Toward Graphic Design Studies (and beyond)

Graphic Design Research Beyond REF2021
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CHEAD/GDEN

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What we propose is one possible approach to activate and sustain research in our subject that fully takes into account ‘practice’: it is called graphic design studies.
‘11. The sub-panel noted a number of weaker discipline areas that, on the evidence of submitted outputs, appeared not to have developed since RAE2008. While there were high quality exceptions, the intellectual and theoretical underpinning of graphic and communication design was thought to be generically weak; a range of installation and performance practice in fine art was unfocused, with unclear research parameters; the quality of curatorial theory and practice was variable, with a proportion being well behind and below current ideas and practices; a significant proportion of the theoretical writing across the subject range lacked innovation and remained locked within parameters established a very considerable time ago.’
Three examples:


‘I define design studies as the field of inquiry which addresses questions of how we make and use products in our daily lives and how we have done so in the past.’

— Victor Margolin

Shaping a field of studies.
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<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<td>To call something ‘studies’ gives it academic credence and legitimisation recognises an emerging body of scholarship and literature</td>
<td>Do we need another name for what we should be doing already in graphic design?</td>
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<td>Supporting emerging scholars in graphic design in forming a community of practice</td>
<td>Are there enough scholars emerging to warrant the development of a field of ‘studies’?</td>
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<td>As it develops will provide new employment avenues</td>
<td>It forces you into a disciplined constrained way of thinking that may be too restrictive</td>
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<td>A promotional and networking framework which gives a focus for research and promotes the study of graphic design</td>
<td>Too few examples which evidence and reflect research where practice is central</td>
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<td>Situates graphic design research in practice, history and theory and pedagogy</td>
<td>Further fragmentation of the subject areas which traditionally come under graphic design</td>
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<td>Helps to identify and articulate a field of practice underpinned by research</td>
<td>Too few academic publishing platforms or articles: look what happened to Communication Design and submission rates</td>
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Table 1: Graphic Design Studies Pros and Cons
Communication Design: Interdisciplinary and Graphic Design Research

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International Council of Design (ico-D), Routledge Taylor & Francis
What does Graphic Design Studies look like?

- The insights and nuanced understandings that designers bring as knowledge to the study of the object and processes; the writing about the practices of other designers.

- Visual essay – alternative models for devising critical accounts. Making as a research statement which can be provocative and as interesting as a text-based essay; Consideration for the researcher’s orientation and positioning.

- New Methods and forms of critical thinking relating to practice.

- Research avenues in developing collaborative processes between historians, theorists, critics, practitioners.
Three examples:


Brick wall or blank canvas?, London 2019
Photo: Teal Triggs
Thank you.