Producing Knowledge With Billboards
Graphic Design & Research

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About London is Changing
‘You end up on the London diet: having to choose between food or transport after the rent is paid.’
— a musician who recently relocated from Greenwich to Denmark

‘We’ve lost hope. We’ll go somewhere we can work without constantly worrying about eviction, empty cupboards and the lights going out.’
— a journalist planning to relocate from Tower Hamlets to Egypt

‘My wife and I have decent jobs and well above average salaries and yet we can’t afford to live in the city where we work.’
— a CEO who recently relocated from Wandsworth to Surrey

‘I’d like to have children and wouldn’t be able to afford to even rent a big enough place in London, let alone ever buy somewhere.’
— a translator planning to relocate from Waltham Forest to Scotland

‘After the break-up of a relationship, I could not afford the rent on my own and had to leave.’
— a project manager who recently relocated from Camden to Southwark

‘I recently moved back to London to find more work and opportunities within my field.’
— a scriptwriter who recently relocated from France to Hackney

‘We needed to make the move in order to get our careers back on track.’
— a product manager who recently relocated from the Midlands to Haringey

‘I was sad to move but there are more opportunities in London than at home.’
— a designer who recently relocated from Ireland to Haringey
'The diversity of people is what makes London amazing.'
— a consultant planning to relocate from Tower Hamlets

'There are so many kinds of people in London and so much creative energy.'
— an art student who recently relocated from France to Tower Hamlets

'That’s where I wanted them to grow up – in a city which was alive and challenging, and busy.'
— a market researcher who recently relocated from Hammersmith and Fulham to Hillingdon

'What will the city do when all the nurses, teachers and police have left?'
— a teacher who recently relocated from Lewisham to Hackney

'It’s not the city I knew. It doesn’t feel like it’s for people like me anymore. It’s a hell of a lot richer and duller.'
— a postgraduate student who recently relocated from Haringey to Sussex

'I do think the increasing rent prices are now being reflected in the culture. Not as many interesting projects/businesses are able to function.'
— an illustrator who recently relocated from Hackney to the Southwest

'If I was 10 years older I would have had a head start on the property ladder and would probably have managed to stay here.'
— a PR consultant who recently located from Wandsworth to Wales

'I am desperately sorry for the generation below me who will have even less of an opportunity to live in this amazing city.'
— a GP planning to relocate from Lewisham to the North
‘London’s not the only paradise of opportunity on this earth!’
—— an events manager planning to relocate from Hammersmith and Fulham to Thailand

‘Let’s make the rest of the UK interesting and prosperous.’
—— a software engineer planning to relocate from Kingston-upon-Thames to the North

‘I am troubled by social cleansing of London left unchecked by local councils and central government.’
—— a postgraduate student planning to relocate from Haringey to the Southeast

‘With no realistic protection for renters or rent capping how is anyone supposed to settle in an area?’
—— an IT engineer who recently relocated from Southwark to Switzerland
So, is *London is Changing* research?
Does it provide original, significant and rigorously produced knowledge about the changing demographics of London? *No.*
Does it contribute original, significant and rigorously produced knowledge about how to engage a large number of people in a city-wide conversation? *Yes.*
It also demonstrated the suitability of graphic design to posing questions about distinctions between different cultures of research and publishing.

These alternate rules of play keep design on the perimeter of many activities the institution values most. And they limit the ability of faculty to work as equal partners in interdisciplinary investigations that have funding and impact beyond the institution.

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I do not need to appeal to the sciences to find legitimacy for my practice, even if that means relinquishing access to capital or relegating myself to what is increasingly a trivialized position.

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Meredith Davis (2016)

David Cabianca (2016)
We must avoid swamping our design research with different cultures imported either from the sciences or the arts. This does not mean that we completely ignore these other cultures. On the contrary, they have much stronger histories of enquiry, scholarship and research than we have in design. We need to draw upon those histories and traditions where appropriate, whilst building our own intellectual culture, acceptable and defensible in the world on its own terms.

Nigel Cross (2001)

To truly engage in [interdisciplinary research] is often a difficult and transformational experience, combining critical engagement with the emergence of new forms of knowledge that are not yet classifiable.

For graphic design, the production of new knowledge is necessarily highly-integrated with experimentation into its form and circulation. This does not mean that it is not or cannot be systematic, inquisitive, validated by expert peers, and original. At its best, graphic design research incorporates all of these substantive characteristics in new and unanticipated forms of knowledge practice.

However, when it deviates from established conventions of academic publishing that serve as indicators of academic rigor, it has the tendency to slip out of view of institutionalized instruments for assessing quality. This limits graphic design’s latitude to interact with other fields with potential to help develop and strengthen its own approaches. It also limits graphic design’s significant potential to contribute its experimental perspective on publication, among other assets, to a wider research community.
If we really want transformation, we have to slog through the hard stuff (history, economics, philosophy, art, ambiguities, contradictions) ....Instead of dumbing-down the future, we need to raise the level of general understanding to the level of complexity of the systems in which we are embedded and which are embedded in us. This is not about “personal stories of inspiration”, it’s about the difficult and uncertain work of demystification and reconceptualization: the hard stuff that really changes how we think. Benjamin Bratton (2013)
Metahaven’s style has become synonymous with critical design even though in a lot of places now there [are] no critical ideas behind it.

Jarrett Fuller (2017)

To engage more directly, visibly, and critically with institutionalized knowledge practices would forge new kinds of credibility and alliances on behalf of graphic design and facilitate new kinds of relationships between publishing, publics, and knowledge production. This would require us to set aside the notion that something is missing that is required to put graphic design “on par,” to refocus instead on its scope to contribute to strengthening the wider academic project as it simultaneously becomes more vulnerable and more integral.

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