

Thesis abstract

Mapping the graphic lexicon of *Emigre* magazine: a visualisation framework for the study of visual communication design artefacts and collections

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This thesis explores the potential of *visualisation* as a means of inquiry. The primary aim of the research is the development of a visualisation *framework*, offering new possibilities for analytical tools to parse visual communication design artefacts and collections in order to identify, describe and elucidate their graphic language features. Given expanding access to digitised archives of graphic design, this research is well positioned to contribute to the methods design researchers use to investigate these collections and support formal analyses of the material they contain. In pursuit of this aim, the 20th-century typography and graphic design publication *Emigre* magazine (1984–2005), is used as a prototypal study. Contributing significantly to design history and practice, *Emigre* offers a rich and heterogeneous collection of material for investigation. Although the visualisation framework proposed in this thesis is applied to *Emigre*, it is applicable to visual communication design material more broadly. These visualisations provide new ways of seeing the *Emigre* collection; identifying and elucidating graphic language features enables more informed, nuanced statements to be made about the complex character of the material.

This framework, offering a suite of three *visual strategies* (*Emplacement*, *Amalgamation*,

Disassembly) and nine *visualisation approaches*, emerges from an approach to data practice I have defined as an *expanded visualisation practice (EVP)*. As a means of visual inquiry, an *EVP* offers an alternative or more expansive domain of practice than conventional visualisation. Conventional visualisations — reductive, quantitative studies of phenomena, such as graphs and charts — are limited in their capacity to respond to the graphic complexity and nuances of visual communication design artefacts and collections. A visualisation framework based on an *EVP* is proposed as a means of facilitating multidimensional understandings of this material, enabling researchers to *parse* graphic artefacts and collections, while maintaining the richness of the visual material, its context and complexity.

This thesis is situated within the model of *Research through Design*, which recognises the distinct contribution of design practice to scholarly inquiry and the production of knowledge. The knowledge produced through this approach to inquiry emerges from both the *practice* of visualisation (a process of *thinking-through-making*) and the *analysis* of the visual representations generated through this process. As research artefacts, the visualisations produced for this thesis evidence the potentiality of the

proposed framework and serve as an adaptable model for future study. These research artefacts provide new ways of seeing the *Emigre* collection; through an analysis of the visualisations, aspects of *Emigre*'s graphic lexicon are explicated. The prevailing narrative on *Emigre* and the narrow, idealised representation of its graphic expression are both extended.

The study of *Emigre* becomes a prototype investigation, formalising alternative means of analysing visual communication design

material and demonstrating how visualisation can support the identification and elucidation of a particular graphic lexicon.

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