Designer-Authored Histories: Graphic Design at the Goldstein Museum of Design

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This paper is based on a presentation made in 2005 at the New Views: Repositioning Graphic Design History conference held at the London College of Communication.

The idea that graphic designers could, and would, create their own histories through their writing, designing, and publishing can be found throughout the twentieth century. Whether documentary, reflective, expressive, critical, self-promotional, comparative, or visionary, designers have harnessed the means of production to state their views in print—a concept and a practice that parallels most of the discipline's growth and maturity. Jan Tschichold's influential *New Typography*, published in 1928, Eric Gill's polemical book, *An Essay on Typography*, from 1931, and Willem Sandberg's *Experimenta Typografica* books, begun in the 1940s, are just a few early examples that illustrate how graphic designers and typographers have advanced their ideas through self-authorship.

On the intellectual heels of deconstruction, semiotics, conceptual art, and postmodernism, and enabled by new technologies for the creation, production, and distribution of designed artifacts, more graphic designers began to produce self-initiated work in the century's latter decades. However, it was not until the early to mid-1990s that formal theories about design authorship emerged. Among the tenets posited by design authorship's framers were redefining the design process, opening new avenues for collaboration, building stronger relationships between visual form and literal content, expanding the space for personal expression, creating a greater level of social and political engagement, and finding more opportunities for entrepreneurial ventures. In 1995 and 1996, in particular, *Emigre* magazine's issues devoted to "Clamor over Design and Writing," the exhibition, Designer as Author: Voices and Visions, held at Northern Kentucky University (Fig. 1), and the *Eye* magazine article, "The Designer as Author," fueled the debate.[1]

When one considers the plethora of commercial graphic design in everyday life, how might a narrowly defined area like design authorship be relevant to the discipline's study and research? Before trying to answer, some background on the context for a collection of designer-authored histories follows. This essay explores a range of examples of works, held in the Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota, that exemplify key moments in the history of graphic design authorship. In addition, selected works will be examined that prompted debates, mainly in the design

1 For further reading on design authorship:
Anne Burdick, ed., *Emigre 35 and 36: Clamor over Design and Writing* (Sacramento, CA: Emigre, Inc., 1995, 1996).
Steven McCarthy, "What is Self-Authored Graphic Design Anyway?" *Design as Author: Voices and Visions* poster/catalog (Highland Heights, KY: Department of Art, 1996).
Cristina de Almeida, "Voices and/or Visions" *Design as Author: Voices and Visions* poster/catalog (Highland Heights, KY: Department of Art, 1996).
Michael Rock, "The Designer as Author" *Eye*, no. 20 (London: Emap Construct, 1996).
Rick Poynor, "Designer as Author" *Design Without Boundaries* (London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 1998).
Monika Parrinder, "The Myth of Genius" *Eye*, no. 38 (London: Quantum Publishing, 2000).
Steven McCarthy, "Tinker Tailor Designer Author" *Eye*, no. 41 (London: Quantum Publishing, 2001).
Cristina de Almeida and Steven McCarthy, "Designer as Author: Diffusion or Differentiation?" DECLARATIONS of [inter]dependence and the im[media]cy of design international symposium web site. (Montréal, Canada: Concordia University, 2002) http://www.declarations.ca/knowledge/author_1.htm (now offline).
Steven McCarthy and Cristina de Almeida, "Self-authored Graphic Design: a Strategy for Integrative Studies" *Journal for Aesthetic Education* (Champaign-Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002)
Rick Poynor, *No More Rules: Graphic Design and PostModernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).
Katherine Moline, "Authorship, Entrepreneurialism and Experimental Design" *Visual:Design:Scholarship*, Research Journal of the Australian Graphic Design Association, vol. 2, no. 2. http://adga.com/au/vds/vds020205.pdf (online September 28, 2007)

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Figure 1
Designer as Author: Voices and Visions poster (detail), 1996.

press, about the role of the graphic designer in the professional arena, as well as the blurring of boundaries conventionally held firm between fine art and graphic design.

The Museum Context

The Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota is known for its collections in apparel design, historic costume, textiles, and some decorative arts. The museum was founded from the collection of sisters Harriet and Vetta Goldstein, professors at the university in the early twentieth century and authors of the 1925 book, *Art in Everyday Life*.[2] Their design philosophy was more Arts and Crafts movement than Bauhaus, but their proto-feminist approach elevated the design possibilities of domestic life at a time when design was largely a man's world.

The Goldstein Museum's decision to add a graphic design collection came from several convergences, including growth in the number of students enrolled in courses in the field, as well as a robust professional community in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St Paul. The Collection, which was established in 2000, focuses specifically on objects of design authorship, making it one of only a handful of specialist graphic design collections housed in a university museum context. (Similar American collections include the Cary Collection at the Rochester Institute of Technology, the Wolfsonian Collection at Florida International University, and the Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography at Cooper Union.) This specialization, in itself, makes it unique in its contribution to documenting—from the mid-twentieth century to contemporary times—an important aspect of graphic design history.

It is important to note, prior to listing the works in the collection, that this is a young and growing collection, an incomplete collection, and a collection that has yet to be fully exploited in terms of research and scholarship. The collection has both macro and micro qualities, as discrete works show particular examples of design authorship, while an entire run of a publication or several publications together reflect how the larger themes of design

2 Harriet Goldstein, *Art in Everyday Life*. (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1925).

authorship have evolved over time. All works position the graphic designer as subject (*by* designers) and object (*about* designers), while the graphic designs that give their ideas tangible form are as integral to their messages as the literal words. After all, as one scholar asserts more generally, "It would be far more productive if the subject of graphic authorship, superficially debated in/by the profession, were addressed in terms of its specifics—highlighting how specific designs work, at the levels of their graphical, semiotic, and ideological dimensions."[3]

The works acquired include the publications *PM* (later *A-D*), *Portfolio*, *Push Pin Graphic*, *Dot Zero*, *Octavo*, *Emigre*, *Fuse*, *Zed*, *News of the Whirled*, and the complete contents of the exhibitions, "And She Told 2 Friends" and "Soul Design." Each publication and exhibition is discussed with particular emphasis on its contribution to the concept of graphic designers' writing and designing of their own histories. Names of major contributors have been cited because doing so expands the connections between design authorship and the designer's involvement with the broader discipline of graphic design practice, and because it is a legitimate historical approach to credit "exceptional individuals."[4]

Each work discussed below signals a shift in the ways we think about graphic design, both in terms of documenting professional practice and in how culture, new technologies, and socio-political issues have informed the history of the discipline. Because ideas about graphic design authorship were emerging in the mid-1990s, and were being debated in *Emigre* and *Zed* in particular, the collection acquires an aspect of being self-aware from that point forward. That the earlier publications hadn't yet been labeled as works of design authorship doesn't diminish their contributions; rather, they establish a foundation for shaping subsequent discourse. The concept comes full circle as many individual works in Kali Nikitas' curatorial project, "And She Told 2 Friends," were created for typical client-designer-user contexts (e.g., Irma Boom's stamps for the Dutch postal service and Robynne Raye's concert poster); therefore, design authorship resides at the level of the exhibit, and not necessarily at the level of the discrete artifact. The works of the Collection have this in common: They all contribute to the historical narrative, in designers' voices, of how authorial practice has enlarged the discipline of graphic design.

Case Studies from the Collection

PM, which stood for Production Manager, was first published in 1934 in New York City and defined itself as an "intimate journal" and a "non-profit, cooperative graphic arts magazine."[5] Edited by Robert L. Leslie, *PM* published articles, reviews, and visual essays and also ran advertising. Its topics were primarily typography, printing, paper stock, art direction, illustration, and photography, which were aimed at an audience within the graphic arts trade, as evident in its title.

3 Gérard Mermoz, "The Designer as Author: Reading the City of Signs—Istanbul: Revealed or Mystified?" *Design Issues*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 79.

4 Alice Twemlow, "End of History? Graphic Design hasn't Started" paraphrasing Rick Poynor from his New Views: Repositioning Graphic Design lecture, "Reluctant Discipline: Graphic Design History's Protracted Birth" *Eye* magazine web site. http://www.eyemagazine.com/review.php?id=130andrid=633 (online September 19, 2007)

5 Robert L. Leslie and Percy Seitlin, eds. "A-D" *A-D* vol. VI. no. 5 (New York: A-D Publishing Co., 1940), 57.

Figure 2
A-D covers, 1941 and 1940.

However, *PM* did change its name to A-D (Fig. 2)—Art Direction and/or Advertising Design—in 1940, to reflect the field's growing professionalism. *PM*/*A-D* published industry and professional news six times per year, until 1942.

The list of contributors to *PM*/*A-D* reads like a who's who of mid-century American and European émigré graphic designers: Herbert Bayer, Gene Frederico, E. McKnight Kauffer, William Golden, William Dwiggins, Cipe Pineles, Herbert Matter, and others. Editor Leslie is credited with "spreading the ideals of European modernism to a generation of designers and art directors,"[6] and doing so with a "missionary zeal."[7]

In *PM*/*A-D*, one encounters several elements of authorship beyond the typical neutrality of many graphic design trade magazines. The June-July 1939 issue advocated a boycott of "Nazi-made type faces" through the publication of a proclamation opposing "international fascism and all the barbarism and oppression inseparably identified with it…."[8] From the August-September 1940 issue, critic Elizabeth Sacartoff titled her essay "Artist as Reporter," bringing to mind terms from the late 1990s like "designer as producer,"[9] "authorpreneur,"[10] and "designist,"[11] which were proposed in the aftermath of the "designer as author" term.

PM/*A-D* began as a trade magazine, but by showcasing progressive design and speaking out on political issues, it set the stage for subsequent publications. *Portfolio* was one such magazine.

Portfolio, art directed by Alexey Brodovitch (during which time he also art directed the women's fashion magazine, *Harper's Bazaar*), was published only three times between 1950 and 1951 (Fig. 3). Frank Zachary was its editor and is credited with corralling the magazine's writers, artists, and photographers. Primarily visual, and formally experimental with elaborate production values, *Portfolio* featured portfolios of design, illustration, photography, and calligraphy from established and emerging artists. Some articles covered historical topics, such as Napoleon's patronage of typographer Giambattista Bodoni, while others portrayed the work of contemporary artists and designers, such as Alexander Calder,

6 Erin Malone, (1994) "Dr Leslie and the Composing Room: 1934–1942, An Important Time in the Development of American Graphic Design" *Dr. Leslie Project* (1994–2006) http://www.drleslie.com/PMADMagazines/Magazines.shtml (online September 27, 2007)

7 Steven Heller, "The Missing Link: Graphic Design Trade Magazines and the Modern Avant Garde" *Baseline* 40 (Kent, UK: Bradbourne Publishing Ltd., 2003), 43.

8 Robert L. Leslie, "PM Shorts" *PM* vol. 5, no. 1 (New York: PM Publishing Co., 1939), 46.

9 Ellen Lupton, "The Designer as Producer" *The Education of a Graphic Designer*, ed. Steven Heller (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 159-162.

10 Steven Heller, "The Attack of the Designer Authorpreneur" *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, 16 (2) (New York: American Institute of Graphic Arts, 1998), 35.

11 Denise Gonzales Crisp, "Out of Context: Designists Slash Entrepreneurs and Other Slash Utopians" *Emigre* 43 (Sacramento, CA: Emigre, Inc., 1997), 51.

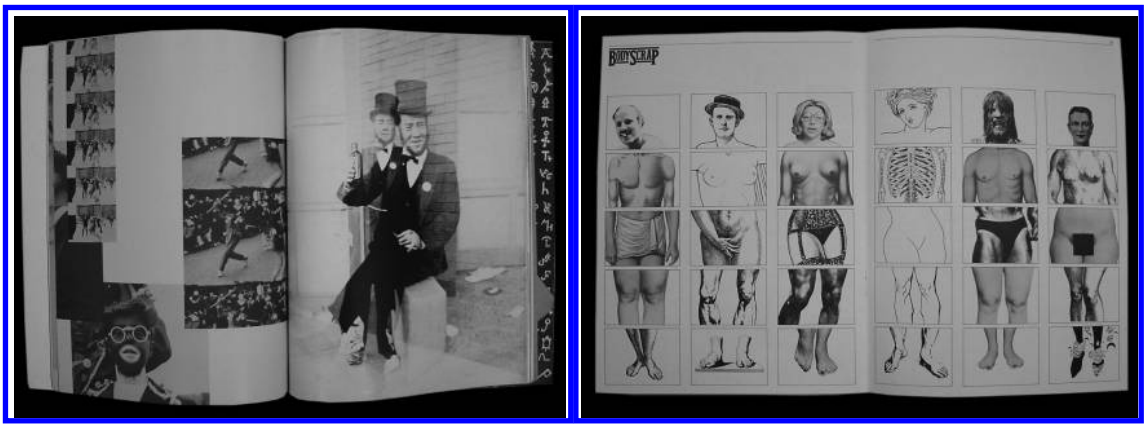


Figure 3 (above left)
Portfolio interior spread, 1950.

Figure 4 (above right)
Push Pin Graphic interior spread, 1977.

Jackson Pollock, Charles and Ray Eames, Richard Avedon, Paul Rand, and Ben Shahn.

Portfolio's engagement with design authorship was through the process of commissioning, inviting, editing, and then exposing the content to Brodovitch's dramatic sense of space and structure. Its filmic pages provided an inventive format for others' works to interact with a master art director in a purely aesthetic context. "They demanded nothing from the reader but admiration."[12]

Portfolio has become coveted as a collectable design artifact. As a work of design authorship, it exudes a celebratory quality: Virtuosity meets optimism, a form of design for design's sake. That it was published just three times signals its ideological success at the expense of commercial failure, as *Portfolio* did not accept advertising.

Taking the opposite approach, *Push Pin Graphic* did accept advertising and ran for 23 years (Fig. 4). Published 86 times by Push Pin Studios (Milton Glaser, Seymour Chwast, and Edward Sorel) from 1957 to 1980, the bi-monthly *Push Pin Graphic* influenced a generation of American graphic designers through its humor and wit. Ostensibly published to promote the illustration, design, and photography of Push Pin Studios, the brochure-sized publication took on its own cultural life over time. Seymour Chwast was the editor and art director for many of the early years, eventually swapping the editor title for publisher. Paula Scher served as contributing editor for many issues and Ken Robbins edited a number of later issues.

Moving beyond its own promotional aspirations, *Push Pin Graphic* eventually began showcasing other artists, designers, and photographers. Colorful and idiosyncratic in an era of type and stripe Swiss modernity, the accessible *Push Pin Graphic* was a flag-bearer for pop culture. Recognizing *Push Pin Graphics'* popularity in the New York-centric graphic design community, ads by printers, service bureaus, and type houses regularly appeared in the publication.

Theme-oriented issues during the 1970s—Mothers, Your Body and You, New York at Night—were vaguely topical, but the era's contentious debates about feminism, sexual politics,

12 Richard Hollis, *Graphic Design: a Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 117.

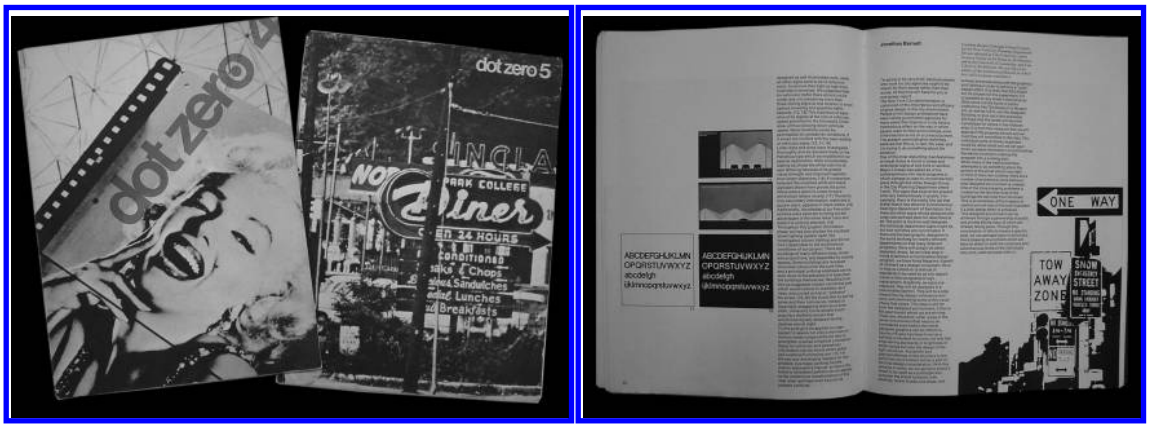


Figure 5 (above left)
Dot Zero 4 & 5 covers, 1967 and 1968.

Figure 6 (above right)
Dot Zero 5 interior spread, 1968.

and marginalized subcultures were primarily referenced for their laughs. Later issues ventured further from typical graphic design concerns, with literary reprints such as "The Lottery in Babylon" by Jorge Luis Borges and "The Masque of the Red Death" by Edgar Allen Poe, which lent themselves as backdrops for Push Pin Studios illustrations.

Blending the promotional with the personal is possibly *Push Pin Graphic*'s main contribution to the idea of designer-authored histories. A newly published monograph, *Push Pin Graphic: A Quarter Century of Innovative Design and Illustration*, by Seymour Chwast, and a Spring 2005 exhibition of *Push Pin Graphic* at the American Institute of Graphic Arts gallery in New York attest to the magazine's continuing popularity. "A precursor to the self-published design zines and promotions that followed its lead, its historical significance is undeniable."[13]

Appearing almost anecdotal to *Push Pin Graphics*, *Dot Zero* was a quarterly publication out of New York City that was produced from April 1966 to Fall 1968 and that lasted only five issues (Fig. 5). Published by Ralph Eckerstrom, and designed by Massimo Vignelli (the two were co-founders of the design consultancy Unimark International), *Dot Zero* was interdisciplinary, modernist, intellectual, and analytical. Austere in its black and white reproduction, *Dot Zero*'s graphic vocabulary implied a high-browed seriousness and objectivity.

In *Dot Zero* 1, editor Robert Malone promised that the publication "…will deal with the theory and practice of visual communication from varied points of reference, breaking down constantly what used to be thought of as barriers, and are now seen to be points of contact."[14] Making good on its claim, its pages were stages for the ideas of media theorist Marshall McLuhan, designer-artist Bruno Munari, economist John Kenneth Galbraith, design strategist Jay Doblin, and author Umberto Eco, among others.

In an introductory statement in *Dot Zero* 1, Herbert Bayer wrote, "*Dot Zero*… plans to assume an unattached attitude by starting from naught and freeing itself from the impediments of

13 The Push Pin Graphic, AIGA New York web site Events page. http://www.aigany.org/events/details/?event=EPPG_ (online October 7, 2005).

14 Robert Malone, Editorial, *Dot Zero* 1 (New York: Dot Zero/Finch Pruyn, 1967).

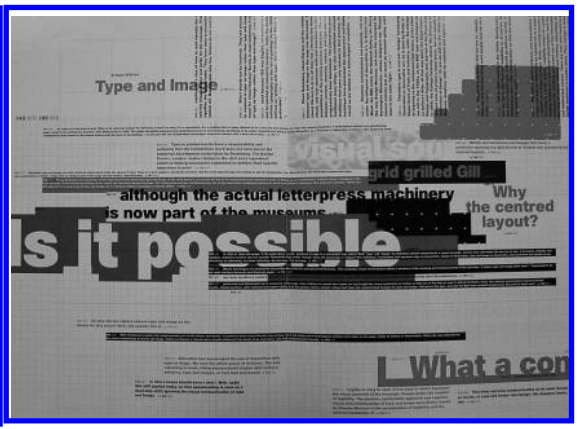


Figure 7 (above left)
Octavo covers, 1986 and 1987.

Figure 8 (above right)
Octavo interior spread (detail), 1990.

taking sides."[15] Perhaps *Dot Zero*'s strict grids and uniform sans serif typography were intended to support this philosophy, while relying on the literal content of articles to express opinions and stake out intellectual territory (Fig. 6). However, the graphic designer's role as neutral participant in the process of shaping meaning through visual form has since been thoroughly contested. In *Dot Zero*, design-authorship is evident less from what is said, and more from how it was said through its selection of typeface: Helvetica.

Octavo: International journal of typography elevated *Dot Zero*'s modernism to high modernism (Figs. 7 & 8). *Octavo* was published eight times by the British graphic design firm 8v0, Eight Five Zero, beginning in 1986 and ending in 1992. 8v0 partners Simon Johnston, Mark Holt, Michael Burke, and Hamish Muir edited and designed the journal, which featured written essays and displays of visual materials. The editors stated: "…we take an international, modernist stance."[16] A philosophy of typographic excellence, high quality production values, and a modernist typographic orthodoxy—small sans serif type, asymmetrical layouts, rectilinear grids, left justification—were the journal's signature. To quote one observer, "Octavo had object quality; it informed and acted as a didactic model in itself."[17]

Some issues explored a broad range of typographic topics, such as signs and information, and the history of lowercase letterforms. *Octavo* 87.4, however, is completely devoted to Wolfgang Weingart's 1972 lecture, "How Can One Make Swiss Typography?" This choice seems appropriate within the context of design-authorship, as Weingart's signature methodology extended beyond his own graphic works to the legions of designers he taught and influenced.

The final issue of *Octavo* in 1992, a CD-ROM, challenged: "Multi-media or multi-mediocrity and the baggage of the past?"[18] The accompanying poster featured the pixelated type common to digital devices, perhaps as an acknowledgement to typography's shifting territory. Ironically, this shift was forecast by digital imaging pioneer April Greiman's poster and essay from *Octavo* 86.1.

15 Herbert Bayer, "Finding Dot Zero" *Dot Zero* 1 (New York: Dot Zero/Finch Pruyn, 1967).

16 Simon Johnston, Mark Holt, Micheal Burke and Hamish Muir, eds. Editorial, *Octavo* 86.1 (London: Eight Five Zero, 1986).

17 London College of Communication (formerly the London College of Printing) student review of Hamish Muir lecture from 2003 (no credit given) hub.lclinst.ac.uk/archive/gmd2003/views/pdfs/8vo_1985-2001.pdf (online September 27, 2007).

18 Simon Johnston, Mark Holt, Micheal Burke and Hamish Muir, eds. *Octavo* 92.8, (London: Eight Five Zero, 1992).

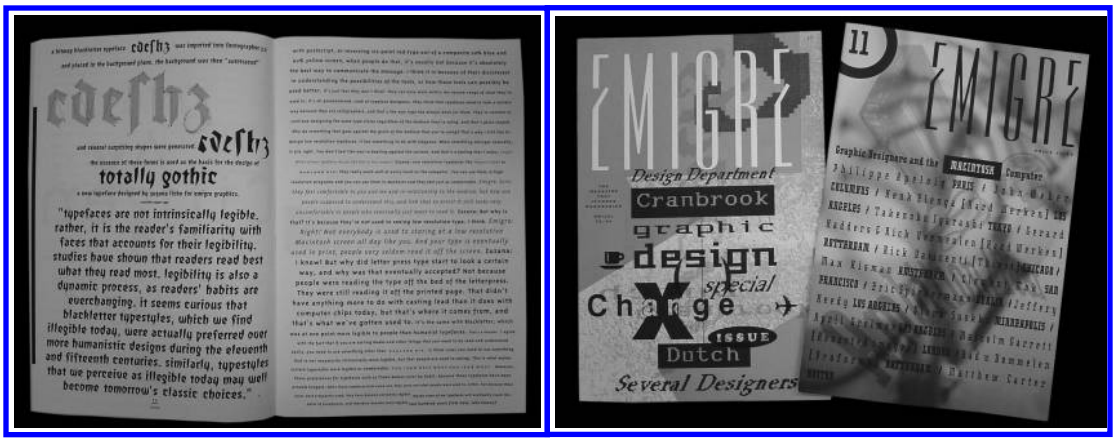


Figure 9 (above left)
Emigre 15 interior spread, 1990.

Figure 10 (above right)
Emigre covers, 1988 and 1989.

As the primary influence that shifted typography's territory, *Emigre* magazine needs little introduction to the discipline's practitioners and scholars of the past two decades (Fig. 9). An avant-garde publication that ushered in the era of digital design and typography, *Emigre* has been a forum for experimental designer-authored work from its first issue. Evolving over time from an eclectic and personal publication in the mid-1980s to one that defined the discipline's major debates about typographic legibility, deconstruction theory, semiotics and linguistics, aesthetics, and contemporary practice, *Emigre* influenced a generation of graphic designers.

Editor and designer Rudy Vanderlans and typographer Zuzanna Licko were both designer-authors in the narrow sense, while the magazine and typefaces they created enabled their peers to have a voice in articulating a new vision for the field. In *Emigre* 11 (Fig. 10), devoted to graphic designers using the Apple Macintosh computer, a fundamental aspect of technology's influence on design-authorship is stated in the editorial: "Text, image, and layout all exist as manifestations of the same medium and the capability of simultaneously editing text and composing the layout will influence both design and writing styles."[19]

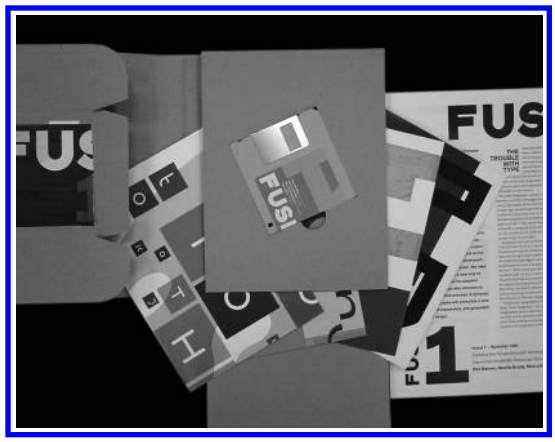
Designing and using original Postscript type fonts was another opportunity for designers' messages to take on added meaning and personality. In this regard, *Emigre* was a pioneering digital type foundry, releasing numerous faces by the prolific typographer Zuzanna Licko, as well as by many others, including Jonathan Barnbrook, Scott Makela, Barry Deck, and Sibylle Hagmann. This creative production allowed new messages to be given new forms—an early modernist credo now recontextualized, reconfigured, and remixed.

In *Emigre* 35 and 36, the "Mouthpiece, Clamor over Writing Design" issues, guest editor Anne Burdick expressed her interest "in the operations and uses of the material word—voice, presence, authorship, ownership, agency…."[20] Rudy Vanderlans' editorial from *Emigre* 39 seems to cement the importance of the designer as

19 Rudy Vanderlans, "Ambition/Fear" *Emigre* 11, (Berkeley, CA: Emigre Graphics, 1989).

20 Anne Burdick, "Introduction/Inscription" *Emigre* 36, (Sacramento, CA: Emigre, Inc., 1995).

Figure 11
FUSE contents and packaging, 1991.



author concept: "The only significant contribution introduced to graphic design in the last 10 years or so … might have less to do with anything visual than with how design is produced and who it is produced by."[21]

Emigre has been central to the idea of graphic designers writing and designing their own histories through its provocatively inseparable form and content. The Goldstein acquired the complete set of issues 1 through 56 in 2001, when only five sets were put up for sale. Later copies of *Emigre* were acquired as they were published.

FUSE was first released in 1991 as an experiment in interactive digital typography (Fig. 11). Whereas *Emigre* served to present and market its own typographic offerings through expressively functional use, *FUSE* pushed its type into the realm of pure aesthetics. Published by FontShop International, edited by Jon Wozencroft, and designed by Neville Brody, *FUSE* featured type designs by leading British and international typographers. Each issue consisted of a 3.5-inch floppy disk with digital fonts, four A2-sized posters showing the creative potential of the type designs, and an additional A2 sheet with an essay.

Occupying the territory between form and function, legibility and expression, and art and communication, *FUSE* investigated the borders of typographic expression and "[provided] a framework for a new way of looking at language…."[22] Contributors of essays and type designs included Matthew Carter, Peter Saville, Bruce Mau, Phil Baines, Malcolm Garret, Tibor Kalman, Rick Valicenti, and WD+RU (Women's Design + Research Unit), among others, within the 18 issues of *FUSE*.

Summing up *FUSE's* innovative approach to letterform design and its contentious role in rendering language visible, Paul Elliman wrote in a *FUSE* essay: "The problem remains that typography not only supports the artificial structuring of language, it exists for it."[23] While many of the typefaces released by *FUSE* were examples of typographic innovation, they functioned less as useable alphabets and more as polemical statements on the nature of visual language. Its typographers' marks were designer-authored signatures, personal

21 Rudy Vanderlans, "Graphic Design and the Next Big Thing" *Emigre* 39 (Sacramento, Emigre, Inc., 1996), 7.

22 Jon Wozencroft, ed. Editorial, *FUSE* 1 (Berlin: FSI GbmH, 1991).

23 Paul Elliman, "Reading Typography Writing Language" *FUSE* 10 (Berlin: FSI GbmH, 1994).

Figure 12 (above left)
Zed interior spread, 2000.

Figure 13 (above right)
News of the Whirled covers, 1997 through 2004.

and abstract, and yet perhaps existing as the runes, cuneiforms, and hieroglyphics to the anthropologists and archaeologists of the future.

Zed: *a Journal of Design* that bridged the gap between education and design practice, was published seven times from 1994 to 2000 by the Center for Design Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University (Fig. 12). Edited by Katie Salen, as well as various guest editors, *Zed* structured its content around themes such as Politics of Design, Design and Morality, and Public + Private in its quest "to identify and embrace the margins; to question, debate, and question again; to weigh the alternatives and consider the possibilities."[24]

In this regard it was intellectually wide-reaching, with written and visual essays by, among others, Tom Ockerse, Gunnar Swanson, Teal Triggs, Russell Bestley, and Diane Gromala. Topics ranged from technology to gender issues to semiotics, with graphic design as the connective tissue, both in content and in form.

A paperback book-sized journal, *Zed's* covers often featured soft-focus photographic imagery printed in a single color. Interior spreads emphasized text that was highly readable while using contemporary type treatments and angular shaped text columns. One illustration by Jonathan Barnbrook used what appeared to be mono-width typewriter type in rendering the tonal likeness of England's Queen Elizabeth. The page opposite, also set in typed characters that created larger letterforms, declared: "The most successful parasites always make the body they are destroying feel that it needs them for its continued survival."[25] A possible interpretation in this context is the role of the avant garde—including design authorship—to mainstream graphic design practice.

Unlike many publications, *Zed* held an open call for submissions so that opportunities for publication were based on merit, which gave emerging designers and academics a new voice. Because it purported to bridge the gap between design practice and education, having an element of peer-review was crucial to establishing the journal's academic credibility.

24 Katie Salen, ed. "Editor's Note" *Zed* 1 (Richmond, VA: Center for Design Studies, 1994), 7.

25 Jonathan Barnbrook, *Zed* 7, Katie Salen, ed., Teal Triggs and Siân Cook, guest editors (Richmond, VA: Center for Design Studies, 2000), 131.

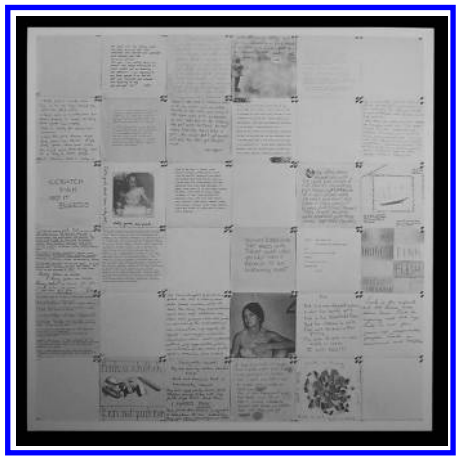


Figure 14
And She Told 2 Friends, 1996. (This particular design, titled "Pink" is by Sheila Levrant de Bretteville)

However, academic credibility isn't always the goal, even when a graphic design professor publishes—as *News of the Whirled* demonstrates (Fig. 13). *News of the Whirled* has been the unconventional publishing venture of Kenneth FitzGerald and his creative project, Ephemeral States. Produced initially in 1997 (the first issue was featured in its entirety within Emigre 41), four issues of the publication have been printed, each in a single monochromatic color: blue, brown, green, and purple. Referred to by one detractor as "an aesthetic and self-referential object,"[26] *News of the Whirled* featured fiction, non-fiction, poetry, photography, visual compositions, and found content by FitzGerald and other contributors.

News of the Whirled did not distinguish between art, literature, and design as disciplines or as creative processes. Its vocabulary of complex forms, densely overlapping image-text compositions, and challenging typography seem appropriate for the publication's eclectic nature, its obscure references, and its multiple meanings and interpretations. FitzGerald preferred to use "arranged and produced"[27] rather than edited and designed to describe his role in the magazine's production, a *Gesamtwerk* of design-authorship. FitzGerald described his work on *News of the Whirled* in this way: "It's the result of intricate plotting, improvisation, procrastination, time, and budget pressures. I still sabotage my desire for refinement with accident, and vice versa."[28]

While much of the Goldstein's graphic design collection consists of publications, the Museum acquired the contents of two exhibitions because "…acting as meta-authors, some curators produce design-authorship at the level of the conceptual exhibition."[29] In 1996, design educator Kali Nikitas curated the exhibition, "And She Told 2 Friends," an "exhibit [that] curated itself"[30] through an invitational network of women graphic designers (Fig. 14). Referring to the manner in which stories spread among a group of friends through sharing, "And She Told 2 Friends" was an innovative work of design-authorship on a larger scale. Although many of the works exhibited were for clients' traditional needs and not created intentionally as self-authored, the body of work

26 Reviewer 2, "Correspondence" *News of the Whirled* 3, Kenneth FitzGerald, ed. (Duluth, MN: Ephemeral States, 2001), 23.

27 Kenneth FitzGerald, ed., *News of the Whirled* 3, (Duluth, MN: Ephemeral States, 2001) inside front cover.

28 Kenneth FitzGerald, essay in *Form\Inform: Catalog of Works*, Steven McCarthy, ed., (St. Paul, MN: The Goldstein Museum of Design, 2003).

29 Steven McCarthy, "Curating as Meta Design-authorship" *Visual:Design:Scholarship*, Research Journal of the Australian Graphic Design Association, vol. 2, no. 2. http://www.adga.com.au/vds/vds020205.pdf (online September 28, 2007).

30 Kali Nikitas, ed. "And She Told 2 Friends: An International Exhibit of Graphic Design By Women" *And She Told 2 Friends* (Chicago: Michael Mendelson Books, 1996), 23.

Figure 15
Soul Design cover and posters (details), 1999.

chosen through curating, collaborating, and editing demonstrates the core concept behind designer-authored histories. Appropriately, the exhibition was originally shown at Chicago's Women Made Gallery.

"And She Told 2 Friends'" participants are a roster of influential women graphic design practitioners and educators from the 1980s onward: Katherine McCoy, Lorraine Wild, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, Irma Boom, Ellen Lupton, Lucille Tenazas, Marlene McCarty, Women's Design + Research Unit, and others. The exhibit's accompanying catalog documents the designs in the show with images and descriptive captions and features paragraph-length biographies; and—perhaps most telling—each friend wrote brief statements justifying their two chosen friends. Anne Burdick's blurb about inviting the WD+RU lauds the collective because "they refuse to keep quiet," especially on issues of gender equity, and ends with "Right on, sisters."[31]

In 1999, Kali Nikitas curated "Soul Design," a project involving an exhibition and a publication (Fig. 15). The premise of "Soul Design" was to have 18 invited designers each create compositions about someone meaningful in her or his life, which were then printed as tabloid-sized sheets and distributed freely at the exhibition, as well as published in a catalog. Personal, emotional, and expressive best describe the spirit of the pieces, with explanatory texts appearing opposite the graphically designed homages in the catalog.

Nikitas framed the topic of "Soul Design," while the individual designers were bound only by the page size and the limitation of a single color of ink. Design-authorship, in this regard, functions as personal narrative, as art, even as therapy. Michael Worthington chose fellow designer Ed Fella; Nancy Skolos chose her grandfather; Jan Jancourt chose past, present, and future musicians; Alexei Tylevich, his girlfriend. Clearly, the designs say as much, or more, about the graphic designers as they do about the objects of their admiration.

31 Anne Burdick, *And She Told 2 Friends*, Kali Nikitas, ed. (Chicago: Michael Mendelson Books, 1996), 27.

In her catalog introduction, Nikitas champions the "Soul Design" participants who "…use their skills to communicate something rooted in their own history."[32] Numerous viewers to the galleries, initially in Minneapolis, MN, and two months later in Oslo, Norway, took away snapshots of the designers' souls as they also took the printed graphic designs.

If a design exhibit attendee in Oslo has a free "Soul Design" take-away print in their personal archive, as does a research university's design museum, is that graphic design history in the making?

Conclusion

The Goldstein Museum of Design's graphic design collection presents a chronology of materials that show a long-standing engagement with the ideas inherent in design authorship. Parts of the collection are largely self-exemplifying, in that the designers were aware of their roles in expanding designers' voices and staking out greater intellectual territory. Discrete elements in the collection—a magazine spread, a typeface design, an essay—represent design authorship at the micro level, while larger aesthetic, social, cultural, political, and economic themes can be derived from strands at the macro and meta scales.

As some elements in the collection extend to within the past decade, one can see how contemporary concerns have a trajectory from design authorship's tenets. *Designism*, a term coined by Milton Glaser in 2006 and interpreted as "the intention for social change through design,"[33] can be traced directly to a number of designer-authored publications (perhaps even to his own *Push Pin Graphic*): "*Critical Design* is a current movement consisting of:

…designers who are … known for their critical attitude towards mainstream product design. Although they have distanced themselves from today's commercial design world, they sometimes use its mechanisms to pose questions about technological, social and ethical questions. Their ambivalent, critical position towards design and the spirited, playful form language used to express this is a constant theme…"[34]

One could easily substitute "graphic design" for "product design" and arrive at similar ideas, albeit something that occurred ten or more years ago. That graphic design authorship—in theory and practice—has had an influence seems beyond debate.

While studio art has the academic field of art history to describe, analyze, criticize, and document it, the disciplines of design history and design criticism are still maturing. Perhaps it is intellectually desirable to have a body of history and criticism that is related to, but not part of, the field being examined. Along that vein, new programs in design writing and criticism have been recently introduced: one at the London College of Communication and the other at the School of Visual Arts in New York. The notion

32 Kali Nikitas, "Introduction" *Soul Design,* Rob Dewey, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Minneapolis College of Art and Design, 1999).

33 Louise Ma, "Design and -isms at the ADC" http://www.mediabistro.com/unbeige/events/design_and_isms_at_the_adc_44315.asp (online September 21, 2007)

34 "Nr. 15 Designing Critical Design: Marti Guixé, Jurgen Bey, Fiona Raby & Anthony Dunne" http://www.z33.be/index/asp?page=detailproject%7Csub=67&lang=en (online September 28, 2007)

of designer-authored histories would then be a transitional stage in graphic design history's development, with more academic specialization and increased scrutiny yet to come.

Allied disciplines are already adding further and deeper analyses. Assessing the history of graphic design through the lenses of cultural studies, linguistics, anthropology, and other fields is poignant, relevant, and refreshing. The collection of materials amassed to date at the Goldstein Museum might, however, lead to this contrary proposal: that the story of graphic design—its trends and styles, its tools and techniques, its senders and receivers, its producers and consumers, which is to say, its history—is best told by its practitioners.

Most of the work in the collection, therefore, occupies a paradoxical position, akin to the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which claims—in its loose, popular definition—that the act of observation alters the thing being observed. The questions become: Does the self-awareness central to design authorship affect its history, one of simultaneously doing, being, and telling? How does one reconcile the hybridity of designing (the verb – action, production) with the design (the noun – artifact, system)?

The challenge remains then, if designer-authored histories enable symbiotic form and content to help tell the discipline's story, is there an audience for this story beyond the storytellers?