

***Citation for the published version:***

Lees-Maffei, G., & Maffei, N. (2019). *Reading Graphic Design in Cultural Context*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

***Link to the final published version available at the publisher:***

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book (introduction) published by Bloomsbury on 07/02/2019, available online: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/reading-graphic-design-in-cultural-context-9780857858016/>

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## **Reading Graphic Design in the Expanded Field: An Introduction**

***Grace Lees-Maffe***

In his essay 'Soap Powders and Detergents' published in French in *Les Lettres Nouvelles* in November 1954, post-structuralist French theorist Roland Barthes points out that advertisements for laundry products which promise to clean deep down are based on the notion that cloth is deep 'which no-one had previously thought' (Barthes [1957] 1972: 37). Barthes makes this point in order to draw attention to how and why advertisers and marketers had imagined this notion of depth. Conversely, *Reading Graphic Design* was prompted by a desire to probe misconceptions of superficiality in graphic design. Graphic designers are dismissed as mere messengers, concerned only with surface appearance, packaging, beautifying and delivering and content for others. This book shows that far from being superficial, graphic design is deep: it functions as a social lubricant, allowing designers and consumers to communicate with others and to express themselves. This introduction reflects on the development of a professional field of graphic design and two impetuses for the writing of this book, before briefly introducing the chapters within the context of the relationship of theory and practice in graphic design education.

### **Graphic Design: A Professional Field**

The initial impetus for this book was increasing frustration with a sense that, notwithstanding the processes of professionalism, graphic designers are wrongly perceived, in educational contexts and in the public sphere, as mere messengers, engaged in superficial window dressing, beautifying and delivering content for others, who are classed as originators. This prejudice is built on a number of stilts, the primary one of which is the continuing influence of modernism. If graphic designers are (rightly or wrongly) perceived as being involved in prettifying the world, making it more acceptable, beautiful and saleable, then they are engaged in an anti-modernist practice. Graphic designers' concern with surface appearance is at odds with the modernist design principle of form following function (to paraphrase architect Louis Sullivan, 1896). If there must be a visible relation between form and function, it follows that a concern for surfaces is anti-modernist, as the historian of design and architecture Nikolaus Pevsner made clear in his book, *Pioneers of Modern Design* (1975 (1936)). This point carries even though many graphic designers across the current and previous centuries have been engaged in the modernist project of making the world more legible (see chapter five on legibility, modernism and postmodernism).

The professionalization of graphic design developed throughout the twentieth century in the UK, the US and elsewhere. It was given a boost in the US through the setting up of professional gate-keeping organisations such as the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA, founded 1914). Graphic designers were not alone in feeling a need to actively professionalise

their field; other designers were engaged in the same task around the same time. However, the work of fostering a professional design identity was difficult, as Jonathan Woodham has noted:

... the widely felt uncertainty of terms commonly used in the interwar years such as 'commercial art' or 'graphic design,' 'industrial art' or 'industrial design' reflected the inability of designers to establish a clearcut professional identity or status (Woodham 1997: 167).

For the US, Ellen Mazur Thomson has distinguished between the drive to professionalize and the achievement of status:

By 1920 members of graphic design associations had achieved a sense of professional solidarity and pride, but they continued to grapple with problems of status. Graphic design, like other applied and popular arts, held an ambiguous place in the American cultural hierarchy (Thomson 1997: 104).

Some clarification in terms of status was achieved when William Addison Dwiggins coined the term 'graphic design' in 1922 (Thompson 1997: 35). This new label separated graphic designers from printers on the one hand, and commercial artists on the other. Following the setting up of various governmental and independent design organisations in the UK (Lees-Maffei 2008: 7), the Designers and Art Directors Association was founded in 1962. The International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA) was set up the following year. The latter merged with ICSID (the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design) in 2003 to form the International Design Alliance (IDA). A third partner, the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI) joined IDA in September 2008.

Even as the process of professionalization was gaining ground, so graphic designers had to contend with the competition of amateur practitioners. Amateur involvement has always been part of the history of graphic design, from the jobbing printers (untrained in graphic design) who set type prior to the twentieth century process of professionalization, to the assemblers of punk fanzines who revelled in the rough and ready appeal of their work. If industrialisation led to the development of graphic design as a discrete field of activity, by allowing the separation of design and realisation, so the further technological developments that produced desktop publishing and a suite of digital aids for graphic design facilitated amateur engagement. Users of PCs and Macs were able to make their own business cards and logos much more easily than before. By the end of the twentieth century and the during the first decade of the twenty-first century, some graphic designers felt threatened by the introduction of desktop publishing and the notion, underpinned by the spread of personal computers, that 'everyone is a designer' (Gerritson and Lovink 2010). However, professional design practice has more recently taken on board developments which

privilege users including user-centred design, or people-centred design, co-design, and issues of social inclusion and sustainable design.

Yet, art and design schools and colleges operate under an unspoken and almost unspeakable hierarchy, with fine art at the top and then the 'hard' design subjects, industrial design, product design, with the 'soft' design subjects at the bottom. The fact that it is difficult to gather evidence of this hierarchy in action does not mean that it does not exist. It exists in ephemeral phenomena such as attitudes, gestures, offhand comments, newsletter stories and the amount of space allocated at the end of year shows, and the names of some institutions, such as the Royal College of Art. Graphic design courses are sometimes regarded as 'cash cow' programmes, attracting large numbers of fee-paying students while at the same time being relatively cheap to resource. Graphic design courses recruit well, perhaps because of public perceptions of the employment opportunities in the field. But one function of a degree is to encourage and allow space for critical thinking. Consultations with design agencies and other employers of graphic design graduates routinely confirm that critical thinking is a valued graduate attribute. Tutors in higher education institutions can adopt the mandate to pursue employability unquestioningly, or they can work to complement the marketization of higher education through developing their students' skills of critical analysis. Increased numbers of students in design higher education have provided a base for increasing academic publishing in design, so the infrastructure exists for there to be more space in which to do the work of graphic design history.

### **Graphic Design and Design History**

A second impetus for writing this book was the complaints we heard from colleagues – design educators and design historians - over a period of about five years from roughly 2008 onwards that graphic design history lags behind design history more generally in terms of published studies. Such complaints have been expressed at, for example, the Annual General Meeting of the Design Studies Forum at the College Art Association in the US. These complaints surprised me because I have used a range of excellent sources with my graphic design students since I started teaching in higher education in 1995. I used the series *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design* beginning in 1994 (Bierut 1994), and David Crowley and Paul Jobling's *Graphic Design: Reproduction and Representation since 1800* (1996), and later Rick Poyner's prolific journalism and books (e.g. 2013 (2003)), among others. At that time, I also taught students on programs entitled 'Software Systems for Arts and Media' and 'Contemporary Applied Arts', both groups which were much less well served at that time in terms of suitable textbooks than the graphic design students.

Was the disparity between my US colleagues' sense of a lack of graphic design literature, and my sense of relative abundance, a result of different literatures being available in the UK and the US? It seems not. Design history developed first in the UK, whereas discreet design history programmes remain rare in the US, and leading design historian Victor Margolin

reported that he got the first US design history PhD (Lees-Maffei 2016: 350). Yet, Margolin himself recognised the existence of 'a plethora of publications' on graphic design as early as (Margolin 1994: 236), although he lamented their failure to distinguish between graphic design, typography, art direction and illustration and the resultant narrative problems within graphic design history.

I began to wonder whether complaints about the lack of design historical writing on graphic design, or more specifically, the lack of a history of graphic design, related not to the quantity of writing or – crucially – to its quality, but rather to its content. The College Art Association is home, principally, to educators in art and design and art history with design historians forming a small minority of members and delegates, and graphic design historians an even smaller constituency of that subset. US higher education delivers survey courses that require survey textbooks (Lichtman 2009). Colleagues' complaints in 2008 were perhaps more specifically about the lack, in 2008, of a survey textbook for graphic design history courses. Indeed, even as recently as 2017, Carma Gorman has complained that 'Design historians still await a truly authoritative account of the development of visual identity design (aka graphic identity design or corporate identity design) in the United States' (Gorman 2017: 371). The fact that the complaints focussed on graphic design history suggests that graphic design history had not developed in the same way as design history more broadly.

Design history emerged as a discreet subject in response to, among other things, the development of art history of the mid- to late-1970s and as a response to Nikolaus Pevsner's aforementioned *Pioneers of Modern Design*, which had been published in 1936 and remained influential as a promoter of modernism in design, with subsequent editions in 1949, 1960 and 1975. Design historians initially followed Pevsner's model by focussing on modern design, promoting modernism and writing heroic accounts of modernist design. However, a backlash ensued in which the centrality of modernism in design historical discourses was challenged with, for example, Clive Dilnot calling attention in 1984 to the limited nature of focussing on 'who said what to whom at the Museum of Modern Art in 1956' (Dilnot 1984: 20). Pevsnerian heroicising was similarly unfashionable and turns to consumption and everyday life developed as alternatives to the dominance of a focus on modernist design.

As D. J. Huppatz and I have noted (2013: 312), design historians have consciously sought to reject their roots in art history, which has been narrowly understood as being 'focused primarily on aesthetic quality and creative geniuses – the cults of iconic objects and personality' and the decorative arts. Design historians have distanced themselves from the work of 'fetishists and idolaters' (Fallan, 2010: 21) and what Denise Whitehouse has termed 'Pevsnerian and art historical practices of canonization and connoisseurship, and the privileging of the innovative designers, aesthetic form, and zeitgeist' (Whitehouse, 2009: 58). Design history's early focus on production and designers was followed by consumption and mediation turns, which have

facilitated a more diverse, inclusive and contextualised understanding of design (Lees-Maffei 2009).

Herbert Spencer's *Pioneers of Modern Typography* of 1969 (revised 1982; third edition, 2004) was clearly named as a companion to Pevsner's own *Pioneers of Modern Design*. We might then ask: did it function in the same way for the field of graphic design history as Pevsner's *Pioneers* did for design history more broadly, i.e. as an influence and then a model to rail against? Yes and no. Spencer's *Pioneers* did not have the same far-reaching influence as Pevsner's in terms of promoting a canon of modernist designers, and nor is it clear that Spencer's book has been subject to the same backlash against the heroicising promotion of modernism and the development of graphic design-focussed versions of the various turns design history in general has undergone. Without a Pevsnerian model to define a developed graphic design history against, then, has the field continued to produce hagiographic, producer-oriented accounts and has it therefore lacked more thoroughly contextualised studies?

Design historians have worked for four decades to understand design inclusively and in context. Have these same developments been seen in graphic design history? Not as much as we might hope. If graphic designers are wrongly perceived as engaged in superficial window dressing, then to what extent are graphic design discourses complicit in this through their formalist, aesthetic focus? Andrew Blauvelt has written that graphic design's ephemerality has:

contributed to the object-oriented nature of most, if not all, histories of graphic design. This orientation developed as an inheritance of art history, which itself developed out of the connoisseurship, historical attribution and classification of objects. For graphic design this has meant the selection of objects which testify to the value of design, or more appropriately the cultural capital of "good design" (Blauvelt 1994: 208).

Supporting the emphasis on appearance in understanding graphic design are the leading textbooks which have foregrounded the history of styles. The standard text for US graphic design history courses since its first publication, Philip Meggs' classic *A History of Graphic Design*, was first published in 1983 during the early years of design history's development (Meggs, 1983). It maintained a chronological arrangement and followed an earlier model for survey textbooks of art history such as Helen Gardner's *Art through the Ages* (1926) with its many subsequent editions, Jansons' *History of Art* (1962) and E.H. Gombrich's *The Story of Art* (1950). Huppertz has noted the way in which design history, interior design history and graphic design history survey textbooks borrow narrative motifs from art history (Huppertz 2010, 2012). Yet, the history of styles had been superseded in art history in the 1970s by the social history of art and the new art history (see Harris 2001). As with these other perennial textbooks, so Meggs' book has been updated in successive editions that have attempted to respond to new currents in scholarship, and a second author has revised the fourth and fifth editions (Meggs and Purvis 2011). A

challenger to Meggs, Stephen J. Eskilson's *Graphic Design: A New History* (2007) was fiercely critiqued and quickly revised for a second edition of 2012 (Lees-Maffei 2012: 3, 12). Even the most recent revisions of these survey texts show that historians of graphic design remain transfixed, perhaps understandably, on the most arresting or innovative examples of work by notable designers.

But there might be another reason why graphic design history has not broadened its focus as design history in general has. Spencer writes in the closing paragraph to his Introduction for *Pioneers of Modern Typography*, that:

The debates about typefaces, about serifs, and other typographical minutiae which, during the late 'twenties and subsequently, have often surrounded modern typography, have sometimes obscured its fundamental characteristics and the advantages, in terms of visual fluency and clarity, which flow from the imaginative use of contrast and asymmetry. This book records some of the achievements of those pioneers of modern typography who, in a period of war and revolution and of political and economic instability, with slender resources but fierce determination and unwavering dedication, created a new and richer visual vocabulary (Spencer 2004: 67).

Spencer is aware of the obscurantist pitfalls of debates about 'typographical minutiae'. His focus is on individuals who have 'created a new and richer visual vocabulary'. His visual preoccupation is demonstrated in the main body of his book where text often cedes entirely to illustrations and functions as a series of, admittedly rather elaborate, captions. Rick Poyner has described Spencer as having 'a connoisseur's taste for aesthetic experiments' (Poyner 2004: 5). I wonder, then, whether the attention to detail which is the hallmark of writing on typography has endowed the entire field of graphic design history with a formalist tendency, and the status of micro history (focussed on the details and small case studies), rather than the meso and macro histories (broadened contextually) being produced for other fields of design?

Spencer's Pevsnerian celebration of his 'pioneers' waned in influence as the interest in modernism of the 1960s ceded to postmodernism, but his book was perhaps the foremost expression of an approach to the history of graphic design which influenced art school students such as Malcolm Garrett and Peter Saville. They responded to modernism as a stylistic influence, ranging from Russian Constructivism to Italian Futurism. Poyner's *No More Rules* (2013 (2003)) picks up this aesthetic preoccupation and critiques postmodernism in graphic design as a series of theoretically-informed appropriations and pastiches, and an aesthetic project.

For examples of writing in both the micro and macro camps we can turn to the designer and writer Paul Shaw, whose forensic 'dissections' in his 'Blue Pencil' blog were born out of disappointment over the decline in 'editorial quality of books on graphic design and typographic

history'. In this detailed critical work, Shaw identifies and publishes about the errors— 'typographical, orthographical and factual'—in books on graphic design history and typography (Shaw 2016). Similarly, Shaw's monograph on the graphic identity of New York's subway (Shaw 2011) minutely details a slow evolution from the rationalisation of the subway's multifarious identities to a commitment in the 1960s first to the typeface Standard (Akzidenz Grotesk) and then in the 1980s and 1990s to the extensive use of Helvetica. Here Shaw is a detective, amassing visual and documentary evidence to deconstruct a typographical myth. In contrast, his edited book *The Eternal Letter*, on the archetypal classical roman lettering and its influence over 2000 years, is macro-historical in scope even if the individual chapters are detailed (Shaw 2015).

Other broadened histories of graphic design include Hannah Higgins' *The Grid Book* (Higgins 2009) and Rebecca Houze's *New Mythologies in Design and Culture: Reading Signs and Symbols in the Visual Landscape* (2016), both of which address the grid. Higgins places a chapter on the grid in the histories of graphic design and typography within the diverse context of chapters addressing architecture, bureaucracy and information networks, among other things, while Houze's study of the grid examines construction toys alongside other chapters which interrogate greenwashing in contemporary corporate identity and bring together MacDonald's Golden Arches and the Jefferson memorial in St Louis, Missouri, to name but two examples from this diverse book. Houze's book is a prime example of the graphic design being understood within context, as part of an expanded field, as Houze sought to replicate Barthes' project of understanding the everyday scene as mythologically rich, albeit as a woman living in the US in the twenty-first century. Further examples of analyses of graphic design in an expanded field include *Megastructure Schiphol: Design in Spectacular Simplicity* (Berkers et al 2013), in which the signage at Schiphol airport is considered alongside its architecture, infrastructure, reception and mythology; *Print Culture: From Steam Press to Ebook* (2013) in which Frances Robertson has avoided a formalist focus by examining print culture as encompassing everything from newspaper plants to postage stamps and posters; and Jesse Adams Stein's oral history of the New South Wales Government Printing Office, which combines graphic design history with the history of technology, labour history and business history (Stein 2016). This work shows what we already know, that design is a complex social process involving design teams and input from clients and users, but this has not always been sufficiently recognised in graphic design history. One exception is Shaun Cole's *Dialogue: Relationships in Graphic Design* which explores designer and client relationships and collaboration through examples of outputs (Cole 2005).

I have described the preoccupation with mediation on the part of early twenty-first century design historians 'as a third stream' in design history, with three currents:

first, the mediation emphasis continues the consumption turn within design history by exploring the role of channels such as television, magazines, corporate literature, advice literature and so on in mediating between producers and consumers, forming

consumption practices and ideas about design; second, the mediation emphasis examines the extent to which mediating channels are themselves designed and therefore open to design historical analysis — indeed, these channels have increasingly constituted the design historian's object of study; third, the mediation emphasis investigates the role of designed goods themselves as mediating devices (Lees-Maffei, 2009: 351).

Clearly, graphic design is particularly important in all three currents of mediation. Graphic designers construct the print media, such as magazines, catalogues, ephemera, billboard advertisements, via which so much consumer education has been channelled. Along with the print media, mediating channels par excellence created by graphic designers include packaging and, latterly, web design. Indeed, it is the very multiplicity of graphic design that prompted Victor Margolin, writing in 1994, to claim that discrimination between the various fields of work which the extant graphic design history has homogenised would enable us to:

...understand better how graphic design practice has been shaped by borrowings and appropriations from other discourses instead of seeing it as a single strand of activity that embraces a multiplicity of things. By recognizing the many routes into graphic design from other fields and practices, we can learn to see it as more differentiated than we have previously acknowledged it to be. This will enable us to better relate emerging fields of endeavor such as information design, interface design and environmental graphics to what has come before (Margolin 1994: 242-3).

We would amplify this in a call for graphic design history to speak to other disciplines outside of design history including sociology, history of technology, cultural history and others. Graphic design, a predominant form of communication in a capitalist society, plays an essentially social role. In communicating messages, whether personal or instructional, individual or corporate, graphic designers and their designs, have a social impact from the individual to society. Graphic design allows people to communicate with one another, as the chapters on t-shirts in the book shows so clearly, and it is therefore undeniably significant socially and sociologically.

Our project is consistent with Margolin's approach in other ways. The book's chapters on discrete fields and practices allow insight into the media with which graphic designers engage, from books and t-shirt to billboards. In this way, our project addresses the problem of viewing graphic design as one thing – one practice – rather than appreciating the diverse skills, artefacts and expressions that graphic design actually encompasses. Gorman points to something of the diversity of graphic design in the expanded field in her discussion of terminology: 'Historians use the terms "visual identity design", "corporate identity design", and "graphic identity design" somewhat inconsistently and interchangeably to refer to the practice of visually unifying or

coordinating the appearance of all of a business's or organization's products, properties, and communications' (Gorman 2017: 385, n. 1). Gorman prefers the broader term 'visual identity design' '[b]ecause readers often understand the term "corporate" to mean design specifically for corporations, and the term "graphic" in "Graphic identity design" to refer only to the coordination of printed materials' (Gorman 2017: 385, n.1).

Graphic design cannot be understood in isolation from the other design fields because design fields do not operate in isolation. The notion of *gesamtkunstwerk* and the architectonic function of architecture are relevant here; consider the ways in which designers from Charles Rennie Mackintosh to Karim Rashid have achieved a total design environment. Theatre design and film design are both, obviously, ensemble efforts but so is graphic design. *Reading Graphic Design* recognises that graphic designers work as parts of teams, with art directors, illustrators, photographers, advertising and marketing professionals and so on, in providing the advertising, marketing and packaging for product design, automotive design, service design and all the other design fields. In so doing they carry manufacturer and producers' messages and precondition consumer responses to the wealth of designed goods they represent. Graphic designers thereby engage with all other forms of design in a significant, constitutive way as many of the chapters in this book demonstrate, including examples such as the advertising of cars to women, the packaging of music and the narratives communicated in corporate literature. Just as undergraduate graphic designers need to understand how illustration and photograph works, so illustrators and photographers need to understand the graphic design contexts within which their work will be situated. *Reading Graphic Design* therefore provides examples of how these phenomena work collectively to create messages. While a chapter on fashion photography may seem odd in a book on graphic design, narrowly understood, if graphic design is recognised as a collaborative practice distributed across a number of creative specialisms and operating in an expanded field, then its relevance should be clear.

### **Reading Graphic Design in the Expanded Field**

This book approaches graphic design as a vital channel of discourse between individuals and society. Unlike some other treatments of graphic design, *Reading Graphic Design* does not focus on iconic or celebrated examples, but rather our emphasis on design in social contexts means that the book interrogates a great deal of everyday and even anonymous graphic design, which is the stock-in-trade of the jobbing designer. Our approach here avoids aesthetic value judgments and a tendency to focus on the most celebrated work, however these might be determined. We do not set out to focus on the most beautiful, or iconic work in graphic design, although we have examined aesthetics (Lees-Maffei 2014a; Maffei 2003) and iconicity (Lees-Maffei 2014b; Maffei 2014b) in design elsewhere.

Rather, following in the wake of work in design history and neighbouring fields such as Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the history of technology which has countered a

latently canonical approach by foregrounding everyday design, design failures (Petroski 1985) and amateur design practices, we show how even the most demotic example of graphic design can be effective in performing social labour. A greetings card, which would be dismissed as kitsch in the art colleges and design studios populated by innovative and creative designers, can be just as effective in expressing the card giver's care for its recipient as one which would garner art and design school approval. By looking beyond recognised aesthetic norms, and standard chronologies of graphic design, we can recognise graphic design as socially profound. We advocate reading graphic design as interacting with the other design fields and as situated within an expanded field, by which we mean in interaction with other design fields and in ways informed by ideas from related fields such as cultural sociology, the history of technology, semiotic and post-structural theory, as well as design histories of modernism and postmodernism. We do not advocate departing from formalist analysis entirely, as is shown in the chapters on semiotics among others. Rather, we propose an approach that combines detailed formalist analysis with contextual understanding of graphic design in action (not to be confused with action research). In this way, we underline the ubiquity of graphic design in contemporary life and its social function. The book asks: how does graphic design function in society? What messages are delivered through these graphic designs and why?

### **The Structure and Contribution of this Book**

The book is carefully structured to emphasise some of the ways in which graphic design succeeds in communicating socially important messages between people and groups. The chapters provide twelve case studies of graphic design examined in social and cultural context, and drawn from different parts of the graphic design industry. Contextual chapters on semiotics, modernism, postmodernism and legibility, situate the book theoretically. Other chapters deal with issues of context and identity as they are played out in relation to different graphic design media, from advertising hoardings to eBooks and other digital contexts, greetings cards to fashion photography. The book is divided into three parts in order to focus the discussion onto three important defining characteristics of graphic design.

The chapters in Part One, *On Message and Off Message*, variously address the ownership of graphic design messages. The first chapter introduces semiotics and structuralism, and the notion of branding as a sign system. It therefore paves the way for chapters 2 to 5, which take up the story of the development from structuralism to post-structuralism through various case studies. Chapter two explores the historical shift from static to dynamic logos, from universal international brand identities to more flexible and responsive corporate personalities within the context of the emergence of the critical consumer, the development of the responsive corporation, and the co-creation of brands in online landscapes. Chapter three surveys the history of outdoor advertising, from the diffusion of handbills and posters to the proliferation of, and resistance to, city and roadside billboards, to the more recent phenomena of out-of-home

electronic displays, including those that survey, record and target consumers. Key design issues broached here include the tension between commercial activity and environmental protection, the role of the landscape in national identity, freedom of expression and the limits of privacy, the visual dynamism of the modern city and highway, and critiques of the morally and visually polluting effect of billboards by reformers. Chapter four examines slogan T-shirts as facilitating social needs. They aid social organization, express cultural meanings, and act as expressions of political resistance. They are key channels for the communication of identity politics.

Part Two explores the semantic richness of graphic design, and the medium's affordance in terms of communicating complexity, contradiction and competing meanings at various times and at once. Chapter five tackles two key issues for graphic designers: a shift from modernism to postmodernism and varying interpretations of legibility promoted within these cultural tendencies. Globalization is one of the defining characteristics of twenty-first century design and culture, economics and politics. But it is not entirely new. Chapter six introduces readers to some key theories of post-colonialism in a semiotic analysis of orientalism, chinoiserie and japonisme as they are represented in British *Vogue* over the last fifty years. Chapter seven considers the functions of corporate identity through the narrative potential of corporate publishing, using Italian household goods manufacturer Alessi as a case study. The proliferation of information – its collection, interpretation and graphic depiction, whether for the purposes of bureaucratic communication, editorial design or personal expression - has been a key aspect of the late-modern period and contemporary life. Chapter eight investigates the origins of information graphics and data visualization and the evolution of infographics into infotainment. Central issues in this chapter are the necessity of balancing function and form, the universal and the unique, and education and entertainment.

The final part comprises chapters that collectively open up the cross-media nature of graphic design as a field. Chapter nine examines the interplay of text and image in advice books, noting the ways in which visual techniques are used both in mutually supportive ways *and* in ways in which image subverts the text. The tenth chapter reviews how advertisers working for car manufacturers have targeted women purchasers through the use of techniques from fashion and beauty advertising, with reference to theories of gender and social and cultural history. The penultimate chapter examines the development of the 12-inch LP cover, as the visual face for performers and as an expression of consumer identity. The chapter considers the impact of the digital music commodity on traditional music packaging. The closing chapter also considers what is gained and lost as a result of a series of technological innovations centred upon a shift to digital delivery, in this case with the advent and take-up of eBooks. While reviewing predictions on the future of the book, the chapter explores a range of profound transformations affecting the digitally distributed text, including the separation of the object from content, audience interactivity, algorithmic content, on-demand publishing and the integration of the physical and the digital.

There are of course many other examples we could have put in our book and did not, including those relating more explicitly to graphic design's interplay with illustration, such as the affective labour performed by greetings cards, whether aesthetically directional or beyond the stylistic pale, and the social conditioning function of children's book illustration. The chapters that appear here relate closely to our research and therefore form evidence of our approach to research-informed teaching, which creates a virtuous circle of mutually informative conversations about the things that interest us and our students. And there are many more international examples we might have explored. As it stands, the book's chapters address graphic design in the UK and the US principally, alongside further examples from outside the UK and US, such as Clean City laws in São Paulo (Brazil), and examples of multinational brands and themes of interest globally. We hope that *Reading Graphic Design* will be of interest in wherever graphic design is taught, around the world.

### **Conclusion: Mutuality in History, Theory, Practice**

This introduction began with two converging catalysts for our book, identified through our experiences of teaching graphic design students and our readings and writings in design history: the tendency to dismiss graphic design as superficial and complaints about the lack of critical writing on graphic design. We have explored these issues and the relationship between them in a brief historiographic survey of design history and the literature of graphic design history. In addition, this introduction has explained the book's structure and the twelve chapters and the selected case studies. The chapters address different areas of the field of graphic design practice, showing it to be part of an expanded field. In responding to specific empirical pedagogic and scholarly impetuses, this book will be a tool for undergraduate students of graphic design and design history, among other fields, to read, or understand and analyse, different parts of the industry, from music to publishing.

Graphic designers need to understand the contexts in which their work is mediated and consumed. We do not simply propose a shift from aesthetics to context in graphic design history, but that these are mutually informative. Here, we provide fledgling graphic designers with examples of graphic design in action, graphic design out in the world, when it leaves the designer's digital desktop to arrive at the desktops of mediators and consumers, and the billboards, TV screens, magazine pages and shopping bags of consumers. This book will inform graphic designers and historians of graphic design alike, along with those working in the range of fields mentioned. In proposing the use of this book in both studio and theory contexts, we are contributing to the range of debates about the use of theory and history in studio teaching and the benefits of embedding contextual understanding in design programmes (Lee 2011; Pollen 2015).

We close with the issue of mutual influence. If graphic design is understood through contextual reference to work in sociology, cultural history, urban studies etc., then graphic

designers and graphic design historians need to demonstrate, in turn, the relevance of their work to audiences in other fields. In turning to sociology to understand a slogan t-shirt we must ask the correlative question: why should a sociologist care about a graphic t-shirt? Ultimately, our approach poses a new challenge to graphic design historians, which is: how and what can the field of graphic design history contribute to allied areas of study such as cultural sociology, cultural history, communication sciences, architectural history and the history of technology, among others which form part of the expanded field through which. We avoid aesthetic judgments to explore how graphic design performs important social functions in Western consumer cultures. By emphasizing communication and context, *Reading Graphic Design* complements an existing history of styles approach and rewrites the ways in which graphic design history is told.

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