that Purcell (2010:par.6) suggests are like "noticing many fascinating people and works through the window of a speeding train, never feeling able to stop and examine them more closely".

Dot Dot Dot lingers on subjects, offering interesting, multiple perspectives. This design magazine, unlike the visual celebration of portfolio magazines, has the essential form and dense quality of an academic journal. It "employed a graphic style of brutal simplicity" (Poynor, 2003:138). The austere aesthetic of design typical of *Dot Dot Dot* is at the interstices of economic restraint, of dour representation of the philosophical, of welcoming scarcity as process, of acknowledging immediate materiality and of providing an antithesis to consumer desire. Peter Bilak studied under Jan van Toorn at the Jan Van Eyck Academy. At this institution the stated aim is to "reposition the culturally productive capacities of design in relation to current intellectual, political, economic conditions by combining the practice of design with critical reflection and research" (Jan Van Eyck Academy, 1998:77). Reflecting these influences, the content of *Dot Dot Dot* expresses a tenacious interest in intellectual enquiry and societal critique. *Dot Dot Dot* is positioned in the complex encounters of ordinary existence and "there is a recurrent emphasis in the work on the ordinary – on everyday situations and the experiences of real people – as well as allusions to the political realm" (Poynor, 2004b:par 5). The impression of the magazine is essentially intellectual, reflexive, journalistic and dialogic. It introduces graphic design as a discipline rich with human interest.

The content of *Dot Dot Dot* magazine consciously plays within a richly varied space. The emergence of playfulness in graphic design that stimulates rather than confirms meaning is inherently postmodern in approach. The role of the graphic designer in a Modernist sense, is to "organise information in a way that is essentially retrievable, understandable, visually

captivating, emotionally involving and easily identifiable" (Vignelli in Blauvelt, 1996:6). The intent is to simplify content and amplify a preferred meaning, attenuating possible interpretations from many to few. In contrast, postmodernist design disrupts the message, expanding from the simple to the inherently complex, diversifying from few to many nuances, introducing unceasing questions in a playful quest for solutions. Blauvelt (1996:7) suggests that this expression of graphic design "embraces the concept of 'play' as its philosophical economy. It seeks the unending plenitude found within the concept of 'repetition-without-exhaustion' which is the basis of all game playing, even games of the most serious kind". In this instance information is not so much a commodity that is consumed as much as a resource that produces new information.

In Dot Dot Dot #10, Siegel (2004c:23) wryly suggests that the familiarity of a serious approach to criticism is simply another way of adding exchange value to a work or text:

> I find myself equally compelled on the one hand to engage with critical theory as a way to deepen my argument, and on the other to take the piss. Perhaps this is because, aside from the examples cited here, theory is always discussed with grave seriousness. In light of [the economic utility of theory] it seems clear that an irreverent approach can actually be more revealing about how theory functions in culture than actual critique.

Siegel introduces the irreverent to be at variance with the serious (and value-laden) qualities of critique. This process of irreverence as a way to address critical issues was a part of Dot Dot Dot's nonchalant identity.

In contrast, the optimistic quality of Giampetro's (2006:172) article "Form-giving" in Dot Dot Dot #13 explores the spirit of gifts. Gifts, he suggests, are a form of work and humanity involving "community-defining objects in constant circulation". He considers the gift inherent within artworks, the concept of gifted human talent, a sense of gratefulness and "community restoring" education. He writes, "Knowledge, like food, is a gift that circulates freely, brings us together, and is, in the best of times, ever-flourishing" and further:

> The gift that is not used will be lost, while the one that is passed along remains abundant… We cannot earn a gift through our own efforts, it must be given to us. And once we have it, it gains value only when we give it to another member of our community (Giampetro, 2006:176).

Giampetro highlights that giving and receiving gifts is a fluid, collective "agent of change", as he asserts the difference between gifts, well-loved designs and self-indulgent commodities. The article, among others, reveals that critique is not limited to negative commentary. *Dot Dot Dot* is interspersed with positive writing that restores a moral sensitivity, always still informed by critical perspective. Its pages are diverse and discrete. Not only is the content of each edition a conscious renewal, but the relocation of the editor David Bailey from the Netherlands to New York brought fresh changes in editorial direction in further editions.

After 2006, Bailey and a new colleague, David Reinfurt, launched Dexter Sinister, a collaborative endeavour in New York. *Dot Dot Dot* was then published and distributed by Dexter Sinister, a design studio interpreted by Reinfurt as a "workshop" (alluding to the Bauhaus and to alternative ways of thinking, working and writing), and "a slightly more public" notion of an occasional, curated bookstore in the same space. Stairs from the street lead down to an intimate underground room in the city (Reinfurt, 2009:32:37) that simultaneously operated as a workshop, a sometime bookstore and a location for events and performances. Working in ways that are "productively strange", Bailey and Reinfurt (2011:58:28) took *Dot Dot Dot* forward in New York in 2007, publishing the magazine sometimes as part of performative gestures at the invitation of fine art biennials (see issues *#15 and* #19).

Dot Dot Dot's content has a knowing "jocuserious" wit (*Dot Dot Dot*, 2010:par.1). Contemplative material is brought into focus just sufficiently to encounter its contradictions. The design curtails "graphic design's rampant visuality" (Poynor, 2008b:par.3), and ventures into a textual rendition of "more abstract areas of interest: chance, rhetoric, humour, standards, dogma, process, systems etc." (Bailey & Bilak, 2000:par 1). Words and images are presented equally (Reinfurt, 2009:27:16). The outcome of these restrained visual designs and explorative critical texts is a sense of intellectual adventure. *Dot Dot Dot* is a cerebral conceit. *Dot Dot Dot* in this sense was "influential" (Thomson, 2010:par.5), as it widened the thinking and practice of graphic design; it disavowed it. Its intention was to be essentially dismissive of descriptive category. As Bilak (in Vanderlans, 2005b:par.10) confirms: "For ourselves, *DDD* cannot be defined by a single description. If it does, it becomes stifled and we should do something about it".

With a characteristic absence of fixed, stable meanings, graphic design magazines in the genre of *Dot Dot Dot* rely on a "constant lack of interpretive closure" (Blauvelt, 1996:8). Umberto Eco (in Bailey, 2011:par.6) confirms:

> In any case, the artistic process that tries to give form to disorder, amorphousness, and dissociation is nothing but the effort of a reason that wants to lend a discursive clarity to things. When its discourse is unclear, it is because things themselves, and our relationship to them, are still very unclear – indeed so unclear that it would be ridiculous to pretend to define them from the uncontaminated podium of rhetoric. It would only be another way of escaping reality and leaving it exactly as it is.

The design of *Dot Dot Dot* is very consciously situated within the conceptual frame of the maverick content. Bilak (in Vanderlans, 2005b:par. 28), in an interview with Vanderlans (of *Emigre)*, comments:

> We try to overcome the duality of form and content now. Each issue has a set of ideas and overlapping themes which emerge from the content. The design is the result of these individual pieces bound into a whole. We do hope that DDD doesn't have a fixed look, since it doesn't have a fixed content.

Emigre and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines were both independent publications that sought to stretch the accepted notion of what constitutes graphic design. Burdick (1993:par.10) comments that a designer's political, theoretical and moral bias can reach its full potential in independent projects. The critical and analytical reflection required in graphic design gains fresh impetus from autonomous work. It forms a critical spine, Burdick (ibid) suggests, against which commercial work – "which renders designers voiceless, opinionless, mindless" – can be contrasted, reviewed and re-envisioned.

2.4 The macro-environment of *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot*

While commercial graphic design sought to confine graphic design concerns to market proclivity, the changing social, cultural and political environment of Europe and America introduced new pressures. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* were products of both Europe and America. Twenty-five years ago, in the decade in which *Emigre* magazine was born, delivered a new political era following the fall of the Berlin Wall. The economic and ideological differences represented by the superpowers of the United States and USSR, the polarity of capitalism versus communism, was replaced by "one unchecked major power with its unshakeable economic/belief system (capitalism)" as the Soviet empire receded (McQuiston, 2004:4). Whereas the conflict of the Cold War had provided a cohesive enemy, the focus of criticism now shifted inwardly to the burgeoning reality of transnational capitalism.

The impetus of culture was being redefined by shifts in power. The United States, at the zenith of its influence, became the focus of global cultural production and circulation. American preferences for the vernacular became prominent in the global landscape, displacing European models of universal high culture with a flood of mass-cultural, image-mediated mainstream popular culture (Hall, 1992:104). A third aspect was the influence of globalisation, the opportunity for "multivalent connections that now bind our practices, our experiences and our political, economic and environmental fates together across the modern world" (Tomlinson, 1999:2). Globalisation introduced a proximity to difference. Alongside this, the decolonisation of the Third World brought an acknowledgement of ethnic hierarchies in cultural politics. The emergence of multiculturalism provoked a new shift towards the local and the marginal voice. It represents "an important shifting of the terrain of culture toward the popular – toward popular practices, toward everyday practices, toward local narratives, toward the decentering of old hierarchies and the grand narratives" (Hall, 1992:105).

The local narrative gained attention as a part of a continually changing social landscape of expressed subjectivities. Yon (2000:31) refers to the notion of "elusive culture", an ambivalent and contradictory space where exchanges of anti-racism, identity and multiculturalism "shift and slide" and are simultaneously resisted, accommodated and redefined. This complexity dislodges, or attempts to mitigate, "the simple enforced distribution of a particular Western (say, liberal, secular, possessive-individualist, capitalist-consumerist) lifestyle" (Tomlinson, 1999:272; Neville, 2011:8).

Modernity, suggests Tomlinson (1999:272), is an amalgam of both the abstracted output of a capital-consumerist lifestyle, as well as a cultural imagination that is centred (and regulated) in a particular place and community. Graphic designers are challenged to respond to cultural identities that have a local substance, "usually politically inflected differentiations of gender, sexuality, class, religion, race, ethnicity and nationality", above and beyond cosmopolitan maturity (Tomlinson, 1999:272). The expression of graphic design is germane particularly at a local level, but is simultaneously pressured to reflect global relevance.

The individual, through subjective interests and concerns, unceasingly creates new forms of collectives. Hardt and Negri (2000:61) argue that contemporary global society cultivates an endlessly shifting diversity, contributing to an awareness of difference and the thriving of democracy.

> Under the banner of an empire (loosely understood as a political domain) society can no longer be understood as a cohesive whole. Instead, the social space is constructed of a "plural multitude of productive, creative subjectivities". The multitude is nomadic, de-territorialised, and "in perpetual motion". In short, the multitude is a boundless mass of networks of people who "express, nourish, and develop positively their own constituent projects".

De-territorialised social systems are a reflection of accessible networks. The growth of social media and the emergence of the Internet interrupted political and commercial power relations by enabling individual citizens or marginal groups to publish messages of global impact (McNair, 2010:13). The accessing of images on the computer is a collective, rather than individual, experience as technology enables many to view, discuss and reflect in social media at any one time. Multiple viewpoints are the norm rather than the exception (Mirzoeff, 2003:10; Cabianca, 2004:68). While the machine was influential in both the industrial and modern era, the network has become the dominant paradigm in the contemporary world (Neville, 2011:7). This required a shift from the modernist linear grid to "a fractal network, permeated with patterns from all over the globe" (Powers in Mirzoeff, 2003:25). The focus of

communication in both print and digital realms, thus, became ideally settled on a multiplicity of perspectives and a newly empowered (participative) audience.

A fundamental aspect of modern graphic design has been the increased intimacy with the means of production and distribution. California was the home of the new Apple Macintosh computer, a machine that facilitated visual layout as well as textual production. The arrival of the Apple computer allowed graphic designers to write and edit text, to manipulate images and compose layouts together with custom typefaces that enhanced the iterative aspect of the design process (McCarthy, 2013a:15). Vanderlans (1995:30) of *Emigre* notes that the Macintosh equally enabled the graphic designer to bypass the conservative preferences of traditional book publishers. Liberated by self-publishing, individuals could circulate alternative points of view. "Free from the pressures entailed in large-scale publishing, critical views can be formulated and disseminated without modification" (Kinross in Vanderlans, 1995:30). Computer software placed the means of production, and of distribution through self-publishing, within the scope of the graphic designer for the first time. The computer thus transformed the boundaries of publishing, creating an avenue for independent critical voices.

2.5 The profound influence of Dutch design

The intellectual enquiry and critical breadth of *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* may also be partly traced to an original Dutch influence. Rudy Vanderlans, editor and designer of *Emigre* was born and educated in the Netherlands and David Bailey, editor of *Dot Dot Dot* trained at the respected Van Eyck Institute. Peter Bilak of *Dot Dot Dot* was born in Czechoslovakia and now lives in the Netherlands. The Dutch rendered graphic design relatively autonomous creatively and intellectually as a result of the help of government subsidies and grants (Vanderlans in Siegel, 2004a:68) – *Dot Dot Dot* magazine initially received a 14,000 euro subsidy per issue from Dutch arts funding (Poynor, 2005:par.5) – and pioneered the shift from conventional problem-solving to "design as an open intellectual pursuit" (Siegel, 2004a:67). Intellectual enquiry implies a curiosity without immediate conclusion, a method of "posing questions and pursuing paths without necessarily knowing where they will lead" (Twemlow, 2008:par.6)

Criticism involves an expansive view of design, a collective interest in the discipline. With reference to the context of Dutch social democracy, Experimental Jetset (2008:par.8) suggest that the influence is subtle but profound:

> Our collective design mentality is not a product of our subsidy system; our subsidy system is a product of our collective design mentality. Subsidy and funding are very conscious acts of design, committed by the welfare state to shape itself, a tremendous process in which the designer becomes part of the collective, and the collective becomes part of the designer.

The concept of a collective is an essentially human-centred approach, linking the individual to the whole. The voice of the designer, the individual active within the collective, is encouraged through this support system. Bailey of *Dot Dot Dot* magazine maintains that Dutch design is distinguished by "the explicit pursuit of personal themes" (Bailey, 2004:par 6) and "a healthy sampling of cultural heritage [that] has helped Dutch graphic design remain a spirited profession rather than a nine-to-five job" (Bailey, 2004:par 1). The Dutch equally did not avoid the political in design, they actively encouraged it, engaging in design that stirred and embraced critique and radical perspective in its content (Poynor, 2008b:35).

State subsidy also contributed to a "healthy proliferation of small practices", with a commitment to maverick rather than celebrity designers (Bailey, 2004:par 1) and a preference for the premise that design is "art rather than industry" (Bailey, 2004:par 2). *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* were thus influenced "in a cultural situation that permitted and perhaps encouraged a critical way of thinking about design" (Poynor, 2004a:par.15).

2.6 Extending the role of designers: graphic design as a commercial critique

Dot Dot Dot published an article that critiques the exigencies of the client as well as the graphic designer, quoting Tibor Kalman: "A designer is a professional liar because he's (sic) hired not to make the properties of a product clear but to enhance the product beyond its truth" (in Seenstra, 2002:5). In parallel, Purcell (2005a:par.1) engages Marxist analysis to explore the way graphic design fabricates commodities that are entirely detached from the complexities of their production, so that "all the messy truths of the commodity are neatly sealed away". The commodity becomes alluring, romanticised and entirely sanitised from the realities of life.

Purcell (2007:par.1) emphasises that the illusion, the "impression" of change, rather than actual transformation is typical in graphic design. The refashioning of corporate brands, the ceaseless publishing of classic books with new cover designs and other redesigns imply something altered without delivering genuine transformation. What is implied provides an apparent experience, a solace, a replacement for real change at the level of society that philosopher Slavoj Zizek refers to as a state of "interpassivity" (in Purcell, 2007:par.1). The word describes the phenomenon of accepting an impression of change as a genuine experience when in reality nothing has altered, an impression that takes the place of more meaningful engagement.

Graphic design intrinsically involves detailed elements of a larger world (Dunne, 2013:01:05). Graphic design rendered as commodity began a conversation that ultimately

formed a connection between graphic design and broader cultural influences. Graphic design's commercialism was linked to a social and cultural commercialism. Blauvelt (1995a:3) in *Emigre* #33, refers to the "newness of recent arguments [that] lie in the epiphany that graphic design is a product of larger social forces and contributes to this thing called 'culture'". Each design relates to a cultural dimension that contributes in part to the development of cultural knowledge as a whole. Vanderlans (2004a:par.22) asserts: "Design is so all encompassing and ubiquitous, how is it ever not a cultural force?". Purcell (2005b:par.1) reinforces the way culture has become implicated in consumerism. "The transformation of culture into commerce has been one of the defining features of recent history. […] The markers we use to define our identity are ever more indistinguishable from 'the economy' that manufactures the narrow range of paid-for experiences". This blurring and transference between culture and commercialism is essentially a disclosure of the impact of advertising and packaging, and by inference, graphic design (Poynor, 2010:9; McCarron, 2001:117; Dee, 1999:62).

If graphic design is a product of culture, it is an expression of cultural complexity. Hall (1992:108) confirms that popular culture is "tricky ground":

> [Popular culture] is at the same time the scene, *par excellence*, of commodification, of the industries where culture enters directly into the circuits of a dominant technology – the circuits of power and capital. It is the space of homogenisation where stereotyping and the formulaic mercilessly process the material and experiences it draws into its web, where control over narratives and representations passes into the hands of the established cultural bureaucracies, sometimes without a murmur.

McGregor (2003:par.14) suggests that consumerism is in antagonism with social justice; it is a form of personal, social and structural violence. The graphic designer in traditional practice is complacent, or complicit, in celebrating consumerism. The false quality of advertising circulates stereotypes that serve to cultivate the inequalities in society. Lopez (2009:3) comments that to be visually literate is equivalent to a survival skill as "the media is what passes for culture and it is extremely powerful. It is crucial that we systematically explore the cultural misdefinition of minorities that is presented in the media".

The societal impact of graphic design is a function not only of its inherent qualities but also of its relationship to media and advertising. Critical to the shaping of *subjective* perceptions of realities, beyond *objective* realities, is the constructed reality of the media with all its biases (McNair, 2010:11). Advertising, in particular, is knowingly constructed. Experimental Jetset (2001:4) in *Dot Dot Dot* #3 comments that: "Advertising is a phenomenon that constantly dissolves its own physical appearance, in order to describe and represent appearances other than itself". The effect of advertising is essentially disingenuous. The communicative

preferences of advertisements, however, are a fundamental part of contemporary culture and they serve to influence, dominate and reflect our lives. They pervade the media. Advertising offers ideas that are "true as a piece of language, but not as a piece of discourse" (Eagleton,1991:16). Advertisements may describe "a possible situation accurately enough; but as a rhetorical act aiming at producing certain effects it is false. It involves a kind of deception" (ibid).

This deception shaped, if not authored, by graphic designers, is pervasive. Every age has involved information, however, as Blauvelt (1996:10) in *Emigre* #40 suggests, our present society involves a degree and intensity of information circulation that is unprecedented. "Information used to be seen as fulfilling particular needs, but information now exists to stimulate demand" (Blauvelt, 1996:11). McCoy (1998:par.42) comments that the proliferation of communications clarifies that "business is increasingly aware that graphic design provides the insights and expertise so necessary to reach audiences in an information revolution". Information at such a level of intensity not only anaesthetises desire for a direct experience, delivering superficial gratification, but also influences behavior as economically as possible (Frampton, 1983:21). Graphic design, an active architect of information, is thus saturated with both apparent and undeclared economic and political intention.

Williamson, featured in *Dot Dot Dot* #10, comments that the social impact of graphic design is not simply the intent to persuade and sell, but the generation of "structures of meaning" in the process (Williamson, 2010:12). These meanings filter into every aspect of contemporary reality as a result of the dominance of mass culture by the media industry (Frampton, 1983:19). Graphic design is a "process of composing and connecting" that integrates a variety of human intentions and messages into relationship with each other (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012:21). Purcell (2003:par.5) explores how the narrow margin between image and place, between subject and object, is effectively collapsed through the graphic designer's invention. At the point of this fused identity, Walchli (in Purcell, 2003:par.5) comments that if "the subject tries to become identical with the object, the result is that the object becomes shadowy and the mind ghostly. The only possibility, therefore, is to become conscious of the fact that the shadowy object was already partly produced in the mind". In other words, as meaning is cultivated, the viewer colludes in this myth-making. The only recourse is to become a conscious and critical spectator of the commercial illusion.

In issue #51 of *Emigre* magazine, Rick Poynor states that:

> Designers are engaged in nothing less than the manufacture of contemporary reality. Today, we live and breathe design. Few of the experiences we value at home, at leisure, in the city or the mall are free of its alchemical touch. We have absorbed design so deeply into ourselves that we no longer recognise the

myriad ways in which it prompts, cajoles, disturbs and excites us. It's completely natural. It's just the way things are (Poynor, 1999:2).

As mediator, the graphic designer is afforded a self-ascribed obscurity that is in fact expedient. The graphic designers writing in *Emigre* #34, Burdick, Sandhaus and Vanderlans (1995:53), argue that the illusion of graphic design renders communication apparently independent from private interests, and inherently authoritarian in its delivery. The normalisation of the process assumes a passive audience and ignores its ideological content. Culture is rendered unproblematic (Hooks, 2006:65). Burdick et al (1995:53) suggest, however, that if something is ideological it is "powered by an ulterior motive bound up with the legitimation of certain interests in a power struggle".

The apparent natural aspect of communication, the normalisation of society, is ultimately coercive (Foucault, 1995:122; Morozov, 2014:334). Power does not simply emerge from authority as expected, but is diffused laterally through society via different mechanisms. Blauvelt (1995a:3) in *Emigre* #33 considers that graphic design is circulated and negotiated across social strata, asserting imbalances of power. Yon (1999:30) discusses Foucault's assertion that power is not "simply an entity that can be 'held, taken or alienated' but is also a problematic of circulation working through and within various channels and everyday networks of social actions". The graphic designer is situated within a capitalist society that seeks to normalise patriarchy, racism and consumerism (Poynor, 2015b:74; Hooks, 2006:64). Mesa-Bains (in Hooks, 2006:26) comments: "What you have now then is the marketing of racialised identities as tools for consumption. And certain racialised bodies and images are associated with hipness, coolness, edginess". It may be argued that communication that seeks to persuade without allowing citizens to think "is just another form of coercion – perhaps the soft variety" (Morozov, 2014:334).

The image is not innocent. An article in *Emigre* #33 asserts that graphic designers facilitate corporate sponsorship of imagery that has far-reaching implications, the inherent value of the image is realigned with product exchange and the pressure to buy (Blauvelt, 1995a:9). Even when the intention is not specifically commercial, graphic design has an influence. The signs, symbols and pictographs of the public sphere – designed by graphic designers – reduce decision-making to artificial polar opposites. These signals "condition our behavior and control our actions, limiting choices by simplifying options" (Lefebre in Blauvelt, 1995a:7).

Communication, however, does not flow in a single direction, rather, ideas are transferred through negotiation. Mirzoeff (2003:4) posits a more "fluid, interpretative structure" of visual culture, acknowledging it as a site of contestation. Graphic design, embedded as it is in

visual culture, actively determines and reflects a contested, debatable and transformative space where the visual is "a constantly challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class, gender, sexual and racialised identities" (ibid). Graphic designers, thus, both operate within an increasingly ideologically saturated world and relentlessly contribute to it (Experimental Jetset, 2008:par 2). Design constructs ideology. And ideology pervades design.

Ideology is an imaginary set of relations that are multiple. Ahmed (1999:113) asserts his belief,

> […] that the concept of ideology could neither be forsaken nor allowed to slip and slide; that ideological relations were not real relations to the material conditions of life but imaginary relations through which the real relations were refracted; that real human beings were caught not in one ideology, corresponding to a mode of production, but to several ideological ensembles, corresponding to the various apparatuses intrinsic to the system; that ideology was no more available for the direct scrutiny of those who live by it than the unconscious is so available to those who live by its compulsions; that ideologies were not holistic but riven wholes, and what mattered for the analyst therefore was their inner contradictions and social over-determinations.

The normalisation of consumerism and societal inequalities, suffused with fabricated images that entertain and sell, has been characterised by Guy Debord as a "society of the spectacle" (van Toorn, 2006:28). Accumulated across society, the profit-making reflection of the directly lived has become pervasive; the directly lived has been replaced by representation. The social relationship between people has become mediated by images, many of which enclose people in sexist or racist commercial stereotypes. (Antithetically, these images equally hold the potential to be a connective tissue between the self and the other). Van Toorn (2006:32) argues that the entirety of the spectacle is "both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society".

Jan van Toorn, Dutch graphic designer and lecturer, was an instructive influence in the perspectives associated with *Dot Dot Dot* magazine (Poynor, 2008a:81). In the interstices of *Dot Dot Dot* magazine, performance and lectures is an acknowledgement of van Toorn's assertion that: "The representation of reality can no longer be regarded as a factual and reliable message. Meaning and cultural symbols do not have any original coherence or fixation. They are appropriated, translated, reinterpreted, reseen and reread" (2006:202). This process of representation is never stable. As one means of representation recedes another replaces it without the first form disappearing. "Modernity, wherever it appears, does not occur without a shattering of belief, without a discovery of the *lack of reality* in reality - a discovery linked to the invention of other realities" (Lyotard in Mirzoeff, 2003:7).

The pages of *Emigre* in the early 1990s, and *Dot Dot Dot* a decade later, thus begin to foreground a critique of graphic designers' *contributions* to a consumer and socio-political environment. Graphic designers have to respond to the reality that they are unavoidably "curators of a concept of reality that is unacceptable" (van Toorn, 2006:35). Designers are linked to the positive and negative aspects of the existing status quo. The graphic designer, in this sense, is no longer imperceptible but rather is perceived as instrumental and influential in the *construction* of a consumer society.

2.7 A maturing profession: graphic design critical of itself

Van Toorn (2006:27), who is featured in *Dot Dot Dot* #9, suggests that graphic designers need to see their personal, social and professional activity in intimate relationship with both micro- and macro-expressions of human reality, rather than collaborating to obscure it. Graphic design is ideological and thus *cannot* be neutral. In mitigation, a design should reveal where it derives from. Stuart Bailey and David Reinfurt, editors of *Dot Dot Dot*, propose that designers should reveal their interests in the construction of the message (Dexter Sinister, 2012:11).

Having established that graphic design tends to substitute theatre in place of essential social messages (van Toorn in Poynor, 2008a:122) and is increasingly performative at the core of social illusions (Rock, 2007:07:38), the imperative is to radically alter the way an audience receives the message. Bailey and Reinfurt suggest that to *interrupt* prevailing norms, the designer/performer should be present and *apparent* to the audience. The graphic designer's presence in the world is pointed out, instead of simply remaining a conduit for information. In this way, the designer/performer reveals the interests that guide the message, consciously implicating himself/herself in the design/action. Making the audience conscious of the presence of the designer/performer and the setting up of the design message, is a device to *expose* how the design/performance is contrived (Dexter Sinister, 2012:11; Kinross, 1994:31). With this technique the unchallenged, familiar surface is disrupted. In effect, the visibility of the designer serves to critique and unsettle the 'normal' traffic of communication.

Unsettled, the traditional forms of social communication are no longer unconsciously digested; they are rendered strange. A process that "increases the poetic distance" between the person and the communication (Morozov, 2014:326), may be argued to be trespassing in the domain of art. As *Emigre* #35 suggests, the idea of defamiliarisation or *ostranenie* draws from the work of Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky.

> Shklovsky in his 1917 essay *Art as Technique* defines *ostranenie* as the breaking up of established habits of reception. In daily life, we often perceive things only superficially – i.e., we do not really *see* them the way they are. To *truly see* things again we must overcome our "blind" perception, and this is only

possible when they are made strange again. This process of making things appear strange is, according to Shklovsky, the essential task of any kind of art. (Spiegel, 2008:369)

Graphic design has engaged this conscious departure from established norms, this encroaching of the art world, in the pages of *Dot Dot Dot* and *Emigre*.

The second source of the concept of defamiliarisation is in the work of playwright Bertolt Brecht. Dexter Sinister (2012:11) of *Dot Dot Dot* comments that "Bertolt Brecht subverted orthodox drama by way of his epic theatre's celebrated 'distancing effects' – leaving the lights on, renouncing expository narrative, presenting a series of objective 'situations' in order that the spectators draw their own conclusions". Dexter Sinister (ibid) suggests that through these manipulations of 'technique' Brecht radically altered "the functional relation between the stage and the public, text and production, director and actor". In a Brechtian gesture, the graphic designer is "working on the line between seduction and alienation, constantly finding ways to expose rather than disguise his/her own role as a manipulator, continually challenging the existing networks of interpretation" (Forde, 1991:par 11). For example, *Dot Dot Dot* #17 (2008:1-3) describes how Bailey and Reinfurt "speak simultaneously, channeled separately through corresponding left and right speakers" in a performance that is "(transcribed)(translated)(transfixed)" in the magazine. The audience /viewer is given (startling) access to the material reality of the performance's/magazine's production.

The impact on the audience is to block their empathy; they are denied the tendency to delve emotionally into the content (Spiegel, 2008:370). Graphic design, in this sense, becomes critical of its own form, dislodging the transparent, familiar form of represented reality. The graphic designer is not only instrumental in developing a critique, he/she deconstructs the message to heighten the readers awareness, "so that the reader can challenge it, as a partner in dialogue" (Poynor, 2008a:108).

As a partner in dialogue the viewer is (ideally) faced with radical social and political questions. In Brecht, *Dot Dot Dot* sources an intellectual enquiry into why things are the way they are. The performance/magazine – and by analogy the social order – is unmistakable as something artificial and man-made (Spiegel, 2008:370). This critical insight ideally leads to an acknowledgement that if the surrounding world is inherently man-made, it is susceptible to profound change. "For Brecht, it is essential that estrangement leads to the realisation that things do not have to be the way they are, that any current state of things is not a natural given but a product of historical processes, which can change and will be changed" (ibid). Experimental Jetset (2008:par.5), featured in both *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot*, observe that "Everything that is made by humans, can be changed by humans: that's why the human-

made always carries with it the possibility of change. To show surroundings as human-made, is to constantly open the horizon of change".

In this sense, graphic design is not *automatically* self-reflexive or conscious of societal contradiction, rather the acknowledgement that it is an artifice, the process of questioning and disruption of familiar processes, affords the audience critical perspective. Bailey (in Bierut, 2007:69:05) comments that when things are done without thinking about them, "when a magazine automatically requires a review section, an editorial, a pull quote – that is the time to really question it". Publications such as *Dot Dot Dot* and *Emigre* thus generate randomness, surprise and change rather than expected, perfect, fixed gestures. These designs

> […] persistently call attention to their status as visual contrivances, obliging the viewer to make an effort to process their complexities. [The graphic designer] wants the public to measure the motives of both the client and the designer who mediates the client's message against their own experiences of the world. This work has stimulated a more active and sceptical view of art, communication, media ownership and society. (Poynor, 2015a:par.14)

In *Emigre #*39, Kay (in Wild, 1996:29) suggests that to make contexts and elements of discourse shift into conscious knowledge, it is vital for graphic design to be "contentious and disturbing". Graphic design easily encompasses the determining factor of estrangement through providing a subject that is at once familiar (existing codes) while rendered seemingly unfamiliar (decontextualised codes). Alongside rendering the designer visible, the graphic designer has the choice to reinvent meanings. The codes are shifted to a different context and carry with them the values of their origin, engaging a disconcerting meaning interchange (Saville in Wilson, 2009:par.1).

The challenge in graphic design, as in other discourses, is that this play in meaning requires a receptive audience. In graphic design, this requirement has become instrumental at times in a constricting of potential audiences. The practice of graphic design historically lacks diverse cultural representation. Audiences that are deemed receptive have been chosen out of many possible plural audiences and repeatedly addressed. For example, audiences steeped in privileged Western traditions have been chosen because the designers themselves were usually drawn from those communities. Purcell (2006a:par.1) confirms the necessity for a shared practice of meaning:

> To understand what a particular symbol or word means is to be part of a shared practice of meaning, however small. Thus, in design, the exact significance of a particular graphic object has to be defined by a certain type of community to be intelligible to those actively using it. Furthermore, the meaning of that community is often contingent upon economic, social, political and ideological shifts in which the language evolves.

A shared practice of meaning in commercial design enables graphic designers to reinforce aspirant lifestyles in advertising and packaging to sell consumer goods. The practice of inviting surprise, questions and disconcerting meaning, however, is a step away from consumerism towards critique. These gestures represent a shift towards graphic designers as alternative, independent voices.

2.8 Graphic design as authorship

Graphic design's potential to critique itself assumes that the graphic designer is an active agent, an author, in the critical process. This practice had precedent in the work of Futurism and Dada. The manipulation of verbal and visual form was particularly apposite in the concrete poetry and artworks of Futurists and Dadaists who expressed and anticipated the uniting of form and content in a radical way. Burdick (1993:par.3) notes that what was extraordinary about these movements was a certain inventive freedom, a "total authorship of words and form" that existed behind their liberation of language from the traditional vertical and horizontal grid. Not only was their work quintessentially graphic design, not only was their effort authorship, but they placed their work formally in a socio-political sphere. As Drucker (1991:255) adds, "these manipulations were an integral part of their aesthetic and political concerns". Graphic designers who sought design-authorship, had an existing paradigm to build on.

In *Emigre #*33, Poynor introduced authorship as an intervention beyond simply the mechanical creative persona of the graphic designer; he suggested the critical and theoretical climate was germane for designers to articulate "something of their own through the material" (Poynor, 1995:37). Designers were encouraged to introduce gestures of the personal and critical (Rock, 1996:par.33). The notion of the personal introduced narrative and human integrity more deeply into the discourse of graphic design.

The concept of "the designer as author" circulated in design discourse, enhancing the *intellectual* role of the graphic designer's individual worldview. Engaging in the conceptual, the graphic designer as author absorbs the designer in a central role, embracing both writing and design. Poynor (2003:146) cautions that "authorship is only useful as a term to the degree that it opens up a space for thinking about [graphic] design that transcends established and possibly limited definitions". Graphic designers have the potential to fuse writing, editing, designing and publishing, motivated by the need to purposefully express opinions or to serve as a curator of relevant perspectives (McCarthy, 2013a:11).

Rudy Vanderlans comments that *Emigre*'s intent was inherently radical rather than traditional, featuring designers who were politically and socially aware. Writers in *Emigre* "came to the profession of graphic design not simply to assimilate but to question and transform it" (Vanderlans, 2005a:9). Writers and graphic designers in these pages were communicating to a likeminded audience that was visually and intellectually engaged (Vanderlans, 2004a:par.6). Soar (2002:2) argues that graphic designers occupy a "privileged place in the circuit of culture" where their preferences, values and intentions prevail over communities, consumers or individuals who are not explicitly involved in cultural production. Graphic designers, while facing a complex fusion of constraints and influences, have the opportunity to assert their talents towards "resistive, transgressive, progressive, even utopian" inclinations (Soar, 2002:5).

> Besides the experimental nature of the work that we showed, I was always drawn to featuring designers who chose to work for small clients, non profits, and cultural institutions, or designers who decided to teach or write, or those who made their own products and started small companies to disperse their own design products. I was very impressed that these designers were often forfeiting the high profile, big money jobs. They had certain social and political convictions and a need to associate with clients and collaborators they felt an affinity with. This way they were able to address small, likeminded audiences, as opposed to large faceless segments of the population. And that's why they afforded themselves such liberties in their designs. They understood their audiences and they communicated to them on a visually engaging level, and they had a high regard for the intelligence of their intended public (Vanderlans, 2004a:par 6).

The concept of the designer as author entails more complex assumptions about the audience. It is significant that alongside the emergence of the designer as author was the surfacing of multiculturalism in graphic design, alert to individual narrative and engaged with previously unheard perspectives.

O'Neil (1996:1), writing in *Emigre #37*, suggests the graphic designer as author is involved in a shift from "labour to ownership". As essentially the creator of meaning rather than the translator, the graphic designer brings a strong point of view to their work in a "confluence of activities" including writing, designing and delivering the message through self-publishing (McCarthy, 2013b:par 2). Here, "the designer's persona is a subtext" in the work (O'Neil, 1996:12). *Emigre* concerned itself with critiquing society as provocation for something better. It may be argued that the designer as author was in essence a reflective process, an opportunity to interrogate normative states in social, economic and political realms; concerned with "a vision of what ought to be" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005:7). Published at a later stage, *Dot Dot Dot* anticipated a forward-looking process of intellectual enquiry that was essentially reflexive and "amoral". Through advocating a reflexive process involving "the constant analysis of one's own theoretical and methodological presuppositions" (Coghlan &

Brannick, 2005:6), *Dot Dot Dot* sought critically to circumvent reassuring dogma. In many senses, thus, McCarthy (2008:par.63) argues that graphic design authorship was inventive in the philosophical foundation of "critical design".

2.9 Synthesis

The shift from being the anonymous messenger of consumerism to providing a critical perspective of the implications of the surrounding commercial world, was a vital one for graphic design. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* were significant as critical intermediaries, acknowledging graphic design's part in the reflection and construction of dominant ideology. The intellectual enquiry and critical breadth of *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines may be partly traced to an original Dutch influence and shifts in the global context. This chapter highlighted ways content in these magazines offers a convincing critique of consumerism and a self-reflexive exposure of its own form. Both magazines are examples of the concept of the graphic designer as author. Graphic design authorship was a repositioning of graphic design that, together with a thrust of new theoretical underpinning, ultimately provided fertile ground for the emergence of (contemporary) critical design as a design category.

CHAPTER 3

Five critical issues reflected in contemporary graphic design

3.1 Introduction

Critical design is a natural offshoot of graphic design authorship and theoretical development and its significance is reflected in contemporary dialogue and debate. Critical design as a graphic design category is significant as it recognises graphic design as a fundamentally critical and transformative catalyst.

While the graphic designer as author introduces a potentially critical voice (not all authorship takes a critical stance), critical design confirms and validates critique as part of contemporary graphic design practice. Here, critical design exemplifies a shift in the focus of criticism from not only critique of consumerism and its implications, but also proactive attention to graphic design's relationship to societal change in the broader cultural, social and political world.

Modern ideas of interdisciplinarity, multiculturalism, social and political agency, environmental sustainability and speculative futures are determined by the strategic priorities for the American Institute of Graphic Arts' preferred Designer of 2015 (AIGA, 2014:par.1-13) and the emergence of critical design as a social, political and speculative futures platform (Dunne & Raby, 2013; Tonkinwise, 2015a:par.5; Antonelli, 2015:02:11). Each forms part of graphic design as an evolving profession. In this chapter, these five critical issues are introduced.

3.2 The emergence of critical design as a design category

Critical design is a broad design category, encompassing graphic design, which shifts the focus of design from an intention to solve problems, to an intention to ask questions. The intention to ask questions suggests that problems are posed rather than decisively concluded. This concept had precedent in progressive educational writings:

> In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (Freire, 1993:64)

Critical design thus amplifies a sense of process, of enquiry and potential change. As a graphic design conduit, critical design, and its kindred frame of speculative futures, is propositional and conceptual (Blauvelt, 2015:6). Dunne and Raby (2013:34), in research that references product design, make the distinction between "critical design" and "affirmative design". Affirmative design describes product design that is fundamentally concerned with

problem-solving, consumer persuasion and reinforcing the status quo (Dunne and Raby, 2001:58), while critical design seeks to "pose questions, encourage thought, expose assumptions, provoke action, spark debate, raise awareness, offer new perspectives, and inspire" (Dunne & Raby, 2013:43). Cadle and Kuhn (2013:31) explore critical design as an intellectual adventure, highlighting the relevance of this theory for graphic design:

> Critical design is a space for design and the imagination, unconstrained by market forces, client pressures, consumer desires and the like. It is a conceptual adventure in design underpinned by critical reflection, and a platform from which to imagine design futures, present solutions and it is a vehicle that draws attention to the challenges affecting the human condition… critical design is able to embrace the entire spectrum of design activity, existing as it does, in a conceptual realm, communicating meaning through abstract ideas and designing with values rather than raw materials.

As it is drawn to the challenges affecting the human condition, critical design is drawn to socio-political complexity. Critical design, suggests Antonelli (2015:02:11) is always political. The provocation of critical design potentially opens the way for political activism and transformation assuming the content of design foregrounds real societal problems (Antonelli, 2015:04:22). Critical design embodies a growing contemporary attitude in graphic design, design that is a critical reference and transformative impetus in the surrounding world. Guided by human and environmental concerns rather than undiluted commercial investment, critical design is noteworthy because it formalises the idea of criticism as an inherent part of graphic design as a discipline and practice. Its introduction has been far-reaching, not simply as an opportunity for intellectual adventure or towards genuine social involvement, but for the unfolding of graphic design, whether traditional or revolutionary, as a sanctioned critically inventive space.

3.3 Political and social agency as a contemporary graphic design issue

Critical design, with an immersion in social and political issues, has motivated graphic designers to not only contemplate their role in a broader context but to also actively participate within it. To expose political intervention in the realm of graphic design, as already discussed, requires graphic designers to be "provocateurs" (Blauvelt, 1995b:44). This intervention is present in two distinct ways; to expose the existing political character *of* graphic design or to encourage social and political agency *through* graphic design.

The ethical graphic designer, designing for non-governmental organisations, has historically played an overtly political role through intended persuasion of a pressure group on issues such as AIDS, anti-war and anti-racism, gender relations, global warming and poverty relief (McNair, 2010:8). Graphic design can also be used as "a tool for social and political agitation" (Heller, 2013:par.1). The rousing of interest in these issues condenses class, age,

religion and ideological affiliations and is design that is intended, with a political agenda, to influence the behaviour of its audience.

Encouraged by educational institutions and emerging curricula, graphic designers seek increasingly to be instrumental in the development of an imaginative and socially conscious citizenry (Waghid, 2002:458). Citizenry explicitly denotes a concern for social relations beyond the marketplace. Graphic design thus extends its field of interest beyond the communication product to the social environment. Political and social agency falls under the umbrella of critical design, but is commonly referred to as social design.

As critical design potentially opens the way for design to foreground real societal problems it encompasses social design. Tonkinwise (2015a:par.5) and Janzer and Weinstein (2015:328) confirm that social design is a nascent field, and note that it requires qualitatively different interventions. Social design signals an acknowledgement of change-oriented contexts and social systems rather than the design of artifacts and communication. As Bailey (2011:par.7) explains, "the material of social design is usually social conditions". Contemporary graphic design, faced with intensifying human issues in the modern world, has validated the art of engagement with communities and the need to "reframe audiences as collaborators" (Charman, 2015:par.1). Communities and organisational members need to be approached as partners rather than purely as recipients of the design process. This requires the contemporary graphic designer to take the time to truly understand a community's needs, to insist on an immersion in the lives, perspectives and preferences of the community. The graphic designer, in the face of inherently uneven power relations, needs to relinquish a relevant amount of control to support and mobilise the community's own assets, strengths and resources, irrespective of the reality that those resources are constrained (Brown, 2008:5). In effect, a socially concerned design practice requires a deep and sustainable attachment to and participation in community concerns.

Shea (2012:8) suggests that while the term community refers to "a group of people who share something, such as a place, culture, emotions or occupation", this commonality is supplemented by a "wide range of perceptions, interests, enterprises and ways of interacting among community members" (Shea, 2012:13) that the graphic designer needs to take into account. "Community engagement is as complex as humans themselves. It requires designers to work with a range of people who have strong opinions and a lot of emotions and pride invested in their community" (Shea, 2012:9). It is in this sense, that the graphic designer is challenged to disengage from prescient power relations or monolithic thinking, to reveal their own vulnerability, to intentionally listen, and to respond with authentic engagement in dialogue with their audience (Ogbu, 2015:21:20).

Socially relevant design faces a challenge to circumvent the entrenched forms of practice expected by modern culture. Stairs (2009:par.9) is concerned with a false sense of general accomplishment, where graphic designers are "selling more design by fetishising social relevance", where altruism is being used for self-aggrandisement or neo-colonialist purposes. In too many cases changing the world is a means to controlling the world, telling the world, educating the world, rather than listening acutely. An adage that suggests "we can change the world by being changed by the world" (Janz in Stairs, 2009:par.12) assumes a more interactive position. Privileged authorship, in this sense, is subverted by or in tension with local needs, identities and futures. Janz identifies the importance of need, involvement and local sourcing from specific communities that represents a radically different and sensitised form of practice and intervention.

Social design thus requires a reframing of design practice, from individual client to collective community need. Traditional graphic design – logos, brochures, poster design and the like – "rarely address the totality of the issue that prompted the designer's engagement in the first place" (Shea, 2012:9).

> It may be unrealistic to set specific goals at the outset of community-based projects, but there are a handful of nonmonetary results that designers might aim to achieve; helping community members establish a common vision and strengthening their interest to work together toward that vision; clarifying complex information or data with graphics that increase the community's knowledge and competence; improving the way an organisation communicates with community members; helping community members improve their quality of life by raising awareness around safety, health and environmental issues in a way that empowers them to take responsibility; increasing the efficiency of a process; and improving the community's social and human capital with better social ties, networks, and support (Shea, 2012:9).

In essence it is a process of designing *with* a community rather than *for* a community. Tonkinwise (2015b:par.12) suggests that the graphic designer of the twenty-first century is challenged to "establish long-term relations with a range of existing organisations as change agents, and/or constitute new organisations themselves…social design is not designing plus facilitation, but the designing of new kinds of productive social relations".

Graphic design's historical and cultural legacy has been a catalyst to define its identity as well as a continuing source to reinforce a particular pool of knowledge (Boswell & O'Kane, 2011:361). Commercial intent has been the dominant (and perceived successful) premise of graphic design. Critical design and social design by comparison receive inadequate attention. The breadth and reality of socially conscious work by graphic designers is simply not adequately reported (Sterling, 2001:125). It is telling that the close association between traditional graphic design and the business world creates the need to assert a different category – "social design" or "critical design" – when graphic design serves communities and

social justice (Shea, 2012:8). This serves to not only identify commercial design as different from social design but to limit the boundaries of conventional graphic design to commercial interests. Social design ostensibly is distinguished by its work among marginalised communities, while graphic design gives form to corporate ideas. The attitudes of contemporary designers, however, suggest a blurring of these boundaries; there is increasing interest in graphic design that is socially relevant, design that is human-centred and in the public interest, with an accompanying thrust towards speculative and conceptual ideas (Blauvelt, 2015:par.27).

As graphic design is instrumental in both social and economic life, to have no response as a graphic designer to a society where the "false images and representations" of visual culture dominate, is a political statement (McCoy, 1993:111). An uncritical position, a "sensibility of subordination" to the economic, is in itself a political assertion in support of the status quo (Fry, 2005:par.3). As McCoy (1993:111) comments: "A dangerous assumption is that corporate work of innocuous content is devoid of political bias". Every affirmative or critical graphic design perspective thus involves the political. Ansari (2015:par.8) argues that graphic design "fails to recognise that all design, even design that claims political neutrality, is a form of frozen politics, that the material is always committed to a political agenda even when it does not claim to be".

When graphic design is conservatively distanced from politics it is inevitably commodified, inevitably prominent as a commercial or aesthetic endeavour. The dynamic need for designers that deal with the human condition suggests that design should in reality be openly political (Laranjo, 2014b:par.6). The context of graphic design, while strongly invested and argued as such, has thus not always been exclusively commercial. While the heritage of graphic design settles unequally in a commercial, social and cultural space, its essence is shifting towards social interests in contemporary society (Blauvelt, 2015:par.6; Bailey, 2012:par.8). As Daniel Yon (1999:29) observes in reference to cultural identity, graphic design is impelled to engage seemingly paradoxical possibilities for empowerment (progressive racial and cultural validation) and disempowerment (commercial stereotype) to be present at the same moment.

Brown (2008:7) suggests that for every design project, graphic designers need to conflate social, environmental and economic impacts. The challenges of working in underserved communities is the reality that where resources are limited, it is vital to justify the impact of an investment in design as opposed to spending money in ways that could support nutrition, housing and other crucial needs (Brown, 2008:15). The contemporary graphic designer is challenged to reinvent the intention and outcome of the design process towards genuine

social upliftment. Nelson and Stolterman (2012:11) argue that the signs circulating in the social milieu, which are part of the toolkit of a graphic designer, either seek to maintain or transform society because they provide vital connections between meanings and action. Transformation is thus a reflection of and an influence on both individual identities and society as a whole. The point of design engagement and criticism in this sense is not to change *design*, but to change *social structures*.

3.4 Contemporary interest in speculative futures

Speculative design is concerned with transforming social structures in the future. Dunne (2013:01:07) proposes a shift from designing for the existing world to designing forward to a future world, in the process reflecting on and questioning the status quo, and proactively imagining alternatives. Dunne makes the distinction between designing for how the world *should* be versus how the world *could* be, the former pointing to a defined perspective and the latter generating many different possibilities and opening up a dialogue regarding the role design can play. Dunne (2013:01:37) suggests this is a shift "from realism to idealism", in the sense of valuing ideas and thoughts above the real world surrounding us.

Dealing with imagination and design fiction, the speculative (graphic) designer explores the potential of a variety of possible *preferable* futures beyond identifying simply *probable* futures. "Design schemas are used to form particular representations or aspects of ideal things out of a cloud of possibilities, in support of a divergent or expansive process of inquiry" (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012:7). Dunne makes the point that it is the designer who confirms abstract research at the point of concrete and tangible creation (and for the graphic designer, at the point of communication).

Dunne (2013:05:45) equally points to the need to represent the future beyond the visuals produced by industry with "new and challenging aesthetic languages". In this sense, the design critique does not simply provide an alternative to existing reality, it replaces society with a new visual realm.

**3.5 Interdisciplinarity, multiculturalism, social and environmental concern:
    critical aspects of a contemporary designer**

Contemporary discourse has enhanced and complicated the bounded perspectives of graphic design. The strategic priorities for the American Institute of Graphic Arts' preferred Designer of 2015 (AIGA, 2014:par.1-13) were drawn from extensive interviews with leading graphic designers and are referred to here to clarify issues circulating in current graphic design debate. They serve to confirm contemporary issues in graphic design.

The first AIGA theme removes graphic design from its disciplinary silo. Contemporary designers need to work increasingly collaboratively with other sectors and their training needs to be *interdisciplinary*, to draw knowledge from the social sciences and humanities, to respond to increasingly diverse challenges (AIGA, 2014:par.2). Such ideas that effectively extend the conventional frontiers of graphic design are found in other contemporary writing about design. Dunne (2013:05:22) discusses the need to look beyond the confines of the design discipline to fields of sociology, physics, philosophy and ethics. This process shatters the inherited narrow category of graphic design as theory and practice. Graphic design, in the contemporary world, urges a return to the analogue – "an integrated, complex whole" that is not separated into distinct categories (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012:18). In this sense, there is a call for "more pluralism in design, not of style but of ideology and values" (Dunne & Raby, 2013:9), for a design that embraces other modes of enquiry and activity (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012:262). Tonkinwise (2015a:par.5) suggests that

> As design has established itself as a discipline, with an increasing research output, and as the profession of design has expanded its remit through strategic design thinking, designers are being asked to be on transdisciplinary teams tackling complex social challenges that are not directly design-related.

Zimbabwe (2015:par.10) expresses the value of interdisciplinarity in interpreting the most vital present and anticipated problems and providing "deep knowledge" of relevant systems. The systems that perpetuate social and environmental injustices are complex and the solutions are equally so. Interdisciplinarity assumes "more inventive solutions will come from different conceptual, organisational, and geographic vantage points than any one discipline could create".

Secondly, therefore, designers need to envision potential challenges before they arise and interrogate complexity at the systems level to respond to diversity and to provide sustainable communication (AIGA, 2014:par.5). Systems thinking is "an intellectual approach that grants complexity to both the causes and effects of a problem and, instead of reducing the roots of the problem to a handful of easily identifiable and controllable factors, seeks to redescribe them in the language of relations, structures and processes" (Morozov, 2014:322). In response, graphic design has thus expanded from giving form to specific objects to approaching systems with open-ended frameworks for intervention. This relational interplay is visible in both the complex socio-political integration of social design and the problem posing of speculative futures. This perspective of graphic design suggests that "the relations between entities are fundamentally more important than the entities themselves; one must look at the dynamic relationship as a whole" (Neville, 2011:4). Contemporary graphic design is therefore a conscious transaction with aesthetic, cultural and socio-political systems. The ingredients for critical design and social design are thus activated within this setting.

Thirdly, designers need to engage with an increasingly individualistic and diverse audience, actively preserving cultural diversity alongside approaching global issues (AIGA, 2014:par.6). Multiculturalism is thus foregrounded in reaction to and in tension with global connectivity. Multiculturalism is a way of formalising a response to audience diversity and it is equally an implied acknowledgement of the voices that have historically been marginalised. Emerging from multicultural social networking and a renewed focus on the audience as active subject rather than passive object, is the suggestion that designers benefit from approaching their customers as 'co-creators' (AIGA, 2014:11).

Finally, according to the research reflecting current trends in graphic design, the inspiration for design must be human-centred and concerned with environmental sustainability, embracing "ethical issues, social need, global imperatives and the unique contribution of design thinking" (AIGA, 2014:13). When graphic design is human-centred, prevailing ideas of social need in turn motivate graphic designers to be socially responsible in their communities.

Social need and ethical motivation demands a humanising intervention. In the face of societal injustices and commercial exploitation, a humanising perspective asserts that graphic designers approach design practice and their surroundings in a more meaningful and fully human way, that designers "promote the worth of human beings" and seek to transform oppressive social conditions (Salazar, 2013:126; Freire, 1985:70). Social and environmental responsibility anticipates a critical interpretation of social need and limited resources in the twenty first century.

Irwin (2015:par.3) remarks that designers need to work collaboratively to understand modern problems in all their complexity:

> Designers are increasingly being asked to work on complex problems within complex social and environmental systems. In order to design effective solutions for systems like these, you have to think in long horizons of time and recognise that we as a society need to transition to a more sustainable future. You need to understand the interconnectedness of the social, economic and political, and be able to entirely reconceive how we live our lives.

It is therefore relevant to consider how *these* issues, and those introduced in the previous sections, serve to define the changed, and constantly changing, space in which the 'critical' finds more enduring attention within the practice and discourse of design. One might postulate that for design to remain relevant in the current age that they should be considered as "critical issues".

3.6 Five critical issues informing contemporary graphic design

The emergence of critical design, in Europe, as a social, political and speculative futures platform in contemporary discourse builds on and expands the critical issues highlighted by the American (AIGA) preferred designer of 2015. These issues are thus a mix of European and American initiatives in graphic design discourse today. The focus on measurement and the quantification of profit margins, the reductionist and decontextualized approach to graphic design practice that disconnects people from societal needs is still prominent but it is attenuated by the thrust of new theoretical and practical critical issues. The shifts in the focus of criticism are reflected in not only a critique of consumerism (and its implications), but also proactive attention to social change. And concomitant with the collective role of these emergent concerns, as stated in 3.5, this research invites a formalised scrutiny of the importance of the "critical" design viewpoint. These critical issues are therefore identified below and are the five platforms that are used to, not only argue for design's altering role but also to confirm the visionary nature of the *Emigre/Dot Dot Dot* discursive space. They are:

Critical issue 1: Graphic design as multicultural

Critical issue 2: Graphic design as interdisciplinary

Critical issue 3: Graphic design as environmentally sustainable

Critical issue 4: Graphic design as social and political agency

Critical issue 5: Graphic design representing speculative futures

3.7 Synthesis

Design wisdom is not simply "an integration of reason with observation, reflection, imagination, action, and production or making" (Nelson & Stolterman, 2012:18) it also necessarily involves critique, self-reflexivity, prediction and disruption. Graphic design is not only peppered with ideology that requires unearthing (Cadle and Kuhn, 2013:27), but it is the premise of this research that graphic design magazines such as *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* may have played a fundamental role in constructing and evolving the ideology of graphic design as a critical, multicultural, interdisciplinary, environmental, social and political, and speculative futures platform.

These contemporary critical issues in graphic design have widened the vision of theory and practice, accentuating a more collaborative and humanising perspective. Viewed as a system integrally related to the surrounding context, graphic design is increasingly concerned with the complexity and sustainability of the present and future. Critical (graphic) design has the potential not only to articulate the need for societal change but to invest, intentionally or unintentionally, in its materialisation.

CHAPTER 4

An analysis of *Emigre* and Dot Dot Dot magazines

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores some of the ways in which *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines reimagined graphic design beyond a commercial identity, anticipating elements of a contemporary discourse. A commercial impetus has been questioned and critiqued as a consequence of shifts towards critical design in the modern day. Critical design has been shaped by the influences of interdisciplinarity, multiculturalism, social and political agency, sustainability and speculative futures. Each of these elements expanded and problematised the traditional boundaries of graphic design. They were instrumental, through identifying graphic design as complex and engaged with contradictions in the broader world, in generating a robust critique of narrowly focused commercial design. These five critical issues - interdisciplinarity, multiculturalism, social and political agency, sustainability and speculative futures – thus provide the basis for an analysis of *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* that is aimed at ascertaining to what extent they contain critical perspectives that anticipated contemporary trends.

Discourse analysis is the central methodology used, drawn from two key texts: *How to do critical discourse analysis* (2012) by Machin and Mayr and *Visual methodologies* (2001) by Rose.

4.2 The rationale for discourse analysis and its relevance to graphic design

In the discipline of graphic design and its practice, designers define what it is to be human (and thus equally the realities of dehumanization) in very particular ways (Rose, 2001:135). Rose argues that design is a subjective process that cannot be neutral, engaging social institutions and practices that denote social constructions of difference. Any work, any representation of ideology, is at once individual *and* discursive at the level of social, cultural and political formation (ibid). Discourse analysis is a methodology that offers a critical perspective on articulated verbal and visual images. Discourse "refers to a group of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it" (Rose, 2001:136; Machin and Mayr, 2012:2).

Graphic design has a distinctive language with its own rules and conventions supported by institutions that circulate and produce a particular design discourse. Relying on the ideas of Michel Foucault, Rose (2001:136) delineates the way that discourse produces subject

positions and specialised forms of knowledge. Knowledge, criticism, cultural institutions, subjects and practices clarify and inform what constitutes graphic design and what does not. Graphic design is nuanced by intertextuality, by the meanings conveyed by other images and texts as well as by the tendency to reinforce and operate within a particular field of vision while marginalising and leaving others unseen.

As Gill (in Rose, 2001:140) suggests "all discourse is organised to make itself persuasive" and discourse analysis looks critically at those strategies of persuasion. Discourse analysis focuses on how text and images are not simply the creative productions of individuals but equally construct accounts of the social world; it is concerned with the social production and effects of discourses. Knowledge does not just exist; it is constructed in social relations that are specific and varied.

Foucault (1972:25) encourages an interruption of prevailing beliefs, a fresh critical perspective.

> Pre-existing categories must be held in suspense. They must not be rejected definitively, of course, but the tranquility with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about by themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known and the justifications of which must be scrutinised.

As an ingredient of analysis, discourses are complex and often contradictory. Machin and Mayr (2012:4) suggest that the complexity and contradictions internal to discourses may disclose more coherently how they are used as ideological instruments. "The term 'critical' therefore means 'denaturalising' the language to reveal the kinds of ideas, absences and taken-for-granted assumptions" that are expressive of certain power interests. These sometimes reside in finely nuanced details (Fairclough, 1992 in Machin & Mayr, 2012:5). The process of discourse analysis thus values "the richness of textual detail, rather than the number of texts analysed" (Rose, 2001:143).

The research into *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines thus extracts salient texts that anticipate or contradict contemporary graphic design concerns. It is a qualitative rather than quantitative process. The central interest in discourse analysis lies in the way certain ideas are foregrounded and others are left in the background or excluded completely (Machin & Mayr, 2012:2). Discourse analysis thus links language, image, power and ideology to reveal practices and conventions that imply political and ideological investment. Fairclough and Wodak (1997 in Machin & Mayr, 2012:4) clarify that its intention is to intervene in the communication, to intervene in the tissue of stereotypes, to suggest social change.

The dominant discourse of graphic design, assumed to be homogenous and stable, "overlooks how individuals may also act upon discourse and resist that discipline by taking

up a range of contradictory and ambivalent positions" (Yon, 1999:30). It is important to note that the object of this research involves publications with a relatively small circulation and with alternative perspectives of graphic design in their time. Both *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines are representative of a "constructive marginality" (Bennett, 1993:64), drawing on their own set of references and awareness of graphic design's potential for their identity, as opposed to looking to established definitions of practice.

4.3 Analysing *Emigre* magazine

4.3.1 Graphic design as interdisciplinary

Interdisciplinarity may be defined as "involving two or more different subjects or areas of knowledge" (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2011:447). The initial stirrings of graphic design as interdisciplinary can be found in *Emigre* #39 in an essay entitled "That was then, and this is now: but what is next?" by Lorraine Wild. According to Wild (1996:27) the reality of a "community of expertise" in graphic design had its early roots in the introduction of the Macintosh computer and the kindred flourishing potential for multimedia. In the 1990s expertise from outside of graphic design became necessary as graphic designers faced an unprecedented realignment from "two-dimensional expertise" (Wild, 1996:21) to multimedia settings. Graphic designers had to be inventive and co-operative as they moved towards contexts where "interactivity, transmutability (ability to deliver information in a variety of formats), the ability to show information in many perspectives (verbal, visual, still and moving, solid and transparent)" became manifest. According to Wild (1996:31), "the practitioner does not come to a situation with fixed, pre-defined problem statements, but undertakes investigation and engages in dialogue through which appropriate metaphors emerge" in collaboration.

The process of interdisciplinary work is highly inventive. Barthes (1986:72) suggests that it is not sufficient to understand interdisciplinary dialogue as simply a mix of ideas and disciplines, as simply graphic designers with new expertise around them, but rather to recognise the way collaboration leads to the generation of "a new object, which belongs to no one". Wild is thus not simply referring to a new synthesis of ideas and expertise for graphic designers, but anticipates a fundamentally modern version of graphic design.

As graphic design is inherently contingent, contemporary designers work increasingly between disciplines and as collectives (Blauvelt, 2015:par 21). Interdisciplinarity implies collaboration. The influence of external collaborative work has led to a widening of the internal boundaries of graphic design, and vice versa. In *Emigre* #66, Vanderlans (2004b:7) already expresses the need for designers to "think and know more about things besides

design", to "expand their field of vision" and to deal with concerns that "only touch tangentially on graphic design". The concept of graphic design as integrated with other disciplines is clearly articulated. Graphic designers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with and "borrow methods, theories and concepts from other disciplines, such as art theory, philosophy, comparative literature and gender studies" (Cabianca in Vanderlans, 2004b:9). A further article in *Emigre* notes that this borrowing from companion disciplines, this expansion of the vision of graphic design, not only serves originality but also begins to define graphic design as a socially relevant (rather than narrowly market-driven) force (Hagon, 2004:45). Through interdisciplinarity, graphic design becomes centred, both in method and in content, in social collectives rather than individual exchange. Graphic design becomes "more relevant to the socio-cultural make-up of our communities, as opposed to only being quantitatively valuable to our potential clients" (Hagon, 2004:45).

The quotes from Wild, Vanderlans, Cabianca and Hagon in *Emigre* suggest that graphic design has the potential, through outside influence, to be re-envisioned. Firstly, the articles anticipate graphic design as a networked collective. Secondly, attention to the socio-cultural make-up of communities immediately engages the graphic designer in specifically human-centred challenges. Human challenges not only present a complexity, but imply more insistent and sustainable interventions. Thirdly, interdisciplinary intention has illuminated the graphic designer as engaged increasingly with theoretical issues and thus identifies the designer as a researcher. As Triggs (1995:7) suggests: "As the graphic design profession matures, the scope for critical analysis and evaluation of its history and theoretical discourses necessarily broadens". Research implies both a maturing of the discipline of graphic design and invites the possibilities of new research methodologies that, through time, refresh the boundaries of graphic design.

4.3.2 Graphic design as multicultural

Muticulturalism celebrates diversity. Diversity in design denotes diversity of experience, viewpoint and intention – equivalent to diversity of thought – and these can be shaped by a mix of factors including race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual identity, ability/disability and location, among others. Multiculturalism may be defined as "the policy of maintaining a diversity of ethnic cultures within a community" (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2012:276). This is reinforced by "the view that the various cultures in a society merit equal respect and scholarly interest" (*American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, 2005:294).

Emigre #34 implies the emergence of multiculturalism by commenting that Modernism's exclusion of women, people of colour and the visual languages beyond its immediate vocabulary has become inadequate (Blauvelt, 1995b:35). Also in *Emigre* #34, Vanderlans

refs to the opportunity for "many individual voices to be heard" as graphic design increasingly shifts from representation of the Modernist ideal to interpreting a form of fragmented postmodern "reality".

> Instead of buying into the fabricated singular narrative of Modernism that would lead us all to an imagined better world, these designers were dealing with the world as it really was; fragmented, ironic, chaotic, humorous, ambiguous, and with room for many individual voices to be heard (Vanderlans, 1995:9).

Many individual voices, set against the singular narrative, invoke multiculturalism. The apparent space for individual voices implies a diversity of opinions, attitudes, cultures and preferences that cultivate or ignore the ideological stratification of society. The challenge with multiculturalism is not to romanticise it so as to conveniently sidestep the existence of systemic inequalities. Multiculturalism in fact engenders a contested space of social interaction, challenging graphic designers to engage with or deny class, gender, sexual and racialised identities.

Cabianca (2004:77) in Emigre #66 expresses an appreciation for work "being done by people who are fusing Western and non-Western cultures". In this text, it becomes clear that Western knowledge and culture, articulated historically as civilised, objective and universal, has been set as the dominant voice over other cultures. This text does not identify and acknowledge the cultures that are viewed in the negative stereotype of "non"– not something – in the description "non-Western". At the hands of European perceptions, other cultures are defined through a lingering colonialist residue, which has not yet been effectively disrupted. Yon (1999:28) argues that the idea of multiculturalism is a politically inflected concept that potentially repeats historically received ideas:

> Multiculturalism draws its inspiration from an entrenched anthropological tradition of cultural relativism. By emphasising the attributes that characterise social groups and communities, cultural relativism produces reified and bounded notions of culture and identity as inheritable entities …The 'dominant culture' assumes dominance precisely because it is unmarked while the 'minority' or 'multi-cultures' are assumed to be neatly marked entities and objects of study.

Multiculturalism thus needs to avoid being a politically expedient description that masks fluid changes and contestations in culture. Boswell and O'Kane (2011:361) confirm that multiculturalism may either entail a confined identity, "identity as bounded, primordial and ready to advance ethnic chauvinism" or a liberating project, a "regularly contested and re-grounded" postcolonial discourse.

As Schmidt (2004:11) comments in *Emigre #67*, seeking to convey the inequities of globalisation: "Media-saturated, technology-integrated, and multifaceted, the worst mistake we can make now is to assume all these appearances of multiplicity signify actual diversity".

This text refers to the many ways that diversity is strategically apparent rather than genuinely expressed and validated. These ideas have precedent in the work of Hall (1992:107), who suggests that this tendency is the product of a cultural backlash:

> For, if the global postmodern represents an ambiguous opening to difference and to the margins and makes a certain kind of decentering of the Western narrative a likely possibility, it is matched, from the very heartland of cultural politics, by the backlash: the aggressive resistance to difference; the attempt to restore the canon of Western civilisation; the assault, direct and indirect, on multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism became increasingly relevant with the swing towards popular culture. The shift of power and the shift of culture to the popular, introduced counternarratives, introduced the voice of the other, even as "what replaces invisibility is a kind of regulated, segregated visibility" (Hall, 1992:108). The change is slow and painful. Multiculturalism is attempting to root graphic design in popular communities, attempting to deal with cultural difference not as an abstract concept but as a practical intervention that "resists being constantly made over as low and outside" (Hall, 1992:108).

The intention to animate multiculturalism compensates for the loss of the locally inflected cultures as a result of expanding globalisation; what philosopher Martin Heidegger refers to as a "loss of nearness" (in Frampton, 1983:29). Blauvelt (1995a:19) in *Emigre* #33 reflects on this concern, discussing the graphic designer who seeks to communicate with "different pockets of culture", engaged with the unique background and particular conditions that are endemic to a particular place and its people. In the text, Blauvelt refers to architect Kenneth Frampton's term "critical regionalism", an attempt to reconcile the influence of universal civilisation through intelligent and critical sensitivity. Frampton warns against the tendency to sentimentalise: "the ever present tendency to regress into nostalgic historicism or the glibly decorative" (Frampton, 1983:20). To truly respond to an individualistic and diverse audience, to impart localised community identities, the designer needs to communicate through "elements derived *indirectly* from the peculiarities of a particular place" (Frampton, 1983:21).

Emigre suggests that Modernism's simplified, authoritative mode of communication has become contentious. In effect, Modernism's preference for the universal provoked Postmodernism's receptivity toward individual and regional differences (Blauvelt, 1995a:33). Frampton initially quotes Ricoeur (1965 in Frampton, 1983:16) who outlines the real deprivation of a universal perspective:

> The phenomenon of universalisation, while being an advancement of humankind, at the same time constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures, which might not be an irreparable wrong, but also of what I shall call for the time being the creative nucleus of great cultures, that nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life, what I shall call in advance the ethical and mythical nucleus of humankind. The conflict springs up from there. We

have the feeling that this single world civilisation at the same time exerts a sort of attrition or wearing away at the expense of the cultural resources which have made the great civilisations of the past.

The world culture, driven by a Westernised framework, both dominates and delivers a fatigue and mediocrity. The challenge is that attempts to "revitalise an enervated society", comprehend cultural diversity not as a rich source of identity, but as superficial exotic forms that serve repression and chauvinism rather than transformation (Frampton, 1983:20). Caban (2004:8) adds: "One of the most characteristic myths of the Western world is that popular art, especially if it is indigenous, should remain the same, stuck in the past". This nostalgic, reformist approach has been complicated and accentuated by Western hegemony. "Western civilisation habitually identifies itself with civilisation as such on the pontifical assumption that what is not like it is a deviation, less advanced, primitive, or, at best, exotically interesting at a safe distance" (Van Eyck in Frampton, 1983:22). The consequence is that graphic design tends towards a standardised, international form (Caban, 2004:2).

In *Emigre* #40, Gromala (1996:31) argues that the richness and diversity of any potential audience, requires the rethinking of a standardised, international profile:

> The 'audience' of the design work, as the term implies, was once thought to be comprised of passive, homogenous recipients of a predetermined meaning, a meaning ordained exclusively by the designer. Redefining the audience as a 'user', negative connotations notwithstanding, refocuses this, implying a co-creator of meaning. The interpretation and use of the design work by users – hardly the static and embalmed design work familiar in reproductions in books and journals, torn from their rich and diverse contexts – is partially constructed by them, contingent always on their cultural field of view.

In this text, Gromala mentions the term "co-creator", which is recognisable in equivalent use in the AIGA contemporary trends of 2015. The concept of the co-creator, a diverse "cultural field of view", signifies the potential for ambiguity, for negotiated or oppositional responses, for individual subjectivity in interpreting graphic design content. The text conveys an essential liberation; firstly, from the deception of apportioned meanings; secondly, from a narrow abstract conception of an audience and thirdly, from the stronghold of patriarchal control. The acknowledged complexity of an audience, participants with 'cultural fields of view', signifies a certain release from hierarchical attitudes in graphic design. Graphic designer Levrant de Bretteville (1998:238), contesting institutional attitudes that reinforce "the over simplified, the unremittingly serious, the emphatically rational" makes the following observations:

> As I become increasingly sensitive to those aspects of design which reinforce repressive attitudes and behavior, I increasingly question the desirability of simplicity and clarity. The thrust to control almost inevitably operates through *simplification.* Control is undermined by ambiguity, choice, and complexity,

because subjective factors in the user become more effective and the user is invited to participate. *Participation undermines control.*

Gromala speaks of an audience that is culturally diverse but does not question the design community's transmission of patriarchal worldviews, highlighting the circumstance of limited diversity and inclusiveness within the field of design. As Cherry (2014:par.16) notes, "Designers are supposed to be problem solvers, yet increasing the diversity of representation in the design community is a problem that remains unsolved". Cherry accentuates the paradox where graphic design is apparently multicultural as it is received, but insubstantially multicultural as it is generated.

Finally, in *Emigre* #67 McCoy (2004:47) acknowledges that multiculturalism required, and still requires, a sensitive shift in the way graphic design is conducted:

> We need some new methods in our design toolkit, a sort of open architecture, to effectively incorporate cultural human factors that respond to diversity, multiplicity, and flux. Rather than a clean, fixed, "timeless" vision and form language, design needs an evolutionary and collaborative process to produce resonant expressions appropriate for each project's audience and moment in time. Then designers' own voices can contribute to the rich cacophony rather than suppress it.

These texts in *Emigre* thus represent a turning point in graphic design from a desire for a universal expression to an acknowledgement of the reality of a diverse, multicultural expression and reception of design. The challenges of multiculturalism notwithstanding, there is in these pages the emergence of an interest in a rich variety of voices, of an awareness of a participative diverse audience and a shifting, although still idealistic, discourse of graphic design.

4.3.3 Environmental sustainability in graphic design

Sustainable design "places primary emphasis on environmentally sound choices with respect to overall concept, location, materials, construction/manufacture and use" (Papanek, 1984:109). In effect, sustainable design anticipates and minimises adverse ecological impacts.

The narrative and ideas in graphic design are as significant as the design itself. Content that explores environmental sustainability is appropriate to graphic design as the outcome of graphic design is a visual and physical environment permeated with advertising and packaging material. As public space is increasingly becoming privatised through ambient advertising and guerilla media (Helm, 2000:6), graphic designers have to take responsibility for the creation of communication saturation and visual noise. The saturation of urban surroundings, both private and public, with persuasive advertising assumes a culture that is constantly discarding and renewing. These aspects contribute to another phenomenon;

consumerism; which in turn entails consumer waste. This issue appears in *Emigre* #46 – "As graphic designers, we actively contribute to the chopping down of trees and the creation of waste" (Vanderlans, 1998:4) – an acknowledgement that the deluge of designed printed work has an environmental impact. *Emigre* sought to "limit the damage" by choosing not to increase circulation and to use recycled paper.

Human equilibrium is increasingly sensitive to ecological equilibrium. The environmental crisis manifests as a design crisis:

> It's a call to recycle, instead of simply discard, what you have already consumed, which is only one part of the solution to save this planet. The other part is to consume less, and for manufacturers to become as radically inventive in manufacturing as in marketing their products by using eco-friendly and reusable materials, and for us consumers to encourage and demand this (Vanderlans, 2000:58).

Emigre #53 invites an interrogation of the consequences of consumption:

> Our enormously productive economy…demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption. We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate (Lebow in Helm, 2000:1).

> Despite being keenly aware that we live on a finite planet with a limited amount of resources, we continue to perpetuate a world-view of continuous, unlimited and ever-expanding consumption (Helm, 2000:11).

The logic of a "finite planet" set against "unlimited" consumption resists the celebration of products that are at the root of traditional graphic design. Helm's article implies that sustainable design requires shifts not only in communication but also in the design methods, behaviours and business processes that feed consumption.
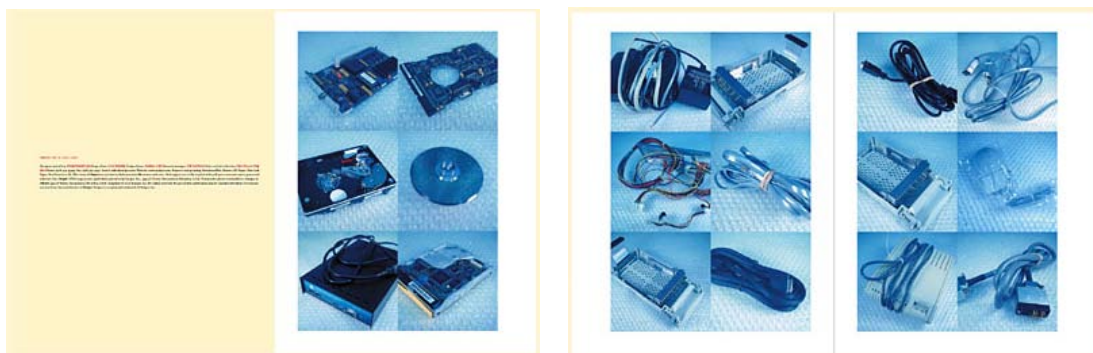

Figure 4. *Emigre* #56, "The Emigre legacy", (2000:1-3) .

Vanderlans in *Emigre* #56, in a visual essay entitled *"*The Emigre legacy", begins to question the effects of a consumer culture and a technologically mediated world, highlighting the inescapable deluge of waste from abandoned computers (see Figure 4). The rows of discarded Apple Mac computers and computer parts are a metaphor to reflect conceptually on the effect of consumerism, on a graphic designer's everyday tools, on their impact and on the kind of society people wish to live in. The contradiction, he suggests, is that "perhaps our true professional legacy, the things that will have the most impact, the stuff we'll pass on and that will remain for generations to come, are not the *Emigre* fonts, or the issues of *Emigre* magazine, but these heaps of planned obsolescence" (Vanderlans, 2000:24). In this text, it could be argued, *Emigre* shifts from the indulgent attributes of aesthetic form to posing questions – anticipating solutions and actions – that are conceived with the welfare of the natural world and future generations in mind. It considers not only the long-term implications of fast-paced processes, but the antithesis of graphic design's contribution to the world. Vanderlans does not speak purely as a designer, he also speaks as a consumer. He expands the focus from production aspects (pollution control, waste minimisation, eco-efficiency, sustainable materials selection etc.) to include debates about sustainable consumption (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2015:1).

Vanderlans and Helm express *Emigre's* pioneering approach to environmental issues. They recognise that a critique of consumerism is intimately bound up with the contradiction of fast-paced production and consumption that lies at the heart of graphic design tools, processes and products. They contributed to a debate that was emerging rather than prevalent at the time *Emigre* was published, but which is growing in significance in the present day.

4.3.4 Graphic design as social and political agency

The purpose of graphic design – "the art and practice of planning and projecting ideas and experiences with visual and textual content" – may be commercial, educational, cultural or political (Cezzar, 2015:par.1). Social and political agency suggests that graphic design may have an active role in citizenship, social engagement and societal transformation.

The hesitancy to be overtly political in graphic design discourse has been profoundly challenged by the culture of fanzines, of which *Emigre* formed a self-declared part (Vanderlans, 1998:2). *Emigre* #46, dedicated to the customised and revolutionary identity of fanzines, confirms their often-progressive insights into sexual politics, equality issues and social consciousness. In an article entitled "Typo-anarchy: a new look at the fanzine revolution", graphic designer Teal Triggs suggests that the fanzine, rooted in the underground and radical press movement, became a space to "shock", to "question

contemporary social values" and to "challenge social and political conventions" (Triggs, 1998:17).

Fanzines typically involve raw expression, a rebellious visual and verbal language, rather than strategic political agency. "Authentic, uncorrupted and often very original" (Vanderlans, 1998:3) they have a radical political surface and youthful spontaneity. Fanzines, by their nature, subvert mass commercial and corporate culture, delivering the romanticised ideal of independent, uncompromised content. They thus represent a stirring and shaping of creative freedom and social consciousness, without "overly moralistic considerations" (Vanderlans, 1998:3). Fanzines inspire political action rather than define it. Typically amateur and passionate, they seek to disrupt and critique rather than develop. In other words, their political aspirations take a radical, experimental visual form without dealing with the complexity of consistent social intervention. In this sense, they represent graphic designers' unencumbered political expression rather than their social investment. Fanzines, with origins in the culture of Punk that "existed in extremes" (Triggs, 1998:13), prefer to signify political anarchy in contrast to contemporary social design that is characterised by attentive political and social engagement.

Political and social design functions to reflect and sustain people; it endures beyond the ephemeral quality of conventional design. Levrant De Bretteville (in Soar, 2002:106) encourages "a process that involves asking, listening, reflecting, suggesting, and sustaining. It's a process that entails on the part of the designers a deep sense of connection and initiative in creating their work". This deep sense of connection is often drawn from a personal narrative. When individuals share their own ideas about political issues with others, it does the groundwork for explicitly and collectively acting on them. Social engagement requires an acknowledgement of personal experience that has collective significance. While both *Emigre #46* and *Emigre #67* deal with the personal in graphic design, *Emigre #67* intervenes in the personal as unreservedly political. In the article *"Hello Ms. Hernandez"*, Schmidt (2004:14) recognises "the motivating force of personal perspective" in highlighting struggles for equality and justice. The first measure is the designer's awareness of the personal in the abstracted face of a complex world.

> The 'personal' is crucial now not because it stands in contradistinction to globalisation, because it doesn't really. Globalisation is everywhere – within and outside our skin. No, personal perspective is important because it brings the designer into design – the human being into the problem. If the personal creative needs of individual designers can converge with their responses to globalisation's injustices, and hence diverge from the impulse to ignore complex arguments, then design will find cohesion in a new dialogue on equity (Schmidt, 2004:14).

In the face of social injustices, this text implies, graphic designers are accountable as citizens. The individual narrative is a terse reflection of a collective exchange. With narratives of land dispossession, union intimidation and environmental contamination, Ms Hernandez expresses her own citizenship and resistance. Just as design has social repercussions, is an inherently political act, the graphic designer has choices and obligations to engage overtly in civic participation. "Citizenship is not obtained by chance: It is a construction that, never finished, demands we fight for it. It demands commitment, political clarity, coherence, decision" (Freire, 1998:90). Graphic design, whether dealing with distracting details or the broad incremental changes in society, cannot be fully realised apart from citizenship. As graphic designers invest in society, they have difficult choices to extend themselves beyond the profit motive into a far more complex lived experience.

Schmidt concludes:

> For all the academic means we can employ to discuss globalisation, the only way I can see our field [of graphic design] achieving a more substantial understanding of the relationship between globalization and design, is if we first come to the subject with a personal and highly impassioned caring for the welfare of those afflicted by injustice and a respect for those who have fought such inequity. Hello Ms. Hernandez. (Schmidt, 2004:19).

The shift towards personal narrative in graphic design and towards subcultures instead of mass culture, not only highlighted a culture of difference within audiences but also registered a delay in the incorporation of black and female perspectives. The relationship of minorities to the development of graphic design is rarely discussed or documented because of the historic lack of racial and gender diversity in the field (Harris in Berry, 2014:par.6).

Emigre #40 deals with gender issues, interrogating the stereotype of women's bodies.

> We may be familiar with discourses relating to a media culture, which designer's help create, maintain, and on occasion, disrupt. It is commonplace to understand how violence on television, or the images we create of bodies, particularly of women's bodies, may affect our culture in indirect but potent ways (Gromala, 1996:52).

Gromala suggests that experiences of the physical body are shaped and constrained by social stereotypes. "The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society" (Douglas in Gromala, 1996:52). Traditional media tend to reflect the female body in a narrow misogynistic portrayal (Economou, 2013:52). In this text, graphic design's concern shifts from the communication product to broader systemic transformation.

In *Emigre* #43 Vanderlans (1997:2) notes that women are both "subjects and objects" in graphic design. He refers to the ways in which the media have often represented women as objects of the male gaze. As a visual commodity, graphic design is concerned with the

conceit of *spectatorship*, "the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance and visual pleasure" (Mitchell, 1995:16). Economou (2013:57) describes how often women are trivialised in media images through being portrayed as passive, 'decorative' or sexually available together with being pressured by a stereotypical Western definition of beauty. The implications of women's mediated identity affect the practice as well as the product of graphic design. Faced with "an overwhelmingly masculinist graphic design discourse" (Soar, 2002:65) women are increasingly challenging assumptions and gender stereotypes within the discipline.

Emigre #43 published Triggs' (1997:23) perspective, revisiting how the personal is political, how it equates to female politics:

> Traditionally, it has been female artists who have dealt specifically with ideas of feminism, representation of the female body, the male gaze, the body as a personal exploration and collective redefinition. Female designers who want to base their work on political activism used the 'emotional' impact offered by non client-based work. Many women drew upon their design skills in an attempt to engage with personal or female politics, voicing their concerns using graphic languages and techniques.

In this way, *Emigre* highlights the voices of women that use the power of visual communication to dispel gender myths. The narratives of human struggle, increasingly prominent within networked contemporary society, imply an intimacy with social concerns. *Emigre* #34 proposes that younger designers are "immersed in political issues from AIDS to homelessness" (Margolin, 1995 :50). Graphic designers are potentially vital "political advocates", drawing attention to constructive work that develops within communities that goes unnoticed or ignored because it doesn't have an "authority in its visual language" (Grant in Poynor, 2013:par.9). The visual language of the graphic designer, in this sense, is expected to repeat the effective strategies of commercial graphic design for the delivery of alternative forms of socio-political messages.

An interview with Dutch designer Thomas Castro in *Emigre* #45 asserts: "We must strive to make design accessible to all levels of society" (Castro in Barendse, 1998:52). In this text, Castro challenges the tendency for design to relate to a knowing minority, a "circle of peers". He refutes the idea that graphic design for a broader audience implies a process of simplifying and generalising design. Expressing his aspiration to design in concert with an audience rather than "from a pedestal", Castro anticipates current design strategies that replace hierarchical communication with dialogue, participation and "new modes of exchange and the sharing and pooling of under-utilised social resources" (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2015:8). He anticipates the production of safe spaces and empathetic frameworks for dialogue with diverse communities rather than design for idealised communities. Design, in this sense, is undergoing "a shift from the design of discrete objects and 'things' to

relationships, interactions and experiences *for* and *within* complex social systems" (Irwin, Tonkinwise & Kossoff, 2015:3). The assumption of access also implies that the design confronts issues of racism, sexism and class inherent within all levels of society. This text thus incorporates (or strives towards) a deeper understanding of the dynamics of social complexity.

And finally*, Emigre #65* notes: "For graphic design to evolve a critical discourse, it must shift from a preoccupation with styles to questions of representation, agency and human values" (Cabianca, 2003:124). *Emigre*'s coverage of graphic design's investment in social and political issues is thus frequent and detailed. Vanderlans (2009b:par.29) observes that:

> Everything you do, every action, has an effect on others. It just so happens that the actions of designers can have significant effects on people due to the fact that our work often demands that people take action. It intends to influence them. It's the nature of the beast. And in that sense I believe design is a political act.

The placement of graphic design as a political act, as alert to social injustice, gender inequalities and progressive concerns has far-reaching implications for current debate surrounding the assertion of human values. Set against the preferred neutrality of graphic design in the marketplace, set against the thrust of a detached consumerism, *Emigre* was a radical voice that genuinely anticipated a contemporary shift towards a more humanising discourse.

4.3.5 Graphic Design representing speculative futures

In an article entitled *"*Tuning up*" in Emigre #*67, Inciong (2004:92) asserts the need to contemplate the future:

> As we continue to fall headlong into the market's velvet embrace, we leave behind values and concerns that make our work a force for positive change. This is an enormous price to pay for the steady stream of comforts granted us by a market pleased to know we are on its side….To operate so insularly prompts me to ask: to whom are we speaking and what are we saying? How (pardon the Modernist cliché) are we to contribute to the future?

A further article in the same edition looks critically at Terry Irvin's essay "A Crisis in Perception" and quotes her as saying:

> I don't think it will be the politicians or the economists or the businessmen who will solve the problems of pollution, loss of biodiversity and indigenous cultures, poverty or war and violence. The design of a new reality may be called for, which doesn't mean creating a 'fix' for our current structure (Irvin in Nakamura, 2004:55).

The intention to "contribute to the future" or to "design a new reality" speaks to the debate between posing questions that critique existing challenges or envisioning a future that

escapes them. These ideas, in a more complex form, are part of a contemporary debate. Speculative design evokes "the unmerciful tension between the poetic and the pragmatic" (Ansari, 2015:par.1). Imagined futures may be conceived as vital, critical interrogations of our current society or they may function as an abstract distraction from existing social disparities. Ansari (2015:par.6) confronts "the artificial separation in critical design discourse between futuring and problem solving. This is a false distinction. All acts of poiesis, of making, configure and change our reality, enabling certain future arrangements and shutting down others". He argues that designers that deal with pressing social challenges are "explicitly involved in the act of imagining alternative political, social and economic arrangements" (Ansari, 2015:par.7).

Speculative design, while a derivative of the academic domain, effectively reflects and potentially operates in a world with unparalleled diversity. Ansari makes the point that the designers' contrasting lived experience and environment influences not only what and how the future is imagined, but also its contradictions:

> Where I come from, we are already balanced on a knife's edge – the existential threats to humanity that have become a staple trope of dystopian design futuring are a perceptible and concrete thing instead of existing in the abstract for us… extremes in unpredictable climate, the rise of ethnic and religious fascism, the increasing takeover of public spaces and institutions by corporations, the shrinking space for radical politics and intellectual debate, the growing gap between the working class and the elite, growing populations that are already massive: these are not some semi-distant futures or theoretical exercises, where problems have yet to be discovered, framed, explored, and turned into prescriptions and provocations – we are already living these futures as part of our everyday lived experience. The crises in design in the Global North are the crises of the abstract framed as possibilities, as opportunities, as futures. Our crises in the Global South are the crises of the concrete present (Ansari, 2015:par.4).

It may be concluded that what is required, is for speculative design to emerge from the bedrock of citizenship. Future imagination needs to take into account the manifold experiences of communities both privileged and oppressed.

The initiative of speculative design, while born in privileged circles, has relevance to and potential widening for all communities (Hunt, 2015:51:34); its deep investigative and creative imperative must be applied equally to the imaginary of disadvantaged or oppressed communities precisely because they most urgently deserve an alternative future. Cunningham (2015:par.15) points to the need to find the interstices between imaginative detachment and grim social realism, noting: "It takes a kind of luxury, mostly alien to the oppressed, to burrow down blindly into the colourless mysteries of existence". The privilege of futurism is always interfaced with society's present moral challenges. "These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond, only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they

transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment" (Bhabha, 1994:6).

Speculative design is a means of clarifying and amplifying complex social concerns. Antonelli (2015:10:36) encourages the imaginative and fictional impetus of speculative design versus the pragmatism of immediate application. It has the potential, she argues, to be instrumental in guiding and anticipating society's moral compass. It equally has the potential to bring into focus societal fears, dilemmas, debates, questions and provocations, representing a diversity of life experience. "Speculative Design makes proposals that digest large complex issues surrounding our futures into tangible designs for debate" (Ma, 2014:par.1).

When speculative design is playful, ambiguous and evasive in the genre of *design noir*, its influence reflects the gestures of art and fiction. Ansari (2015:par.7) notes the difference between the fictional "what if" and the transformative "how else" that "emphasises a connection to current systems and structures where the principal project is framed not as an aesthetic, exploratory, intellectual exercise but as a political, transformative, active enterprise". While both interrogate a future, the former (fictional) involves imaginative potential while the latter actively defines change. It may be concluded that the tension between different worldviews and knowledge systems is necessarily ambiguous and inherently productive. Alongside dealing with the present that is in itself a transitional social reality, anticipating the future is conducive to both negotiating real conflicts and arousing idealism. The resurgent interest in speculative design is both a mirror and a catalyst for what humanity is facing in social, environmental and economic paradigms. For the privileged in society it responds to a characteristic sense of "some kind of imminent implosion" (Sueda, 2012:20) and for the poor and oppressed it describes an experience of discord in the present moment (Cunningham, 2015:16). Differences in speculative methodology are thus partly ameliorated by self-reflexivity, by designers acknowledging the role played by their own class, race, and gender privileges and their own ideological commitments in shaping future ideation. The indulgence of speculative design, however, can never fully circumvent a vivid juxtaposition with social inequities across the world (Miller, 2014:9).

Speculative design escapes reality as it restructures it; and the moment of escape is vital to provide the space to envisage something profoundly different. It proposes an alternative course of action to the blinding impression that "Design no longer envisions, it advertises. Design no longer informs or educates, it blindly promotes the accumulation of wealth and power" (Ewan & Brody in Poynor, 2013:par.8). It is in spite of and precisely because the

world today has "so little sense of a future" (Hunt, 2015:51:34) that it is increasingly vital for skilled designers, necessarily drawn from diverse communities, to be radically visionary.

As the texts by Inciong and Irvin in *Emigre* leave aside the present and engage a concern for the future, they anticipate speculative design but do not fully articulate or envision it. They do, however, assert the need for design intellectuals to be critical of existing circumstances and to respond to that need through conceiving of a transformative potential actualised by graphic designers. It may be concluded that speculative futures was not a compelling focus of *Emigre*. The magazine imagined the need for graphic designers to consider the future, suggesting the need to design a new reality and reflecting a vision of sustainability which critiques consumerism, without fully engaging, however, with the complexity or practical synthesis of the idea as it is grappled with in contemporary design.

4.4 Analysing *Dot Dot Dot* magazine

Dot Dot Dot was published, fifteen years after *Emigre's* first edition, in 2000. The editors chose to advertise *Dot Dot Dot* in the penultimate pages of *Emigre*, so they contemplated the possibility of a shared readership. They were, however, independently published magazines.

4.4.1 Graphic design as interdisciplinary

Dot Dot Dot magazine provided a persuasive and an authoritative space for graphic design as an interdisciplinary phenomenon:

> From about issue #4 onwards, which is when DDD started to really change, we stopped thinking in terms of "what pieces should a graphic design magazine contain" and started thinking "whatever we decide to include makes it a graphic design magazine, if that's what we still choose to call it" (Bilak in Vanderlans, 2005b:par.12).

In the process, the editors of *Dot Dot Dot* magazine reimagined a blend of disciplines under the umbrella of graphic design. *Dot Dot Dot* "recontextualised graphic design" (Siegel, 2004a:67). Curated, highlighted and published in a magazine, the original boundaries of graphic design become the starting point for new forms of articulation and integration. *Dot Dot Dot* as a defined graphic design magazine, in this sense, was not simply interdisciplinary in content – the carrier of the message of graphic design as an interdisciplinary field – but embodied the message itself; it constructed a new profile of graphic design (Barendse, 1998:50; Siegel, 2004a:67).

Shields (2010:69) argues that the most interesting publications are those that "sit on a frontier between genres". *Dot Dot Dot* magazine lives in the interstices in three compelling ways that are discussed below:

Firstly, *Dot Dot Dot* implied a change of attitude about graphic design's relationship to art and the germination of graphic design as "a legitimate subject for the traditional art gallery" (Purcell, 2011b:par.1). Graphic images that were published over time in the magazine were revisited as collections and re-envisioned in exhibitions, straddling both the elite quality of an art gallery and the inherently democratic quality of its design origin. This had a particular impact. In an interview in *Dot Dot Dot* #16*,* Osbaldeston (2008:42) declares that art functions to witness and articulate encounters with the world. Art is an interrogative space. The concept of graphic design coalesced with art thus significantly reflects a shift from graphic design as an object within the world to graphic design as an observer of the world. This emphasis in graphic design anticipates an engagement with the issues of the surrounding world. This fusing of graphic design and art predicted the interrogative interests and agency of social design alongside esoteric argument. As graphic design became interdisciplinary it

increasingly absorbed human-centred concerns, as well as intellectual playfulness, from other fields of study.

As the editors of *Dot Dot Dot* revisited, refreshed and recycled the content of the magazine as artwork, they rendered the material indefinite and interconnected. They exhibited work that originated in different contexts – graphic design, interactive design contexts, writing or other contexts – as carefully framed "waste prints" left over from design projects. Each context redefines the work as it is placed in new relationships. Together with the work were extremely long captions "which don't actually explain the work but maybe complicate it, maybe draw it out or maybe work in a similar way to the blazen of a coat of arms where the writing has equal weight to the print" (Reinfurt, 2009:39:02). The outcome is unclear, unsettled, indefinite meanings. The conclusion, as indecisive as it is, is of an overt multiplicity of thought-provoking messages.

Secondly, *Dot Dot Dot* expressed interdisciplinarity through borrowing from the abstract, intuitive explanations of chaos theory in mathematical and scientific disciplines. In an article entitled "Blind man in dark room looking for black cat that's not there", Huberman (2009:32) outlines that the human mind involves analogy, not pure logic, and that knowledge involves speculation and the inexplicable, not simply conclusive "truth". The implications of this are that knowledge is more interesting as a weight of curiosity than fact, and that modernity celebrated what John Keats (in Huberman, 2009:32) referred to as "negative capability", "the ability to tolerate, and even enjoy, the experience of confusion or doubt". The experience of not-knowing is always a part of how knowledge works.

> All axiomatic theories (top-down explanations) are necessarily incomplete and the 'truth' will always have a hole in it. In other words, all mathematics – even simple mathematics – always relies on at least one assumption that cannot be proven within its own system. To restate this theorem (outside the language of numbers) would be to claim that it is fundamental to the nature of any explanation that it always contains an element that remains unexplained and not understood (Huberman, 2009:33).

Bailey (2009:1) of *Dot Dot Dot* says of the pragmatic method: "The ongoing process of *attempting to understand* – though never really understanding completely – is *absolutely productive*. The relentless attempt to understand is what keeps any practice moving forward". The intention is "*only an attitude of orientation*, of looking away from first things (preconceptions, principles, categories and supposed necessities) and towards last things (results, fruits, and consequences)".

Graphic design is conventionally explained and acquires its meaning through its differential relation to art, literature, science and mathematics. Reinfurt (2009:42:05) suggests that the interstices – the "running room between clearly defined modes of practice" between projects,

the blurring of boundaries between performance, catalogue, magazine and journal – are fertile areas precisely because they cannot be easily named and categorised. According to the content of *Dot Dot Dot*, graphic design thus coalesces legitimately and ironically with other contexts and disciplines; in a position of scepticism, of doubt, of sometimes philosophical clarity and sometimes cynical distance. Bailey (in Sueda, 2006:par.6) comments "I've tried to explain elsewhere how I don't really see graphic design as deserving of being treated as an independent, navel-gazing discipline. It exists entirely in relation to other subjects".

Thirdly, *Dot Dot Dot* embraces film, literature and poetry. Much of the narrative content in these genres is an indirect pursuit of truths, an unsettling and restless engagement. Resisting closure is a recurring element. In *Dot Dot Dot,* much of the literature features vague plots that accomplish little and the reader, in completing the ideas, is "lured to fill in the large gaps", and as Ammarati (2009:8) suggests, "[to] engage in the kind of overinterpretation or outright invention" of a critic.

The unresolved narrative has an important part to play in modern society. As the information age has burgeoned, as capitalism has nurtured the media, communication has been substituted by, and is confronted by, information. Walter Benjamin (1936:101) suggests that audiences pay little attention because "no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation". *Dot Dot Dot* returns the reader to storytelling, to "evidence of the profound perplexity of living", in full ironic cognisance of its discomforts.

Notwithstanding the productive role of information, at a concentrated level, facts are also indifferent. Information is often short-lived.

> In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it… The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him [sic] to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks (Benjamin, 1936:101).

The literature curated in *Dot Dot Dot* concentrates the attention of the reader. As Shields (2010:69) suggests "What I want is the real world, with all its hard edges, but the real world fully imagined and fully written, not merely reported". In this process, *Dot Dot Dot* embraces an imaginative, enquiring sensibility within the purview of graphic design; a tendency towards the associative rather than the rational, to the subjective rather than the objective, and to the notion of complicating rather than explaining meaning. It may be argued that these qualities are precisely those which situate critical design as thought-provoking in the present day.

Interdisciplinarity and the accompanying widening of graphic design expression is thus fully realised in *Dot Dot Dot*. This magazine forms a critique of banal market instrumentalism and provides alternative avenues for graphic design thinking and focus. Its content anticipates a contemporary interest in the role of critical design and narrative in graphic design, a modern easing of the friction between fine art and design, and a readiness to gain from surrounding disciplines that inform graphic design and the intellectual world. *Dot Dot Dot* thus positions graphic design as a cultural system, it becomes a relative part of modernity as an interdisciplinary form. It confirms a fresh, collaborative profile for graphic design.

4.4.2 Graphic design as multicultural

Dot Dot Dot improvises on and simultaneously critiques the convention of a single editorial mouthpiece in magazines. As *Dot Dot Dot* #13 curates three editorial voices that move backward and forward in time, it convincingly reflects the complex, mingling nexus of attitudes and opinions that characterise social (and graphic design) discourse. It suggests an active provoking of dialogue while acknowledging an active audience prepared to navigate its content. It also juxtaposes voices and personalities as part of a wry critique on celebrity, media and power, transmitting and simultaneously collapsing a sense of continuous time. Multiple voices are present in the same instant from across centuries. Finally, it signifies a return to the personal, to the idea of individual interpretation, at the heart of multicultural perspectives. The concept of simultaneous editorials revisits the works of the Middle Ages where the text was habitually framed by a number of interpretations (de Certeau, 1984:xxiii).

A mix of voices is rendered more complicated through the recognition of its potentially divergent, multicultural audience. The concept of the author, designer and audience as complex, participative entities in graphic design opens up the space not only for difference but also for uncertainty, for ambiguity. As argued, the individual is relational, inevitably social and interactive, and is the convergence of "an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality" of determinations (de Certeau, 1984:xii). The interests of the individual are multiple and varied. *Dot Dot Dot* #20 expresses this plurality, and uncertainty, as a fetish in the postmodern world. In an article by David (2010:34), multiculturalism is situated as yet another neologism:

> The fetishistic cult of ambiguity has many names and faces, and the obvious fact of its multiple faciality or multifacetedness ("ambi" is Latin for "both", so ambiguous really only means two-faced) is among the first to be named in its defense, soon to be followed by the different and the dubious, the fissured, fractured and fragmented, the hybrid, hesitation and heterogeneity… the intermediary, interstitial and non-linear, the liminal, the mobile and multiplicity (and many more neologisms that start with multi-, ranging from multicultural to multinational), periphery, pluralisation and polysemy (and many more neologisms that start with poly-, ranging from polymorphous-perverse to

polyphony), the rhizome and the reticular, the situational transience and shifting, fuzzy logic of all nuance and becoming (David, 2010:34).

As a product originally of Europe*, Dot Dot Dot* expresses a less contentious approach to diverse cultures. Assertions of politically inflected racial hierarchies expressed in American culture were less prevalent in European culture where, until recently, ethnic consciousness was relatively absent (Hall, 1992:105). *Dot Dot Dot* thus places multiculturalism as an emerging part of design discourse, while advancing it as an embodiment of a postmodern fixation. It is situated in a network of new, abstruse terms and is subject to a critique as a concept, rather than for its pragmatic implications.

At another level, *Dot Dot Dot* illustrates and embodies multiculturalism through publishing an editorial edition that simultaneously represent a variety of perspectives. As *Dot Dot Dot* #13 curates three editorial voices that move backward and forward in time, the publishers do not simply coalesce time; they question *if* the traditional cliché of a single editorial voice is valid in a necessary dialogue, and simultaneously make the reader aware of *how* graphic design conventions are contrived in a Western, liberal, possessive-individualist society. The integration of simultaneous perspectives equally anticipates a contemporary fractal network that reinforces the exigencies of multiculturalism.

4.4.3 Environmental sustainability in graphic design

At the juncture of the new millennium, when *Dot Dot Dot* was first published, a new level of gravitas emerged. The idea of scarcity informed an interpretation of the economy, the political landscape and perceptions of the environment. "As growth was the defining condition of the 20th century, so scarcity is set to define the 21st" (Goodbun, Klein, Rumpfhuber & Till, 2014:1). Goodbun et al suggest that scarcity is not only accentuated as an inescapable outcome of growth and resource exploitation or global economic fragility, but is also constructed repeatedly through consumerism and the creation of desire. A conscious acknowledgement of scarcity informed not only the impetus of environmental sustainability but also exerted an influence on layout and design preferences exemplified in *Dot Dot Dot*.

The limited print run of *Dot Dot Dot* is a conscious attempt to respond to post-Fordist sustainable principles. Dexter Sinister, publisher of the last six editions of *Dot Dot Dot*, was originally set up to model a "just-in-time" economy of print production, using a small local printer and distributing to a small, intimate audience that was purposefully counter to the contemporary assembly-line realities of large-scale publishing (Reinfurt in Ryan, 2010:par.10). Production strategies avoided waste by working on-demand, utilising local cheap machinery, considering alternate distribution strategies, and collapsing conventional

distinctions between editing, design, production, and distribution into one efficient activity (Bailey and Reinfurt, 2011:par.2).

Dot Dot Dot #15 comments on a "high performance culture" that produces unsustainable levels of waste:

> We live and work in economies based on the concept of "just-in-time" production – and "just-in-time" usually means things have to be ready in no time at all. Who sets the urgent pace according to which all others are measuring their progress? Or rather: Who sets the pace of planned obsolescence that keeps people buying the same product in slightly upgraded designs over and over again, allowing industry to thrive on the constant over-production of what will essentially be tomorrow's waste? (Verwoert, 2007:98)

In response, Dexter Sinister explored "not only alternative modes of production, but also other means – or ecologies – of circulation" (Verwoert, 2007:98). The pages of *Dot Dot Dot* have no urgency for the new, they sometimes return to an article already published. The decision to republish articles, to keep them in circulation beyond a point of planned obsolescence, forms a part of Dexter Sinister's critique of the unsustainable preference for the latest commodity.

Traditional commercial graphic design, large print runs and the drive of consumerism is the antithesis of environmental sustainability. It is noteworthy that the editors of *Dot Dot Dot* were very alert to issues of environmental sensitivity and put a sustainable ethic into practice at every level of publishing, production and circulation, including (wittily) charging advertising based on the incremental amount of ink used.

4.4.4 Graphic design as social and political agency

Experimental Jetset (2001:4) in *Dot Dot Dot* #3 assert:

> We believe that abstraction, a movement away from realism but towards reality, is the ultimate form of engagement. We believe that to focus on the physical dimensions of design, to create a piece of design as a functional entity, as an object in itself, is the most social and political act a designer can perform.

Focusing on the material, functional qualities of design, these designers assert a critique. They avoid the immediately political. The more overtly political the work, suggest Experimental Jetset (2008:par.7), the more it "reduces the power of estrangement and the radical, transcendent goals of change". Graphic design is not revolutionary because it is designed for the working class, Experimental Jetset assert, rather, it gains a revolutionary potential through the way content is interpreted as form. They argue that both design and anti-design use the same gestures. This perspective of design, albeit valid, may, however, be construed as unassuming as "it lacks the antagonistic charge of designating a clear

enemy, which is the *sine qua non* of every effective mobilising political formula" (Zizek, 2006:par.22).

Experimental Jetset, in their focus on the material, oppose but at the same time reinvent the materialist impetus of contemporary society. Design, in their hands, becomes a critical intellectual exercise regarding materialism rather than a potentially instrumental human-centred imperative. McGregor (2003:par.2) illuminates that:

> In a consumer society, the act of consuming eventually leads to materialism, defined as a culture where material interests are primary and supersede other social goals. People living in a consumer culture attempt to satisfy social, emotional, and spiritual needs with material things. This materialism eventually co-opts people's physical lives, community, and spirit because it gives a misleading sense of being in control and secure, in the short term.

Graphic design may have political content, but a context that conflicts with its meaning influences the outcome of its message. Much work invites and allows political agency at the same time as it disavows it, offering "a kind of difference that doesn't make a difference of any kind" (Hall, 1992:106). It is disseminated and consumed as an abstract idea rather than with a purpose. Cultural critic Susan Sontag in *Dot Dot Dot #7* (in Giampetro, 2003:10) notes:

> [Groundbreaking work] is defined as revolutionary, even though, contrary to popular standards by which the merits of politically revolutionary acts are measured – popular appeal – the avant-garde artist's acts have tended to confine the audience for art [and design] to the socially privileged, to trained culture consumers.

In the first instance, Sontag acknowledges revolutionary principles, but brings to them some of the cultural habits of a much more parochial movement, an elitist audience of "trained culture consumers". The notion of "culture" here is once more conceived of as a relatively neutral entity, a privileged elite functioning as arbiters of "good taste". Sontag critiques the underlying paradox; the arbiters of good taste usually signify stasis, revolutionary work premises change. Her critique implies the desirability of transformative social and political action.

Sontag's article suggests that as a collection, with their meaning altered irrevocably, the revolutionary character of political posters is reviewed in an art gallery, exhibition, on the internet, or in a magazine. In the process, their original intention becomes abstracted. "Their abstraction and formality allows them (to some extent at least) to be 'disembedded' from their sites of origin and re-embedded elsewhere" (Giddens in Garrety & Badham, 2004:209). As a curated series, Sontag argues, political posters circulate (without question) already mature traditions of what constitutes good design in a comfortable innocuous feedback loop to the privileged. At a second level, the conventions of protest are used (protest as an

aesthetic) without a meaningful outcome (the activity of protest). The imaginary of protest is consumed as a contradiction, a dispassionate visual artifact.

A direct reversal of this idea can be found in a later article in *Dot Dot Dot*, a subtle fiction of dissent provides a knowing antithesis. The story of Ernst Bettler in issue #18 describes a designer who has a "thirst for subversion" who designs a set of apparently dispassionate visual artifacts – posters for a pharmaceuticals company – but places them in a series that renders them politically dissident in context. It dawns on the readers that the posters' messages are clandestine, concealed as innocent individual designs that receive the full approval of the company, only to emerge defiantly as a political commentary on the immoral activities of the company, that results in public outrage and the company being gratifyingly brought to trial.

> On hundreds of sites around Burgwald and neighbouring Sumisdorf, the posters appeared in fours. In the first a clowning child's body made an 'N'; in the second a woman's head was bowed inside the 'A'-shaped triangle of her forearms. An old man's contortions in the third poster ('that took forever to shoot') sketched a 'Z'. No prizes for guessing that the girl in the final plakat stood defiantly still, her almost silhouetted profile as stiff as, well, a letter 'I' for example (Wilson, 2005:16).

Ernst Bettler, a role model of justified deception and moral presence, protests his innocence when challenged and receives compensation from the company he has masterfully discredited. With fatigue from pages of critique and disempowering realism, the reader enthusiastically colludes in Bettler's project and the narrative "stands as a testament to design's power to change things" (Wilson, 2005:16). The article marvellously affirms the designer's potential influence in society. It judiciously reminds the designer that the apparent estrangement between social design and graphic design, between meaningful design (social agency) and effective graphic language (aesthetics), is a miscalculation.

> Historically, there are those whose work has pushed the boundaries of graphic language but has not set out to change the world, and there are others whose primary motivation has been shock or social change rather than concern with any intricacies of form and function. Bettler's importance stems partly from the fact that he has been able to sit comfortably in both camps at once (Wilson, 2005:16).

The either/or polarity between producing beautiful designs and being a powerful influence through socially committed design has served as a false dichotomy within graphic design. At its roots in the 1900s, graphic design's purpose was "to help influence and challenge society in both a social and political sphere" (Kreisworth, 2015:par.1). Bettler's narrative, while a fictional account, brings graphic design full circle.

Dot Dot Dot #13 includes a commentary by designer Milton Glaser (1995 in Giampetro, 2006:180) who confirms that graphic designers need to wrestle with moral and social values:

We may be facing the most significant design problem of our lives – how to restore the "good" in good design. Or, put in another way, how to create a new narrative for our work that restores its moral centre, creates a new sense of community, and re-establishes the continuity of generous humanism that is our heritage.

The social and political content of graphic design in *Dot Dot Dot* is thus interrogated as a dispassionate conceptual idea on the one hand, and celebrated as a conceivable force for change on the other. While viewing political and social agency from a number of critical vantage points, the texts question and confront the difference between criticism, protest, activism and a sense of moral focus. Essentially the writers in *Dot Dot Dot* fulfil the role of provocateurs.

4.4.5 Graphic design representing speculative futures

A trajectory into a speculative future assumes a linear conception of time. The premise of *Dot Dot Dot,* exemplified in issue #7 and issue #16, is that time is expressed within ideas and design work as a simultaneous network:

> The project understands history as a dynamic, non-linear process where now and then coexist. Based on non-dogmatic plurality, this design strategy involves building directly on existing solutions rather than chasing novelty (Bilak, 2003:18).

> I tried to envisage it from a multiple perspective of time, abandoning the points of 'before', 'after' and 'infinity' simultaneously (Malasauskas, 2008:67).

Appropriating graphics and writing from the past within altered contexts, *Dot Dot Dot* suggests an alternative scholarship towards graphic design futures; rather than a procession of ideas and styles into the future in a chronological pattern, the narrative of things can be a formal sequence – a single problem with early, middle and late solutions in history in a circular, intermittent pattern (Reinfurt, 2009:19:25). An idea or object thus is conceived of as a signal that has "gone on a trajectory through things" (Reinfurt, 2009:37:19).

Reinfurt (2009:36:46) of *Dot Dot Dot* refers to a consciousness of "signals" rather than historical progressions in the world. Explicitly linear time is replaced by a simultaneous network where "the rest of time emerges only in signals relayed to us at this instant by innumerable stages and unexpected bearers" (Kubler in Reinfurt, 2009:15:35). Reinfurt suggests that we only know the past or future by the artefacts that signal a past existence, which are accessed through the interruptions of "noise, distance and interference of reading it now versus reading it then" that mitigates the signal (Reinfurt, 2009:16:21). "The nature of a signal is that it is neither here nor now, but there and then" (Kubler in Reinfurt, 2009:16:40). This concept of simultaneous time anticipates that slowness and attention are a rewarding alternative to the pursuit of newness. This perspective does not leave an easy

pathway to escape into the concept of the future. Speculative futures here do not reflect the ultimate desire for something new, but rather gather the collective integrity of past, present and future.

In *Dot Dot Dot* #13, an article entitled "On 1984 and beyond" offers a retrospective of a mix of science fiction writers invited (in 1963) by *Playboy* magazine to envision a future society circa 1984. Pethick (2006:166) writes:

> Where George Orwell's 1949 vision of the future sees a dystopian totalitarian regime, *Playboy*'s group of writers see immanent sexual, scientific and social liberation. At the same time they appear steeped in political tensions and social and ideological anxieties surrounding the Cold War, their visions of the future simultaneously unfold fears of the present.

These ideas were resurrected in a live reading and screenplay in 2005. As a reconstruction in the present, the article outlines how these ideas are revisited with the benefit of hindsight, a "forwards-and-backwards vision" of 1963, 1984 and 2005 (Pethick, 2006:167). What is imagined as a future is already a part of the past, and the predictions, fears and fictions form the object of interest and critique. Speculative futures as concept and process are complicated rather than clarified, viewed from a distance rather than set in motion.

An example of the fertile quality of speculative futures occurs in a later edition. Huberman (2009:35) in *Dot Dot Dot* #19 discusses the role of artwork as an inventive, speculative space, with the potential to "invalidate entrenched patterns of understanding":

> […] let us recognise the importance of not understanding a work of art. A work of art opens up that world of non-knowledge and helps to make sure we don't lose sight of it, keeping us curious and actively speculating. Artists don't solve problems, they invent new ones.

The relevance of this encounter "is directly proportional to our ability to convert the crisis of insecurity into the fertile potential of change" (Huberman, 2009:35). The future is characterised by the value of not-knowing. The process of speculating is an exercise in inventing, of inherent transformation and curiosity at the point of materialising ideas. Speculative design, this text suggests, with its focus on critical change and its preference for the inventive, has an antecedent in the art world.

The thrust of speculative ideas, suggests Leckey (2010:30) in *Dot Dot Dot* #20, is a corollary of an "interconnected global – and cosmic – cybernetic system". He writes:

> As all our goods and communications become increasingly abstracted from their physical forms we begin to find ourselves moving closer to the realm of thought than the world of things. We're moving up into the cloud, building real castles in the air. And up there, on-air, free from the gravitational pull of the earth down below it is dreams and desires that have greater power than cause and effect (Leckey, 2010:30).

Dot Dot Dot #15 explains that this equals an unevenness in relationships across the world:

> Today, time is becoming progressively disjointed as the "developed" countries push ahead into a science fiction economy of dematerialised labour and virtual capital – and simultaneously push the "developing" countries centuries back in time by outsourcing manual and industrial labour that imposes working conditions on them from the times of early industrialisation (Verwoert, 2007:99).

These texts suggest that the future cannot be conceived of as a distant abstraction but rather needs to be conceived of as a set of relationships with an urgent immediacy. The potential to think, to conceptualise a future, however invests in an ability to explore dreams and desires. A speculative future is always away from the present. *Dot Dot Dot* thus interrogates the values of future speculative design as something that is both urgently immediate and significantly removed from the sometimes-oblivious quality of being immersed within the existing world. A speculative future is always unfinished, incomplete, in the process of coming into being (until viewed retrospectively). Yet it is impossible to refuse that it has an ambivalent relationship to existing reality. It is a contradictory space, a place of contestation that cannot truly escape the vicissitudes of existing conflict or congruence in the societal present. It makes demands on the present day.

In recording an interpretation of the future the graphic designer situates the work in relationship to the present and in relationship to memory. The process of simplifying and romanticising, distances complex reality into an unexacting visualisation. As Malasauskas (2008:67) confirms, humanity still longs for "an unimaginable future", a visual image that does not interrogate the principles and assumptions that govern it. "Societies, like individuals, sometimes need positive illusions" (Tenner, 2010:par.8). An imaginative adventure into the future, albeit illusionary, motivates individuals to prefer certain projects in the present. Yet speculative futures are not confined to the nostalgic ideal, they may anticipate the outcomes of systemic weaknesses and societal flaws. Speculative futures, when they reflect failure or discord, provide a space for critique. The disillusionment of arriving at a predicted future with harsh realities still intact or spiralled beyond control potentially stirs the impetus for change in the current social and political environment. This is the logic of speculative design, that is interested not simply in visualising a future, whether flawed or ideal, but in exploring its veridical consequences.

In conclusion, imaginary futures amplify the realm of ideas. Virtual cyberspace has enabled an increasing level of comfort with fictional idea-generation rather than the world of the material object. These projections may be idealised or may form a critique through creating a sense of discord. Futurism assumes a linear trajectory of time, whereas an alternative viewpoint is that there is potential to express time more desirably as circulating around and through a particular idea, problem or object. This perspective encourages an awareness of

the profound knowledge existing in the past and present, the merit of building directly on existing solutions rather than chasing novelty. *Dot Dot Dot* comments on the pressured pursuit of the new. The concept of simultaneous time anticipates that slow discerning attention is a gratifying alternative to the striving for newness. The pursuit of knowledge is always moderated by the expansiveness of ambiguity and not-knowing rather than the narrow margins of crisp clarity. In this way, the articles in *Dot Dot Dot* express the ingredients of speculative design as an integrated, continuous and sentient form of critique.

4.5 Synthesis: how *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* contributed to contemporary graphic design perspectives

Criticism has an evaluative function, bringing to consciousness the meanings and consequences of ideas and practices. Critical consciousness potentially underpins a humanising ethic, a process of acknowledging social, political, and economic contradictions, and taking action against the oppressive aspects of reality. These contradictions are confronted, or at least the subject of discourse, in the exigencies of multiculturalism, collaboration with other matured disciplines, social and political agency, environmental sustainability and speculative futures.

These critical issues draw graphic designers nearer to the problematic of real human engagement and environmental limits. While commercial graphic design is arguably equally involved with the imaginary of human potential, it celebrates human life in a way that is habitually deceptive and fabricates commodities that are entirely isolated from the complexities of their human production. A deeper interpretation of the production of commercial graphic design is that it invites unbridled consumption as a substitute for social and political engagement. The spectacle of consumerism serves to mask and compensate for social injustices and inequalities. It is a kind of anaesthetic, an avoidance of the complexity of what is happening in the world. In contrast, critical design focuses on human diversity, societal discord and the potential transformation of the wider socio-political environment. It is concerned with critical enquiry, with penetrating the "connective tissue" of graphic design and the ideological assumptions of consumerism and the status quo. In this way, critical design unsettles and disrupts the disempowering narrow focus on profit margins and the decontextualised consumerism typical of commercial graphic design practice.

While commercial graphic design is an existing, and necessary, part of economic development, it needs to be attenuated by ethical and critical opposition. Critical design is a (contemporary) intellectual field that integrates critique as part of design practice, approaching transformational concerns that traditional design is inadequate to address. The AIGA preferred designer of 2015 reflects designers who are attentive not just to the object of

graphic design communication but also with its consequences within relational systems and societal structures. The precedent set by *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* contributed to contemporary graphic design perspectives in the following ways:

4.5.1 Interdisciplinarity

While *Emigre* imagined and forecast the concept of interdisciplinarity in its articles, *Dot Dot Dot* put integration with other disciplines into practice. For example, *Dot Dot Dot* consciously published philosophy, art, physics and sociology (among others) as part of the interests of graphic design. Interdisciplinarity brought a practical and theoretical widening of the realms of possibility of graphic design. The influence of art, literature, philosophy, mathematics and sociology was not only evident in the immediate mix of new ideas, skills and preferences in collaboration, but equally in the theoretical maturity of these disciplines that influenced the how and why of design practice. Informed by the intentions of art and the humanities, for example, graphic design thinking potentially engages an acute sense of realism that contrasts with a historically dominant preference for idealised imagery. A sense of realism does not usually sit easily with the aspirations of commercial design and thus it is evident that, as interdisciplinarity moves from the margins to the core of contemporary graphic design practice, the immediacy of commercial intention is equally potentially moderated. With the influence of the humanities, graphic design naturally gravitates towards a more human-centred, cultural and socio-political voice that situates consumerism and commerce within a particularly critical frame.

Ultimately, the influence of other disciplines introduced graphic designers to systems thinking. Graphic design expanded from giving form to specific objects to approaching systems with open-ended frameworks for intervention. Attention to systems begins an engagement with the social and political context of design. The ingredients for social design and critical design are activated within this setting.

4.5.2 Multiculturalism

Emigre reflects the emergence of multiculturalism and acknowledges that Modernism's simplified, authoritative mode of communication has become contentious. Within its pages is the motivation to incorporate cultural human factors that recognise diversity, multiplicity, and flux. The concept of multiculturalism acknowledges diverse cultures, dislodging the idea that communication is directed at a universal, but relatively unknowable, passive audience. The notion of multiculturalism is equally present in the simultaneous editorials of *Dot Dot Dot,* providing a commentary on the ambiguity, uncertainty and diversity of cultural expression. While *Emigre* celebrates multiculturalism, *Dot Dot Dot* provides a wry, and already fatigued,

critique. Through expressing plurality, and ambivalence, as a fetish in the postmodern world it acknowledges its prevalence. No longer conceived of as a cohesive whole, global society reflects a multitude of subjective, shifting perspectives. As multiculturalism invites a celebration of difference, it simultaneously exposes existing cultural stereotypes that signify oppression. Multiculturalism provokes a contested space of social interaction, challenging graphic designers to engage with class, gender, sexual and racialised identities within cultural spaces. Through introducing multiculturalism, *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* thus advance human-centred concerns and anticipate a contemporary critique of the graphic design industry's tendency toward self-referential interest.

4.5.3 Environmental sustainability

Both *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* reflect a concern for environmental sustainability and place the obsessive discarding and renewing of ever-expanding consumerism in a particularly critical frame. Both publications made practical interventions to mitigate environmental waste through the use of recycled paper and a conceptual visual essay critiquing the exigencies of abandoned design tools (*Emigre)*, and the efficient (just-in-time) integration of resources (*Dot Dot Dot*). These publications pose important questions about the unsustainable preference for the latest commodity – anticipating actions and solutions – that are conceived with the welfare of the natural world and future generations in mind.

4.5.4 Social and political agency

Emigre is concerned with critiquing society as provocation for something better. It asserts that design has social repercussions; is an inherently political act. It articulates examples of the realities of social injustice and voices the need for representation, agency and social values. As *Dot Dot Dot* critiques the circumstances in which political agency is disempowered as a dispassionate visual object, it implies the desirability of transformative social and political action. The story of Ernst Bettler, an activist who reveals the Nazi affiliations of his client subversively within the conventions of advertising, confronts the potential for political resistance within the boundaries of graphic design. At the time of their publication, acknowledging that graphic design seeks to be stridently and expediently apolitical, *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* set a precedent for graphic design's engagement with social and political agency.

4.5.5 Speculative futures

Speculative design is a relatively new, thought-provoking field that is emerging particularly in academic circles. It is relatively absent in the content of *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot*. *Emigre* articulates the need for a vision for the future without fully engaging with the practical

synthesis of speculative design or the complexity of the debate that surrounds it. *Dot Dot Dot* expresses the ingredients of speculative design as a never fully known and sentient form of inquiry in continuous time. The materialisation of speculative ideas becomes a historical reference point over time, alongside new imagined futures. Neither publications manifested speculative futures as a strategic, critical tool.

4.5.6 Transformation and contradiction

The productive criticism and potential for a humanising ethic, evident in these five critical issues explored in *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot*, with the exception of speculative futures, positions these publications beyond the abstracted, sometimes oblivious quality of pure commercial design.

Philosopher Albert Camus (1940 in McKee, 2003:60), however, expresses the inherent ambivalence of the commercial and social world: "We know that we live in contradiction, but we also know that we must refuse this contradiction and do what is needed to reduce it" and "We must mend what has been torn apart, make justice imaginable again in a world so obviously unjust". All five critical issues hold the promise of both optimism (at best, transformative social and environmental justice and, at least, the propensity to mitigate severe market values), and cynical reluctance that inhibits progressive human and economic relations. These critical issues are only useful to the degree that they open up room for thinking about graphic design that transcends established limitations. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* characteristically strived to introduce fresh voices, alternative perspectives and progressive avenues of critique, and, within the margins of their limited circulation, challenged and widened the conversations and responsibilities of graphic designers irrevocably. Articles within them express the opportunities, purposes, flaws, wit and acerbic reality that accompanies a mature (expressively human) perspective of graphic design in a contradictory world.

CHAPTER 5

Summation and suggestions for further research

5.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate how criticism in two independent, seminal graphic design magazines contributed towards shifting the dominant habitus of graphic design away from a purely commercial endeavour. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* are recognised for their critical intent and within them are emerging critical issues that have potentially reflected a niche, in which graphic design can operate, beyond consumerism and commerce. The following objectives were formulated in support of this study:

- To establish what the role of graphic design criticism is, so that it is possible to position criticism as a transformative influence in graphic design discourse.

- To examine the ideological power of a consumerist society and the traditional role of the commercial graphic designer.

- To validate *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* as magazines with critical voices.

- To identify five contemporary critical issues in graphic design that reflect a more humanising and environmentally conscious perspective within the discipline.

- To analyse evidence of the emergence or absence of these five contemporary critical issues in *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* that were independent magazines published in the period from 1994 to 2010.

- To determine if critique in *Emigre* magazine and *Dot Dot Dot* magazine anticipated a role for graphic design beyond consumerism and commerce.

5.2 Summary of the preceding chapters

Chapter one discussed the role of criticism in graphic design. Criticism reflects, clarifies, observes, evaluates and urges new ideas. As it establishes a more expansive view of graphic design, criticism is a potential force for change, although it is tempered by the ideological preferences and structures of the status quo.

Chapter two examined how graphic designers, professionals in an established social order, are often pressured to abide by its norms. The traditional profession of graphic design serves the private interests of the client, at the expense of collective interests. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* were concerned with critiquing society and the exigencies of graphic design as provocation for something better.

The context within which *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* circulated, may be understood as enabling, and equally at times obstructing, the repositioning of graphic design priorities. Graphic design, always subject to evolution and transformation, is in a reciprocal relationship with socio-political, environmental and technological changes in the broader environment. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* were at the interstices of Dutch and American visual communication, subject to American preferences for the vernacular that attenuated European models of universal high culture, and influenced by the Dutch assertive sense of the personal and the political in graphic design. Globalisation introduced a proximity to difference and an awareness of minority voices in a constantly changing, plural multitude of individual subjectivities. The introduction of the computer and the advent of the Internet radically changed perceptions of graphic design audiences and the potential for self-published magazines. The designer as author was a natural and emerging side effect of technological progress as well as theoretical shifts in critical scholarship.

Consumerism is in antagonism with social justice; it is a form of personal, social and structural violence. The graphic designer in traditional practice is complacent, or complicit, in celebrating consumerism. Graphic design, an active architect of information, is thus saturated with both apparent and undeclared economic and political intention. To become a conscious and critical spectator of the commercial illusion, to disturb the unconsciously accepted ideology of the dominant status quo, both *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* apply the techniques of defamiliarisation. These radical interventions are in stark contrast with commercial design's nescient, persuasive intentions.

Emigre was an award-winning publication with a larger circulation than *Dot Dot Dot,* although both magazines expressed an experimental approach to graphic design. The design of *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* is very consciously situated within the conceptual frame of the critique/intellectual enquiry of the content. The recognition that *Emigre* expresses graphic design's relationship with hard-edged theory and criticism, while *Dot Dot Dot* is essentially dismissive, ironic and playful (but serious), provides valuable insight into the identity of these magazines.

The integrity of *Emigre* is born of thoughtful, well-researched critique. Dot Dot Dot is questioning, detailed, alternatively optimistic and pessimistic, and sometimes fictional with

the intention to subvert dogma and stimulate intellectual enquiry. Intellectual enquiry is inventive. It empowers readers to draw their own conclusions by approaching them as thinking individuals that mediate the message against their own experiences of the world, penetrating their consciousness with paradoxes and ambiguities that are more typical of real life than clarity and issued solutions. Criticism established a more expansive view of graphic design. By privileging ideas that were provocative, *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* contributed to a critical inventiveness in graphic design thinking.

Chapter three explored contemporary graphic design that has begun to dislodge, or at least mitigate, a singular commercial narrative. Critical design and recent shifts towards collaborative, multicultural work and social, environmental and political agency are a coherent repositioning of graphic design beyond the selling of commercial goods.

Chapter four recognized that discourse analysis intervenes in particular knowledge about the world, revealing the kinds of ideas, absences and taken-for-granted assumptions that are a part of power interests that influence graphic design preferences, understanding and agency.

Involving a fundamental change in the way graphic design is imagined and practiced, *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* led conversations that involved the conceptual shift from designing things to designing relational systems. These ideas were a repositioning of graphic design from short-term ephemeral processes to long-term thinking, human-centred investment and societal observation. This was, in no small part, a function of the rich source of research, perspective and collaboration of interdisciplinarity.

The inexorability of multiculturalism is asserted in both *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot.* The ideals of cultural diversity are, however, complicated by historical precedent. The unevenness in cultural identities premises the dominance of white Western culture and replaces the historic invisibility of black African, Asian, South American and other cultures, with a form of visibility that is often stereotypical and trivialised. Commercial stereotype serves superficial exotic forms that serve repression and chauvinism rather than transformation. Inadequate representation of diversity among graphic designers practicing in the field suggests a paradox where graphic design is apparently multicultural as it is received, but insubstantially multicultural as it is generated. Graphic design is impelled to engage seemingly paradoxical possibilities for empowerment (progressive racial and cultural validation) and disempowerment (commercial stereotype) to be present at the same moment. The notion of multiculturalism thus exposes the complexity of cultural identity and status. As it celebrates cultural difference, it places graphic designers at the nexus of a capitalist society that seeks

to normalize patriarchy, racism and consumerism, but at the same time comprehends a contested and potentially transformative space of validating identities.

Through provocation, *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* imply the need for political and social intervention. Political and social agency is equally a shift from attention to the specific – the ephemeral products of graphic design – to attention to social systems – a longer term critical questioning of, and investment in, the social, political and environmental context that graphic design finds itself in. Modern graphic design leans towards a more critical and humanizing discourse. The criticism in *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* was revolutionary for designers because it demarcates a shift in focus and widening in graphic design thinking. Graphic design has increasingly absorbed a critical framework to not only develop a conceptual process and communication product, but as a comprehensive approach to the surrounding social world.

There is a growing shift from, or perhaps it is a tension between, graphic design as communication product with a profit motive to graphic design as speculative futures project with a social incentive. This is not to suggest that traditional design does not ever reflect rebellion, but rather acknowledges that this aspect is usually commodified and absorbed by market preferences. Speculative futures are a way of practising future research, of materialising a critique of existing conditions through anticipating their consequences. The process thus both provides a vision of the future and a reflexive lens to critique the present. In this way speculative futures do not simply predict and forecast, but defamiliarise and disturb accepted social and environmental conditions. They challenge (rather than inform) inevitable futures. Speculative futures cannot simply be treated only as independent entities with imaginative freedom, they ultimately also need to awaken a consciousness for social, economic and political justice in existing society.

Graphic design cannot be neatly categorised or theorised, it is a dynamic, contradictory and complex space, with ambiguous and diverse intentions. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* magazines are persuasive alternatives to commercially-inflected graphic design. They sought to express a realism of the everyday in contrast to the aspirational clichés of industry. For *Dot Dot Dot* that reality is largely acidic and discordant, for *Emigre* it still retains a certain idealism.

5.3 Viewing the study from an African environment

The author of this dissertation is South African. Vast inequalities in South Africa, and the social and economic distress of Africa, inform the need for graphic designers to engage in constructive and committed community interventions. Design expresses its human environment, even as commercial practice seeks to deflect it. Design is always a consequence and expression of a certain socio-economic and political climate. It is

inevitable that South African design work should reflect not only a sense of place but the post-colonial inequality that characterises it; a position notably different from the Dutch, Californian and New York origins of the studied magazines. Stereotypes abound about Africa. South Africa also confronts a history of racism that is not merely cultural prejudice, but a structural subjection. African graphic designers need to recognize how the creative and the political coalesce and how existing stereotypes of dominant Western ideas prejudice graphic design thinking about the continent.

The kinds of knowledge systems, frameworks and methodologies graphic designers have inherited mostly have come from the global North. The developing thrust of an African voice, and other marginalised perspectives, engages the potential for constructive knowledge to be extended and enriched rather than supplanted and rejected entirely. As a developing region, Africa has an interest in its own unique human voice and in human-centred concerns that ideally should nuance the content of graphic design and the transformational urgency of unequal social relations.

5.4 Contribution and significance of the study

The value of this study is that it shows that graphic design benefits from mechanisms that monitor and evaluate the discipline. This study has identified criticism as a decisive, although simultaneously resisted, source of change in graphic design. The change is visible in the imaginary that design involves critique, self-reflexivity, prediction and disruption. The dominant perspective that graphic design primarily serves commercial interests is mitigated by the emergence of critical design as a design category and by five critical issues – interdisciplinarity, multiculturalism, environmental sustainability, political and social agency, and speculative futures - requisite in contemporary discourse.

The value of interdisciplinarity is that a cross-fertilisation of ideas and research can assist in determining the most relevant present and anticipated problems in society. In the case of critical (graphic) design, this calls for a profound knowledge of the systems at play in social injustices, environmental pressures and commerce. The value of multiculturalism is that it confronts the complexities of gender, race, class, age and cultural diversity. It provides the opportunity for marginal voices to be heard. This study asserts that social and political agency is a vital aspect of contemporary graphic design, defining a more lasting commitment to social change than ephemeral graphic design products. A commitment to environmental sustainability reinforces long-term, interconnected systems and perspectives, challenging the graphic designer to provide comprehensive solutions that take future generations into account. And finally, speculative futures provide a valuable strategic tool to reflexively

critique the present or boldly envision a preferable future. In this way, the study has value for an African environment.

The value of this study also lies in perceiving the significance of the role of independent graphic design magazines in introducing fresh perspectives to graphic design discourse. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot*, described as a fanzine and an indie magazine respectively, were a counter to conventional graphic design magazines that are often positioned at the periphery of intellectual and socio-political concerns.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

Further research could focus specifically on the critique of graphic design in South African or African publications introducing and identifying a distinctive African voice. As Africa is conceived by prevailing Western ideas as constituting an exotic "other", an African study will play a vital role in decentering of the Western narrative.

A comparative study of selected international publications with African publications concerned with graphic design and visual culture, could determine how the political and socio-cultural environment influences and impacts on graphic design perspectives.

5.6 Closing comments

Graphic design is an expression of society, providing not only cultural influences within design circles and beyond, but also socio-political interests. As the development of meaning is inseparable from the production of power relations, graphic design is arguably intrinsically political. Beyond the role of graphic designers as invisible professionals, are the opportunities to penetrate the illusionary reality of consumerism, to critically reveal and question graphic design conventions, to responsibly serve communities and social justice, and to imagine new, speculative realms. In particular, critical (graphic) design involves intellectual enquiry that, together with social design, potentially attends to social and political transformation.

Graphic designers must be capable of critical perspective and constant evolution, both personally and in the societies and industries they occupy. The transformative potential of graphic design, always simultaneously resisted and realised in the contemporary world, is set in motion by critical inquiry. The demands of social need within a pervasively unequal society and the reductive stereotypes of consumerist society confront the need for a transformative purpose, parallel to and in the face of resisting ideological contradictions in regular industry-driven graphic design practice. *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* are no longer published. The last editions were circulated in 2005 and 2010 respectively, although as

printed material in libraries they provide a contribution to present and future generations. Viewing them retrospectively provides a perspective of incremental (sometimes imperceptible, sometimes radical) changes that together constitute a gradual, meaningful transformation that stirs hope in a cynical world. As their ideas have become familiar and assimilated into mainstream graphic design, *Emigre* and *Dot Dot Dot* provide an inspiring set of principles that respect and provoke an empowered audience. Their legacy is the way they reinforce that graphic designers, in the modern world, have a responsibility (and opportunity) to be liberating critics rather than simply servants of power.

Ends.

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