CRITICAL AND ARTISTIC DIMENSIONS OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

A Case Study of Sulki and Min's Practice as Graphic Design Research

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ABSTRACT

The subject and purpose of research in graphic design, or "graphic design research", is often framed under dominant definitions of "graphic design" within the profession. This is generally defined as "the production of visual solutions to communication problems" (Bennett and Vulpinari 2011) and is closely tied to commissioned-based, mass-produced, or market-based requirements or demands (see Walker 1989, 29), measured and validated through quantifiable outcomes (Bennett 2006, Noble and Bestley 2005, Skaggs 2017, etc.).

However, the larger field of "design research" (Simon 1969, Schön 1983, Cross 2007a, etc.)—where graphic design research could be considered a part of—is moving away from its pragmatic and instrumentalist past towards diversified approaches. This is to search for an epistemological foundation for research rooted in design activity (Glanville 2015, Jonas 2016, Rodgers and Yee 2015, etc.). With this move, the field presents an opportunity to consider alternative forms of graphic design practices that do not reflect the dominant characteristics specified above and are seldom studied in academic literature due to their difficult classification. Specifically, this research posits and examines *critical and artistic* forms of graphic design practices as "graphic design research". Provisionally, such practices can be defined as alternative forms of design practice that involves research and critique either towards conventions of the discipline and profession or towards broader cultural or societal issues (Dunne 2008, Laranjo 2017a, Malpass 2017, etc.).

In arguing for critical and artistic graphic design practice's position and contribution as graphic design research, this dissertation first reviews scholarly literature in "design research" and "graphic design research" to find points of convergences between the two fields. It then surveys a range of academic and para-academic materials (Laranjo 2017a, Bailey 2014, Malpass 2017, etc.) surrounding critical and artistic graphic design practice to theoretically arrive at key characteristics of such practices. Finally, this research identifies the practice of Sulki and Min as one that is critical and artistic and examines it in relation to the findings from the earlier two sections. This is presented as an in-depth case study of their ideas, works, and broader engagements.

Overall, this research arrives at insights on how critical and artistic graphic design practices can be considered forms of research and how they contribute to the growing graphic design research discourse, hence arguing for its broader relevance in the graphic design discipline. These insights present useful points of departure for developing other specific understandings (i.e., methodological, pedagogical, etc.) of critical and artistic graphic design practices in future research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Graphic design is generally understood as a field of practice that has professional and cultural relevance in society, it is also acknowledged as a discipline of study not only in vocational but also higher education. For a field or discipline like this, "research" should not be an unfamiliar term. Although the topic of research in graphic design has indeed received interest from both researchers and practitioners in recent years (e.g., van der Velden 2006, Rodgers and Yee 2015, Joost et al. 2016, Margolin 2016), it has been increasingly difficult to define what research in graphic design means when we consider the expanding range of activities and practices in the field.[1]

To date, research in graphic design, or "graphic design research", is often framed under dominant definitions of "graphic design" within the profession. This is generally defined as "the production of visual solutions to communication problems" (Bennett and Vulpinari 2011)[2] and are closely tied to commissioned-based, mass-produced, or market-based requirements or demands (see Walker 1989, 29), and are measured and validated quantifiably (Bennett 2006, Noble and Bestley 2005, Skaggs 2017, etc.). This positioning of graphic design research—as a largely pragmatic or market-led activity—may be problematic when we consider broader notions of research in design.

The larger field of "design research" (Frayling 1993, Simon 1969, Schön 1983, Cross 2007, etc.)—where graphic design research could be considered a part of—has been moving away from a pragmatic and instrumentalist past towards diversified approaches. This shift is marked by the search for an epistemological foundation for a kind of research rooted in design activity and not that of scientific or academic traditions (Glanville 2015, Jonas 2016, Rodgers and Yee 2015, etc.), yet such developments and ideas remain relatively distant from graphic design research discourse. For this reason, there is an opportunity to look at alternative forms of graphic design practices that potentially align with this shift in design research even if they do not reflect the general or dominant characteristics of graphic design, which leads to the focus of this research.

This research examines graphic design practices that can be described as critical and artistic, an area of practice that has been growing in interest and practice amongst designers and researchers alike. Such practices could be traced back to the 1950–80s in the fields of industrial design and architecture, where designers pursued, broadly put, social or political engagements through conceptual and artistic approaches (Malpass 2017, 18; Sparke 2014), and were critical of the increasingly commercial and consumer-driven side of design, (Malpass 2017, 19; Dunne and Raby 2013, 6). Critical and artistic practices in graphic design carried similar motivations and were further articulated by important figures in the field like Jan van Toorn (1998; 2010), Rick Poynor (2013), or Andrew Blauvelt (2003). Some examples of prominent graphic design practices that emerged in this area were that of Metahaven, Dexter Sinister, and Jan van Toorn.

For this introduction, I provide a provisional, easier definition of critical and artistic graphic design by borrowing from Rick Poynor and Anthony Dunne, both of whom have contributed to this field or graphic design.[3] Critical and artistic graphic design treats design as a critical medium to reflect on—in a self-aware manner—the social and cultural role and effects of design (as object/subject) (Dunne 2008, xii). Designers of

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[1] See for example, the increasing range activities that are considered "graphic design" due to technological developments as described by AIGA in their article What is Design? (they are referring to graphic design based on the tags listed at the bottom of the article) (AIGA n.d.). Also, a recent major graphic design exhibition on contemporary graphic design, *Graphic Design: Now in Production* at Walker Art Center from 2011–12, focused on practices that were "remaking" graphic design practice (Byrne 2011), which hints at the changing nature of the field and discipline. A review article of this exhibition on Eye magazine was titled "Always in Flux" and well emphasises the earlier point (McCarthy and Goggin 2012).

[2] This is taken from a document by Ico-D, the International Council of Design (previously the International Council of Communication Design).

[3] A clearer and more elaborate definition is provided in chapter 3 of this dissertation as an important component of this research.

such practices "believe that design's role in society should be broader and more inquiring than simply serving the processes of manufacturing, promotion and consumption" (Poynor 2009, 120).

Critical and artistic graphic design practices allow us to tap on a potentially overlooked function of research where, like research in the arts and humanities, it could investigate into and develop knowledge that allow us to better understand, appreciate, or make informed decisions about the world around us, particularly aspects of it that concerns the built environment—communications, spaces, objects and structures, etc. Design research need not always derive or devise immediately practical solutions, but they can and should first consider and examine the nature or validity of these "problems"; outcomes of such research can still be used or applied instrumentally.

With this focus, this research is interested to find out *how* critical and artistic graphic design practice—which fall outside of dominant characteristics in general graphic design practice and discourse—may challenge or problematise authoritative ideas of graphic design research. This aim is particularly relevant given the many correlations between critical and artistic graphic design practice and design research identified in this dissertation (discussed in later chapters). Moreover, studying critical and artistic graphic design practices in the context of—and therefore also as a form of—graphic design research provides new perspectives on understanding the value of such practices, since they are often seen or labelled as marginal and not given as much attention in the discourse around graphic design research or design research.[4]

Critical and artistic graphic design practices are, however, not always clearly defined and without problems. There has been criticism towards the elusiveness of these practices and many of them—particularly recent ones—being self-serving and irrelevant rather than "critical" (e.g., Laranjo 2014; 2017, Oliveira and Prado 2015). These will be addressed and discussed in this dissertation.

To draw specific connections between critical and artistic graphic design practice and graphic design research, other than discussing and presenting the necessary historical and theoretical contexts, there is also a need to understand how this work in a real-world context (i.e., in practice). For this purpose, the latter half of this research employs an in-depth case study of a specific graphic design practice—that of Sulki and Min, a graphic designer duo based in South Korea whose practice could be described as critical and artistic. The rich variety of projects and subject matters in their practice—all well documented and archived online—position their practice as a suitable case example for this study among other reasons listed elsewhere in this dissertation.

This dissertation describes how critical and artistic graphic design practices can be forms of graphic design research and are equally valuable forms of practice that should be considered and discussed in graphic design research discourse within academic literature. The following paragraphs briefly state the research aim and objectives, overall research approach, and provide an overview of the chapters.

The general aim of this research is to better understand critical and artistic graphic design practice through positioning and contextualising it as a form of graphic design research, therefore examining the potential connections and relationships between the two areas. Doing so contributes to understanding graphic design research beyond current characterisations of it being a largely pragmatic and market-led or service-providing endeavour, heavily tied to dominant definitions of graphic design.

With this, the research question can be summarised as such: what are critical and artistic graphic design practices and how might they contribute to "graphic design research" discourse and practice?[5] This research

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[4] Critical and artistic graphic design practices were developed largely in isolation from larger related pursuits in design, like for example, from ideas in design research. Firstly, this is because of the disconnections already present between design research and graphic design research; key contributions to design research discourse often refer to the industrial design discipline. As far as many scholars are concerned, "design" is industrial design (Walker 1989, 27). Secondly, critical and artistic graphic design practices are not recognised as a serious enough form of design given its lack of theoretical grounding (see Malpass 2017, 9).

[5] This question assumes a connection between critical and artistic graphic design practice and graphic design research—a reasonable premonition based on a personal understanding and experience (from running an independent graphic design practice since 2016 that

question is positioned at the intersection of three areas: (1) graphic design, (2) (graphic) design research, and (3) critical and artistic graphic design practice. Bringing together these areas also raises other secondary but necessary questions: What are the other qualities and characteristics of graphic design beyond being a commercially driven or largely pragmatic activity? What is the relationship between research and graphic design? What is the role of practice in graphic design research?

To address these questions, this research sets out to meet the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between design research and graphic design and arrive at a *working description* of graphic design research.

2. To identify *key characteristics* of critical and artistic graphic design practice and its connection to graphic design research.

3. To study a *case example* of critical and artistic graphic design practice and discuss how such a practice contribute to graphic design research.

The approach and structure of this dissertation corresponds to the three research objectives listed above. The first objective is addressed in chapter two, the second objective is addressed in chapter three, and the third objective is addressed in chapters four and five. The following paragraphs explain the overall structure and approach of this dissertation.

Firstly, *chapter two: Design Research, Graphic Design, and Graphic Design Research*, surveys secondary literature across design research and graphic design research and finds connections between key ideas and developments from the two areas. This chapter addresses complications in defining graphic design and provides further clarification. It specifically points out the current disconnections between design research and graphic design and proposes a direction for thinking about a kind of "graphic design research" that converges with developments in design research, one that potentially aligns with critical and artistic graphic design practice. This chapter provides the historical and theoretical context needed to position the proposed study into critical and artistic graphic design practice.

Secondly, *chapter three: Critical and Artistic Practices in Graphic Design*, discusses the general background of and motivations for critical and artistic graphic design practice. It also identifies and describes the nature and characteristics of critical and artistic graphic design practices by surveying and organising ideas from an emerging body of discourse taken from both academic and para-academic literature surrounding this subject and makes significant reference to practitioners who are themselves involved in these practices. The chapter ends with a discussion on the limitations and possibilities of such practices by highlighting various criticisms against them and how they can be addressed when thought about in relation to graphic design research, thereby reasserting constructive connections between critical and artistic graphic design practice and graphic design research. This chapter provides a general foundation for understanding the otherwise elusive field of critical and artistic graphic design by drawing together and comparing ideas across different voices in the field.

Thirdly, chapters four and five present an in-depth case study of Sulki and Min's graphic design practice, which can be described as critical and artistic based on the ideas identified in chapter three. *Chapter four: Case Study Method*, lists specific methodological considerations—choice of case example, type of case study, etc.—behind the case study presented in *chapter five: Case Study: Sulki and Min*, where Sulki and Min's works and practice are studied closely in relation to ideas from the earlier two chapters. This case study does two things: it presents an example of critical and artistic graphic design practice and reveals, more specifically, how such practices are critical and artistic *in practice*, therefore putting the ideas in chapter three into context. It also studies and describes how such a practice contributes to research, thereby contextualising the connections between chapter

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explores critical and artistic approaches) as well as familiarity with the discourse in design research and graphic design prior to this research.

two and three, that is, between critical and artistic graphic design practice and graphic design research. The concluding chapter then draws together key findings from the earlier chapters and identifies possible directions for further research.

In general, a better understanding of critical and artistic graphic design practices and their role within the range of activities in the field of graphic design helps enrich our understanding of the discipline and its role and purposes in broader society. As this research will draw out at the end, critical and artistic graphic design practice also contributes productively to the development of graphic design research in ways that consider design as a specialised activity that contrasts or builds on other forms of research more common in the sciences for example. More specifically, understanding critical and artistic graphic design practices allows us to better understand what "research" in graphic design is or can be. This is especially relevant for a field (i.e., both graphic design and graphic design research) that is, as we will later see, somewhat uncertain or disconnected from within as well as from broader developments in design research.

2. DESIGN RESEARCH, GRAPHIC DESIGN, AND GRAPHIC DESIGN RESEARCH

Before discussing "critical and artistic" forms of graphic design practice, this chapter first constructs a historical and theoretical context for positioning the proposed study. It does so by tracing and connecting key ideas within three main areas that are directly relevant and useful for this research. They are design research, graphic design, and what I refer to as "graphic design research", a term consistently used in subsequent chapters to refer to design research in graphic design. Although this term, or variations of it (i.e., research in graphic design), has generally been used to describe forms of research in graphic design across scholarly settings, their definitions often vary across different usage and contexts (e.g., Bennett 2006; Harland 2010; Korzeńska and Satalecka 2012; Walker 2017).

Considering this lack of clarity in the field, the intention of this chapter is to develop a working definition of "graphic design research" based on a literature review around "design research" and notions of research in graphic design. This working definition provides the necessary foundation for systematically studying and discussing "critical and artistic practices" as forms of research in graphic design in later chapters, which is proposed as the key contribution of this research. This is achieved in three sections. First, section 2.1 refers to and compares secondary sources that compile and communicate historical accounts of design research (e.g., Roth 1999; Bayazit 2004; Cross 2001; 2007b; Margolin 2010) as well as more recent ideas on design research found in monographic works and edited volumes (e.g., Cross 2007a; Joost et al. 2016; Michel 2007; Swiss Design Network 2008; Rodgers and Yee 2015). Section 2.2 then discusses the relationship between "design research" and the field of graphic design—later revealed to be a disconnected one—by referring to scholarship that addresses research in graphic design. To address this disconnection between graphic design and design research, section 2.3 identifies potential convergences between the two as a working definition for "graphic design research".

2.1 Design Research

Research in design has been a subject of academic study and interest for various communities of practice since the 1960s,[6] even outside of design (e.g., Bonsiepe 2007, 27; Cross 2001, 50). Its history, although short, was a complicated one, moving across different terms like "design science" in the 1960s (Gregory 1966; Cross 2001, 52; Bayazit 2004, 18), "design methods" or "design methodology" (Alexander 1964; Archer 1965; Bayazit 2004, 21; Margolin 2016, 6), and "design studies" (Margolin 1998; 2016; Roth 1999, 19). With these developments also came along the initiation of several journals from the 1980s–90s (*Design Issues*, *Design Studies*, etc.), professional organisations (e.g., Design Research Society [DRS] founded 1966 in London), and international conferences (e.g., Design: Science: Method in 1980, the ongoing biannual international conferences organised by DRS). These efforts did not only involve designers or researchers in design but also—sometimes more so—from fields in engineering, cognitive sciences, computer science, and "artificial intelligence" for example (Bayazit 2004, 27). These show the rapid growth and development of a young academic field that influenced other professional fields while also shaping design education in universities (ibid.).

This first section traces through key ideas of design research in three subsections. Subsection 2.1.1 briefly traces through historical definitions and developments of design research. Subsection 2.1.2 identifies and elaborates on specific contributions that are useful for framing practices within design research and subsection

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[6] This can also be traced back to the 1920s where Bauhaus "established the methodological foundation for design education" (Bayazit 2004, 17).

2.1.3 highlights possible trajectories and challenges of the field by examining recent ideas and developments in design research discourse, which forms the stand of this dissertation regarding the term design research.

2.1.1 Tracing design research and its brief descriptions

One early and major influence can be traced back to Hebert Simon. His work, *The Sciences of the Artificial* (1969), is often described as the seminal book for a systematic and rational "scientific" method and foundation of design although he was focusing on a broader field that encompassed the entire artificial world, which included economics and engineering among others. This resulted in theories of "design research" that strictly supported the understanding of design as a "problem-solving and decision-making activity" (Bayazit 2004, 22). Largely influenced by system analysis and system theory (Bayazit 2004, 18),[7] design research at this moment was directed at finding optimised solutions for "solving […] problems and meeting user requirements", which were likely impacted by the scientific developments during and after World War II (Bayazit 2004, 22). Such an approach particularly benefitted the engineering disciplines (Bayazit 2004, 22; Cross 2001, 50), where those within the engineering fields began developing a "theoretical scientific approach" to an engineering design method they termed "design science"[8] in 1967. This focus on scientific and engineering methods in design can be understood as a pioneering form of design research (Bayazit 2004, 18).

Parallel to this "design science decade" in the 1960s, there was also a broader "design methods movement" in Great Britain which historian and researcher Victor Margolin traced as the starting point in design research (2010). In a similar vein, this movement envisioned to resolve human and environmental problems through science, technology, and rationalism (Cross 2001, 50). Key to this movement were L. Bruce Archer and J. Chris Jones, both of whom were engineers who became interested in design and organised the first conference on design methods in 1962 at Imperial College in London (Margolin 2010). Archer, who founded DRS, was a professor of design research at Royal College of Art and established the Industrial Design Research Unit there in early 1960s. Jones published the first edition of *Design Methods: Seeds of Human Futures* in 1970, another seminal work that intents for designers to rely on clear methodological processes instead of intuition or inspiration (Margolin 2010, 2). What resulted from this movement could be summarised into the following questions about the discipline: "Is design a science or something else that made use of scientific methods? What makes design knowledge unique and different from other kinds of knowledge?" (Margolin 2010, 3). These questions are largely motivated by a resistance towards "traditional" views of the designer being a "creative genius or (worse) stylist" to someone who is methodical in working collaboratively with other disciplines to solve, address, or interpret real issues (Roth 1999, 20). Overall, design research here is defined as "a systematic search for and acquisition of knowledge related to design and design activity" (Archer cited in Bonsiepe 2007, 27; see also Archer cited in Bayazit 2004, 16). Although such a definition remains tautological, this is grounded on Archer's belief that there exists a "way of thinking and communicating" that is distinguished from, yet equivalent to, scientific and scholarly approaches to research (Archer 1979).

These developments in the 1960s were not always well-received. There was a backlash in the 1970s towards the overly simplistic and rigid approaches put out by these communities of research (Cross 2001, 50; 2007b, 1; Bayazit 2004, 20). Critiques were directed toward the use of a scientific paradigm for defining *all* processes of design and many still view design as a non-scientific activity (Cross 2001, 53). The extent of this backlash was so significant that even Jones, introduced earlier as a pioneer of the movement, disassociated himself from the term "design methods" because of his disagreement with the continuing attempts to "fix all of life into logical frameworks" (Bayazit 2004, 21). Later, Horst Rittel, a researcher deeply involved in the design methods movement in the United States, proposed a "second-generation design methods" in reaction to these early

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[7] This was also referred to as "systematic design methods" which were generally "simplistic in character". One example is L. Bruce Archer's *Systematic Methods of Designers* (1965) (Bayazit 2004, 18).

[8] This term was defined as something "to be understood as a system of logically related knowledge, which should contain and organise the complete knowledge about and for designing" (Hubka and Eder in Bayazit 2004, 26).

developments he labelled as "first-generation" (Margolin 2010, 3). This shift was characterised by its user-centred and participatory approach in the design research process that were argumentative in nature instead of following formulated procedures (Bayazit 2004, 21) and was described to have "saved" design methodology from being dismissed entirely (Cross 2007a, 2).

With this shift, there are also two subsequent and noteworthy contributions. Nigel Cross, a recent prominent figure in the field, revisited the term "design science" in this light and clarified how it should simply be referred to as a "science of design"—i.e., a scientific approach to looking at design processes—and that we should not consider all of design practice to be a scientific discipline and therefore claim a positivist paradigm for the entire design discipline (2001, 54). Researcher Rudolph Glanville also contributed to this critique by arguing the need to put design back to its rightful place in research. His argument resists the common understanding of design being originally an inadequate form of research—which was what resulted in the effort to "scientise" all of design—but that scientific research is a (restricted) form of design (1999). In other words, Glanville defines design as a much broader category of activity that encompasses "scientific research".[9]

These ideas from Cross and Glanville were preceded by equally significant ideas of philosopher Donald Schön who introduced a new constructivist paradigm to the design research discourse in the 1980s and whose ideas were often contrasted to the generally positivist basis of Hebert Simon's work—a subject of critique in Schön's work (see Cross 2001, 53).[10] Schön took a step back from the methodological rigidity of design science to first search for a particular epistemology of practice that was inherent to design, which he believe implicitly resides in the artistic and intuitive processes of design when dealing with more "messy and problematic situations" that the "design science" movement overlooked or ignored. He characterised this active process of learning and understanding that occurs through the process of designing as the "reflective" nature of design practice—a kind of knowing or reflection *in action*—in his book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). This resulted in a refocused definition of design research: the research into "forms of knowledge special to the awareness and ability of a designer, independent of the different professional domains of design practice" (Cross 2001, 54).

These ideas from Schön, Cross, and Glanville mark a shift in the historical development of design research. With this brief overview, we saw how design research started in the 1960s largely as a form of research *adjacent* to design activity—specifically in scientific or engineering disciplines—mainly seen through the ideas of Simon, Archer, and Jones. This began to shift in the 1980s to something that more seriously considers the inherent or implicit characteristics or nature of design and forms an important context for this research. The next subsection identifies three specific ways to think about design research in light of this shift.

2.1.2   Ways of thinking about design research

Since the 1990s, there was significant growth in the field of design research (Bayazit 2004, 27). More specific ways of structuring knowledge around design research—its nature, functions, and outcomes—surfaced in the discourse. I briefly highlight three important recent contributions to categorising research in design from Christopher Frayling, Nigel Cross, and Per Galle that consider and work with the implicit characteristics of design described in the previous section.

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[9] This is supported by his view of design being a much broader activity that involves not only the processes of making, but also the *circular* (or cyclical) processes of conceptualisation, understanding, pattern finding, and the continuous processes of modification and unification within (Glanville 1999, 87). Therefore, if these can be considered design, and if these are already present in the scientific research process as put forth by Glanville, then scientific research is by default a subset of "design".

[10] There are however challenges to Schön's claims towards Simon's work. Singaporean educator and researcher Jude Chua in the essay "Donald Schön, Herbert Simon and The Sciences of the Artificial", revisited and questioned the popular narrative of how Schön criticised and dismissed Simon's work for its strictly positivist philosophy and therefore concluded with how Simon's later editions of *The Sciences of the Artificial* contain "open-ended constructivist trajectories" that is valuable for the discourse (Chua 2008, 60).

Firstly, Christopher Frayling, a professor in Royal College of Art in London, identified three types of research in art and design in 1993. With reclarification,[11] they are: "research into (or about) design", which is most similar to traditional forms of research in the humanities that looks at design as a phenomenon or object of study (i.e., design history, cultural studies, visual culture, etc.); "research for design", which is a form of practice-oriented research that is pragmatically driven (i.e., research and development, product innovation, material studies, market research, etc.); and "research through (or by) design", which is a form of research where design activity and practice plays a "central methodological role" but is also described as the least properly defined and therefore requires further clarification (Findeli 1999, 2).[12] To elaborate further, the last of the three, which I simply refer to as "research through design", is where the end product primarily involve(s) artefact(s) and where the thinking (or research) is embodied within them (Frayling 1993, 5). However, this does not imply that design practice alone is equivalent to research (Friedman 2008, 158), neither does it mean that such research should only be limited to traditional outcomes of research like writing or reports (see Cross 2007a, 126). Such complications explain why "research through design" remains a contentious area of research, yet this is likely the only area that distinguishes "design research" from other types of research,[13] where it justifies the need for a *compound* term rather than general descriptions like "research in design" or "design and research". This is also where design research discourse received most interest and discussion[14] since it contains the most potential yet remains the least explored[15] and most problematic.[16] This category of "research through design" is the focus of this dissertation and will be revisited as a recurring key idea.

Secondly, building on the past few decades of design research, Nigel Cross introduced the notion of "designerly ways of knowing", which is used to describe a kind of design knowledge specific to the discipline and where there is a focus on design *practice* as forms of research (Cross 2007a, 9). For Cross, this specific form of (tacit) knowledge is implicit to design (i.e., found and present in designers, design processes, and designed outcomes) and is intrinsically valuable as a way of thinking and learning rather than being extrinsically beneficial as knowledge in instrumental terms (i.e., the kind of knowledge tied to the vocational value of design). Cross further defines this "design knowledge" by mapping a three-part taxonomy of design research: (1) design epistemology, the study of designerly ways of knowing in *designers* (i.e., what can or do designers know?); (2) design praxiology, the study of *design processes* in design practices (i.e., what roles do designers play in knowing?); and (3) design phenomenology, the study of forms and configurations of *designed outcomes* (i.e., what results from the knowledge of a designer?) (Cross 1999, 2; 2007a). This contribution was part of Cross' intention to work towards a new paradigm for design research that departs from the previous

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[11] It is important to note that these three distinctions were not clearly articulated by Frayling (Jonas 2007, 187–200). This resulted in occasional confusions, misuse, and inconsistencies across various subsequent articles and works that made reference to it. I am using the categorical distinctions based on Alain Findeli (1999)'s interpretation, which is in my opinion is logical and clear in its use of the different prepositions (about, for, through, etc.) in linking design and research (i.e., research about design, research for design, research through design).

[12] The *nature* of the three different types of research can be described as such: "research about design" being a form of theoretical research, "research for design" being a form of practice-led research, and "research through design" being a form of practice-based research (see Candy 2006), though these remain as conceptual distinctions that should be explored further in practice.

[13] Wolfgang Jonas' hypothesis is that "research through design" provides the epistemological means for the development of a genuine design research paradigm, but more research has to be done about "about", "for", and "through" "research through design", in order to understand, improve, and stabilise this proposed disciplinary paradigm (2007, 202).

[14] See for example, *Design Issues* volume 15 number 2, a special issue on design research. The call for papers for that particular issue was directed towards forms of research "through" design and not so much from the other two categories (Findeli 1999, 1). Ralf Michel also described it gaining "special epistemological significance" (2007, 16), although he went on to point out the consequences of this approach as put forth by Frayling.

[15] It is worth noting that most of the outputs from design research before the 1990s fall under research "about" design (Findeli 1999, 1).

[16] It is important to acknowledge the problematic nature of "research through design", articulated by Ken Friedman in his article "Research into, by, and for Design" (2008, 153). In it he pointed out many misconceptions researchers had when quoting and citing Frayling's categories without careful consideration, where they claim design practice to be a form of theory construction and that designed artifact itself is "theory". This is followed by his argument that practice alone (and its tacit knowledge) cannot be equivalent to "research" and that "explicit and articulate statements are the basis of all theoretical activities" (Friedman 2008, 158). See also Cross 1999, 9.

debate between positivist and constructivist approaches (1999, 10), one with its own validity and distinct intellectual culture (2007a, 126).

Thirdly, philosopher and researcher Per Galle offered one way to think about the types of theory produced in design research. For Galle, design theory is assumed to be an outcome of design research[17] and he differentiated two types of design theory. One of it is "instrumental design theory", which is the applicable (i.e., instrumental) theory that "facilitate, accelerate, or improve design practice" (Galle 2011, 81). The other is "foundational design theory", which is a general (i.e., foundational) theory that supports and ground instrumental design theories. Instrumental design theory serves applied research and foundational design theory serves basic research. Also, both types of theory have an inseparable relationship and should always be developed in a coordinated manner though not necessarily simultaneously (Galle 2011, 82); any instrumental design theory would have its "underlying conceptions about the nature and purpose of design" grounded on relevant foundational design theories (ibid.). In his essay "Foundational and Instrumental Design Theory" (2011), Galle used this differentiation to analyse landmark texts of design research and systematically explained the theoretical foundations these texts were possibly built on, as well as how these ideas could serve other instrumental purposes.

Together, these three contributions provide ways to think about design research in overlapping ways:

- Frayling proposed categorical distinctions between types of research in design, of which "research through design" is identified as an area of focus and importance

- Cross discussed distinctions between types of knowledge (or areas of research) in design practice which provides a framework for better understanding how designers "research through design"

- Galle distinguished different purposes of research in design which is useful for positioning outcomes of "research through design"

This subsection identifies these contributions as useful "tools" for framing any design research or study of it given how they embrace and acknowledge design's intuitive and practice-driven nature. These frameworks are also mutually constructive and can be used interconnectedly in framing the same research or study.[18]

2.1.3   Trajectories and challenges of design research today

Despite developments in design research discourse highlighted earlier, there remains a disparity of ideas and approaches that is worth further attention. In contrast to proponents of design research, many prominent design academics and researchers today still believe "design research" lacks a robust epistemological and methodological foundation, and hence lack universal standards with regards to its processes, presentation, and evaluation (Roth 1999, 18; Margolin 2016, 9). The following paragraphs pursue these issues and highlight possible ways to address them.

In *Design Dictionary: Perspectives on Design Terminology* (Erlhoff and Marshall 2008) that is published by the Board of International Research in Design (BIRD)—an organisation that has been active in publishing key texts around design research[19]—it states that design research is still a vaguely defined term (ibid., 332). There

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[17] Since design research is only "research" when its outcomes are transferable to other forms of design or design research projects, that is in itself a form of "theory" that is generalisable and applicable across the discipline, whatever its extent may be (Galle 2011, 81).

[18] For example, by identifying the types of foundational design theories (Galle) that support the form of research that occurs "through" design (Frayling), we are able to better situate and justify forms of "research through design". Or, we could use Cross' distinctions between design epistemology, praxeology, and phenomenology to organise or structure a study or analysis of a "research through design" case. The case study presented in chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation uses these ideas to structure and frame its own study.

[19] They have, for example, published Nigel Cross' *Designerly Ways of Knowing* (2007a), and edited volumes like Michel's *Design Research Now* (2007) and *Design as Research* (2016) that brings together contributions from an international group of researchers active

are "various concepts of research manifested in different communities" although it is generally agreed that design research includes both theory and practice in design (ibid.). This ambiguity of the field is further amplified in a recent opening article for a DRS conference in 2016 by design historian Victor Margolin where he first questioned whether "design research" delineates a specific scholarly area of practice and then advocated a return to the use of "design studies" to distinguish and separate research *about* design from design research, of which the latter remains, to him, a project-oriented form of knowledge rather than "true" scholarship. He claims that this separation is "more practical and [have] their respective employment opportunities more evident" (Margolin 2016, 13). Yet, contradictory to Margolin's opinion, BIRD suggested elsewhere that this "productive ambiguity" in design research is not entirely disadvantageous and may provide an opportunity to "distinguish design from other forms of study", thereby allowing design research to formulate alternative conceptions of "research" that may in turn affect other sciences (Erlhoff and Marshall 2008, 333).

In a similar vein, editors Paul A. Rodgers and Joyce Yee—through their varied collection of chapters in *The Routledge Companion to Design Research* (2015)—argued that "various cultures co-exist in contemporary design research and that this pluralism should be celebrated in what is rapidly becoming a very healthy and mature field of research" (ibid., 1). This aim towards diversification in the field is also seen in another compilation work *Design Research Now* (2007), where instead of asserting a single valid form of design research, its aim was to present a "diversity of viewpoints and research projects" to engage a wider audience and provide extensive points of reference for further debate within the field (Michel 2007, 13).

Although it is unclear as to what exactly this "diversification" may be and entail, only partially revealed through the occasional scattered collection of writings—which is what forms the basis of Margolin's argument—what we do know is that those in the field of design research intend to develop its practice by opening up the discourse by moving away from its rigid past.[20] In their ending note, editors Rodgers and Yee described how the field have left the clutches of being obsessed with the "rational" and "measurable", an early characteristic of design research (2015, 517). In the same way, editor Michel described in his introduction in *Design Research Now* that during the late 1990s to late 2000s, the field's largest realisation was that it should not dismiss design's own "cognitive force and agency" if it were to become socially, culturally, or economically relevant (2007, 15).

This emphasis on relying and focusing on cognitive processes implicit within design, differentiated from those within science or art—following the ideas of Schön and Cross—is also evident in another recent work *Design as Research* (Joost et al. 2016). The title itself, in a self-aware manner, points towards the previously mentioned, slippery category of "research through design" as a form of practice-based research, where design activity is in itself core to the research. In its foreword, design researcher Gesche Joost portrayed this form of design research as a hybrid creature, describing it as something that taps into other disciplines and "remixes" their methods. Again, this stance of embracing diversity of approaches and opinions is what she thinks will contribute to the field's potential to "innovate research and to address global challenges by bridging gaps between theory and practice as well as between disciplines" (Joost 2016, 8).

Joost's proposition in saying that design research now has the potential to bridge what has always been a divide between theory and practice finds itself on one end of the dichotomic confusion present in design research discourse—one that is between design research as a traditional form of academic discipline or something more hybrid in nature that crosses between theory and practice (see Roth 1999, 19)—the latter of which is Joost's position.[21] Although this is a provocation towards general traditions of research practice, it is not an overly

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in the field of design research. Across the span of several publications, BIRD's advisory board also consists key figures in the field; some of which who are mentioned in this dissertation are Alain Findeli, Gui Bonsiepe, Nigel Cross, etc.

[20] For many new fields of research or profession, diversity of opinions and approach is more productive than otherwise because it leads to "further exploration and new ways of thinking" (Roth 1999, 19).

[21] Designer and professor Gui Bonsiepe traced the division back to the two reasons for the emergence of design research, one related to academic activity and the other to professional practice; the tensions between them have led to many "controversies and divergences" in early design research discourse (2007, 28).

idealistic idea[22] as similar views are shared and ardently put forth by Glanville (1999; 2015) and professor Wolfgang Jonas (2007; 2016), albeit in slightly different ways.

Glanville's argument was that design should *change* (scientific) research. He uses a much broader definition of design as a "verb" that indicates a circular reiterative process of searching and learning which he argues is the key characteristic of "design". Any other aspects of design, particularly "problem-solving" is simply a practice on its own that is not central to the act of designing (Glanville 1999, 88). This way, design research should primarily have "design" both as an "object of study" and as the "means of carrying out that study". Scientific research is merely a subset of "design"; design research does not have to perform according to "scientific" criteria as how there is no need for a "set of a subset to act as the sub subset" (ibid., 87). This idea puts design as the key to research, and challenges traditional approaches and paradigms of (scientific) research[23]. In the author's own words: "Considering design carefully (making theory from or even researching it) can reveal how better to act, do research—to *design* research" (ibid., 90, emphasis mine). More recently, Glanville reiterated that dividing between theory and practice is a mistake and design's alternative way of approaching research may bring greater value to research in general (2015, 15), which reinforces Joost's earlier proposition.

Parallel to Glanville's argument that "research practice *is* a specific form of a design process", Jonas questions the needless distinction between "text" and "artefact"— equivalent to that between "design research" and "design practice" (2016, 70). He considers this dualism counterproductive and meaningless to the discourse and emphasised that design research, only when conducted under the "designerly" paradigm, can "contribute to design's methodological development and its disciplinary stability/autonomy" (Jonas 2007, 203). The emergence of various hybrid forms between text and artefact (or practice and theory) can be a way to "conceive and further develop design/research as a non-conventional actor within a transdisciplinary transformative science community" (Jonas 2016, 76).[24]

As a whole, this subsection showed how design research discourse contain highly divergent opinions and how design research is still actively debated. This sustained interest and development however reveal its potential for further development as a clear field of investigation. In summary, although some consider "design research" a needless term and believe a clearer divide should be made between theoretical and practical activities in design (e.g., Margolin), the developments have since grown to embrace and support pluralistic viewpoints (see Rodgers and Yee 2015; Michel 2007) and to leave its rigid past that is largely tied to "scientific" approaches and preferences (see Rodgers and Yee 2015, 517; Glanville 1999, 87). This does not however mean that anything can be considered "design research". There remains a particular emphasis on identifying, acknowledging, and tapping on inherent or implicit characteristics of design (see Michel 2007, 15; Glanville 1999, 90) and on embracing a hybrid form of research practice that crosses between theory and practice and taps into other disciplines (see Jonas 2016, 76; Joost 2006, 8). This is the position adopted in this dissertation and will be apparent in later chapters when the dissertation moves into discussing "critical and artistic" graphic design practices.

2.2   Design research and graphic design

The attitudes that embrace the productive tension between the field's lack of "focus" and its diversity of contributions seen in the last subsection is not something observed of research *within* graphic design, which is the focus of this dissertation. (Here, graphic design is understood as a discipline within the field of design that

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[22] Joost is also aware of parallel developments in another recent scholarly field called "artistic research", which is in a very similar situation as design research and shares many overlapping concerns. The "artistic" nature present in some design practice is an idea that surfaces in later chapters of this research.

[23] In fact, Glanville holds the idea that the "scientific" way of doing research is not the only way (2015, 15).

[24] It is important to note that none of them actually means design practice is in itself research (see Glanville 2016, 155).

primarily works with materials and mediums involving two-dimensional graphics (i.e., texts and pictures) (Hollis 2001, 7).) To date, although there exist a fragmented discourse on research in graphic design, there are few discussions that address graphic design in relation or context to the field of design research and its specific literature. This may be due to the lack of clarity in the definition of "graphic design", the lack of immediate relevance of "design research" to general graphic design practice, or simply the lack of engagement from graphic designers and researchers in articulating what research is in this field. I discuss these three possibilities in the following subsections.

2.2.1   Disconnections between graphic design and design research

Sue Walker, a researcher of graphic design, mentioned in her article "Research in Graphic Design" that despite design research's growth as a field in the last few decades, research in graphic design has not received significant attention (2017, 549). There is a tendency to see graphic design as a supplementary discipline that is an "additional" other within the field of design and it is often viewed from outside as an activity that is "not particularly thoughtful [and] aesthetic-led" (ibid.). She also cited a feedback from a report stating that "the intellectual and theoretical underpinning of graphic and communication design was thought to be generally weak" (quoted in Walker 2017, 550).

Gui Bonsiepe, designer and writer of design theory and one of few who is both active in the field of design research and graphic design (e.g. Bonsiepe 2007; 1994) briefly hinted at their relationship although he did not extensively compare the two. In "The Uneasy Relationship Between Design and Design Research" (2007), he mentioned that Archer's definition of design research in 1981[25] is clearly tailored to industrial design and not for communication design (or graphic design) (Bonsiepe 2007, 27). This is inevitable as, among most scholars from that period, "design" is almost synonymous to "industrial design" (Walker 1989, 27). This is likely one of the reasons why design research's connection to graphic design as a specific discipline remains lesser explored, which is emphasised through Bonsiepe's next point. He states that "graphic design was barely mentioned" in design research discourse because the main representatives of design research—who as mentioned were formerly from fields outside of design—were mainly interested in finding rational methods for "evaluating buildings and products" and had little or no experience in design disciplines (ibid.).

This disconnection between design research and graphic design is further illustrated by designer and researcher David Cabianca in "A Case for the Sublime Uselessness of Graphic Design" (2016). Cabianca's larger agenda was to rethink the graphic design discipline entirely while examining its relation to research; he intends to locate another more relevant and urgent reference point for graphic design research outside of the design research discourse. He explained that graphic design in recent years went through a phase similar to that of "design research" in its early phases where many prominent professional and educational bodies in graphic design have adopted the term "research" as a way to quantify and measure graphic design's contribution as a valid and accountable profession or activity (see Bennett 2006; Noble and Bestley 2005; Heller 2006, 12; Skaggs 2017, etc.), particularly against the backdrop of "fundable research opportunities that partake in the view that design is a quantifiable commodity" (Cabianca 2016, 107). Turning to the field of engineering, for example, is attractive and likely, given that it is a form of applied knowledge. Nonetheless, Cabianca's argument is that doing so only addresses a small aspect of graphic design's value as a discipline. Its potential and ability to engage in cultural discourse and societal concerns for example—which evidently occupies a large part of graphic design's history—will be totally ignored when its "research" is reduced to a "fundamentalist and instrumentalist outlook" manifested through an increasing over emphasis on graphic design being a "user-centred practice and service schema" (ibid., 107; for examples, see Frascara 2012, 16, 18, 23; Raff 2012; Nini 2006, 117; Cooke 2006, 131).

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[25] That design research is "a form of systematic inquiry [for] generating knowledge of the form/embodiment of—or in—design, composition, structure, purpose, value and meaning of [the artificial]" (Bonsiepe 2007, 27).

There is a clear disconnection between graphic design and design research due to the perception of graphic design being of lesser importance within the broader field of design. There is also a lack of focus on graphic design's value and ability in engaging cultural discourse given the prominent efforts to quantify and measure its contributions as a form of applied knowledge.

2.2.2   Dominant forms of research in graphic design

The disconnections between graphic and the field of design research—whether due to isolated developments from the design research field (according to Bonsiepe) or a lack of compatibility of methods (according to Cabianca)—does not mean the absence of "research" in graphic design. Sue Walker—in the earlier mentioned article "Research in Graphic Design"—argues that there exists rich materials and a thriving discourse on "graphic design research" (its history, theory, and practice) if one knows where to look (Walker 2017, 557). This is however based on a much broader view of graphic design that encompasses a number of adjacent fields or "sub-disciplines" like typography, graphic design journalism, critical writing, graphic design history, visual culture, etc., and therefore include materials beyond academic literature, like professional magazines or periodicals, anthologies or readers, monographs, para-academic publications, and other major works from popular publishers in graphic design. Although most of the examples she mentioned are important works, very few of them can be considered "research through design".[26] They only fall under "graphic design research" in a generic sense and it will be more appropriate to consider them as research "about" or "in" graphic design.

Research in graphic design is also clearly shifting towards one that primarily values quantifiable and objective outcomes, almost as if it is going through what "design" experienced in its early "design research" phase and this is problematic if it applies to *all* of "graphic design research". This was briefly mentioned earlier (from Cabianca) but will be elaborated here with more specificity. In a recent and one of very few international graphic design conference titled "Research in Graphic Design; Graphic Design in Research" (Korzeńska and Satalecka 2012), many of its projects and entries advocated design-as-problem-solving as the primary approach to situating graphic design as a form of research (Frascara 2012; Kubasiewicz 2012; van Der Waarde 2012; etc.).[27] Contributors in this conference differentiate this quantifiable form of research in graphic design from "traditional" graphic design labelled as forms of "personal expression" (Lenk 2012, 7; see also Nini 2006, 117). In one of the articles titled "Research, Design, and the Kind of Design We Need", Jorge Frascara asserted that the purpose of research in design is the "creation of new information, arrived at through an objective and systematically planned process, and generally including members of the user population of the device to be designed". He follows to add: "research serves to: a) get reliable information; b) remove doubts and answer questions; c) test hypotheses; and d) defend proposals" (Frascara 2012, 16, see also van Der Waarde 2012, 201) and that the purpose of research in design is to help "design products [to] do what they are intended to do" (ibid., 18). This pragmatic emphasis seems to be a haunting echo of design research in the 1960–70s as it assumes a complete fundamentalist and instrumentalist purpose of research in all functions of graphic design. There is a clear rejection or scepticism towards qualities of open-endedness, subjectivity, expressivity, and intuition in graphic design research (ibid.; Bennett 2006, 17; Tarbox 2006, 73; Frascara 2012, 17). Such conceptions of research falls plainly under the "research for design" category, where research exists only for designing solutions for *pragmatic* problems.

Some other key literature that directly discuss research and graphic design are, in chronological order, *Visual Research: An Introduction to Research Methodologies in Graphic Design* (Noble and Bestley 2005), *Design*

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[26] Although Walker introduced some works she labelled "graphic design as research", these were loosely described as practice-based research that still does not seem to align with notions of "research through design". These were also only a handful out of all the other examples mentioned.

[27] This is particularly emphasised through Frascara's bold statement that "without meaningful problems, research is useless, however developed it might be" (2012, 23). In another article titled "Design Research is Design Practice: Mapping Design Intelligence", the author claimed that Archer's definition of design research being "systematic" and "goal-directed" aligns perfectly with "design defined as a problem-solving activity (Kubasiewicz 2012, 59).

Studies: Theory and Research in Graphic Design (Bennett 2006), and *Basics Graphic Design 02: Design Research: Investigations for Successful Creative Solutions* (Ambrose and Leonard 2012).[28] Here are a few short quotations from these titles extracted from their introductory texts or summaries. They provide a partial yet clear glimpse of how "research" is represented and defined in graphic design.

- "Research is an intrinsic aspect of design practice and an essential part of the activity of problem-solving" (Noble and Bestley 2004).

- "Graphic design is at a crossroads. […] Looking ahead, one sees [designers] engaged in a process where research is integrated into the design of objects and experiences *for* and with the audience" (Bennett 2006, 14, emphasis mine).

- "*Design Research* shows readers how to choose the best method of research in order to save time and get the right results" (Ambrose and Leonard 2012).

We see from these a general consensus that graphic design, especially when associated with "research", is valuable only when it is primarily a problem-solving or efficiency-oriented business. Steven Heller, another renowned figure in graphic design writing, described this clearly in a foreword to one of the books listed above: "the most recent discourse to hit academia centers around the old/new process of 'quantifiable research', or rationalising through data why particular designs are produced and for what purpose […] some students are now required to develop rationales and justify them through various quantifiable means" (Heller 2006, 11). Editor Audrey Bennett pointed out that the need to consider and include audiences or users into the design process may be the motivation for graphic designers to adopt research methods over relying on intuition (Bennett 2006, 17). Here, we observe that what finds its way recurrently into the arguments and proposals of these "popular" forms of "graphic design research" is a "user-centred" approach or focus.[29]

Another clarification I will like to make here is regarding the use of the term "graphic design theory". We see this used to, often misleadingly, refer to a form of theory related to graphic design (Harland 2015, 95). Two major works on research and graphic design, *Graphic Design Theory* (Davis 2012) and *Graphic Design Theory: Readings from the Field* (Armstrong 2009) use the term in their titles. However, this does not refer to a form of theory that results from graphic design—as what one might expect "graphic design theory" to outline—but theory that is *about* or *for* graphic design, i.e., not constructed as a result of the discipline but borrowed from related disciplines to understand graphic design activity. Given how such examples do not position graphic design as a research discipline with its own theoretical knowledge, Robert Harland, a researcher and educator in graphic design, concluded that graphic design is not entirely situated within a research culture unique to its own discipline despite the abundance of research studies around it (2015, 96).

This brief survey shows that among materials that directly discuss research in graphic design, there is an overly rigid focus primarily on the pragmatic or instrumental functions of graphic design rather than cultural or

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[28] There is of course other literature related to—but not directly about—research in graphic design (e.g., Arnheim 1969; Lupton and Miller 2007; Baldwin and Roberts 2006; Armstrong 2009; Davis 2012; Drucker 2014; Skaggs 2017; Kim 2018; Atzmon and Triggs 2019). Although these are also pointed out by Robert Harland (2015, 88–89) as materials that "link graphic design, research and theory, they are better described as materials situated outside the *practice* of graphic design because they view graphic design more as a subject of study and analysis using theories outside of design (critical theory, cultural theory, semiotics, visual culture, etc.) to "research about design" (see Harland 2015, 89). Although these materials might still be useful for thinking about research through graphic design—although they are likely more beneficial as research "for" design, they are not discussed here because they are not sources that research into or provide instruction on research in graphic design, unlike the other sources mentioned in the main text above.

[29] There are a handful of authors and articles in these readers or conference proceedings that do not fall into these descriptions and introduce alternative ways to think about research in graphic design. Still, there is a tendency to overlook their points when they are sandwiched between the contrasting opinions of the majority, particularly when these opinions also appear in the introductory texts or editorials of the publications. I will discuss some of these in a later section where I propose a direction of graphic design research different from the ones here.

conceptual purposes. Yet, this does not mean that such kinds of literature or research are entirely absent. My presumption at this point—clarified in subsequent chapters—is that these have extended into areas less common to researchers in academia, into critical or para-academic magazines or periodicals, independent or cultural institution-funded conferences, professional communities, or simply in the collective practices of certain graphic designers.

Also, the thorny yet latent area of "research through design" remains almost unknown or unexplored in the field of graphic design, seen from the general literature surveyed. Nonetheless, borrowing Sue Walker's viewpoint, it is likely that there is at least a small abundance of "graphic design research" practices that are not merely regurgitating the early (now questionable) arguments in "design science" or "design methods"[30] but exploring new terrains and potential of graphic design as research. Before addressing this, however, I take one last sidestep in this chapter to discuss the definition of graphic design. This will provide further clarity to eventually focus into what I propose to investigate: an alternative form of graphic design research that aligns itself with the potential trajectories in broader design research discourse.

2.2.3   Clarifying complications in "graphic design"

On top of the elusive nature of research in graphic design, the term "graphic design" or graphic design practice, is increasingly difficult to define. Instead of seeing this as a limitation in establishing and developing a stable definition and practice for graphic design research, this research sees it an appropriate opportunity for rethinking its possibilities while simultaneously reflecting on the role of graphic design. This also allow us to revisit the term graphic design with critical questions and additional insights. The following discussion highlights some of these complications and presents them for further clarification.

The professional discipline of design is dominantly understood as a specialised activity associated with industrial production, mass reproducibility, modern movement, and consumption (Walker 1989, 29). This is similar to the graphic design discipline where, because of its visual nature, it is often defined differentially from, and in contrast to, general characteristics of "art" like autonomy, expression, individuality, non-functionality, or non-reproducibility (see Barnard 2005, 162; Walker 1989, 26).[31] The International Council of Design (Ico-D), previously International Council of Communication Design (and yet previously International Council of Graphic Design Associates), described graphic design as an activity that "essentially involves the [re]production of visual solutions to communication problems" (Bennett and Vulpinari 2011). Their definition is heavily associated with processes and outcomes driven by commissions, reproduction, and external requirements like market-based demands or problems.

If we refer to the dictionary entry from *Design Dictionary*, we find some general consensus on the definition of graphic design: it "encompasses a notoriously wide range of activities" that includes all kinds of traditional to digital mediums (see for example, Armstrong 2016; Lupton 2014); it encompasses activities like typography, illustration, advertising, book design, etc. (see Harland 2010, 21–22); it is (traditionally) perceived as an activity concerned with how things "look" rather than how they "work" [32] (see for example, Poynor 2013; see

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[30] I am careful not to dismiss their importance as *part* of the graphic design discipline. It is only problematic when *all* of graphic design research is defined within a positivist paradigm and being given a specific function when the graphic design discipline originally encompassed highly varied and engaged practices that spans across highly commercial, social, critical, or even scientific practices.

[31] These descriptors are problematic in their own ways. They will not be elaborated here and are listed here simply to provide general understandings of how graphic design is often defined differentially from art. See chapter "Graphic Design and Art" by Barnard in his book *Graphic Design as Communication* (2005) in highlighting the issues surrounding these distinctions.

[32] This should not be received negatively, since the concern with how things look is an inherent quality of a primarily "visual" discipline—and the concern might very well be how something works through how they "look"—although we have seen how "graphic design research" may have tried to change this.

Frascara 1988, 20); it is associated closely with commerce, sometimes "synonymous with corporate identity and advertising" (Erlhoff and Marshall 2008, 198–99; see Frascara 1988, 25).

Among these definitions, one difference did surface regarding the *context of practice* in graphic design. According to graphic designer Stuart Bailey, the author of this dictionary entry, this difference lies between two general aspects of contemporary graphic design practice. One is overtly "commercial" and synonymous with branding or advertising, and the other "marginal", practised by an "international scene of graphic designers" who make work that are typically "experimental and personal" in nature and widely circulated across various media (Erlhoff and Marshall 2008, 199; Bailey 2014, 378).[33] Although he did not elaborate on what constitutes work in the latter category other than them being mostly self-directed, collaborative and multi-disciplinary, it is not difficult for someone in the graphic design profession to identify these "alternative" practices or international figures. Some examples of these individuals or collectives are: Karel Martens, Dexter Sinister (which Bailey is part of), Metahaven, Daniel Eatock, Sulki & Min, etc.[34] This distinction reveals another complication of "graphic design research". Do existing discourses of research and graphic design consider such practices (the latter category) or conveniently dismiss them due to their experimental or artistic nature? Are such practices considered legitimate examples of graphic design practice in scholarship around graphic design research?

Other than this divide, there are also other uncertainties within the field manifested through several attempts to re-evaluate, refine, or reinvent the term "graphic design". In 1994, Gui Bonsiepe, in his article "A Step Towards the Reinvention of Graphic Design", proposed to replace "graphic designer" with the term "info-designer" in order to cater for newer technological innovations and the proposed shift of the graphic designer being someone who "[translates] information from a non-visual state into a visual state, to the authorial organisation of information" (1994, 48). In 2011, Ico-D adopted and proposed the term "communication design" as one that is, to them, more appropriate given graphic design's evolvement into a "plural state of being" (Bennett and Vulpinari 2011, 10). This shift is likely due to graphic design's historical baggage of being heavily associated with the print medium, while also being a term related to and preceded by "commercial art" (Hollis 1994). In another article titled "The Dimensions of Graphic Design and its Spheres of Influence", Robert Harland examined the instability of current definitions of graphic design, particularly when defined through material specifications or mediums (typography, illustration, etc.), simply because these terms will always be subjected to technological change and professional shifts (2010). In addressing this, Harland presented a work-in-progress diagram that presents a rethought diagrammatic "definition" of graphic design, albeit incomplete. Through this, he more carefully considers graphic design's hybrid nature and transdisciplinary potential by positioning graphic design as a *multiplicity of related activities* that can be shaped or defined in different ways by various connected "spheres of influences" (e.g., history, theory, criticism, research, education, craft) (Harland 2010).

We cannot assume that these efforts in revaluating graphic design are without any underlying agenda. Like the proliferation of terms within design research—which Glanville described as a "jousting for superiority" of the relevance and authority of each within the field (Harland 2015, 19)—it is not unlikely that some of these efforts in redefining graphic design are based on subjective experience and knowledge with a specific range of graphic design activity, or an objective prioritisation of definitions reinforcing certain conventions of commerce or

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[33] I clarify that these two aspects of graphic design practice are not definitions of graphic design, they are two general aspects—important and relevant ones according to Stuart Bailey—that could be used to think about or describe graphic design practice. The two types of graphic design practice are likely contrasting—though not necessarily opposing—ends; what is experimental and personal most often do not have commercial success as its primary motivation and the same applies vice versa. This is a generalisation—the same with other general descriptions—and there might be cases where this binary might not apply in a large extent. Despite this limitation, these two aspects remain a reasonably important way to think about or describe most graphic design practices—especially when it is based on observations of contemporary graphic design practice (see examples listed in the same paragraph)—which is what Bailey suggests rather than claims.

[34] One ambitious and well-known international graphic design exhibition and eponymous publication *Graphic Design: Now in Production* catalogues many of such practices including those mentioned here. Even if the selection may be bias to some extent, these are still valid examples that reflect such practices.

socio-economic functions. This is also likely the reason for categorising certain practices that fall outside of dominant definitions as "marginal", as seen in the earlier mentioned dictionary entry.

Strangely, as we have seen, "graphic design" is commonly defined by where, when, and for whom it is practiced instead of *what* it is and *how* it is practiced (i.e. through the profession instead of discipline or practice), although the latter should be at the core of what it is. In a broader definition by Richard Hollis, we find a more accommodating yet fundamental description of the activity:

> Graphics can be signs, like the letters of the alphabet, or form part of another system of signs, like road markings. Put together, graphic marks—the lines of a drawing or dots of a photograph—form images. Graphic design is the business of making or choosing marks and arranging them on a surface to convey an idea (Hollis 2001, 7).

This describes the nature of the graphic design activity and brings to focus the essential act of graphic design, which is a form of visual communication, whether it is a commission, providing a service, or solving a problem. The earlier distinction between "dominant" (primarily commercial) and "marginal" (not necessarily commercial) practice can also easily translate into another binary, which is that between "art" and "science": "the more aesthetic and sensory latitude involved or allowed, the closer graphic design veers towards art (poetics); the less, the closer toward science (functionality)" (Erlhoff and Marshall 2008, 198). Practitioners associated with the former will value "subjectivity, imagination, commitment, and a concern for justice", and those with the latter likely value "objectivity, rationality, neutrality, and a concern for truth" (Harland 2010, 27). This description reveals a potentially overlooked fact about the state of graphic design research now. If graphic design exists within the described spectrum and could be defined accordingly, graphic design *research* will also be subjected to the same spectrum of "definitions". This means that the current dominant "scientific" leaning of graphic design research is only one of at least two possibilities, since "research" is not synonymous to "science".

With this insight, Harland's description of graphic design as a multiplicity of activities affected by various spheres of influence is an appropriate one for this research. It contains the most potential for rethinking graphic design in relation to research and differs from those described by Ico-D and Bonsiepe. Most importantly, without being entirely open-ended or tautological, Harland's description of graphic design acknowledges how it is both influenced by the "sciences (science and knowledge) and arts (humanities and expression)"— referencing Archer and Cross' ideas of design being a "'third culture' in addition to science and the humanities"—and not does lean towards a disciplinary bias (Harland 2010, 30). Since what he proposed is also something that is in-progress, it also allows for continuous emergence or prompting of new overlapping or extended spheres of influence around graphic design as a way of defining itself. Also, this research dissertation aligns with Harland's decision to stay with the term "graphic design" instead of reinventing it with "communication design" or "visual communication", which are problematic in their own ways.[35] Graphic design already has a rich history of examples and discourse that encompasses a wide range of activities. Other terms like those listed earlier are not as inclusive towards graphic design practices that may not primarily be described as "communicative" or "informative" but critical, speculative, or artistic for example.

As a whole, this subsection showed that certain institutionally-endorsed or academically-recognised definitions of graphic design are sometimes disconnected from what actually occurs in practice; there is a lack of inclusivity in general understandings of "graphic design". This subsection identified appropriate definitional foundations that this research can build upon, namely, Harland's proposition that graphic design involves a multiplicity of activities and is better understood through its spheres of influence and Bailey's insight that

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[35] Visual communication or communication design denote much broader spheres of activity. Visual communication does not describe itself as a deliberate (design) act, whereas communication design lacks specificity in its relation to particular types of tangible or non-tangible artefacts. For example, we can argue that architecture and products might also be "communicative". Also, "Communication design" is closer to terms like "functional design" or "speculative design", which refers to a type or genre of design rather than a discipline.

graphic design involves the characteristics of the arts (e.g., personal, experimental) as much as that of the sciences (e.g., functional, pragmatic).

This broader section pointed out how research in graphic design differs from recent trajectories of design research and is instead similar to how design research was in the 1960s, which did not carefully consider the intuitive or artistic characteristics that equally exist in the dual nature of (graphic) design. There is a need for practitioners and researchers of graphic design research to not only consider graphic design activities that are not immediately concerned with solving pragmatic problems, but also, through this, find opportunities to develop a more balanced definition and understanding of the graphic design field. With this, the next and last section of this chapter delineate potential convergences between graphic design and design research to identify a more satisfactory understanding of graphic design research that better supports the focus of this research.

2.3 Towards an alternative graphic design research

To recap, section 2.1 "Design Research" introduced key historical ideas and developments in design research discourse and discussed potential trajectories of the discourse. Section 2.2 "Design Research and Graphic Design" then discussed design research's relationship with graphic design and pointed out their disconnections, situated against debates regarding the definition of graphic design. From what is surveyed, the potential points of convergence between the trajectories of design research from section 2.1 with the complications and limitations of graphic design research from section 2.2 are summarised and distilled into three main points in the following subsection.

2.3.1 Potential convergences between design research and graphic design research

Firstly, there should be a concerted effort to think about and connect the two fields given their current disconnections. The general lack of a research culture in graphic design and the lack of focus on graphic design within design research discourse caused a disparity between both fields despite graphic design research being (naturally) a subset of design research. Many of the current ideas and developments around graphic design research are framed—like design research discourse in the past—through rationalist and positivist approaches and paradigms for research. We also saw how design research has left the rigidity of its "first-generation" design methods or "design science", embracing diversified approaches and alternative arguments in working towards an epistemology intrinsic to design activity. This presents an opportunity or need to develop graphic design research according to the repositioned ideas of design research, hence ensuring a situated and coordinated development of graphic design research that both corresponds and contributes to developments in design research.

Secondly, this convergence should be based on the exploration and investigation into "research through design". This category of design research has been identified as the key to distinguish design research from other forms of research in, about, or for design, which hardly justifies for a distinct form of research specific to design. "Research through design" is also identified as the bridge between what may traditionally be separated between theoretical or practical pursuits; it establishes a "designerly" paradigm for developing a hybrid form of research that constructively provokes or questions established or traditional models of research. This kind of research is largely absent in current graphic design research examples and discourse; most are either research "about" or "for" design. This presents another opportunity for graphic design research by focusing on (i.e., studying or developing) practices that are forms of research *through* graphic design; these are practice-based rather than research situated purely in the humanities or the sciences.

Thirdly, the ambiguous state of graphic design research is productive for reassessing graphic design's larger social and cultural relevance in society. Given the departure of design research from its positivist and rational past into pluralistic consideration of alternative cultures in design and research, it allows the discourse to confront existing conventions, conservations, and underlying agendas in the field through critically examining other forms of design practices or activity that have not been given attention in academic discourse. This is a

particularly relevant opportunity for graphic design because there exists a prominent body of "marginal" practices that have not been considered in defining graphic design research. There is a need to develop a graphic design research that explores alternative forms of meaning or knowledge construction that are directed towards social or cultural ends, hence contributing to its socio-cultural relevance and agency.

2.4   Summary

This chapter introduced the relationship between graphic design and design research by briefly reviewing and comparing key ideas within both fields. This revealed several key points, summarised here in list form:

- Design research has shifted away from its early associations with scientific and engineering disciplines from the 1960–70s from an overall positivist research paradigm to a constructivist, "designerly" one that more carefully considers the artistic and intuitive process of design activity.

- "Research through design", as opposed to research about or for design, contains the most potential yet unexplored focus for thinking about and developing design research.

- Recent debates in design research discourse, despite having divergent opinions, show a firm rootedness in a "designerly" paradigm and a willingness to embrace and support pluralistic viewpoints without the need to divide between theory and practice, writing and design.

- These important developments in design research—embracing and recognising inherent or implicit of design (i.e., reflexivity, intuition, etc.)—are not considered in or do not align with graphic design research, which mostly assume a fundamentalist or instrumentalist purpose.

- Most discussions and ideas on research in graphic design fall under the "research for design" category. The thorny yet latent area of "research through design" remains lesser explored in the field of graphic design.

- The broader field of "graphic design" is often defined as a professional activity that is commission-based, service-providing, or problem-solving when it actually contains a multiplicity of activities influenced by various spheres (e.g., history, theory, research, craft) and involves characteristics of the arts (e.g., personal, experimental, exploratory, etc.) as much as that of the sciences (e.g., functional, solution-focused, quantifiable, etc.). Whether it is commission-based, service-providing, or problem-solving is secondary to understanding the essence of graphic design activity.

With these findings, this chapter arrived at the proposed direction for a form of graphic design research that directly builds on the foundations and concerns of both fields (i.e., graphic design and design research). Namely, this is a form of graphic design research that is (1) not bounded by scientific and rationalist research intentions and approaches (2) characterised as a form of practice-based research ("research through design"), and (3) critical and aware of its own role and agency in a larger culture and society. This forms the provisional definition of graphic design research I set out to provide in the beginning of this chapter.

The rest of this dissertations aims to address these issues by focusing on "critical and artistic" graphic design practices and how such practices align with the kind of "graphic design research" highlighted here. Doing so fosters a development of graphic design research that considers its wider discourse and not risk an isolated development, which only results in—as identified earlier—fragmented developments in the discourse. The next chapter identifies and describes the nature and characteristics of "critical and artistic" graphic design practices and presents specific connections between such practices and graphic design research.

3. CRITICAL AND ARTISTIC PRACTICES IN GRAPHIC DESIGN

It is appropriate to start this chapter with this question from design historian John A. Walker: "who determines what the concept 'design' encompasses?" (1989, 32). If we have witnessed several shifts in the definitions of design across time, it is surprising how "concepts of design have so quickly become conventional and orthodox" (Walker 1989). Here, Walker's comment was challenging the conventions of how researchers commonly select objects of study in design history—for example, the customary choice of consumer goods and advertising over military weapons and scientific instruments as "legitimate" works of design for study. A parallel could be drawn to the relationship graphic design has with research: should "graphic design research" be limited only to "research" that brings measurable returns or data-driven outcomes? Can it consider exploratory, interpretive, and self-reflexive forms of inquiry that are still systematically contextualised within existing bodies of knowledge and situated within concerns and interests of the design discipline? Despite theorists' efforts in drawing sharper distinctions between realms of design and art, Walker pointed out that there are always practitioners whose work occupy and thrive in the gaps between these boundaries and that creativity often flourishes in these "margins and interfaces" (1989, 26). For graphic design, such "marginality"[36] could very much describe practices that are critical and artistic[37] in nature, since graphic design is often expected to work within established economic and commercial structures rather than critically examine them, and results in pragmatic and instrumental outcomes rather than artistically open-ended ones.

Further specificity is needed to delimitate characteristics of such practices and how they can be considered "graphic design research" and this chapter taps on an emerging body of discourse to fulfil this. Section 3.1 briefly surveys ideas across relevant recent literature to establish a general understanding and foundation for the otherwise elusive field of critical and artistic graphic design practice. Section 3.2 then studies the nature of such practices and list a provisional set of general characteristics.

3.1   Contexts

3.1.1   Background

It is not a recent phenomenon for some design practices to be described as "critical" in nature—whether the term was directly conferred upon or through self-association. Examples of such practices and writings about them seem to originate from various points around the 1950–80s, more commonly in the discipline of industrial design and architecture. Matt Malpass, a design researcher on critical design, pointed out that "conceptual and critical forms of industrial design" could be traced from the artistic avant-garde practices in Italy during the late 1950s identified through terms like "radical design" and "anti-design". (Malpass 2017, 18; Sparke 2014; see also Mazé 2009, 383; Redström and Mazé 2007, 3), and associated with the practices of architecture groups like Superstudio, Archigram, or Archizoom for example. In brief, these practices were critical towards

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[36] The term "marginal" is often used to describe practices of such nature. Because of increasing lack of opportunities or appropriate spaces within commission-related practice, much of critical design practice is "situated literally and metaphorically on the periphery of society, on its social and economic margins" (Kuijpers 1998, 14). Francisco Laranjo also mentioned that such practices will always be marginal because it aims to challenge the status quo. Being otherwise would cause it to lose its effect and intention (Laranjo 2017a, 53). "Marginality" becomes the site of resistance for critical design practices (Kuijpers 1998). This is elaborated later in section 3.2.1.

[37] This research includes "artistic" as a key characteristic although such practices are often generally referred to as only "critical". This significance of its inclusion is addressed in section 3.2.2 where I discuss the "artistic" as one of the key approaches—and hence characteristics—of critical practices.

orthodox or dogmatic approaches[38] to design in the age of industrial production; they removed themselves from monetary motivations and engaged socially and politically, through design, against ideas of capitalist consumer society (Malpass 2017, 19). Several other related key historical movements or ideas in art and design were also pointed out as possible influences of, or bears connections with, critical design practice—for example, Russian Constructivism (Laranjo 2017a, 216) and Dada and Situationist movements in art (Malpass 2017, 11). A similar strand of criticality in graphic design can also be traced back to "postmodern" graphic design practices and initiatives like Emigre, Wolfgang Weingart, Neville Brody, and Jeffery Keedy (Poynor 2013). In Rick Poynor's rich survey and study of postmodern graphic design, he highlighted the *potential* for these to function as "critical practices" that specifically react and resist to what might be seen as the elitist ideologies of modernism (Poynor 2013, 151). These practices often embrace qualities like ambiguity, dysfunctionality, discursiveness, etc., and emphasises authorship, subjectivity, and agency, etc., which again are qualities less commonly associated with design but with artistic practices.

The term "critical design" was more formally introduced in the field of industrial and interaction design by Anthony Dunne, a designer and researcher at the Royal College of Art in London. In his book Hertzian Tales (2008), he described critical design as an alternative form of design practice involving research and critique intended for socially driven purposes instead of commercial ones (Dunne 2008). His research with Fiona Raby—later known as Dunne and Raby—dealt mainly with designing fictional objects that address issues of technological progress. Their works mainly took the form of designed speculations that reveal or critique the limitations or hidden mechanisms of our technological environment. Dunne and Raby's approach builds on the critical traditions highlighted earlier, where they share a similar concern about the role and positioning of design in society. This parallel reveal the broader motivations, interests, and approaches for a critical design practice beyond Dunne and Raby's primary focus on industrial design or its technological contexts—including any derivative tools and approaches under their proposition of "critical design". Despite the popular associations between Dunne and Raby's works and critical design, a critical practice in graphic design may benefit from an expanded understanding and approach,[39] which forms the task of the rest of this chapter.

3.1.2   Conditions and motivations

Increasing interests in critical design practices were likely results of societal conditions and professional shifts in the late twentieth century. Dunne and Raby themselves argued that by the 1980s, the design profession was already largely "hyper-commercialised" and fully "integrated into the neoliberal model of capitalism" to the extent where any alternative forms of design that were not economically driven or viable were quickly considered irrelevant (Dunne and Raby 2013, 6).[40] Design theorist Johan Redström and Ramia Mazé also highlighted the difficulty in establishing criticality in design in both disciplinary and professional terms because of how the discipline "thoroughly [integrates] itself in capitalist production" and lacks an "independent critical tradition" on which to develop any alternative (Thackara quoted in Redström and Mazé 2007, 2). Under these changing ideologies in the profession, Dutch designer Jan van Toorn, a key figure in graphic design, laments in a *Design Issues* journal article "A Passion for the Real" (2010) on how (graphic) design has quickly accommodated to these shifts and lost its "public responsibility" and what he refers to as the "journalistic" side of the practice (2010, 48; see also Bailey 2014, 377).[41] Since then, the potential of graphic design has been

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[38] These orthodox and dogmatic approaches overlap with the kind of rationalist or positivistic design approaches advocated in early forms or definitions of design research highlighted earlier in chapter two. Such approaches often rely on and work with existing socio-economic structures and seldom work to examine, challenge, or question them.

[39] The term "critical" was likely first introduced to graphic design by design curator and writer Andrew Blauvelt when he first suggested to think about a form of "critical graphic design" based on Dunne and Raby's notion of critical design (2003).

[40] The duo gave an example of the practice of Victor Papanek, an industrial designer whose socially-oriented practice was celebrated in the 1970s but because of its lesser value in "generating wealth", it no longer held as much interest as when it started (Dunne and Raby 2013, 6).

[41] According to researcher and designer Francisco Laranjo, van Toorn has been arguing for the emergence of a critical designer since the 1950s before the term "critical design" was popularised by Dunne and Raby.

underutilised due to a lesser political awareness of its (i.e., the visual medium) mediatory potential and much of the profession has been reduced to a "spectacle of the neo-liberal world order" (van Toorn 2010, 55) . In a similar vein, graphic designer Stuart Bailey emphasises that most of the graphic designer's job today is "superfluous" packaging and form-giving to ideas that have already been largely formulated elsewhere or by someone else. In other words, earlier prospects of a socially minded and constructive graphic design practice are no longer as available today (Bailey 2014, 379; see also Laranjo 2017a, 83). This is likely due to the current and growing obsession with economic growth, which researcher and designer Francisco Laranjo describes as a "state of crisis" that graphic design, as with many other disciplines, cannot escape (2015, 20). There is therefore an opportunity to rethink alternative possibilities beyond complying with current conditions (Laranjo 2015). Call for changes to the discipline during these times, particularly those set forth by designers and design practices with critical leanings and approaches, should not be ignored just because they represent a small or amorphous group in the entire professional community, especially since they are, according to Redström and Mazé, "amassing an increasing number of examples, theoretical depth, and public exposure" (2007, 3). Many of them also represent key voices in the field (e.g., Blauvelt 2003; van Toorn 1998; Redström and Mazé 2007; Bruinsma 2014, etc.). Altogether, these efforts could be summed up in a resonating call—by Dutch design duo Metahaven—to invest effort into graphic design as a discipline that conducts "research and generates knowledge" (van der Velden 2006, 91). By not primarily relying on the "commissioned assignment" (see also Kuijpers 1998, 14),[42] graphic designers could participate in discussions beyond design, and these can be shaped into a politicised form of labour.[43] This is likely an important way to reconsider the relevance of graphic design amidst this "state of emergency" in the field described by van der Velden (2006, 91).

With this background, the following section proceeds to list and describe possible characteristics of the nature of critical graphic design practices.

3.2   Nature

Motivated by resistance towards dominant ideologies that limit critically conscious graphic design practice, there have been various efforts to clarify and characterise critical design practices. Ideally, such practices would contain a set of distinguishing attributes if it were to be understood as a specific area or nature of practice.[44] However, this is not the case due to a general lack of theorisation and research done on the subject, particularly for the field of graphic design.[45] Although there is an increasing amount of scholarly and para-academic literature on the subject, it does not yet reflect a clear consensus. Nevertheless, this section survey major arguments across the literature to arrive at a set of provisional criteria for identifying and ascertaining the *general* nature of these practices. The purpose is not to arrive at an externally constructed, comprehensive survey of its nature but a general map of ideas about such practices from *within* the field. It does so by

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[42] Designers primarily receive work through commission-based model. However, Kuijpers mentioned in 1998 that there are hardly any convincing examples of design work with a critical or emancipatory agenda in the world of commission-related practice. (Kuijpers 1998, 14). This shows that commission-based model does not directly benefit the development of critical design practices.

[43] Ramia Mazé identified that "critical" designers were motivated by the realisation that criticisms or critical positions of design could "actually be mounted from within practice and by practitioners" using their individual or collective practices, tools, methods, materials, and forms of design to push back predominant or prevailing ideologies of the time. Along with Johan Redström and Christina Zetterlund, Mazé described such design practices as instruments for broader critique that allows for "reflection on and reformulating societal and historical conditions" (Mazé et al. 2013).

[44] Francisco Laranjo distinguished "critical practice"—as a sustained and committed *mode* of practice—from "critical design"—which refers more to a *field* of practice that may be used to describe one-off projects. Considering this distinction, I adopt the overall term "critical design practice"—which Laranjo also uses interchangeably with "critical practice". This preference emphasises the central role design plays in such practices.

[45] As already mentioned, much of "critical design" is associated with product and interaction design and the only scholarly book-length work on the subject to date—*Critical Design in Context* by researcher Matt Malpass—is also written in context to those fields. A recent work dedicated to the theorisation of critical design practice in the field of graphic design is Fraciso Laranjo's PhD thesis *Design as Criticism: Methods for a Critical Graphic Design Practice* (2017a).

identifying and discussing three major components: the *sites*, *strategies*, and *forms* of criticality in graphic design practice. These three components translate into the following questions in corresponding order. Where do such practices originate and are situated in? How are they practised? What do they result in? The answers to these questions that this chapter provides adds clarity to the otherwise fragmented discourse.

3.2.1 Sites of practice (positioning)

The site of critical and artistic graphic design practices refers to the position from which these practices originate or are initiated. This should be understood in relation to existing structures and conditions of graphic design practice found in prevailing models of practice, and alongside related fields and disciplines. This subsection addresses *where these practices are situated* in relation to the broader field of graphic design.

Marginality

The term "marginal" is often used to describe critical design practices. Because of the increasing lack of opportunities or appropriate spaces within commission-related practices, many of such practices are "situated literally and metaphorically on the periphery of society, on its social and economic margins" (Kuijpers 1998, 14). Francisco Laranjo mentioned that these practices will always be marginal because it "aims to challenge the *status quo*" and not doing so would cause it to lose its effect and intention (Laranjo 2017a, 53). As a nature of critical design practice, the marginality of such practices highlights their position as a site of resistance (Kuijpers 1998) since they are often initiated, organised, and financed independently given their non-commercial nature (Steiner 2012, 103). These practices are therefore primarily led by designers rather than historians or theorists for example (Mazé 2009, 387). Within the margins, however, designers nevertheless navigate, adapt, or appropriate established and existing economic structures and methods of production to find ways of working within them while maintaining a critical stance towards it; critical and artistic design practices are not *entirely* opposed to any form of commerce or economic returns. Instead, designers of such practices adopt hybrid practices that—despite being framed by externally-imposed restrictions—constantly find ways to develop agency or autonomy. This precariousness is also what drives "discursive approaches that actively involve [one] in debates about a culture determined by capitalism, and how to live under and respond to these conditions" (van der Velden quoted in Steiner 2012, 107; see also van Toorn 1998, 153).[46] Critical and artistic design practices are therefore simultaneously labouring against yet driven by its marginality.

Autonomy

Given its largely independent nature, graphic designers with critical and artistic practices have to actively reconsider or "redesign" their practice in relation to other dominant patterns of "standard" practices. This idea finds connection to earlier seminal ideas of "graphic authorship" that occupied graphic design discussions in the 1990s, which denoted broader notions of the designer being an author that—beyond the written mode—is involved in the origination of ideas (Rock 1996) and is concerned with the "emancipation, evolution and autonomy of the role of the designer" (Laranjo 2017a, 49).[47] Daniel van der Velden, a graphic designer part of the Metahaven duo, describes a similar idea where the designer "becoming his own author" (2006, 90). According to him, the designer has to assume the role of a "developer" to be taken seriously and to advance the profession (van der Velden 2006, 91). Instead of working on "solutions" to the questions from clients and enterprises—which he argues are questions principally motivated by profit and commerce and not necessarily urgent questions pertaining to society—designers should be directing their efforts towards rethinking and asking questions. Only when assuming extended roles beyond that normally associated with the profession—as

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[46] For example, curator and writer Barbara Steiner described Dexter Sinister and Rollo Press—two small publishing enterprises tied to the field of graphic design—as initiatives that tap on "self-organisation and alternative distribution strategies beyond large publishing sales networks" and by pairing publishing and printing activity with other related activities (Steiner 2012, 103).

[47] Designer and critic Ellen Lupton later proposed the clarification from "designer as author" to "designer as producer", hence denoting the act of production as authorship in reference to Walter Benjamin's idea of the producer. In this case, the designer becomes an initiator, organiser, and director of projects rather than engaging specifically with writing.

author, producer, or developer of ideas rather than only visual form or communication[48]—graphic designers are able to find alternative trajectories of practice and have the necessary autonomy to direct them towards critical or social ends. This is not so much a change of roles, but a re-orientation and extension of skills—nonetheless drawn from design training and practice—towards symbolical, cultural, and discursive ends (Malpass 2017, 72).

Mediatory

Critical and artistic graphic design practices often work *with* and *across* related subjects or mediums to develop or expand intellectual capacities and relevance (e.g., Kyes and Steiner 2012, 7; see Mazé 2009, 393; Kyes and Owens 2009, 347). In this sense, they are practices that both mediate and are mediated by other fields of practice and knowledge. This mediatory nature is seen in many contemporary exhibitions or events under the umbrella of "critical graphic design". Prominent examples include the exhibition and publication *Forms of Inquiry: The Architecture of Critical Graphic Design* (Kyes and Owens 2007) that explored probable commonalities in approaches within graphic design and architecture, the exhibition and publication *All Possible Futures* (Sueda 2014) focused on fictional qualities and strategies in graphic design, and the *Iaspis Forum on Design and Critical Practice* (Magnus et al. 2009) brought together researchers, curators and practitioners across fields in art and design through lectures and conversations. The practices of individual entities also reflect such mediatory potential. One example is the recent exhibitions of designer-researchers Metahaven that explored design's connection with, broadly, film-based media and geopolitical issues (e.g. Archey and Metahaven 2018). It is also important to note that the examples above often use the exhibition or book as the primary format of engagement, often within the setting of a gallery or museum. This partially reveals the appropriation of spaces or platforms normally associated with "art". Away from traditional client-based relationships or archetypal formats, it is customary, if not needed, for critical and artistic design practices to work with, borrow from, or infiltrate into extended fields—hence taking on hybrid forms and formats—as a way of understanding and researching through graphic design.

Dissidence

Although critical design practices are often described as a subset of design practice, they are in fact practices that exist in parallel or even *opposition* to general design practice given that its *raison d'être* is to question and eventually shift or affect the role and purpose of design. As a result, the relationship between critical design practices and general design practices are sometimes presented as binaries. Mazé et al. reminds us that all forms of design are ideological as all design processes are informed by different world views. Any form of design that is not critical is in effect "affirmative" since they work with existing professional structures and conditions instead of working towards changing them[49] (Mazé et al. 2013, 6; see also Dunne and Raby 2013, vii). Stuart Bailey provides a similar but technical distinction by differentiating between "commercial" and "uncommercial" (or non-commercial) work—the latter being where socially-minded practices could better develop (Bailey 2014, 379).[50] Similarly, designer and academic Brad Haylock argued the impossibility of aligning design primarily as a "profession" while also being a "social practice". This is based on his argument that "design as profession" is always, in some measure, an "economic operation" and thinking about a social

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[48] This is not to say that visual form has no role in the development of ideas. Visual form, visual literacy, and visual vocabulary should play a key role in the authorship, production, and development of a designer who is engaged with society.

[49] As mentioned earlier, there is some extent to which such practices have to "work with" existing structures and conditions of the profession and not entirely oppose them. The difference is that "affirmative" design work *with* given conditions as ways of reaffirming them whereas critical practices work *within* them as ways of changing them.

[50] We have to be careful not to confuse "commercial" with the term "commission". Since Bailey was originally distinguishing between commercial and cultural work—and then proposing "uncommercial" as a replacement for the latter—we can assume that his usage of the term "commercial" refers to the nature of the work rather than the way it is initiated. In other words, "commercial" work are projects of dealing with commerce rather than being client-commissioned work. This means that it is possible for client-commissioned work to be critical in nature (see Bailey 2014, 379).

practice under such terms will always result in a clash of ideologies (Haylock 2013). These binaries reveal the dichotomy between "critical" and "non-critical" practices and shows how critical practices are by nature dissident practices.

Marginal, autonomous, mediatory, and dissident positionings

Altogether, these positionings communicate the marginal (or precarious), autonomous, mediatory, and dissident nature of critical and artistic graphic design practice as characteristics *relative* to general graphic design practice. In other words, these practices are only marginal (or precarious), autonomous, mediatory, and dissident because of, and in relation to, existing and prevailing forms of graphic design and their present socio-economic functions. The label "critical and artistic" is relevant as long as it is categorically distinct from general practices. Although, ideally, there should be no need for this distinction since it assumes that the broader field of graphic design need not, in essence, be "critical" (see Bailey and Goggins quoted in Laranjo 2017a, 73), but such a provisional distinction is still required to explicitly discuss and study these, after all, relatively *uncommon* practices. The "site" of these practices should then be understood as transitionary, fluid, unstable (i.e., not permanent) as long as the tension between "affirmative" and "critical" graphic design remains.

3.2.2   Strategies of practice (approach)

The strategies of critical and artistic graphic design practices describe the approaches of such practices; they refer to the general tactics and methods articulated by practitioners or researchers. This addresses *how* practitioners develop such practices and how these approaches differ from general ones in graphic design,[51] while particularly focusing on the "artistic" nature and approach in these practices. This subsection does not elaborate or explain the actual methodological workings but provide general descriptions of approaches. Any overlaps, interconnections, or contradictions between them will be highlighted.

Speculation

In Dunne and Raby's work, they lamented how design is fiddling with the problems in the world instead of shaping belief systems—the ideas and attitudes that form the world. This led them to embrace and propose a speculative approach to design, one which uses "design as a means to speculate how things could be", as a collective way to redefine our relationship to reality (Dunne and Raby 2013, 2; see Dunne 2008, 83). Results of this are design speculations, or "design fictions" (Bleecker 2009), and can take the form of prototypes, written narratives, films, presentations, etc., that become catalysts for productive imaginations of alternative everyday life; they facilitate potential reconfigurations of the future by stimulating active thinking and discussion rather than determining them (ibid, 9). Fiona Raby distinguishes them as "functional fictions" that address pressing "functions" of our world and contrasted them to the "fictional functions" in products that often fill our world of consumption and desires (Raby 2017, 41).[52]

Although Malpass described speculation as a central tactic in critical design practices and attributed its relevance towards socio-scientific and socio-technical concerns, particularly in the specific field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) (Malpass 2017, 56; 59), there exist other notions of the "speculative" in the field of graphic design. Graphic designer Jon Sueda's exhibition project *All Possible Futures* is one such example,

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[51] Although many have argued for the need for a critical design practice, not many articulated possible methods and approaches for such a practice. Even so, there are some who elaborated on or hinted at possible methods and tactics as a result of making a case for critical practices, sometimes indirectly. Also, in one of the chapters of *Critical Design in Context* (2017), Malpass introduced and discussed several concepts and terms that could be considered "tactics" in critical design, most of which were derived in relation to works similar to that of Dunne and Raby (2017, 41). Some of the relevant ideas from that work are synthesised into various points in this section.

[52] A possible historical precedence of this is the practice of "paper" or "visionary" architecture as theoretical pursuits where "idealistic, impractical, or utopian imaginings" were used as aspirational or cautionary tools for rethinking futures (Sueda 2014, 6).

where it brings together "speculative" works from an international group of graphic designers (2014). Although this collection is based on a loose connection to the idea of speculation,[53] they generally emphasised the importance of non-commissioned or non-realised works as valuable explorations reflecting an expanded field of practice that enriches the discipline and ignoring them would be missing an important "history" of graphic design. There were also several other occasions where a speculative approach, or design fiction, was referenced as an appropriate tool for critical design practice or research (e.g., Grand and Jonas 2012, 166; Laranjo 2017a).

Taking a broader view, one could also argue that some form of speculation is always present in all kinds of design (see Bilak quoted in Sueda 2014, 12; Sulki and Min quoted in Sueda 2014, 51), yet the emphasis on it as a specific method sets it apart from being a natural *disposition* to a deliberate *strategy* against the apparent and often consistent limitations found in client-based work (see Sueda 2014, 7). When this is understood in relation to designers becoming "authors" in their own right, we see how speculation-as-strategy can and should also be directed towards the whole of design practice and its role in society.

Research-driven

Understanding critical design practice as a form of research is an idea generally shared by those in the field even if they differ in views and methods. Laranjo positions critical design as something that progressed from "graphic authorship", one that focuses on addressing social, political, and cultural issues from being just concerned with the agency and role of design. He describes this shift as one that moves from the "designer as author" to the "designer as researcher" (Laranjo 2017a, 15). Similarly, van der Velden from Metahaven argued that graphic design must redirect itself towards research and generating knowledge to participate in serious discussions outside of, *but still related to*, design (2006, 91). He later referred to this as "research by design", where the "process is itself a type of research" and that research not only informs but also directly "forms" the work (van der Velden 2009, 241). This resonates with what was highlighted in the previous chapter as "research through design" and again emphasises the importance of acknowledging design's inherent nature when thinking about it as a form of research. An implicit reference to this can also be made from Dunne and Raby's description of critical design as critical thought materialised through design; it is a kind of thinking that happens *through* design rather than words (2013, 34, see also Redström and Mazé 2007, 9). Adding on to this, in one of Metahaven's interview responses, they were careful not to attribute critical design practices as an entirely academic practice despite arguing for it as "research" (Magnus et al. 2009, 253). For them, the challenge for such practices is to "sustain a research-oriented design practice without being academic", yet acknowledging academia as necessary "productive and contextual" domains (Magnus et al. 2009, 253.). A similar viewpoint is seen in Kyes and Owen's *Forms of Inquiry* exhibition project when they adopted the term "inquiry" over "research" to avoid assumptions and interpretive baggage tied to the latter term despite still being concerned about investigative, exploratory and inquisitive processes (Magnus et al. 2009, 325).[54]

For these cases above, it is reasonable to assume that practitioners involved in such practices were not avoiding research altogether but were interested in a different kind of "research" not tied to strong traditions of "empirical […] scientific data-gathering and problem-solving" (Magnus et al. 2009, 325). As I have mentioned and will further elaborate later, critical and artistic practices are not recognised within design research discourse or academic circles (see Malpass 2017, 9). This is also likely why Redström and Mazé were careful not to immediately equate critical design practice to design research despite their argument and belief that such practices could contribute to the—otherwise lacking—intellectual basis for design research (2007, 7), which currently is more "operational" in nature. This intellectual basis has to consider design itself as a reflective

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[53] Jon Sueda describes this as "everything from self-generated provocations to experimental work created 'in parallel' with client-based projects to unique situations where commissions have been tackled with a high level of autonomy and critical investigation" (Sueda 2014, 8). This looseness was critiqued by Laranjo but I will leave this for a later discussion in this chapter on the limitations of critical graphic design.

[54] Such a loose positioning does of course invite skepticism and critique from those within academic circles. Laranjo argued how such pioneering efforts in "critical graphic design" have created an inappropriate "canon" of such practices without proper articulation of how they contribute to knowledge or research (2017, 49). This will be addressed later.

space for ideas, theories, logics, and further examine the implications of research "in and through" design practice; it is also a "problem-finding" rather than a "problem-solving" activity (Redström and Mazé 2007, 7; 11; Mazé 2009, 381; Dunne and Raby 2013, vii).

Seen together, these references to research show strong interests in shaping critical design practice as a research activity even if it is unclear what some of the more specific correlations may be, which is likely due to an impeding definition of "design" within design research rather than the invalidity of critical design practice regardless of its potential problems or limitations (discussed later). What is notably apparent in this discussion is how critical design practice would benefit from the growing discourse of research in design (see Laranjo 2017a, 49) *while* also contributing to it (see Redström and Mazé 2007, 7).

Artistic[55]

A *possible* epistemological foundation for the kind of research conducted through critical design practices can be found in ideas and concepts found in the approaches and strategies of practitioners.[56] One important and possible synthesis of these ideas is that critical design practices borrow and reflect certain approaches and nature of artistic practice; there have been consistent and frequent references to artistic practice as ways of thinking about critical design practices (see Dunne and Raby 2013, 43; Steiner 2012, 108; Redström and Mazé 2007, 5; Malpass 2017, 11; Bailey 2014; Ericson and Metahaven 2009, 247). The following paragraphs draw on ideas and approaches from several practitioners that, I propose, contribute to this and elaborate on its possibilities.

As marginal practices, critical graphic design practices take on an uncertain bearing between art and design and hence adopts hybrid strategies across both fields. For Bailey, a type of borderline or hybrid "design/art disposition" describes his approach. He argues that the "grey zone" between art and design—the confluence of fine art and graphic design—is a productive space for a socially-committed graphic design practice (Bailey 2014, 5). The channels for such practices are almost non-existent in the context of design profession today (Laranjo 2017a, 83; Bailey 2014, 379) but artistic domains remain as channels that are "ambiguous and expansive enough to accommodate such orphaned interests" (Bailey 2014, 5). This view is indirectly shared with others: Dunne and Raby agrees that critical design heavily appropriates from "art's methods and approaches" (2013, 43; see Malpass 2017,11); Metahaven recognises the importance of the artistic content in their works (Ericson and Metahaven 2009, 247); Redström and Mazé describe the borrowing of artistic strategies to subvert design norms (2007, 5; see Malpass 2017, 11); Steiner identifies shared attitudes between critical design practices and contemporary art (2012, 108); Malpass mentions how critical design practices often appropriates art spaces for its own presentation and engagement (2017, 11).

More specifically, comparisons have been made between critical design practices and conceptual art, since critical design practices are often categorised as or alongside "conceptual design" (Redström and Mazé 2007, 5; Dunne and Raby 2013, vi; 11). Conceptual art describes the shift in focus from the (external) artist and object towards the (internal) ideas and processes; this shift also reflects a critique towards conventions within art. The same is with critical design. An object or form foregrounds a concept or symbolic function that performs the same way a conceptual artwork would. The only difference is that instead of critiquing conventions within art, it does so for design; it subverts the "ingrained expectations" of or in relation to design (Malpass 2017, 11; Redström and Mazé 2007, 5). However, this does not mean that critical design practices are merely self-critical and cannot engage other concepts and theories remotely connected in design. As how conceptual art has

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[55] Although "artistic" is included and listed here as one of several characteristics, it is also an overall descriptor for the kind of graphic design practice this research focuses on (which also explains why this segment is slightly lengthier).

[56] Not all practitioners engage in writing and therefore what follows is only a limited survey of ideas from those practitioners with critical practices who considered it important to express their work and embodied ideas through writing, particularly those in academic journals, professional magazines, or doctorate dissertations.

progressed to address broader issues beyond art, critical design practices will also eventually be able to address extended issues of design (Redström and Mazé 2007, 7).

Despite this proximity to art, some of the practitioners clarified that critical design practices are not and should not be considered "art", whatever its definition may be (Ericson and Metahaven 2009, 249; Dunne and Raby 2013, 43). Malpass warned against absorbing critical design practices into the social practices and institutional structures of the "artworld" and argues that it will be more appropriate for works from such practices to keep its "everyday" context to retain its purpose and effectiveness (2017, 11, see also Dunne and Raby 2013, 43; Ericson et al. 2009, 327). Others rule out the need for a distinction altogether. Graphic designers and editors Laura Pappa and Elisabeth Klement deliberately omitted "art" as a category in their curatorial strategy for the exhibition *Signals from the Periphery*,[57] whereas Steiner argued that the distinction should instead be made between the attitudes and intentions rather than disciplinary traditions or conventions (2012).[58]

A return to Bailey's proposition of a design-art hybrid would be useful considering these views. After describing a *general* distinction between art and design, where "art" departs from "personal interests" and "design" responds to "others' interests", Bailey formulated a reciprocal relationship—hence a hybrid—between the two (Bailey 2014, 398). Critical practice in graphic design is akin to art in how it corresponds to a personal set of interests even though they are usually rooted in and extended from the "mechanisms of graphic design"; it is also akin to design in how it responds to "real-world" conditions and contexts (i.e., others' interests) even if it is often an "eccentric" and non-utilitarian application (Bailey 2014, 399). A stereotypical "best of both" hybrid is then a work that, like "art", seeks unlikely or unorthodox ways of searching and working, yet, like "design", is concerned about how effective or clear its communication and objectives may be (Bailey 2014, 399). Bailey's formulation here is an example that acknowledges and brings in certain qualities found in art that are valuable and relevant for critical design practices. It is not one that merely borrows and appropriates for the sake of posturing itself (i.e., design) as art to, for example, conveniently escape critique in the field of design— which is what Malpass warned against.

We see in these ideas above that the resistance towards art from within the field of critical design practice is not so much a rejection of qualities in art, but *a rejection towards using "art" as a way of escaping definition or purpose of any kind*; critical design practices are resistant towards the all-too-common "anything goes" mentality that is found sometimes, if not frequently, in contemporary art practices (see Blauvelt quoted in Laranjo 2017a, 69). Therefore—in the context of this research—I describe critical design practices as "artistic" in nature and not label it "art" (although outcomes from such practices can be referred to as 'art' depending on the context they are viewed or discussed). Critical design practices are "artistic" in the way they borrow and reflect approaches or ideas in art but there is no need to exclusively categorise them as "art" practices based on these reasons summarised from the authors referenced above:

- Critical design practices should keep to its "everyday" context to retain its purpose and effectiveness and should not be absorbed into the social practices and institutional structures of the "artworld" (Malpass 2017, 11).

- Critical design practices should be distinguished based on their attitudes and intentions more than strict disciplinary traditions or conventions to critical design practice (Steiner 2012).

- Despite corresponding to personal interests like in art practices, critical design practices usually contain ideas or outcomes rooted in and extended from the "mechanisms of graphic design" that responds to "real-world" conditions and contexts (i.e., others' interests) even if it is often an "eccentric" and non-utilitarian application (Bailey 2014).

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[57] This recent exhibition presented works that could again be considered critical practices in graphic design.

[58] For example, distinctions should be made between practices that are critical and non-critical in nature. Whether they are considered "art" or "design" does not matter, what matters is the common attitudes and intentions they share.

Positioning critical graphic design practices as artistic and not "fully" art practices is also indicative of the hybrid design-art disposition put forth by Bailey without unnecessarily associating with the complex traditions and conventions of art practices and discourse in their *entirety*.[59] The "marginality" and "hybridity" of critical design practices, presented earlier as "sites" in the earlier section, are now more clearly situated in the domain of the "artistic", which forms a key characteristic of such practices. Critical graphic design practices will have to strategically navigate a precarious line between continuously shifting definitions and discourse of art and design, hence always negotiating its hybridity between the two in light of the considerations highlighted above. This condition-as-approach also reveals how such practices may be artistic forms of research where it self-reflexively seeks out understandings of broader issues through an understanding of itself.

Critical[60]

Throughout his practice, van Toorn has been arguing for the graphic designer to become a "practical" intellectual that, I paraphrase, actively and critically visualises personally engaged perspectives through conceptual and intuitive approaches instead of passively illustrating impersonally derived responses through descriptive approaches (van Toorn 1998, 160; 2010, 52). This finds agreement with what design critic and writer Max Bruinsma identified as the core of the graphic design profession which, more than any aesthetic or technical knowledge, is to have a "critical eye". This posits the graphic designer as an "editor" in a broad sense who—in this "world saturated with media that risks any real meaning"—works to "embed […] message[s] in meaningful associations with other messages" (Bruinsma 2014, 37). Here, the critical involvement of a designer is first determined by how he or she engages societal or cultural issues in and through practice.

Laranjo provides something more specific in this respect through his PhD thesis, which is one of few works[61] that specifically discuss critical practice in graphic design at length. In it, he reconsidered the traditions of critical theory in order to establish a more meaningful and critical method, from which he proposed the idea of "design as criticism" (2017a, 3). His method consist three parts: (1) "visual criticality" aims to identify ideological structures within design works and practices and their connections to social, cultural, or political issues, (2) "design fiction" sets up speculation and prototyping as tools in design for understanding the present by investigating the past and future, and (3) "critical reflexivity" uses writing—which includes editing, publishing, etc.—as a tool for reflecting on design works and practices while accessing and receiving from a wider discourse (Laranjo 2017a, 205). Laranjo clarified that these are not separate parts or sequences of a process but are overlapping areas of engagement that are to work in tandem in order to achieve a non-insular "critical practice". He differentiates this "critical practice"—which he defined as a "mode and approach of design"—from "critical design", which to him is a "method and developing field" that might not necessarily reflect a social commitment to the public and have a tendency to be self-centred, stylised, and indulgent (2017a, 64; 116; 216). This critique recurrently appears in Laranjo's works and is directed towards practices and discourses labelled "critical graphic design",[62] more specifically those that revolved around or departed from the Forms of Inquiry exhibition and their participants. Laranjo's thesis reflects an overall focus on critical design practice as one that directly engages the "political" and "ideological" as a way of emancipation. There is also an emphasis on critical writing or criticism as a kind of "practice" that occurs alongside actual design activity as an integral but not assimilated whole,[63] and a predominant concern with rigorous accountability and

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[59] As much as there are overlaps between design and art given their shared or intertwined history, it is common knowledge that both fields are still separated by very different set of discourses and knowledge.

[60] Although "critical" is included and listed here as one of several characteristics, it is important to note that it is a key descriptor for the kind of graphic design practice this research focuses on (which also explains its longer segment). The following paragraphs under this header only discuss ideas that more directly address criticality in graphic design. This discussion is to be understood alongside the other terms and their corresponding descriptions, which also serve to address "criticality" in graphic design practice.

[61] I consider Stuart Bailey's PhD thesis (mentioned later in this segment) to also be an example of such works although it was completed in a fine arts department. Nevertheless, Laranjo's thesis more directly addresses the need for theorisation in critical graphic design practice.

[62] One example where this critique appears is in the ongoing *Modes of Criticism* magazine, a project he initiated and is an editor of.

[63] In this sense, Laranjo's idea of "design as criticism" does not mean that design itself becomes a form of criticism from *within*, but that the activities a designer practices includes criticism as a way of reflection or engagement with broader issues. In this case, "design as

responsibility of critical design practice based on his critique of critical graphic design's elusive and ambiguous recent past (see 2017a, 73; 75).

Laranjo's ideas are not, however, entirely opposed to those he critiqued, one of whom was Stuart Bailey who appeared in both exhibitions *Forms of Inquiry* and *All Possible Futures* (see Laranjo 2017a, 40; 75). Based on Laranjo's differentiation between critical practice (a mode and approach) from critical design (a method or field), it is imperative for his analysis and critique to *also* be based on examining *modes* of practices rather than one-off works in the field. The aforementioned analysis and critique by Laranjo, however, ignores Bailey's overall practice and his key ideas.[64] A closer reading of Bailey's albeit unconventionally written dissertation actually reveals overlaps between his ideas and Laranjo's. Bailey was also after the kind of social responsibility Laranjo sought, even if in a different manner. For Bailey, this comes through a kind of "self-captioning" and "didactic" work that communicates and embody "form" *as* "content" (that is discussed in detail in the next subsection).[65] Bailey's concern is that designers should design and communicate "responsibly" by pursuing and devising forms that in themselves embody and therefore also communicate messages and meanings. More specifically, he emphasises and uses Umberto Eco's notion of "social commitment" in going beyond manipulating conventional codes (which is what normally happens in practices with commercial agendas) to creating artistically "open" forms that engage viewers in dialogue towards "reality".[66] This is not unlike van Toorn's notion of the dialogic image, which Laranjo heavily references. We see from this example that Bailey did extensively communicate the workings of his practice and ideas. If this does not fulfil the "accountability" Laranjo sought, it will not be because of Bailey's self-indulgence or self-centeredness as how Laranjo might have put it, but because of the deliberately indirect nature of Bailey's response. This should in no way dismiss Bailey's contribution. It only reveals a separate trajectory to that posited by Laranjo.

Furthermore, one of Laranjo's key argument—for written criticism to happen alongside or *as part of* design practice—does not address a key complication described by Redström and Mazé when arguing for the relevance of critical design practice. Redström and Mazé mentioned that the challenge of such practices is not only to "understand and incorporate 'critical theories' from *without*, but the potentials and problems of 'criticism from *within*' practice" (Redström and Mazé 2007, 6; emphasis mine). The potential of critical design practice is in its ability to draw out an "integral evolution" rather than an "external construction" of design theory; this is what forms the epistemological and intellectual foundation for true design research (as already articulated in the previous chapter). According to them, design has the potential to alter the current dichotomy between theory and practice, of which they argue is even found in discourses around "practice-based research" (Redström and Mazé 2007, 7). Critical design practices should tap on this transformative potential to go beyond textual traditions and discourse that dominates much of the humanities, social sciences, and critical theory— which are in fact areas Laranjo currently heavily taps on (see 2017a, 52)—into new research paradigms appropriate for design (see Redström and Mazé 2007, 7; Malpass 2017, 11). Nonetheless, Laranjo did point out that eventually, a synthesised approach towards the three-part method he identified is what would loosely allude to and eventually result in a design-as-research paradigm, similar to that put forth by Redström and Mazé among several others in the field (2017a, 213).

Through these examples, we see how the methods and criteria for "criticality" set out by Laranjo should not form the entire measure, approach, or model for critical graphic design practices. Given that he is one of the first or very few that specifically theorises and addresses critical practice in graphic design, this work is no doubt an important contribution to the field. Nevertheless, as illustrated, Laranjo's work might not entirely

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criticism" might be better replaced with "design criticism"—like how we understand "design writing" as writing about design—or to replace the current conjunction ("as") with "and", "with", or "in" to avoid confusion.

[64] Many of these ideas and clarifications are found in Bailey's PhD dissertation titled *Form as a Way of Thinking* completed in 2014, three years before Laranjo completed his PhD.

[65] One example of this is how the form of a writing can communicate as much as its contents when it is made deliberate and intentional (Bailey 2014, 2). This idea also has similarities to the making-as-thinking process commonly discussed and taught in the field of design and art.

[66] Bailey provided extensive case examples of such forms of practice in chapter 7 of his PhD dissertation (2014).

consider other relevant and valid views—like that of Bailey, Redström, and Mazé—that also potentially contribute to understanding and practising critical graphic design. In this case, a reasonable strategy would be to seriously consider Laranjo's critique of the field's current limitations and his references to critical traditions that may be potentially overlooked,[67] while ensuring an openness towards other relevant and alternate approaches that may not be immediately expedient but speculatively worthwhile. This is especially important in view of the need to build intellectual foundations for critical design practices from within rather than without. As a result, a "critical" approach in graphic design practice should not only be present in outward involvements of related subjects or contents, but also in an inward examination and awareness of its own foundations in design and research.

Speculative, research-driven, artistic, and critical approaches

This subsection synthesised and distinguished overlapping ideas on the strategies and approaches to critical graphic design practices despite the fragmented state of its discourse. Even if specific approaches may vary across individuals and practices, they still come together to form observable courses of action: as speculation, research, artistic practice, and critique. Together, these strategies are both strategies *for* practice and strategies *of* practice; as much as speculation, research, artistic inquiry, and a critical attitude are how such practices approach subjects of study, the field itself is also further developed and understood through these strategies. The next subsection moves on to examine the *forms* of critical graphic design practices these strategies result in.

3.2.3 Forms of practice (outcomes)

Forms of critical and artistic graphic design practices refer to possible characteristics of the outcomes of such practices. It describes how "criticality" take form in such practices as compared to other mediums of critical practice outside of design like writing for example. This subsection addresses *what* actually results from such practices and how they differ from general graphic design practice.

Multidimensional (criticality)

Ramia Mazé provided three dimensions of criticality in design. They include (1a) criticality within personal practice, (2a) criticality within a community of practice or discipline, and (3a) criticality within issues and ideas outside of design (Mazé 2009, 395). These three dimensions of criticality, correspondingly, (1b) work towards a greater level of self-awareness and reflexivity in one's practice through (re)contextualisation, (2b) builds a meta-level or disciplinary discourse by identifying and articulating graphic design as a form of knowledge and discipline, and (3b) addresses broader social issues outside of design in a way that is specific to the tools, knowledge and processes of design. Laranjo pointed out a similar articulation from van Toorn describing that design education should be concerned with: (1) individual freedom (personal), (2) disciplinary discourse (professional), and (3) public interest (social) (Laranjo 2017a, 56). These are not progressive layers of criticality but *interconnected* dimensions that inevitably "intersect, overlap" and affect each other. An awareness and openness to work in and across these dimensions form the foundations of critical design practice (Laranjo 2017a, 56). These dimensions of criticality from and towards one's personal work, one's field of practice, and one's role in society are an interconnected whole that reflexively affect each another. In other words, a designer cannot truly approach his personal work critically without also affecting (or wanting to affect) the community of practice and the society he or she operates in and the same way vice versa. To further illustrate this: any practice that isolates or divides "disciplinary discourse" from "public interest" is not really interested in the discipline as part of society, or "personal interest" from "disciplinary discourse" is not really interested in one's positioning within a community of practice, and hence do not reflect true criticality as one that is necessarily multidimensional.

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[67] Reconsidering potentially overlooked traditions in critical theory is something also explored by educator and designer Brad Haylock in a recent chapter titled "What is Critical Design" for an edited volume titled Undesign (2019).

Para-functional

When purposed for inquiry rather than finding practical solutions, critical and artistic graphic design practices do not result in overtly "functional" objects or concepts like in traditional graphic design—where it communicates on behalf of an external commissioner or client with clarity, persuasion, or with any other intended effect. This does not mean that outcomes of critical graphic design practices are not clear, persuasive, or have any intention at all. Instead, works of such practices function rhetorically or discursively in order to open "lines of inquiry" that encourages criticality towards issues engendered in design and society (Malpass 2017, 41). For this reason, works of critical design practices are described as "para-functional" and "post-optimal" (Dunne 2008, 20; 43). They go beyond concerns of practical functionality and optimal performance into rhetorical, discursive, fictional, speculative, or poetic *use*, through qualities of ambiguity, open-endedness, or at times satire and playfulness (Malpass 2017, 63; 68; Redström and Mazé 2007, 5). Although these terms were originally used by Dunne in referring to examples in the product design and technology, this idea of a "parallel function" is not something entirely foreign to graphic design. Designer and theorist György Kepes wrote an important article for the field of graphic design in 1949 titled "Function in Modern Design".[68] In it, Kepes was already searching for a *broader* notion of "functionality" beyond what was then largely understood as a pragmatic pursuit, one that fulfils a deeper function that is directed towards people and society rather than merely fulfilling a utilitarian task that has little meaning beyond its practical use (see Kepes 1949).

There are also overlaps when we compare this broader notion of functionality to discussions tracing the core functions of design. For instance, a definition based on Herbert Simon's idea of design as a "science of the artificial" (1969)—that designing is to "devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones"—reveals how design should also be directed towards visioning future solutions (problem-finding) than only solving existing problems (problem-solving) (Haylock 2013). We can also find similar traces in the work of historian and graphic designer Richard Hollis, who mentioned that graphic design is the "work made by someone well aware that they are […] manipulating text and image […] according to meaning" (Hollis quoted in Bailey 2014, 382). Such a description clearly emphasises the meaning-making and communicative intentions of graphic design over it as a professional or technical activity; graphic design works are not legitimate only when they are commissioned, practically functional, or technically proficient. Works that are para-functional—non-utilitarian yet rationally conceptualised, non-commissioned yet socio-culturally relevant—are also "functional" as works of design in its *truest* sense. Other than challenging notions of utility or practical functionality like what occurs through the designing of objects, para-functional works in graphic design could then, for example, challenge notions of clarity and practical forms of communications in the area of visual media. The subversion of meaning through para-functional designs translates into criticality towards the medium and its capabilities in shaping our environment.

Epistemic (quality)

Given the overlaps between critical and artistic graphic design practices and the artistic disciplines, there are shared characteristics in their outcomes. One example is how designed outcomes from such practices contain epistemic qualities similar to that found in art objects. This contributes to how works of critical and artistic practices may constitute or generate knowledge on its own terms as "epistemic things" that contain embodied forms of criticality and knowledge, a concept discussed by philosopher and theorist Henk Borgdorff in the field of artistic research (2012, 47; 151). Rather than relying on writings in artistic research, the following paragraphs elaborate and support this point using similar ideas already found in graphic design, more

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[68] This was later republished in the third book of the important book series *Looking Closer: Critical Writings in Graphic Design*, of which the editors included Michael Bierut, Steven Heller, and Rick Poynor among several others.

specifically through van Toorn's notion of the "dialogic" image and Bailey's notion of the "articulate objects" in graphic design.

Reputable for a radical design practice that spans an extensive profession, van Toorn has been arguing for a "dialogic" practice to image-making—one that recognises and taps on the subjective narratives and mediatory role of visuals by involving the viewer in a "dialogue" with the work.[69] In such practices, the meaning of a work is generated or understood through a subjective "independent formation of opinion" from the viewers, based on their past experiences and backgrounds (van Toorn 1998, 165; Kuijpers 2017, 19). He describes the dialogic practice in graphic design as one that employs a "polyphonic [visual] vocabulary" that challenges its viewers into active interpretation of the work rather than passive reception of any obvious message or meaning (van Toorn 2010, 52; 55). This emphasis articulates a kind of intellectual mediation between society and design practice and comes through more as a form of critical resistance rather than a direct political action (van Toorn 1998, 160); "criticality" is embodied both in the interpretive possibilities within a work of design and in the reflexive mode of exchange design allows for.[70]

Parallel to this, graphic designer Stuart Bailey refers to certain works of critical and artistic practices as "articulate objects", which are "self-captioning" and "speak for themselves". These are works that "teaches" its readers how to read them by incorporating its own making (form) into its thinking (meaning) through a self-reflexive process. Such works also embody an "openness" based on Umberto Eco's notion of the "open work" (2014). Bailey's description of the "articulate object", along with van Toorn's "dialogic" work, acknowledges the ambiguity or openness of forms and how they are part of a "dynamic universe of symbolic exchange" in a social world (van Toorn 2010, 51). These approaches reveal how critical and artistic design practices are constructively "affective" rather than imposingly "explanatory" and could result in works that engender epistemic qualities (see Malpass 2017, 42). Both of these approaches embrace ambiguity as a productive characteristic towards generating meaning and understanding.

Discursive

Given the epistemic quality in works of critical and artistic graphic design practices and the possibility of "dialogic" exchange between such works and their viewers, it is only natural for them to engage specific ideas or discourse. This describes one of the main characteristics in works of such practices: the ability to stimulate debate through a symbolic functionality of the designed object (Malpass 2017, 71) and could be compared to the kind of "imagined narratives of use" that results from para-functional works in product design (see Dunne 2008, 69). These imagined narratives or debates, determined by viewers engaged with the designed outcomes, forms *discursive* spaces within specific contexts of information, knowledge, or discourse. These discursive spaces—the conceptual exchange that occurs around works of critical and artistic design practices—does not happen in a vacuum or in random association. Instead, they are often quite deliberately situated by their designers in specific domains of interests, knowledge and cultures in order to facilitate *directed* critical reflections. This also means that works of critical graphic design practices are often coupled with contextual content, whether in the form of texts, images, other supporting materials, or self-referentially encoded either within the work or throughout a designer's body of work and other related involvements. For example, these can take the form of exhibition texts, curatorial statements, published texts, or work descriptions. More specifically, if we refer to the earlier discussions from Laranjo, these would be writings of criticism completed alongside or as part of design practice, whereas for Bailey, these might be embedded within acts of writing, publishing, and designing as a unified whole. Since these contextual materials play a key role towards

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[69] Although the "dialogic" nature is often discussed by van Toorn, "dialogism" as a larger concept can be traced to Mikhail Bakhtin in the field of philosophy. This research however will not elaborate on Bakhtin's definition of the term and will focus on the idea in relation to graphic design as articulated by van Toorn in order to keep to a reasonable scope. van Toorn's notion of the "dialogic" also more specifically addresses the field of graphic design rather than art of philosophy.

[70] An example of how this occurs is that when a designer finds ideological interpretations of a received commission and find ways to visually mediate or embody a critical stance or awareness into the resulting work, it allows viewers to develop their own awareness and responses to the issue at hand *as well as* towards the often "mythical" or manipulative nature of mass media and visual communication (see van Toorn 1998, 160).

understanding works in critical and artistic practices, it is reasonable to consider them as important as the designed objects; they constitute the work's integral whole and should be taken into consideration in understanding and interpreting works. In this sense, it is also possible to determine how well a particular work "functions" by considering its discursive nature and potential in relation to the ideas and context it addresses, whether directly or indirectly.

Multidimensional, para-functional, epistemic, and discursive outcomes

This subsection builds on the earlier two subsections to present various characteristics and ways of thinking about outcomes of critical and artistic design practices. This discussion reveals how forms of criticality are embedded within works of such practices and could hence be evaluated or understood through their multidimensional criticality, para-functionality, epistemic quality, and discursive potential. Altogether, these characteristics describing the outcomes of critical and artistic graphic design practices are also guidelines for studying or interpreting them.

3.2.4   Sites, strategies, and forms of critical graphic design practices

As a whole, this section organised and revealed key ideas and characteristics around the nature of critical and artistic graphic design practices, expressed by both practitioners and theorists in the field. By analysing the sites (positionings), strategies (approaches), and forms (outcomes) of critical graphic design practices through its emerging discourse, the section sketched out broad foundations for further research and contextualisation of such practices.

Also, although the highlighted characteristics likely also reflect positionings, approaches, and outcomes in art practices, this does not invalidate the need to think of them in relation to design practice. The validity of critical and artistic design practices does not depend on a distinction from art but on its potential and possibilities *as* design. Such practices are after all in between, or both, art and design; they can be studied as "art" practices and their outcomes as "artworks" given another context. This dissertation, however, *categorically* positions critical and artistic graphic design practice as a variant or subset of design as a more productive way to study them, supported by the fact that most of its practitioners have some kind of connection to design, whether they received design education or training, identify as designers, or work with the market and commercial structures of design in some extent. Furthermore, although outcomes of such practices could also be considered "art", they are often created in response to ideas, contexts, or discourses that are closer or more specific to the field of design.

The next section moves on to consider existing criticisms towards critical graphic design practice and from there, draw potential connections with graphic design research as ways of addressing these criticisms.

3.3   Limitations and possibilities

As with many other emergent fields, even with the amount of growing literature around critical design practices, there are prominent limitations and gaps within the field that should not be overlooked. Criticisms have mainly been directed towards well-known examples of "critical design" works or practice, mostly towards their lack of rigour and ironically, criticality. These criticisms, however, provide opportunities to further strengthen the relevance of critical design practices by considering their connection to graphic design research, as pointed out in the beginning of this chapter. This last section of the chapter identifies and discusses criticisms within the field and discuss how they can be potentially addressed when thought about in relation to graphic design research.

3.3.1   Some limitations

Although some of the critique towards examples of "critical graphic design" were mentioned earlier, they are briefly consolidated here again alongside other key criticism not previously mentioned. Many critical graphic design practices in the recent years, particularly the *Forms of Inquiry* project along with its circle of participating designers whose practices formed—according to Laranjo—an inappropriate canon or "mainstream" references of such practices (Laranjo 2017, 49; see also Oliveira and Prado 2015, 61), were challenged for a lack or absence of accountability towards articulating and maintaining the kind of "criticality" they posit (see Poynor 2008; 2014, Laranjo 2014; 2017, 33, 73).[71] In 2008, Poynor pointed out their omission of important historical and ideological precedents that reflect their reluctance—whether deliberate or not— towards an "explicit acceptance and conscious interrogation of its own evolving history" (2008). Later in 2014, Poynor revisited the critique and emphasised the continuing lack of critical engagement with what the term may have promised, given its continuing absence in mainstream design presses and therefore its limited reach beyond a select group directly involved or implicated by its discussions and ideas (2014). Laranjo also sees a potential danger of "critical graphic design" being reduced to a mere "soundbite"—that becomes a part of other transitory terms often appropriated for novelty sake—if we continue to ignore the need to discuss and evaluate the general means, effects, and quality of such practices (2014).[72] More recently, several researchers in the field demystified "critical design"—more specifically, speculative design—by revealing what they saw as unnecessary ambiguity in the field; designs from such practices often aim to be thought provoking without committing to constructively address them (Tonkinwise 2016). They also assume a privileged position or viewpoint when they ignore social and cultural complexities—pertaining to nationalities, class, race, etc.—and uses the limited gallery setting as a primary form of engagement (Oliveira and Prado 2015, 63).

Parallel to these criticisms, some researchers pointed out that critical design practice was largely developed in isolation from larger pursuits in the field of design, whether practically or intellectually, particularly in relation to "design research". Malpass pointed out that this might be due to the ideological differences between the two, especially since critical design is not seen as a serious enough form of design given its lack of theoretical grounding when it started (2017). Also, after receiving widespread interests from the 2000s, the term "critical graphic design" was heavily misused to fashionably describe almost any form of independent or self-initiated practice without considering any larger implications (see Oliveira and Prado 2015, 62).

These criticisms reveal some of the intellectual and practical limitations critical design may have, both in the field of graphic design and the broader design field it originated from. However, it is important to note that these limitations are directed at specific examples of practices and not critical design practice itself. The intention of these criticisms is to either redirect or develop a kind of critical practice that is true to what it claims or should claim, which only returns to reinforce its importance. It is also necessary to clarify that some of these criticisms treat "critical design" as synonymous to "speculative design", likely because of Dunne and Raby's transition from the former to the latter term in the publication of their book, *Speculative Everything* (see Oliveira and Prado 2015; Tonkinwise 2016). However, this research argues for and presents a *broader* notion of "critical graphic design practice" that may or may not use speculation as an identifying strategy[73] but encompass more open forms of criticality (as already articulated in section 3.2). The significance of these criticisms then, is how they reveal the need to ground critical graphic design on, or in relation to, a recognised

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[71] Similar criticisms also appear in other fields like interaction design where "critical design" takes on a different focus (see Bardzell and Bardzell 2013).

[72] There have been many related terms that surfaced in the recent years under the general banner of critical design practice, for example, "discursive design" or "adversarial design". Because these are often not directly addressing the field of graphic design, this dissertation does not include them in the discussion. Based on Laranjo's warning, these terms—particularly future practices surrounding them—need to be subjected to longer periods of scrutiny before it is possible to evaluate if they are mere soundbites that does more to unnecessarily differentiate than establish new and relevant areas or types of design practice. This research dissertation is also an attempt to address Laranjo's caution towards critical graphic design practice by subjecting the term and its practice to critical discussion and evaluation.

[73] Even so, this broader notion of critical graphic design practice is still speculative in its overall approach when, for example, it materialises alternative modes or outcomes of design practice.

field within graphic design that has a longer and accepted history of intellectual engagement and practice. For this reason, this research proposes to situate critical graphic design practices *within* graphic design research. The next subsection discusses connections between critical graphic design practice and graphic design research.

3.3.2   Connections with graphic design research

There is a need to build theoretical support for considering critical graphic design practice as research by returning to ideas of graphic design research in chapter 2. To reiterate, the previous chapter concluded that graphic design research (1) should not be bound by scientific and rationalist research intentions and approaches, (2) should be characterised as a form of practice-based research, and (3) should be critically aware of its role and agency in a larger culture and society. Based on these directions, the following paragraphs tap on the earlier mentioned characteristics of critical and artistic graphic design practice to propose how they can be a form of graphic design research, or even be integral to the continuing development of graphic design research today.

To do this, the following paragraphs bring attention to some scattered and likely lesser-noticed but key ideas by researchers in graphic design research that find similarities with the nature of critical and artistic graphic design practice. These include: an article about the trans-disciplinary potential of graphic design in Jennifer Williams and Ian Gwilt's contribution to the conference *Research in Graphic Design, Graphic Design in Research* (2012),[74] David Cabianca's (2016) and Phil Jones' (2014) articles about the value of productive ambiguity in designing and reading graphic objects,[75] both published in a well-established academic design journal *Design and Culture*, Cristina de Almeida's article about the "rhetorical genre" in graphic design (2009) in *Journal of Visual Literacy*, and Robert Harland's chapter contribution in *The Routledge Companion to Design Research* (2015) which is the only chapter in the book that is specific to graphic design.[76]

Firstly, the artistic nature of critical graphic design practices—stated earlier as one of its key characteristic—aligns with how graphic design research is moving away from positivistic research paradigms, based on the reason that design cannot be entirely reduced to or replicated through formulaic processes. By leaning heavily towards artistic approaches and therefore deliberately adopting open-ended (discursive) outcomes, critical and artistic graphic design practices introduces a way of researching that breaks away from the rigid conventions design research wants to free itself from and aligns with its directions in searching for a research paradigm appropriate for design. This alignment is further seen through ideas in the general field of graphic design research: Cabianca warned against efforts to legitimise graphic design by appealing to the scientific disciplines, hence limiting graphic design to immediate or instrumental functions (i.e., its ability to solve problems). He argues that in order to restore an intrinsic "disciplinarity" that is key to continuing or establishing graphic design's overall relevance, it is crucial for graphic design to generate knowledge (i.e., research) under its own terms (2016). Almeida's emphasis on the rhetorical potential of graphic design—and hence the non-neutrality of the graphic design process—further supports this position. By acknowledging design's subjective and authorial agency over the shaping of content, she calls for the graphic designer to *examine* topics and issues rather than to only communicate them in proxy of extrinsic intentions (Almeida 2009, 188). This is not that different from Williams and Gwilt's ideas on positioning design as a formative activity rather than one limited to pre-defined problems and operational tasks. It is also not different from both Jones' and Harland's ideas about graphic design being a process of meaning production, which allows it to engage in theoretical rather than practical research. Together, these authors emphasised on the continuously "open-ended" (Williams and Gwilt 2012, 75), "ambiguously" discursive (Jones 2014, 215) and "aesthetically powerful" (Harland 2015, 96) as productive qualities of the graphic designed object, which are qualities also inherent to and embraced within

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[74] This article was one of the very few that stood out from all the rest in terms of its positioning; most of the contributions to that conference frames graphic design as a largely scientific and purely practical practice, whether knowingly or unknowingly.

[75] Cabianca describes it as a "sublime uselessness" (2016) and Jones as the "graphic thing" (2012).

[76] In this contribution, Harland describes a kind of "graphic design theory" that could be derived from graphic design practice.

critical and artistic graphic design practices. These ideas reveal how some in the broader field of graphic design might already be in search not only for a non-scientific or non-instrumentalist approach, but a way of defining and developing the discipline that emphasises the artistic and visual nature of graphic design, the foundation of which is already found in critical and artistic graphic design practices.

Secondly, the way critical and artistic graphic design practices are centered around practice and are not pure theoretical pursuits aligns with graphic design research's focus on practice-based models of research. Although critical graphic design practice uses the term "practice" and graphic design research uses the term "research", they are not different areas of activity but mutually inclusive ones. As already seen, critical and artistic graphic design practice has to become a form of research in order to achieve the kind of rigour and accountability it needs. Likewise, graphic design research needs to be practice-based (i.e. research *through* design) in order to become a kind of design research distinguished and therefore also validated amongst other types of research in the humanities or sciences. Cabianca's assertion that creative practice in graphic design is in itself a form of research regardless of the legitimacy of this claim within the social and hard sciences (2016, 111),[77] along with Williams and Gwilt's call to integrate design into more open models where design is used to frame research inquiry and form research agendas (2012, 74), supports the view that research activity can happen *through* and not just around graphic design (see also Williams and Gwilt 2012, 76). Harland argues that there is already an epistemological foundation for this when we think about how objects of graphic design—what he calls "graphic object"—embodies a complex interrelationship of form (i.e., outcomes or processes in research), content (i.e., meaning or intentions of research), and context (i.e., context or relevance of research) (2015, 95; see Almeida 2009, 188). Furthermore, the fact that form or image-making in graphic design is *in itself* a way of contextualisation and understanding—and not separate processes (Blauvelt cited in Harland 2015, 95)—perfectly aligns with what practice-based (graphic design) research is. These practice-driven processes of graphic design can not only serve professional practice but also become tools of research (Harland 2015, 96).

Thirdly, the core characteristic of critical graphic design practice—a critical engagement with the discipline and its relation to broader culture and society—aligns with graphic design research's need for rethinking its role and relevance amidst other fields and concerns. Cabianca highlighted that communication in graphic design is as much a cultural practice as it is a functional task; it balances between technical or technological progress and cultural concern and is unlike the field of engineering for example (2016, 107). Also, Williams and Gwilt's call for graphic design to frame research inquiry and agenda activates the agency of the designer in critical and ethical dimensions (2012, 72); graphic design becomes a "questioning activity" that aims to draw out insights and perspectives in a field of enquiry rather than only provide immediate pragmatic solutions. This involves a degree of authorship that—as pointed out by Almeida—brings about "social, moral, and political ramifications" through the act of design and this therefore extends the graphic designer's responsibility beyond the professional realm (2009, 188; see also Harland 2015, 95);[78] the graphic designer becomes a social agent rather than, or before, being a service provider (Almeida 2009, 195). These ideas in the role of graphic design in society is clearly tied to the critical agenda found in critical and artistic graphic design practices that were described earlier. The search and development of a kind of criticality specific to graphic design practice—to reflect on and engage with socio-cultural concerns—can only benefit graphic design research.

Along with all of the contents presented thus far, this section sums up the relationship between critical and artistic graphic design practice and graphic design research. The earlier three points revealed how the limitations within both fields could benefit from the theory and practice of the other. Despite the lack of attention given to critical and artistic graphic design practices in the field of graphic design research, or vice versa, this research argues for a reciprocally constructive relationship between the two: i.e., critical graphic design practice as graphic design research *and* vice versa. In simpler terms, it means that critical and artistic

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[77] This is not entirely an unsupported claim, he mentioned that key graphic designers like Lorraine Wild, Michael Rock, Karel Martens, etc., would not disagree with this—that creative practices are some form of research (Harland 2016, 107). There is a need to examine and explore this claim rather than dismiss it altogether.

[78] When quoting Blauvelt, Harland described that design now explores subjects across many different contexts—"social, cultural, political, geographic, technological, philosophical, informatic, etc." (2015, 95).

graphic design practices are forms of research in design and this claim was contextualised against key ideas from discourses in design research, graphic design research, and critical graphic design practice.

3.4   Summary

Altogether, this chapter examined the ideas and concepts surrounding critical and artistic graphic design practices by comparing and organising ideas found within the otherwise scattered and fragmented discourse, as seen from the wide-ranging materials and sources referenced. Through this, it highlighted 12 key characteristics, organised in three categories, the sites (i.e., where do these practices originate or are situated in), strategies (i.e., how are they practiced), and forms (i.e., what do they result in) of practice. They are summarised here:

Positionings of critical and artistic graphic design practices are, in short,

- **marginal** in relation to existing and prevailing forms of graphic design and their socio-economic functions

- **autonomous** in how they differ from dominant patterns of practices in the general profession through extended roles and functions

- **mediatory** in how they mediate and are mediated by other fields of practice or knowledge

- **dissident** as they exist in parallel or even opposition to general design practice given that its *raison d'être* is to question and eventually shift the current role and purpose of design

Together, these characteristics should be understood as transitionary, fluid, and unstable as long as the tension between "critical" and "affirmative" practices remain.

Approaches of critical and artistic graphic design practices are, in short,

- **speculative** in how they use design to imagine and investigate possible futures around the role of design practice as well as other related or extended areas of interest

- **research-driven** in how they participate in discourse outside of but related to design. (Research here is also better understood through the notion of "research through design" rather than academic or empirical forms of research, hence shaping its own intellectual foundation. This also directly builds on ideas of **authorship** in graphic design.)

- **artistic** in how they productively adopt hybrid strategies across both design and art (which can be described as a hybrid "design/art" disposition by Bailey)

- **critical** in its attitude and intention to emancipate itself and, by extension, others (communities, ideas, subjects, etc.) from the hegemonic conditions of the profession or broader society (which is better described as an embodied form of criticality rather than one primarily expressed through written criticism)

These strategies of practice are both strategies *for* practice and strategies *of* practice; they are how such practices approach subjects of study as well as how they embody itself as a subject of study through these approaches (i.e., speculating towards, researching about, artistically exploring, and critical towards graphic design practice).

Outcomes of critical and artistic graphic design practices are, in short,

- **multidimensional** in how they address ideas within and across personal (individual practice), professional (community of practice), and social dimensions (broader society)

- **para-functional** in how they go beyond concerns of practical functionality or utility into rhetorical, discursive, fictional, speculative, or poetic use

- **epistemic** in how they contain embodied forms of criticality and knowledge that allow interpretive and reflexive modes of exchange (which can also be understood through Bailey's notion of the "articulate object" (2014) and van Toorn's notion of the "dialogic" work (2010))

- **discursive** in how they—through their para-functional and epistemic nature—engage with specific ideas or discourse, whether taking the form of text, designed object, or both

These forms or outcomes of practice directly build on the other characteristics from the earlier points; there is a direct relationship between the positionings, strategies, and outcomes of practice (e.g., an autonomous positioning allows for a research-driven approach that results in a discursive outcome).

These characteristics present opportunities to think about critical and artistic graphic design practice in relation to graphic design research given the reciprocal relationship between them, listed below:

- the artistic nature of critical and artistic graphic design practices aligns with how graphic design research should move away from a positivistic research paradigm

- the way critical graphic design practices are centred around practice—and are not purely theoretical pursuits—aligns with how graphic design research should focus on practice-based models of research

- the core characteristic of critical graphic design practice—a critical engagement with both graphic design and its relation to broader culture and society—aligns with how graphic design research is searching for its role and relevance amidst other fields and areas of concerns

Given this constructive relationship, there is an urgency to consider critical graphic design practices *as* graphic design research and how this *works in practice*. There is both an opportunity and need to build on our understanding of critical and artistic graphic design practices by studying existing examples in relation to these ideas, which is the task of the rest of this dissertation. The following case study will be framed around the historical and theoretical foundations from this and the earlier chapter, hence drawing further connections between theory and (the understanding of) practice in critical and artistic graphic design and graphic design research. The next chapter first addresses methodological considerations before the case study.

If the eventual aim is to understand the kind of "graphic design research" outlined in chapter two—of how graphic design can be practised *as* a form of research and more specifically "research *through* design" or "design *as* research"—there is a need to first research *about* such cases. The case study in the next chapter attempts this practical study;[79] it researches *about* "research through design" that happens in critical and artistic graphic design practices, which is both the argument and proposition of this dissertation.[80]

With the need to develop "graphic design research" more specifically and intentionally beyond dominant but limited examples and definitions in the field today (presented in chapter two) and the proposition to look at critical and artistic graphic design practice as potential examples of such "graphic design research" (presented in chapter three), this chapter examines a specific case example of a critical and artistic graphic design practice as a way to contextualise the ideas and theoretical arguments presented in the earlier half of this dissertation— that critical and artistic graphic design practice contributes to a form of graphic design research. Adding on, the purpose of this case study is also to investigate in an in-depth manner, *how* and *why* critical and artistic practices contribute to graphic design research. As a whole, this case study further bridges the ideas from chapter two and three, between graphic design research and critical and artistic graphic design practice. Before doing so, this chapter first introduces, in section 4.1, some methodological considerations before moving into the case study in the next chapter.

4.1   Research design of case study

A case study is generally defined as an empirical inquiry appropriate for studying a contemporary phenomenon, especially when it requires contextual understanding of a complex interrelationship of variables and sources rather than a fixed set of data points (Yin 2014, 16–17), like in the case of the subject of study in this dissertation. This methodology section relies largely on researcher Robert Yin's work on the general case study method in the field of social science, since there is no major work done on the case study method in the field of design.[81] The following subsections list and describe the:

- 4.1.1   Unit of analysis (case)

- 4.1.2   Study question (nature and objective)

- 4.1.3   Study propositions (focus areas)

- 4.1.4   Collection and organisation of data (approach and outcome)

- 4.1.5   Interpretation, evaluation, and presentation of evidence (approach and outcome)

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[79] This part of the dissertation is "practical" in how it is primarily concerned with practice and differs from the earlier chapters that examined mostly theoretical ideas.

[80] One one hand, it is an argument because such practices have not been given much attention in academic study, particularly not in relation to "graphic design research". On the other hand, it is a proposition because these critical and artistic graphic design practices are not entirely synonymous with "graphic design research" yet are potentially connected or relevant. To propose the relevance of critical and artistic graphic design practice in graphic design research, it would require, either, further framing and contextualisation from researchers externally studying such practices, or awareness and engagement with graphic design research discourse internally from practitioners of such practices. This following study takes the role of the former, which is to externally frame and contextualise such practices as "graphic design research" while building on the foundations in the earlier two chapters.

[81] *Visualising Research* (Gray and Malins 2017), a key text in research methods in art and design, makes reference to Yin for further reference to the use of the case study method and does not provide a comprehensive account of how case study research in art or design might differ from the field of social science (117).

Together, these subsections identify:

- the specific contents for each component (i.e., what are the study questions, what are the units of analysis, what is the logic connecting the data and propositions, etc.), and as a result,

- further specify characteristics or approaches of this case study as compared to other types of case studies (e.g., what epistemological orientation), and therefore,

- demonstrate the appropriateness and advantage of the prescribed case study method for the broader objectives of this research.

4.1.1   Unit of analysis

This is a single-case case study research and its unit of analysis is the graphic design practice of Sulki and Min, run by Choi Sulki and Choi Sung Min (they will be subsequently referred to as Sulki Choi and Min Choi). Based in South Korea, their practice can be considered an example of a critical and artistic graphic design practice based on the characteristics listed in the earlier chapter.

Their practice, primarily selected for their complexity and relevance towards the identified phenomenon (critical and artistic graphic design practices), is also an exemplary one in general graphic design practice—its prominence and quality evidenced through their consistent and frequent appearances across familiar key platforms or publications in the profession (e.g., IDEA magazine from Japan, GRAPHIC magazine from South Korea, Brno Graphic Design Biennial in Czech Republic, Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis, and numerous other solo or group exhibitions they were part of).

The phenomenon of critical and artistic graphic design practice is not bound geographically but they are not as common in Asia as compared to Euro-America. Although Sulki and Min are relatively well-known internationally and have been involved in many engagements outside of Asia, their practice is still largely based in South Korea and there are not as many writings (in English) *about* them as compared to other similar Euro-American examples like the practices of Dexter Sinister (US), Metahaven (NL), or Jan van Toorn (NL) for example. This research, therefore, also takes the opportunity to study this lesser discussed yet equally prominent example.

Another reason for selecting Sulki and Min's practice is the large amount and variety of materials and information available for study, which is not always the case for other practices, like that of Åbäke and Manuel Raeder for example.[82] This case study research taps on the rich amount of information and materials already present in published works and documentations of their practice, many conceptualised and designed by Sulki and Min themselves. Such materials are either well-documented in online archives maintained by the designers (www.sulki-min.com) or in self-published or authored works containing extended writings and contextualisation of their practice. Many of their publication works—a significant component of their practice—are also available through publicly accessible platforms or in my personal collection. On top of this, the design duo is also active in communicating their processes, interests, and intentions in both professional and informal platforms through published interviews, recorded lectures, presentations, and written articles.[83] Altogether, these come together as a rich collection of primary and secondary sources for study and analysis, of which the case study method is appropriate for (Yin 2014, 12).

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[82] These are designers who have practices of a similar nature who also participated in the Forms of Inquiry exhibition but there is comparatively lesser available information on these practices.

[83] This wide range of engagements by the designers within a community of practice is also proof for being a case example worth studying in further detail.

As a whole, Sulki and Min's practice—in terms of its case type[84]—can be described as an "influential" case of critical and artistic graphic design practice. It can also be seen as an "unusual" case when understood in context to the broader field of graphic design, or a "deviant" case of graphic design research for not falling within dominant ideas and definitions in its discourse. These case types can be used to understand the intention of this case study, which is to describe and present an "unusual" case of graphic design *practice* as well as a "deviant" case of graphic design *research*, as a way of better understanding an "influential" example of a critical and artistic graphic design practice.

The choice of doing this single case study rather than multiple cases allows for a more in-depth investigation than multiple brief studies would. After all, studying the particular, or "particularisation" (Simons 2014, 466), is the original and overarching justification for doing and learning from case studies in the first place. Generalisations, as opposed to particularisation, are better addressed through broad surveys and questionnaires where quantitative information is of key concern. This does not mean that the resulting insights from a single-case, qualitative study are not *generally* relevant. For this, I quote Simons at length, whose article "Case Study Research: In-Depth Understanding in Context" was what first challenged me to do an in-depth single-case study:

> […] I believe the "real" strength of case study lies in the insights we gain from in-depth study of the particular. But I also argue for the universality of such insights—if we get it "right". By which I mean that if we are able to capture and report the uniqueness, the essence, of the case in all its particularity and present this in a way we can all recognise, we will discover something of universal significance. This is something of a paradox. The more you learn in-depth about the particularity of one person, situation, or context, the more likely you are to discover something universal. The process of reaching understanding has support both from the way in which many discoveries are made in science and in how we learn from artists, poets, and novelists, who reach us by communicating a recognisable truth about individuals, human relationships […] (Simons 2014, 466–467).

4.1.2 Study question

The main study question for this case study is: how and why do Sulki and Min develop their graphic design practice and how might it contribute to graphic design research? Although the earlier two chapters established the possibility for critical and artistic practices to be considered forms of graphic design research based on a historical and theoretical survey, what remains unclear is how this happens in a real-world context. The following questions—more specific ones that underlie the main study question above—will also be addressed through this case study. Do critical and artistic practices generate relevant knowledge and what are they? How do these works contribute to a better understanding and practice within design and its related fields? Why do practitioners involve themselves in such practices that differ from dominant types of practices? How do they approach building such practices?

A qualitative method is best suited for answering questions of this nature—an approach that is descriptive and explanatory in its purpose (see Yin 2014, 10). The case study qualitatively works to describe and understand the "mechanisms and pathways between causes and effects" (i.e., *how and why* Sulki and Min's practice contributes to research) rather than quantitatively identifies the "average strength of a factor that causes an effect" (i.e., *how much* does Sulki and Min's practice contributes to research) (Blatter 2008, 69). This research therefore falls under a constructivist paradigm (see Blatter 2008, 68; Gray and Malins 2017, 19). The ontological assumption is relativist and its epistemological orientation is subjectivist (see Gray and Malins 2017, 19; Yin 2014, 17). It acknowledges observer-dependent findings that tap on the perspectives of its

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[84] Identifying types of cases is a common strategy to position or understand any case study research (see Gerring 2007, 87). It is also common for case examples to have mixed case types although they are representative samples of some phenomena (Gerring 2007, 147)

participants—Sulki and Min—and therefore results in interpretative or discursive outcomes (see Gray and Malins 2017, 19). This positioning is also fitting to this research because it is problematic to assume objective realities (i.e., fixed formulas and processes) across all design practices.

4.1.3   Study propositions

Study propositions define the scope of a case study by directing attention to specific points of study within each case example (Yin 2014, 30). In this research, the study propositions relate to three specific areas of focus that will guide the collection of data and influence its interpretation. These areas are:

1a. How Sulki and Min frame, understand and describe the *roles* they assume and participate in. It requires the researcher to identify the interests, intentions, and motivations behind their practice and works, and is useful for understanding alternative roles, concerns, and potential of graphic design practice outside of existing conventions.

2a. How they address *issues* and *areas of concern* through practice and what these issues and areas of concerns are. It requires the researcher to identify how their practice relates and contributes to other fields of knowledge and is useful for understanding how "design as research" occurs within critical and artistic graphic design practices.

3a. How they adopt relevant *tools*, *approaches*, or *strategies* toward their topics of interests. It requires the researcher to identify how these tools and strategies are employed towards critical and artistic ends and is useful for understanding the modes and formats of presentation and engagement in critical and artistic graphic design practices.

4.1.4   Collection and organisation of data

In correspondence, the study propositions above guide the reading and gathering of information and insights—from the wide range of available data or information previously introduced in subsection 4.1.1 (unit of analysis)—in the following ways:

1b. To extract and interpret contents in interviews, writings, and recordings where Sulki and Min's thoughts on their roles and motivations are articulated (see Yin 2014, 110–111).

2b. To visually read and study available key artefacts produced in Sulki and Min's design practice alongside their descriptions, contexts, and interpretive meanings (see Yin 2014, 113 & 117). This is informed by insights from 1b.

3b. To identify and draw connections across key intentions and works in Sulki and Min practice *as a whole*, through interpretation and analysis. This is informed by insights from 1b and 2b.

This logic connecting the data and study propositions works with some important principles of data collection in case study research. They are the use of multiple sources of evidence (see Yin 2014, 118), a case study "database" (see Yin 2014, 123), and the maintaining of a chain of evidence throughout the case study report (see Yin 2014, 127). By using various kinds of sources—writings, works, recordings—it allows for data from different sources to corroborate into specific insights even when the research takes a relativist perspective (Yin 2014, 122). Also, the case study "database" equivalent of this research would be the bibliography (where Sulki and Min's writings and works are referenced) as this research primarily works with publicly available information rather than researcher-generated or independently sourced data. All images and descriptions of works discussed in the case study report are also either directly included in the report or listed in the appendix. This bibliography and appendix serve as the evidentiary base for any critical examination of the arguments or insights made in the case study and will also be useful for further research. Finally, the interconnected nature of the focus areas (study propositions) and their influence on the progressive collection and reading of data allows

the case study report to maintain a chain of evidence for the reader to follow throughout the case study report. All these considerations above contribute to the construct validity of the research data.

4.1.5   Interpretation, evaluation, and presentation of evidence

This last subsection highlights further considerations when interpreting and presenting evidence in the case study based on Yin's description of strategies and techniques in approaching analysis in case study research. In line with this research's relativist positioning, the case study takes an inductive and iterative approach towards analysing and interpreting the information gathered around Sulki and Min's practice. Employing explanation building as a method (see Yin 2014, 143), it focuses on "descriptive-interpretive" elements in the causal relationships within their practice (see Given 2008, 68). The case study also adopts what Simons refer to as "progressive focusing" in qualitative research (2014), which is to "gradually [reframe] initially identified issues into themes that […] are further interpreted to generate findings" (464).

The evaluation of any generalisations made regarding Sulki and Min's approach and ideas can be reasonably justified by comparing them to and across the work examples discussed in different parts of the case study. Construct validity of the case study is strengthened when it compares and synthesises perspectives and insights across various parts of Sulki and Min's practice. External validity of the case study is strengthened through contextualisation against the historical and theoretical ideas in the earlier chapters, as well as through my knowledge and experience as a graphic designer practising in a similar area.[85] The use of different kinds of data or evidence—visual works, writings by Sulki and Min, interview texts, other texts about Sulki and Min, etc.—strengthens the internal validity of the overall understanding of their practice resulting from this study. Although it is not possible to attend to all the available evidence (the entire body of works of Sulki and Min), this research still fulfils the expectations of a case study when it addresses significant aspects within the unit of analysis, which in this case are the works and activities of Sulki and Min that directly relates to the "critical and artistic" nature of graphic design.

In terms of presentation, instead of discussing the ideas, approaches, and outcomes of Sulki and Min's practice (as described in the study propositions) as separate parts within the case study, it discusses and presents them as an interconnected whole, organised thematically based on specific ideas and insights revealed in their practice, which allows for progressive focusing of insights as the reader move through the case study.

4.2   Summary

In summary, I take an in-depth single-case approach to study the complex phenomena of a critical and artistic graphic design practice. Situated in a relativist perspective, it is descriptive and explanatory in its purpose and taps on a wide range of source types generated by, and around, Sulki and Min. The result will be an interpretive and discursive portrayal of Sulki and Min's practice that reveal insights into how and why such a practice—representative of critical and artistic graphic design practices—contribute as graphic design research.

Instead of finding a set of criteria by which we could quantify or measure critical and artistic graphic design practices, the overall approach and intention for this case study is to *investigate possible key concepts and processes that naturally contribute to such practices*. For a field of practice that is undergoing development and change, this approach likely results in a more productive outcome as it is open enough to suggest future

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[85] I have been practicing as graphic designer since 2016 and have been doing so independently through gideon-jamie, a two-person studio founded in 2017. The studio has been active in making works, participating in exhibitions, conducting workshops and talks, and writing and publishing both directly and indirectly around this subject. I am also involved in adjunct teaching at a BA and/or Diploma level since 2017.

trajectories of research rather than to identify a fixed set of criteria for prematurely ruling out non-critical graphic design practices.

Sulki and Min[86] (Choi Sulki and Choi Sung Min) is a two-person graphic design studio based in South Korea. Although they are generally referred to as graphic designers, they also actively make work as artists, publishers, curators, or writers and their works span generously across commissions, collaborations and independent projects, which can be seen in their well-maintained website archive (www.sulki-min.com). The following paragraph provides a short biographical note.

Both Sulki and Min earned their MFA degrees in Yale University (US) where they also met. They then worked as researchers at the Jan van Eyck Academie (NL) before starting their practice in 2005 after returning to South Korea. They later founded Specter Press in 2006, a publishing imprint that presents the works of Korean artists and authors among other projects. Specter Press is also where the duo actively publish writings and translations, which occupies a significant area of their work. Throughout their practice, they have also worked as graphic designers of the BMW Guggenheim Lab from 2010–2013 where they designed an interactive identity system and started an artist-designer collective SMSM with two Korean artists Park MeeNa and Sasa[44] where they made several artworks and installations. Sulki and Min have also been actively participating in, designing, or curating exhibitions (e.g., several solo exhibitions to date, International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno (CZ), and Typojanchi International Typography Biennial (KR)). Parallel to their studio practice, Sulki Choi teaches at Kaywon School of Art and Design and Min Choi at the University of Seoul; both have also delivered lectures or workshops internationally (e.g., at Walker Art Center (US), Osaka University of Arts (JP), and China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CN)). Their works are also included in the collections of museums or institutions across the world (e.g., National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Gwacheon, M+ in Hong Kong, Cooper Hewitt, and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London).

Although commission-based works and conventional graphic design formats form an important part of Sulki and Min's output, many of these outcomes differ largely from traditionally conceived graphic design work in their intentions, forms, and meanings, and many of them are produced in relation to the myriad of activities they are involved in listed above. This would be the primary point of departure for studying their works and practice.

The case study organises its study of Sulki and Min's practice in four parts, organised and arranged progressively:

- 5.1   Critically productive balance between "art" and "design"
- 5.2   Synergistic relationship between independent and commissioned work
- 5.3   Integrated authorship through designing form and texts as content
- 5.4   Researching through an expanded design practice

The first two parts, subsections 5.1 and 5.2, introduce and discuss Sulki and Min's broad positioning of their practice, specifically touching on how they occupy a productive space between art and design and how they navigate their interests through both commissioned and independent project settings without either one being supplementary to the other. The next two parts, organised into subsections 5.3 and 5.4, examine and discuss how Sulki and Min approach "design as content" and "practice as research", specifically touching on the various ways they work with and generate ideas through graphic design as well as their involvement in an expanded practice that consists a range of other design-related activities. The latter subsections (5.3 and 5.4)

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[86] For convenience and clarity, I will use the compound name of Sulki Choi and Min Choi—"Sulki and Min" in plural form—in subsequent references to them in writing as well as citations.

directly builds on the former subsections (5.1 and 5.2); the former subsections first focus on factors in Sulki and Min's practice that *allow* for a critical and artistic graphic design practice and the latter sections then focus on factors in Sulki and Min's practice that more directly *contribute* to a critical and artistic graphic design practice and research. Each of these subsections pulls together relevant projects and discuss them both individually and interconnectedly. For clarity, the large number of work or project titles by Sulki and Min mentioned in the case study will be underlined for easier typographic distinction regardless of the type of work.[87] The year of which the work was produced is included whenever it is mentioned for the first time.

5.1   A critically productive balance between "art" and "design"

Sulki and Min introduce themselves as artists working mostly on graphic design or vice versa (i.e., graphic designers working mostly in art)[88] (Ong 2018; Schwulst 2017) and have been developing a graphic design practice that primarily involves art or culturally related organisations or individuals (Ong 2018). Complementary to this, they also describe their studio "motto" as: "clarifying is our business and obscuring is our pleasure" (Walker Art Center 2016). With this, they point out how all projects contain a "mixture of clarity and obscurity", or more precisely, "the clarity of principles as opposed to the obscurity of meaning" and how they always search for a "risky and inspiring" balance between both (Choi and Offermanns 2016). When read together with the earlier statement, this balance between clarity and obscurity could also refer to their practice as a whole, where, as "artists", they find pleasure in obscuring the meanings of their work—*designs* in particular—by incorporating instinctual preferences or open-ended forms, and as "designers", they make it a point to clarify the intentions of their works—*artworks* in particular—by describing the thoughts and processes involved in making a particular work. This unexpected "balance" between the two seemingly contradictory qualities—art and design, or obscurity and clarity[89]—characterises many of their works and position them as interesting and difficult-to-categorise outcomes that elicit further engagements from viewers. This idea is elaborated in the following paragraphs using specific work examples. The first is a graphic design commission for a series of journals titled Ob.scene (2011–ongoing), the second one is an artwork for an exhibition in the form of a poster titled Graphic Design in the White Cube (2006).

Ob.scene, an ongoing performing arts journal designed by Sulki and Min,[90] commissioned by editors of the journal, offers one way to understand what Sulki and Min refer to as "obscuring". According to the editors of Ob.scene, the journal focuses on "things out of the stage". Sulki and Min further described that this journal covers "extremely broad interests from contemporary dance […] to more abstract ideas about mirroring or tracing" in the field of performing arts.[91] An immediate visual characteristic of the Ob.scene journal is the blank, unprinted covers given to the publications as a unifying design element across all of them (eight publications to date, from 2011–18) (see fig. 1A).[92] On first thought, the decision to not include any kind of representation or information on the cover might just seem to be a counterproductive act of "design" and reflects a literally obscure act that is difficult to comprehend without further engagement or understanding of the journal. However, given the journal's focus on "things out of the stage"—likely referring to "behind-the-scenes" processes when understood in relation to the field of performing arts—the blank covers seem appropriate and highly relevant as a (non-)visual representation of not only the journal's contents but also its

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[87] The types, formats, and medium of each work are included in the accompanying image captions.

[88] This description points towards a needless distinction between activities of art and design for Sulki and Min. Min Choi mentioned in an interview that "comparing art and design [is not] at all productive" ("Getting to know graphic designer, Min Choi" 2013).

[89] Obscurity is generally associated as a characteristic or nature of "art" and clarity a purpose and requirement of "design".

[90] With the exception of the third issue which was designed by Shin Shin.

[91] The journals are published in the Korean language and I describe their contents using secondary information from Sulki and Min. This is adequate for a short analysis of the work describing its design intentions and outcomes.

[92] With the exception of the fifth one, which was a site-specific installation instead of a publication.

"attitude". This design decision is representative of the journal's focus in how the covers—metaphorically seen as the "stage" of a publication—are empty and all focus is being pushed behind, or outside of them (i.e, the "stage"). Similarly, it is representative of the journal's attitude in how the design decision embodies a "gesture of […] indifference" (Sulki and Min 2020a) towards what is generally of commercial interest—in terms of the subject matter (i.e., the general focus on things *on* the stage for performing arts) and graphic design (i.e., the general desire to have visually distinct covers for journals).

When this design decision is applied consistently to all journal issues, the blank covers takes on an important function of "unifying" the entire series of Ob.scene since all of the issues are housed in a range of contrasting sizes, formats, binding, and even material—from a proportionately thick but small perfect-bound booklet, roughly the size of a palm (Ob.scene 8) (fig. 1*B*), to an A3-sized saddle-stitched thin publication (Ob.scene 6) (fig. 1*C*). A blank cover that might at first seem to be too drastic a design decision becomes a sensible, distinct enough, solution for visually and conceptually distinguishing and positioning this journal series.
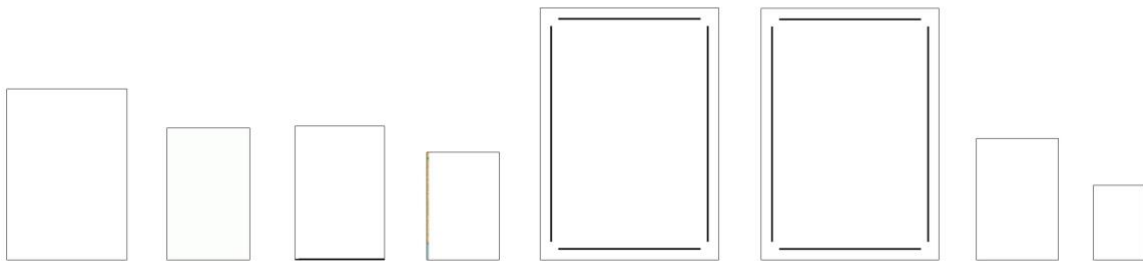
Figure 1*A*. *Left to right:* Front covers of *Ob.scene* journals 1–8. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Ob.scene – Search Results." Sulki and Min. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/category/english/?s=ob.scene&site_section=search-en.)
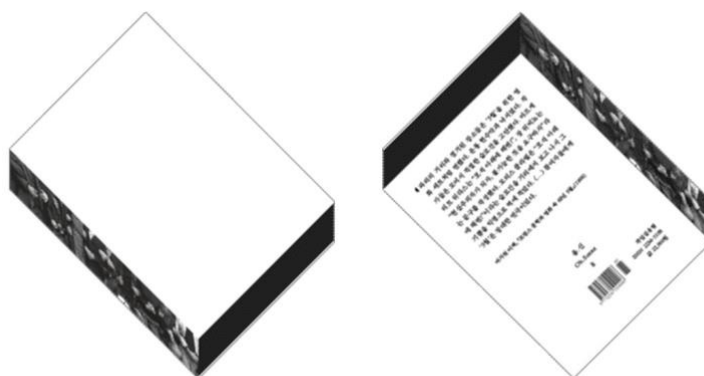
Figure 1*B*. 3-dimensional view of *Ob.scene* 8. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Ob.scene 8." Sulki and Min. 2018. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/ob-scene-8/.)
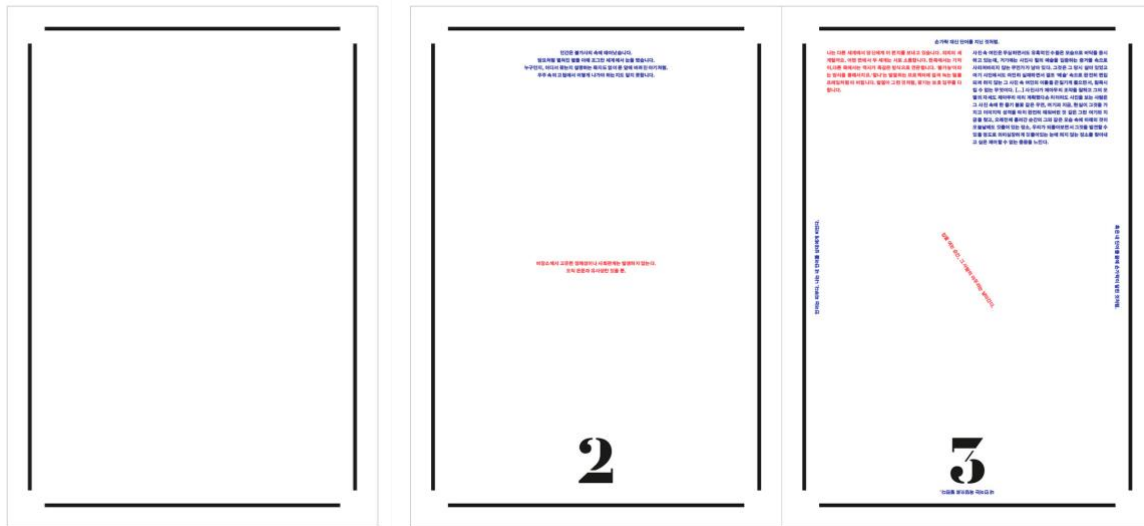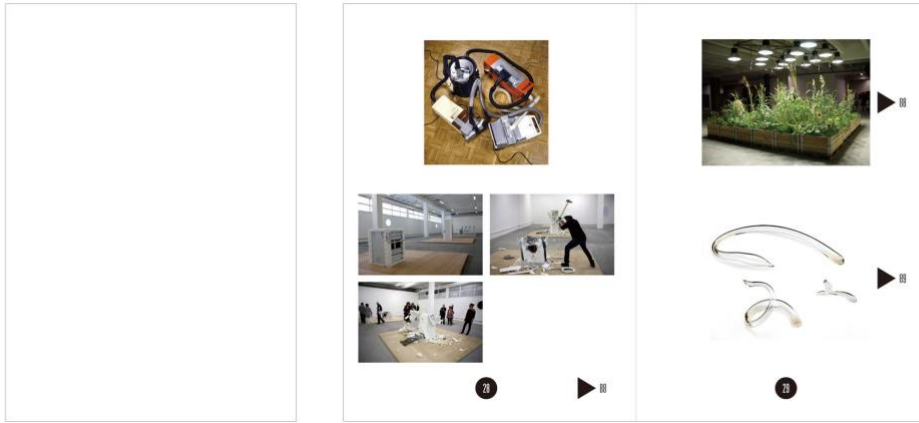
Figure 1*C*. Front cover and first spread of *Ob.scene* 6. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Ob.scene 6." Sulki and Min. 2016. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/ob-scene-6/.)

On top of the blank covers, the individual journals also contain other design characteristics that echo this focus and attitude. The first journal issue for example—Ob.scene 1 (2011) (fig. 1*D*), had all of the essay contributions broken up into three parts: its texts, notes, and images. These parts of the different essays were then regrouped to form three different sections within this issue. This means that the first section would have all the texts grouped and presented together, another section would include all the images, and so on. With this reorganisation, Sulki and Min included necessary navigational graphic devices that allow readers to still make sense of the original sequence of contents albeit at an interrupted pace. According to them, this reorganisation of contents forces the reader to move back and forth between the sections while reading each essay in the journal and this becomes, for them, a way of "performing" the reading (Sulki and Min 2020a). A similar "performative element" is also seen in Ob.scene 4 (2015) (fig. 1*E*), which had the theme of "walking in the city". Ob.scene 4's contents were entirely made up of fragmented borrowed excerpts and images ranging from internet cartoons and K-pop lyrics to formal and literary writings (the avant-garde Korean poet Yi Sang and cultural critic Walter Benjamin were examples they mentioned) that "intermingle" or "clash" as they "pass by" just like "pedestrians in the city" (Sulki and Min 2016a). With this theme and contents, Sulki and Min's approach was to randomly tilt the elements in each individual spread in different angles to "suggest the experience of walking in a city" as how it might occur when using a map application on a smartphone. Such a design treatment allows the reading experience to "perform" the thesis of this journal issue—of how "walking and reading trespass each other" (Sulki and Min 2016a). My experience in attempting to "read"[93] a physical copy of this journal issue emphasises this; it reflects a sense of disorientating instability that is perhaps like the experience of reading while walking, even when stationary. Although slightly discomforting, the experience is a peculiarly perceptive one when the subject matter I encounter (i.e., walking in the city) is directly conflicted with the experience of "walking" the streets afforded through its graphic design.

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[93] My experience of "reading" this journal is limited by my unfamiliarity with the Korean language this book is published in. I could however still "read" the texts by visually tracing through the letters in attempt to experience the book's design, while having an idea of its contents through the images—many were directly related to the theme of the "city"—and secondary information from Sulki and Min.

Figure 1*D*. Front cover and selected page spreads of *Ob.scene* 1. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Ob.scene 1." Sulki and Min. 2011. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/ob-scene-no-1/.)

Figure 1*E*. Selected page spreads from *Ob.scene* 4. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Ob.scene 4." Sulki and Min. 2015. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/ob-scene-4/.)

In this and the earlier example, Ob.scene 1, the design decisions disrupts rather than "functions"; they directly interfere with what is considered "good" or acceptable when designing for reading. Yet, it is clear upon closer examination that these somewhat unusual design decisions deliberately alter or affect a reader's expected behaviour or interaction with a publication as a way of drawing attention to its subject matter or themes. These publications are "para-functional" outcomes of graphic design—mentioned in chapter three as one characteristic in the outcomes of critical graphic design practice (see Malpass 2017, 14; Dunne 2008, 20; 43)— where what seems like ambiguous or non-functional design decisions reveal themselves to function rhetorically which in this case, happens through the experience and use afforded by its graphic design. These examples also show how the graphic design of these publications have an "epistemic" quality, or what Bailey describes as "articulate" works that "speak for themselves" when their design (or form) is directly incorporated as or into its contents (or meaning) (see Bailey 2014). In the case of Ob.scene 4 for example, because the randomly tilted elements on each spread directly relates to the theme and contents of that issue, its graphic design constructively informs and affects the resulting experience and meaning of the work and its contents. Something like this need not be achieved through an additional note that "explains" or "justifies" the graphic design but would reflexively surface when a reader interacts with the book and its contents.[94]

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[94] Of course, this requires an awareness from the reader that it is possible to engage with and understand the publication by "reading" its form alongside the contents.

Considering the para-functionality and "self-captioning" nature of these designs, Sulki and Min's approach to "counterproductively" design these journals—also observed across other journal issues[95] and in other projects discussed later—are well-thought-out decisions that responds appropriately to the specific contents they hold. Their act of "obscuring" works through unexpected design decisions reflects an intention to engage with the publications' contents on a para-functional level, which further contributes to other possible interpretations, understandings, or experiences of the contents.

In contrast to Ob.scene, Graphic Design in the White Cube (2006) (fig. 2), a poster Sulki and Min made for an exhibition of the same title, is a commissioned artwork that pays more direct attention to "clarifying"—particularly towards its processes and intentions—rather than "obscuring" (although it still does so indirectly). As an exhibition initiated and curated by graphic designer Peter Bil'ak, the idea was to invite designers to create promotional posters that would be shown around the city for promoting the exhibition, but also shown as the final "artworks" in this same exhibition at the Moravian Gallery in Brno. This curatorial premise by Bil'ak interestingly and self-referentially addresses and confronts the problem of showing graphic design within an isolated "white-cube" space.[96] For Sulki and Min, this "deliberate conflation of the outside and inside", as interpreted and described by them, is what they find interesting and hope to further "push" or explore through their poster contribution (Sulki and Min 2020b). The first paragraph in their description of this work articulates this intention and idea:

> We thought that the premise of the exhibition [commissioning the invited designers' posters to advertise the exhibition itself, and actually putting them out in the streets as well as showing them in a gallery] offered an interesting way to deal with the problematic situation of showing graphic design in a gallery. And we wanted with our contribution to push the deliberate conflation of the outside and inside, the real context of design work and the isolated place of presentation, a little further. We decided to make a poster for an expanded—"real"—audience: not only the pedestrians in Brno, but also some others that we can more directly reach—people in Seoul, Korea. We'd make printouts of a poster for the Brno exhibition, and put them in places in Seoul for a certain period. Our contribution to the exhibition itself would simply be a photograph of one of the posters on site: a kind of poster with a frame narrative (Sulki and Min 2020b).

With this idea, Sulki and Min ended up showing the "first" poster at Incheon International Airport "a few hours before the departure of a Korean Airlines flight to Prague", the capital of the country where the exhibition is held. A photograph of this poster shown in Seoul was included as the primary element in the final exhibited poster that was submitted for the exhibition, accompanied only by an additional gallery and event logo, and a caption of that photograph that almost resembles fine print given its inconspicuous size—against the surrounding white space. This poster from Sulki and Min differs from many of the other contributed posters in the exhibition in terms of its conceptual approach; it does not look or function like an informative or promotional poster where, conventionally, typographic information is clearly foregrounded or distinguished from any supporting visual or image. In this poster, Sulki and Min deliberately conjoin them into a single ambiguous whole. To a viewer, it is uncertain whether the textual information displayed on (the poster photographed within) the image is indeed the information promoting an actual exhibition. Similarly, it is also uncertain whether the image is actually an artwork shown in the exhibition. The final poster is really a meta-

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[95] These can be seen, for example, in the deliberately "poor" choice of typeface for Ob.scene 7 (2017) (fig. 1*C*), the unconventional typesetting of Ob.scene 2 (2012) (fig. 1*D*), or the use of an ambiguously cropped image on the book's spine (which conventionally contains texts) in Ob.scene 8 (2018) (fig. 1*E*).

[96] There is a common contention of whether works of graphic design could be truly understood when shown in gallery settings since they are isolated from their intended contexts or use (as signages, book covers, printed information, product packaging, etc.). Although not mentioned by Bil'ak, there is also a possible reference to Brian O'Doherty's popular critique of the modernist obsession with "white-cube" gallery space, which is not void of any ideology and might be problematic for reading and showing art, articulated in his book *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1986).

depiction of itself; the (final) poster promotes the exhibition in Brno by showing the (initial) poster they designed for promoting the same exhibition in Seoul, Korea.

In the rest of the work description (of which the first paragraph was quoted earlier), Sulki and Min recounted the steps they took to fulfil the idea and provided clear insight into why and how the poster became what it is.[97] They mentioned, for example, how the high cost of digitally printing the large poster (measuring 1000 by 1414mm) pushed them to use their office printer instead, which then required them to "stitch" together individual A4 printouts using coloured tapes to form the final poster of that size. They also explained how their preference for a conventional yet slightly odd-looking poster resulted in a final poster that resembled typical exhibition posters that commonly feature a single image, hence ruling out the consideration of including a series of photographs. These textual explanations, which are also generally seen accompanying their other artworks,[98] show their attempt to clarify rather than "obscure" the work's *formal* meaning and considerations. Yet, these clarifications do not limit the work to a specific interpretation, as already seen through the ambiguity imbued in their conceptual approach. Instead, what these descriptions do is to direct viewers towards open-ended readings or understandings of the work; they set up a discursive space for viewers to think *through* the work *and* its description. In the case of this poster, Sulki and Min further complexified the implications of— and therefore further brought to the viewers' attention—Bil'ak's curatorial idea, by directly "translating" his idea into the execution of the work. The single image in Sulki and Min's poster, purposely set against a generous amount of white space, is an extended representation or exaggeration of Bil'ak's idea to treat the work as both "graphic design" (representational) and "artwork" (represented). Sulki and Min described this as the "literal translation of the irony of the exhibition" (2020b)—the irony of which is exhibiting a work that is used to promote the very same work.

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[97] The decision to do this was likely influenced by Bil'ak's requirement for the design process to be documented and shown alongside the poster in the exhibition (Bil'ak 2006).

[98] See for example, the texts accompanying their works Dinosaur (2017) that was exhibited in Exhibited in A Tale of Two Cities: Narrative Archive of Memories, their solo exhibition Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513 (2008), or another work College Scholastic Ability Test for 1997: Mathematics (2014) that was exhibited in National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul.
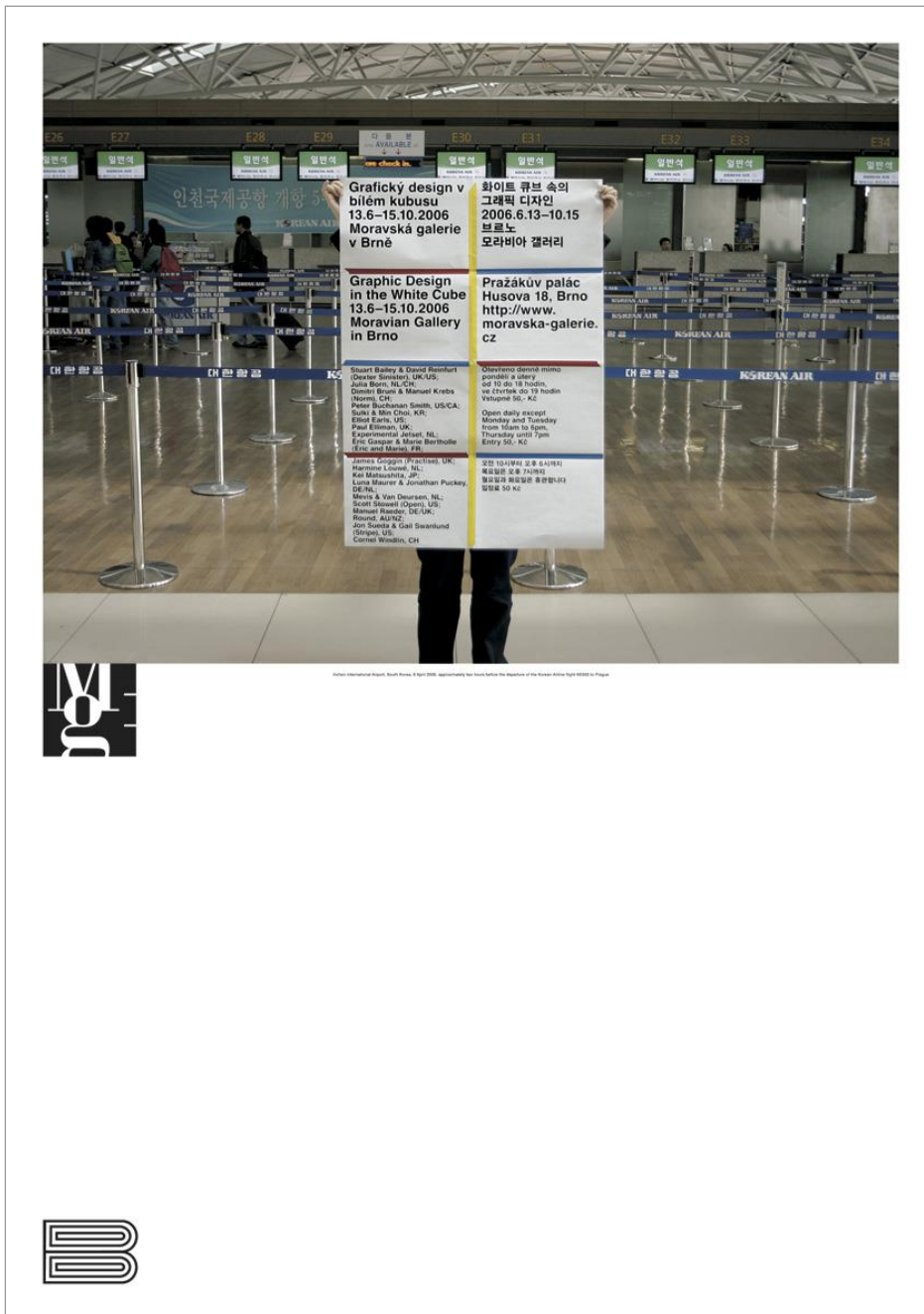
Figure 2. Poster for the exhibition *Graphic Design in the White Cube*. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Graphic Design in the White Cube." Sulki and Min. 2006. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/graphic-design-in-the-white-cube/.)

Sulki and Min's Graphic Design in the White Cube therefore "disturbs" the common expectation of any conventional exhibition poster and elicit an inexplicable or unusual reading, a gesture that pushes the viewer to further question the idea (or purpose) of exhibiting graphic design, one extended from Bil'ak's broader premise but realised even more tangibly through their contribution. What is the difference between viewing a piece of graphic work in and outside of its context of use? When a poster becomes an image within another poster, does it become an abstract image to be appreciated visually or can it still serve as a piece of functional information? Although Graphic Design in the White Cube is a work presented with well-defined intentions and processes, Sulki and Min's detailed description of it does not reduce the work into a single meaning, but carefully opens up questions embedded in its design scaffolded by textual description—questions that also correlates to broader

concerns and opinions of the duo beyond this piece of work.[99] [100] Despite the general assumption that extended descriptions of artistic works would defeat the purpose of having the work speak for itself, this example shows how this may be a matter of how the work description is written rather than whether or not it should be used. We see how "clarity" need not be avoided as a characteristic for artworks; a piece of work can be clear and well-defined yet still allow for inquisitive viewing and reading.[101] Aiming for clarity through the use of descriptive texts like these may better allow for a deeper reading that *responds* to the intention of an artwork.

Like Ob.scene, Graphic Design in the White Cube is para-functional in nature, afforded by its unconventional form and approach despite being a "promotional" poster. Yet unlike Ob.scene, it functions more discursively with contents or ideas directly embodied in the work. Rather than responding to a set of externally-imposed contents, Graphic Design in the White Cube is work example that is designed around a topic or issue the authors are personally invested in. A discursive outcome was discussed earlier in chapter three (subsection 3.2.3) as one main characteristic in critical and artistic graphic design practices (see Malpass 2017, 17). It was also mentioned earlier that the way design works discursively is, on top of the ideas it embody, through its contextual content. In this case, these include the accompanying text Sulki and Min wrote, the ideas Bil'ak addressed in his essay of the same title (2006) that accompanied the exhibition, and also the broader ideas surrounding this topic which, for example, could be Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1986). By choosing not to respond conventionally to the brief (i.e., to not design a functional or conventional promotional poster), Sulki and Min treats this more like an artwork commission even if it involves a conventionally written design brief.[102] This way, they were able to directly engage contextually relevant ideas and discursively situate this work in the growing interest of exhibiting graphic design. For example, one question that they possibly posit through this work—specifically through the confusing conflation of the inside and the outside, or of the represented and representational—is whether it is indeed possible or effective to "honestly" exhibit graphic design works "in use" in a gallery setting (what Bil'ak did), and whether Bil'ak's suggestion through this curatorial experiment is paradoxically futile (or self-referentially interesting).

Although Graphic Design in the White Cube could be considered an artwork, the subject matter it addresses is specific to graphic design. This is a good example of what Bailey described as an hybrid design-art disposition—discussed in chapter three (subsection 3.2.2)—where outcomes of critical and artistic practices, like art, correspond to personal interests even though they are rooted in and extended from "mechanisms of graphic design", and like design, responds to "real-world" conditions and contexts (i.e., others' interests) even though it is a non-utilitarian but para-functional application (Bailey 2014, 399). Here, Graphic Design in the White Cube distinctively relates to Sulki and Min's personal approach and their interests and involvements in exhibiting graphic design, while also responding to broader conditions and contexts of that same phenomenon as articulated by Bil'ak.

On a broader level, both Ob.scene journal and Graphic Design in the White Cube are characteristically reflective of their other works. In them, we see a productive balance between "art" and "design"—one that does not *modestly* borrow and reflect artistic qualities in design or vice versa, but *confidently* and *riskily* muddle up seemingly opposing qualities across art and design. For Sulki and Min, an artwork could be systematically conceptualised the way a work of design would, and a piece of graphic design work could also be imbued with the kind of sensibilities normally found in art. Even though Sulki and Min dislike arbitrary formal choices and

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[99] Min Choi addressed elsewhere the complication of exhibiting graphic design as "art" in the context of a gallery and pointed out their views on design's relationship with "art" ("Getting to know graphic designer", Min Choi 2013).

[100] Similar observations can also be made with many of their other works like I Miss Sonia Henie (2010), List of Exhibits: 7½, 2016 (2016), Our "Public Design" Manifesto (2017), and Poster for the 29th International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno 2020 (2019), etc.

[101] The work itself remains "self-articulate" since its description does not literally explain what it should mean.

[102] This work is also primarily commissioned as an exhibition piece rather than a promotional poster since there are multiple of such promotional posters produced by all of the invited designers when an exhibition normally only needs one. For this reason, whether they function well or are effective is likely of secondary importance to Bil'ak as long as they fulfil the basic requirement of displaying all the necessary information about the exhibition. These commissioned posters would therefore not be subjected to the same kind of scrutiny or evaluation from the "clients" like how a commercially commissioned project would.

prefer to start with clear ideas, they find that if the "translation of an idea into visual form is too transparent", it becomes uninteresting. They prefer the execution of a work "to be slightly unpredictable" (Sulki and Min in Butler 2015). This is seen both in the editorial direction and design for Ob.scene and concept for Graphic Design in the White Cube even though they diverge in how they reflect elements of obscurity or clarity. More specifically, we see how "obscurity" in design does not necessarily lead to arbitrary (and therefore meaningless) outcomes and how "clarity" in more autonomous or artistic works do not only point towards a one-dimensional interpretation, although both of those outcomes are often the intentions of artworks and design respectively—i.e., artworks to be open-ended, designs to be clearly purposed. Because of this, instead of finding a "middle ground", this balance is better described as one that *includes both* characteristics simultaneously and not one significantly more than the other—whether of art and design or of clarity and obscurity (see Choi in Smith 2017). Again, this further reinforces the productive position Sulki and Min adopts between the two seemingly opposing characteristics or approaches and returns to support the "risky and inspiring" balance Sulki and Min described when approaching their work, as well as reflect a possible form of the hybrid art-design disposition articulated by Bailey, whether it is a piece of work that functions in an applied or autonomous setting.

The uncertainty involved in navigating between "clarity" and "obscurity", or "art" and "design" does not immediately benefit a graphic design business given the conventions around such practices. The choice to adopt this nature and approach of practice reflects larger intentions or motivations that could be examined to draw further insights into Sulki and Min's practice. Clarity in visual communication is generally sought for and deemed primary in graphic design. Obscurity, however, is a quality that is understandably less important in comparison, or even less desirable in most cases. For Sulki and Min, the inclusion of the latter as an equally important quality in graphic design could be seen as a form of dissidence towards the sometimes over-romanticised or idealised notion of "clarity" in communication (see Z-won 2015). This reasserts a characteristic of critical and artistic graphic design practices mentioned in chapter three (subsection 3.2.1)—that such practices often exist in opposition to some extent towards general (i.e., affirmative) practices that reinforces the status quo (see Mazé et al. 2013, 6; Dunne and Raby 2013, vii). Although this positioning is not forthrightly stated by the duo, it can be drawn out from—which also means it is embedded in—their work Functional Typography series (2006) and Technical Drawing series (2014).

Functional Typography (fig.3) is a self-initiated work Sulki and Min made for their first solo exhibition titled Sulki and Min: Factory 060421–060513 which was shown at Gallery Factory in South Korea in 2006. In Functional Typography, Sulki and Min isolated typographic codes from products and packaging and presented them as graphically abstracted and enlarged typographic elements in the form of a poster series. Silkscreen printed black on white, these posters are slightly smaller than a standard A0 size and appear in both portrait and landscape orientations. The sources of these "functional typography" range randomly from, for example, a Christian Dior Fahrenheit perfume package, a Hegaon PurePlus Organic Orange Juice 245 ml bottle, and a power supply adapter for Macintosh G3 PowerBook. In their description of Functional Typography, they mentioned that despite the importance of these codes to manufacturers and suppliers, they are "completely incomprehensible" to consumers and this quality of between being meaningful and meaningless at the same time intrigues them (Sulki and Min 2020c). In the same way, the resulting posters seem to contain important information based on their typographic choice and graphic treatment but they do not actually communicate any information other than the source from which they were taken—which were mentioned in each work's specific title.
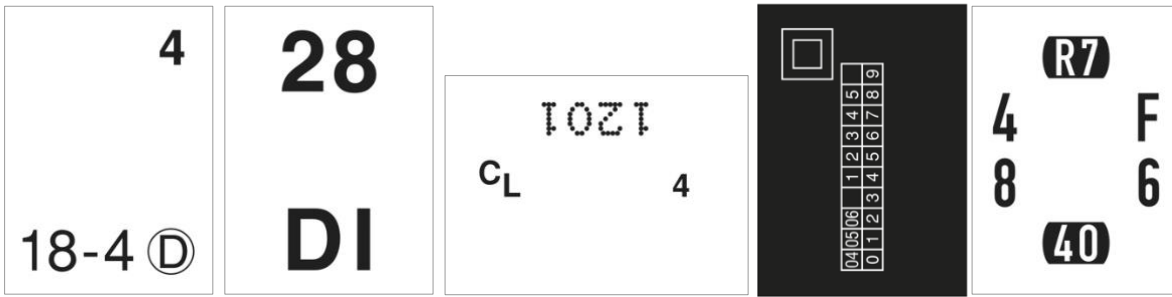
Figure 3. *Functional Typography* series. *Left to right*: Functional typography on a Christian Dior Fahrenheit perfume package: 78.8cm × 109.1cm; Functional typography on a Hegaon PurePlus Organic Orange Juice 245 ml bottle: 78.8cm × 109.1cm; Functional typography on a Crabtree & Evelyin Summer Hill Hydrating Body Mist Spray 100ml bottle: 109.1cm × 78.8cm; Functional typography on a power supply adapter for Macintosh G3 PowerBook; Functional typography on a Bic Mini gas lighter: 78.8cm × 109.1cm. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Functional Typography." Sulki and Min. 2006. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/functional-typography/.)

The other work, Technical Drawing (fig.4*A*), is also a self-initiated one and like Functional Typography, it is a series of prints created for an exhibition—the Hermès Foundation Misulsang nominees' exhibition—in South Korea from 2014–15. Technical Drawing is larger in scale and are Chromogenic colour prints (C-prints) of varying sizes, each measuring around more than one metre in height and some more than two metres in length (see fig.4*B*). In this work, Sulki and Min chose to zoom in to extremely close-ups image crops of technical drawings they found and then further manipulate them by blurring them to become large print-impressions. Although this work carries similar ideas to Functional Typography, where it makes ambiguous originally meaningful and precise pieces of visual information, it explores something else that is "less articulate and more atmospheric, something more difficult to rationalise or contextualise" (Sulki and Min 2020d). They describe this change as celebrating the invisible or incomprehensible in a less "confident or optimistic" way (Sulki and Min 2020d), which can also be observed in its naming convention—works in the series are titled "untitled" and ordered numerically. Unlike Functional Typography, Sulki and Min did not share the original sources of these images.

Figure 4*A*. Installation view of *Technical Drawing*: Photo by Nam Kiyong. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Technical Drawings." Sulki and Min. 2014. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/technical-drawings/.)
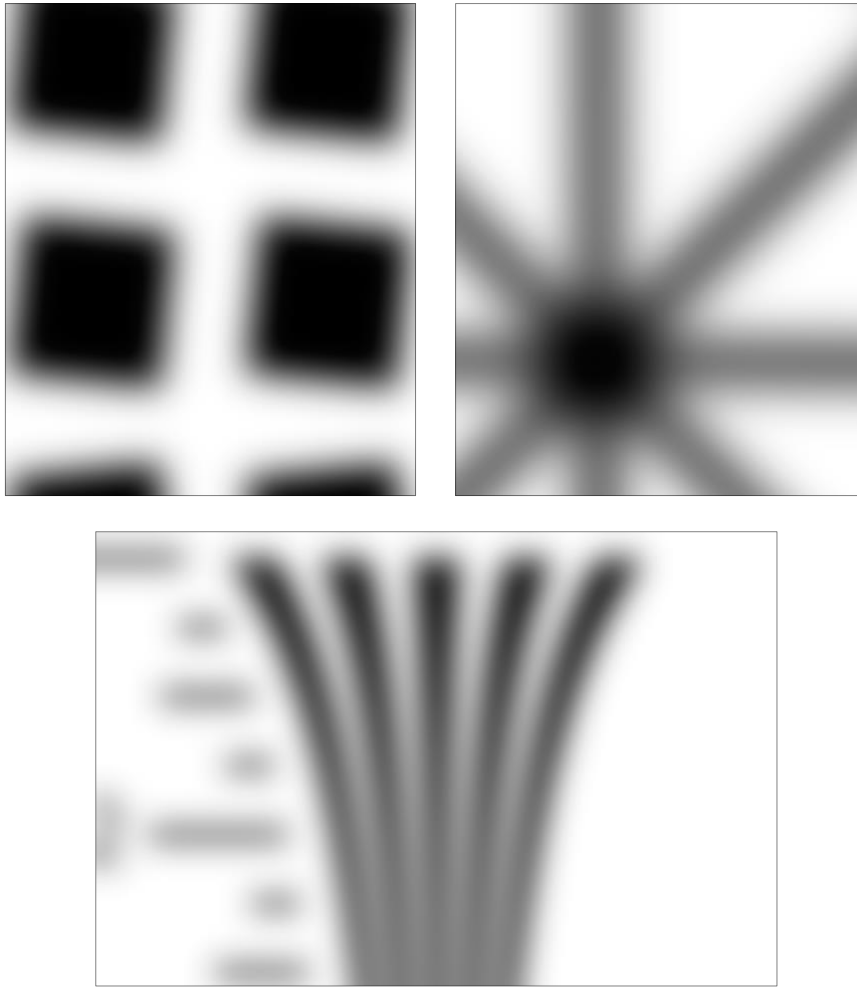
Figure *4B*. Selected works from the *Technical Drawing* series. *Above left*, Untitled 1-1-7 150 × 180cm; *above right*, Untitled 1-1-11, 150 × 180cm each; *below*, Untitled 1-1-20, 270 × 180cm. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Technical Drawings." Sulki and Min. 2014. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/technical-drawings/.)

In both of these works, Sulki and Min find and appropriate highly specific and functional pieces of graphic or typographic information as artistic materials for exploring themes of invisibility or incomprehensibility in graphic communication. Although we could simply see these as works that reflect suspicion or scepticism against the celebrated notion of "clarity" in graphic design or even label them as acts of appropriation for the sake of producing "art", what comes through more distinctively is an attitude reflecting a fascination with, or curiosity towards, the nature of what they both work with and encounter daily—graphic communication. This is supported by Sulki and Min's consistent reference to the idea of the "cryptographic imagination", an attitude towards language that acknowledges both its "opaqueness and "slipperiness" and therefore "endlessly inquiring what really is behind the apparent meaning of a text" (Z-won 2015). This attitude well characterises their practice. When Sulki and Min consistently make obscure what seems to be clear and find clarity in what seems ambiguous, they continually question the nature of communication in relation to, and through, graphic design and language.[103] This does not only happen in self-initiated or independent work but also in commissioned graphic design and collaborations. This attitude overarching their practice allows for, at the very least, a graphic design practice that never stops critically examining its own assumptions or nature (i.e., a graphic design practice that is critically reflexive), as much as it is critical towards the subjects it explores, which

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[103] Text and language are also what they use as "material" in their graphic design practice. They mentioned that the way they make obscure is also through how they present or talk about their works (Sulki and Min http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/technical-drawings/).

returns to support the kind of "criticality" posited in chapter three (subsection 3.2.2) in critical and artistic graphic design practices. Rather than seeing criticality as an additional (i.e., integral but not assimilated) component alongside graphic design practice—which was what Redström and Mazé describes as criticality from without (2007, 6)—there is a need to also understand the "potentials and problems of [criticality] from *within* practice" (ibid., emphasis mine). Such an awareness acknowledges and works with the nature of design and is more likely to be able to draw out an epistemological or intellectual foundation inherent to design. Sulki and Min's adopted attitude, described above through the two works, begins to reflect an inward awareness and examination of graphic design's foundations in communication; criticality is embodied in the way they view and approach the medium of graphic communication *itself*. In the case of Functional Typography and Technical Drawing, this is revealed in the focus on and reflection through objects of graphic communication.

In addition, these two works of Sulki and Min, which reasonably sets the tone of their overall practice,[104] show the three dimensions of criticality explained by Mazé (2009, 395) and van Toorn (in Laranjo 2017a, 56). It was mentioned in chapter three (subsection 3.2.3) that these three dimensions of criticality—criticality within personal practice and interests, a community of practice and its discourse or interests, and broader issues and ideas extended from design—are interconnected and reflexively affects each other. This means that any critical and artistic graphic design practice would have to, necessarily, involve these three dimensions of criticality to some extent and not only focus on a single "dimension"—e.g., a graphic design practice that only "critically" address its practitioners' interests and not contextualise these interests to broader ideas within or around the field. Functional Typography and Technical Drawing reflects a simple "multidimensional" form of criticality as posited by van Toorn and Mazé in the way it involves Sulki and Min's personal interests and encounters with highly specific forms of (typo)graphic communication (the first dimension), framed through the notion of the "cryptographic imagination" (the third dimension),[105] while also addressing the nature of communication in graphic design when the work is read and interpreted (the second dimension). As works that reflect broader interests and intentions underlying their practice, these works provide us a first insight into how their practice is critical, both through Redstrom and Mazé's notion of a criticality from within (2007, 6) and van Toorn and Mazé's interconnected dimensions of criticality (Laranjo 2017a, 56; Mazé 2009, 395).

As a whole, this first subsection discussed the overall nature of Sulki and Min's works as one that sits productively between qualities in art and design, specifically articulated through their interest and approach in coalescing elements of clarity and obscurity. The primary insight is that these two seemingly contrasting qualities are not separately seen in, or exclusive to, either works of "art" (i.e., independent, self-initiated, etc., works) or "design" (i.e., client commissioned, commercial, etc., work). Instead, a curious combination of both is almost always present across works of various nature and intentions (e.g., Ob.scene journals and Graphic Design in the White Cube), where elements of clarity and obscurity constructively constitutes an open-endedness within a loosely defined boundary or context for directed interpretations and understandings. This unusual yet productive balance reveals a form of dissidence and general criticality towards the graphic design medium, seen in their sensibility and attitude towards graphic communication represented through Functional Typography and Technical Drawing. With these early observations, I posit Sulki and Min's practice as a critically reflexive one.

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[104] Functional Typography is one of their earlier works and was also one made for the first solo exhibition of their practice that is naturally reflective of their broader foundational attitude towards graphic design practice. Technical Drawing carries on from this work and moves into other explorations of this obscurity-clarity paradox in everyday graphic communication; it also reflects a graphic treatment (blur) that is consistently seen in some of their other works that will be discussed later. Both of these works also directly reflect their interest in navigating between obscurity and clarity, which they keep to as a "motto" until today.

[105] The "cryptographic imagination" is consistently referenced and mentioned across Sulki and Min's other works and will be revisited in later sections.

**5.2	Synergistic relationship between commissioned and independent work**

Sulki and Min's practice contains as many commercial or commissioned works as independently initiated work. Yet, the distinction between these two is not obvious; they also do not intentionally distinguish them. Sulki and Min approach both commissioned and non-commissioned projects with as much experimentation or limitation as they would like for either. This is unlike how works are generally distinguished in graphic design practice where self-initiated work is generally assumed to have more room for experimentation and need not work with as many limitations as commissioned projects.

Although Sulki and Min's practice differs from general graphic design practice, when asked if they see their practice as something that is positioned at the "margins" of graphic design in an group interview,[106] they responded that they sometimes cross over boundaries but also sometimes stay within them and so do not see their practice as something "marginal".[107] Most of the time they "just do not think about them" and they find their practice to be in fact quite "muddled" (Sueda 2014, 57). Sulki and Min's disassociation with the term "marginal" here describes more of a careful positioning of their practice rather than a contradiction to "marginality" as a key characteristic of critical and artistic graphic design practices identified and discussed in chapter three (subsection 3.2.1). They challenge the common assumption of how the roles in graphic design are often separated between "problem-solving" and "provocation", which contains the underlying rhetoric that commissioned, conventional graphic design work focuses more on the former and independent, self-initiated ones on the latter. They then further questioned if graphic designers "would […] stop solving problems [even] if [graphic design's] primary role has somehow proved to be provocation" and asserted that their intention is to at least choose both (Sueda 2014, 62). We see from this that what they are avoiding is actually the limitation of having to choose between only being "provocative" (i.e., in self-initiated or non-commercial work) or to "problem-solve" (i.e., in commissioned or commercial work); what they hope for is instead something that balances or moves in a "muddled" manner between both. This position goes against the typical assumption that a graphic design practice could only exclusively focus on problem-solving or problem-finding[108] and as a position that challenges "the status quo", Sulki and Min's practice is characteristic of "marginal practices" in graphic design. We see that the positioning of their practice is in fact "marginal" in how they navigate, adapt, or appropriate existing structures and conventions in order to work within them while still maintaining a critical stance towards them. Although this position and view is not exclusive to Sulki and Min—it is also shared amongst the other practitioners or studios who responded to the same interview question, albeit in different ways and extents (see Sueda 2014, 53–58)—it is still at the periphery when compared against the entire field of graphic design, as already portrayed in chapter two of this dissertation (see subsection 2.2.3).[109] The kind of experimentation more commonly associated with "free", "independent" work is what these practitioners, including Sulki and Min, want to directly *integrate* in general graphic design practice rather than dedicated spaces outside of the profession. Interestingly, this positioning challenges graphic designers to consider their original place of practice as sites where critical explorations and interests could equally occur and develop, and not have an isolated "parallel universe" for critical graphic design work since such work carry an equally important role in the graphic design discipline (an idea argued for in the previous chapter). This returns to support how such practices simultaneously labour against, yet are driven by, their "marginality" (described in subsection 3.2.1).

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[106] This interview, titled "Questions on Speculative Graphic Design Practice", was done by Jon Sueda (2014).

[107] They also pointed out that these "margins" are not so clearly defined in the first place (Sueda 2014, 57).

[108] This typical assumption is common in communities of practice in graphic design and the prevalent distinction between commercial and non-commercial works, or commissioned and self-initiated work, seems to amplify this. In the same group interview, one notable graphic design studio Experimental Jetset pointed out an example of the "schizophrenic" designer that carries two portfolios, one with "free" projects and the other for "corporate" projects where the latter financially supports the former (Sueda 2014, 54). This way of compartmentalising types of graphic design work perfectly describes the earlier mentioned assumption.

[109] This is what Sulki and Min also acknowledges but they mentioned that they are "too close to the ground to make any meaningful distinction" (Sueda 2014, 57).

Finding and aligning one's interests and critically exploring it in various capacities through day-to-day graphic design projects is expectedly more challenging than doing so in an otherwise isolated "free" space. This is what might have created the divide in purpose and intentions between commissioned and non-commissioned work in the first place. Yet, what is worth noting in Sulki and Min's practice, perhaps also similar to some other critical and artistic graphic design practices, is that commissioned projects could involve or contain a high level of visual experimentation or conceptual exploration, and reversely, their independent work could also tap on the problem-solving process and work with self-imposed limitations or given premises and constraints to arrive at "solutions"; the two types of work also feed each other conceptually (Sulki and Min 2016a). Such a synergistic relationship is likely possible because of the close and long-term collaborations Sulki and Min have with those they work with, whether independently or through commissions, which allows for progressively deeper levels of involvement through design.[110] The following paragraphs discuss examples of work completed with two of Sulki and Min's close collaborators.

In a lecture given at Walker Art Center in 2016, the duo presented some selections of their works organised around specific collaborators or commissioning clients. One of it was a body of work—mostly commissioned graphic identities and implementations—done for various cultural organisations or festivals but always with or through their curator friend, Kim Seong Hee. These include Modafe (2005), a modern dance festival; Springwave (2007), a performing arts festival; Festival Bo:m (2008–13), a performing arts festival; Asia Culture Center Theatre (2014–16), various projects and programs; and later also National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea (2017–18) (not mentioned in the lecture). Among them, the graphic identity Sulki and Min designed for Festival Bo:m (fig.5A–E) is one example where the consistent collaboration resulted in a progressively distinct and bolder graphic identity across its several editions from 2008 to 2013.

The graphic identity started with a simple idea to directly use Festival Bo:m's logo—a typographic one that included the festival's name and date (see fig. 5A)—as the key visual element that should always be presented and used in a fixed size no matter the size of the deliverable (brochure, poster, leaflet, etc.). Whenever needed, this fixed-size logo will be tiled repeatedly to fill the visual space of larger items. The size of the logo is therefore determined by that which fits within the smallest item—a business card—and a large poster measuring 605 × 840 cm would then contain 99 repeatedly tiled logos as the primary visual element (Sulki and Min 2020e) (see fig. 5b). The word "bom" means "Spring" in Korean and this is the general reasoning behind the logo's visually "light" and "fragile" appearance emphasised using a lighter weight typeface and soft colours. However, the idea of keeping the logo at a single size and repeated throughout the deliverables as a key visual element is something without clear reasoning. Sulki and Min left this unexplained by saying that "for some reason, it was decided that the logo should maintain a certain size throughout the printed applications: it would be repeated, rather than enlarged, to reinforce its visual presence" (Sulki and Min 2020e). Later designs of this graphic identity for subsequent iterations of Festival Bo:m also reflected this hard-to-justify and intuitive approach as they became increasingly bolder visually. When describing this work, Sulki and Min mentioned that the first two successful iterations allowed trust to develop between them and the project commissioner and festival's director Kim Seong Hee. As a result, they were able to "enjoy complete free hands with the designing" and "began to infuse some *personal interests* or *instincts* that are hard to explain or justify" (Sulki and Min 2016a, emphasis mine). This is also reflected in the generally brief descriptions of subsequent Festival Bo:m's design identities on their website archive, where they do not attempt to over rationalise or describe these works.[111] Instead of seeing these as arbitrarily designed identities, they reflect Sulki and Min's efforts to integrate the kind of experimentation and attitude more commonly associated with independent work into their commercial commissions. The graphic identity for subsequent Festival Bo:m

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[110] Most of the time, Sulki and Min works with a handful of clients who are also their friends and their relationships are built on trust (Choi and Offermanns 2016). This is also recognised by them as an important characteristic of their work when they included "frequent collaborators" as a tagged category for their website work archive; users can sort and identify groups of works based on specific collaborators.

[111] This brevity is similar to their work descriptions for the earlier mentioned Ob.scene journals, which is also a client-commissioned project that reflects a similar intuitive and "free" approach to designing.

editions built on the same graphic system but introduced striking colour gradients (2010's edition) (fig. 5*C*), large solid colour and shape overlays (2013's edition) (fig. 5*D*), or even bold graphic ideas that heavily alter the "original" design but still keeping to the fixed-size logo (2011's and 2012's edition) (fig. 5*E*). Even if each edition's design may be arbitrary to some extent, the intention to adopt such an instinctive approach is a deliberate one.[112] Such an approach also caused the graphic design of <u>Festival Bo:m</u> to became "part of the festival's appeal" when people began collecting the festival's graphic collaterals of each edition (Sulki and Min 2016a).

FESTIVAL
BO✲M

SEOUL
2008
3✲22-4✲5

Figure 5*A*. Graphic Identity for *Festival Bo:m*. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Festival Bo:m Identity."
Sulki and Min. 2008. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min.
<u>http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/festival-bom-identity/</u>.)

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[112] It is also still possible to read into the possible meanings or messages the chosen graphic treatment communicates about Festival Bo:m.
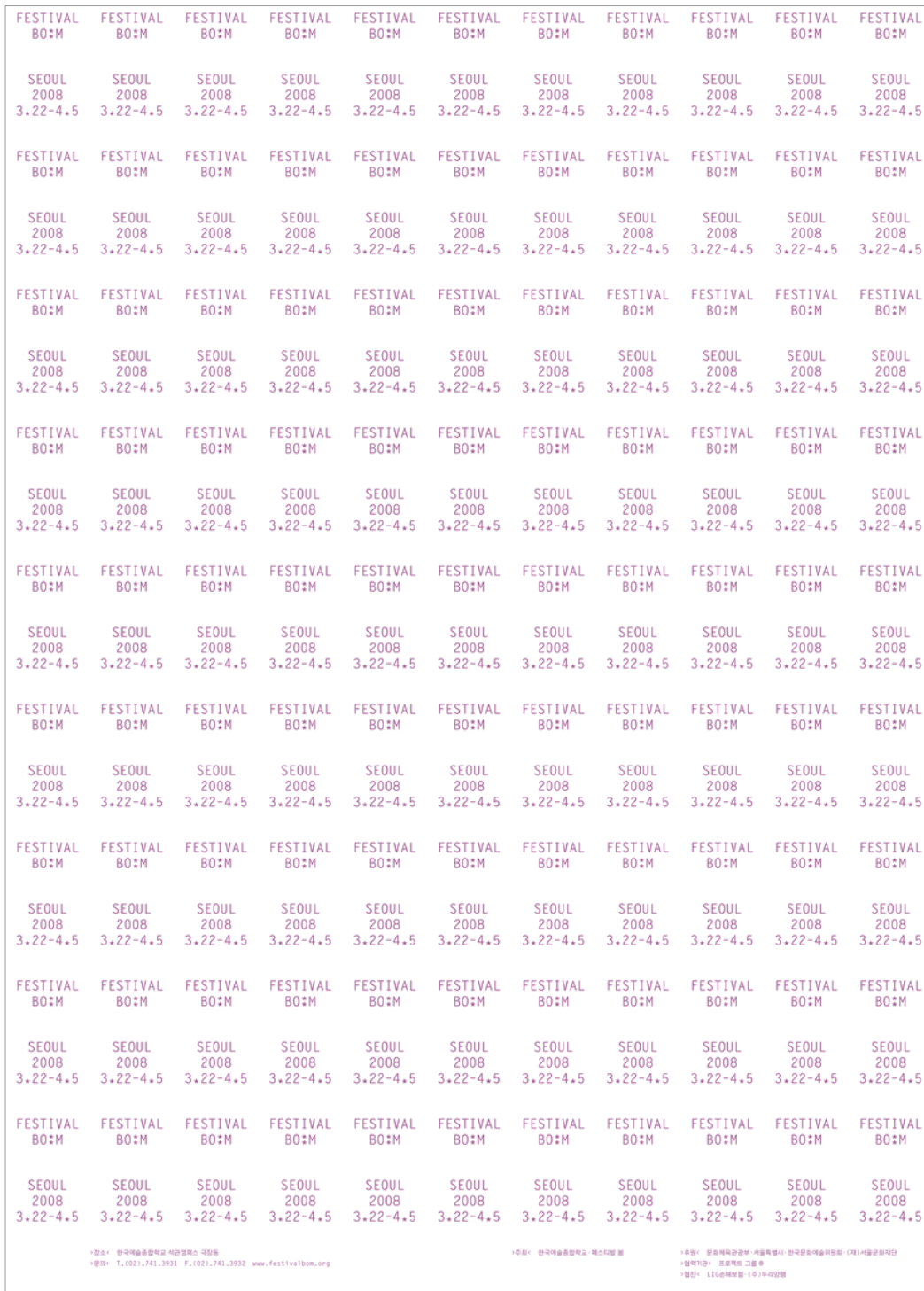
Figure 5*B*. Poster for *Festival Bo:m*, 605 × 840mm (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Festival Bo:m Identity." Sulki and Min. 2008. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/festival-bom-2008-poster/.)
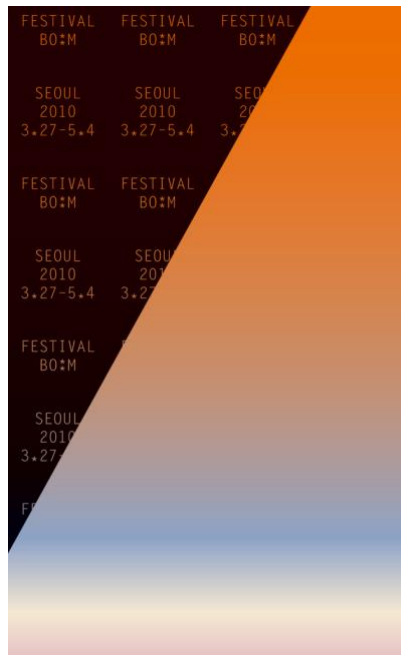
Figure 5*C*. Front cover of program booklet for *Festival Bo:m*, 220 × 360mm. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Festival Bo:m 2010: Program." Sulki and Min. 2010. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/festival-bom-2010-program/.)
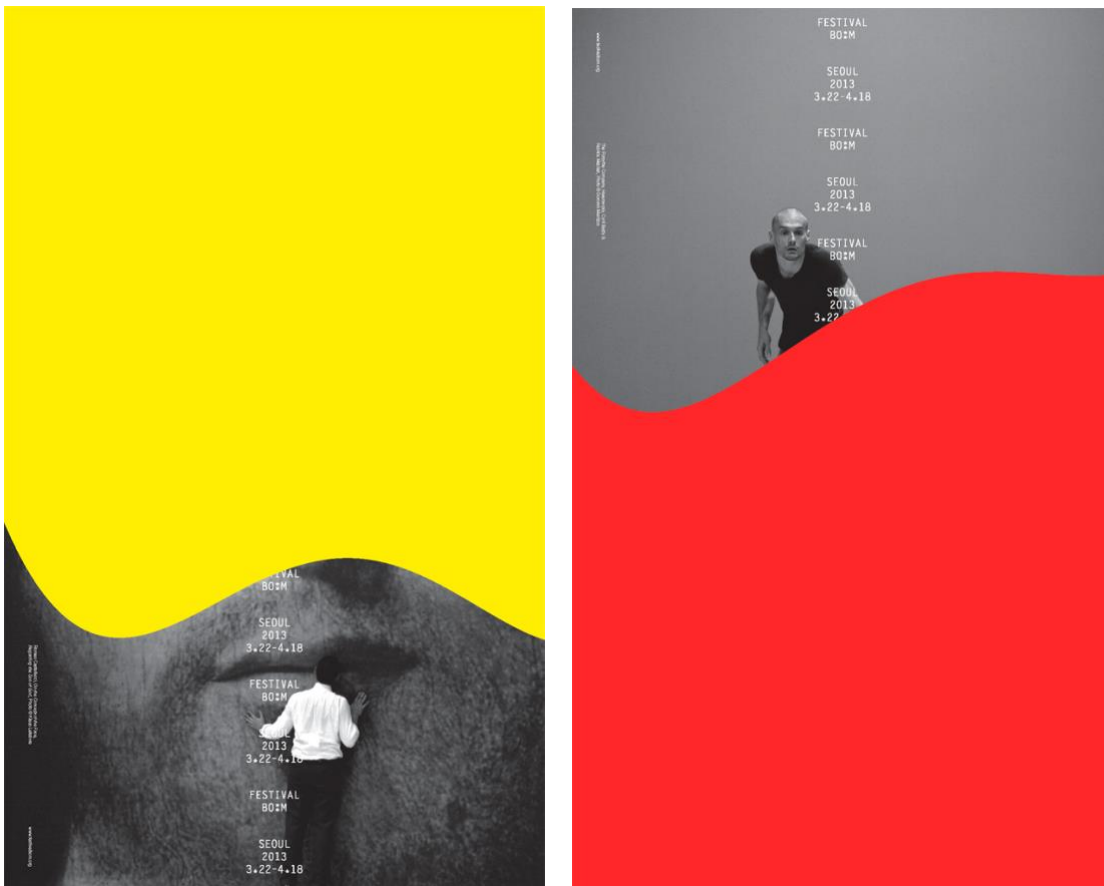
Figure 5*D*. Selected posters for *Festival Bo:m*, 440 × 720 mm each (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Festival Bo:m 2013: Posters." Sulki and Min. 2013. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/festival-bom-2013-posters/.)

Figure 5*E*. *Left to right*: Posters for *Festival Bo:m* (2011 & 2012). (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Kim Seonghee." Sulki and Min. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/category/collaborators/kim-seonghee/.)

A similarly collaborative and iterative process exists in another set of works designed by Sulki and Min for the artist Sasa[44], which is a series of 10 artist publications to date (2006–16) in the form of "annual reports" where each one is simply titled "Sasa[44] Annual Report" followed by its corresponding year. The nature of this project differs in how these publications are collaboratively initiated by Sasa[44] and Sulki and Min and are independently published through Sulki and Min's imprint, Specter Press. This publication series also function more like artworks than functional design pieces.

In these personal "annual reports", Sasa[44] collects and treat mundane forms of data around his daily life (meals, things purchased, etc.) as an artistic material and obsessively documents them into indexes of information. The various iterations of these publications designed by Sulki and Min took very different printed formats or visual presentation ranging from a small paperback (Sasa[44] Annual Report 2010 (2011)) (fig. 6*A*), a bulky coffee-table-sized book (Sasa[44] Annual Report 2006 (2007)) (fig. 6*B*), single-sided worksheets (Sasa[44] Annual Report 2014 (2015)) (fig. 6*C*), a series of postcards (Sasa[44] Annual Report 2016 (2017)) (fig. 6*D*), a multilingual edition (Sasa[44] Annual Report 2009 (2010)) (fig. 6*E*) to one that had all its contents digitally blurred-out (Sasa[44] Annual Report 2012 (2013)) (fig. 6*F*). Yet, these wide-ranging designs were not arbitrary preferences of Sulki and Min but had to do with strict parameters often imposed by the artist or based on interpretations by Sulki and Min. For example, some of the publications could be working with budget constraints and therefore take on economical formats like a large fold-out poster or work with very small dimensions to increase its thickness (i.e., page count) according to the preference of the artist (Sasa[44] Annual Report 2007 and Sasa[44] Annual Report 2010) (fig. 6*G* and 6*A*). The one with all of its information and contents digitally blurred-out and printed, Sasa[44] Annual Report 2012, was one completed on a "blurry" year, likely referring to the economic or social conditions of the country or the artist (Sulki and Min 2020f) (see fig. 6f). The multilingual edition, Sasa[44] Annual Report 2009, featured and used the languages of all the countries

where Sasa[44] has exhibited his work. In addition to these annual reports, there was one work titled
<u>Rehab 150116–160115</u> (2016) (fig. 6h)[113] that was entirely printed using pastel spot-colour inks instead of the common CMYK four-colour process, trivially based on the colour palette of the artist's favourite music video (Sulki and Min 2020g).
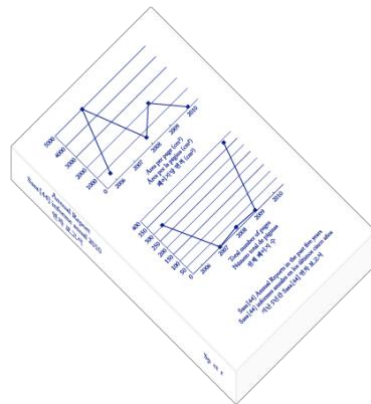
Figure 6A. *Sasa[44] Annual Report 2010*, paperback binding, 78 × 126 mm, 384 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "SASA[44] Annual Report 2010." Sulki and Min. 2011. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min / Specter Press. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/sasa-44-annual-report-2010/.)
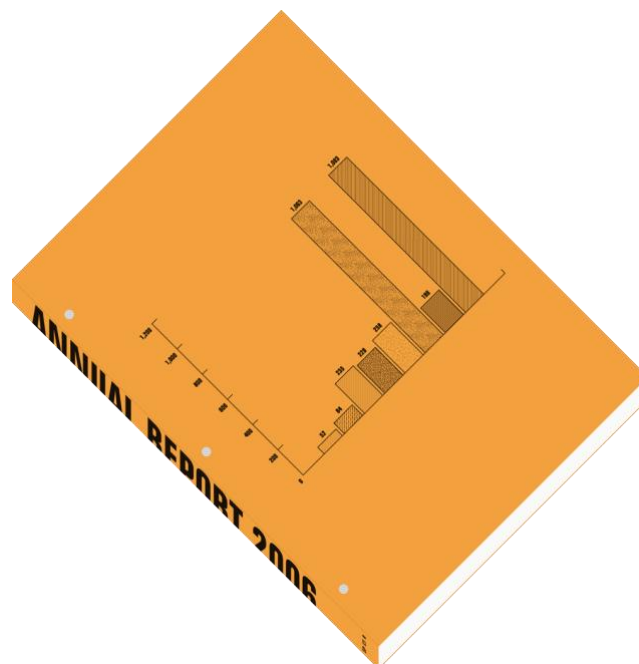
Figure 6B. *Sasa[44] Annual Report 2006*, paperback binding with hole punch throughout, 213 × 290 mm, 304 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "SASA[44] Annual Report 2006." Sulki and Min. 2007. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min / Specter Press. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/sasa-44-annual-report-2006/.)

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[113] This work does not belong to the annual report series but is of a similar nature.

Sasa[44] Annual Report 2014

1. In 2014, how many bowls of *seoleongtang* did Sasa[44] consume?
   1) 34   2) 75
   3) 55   4) 4

2. In 2014, how many bowls of *jajangmyeon* did Sasa[44] consume?
   1) 32   2) 81
   3) 23   4) 66

3. In 2014, how many movies did Sasa[44] see at cinemas in Seoul?
   1) 6   2) 19
   3) 0   4) 14

4. In 2014, how many books did Sasa[44] buy at the Kyobo Book Centre?
   1) 24   2) 13
   3) 72   4) 93

5. In 2014, how many transit card transactions did Sasa[44] make?
   1) 11   2) 107
   3) 9   4) 33

6. In 2014, how many mobile calls did Sasa[44] make?
   1) 14   2) 390
   3) 383   4) 170

7. In 2014, how many guest attendance records did Sasa[44] produce with the punch clock at his studio?
   1) 10   2) 6
   3) 21   4) 45

8. In 2014, how many people did Sasa[44] have queuing ahead of him?
   1) 24   2) 16
   3) 21   4) 49

Sasa[44] 연차 보고서 2014

1. 2014년 한 해에 Sasa[44]는 설렁탕을 몇 그릇 먹었는가?
   1) 34   2) 75
   3) 55   4) 4

2. 2014년 한 해에 Sasa[44]는 자장면을 몇 그릇 먹었는가?
   1) 32   2) 81
   3) 23   4) 66

3. 2014년 한 해에 Sasa[44]는 서울 시내 극장에서 영화를 몇 편 보았는가?
   1) 6   2) 19
   3) 0   4) 14

4. 2014년 한 해에 Sasa[44]는 교보문고에서 책을 몇 권 구입했는가?
   1) 24   2) 13
   3) 72   4) 93

5. 2014년 한 해에 Sasa[44]는 교통카드를 몇 차례 사용했는가?
   1) 11   2) 107
   3) 9   4) 33

6. 2014년 한 해에 Sasa[44]는 휴대전화를 몇 통 걸었는가?
   1) 14   2) 390
   3) 383   4) 170

7. 2014년 한 해에 Sasa[44]는 작업실 출퇴근 기록기로 방문객 출입 기록을 몇 건 얻었는가?
   1) 10   2) 6
   3) 21   4) 45

8. 2014년 한 해에 Sasa[44]가 용무를 보려고 기다린 대기인은 총 몇 명인가?
   1) 24   2) 16
   3) 21   4) 49

Figure 6*C*. *Sasa[44] Annual Report 2014*, Single-sided worksheets, folded and enveloped, 257 × 364 mm each, folded to 257 × 182 mm. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "SASA[44] Annual Report 2014." Sulki and Min. 2015. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min / Specter Press. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/sasa-annual-report-2014/.)
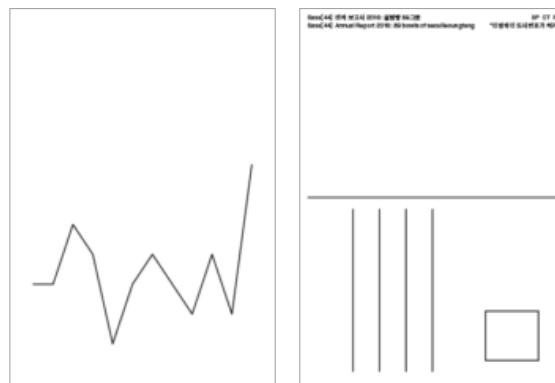
Figure 6*D*. Front and back of selected postcard (1 of 8) for *Sasa[44] Annual Report 2016*, 105 x 150 mm. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "SASA[44] Annual Report 2016." Sulki and Min. 2017. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min / Specter Press. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/sasa-44-annual-report-2016/.)

Figure 6E. Page spread of *Sasa[44] Annual Report 2009*, 394 × 545 mm, 4 pages. Text in Spanish, English, Japanese, German, Korean, Dutch, Czech, and Hebrew. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "SASA[44] Annual Report 2009." Sulki and Min. 2010. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min / Specter Press. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/sasa-44-annual-report-2009/.)

Figure 6F. *Left to right*: Front cover and detail (right) of *Sasa[44] Annual Report 2012*, 210 × 297 mm, 8 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "SASA[44] Annual Report 2012." Sulki and Min. 2013. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min / Specter Press. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/sasa-44-annual-report-2012/.)
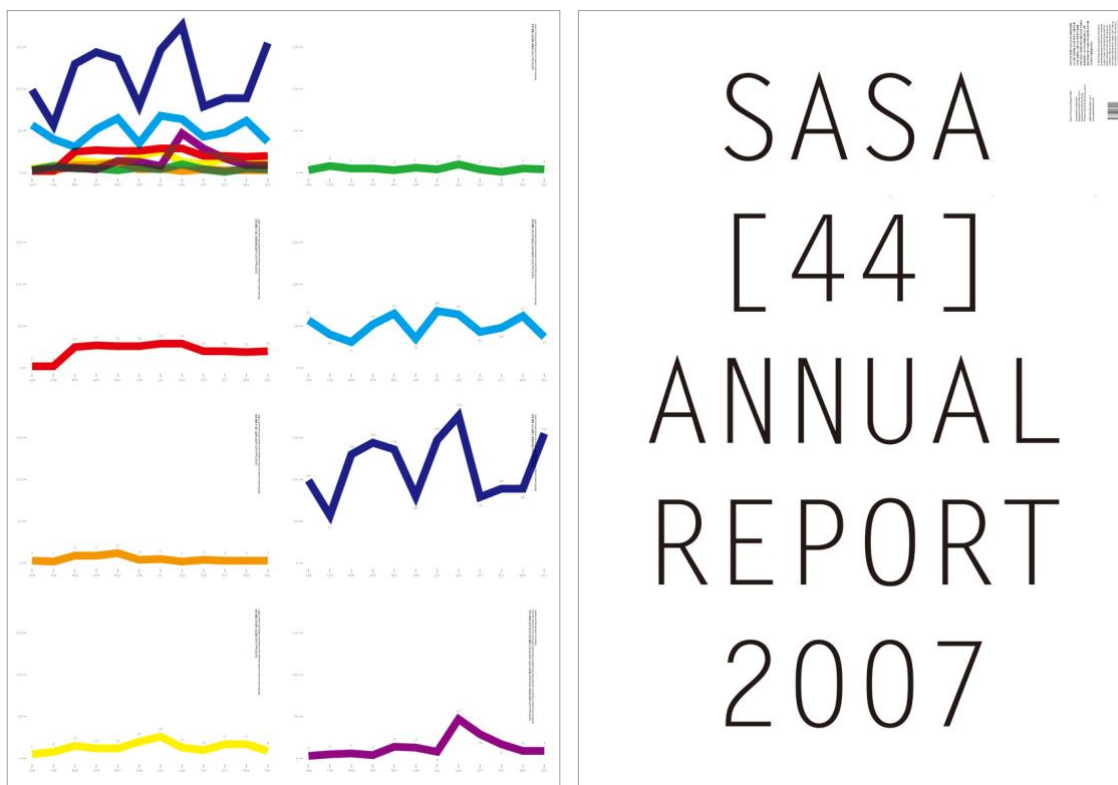
Figure 6*G*. *Sasa[44] Annual Report 2007*, 594 × 840 mm. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "SASA[44] Annual Report 2007." Sulki and Min. 2008. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min / Specter Press. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/sasa-44-annual-report-2007/.)

Figure 6*H*. Sasa[44], *Rehab 150116–160115*, offset printing, paperback binding, page size 105 × 150 mm, 368 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Rehab." Sulki and Min. 2016. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min / Specter Press. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/rehab/.)

Given the artistic nature of these publications, the information they contain are of secondary importance despite them being meticulously documented by the artist. More than the actual data or contents in these publications, their design (i.e., the act of form-giving rather than content-giving) is arguably more important in contributing to the meaning of the work (see Sulki and Min 2016a). The wide range of atypical design considerations for the Sasa[44] Annual Report series—some going as far as to visually obscure the data—place importance on the communicative aspects of the publications' form as much as, if not more than, the contents. Similar to the earlier mentioned graphic identity for Festival Bo:m, the graphic design of Sasa[44] Annual Report series play a key role in making tangible the idea or meaning of the work. In Sulki and Min's words, they allow for "more tangible and enduring embodiments of otherwise transient ideas" (Sulki and Min 2007, XLIX). Rather than taking a supplementary role, graphic design in both of these cases directly contributes to the work as an

indispensable whole, even if the "problem-solving" approach seen in the <u>Sasa[44] Annual Report</u> series (i.e., Sulki and Min objectively "solving" the requirements or problems defined by the artist) contrasts the hard-to-justify or intuitive approach in <u>Festival Bo:m</u>'s graphic identity.

These two collaborations between Sulki and Min and Kim Seong Hee and Sasa[44] elucidate the synergistic relationship mentioned earlier, where commission-based work is able to reflect a spirit of free experimentation more commonly found in independent work and where independent projects can tap on systematic ideas or processes that works within more strictly defined parameters more commonly found in commission-based work. This interchangeable characteristic is not limited to the two examples mentioned but is also reflective of other independent and commissioned works in their practice that will be discussed in the following sections. Specifically, the two projects showed how a series of commissioned projects with specific applications in mind allowed free space for visual experimentation that worked *in favour* of the project, and how a series of open-ended publications worked with strict limitations to result in a wide range of interesting or appropriate publication formats. This begins to reveal how the duo's involvement as graphic designers reflect forms of *co-authorship* with their collaborators, where graphic design directly affects or builds on the meaning or identity of given contents and differs from simply shaping or providing visual form. A key contributing factor to this co-authoring process is how they were able to imbue—to various extents—their personal voices and intuitions, the intention of which is not to bring attention to—or create an isolated appreciation for—the designed form, but to meaningfully engage with *on top of* communicating contents through graphic design (any visual appreciation of the design that comes after results naturally from the meaningful engagement between form and content).

In this second subsection, we see that both commissioned and independently produced work, whether of a commercial nature or not, contributes *equally* to their practice. It is important to note that this characteristic of Sulki and Min's practice differs from other kinds of practice that also involve independent initiatives but are still primarily commercially driven and commission-based, and where occasional independent projects supplement as promotional efforts or additional avenues for side interests but not intentionally or essentially constituting an overall practice. For Sulki and Min, their independent initiatives are often started in response to ideas or projects they hope to do but are not able to find through commissions, like the work they do with their publishing imprint Specter Press (Choi in Smith 2017). These kinds of work integrally complement rather than supplement their commission-based works and are pursued with an equivalent scale and commitment; they push or broaden the boundaries of what is possible in commission-based settings. This commitment returns to support their earlier point of not dividing graphic design practice into independent projects (for "provocation") and commissioned ones (for "problem-solving"), but to have a synergistic relationship between the two, sharing the same level of experimentation or systematic process whenever required or appropriate. This also means that close collaboration and "co-authorship" is equally important to *both* their commission-based and independent work.

To further contextualise this, Sulki and Min's positioning in navigating commissioned or independent, commercial or non-commercial work reveals a more specific kind of "autonomy". Sulki and Min's careful balancing of "problem-solving" and "provocation" in both commissioned and independent works is an important but overlooked effort in general graphic design practice. Instead of carving out a "parallel universe" for critical and artistic graphic design work, finding opportunities to explore these ideas in original sites of practice (i.e., commission based or collaborative settings) is a critical position Sulki and Min adopt. This perfectly describes how critical and artistic graphic design practices—quoting the earlier chapter in subsection 3.2.1—adopt "hybrid practices that […] constantly find ways to develop agency or autonomy". Sulki and Min's approach in synergistically working through commissioned and non-commissioned work is an effort to "redesign" (their) graphic design practice in relation to other dominant patterns of practice. Instead of only focusing on either end of the spectrum, they insistently choose and explore a combination of commercial and non-commercial settings as *equally* important sites for experimental as well as rational approaches and outcomes regardless of existing stereotypes between commissioned and independent work. For Sulki and Min, the kind of autonomy found in critical and artistic graphic design practices applies to settings where they directly author or direct projects *as well as* in those they indirectly "co-author" through design commissions, like in the case of <u>Festival Bo:m</u>. This returns to describe how "autonomy", as described in chapter three (subsection 3.2.1), is "not so much a change of roles, but a re-orientation and extension of skills", and is

possible even in professional settings that do not always allow for such autonomy. This mode of working enables Sulki and Min to achieve criticality (through developing autonomy) in both commissioned and independent projects albeit to varying extents and effects. With this understanding of their model of practice, the next subsection moves into a more specific discussion of how they approach content production.

5.3   Integrated authorship through designing both form and texts as content

Building on the earlier two subsections (5.1 and 5.2) which highlights Sulki and Min's general attitude, approach, and intentions towards graphic design practice, this and the following subsection (5.3 and 5.4) examines specific means and methods towards the design and production of contents that results from—which also support and sustain—Sulki and Min's attitudes, approaches and intentions. Some questions are: What are some of the other factors that enable them to self-reflexively incorporate their interests and perspectives into both their independent and commissioned works? How might co-authorship through graphic design look like *in practice*? What are some of the specific characteristics of such outcomes in Sulki and Min's practice? How is content or meaning produced through design and vice versa?

Since they started, Sulki and Min have always maintained a keen and committed interest in developing "content".[114] The duo appreciates projects that allow them to participate "in the creation of content itself, not just the appearance". This explains why they started Specter Press, where they can "directly contribute to the content and editing of publications" and which resulted in many titles they were pleased with (Dover 2010). Since 2006, the press has produced over 70 titles at the point of writing.[115] By discussing some examples of these publications, the following paragraphs describe various ways Sulki and Min shape, affect, or develop texts and contents as graphic designers. This is done in three parts: the first part discusses their commitment and sensibility towards texts and contents, the second part discusses examples where Sulki and Min approached formal and design considerations as opportunities for meaning making (what I refer to as "designing form as content"), and the third part discusses examples where Sulki and Min took into consideration the form and delivery of texts as ways of manipulating and creating content or meaning (what I refer to as "designing text as content"). Altogether, these points can be referred to as a form of integrated authorship where Sulki and Min "author" contents not only through writing, designing, or both as independent part of an overall practice, but them as an integrated whole.

5.3.1   Commitment and sensibility towards texts and contents

Through Specter Press, Sulki and Min have engaged a rich variety of subject matter across fields like visual arts, theory, criticism and history. Their titles also reflect an eclectic, if not extensive, range of publication types and formats that include conventional monographs, books on Korean design history, translated works, and particularly also publications that "are themselves works of art". These hint at the wide range of interests and involvement of Sulki and Min in producing content as graphic designers. Through Specter Press, Sulki and Min have also translated important design literature from English to Korean, which has been an active and consistent work of the duo over the years. Notable examples include Korean editions of Norman Potter's <u>What is a Designer: Things Places, and Messages</u> (2008, 2015), Robin Kinross' <u>Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History</u> (2009), and Michael Rock's <u>Multiple Signatures</u> (2019). Although most of these translated

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[114] This refers to ideas, texts, or discourses related to any subject matter of their interests, or those they encounter and engage with through commissions or collaborations.

[115] The activities of Specter Press are also where the close collaborations and critically reflexive processes—insights mentioned earlier in the earlier two subsections—directly play out.

works contain generally straightforward design executions, they nevertheless assert Sulki and Min's strong commitment to design discourse.

Other than translating and publishing key works, their commitment towards producing content can also be seen at a more detailed level through Sulki and Min's typographic and design sensibilities. They mentioned that they "handle texts with care" and see themselves as an "editorial companion for publishers" (Choi and Offermanns 2016). This sensibility applies to works that are commission-based, where they are primarily involved as graphic designers, as well as independently published titles, where they sometimes take on additional roles like editing or translating. Score by Score (2017) (fig. 7*A* and *B*), an artist publication by the artist Min Oh, and Diagrammatic Writing (2019) (fig. 8*A* and *B*), a translated work, are two publication examples that reflect this sensibility towards writing, typography and design.

Figure 7*A*. Oh Min, *Score by Score*. Offset printing, sewn and clothed hardback binding, 138 × 213 mm, 144 pages.
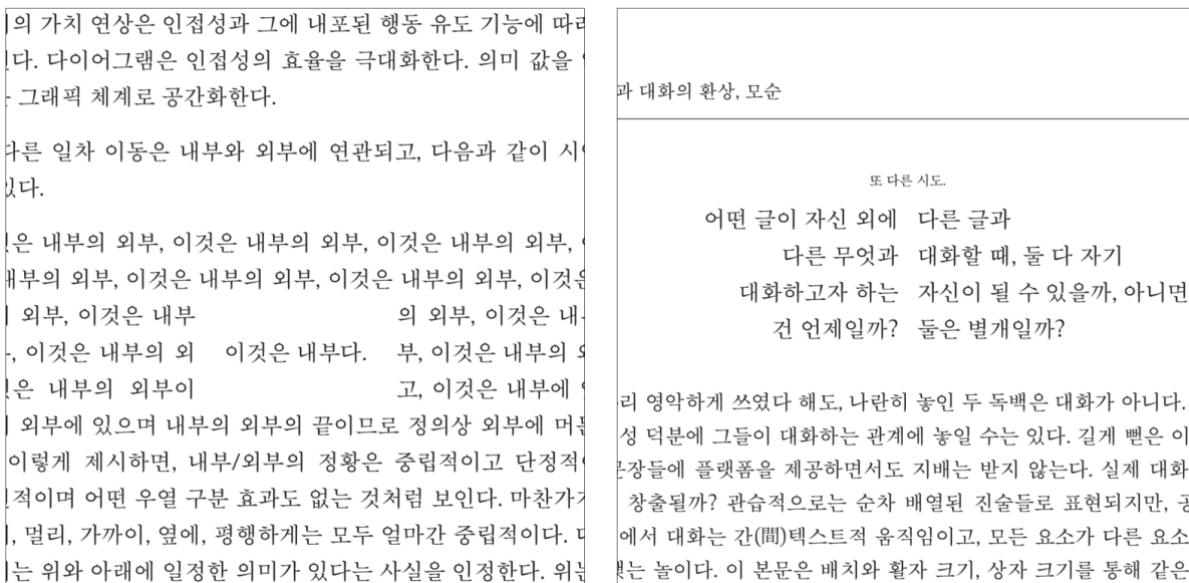(Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Score by Score." Sulki and Min. 2017. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/score-by-score/.)

choreography" was used as an eq
ation." The word choreography
debook 『Orchésographie』 by Thoi
ntury. As pointed out by dance t
onstrates how something leaves
ards "documentation," or the t
horeography." Since then, 『Chor
ibing the Dance』 by Raoul Feuil
recorded dance by centering on

조그라피』(Orchésographie)에서 ㅊ
드레 레페키가 지적하듯이, '소멸되ᄂ
로, 즉 '춤'에서 '안무'로 이행했다고
예가 펴낸 『무보 작성법』(Chorégra
nse)에서는 발레에 한정하여 플로아
선)을 중심으로 춤을 기록했다.
20세기에 이르러 루돌프 라반은 움?

riefly stated, it is also secre
fying hours, minutes, and second
my mind is ⁄A Garden in Italy⁄ (201
rformance of clues, provided by
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mentarily. It looked at the recor
t of reproduction, but as a con
ne. In 〝Time Mechanics〞 (2015), I t
e present makes contact with th

한다'는 생각 같은 것도 비밀스럽게 ᄀ
것이 ⁄이태리의 정원⁄ (A Garden in
가 최승희의 기록을 단서로 만들어ᄌ
고 사라지는 시간의 아카이브가 될 ᄉ
거의 기록을 재현의 대상으로 보지 ᄋ
건으로 본 것이다. 개인전 〝시간의
l서는 현재가 과거로, 과거가 현재ᄃ

Figure 7*B*. Close up of specially designed punctuation marks for *Score by Score*. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Score by Score." Sulki and Min. 2017. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/score-by-score/.)

Score by Score can be considered a design commission by the artist Min Oh although it is also co-published by Sulki and Min under Workroom Specter.[116] This publication contains Min Oh's study—in the form of interviews—of various kinds of notation or "scores" used in artists' practices from various fields. Because of the nature of its contents—spanning music, dance, or the visual arts—these interviews contain many references to different kinds of works like "books, exhibitions, performances" (Sulki and Min 2020h) and it would be tricky differentiating between them if they were all simply styled the same way (e.g., italicised). To solve this, Sulki and Min introduced specially designed punctuation marks that typographically distinguish between them whenever they were mentioned (see fig. 7*B*). Visually, they also chose a monospaced-looking typeface that seems to draw out an unfamiliar sense of textural "irregular modularity" that resembles the visual logic found in the way "scores" are arranged and put together. In this, Sulki and Min tapped on their typographic sensitivity and intervened beyond the exterior "design" of the publication by introducing custom typographic characters while still paying attention to the overall formal appearance and quality of its typesetting.

Unlike Score by Score, Diagrammatic Writing is an independent work. It is a Korean translated edition of Johanna Drucker's eponymous book originally written in English and is both translated and designed by Sulki Choi, again co-published by Workroom Specter. The original publication was one that explored how typographic form affects meaning by directly using and experimenting with its own typography and textual content for that purpose. This resulted in a book where its "texts and graphical presentation are fully integrated, co-dependent, and mutually reflexive" (Sulki and Min 2020i) and translating a book of this kind would require translating both its text and *form*. Since the translator of this text is Sulki Choi herself, the textual translation was directly affected by "the need to find matching visual arrangements" (Sulki and Min 2020i) (see fig. *8B*). This translated Korean edition therefore not only reflects the literal translation of both written texts and graphic

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[116] Workroom Specter is a joint imprint set up by Sulki and Min with Workroom Press to better manage distribution and publishing-related operations.

form, but also the reflexivity[117] that was employed in writing the original book. In other words, this translated version directly embodies the idea and process behind the original publication and this would be impossible if the designer was not both the typographer and translator of the work. This work also reflects how they can put together, quite literally in this case, their interests in contents and skill in typography.
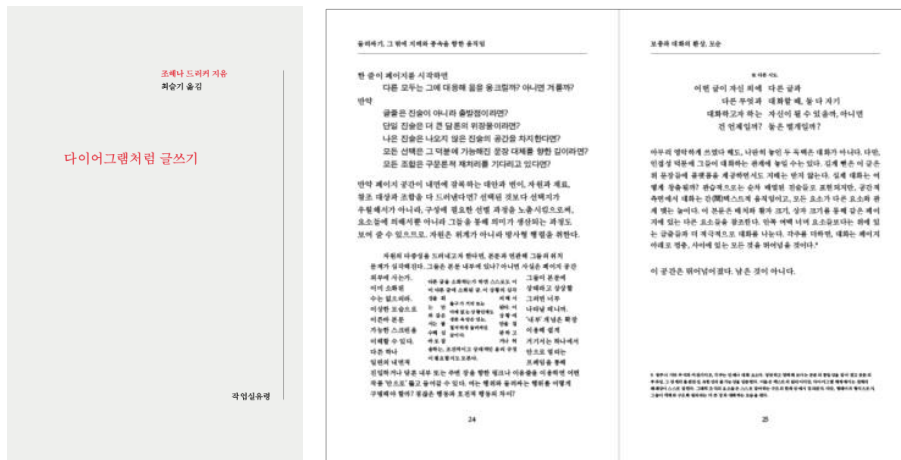
Figure 8*A*. Johanna Drucker*, Diagrammatic Writing*, Korean edition, translated by Choi Sulki. Offset printing, section-sewn paperback with dust jacket, page size 138 × 213 mm, 36 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Diagrammatic Writing." Sulki and Min. 2019. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/diagrammatic-writing/.)

Figure 8*B*. Detail of *Diagrammatic Writing*, Korean edition. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Diagrammatic Writing." Sulki and Min. 2019. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/diagrammatic-writing/.)

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[117] This reflexivity is better described as "meta-language of diagrammatic thought", quoted from a description of the English edition on the publisher's website (Onomatopee n.d.).

These two examples, Score by Score and Diagrammatic Writing, revealed Sulki and Min's interests and efforts to consider changes or implementations on an editorial level that directly adds to or affect the publications' contents, again *through* graphic design and not independent of it. There is an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between typographic form and content that results in appropriate design solutions, conceptually meaningful additions, or both. Although works like these do not yet immediately classify as outcomes of a critical and artistic graphic design practice, they reflect an important foundational characteristic that allows for such a practice—the understanding of and approach towards form and content as a single whole. Mentioned in the earlier chapter under subsection 3.2.2, the "research-driven" nature of critical and artistic graphic design practice is one that is rooted in visual "language" as much as conventional language. One has to be able to acknowledge and tap on design's inherent nature—to approach design and content as a single whole—to be able to engage it as research in practice (see van der Velden 2009, 241; Redström and Mazé 2007, 7; 11; Mazé 2009, 381). The next two points further examines this symbiotic relationship between form and content through several other work examples.

5.3.2   Designing form as content

The kind of autonomy Sulki and Min sought with Specter Press was to be able to determine a publication's reason of existence and more specifically the *way* it exists, as much as the appearance and contents of the publications (Sulki and Min 2007, XLIX). They drew a parallel to the "private presses" in Europe or North America in the 19th and early 20th century, where there were designers who wanted "to be the ones who decide what is worth publishing in the first place", where they "actually read the texts" and through this, act as "silent editors" of the texts they select, design, and publish (Sulki and Min 2007, XLIX). Similarly, although Specter Press' publications are generally "quiet" or "modest" in visual form— often "emerg[ing] naturally from the concept or the content"—the authorship of Sulki and Min here lies in the entire or integrated process of selecting, designing, producing, and publishing these publications. It is appropriate to consider the *overall* idea, concept, and physical construction of these publications as where authorship lies and where the publications' design is or "speaks".[118] Many of the Specter Press publications, in contrast to its generally "quiet" visual appearance, are purposely unusual and atypical in idea and form. The following paragraphs look at three sets of such publication(s), each providing specific insights on how Sulki and Min approach form (i.e., overall idea and design) as content (i.e., resulting meaning):

1.   The Power of Color (2009)

2.   MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z (2012), Technical Problem (2010)

3.   Cosmos 3rd Korean edition 1981 (2017), and Exercise in Modern Construction Part 3 (2008).

The first work, an independently authored and produced book titled The Power of Color (2009) (fig. 9), shows how Sulki and Min translate ideas into designed form. Authored by SMSM, the artist collective of Sulki and Min, Sasa[44] and Park MeeNa, this work explores, or question, health science writer Dr. Morton Walker's ideas on the physiological effects of colours in a book of the same title published in 1991. Accompanied by several essays, the main bulk of the 144-page publication simply consist of different coloured sections, each containing brief corresponding direct quotations from Walker on that colour's physiological effect. The idea, as much as it was to "demonstrate the theory" of Walker, was also for readers to "perform" that theory through "improving [their] physical conditions" by staring at the coloured pages in this book (Sulki and Min 2016a). This work may carry a satirical slant when we consider other projects done by SMSM[119] although it is not made

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[118] This reinforces the understanding that design is as much the organisation, editing, and positioning of contents as it is in the visual presentation of contents.

[119] Sulki and Min described another of SMSM's work as one that is about "imaginary functions and how irrational expectations could be stimulated by design" (Sulki and Min 2016a). This may also well fit the purpose of The Power of Color.

obvious in the work nor its description. The decision of letting unadorned colours fill up most of the space in a book of relatively generous proportion exaggeratedly realises Walker's theory: if the viewing of colours indeed implicates significant physiological impact, then a book that *just* holds colour may not be that extravagant after all. What the work communicates—albeit indirectly—is a way of para-functionally questioning Walker's ideas, and possibly also other "imaginary functions" or "irrational expectations" or ideas without directly challenging them. Here, the work engages with its contents by directly *translating* it into a designed object and in doing so, subjects its contents to further questioning and thinking.

Figure 9. SMSM, *The Power of Color*. 180 × 240 mm, 144 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "The Power of Color." Sulki and Min. 2009. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/the-power-of-color-book/.)

The second set of works, MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z (2012) (fig. 10) and Technical Problem (2010) (fig. 11), both published by Specter Press, shows how Sulki and Min affect or create meaning through design interventions to contents. Unlike the earlier example, these two works are not authored by Sulki and Min but by the artist MeeNa Park (for MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z) and Jeong Geumhyung, Jackson Hong, and Lee Chungwoo (for Technical Problem). Although Sulki and Min were the graphic designers for the two publications, the design decisions they introduced affected their contents editorially; their organisation and presentation of the contents directly contribute to the idea and concept of each work. These examples also reflects one of the ways co-authorship applies in settings where Sulki and Min are involved as designers rather than writers or authors.

MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z is a work that presents a retrospective of the artist's 300 drawings in conjunction with an exhibition titled MeeNa Park: 1998–2012. Sulki and Min's idea is to present the same set of 300 drawings four times in the book that consecutively increases in size each time, with the number of drawings decreasing in each section. This resulted in the first section showing all 300 drawings in thumbnail size, the second section showing about half of the drawings at 33% of the actual size, the third section showing about a quarter of the drawings at 66% of the actual size, and the last section showing the smallest selection of drawings in actual size. The selections for each section were decided "mechanically"—rather than by choice of

the artist—based on the idea of sampling them at equal intervals after they were sorted alphabetically (Sulki and Min 2020j) (see fig. 10). According to Sulki and Min, this method of organising and presenting the works is both rational yet arbitrary but what it does is to present the works entirely independent of any conscious intention of the artist, which is usually not the case for artist monographs. The "graphic design" of this work is the underlying logic Sulki and Min devised to organise and sort the drawings; what it communicates and how that affects the body of drawings is simply left to chance and subjective interpretation.[120] This simple system extends from the original set of 300 drawings to form another work in its own right that differs from a simple catalogue; the overall idea and concept of the publication presents itself as an interpreted work that simultaneously uses the drawings as "material" for meaning-making while presenting them as a catalogue of works.

Figure 10. *MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z.* 225 × 300 mm, 304 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z." Sulki and Min. 2012. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/meena-park-drawings-a-z/.)

Technical Problem is a book that documents a performance work by choreographer and performer Jeong Geumhyung and designer-artist Jackson Hong, contextualised with an introduction by and conversation with critic Lee Chungwoo. The performance work was described by Chungwoo as a "crash test" between "two heterogeneous worlds of theatrical performance and industrial design"—an experiment between Hong's work in putting together various equipment as props that Geumhyung's would use and interact with in a performance piece. In conceptualising the publication design for this work that strongly embraces ideas of accidents and improvisations, Sulki and Min themselves also embraced "failures" in the design and construction of the book as opportunities for meaning-making. One key element was that the entire saddle-stitched book is physically reversed or flipped inside-out; what was originally the centrefold spread now becomes the outer front and back

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[120] Again, this does not mean that the work escapes any form of interpretation or meaning. Through this work, we can ask: what happens when we remove the element of choice from an artist in his or her monograph? How does the choice of (objective) presentation affect the meaning or reception of these drawings? How might this then create further interpretations or understanding of MeeNa Park's practice, particularly in the case of her drawing series?

"covers" and what was originally the front and back covers now become the "centrefold" spread (see fig. 11*A*).[121] The typeface used throughout the book is also an intentionally "defective" version of Gill Sans; the original letterforms were digitally tweaked to resemble a "broken script" (Sulki and Min 2020k) (see fig. 11*B*). Because of these design decisions, the experience of the book is one interrupted with "errors", yet, when considering the specific context of this work (i.e., the contents it documents and ideas it explores), these deliberately designed "mistakes" make tangible the concept of the publication. The book communicates not only through its contents but through the way a reader encounters and make sense of the contents in physical form. Both MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z and Technical Problem engage their contents by *intervening* or *responding* through its design and in doing so, affects how its contents would be read and experienced.

Figure 11*A*. *Left to right*: Front cover, centrefold spread and back cover of *Technical Problem = Geumhyung Jeong × Chungwoo Lee × Jackson Hong*. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Technical Problem." Sulki and Min. 2010. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/technical-problem/.)
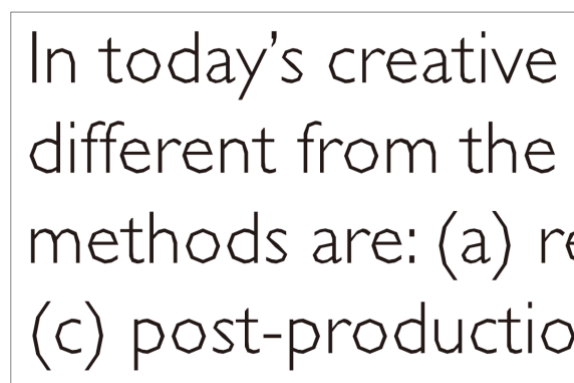
Figure 11*B*. An intentionally 'defective' version of Gill Sans used as the typeface in *Technical Problem*. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Technical Problem." Sulki and Min. 2010. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/technical-problem/.)

The third set of works, Cosmos 3rd Korean edition 1981 (2017) (fig. 12) and Exercise in Modern Construction Part 3 (2008) (fig. 13) are entirely authored and produced by Sulki and Min. These were exhibited in two of their solo exhibitions, the former in Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513 in 2017 and the latter in Sulki and Min: Kimjinhye 080402–080414 in 2008. Compared to the earlier discussed examples, these works are more

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[121] Under normal circumstances, this would entirely jumble up the page sequence and is logically not possible for it to still remain as a functional book. In the case of this bilingual publication, the two languages were divided exactly in the middle of the book. The English section could therefore start from the "front" cover and the Korean section from the right facing page of the centerfold spread when it was originally meant to be the other way around.

abstract and are without any obvious form of "graphic design"; they simply exist as pure image and form without any immediate "contents" that could be conventionally read. Instead of embodying ideas within form like in The Power of Color or affecting meaning through design interventions like in MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z and Technical Problem, this set of works function more like artworks that opens up possible interpretations and readings in relation to specific ideas and interests of Sulki and Min, which shows yet another way they engage with "content" or meaning through the book form.
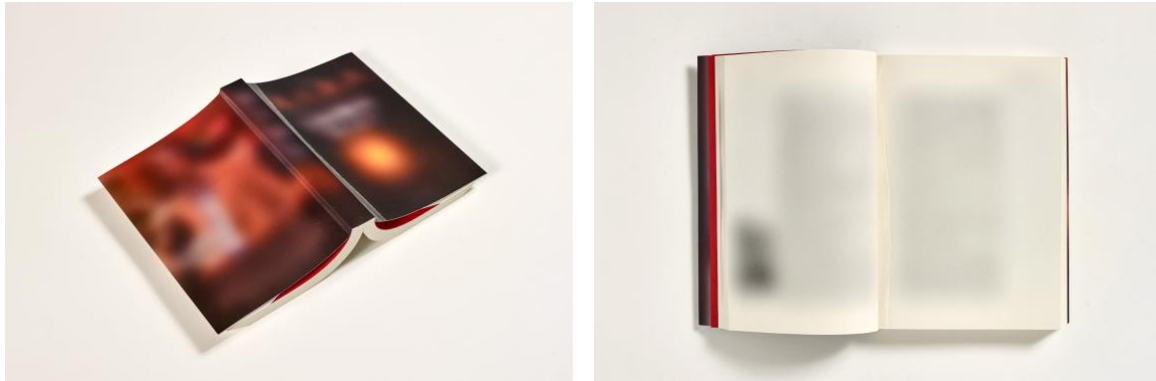
Figure 12. *Cosmos, 3rd Korean Edition 1981*. 170 × 240 mm, 480 pages. Photo by Nam Kiyong. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Cosmos, 3rd Korean Edition, 1981." Sulki and Min. 2017. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/cosmos-3rd-korean-edition-1981/.)
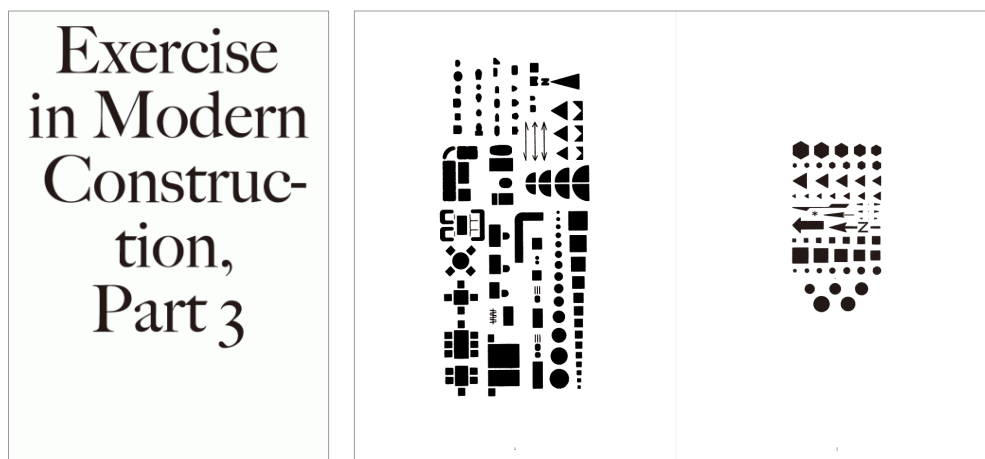
Figure 13. *Exercise in Modern Construction, Part 3*. 210 × 297 mm, 32 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Exercise in Modern Construction, Part 3." Sulki and Min. 2008. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/exercise-in-modern-construction-part-3/.)

Exercise in Modern Construction Part 3 is part of a larger body of work that freely explores classification and arrangements of forms using Sulki and Min's personal collection of plastic drawing templates (Sulki and Min 2020l). This one takes the form of a thin A4 booklet that contains only abstract pattern drawings directly created from these templates as stencils. Cosmos 3rd Korean edition 1981 (Cosmos for short) is also part of a larger group of works shown in the same exhibition this book appeared in. This work is a "replica" of the existing Korean translation of the book *Cosmos* written by Carl Sagan (1981), except that it is visually blurred out in its entirety, including the covers. The result is a book that has the exact format and similar material as the original book except for visual appearance. On their own, both of the works have no apparent meanings and viewers are left to make sense of them in their own terms and experience. However, these works were made in response to specific ideas that occupied the duo's interest throughout their practice and were mentioned in various occasions—Cosmos explored the notion of the "infra-flat" (Minnie and Sulki 2017) and Exercise in Modern Construction explored the notion of "cryptographic imagination" (Z-won 2015). Elaborated later

elsewhere[122] in this dissertation, both of these notions relate to the general state and condition of communication today and therefore also our perception and capacity to understand information in this post-truth age (see Minnie and Sulki 2017). The two works mentioned are speculative and perhaps exaggerated executions of these conditions that Sulki and Min are curious about, if not critical towards. Part of what this condition is could be, for example, the "obsession with instant communication and data collection [that is] mediated by ubiquitous connectivity" (Minnie and Sulki 2017)—something Sulki and Min articulated in a text for the exhibition that Cosmos was part of.

Specifically, Sulki and Min described the body of "blurred-out" work—that Cosmos is part of—as an intentionally "superficial visual and verbal stimulation" that does more to "arouse suspicion and confusion" in its viewers (Minnie and Sulki 2017). On the other hand, the Exercise in Modern Construction series explore and construct what Sulki and Min believe are inherent "forms and visual orders" or relationships that are fundamental to items or spaces they encounter (Z-won 2015), put together and exhibited for appreciation, comprehension, or even misunderstanding (Sulki and Min 2020m). Both of these works make tangible otherwise highly abstract ideas and interests of Sulki and Min; the works engage with content by directly embodying ideas and could be described as "epistemic" in nature, which was one characteristic of outcomes in critical and artistic practices (see chapter three, subsection 3.2.3) where the designed object challenges its viewers into active interpretation of the work rather than passive reception of any obvious message or meaning (see van Toorn 2010, 52; 55). Instead of being provided with clear intentions, viewers are confronted with "suspicious" or potentially "misunderstood" objects or contents and have to make sense of them in relation to the larger body of work they belong to as well as the texts and ideas that accompany them. (More specific discussions and interpretations of these works and ideas appear in the last section, section 5.4, where it addresses how these ideas come together as "research".) Although more open-ended than the earlier two set of examples, these two works are equally intentional in working with "form as content" and are not to be mistaken as purely self-indulging efforts despite appearing so when read or understood in isolation.

Together, these three sets of work show various ways Sulki and Min approach design and form-giving as opportunities for meaning-making, whether it is translating, affecting, or embodying ideas. The Power of Color *discursively* explores Dr Morton Walker's ideas on the physiological effect of colours, the design of MeeNa Park: Drawing A–Z and Technical Problem *para-functionally* affects the reception of its contents, and Cosmos and Exercise in Modern Construction Part 3 *epistemically* embody meaning in relation to specific ideas and a body of related works. In these examples, the role of a graphic designer shifted from one that contributes at the tail-end of a process to visually "package" contents—which is common in (although not exclusive to) commissioned projects—to one that encompasses the entire process of content production, in this case, for publications. This shift likely explains the eclectic range of works from Specter Press, where graphic design and communication—whether as subject matter or process—directly alters and mediates between other points of interests, intent, and contents in varied ways. This also means that the "content" Sulki and Min produces can be found in—and vary between—both its conception (in design) and communication (of contents). This kind of reflexivity allows for complex or unexpected possibilities where, in the examples discussed above, the graphic design of a publication becomes its contents, directly (in)forms its subject, or becomes a counterpoint for making sense of the contents it presents. As a result, it is not only possible for the intent or designer-authored contents of a publication to be reflected and communicated through its visual form—typography, layout, composition, etc.—but also through other extended "design" considerations like the selection and presentation of contents, a book's reading orientation (or the lack of one), length of texts, organisational structure, or even print-run. For Sulki and Min, other than formal considerations and design, practical or technical considerations in production could also become unexpected chances for meaning-making.

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[122] "Cryptographic imagination" is further elaborated in section 5.1 of this chapter and "infra-flat" later in this same section.

5.3.3   Designing text as content

There is dexterity in the way Sulki and Min navigate between design and contents. Seen in the previous subsection, the delineation between each is no longer clear when design or form can also contain textual meaning. This also works in reverse, when the "design" (i.e., form-giving) of written texts becomes opportunities for semantic explorations. In these instances, texts are treated as "material" that can be shaped and moulded, where its form—the *way* it is written, composed, or delivered—communicates as much as the information it contains. In some cases, the information it holds might even be insignificant compared to *why* and *how* it is included, very much like a "reversed" example of the work <u>Cosmos</u> and <u>Exercise in Modern Construction Part 3,</u> where its visual appearance is of lesser importance to the ideas they embody or meanings they conjure. This subsection discusses two set of text-based work examples that further illustrate this, the first set contains text contributions—<u>Infra-flat / Ultra-deep</u> (2016) and <u>Vertical Reading</u> (2016)—directly written by Sulki and Min. The second set contains only <u>Print: The Trash Issue</u> (2012), a magazine issue they both designed and edited. The first set shows how Sulki and Min pay attention to and shape the "form" of texts and the second set reflects their broader dexterity as designer-editors authoring reflexively and interconnectedly through written text and visual form. These reflect Sulki and Min's approach to "designing text as content".

<u>Infra-flat / Ultra-deep</u> is a short keyword-based text Sulki and Min contributed to the catalogue of the 27 Brno Biennial in 2016, a graphic design biennial in Czech Republic, Brno. It was written in response to the curators' invitation for a keyword and description about "contemporary graphic design". This contribution directly builds on a previous one they wrote for IDEA magazine—titled "Infra-flat", the first half of "Infra-flat / Ultra-deep"— where they responded to a similar invitation to describe the "future of graphic design".[123] In this earlier contribution to IDEA magazine, Sulki and Min wrote:

> We proposed the concept of infra-flat (obviously inspired by Duchamp's notion of infra-thin) in order to describe a sense of depth created by the same force that has been flattening the world: the technology of universal connectivity and instant access. It's the kind of sense that is evoked once the force has crossed the threshold of total flatness—pseudo-depth, so to speak, for a vision that sees the world as 3-D version of the 2-D. The world has been flattened to the point where the depth is defined by the distance between a selfie-pod vision once it has finally reduced the distance below the minimum (Sulki and Min 2016b, 96).

The updated "Ultra-deep" portion of the text "Infra-flat / Ultra-deep" is simply an "inverted" version of "Infra-flat":

> [W]e're proposing the concept of ultra-deep (obviously inspired by Duchamp's notion of infra-thin) to describe a sense of flatness created by the same force that has been deepening the world: the technology of universal connectivity and instant access. It's the kind of sense that is evoked once the force has crossed the threshold of total-depth—pseudo flatness, so to speak, for a vision that sees the world as a 2-D version of the 3-D. The world has been deepened to the point where the flatness is defined by the distance between a selfie pod and the subject. Ultra-deep is about negative flatness possibly created by a selfie-pod vision once it has finally increased the distance beyond its maximum (Sulki and Min 2016b, 96).

Written this way, the second part—"Ultra-deep"—does not really contribute anything new to what they initially highlighted in "Infra-flat"; it merely creates a "reversed" perspective to view the same concept. However, the intentional play on its form (i.e., the way which it was written) could communicate something about the condition of "contemporary graphic design" beyond or on top of what is written. Sulki and Min's "design" of this text contribution could be described as a simple gesture of reversing the "subjects"—flatness and depth— and presenting the same concept through a metaphorical "mirror". This gesture resulted in a pair of *opposite*

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[123] This information is taken from the text Sulki and Min wrote for the 27 Brno Biennial catalogue.

descriptions that nonetheless describes the *same* concept. Given that this pair of text do seem elusive or even confusing to some extent,[124] Infra-flat (or Ultra-deep) is more strongly communicated as the idea of a distorting perception perpetuated by a sense of pseudo-depth (or pseudo-flatness) when the way the text is written, and therefore read, communicates that *experience*. This is not surprising since Sulki and Min mentioned elsewhere that their intention to obscure is sometimes also done through the way they talk about or present their works or ideas (Sulki and Min in Z-won 2014); the way texts are written matters as much as what was written. Understood this way, Infra-flat / Ultra-deep could be Sulki and Min's way of pointing out—among other possible interpretations—how the "future" and "contemporary condition" of graphic design are in fact reflections of each other without saying what they might be.

The other written contribution titled Vertical Reading (2016) was written for a book titled *Roma 1–272* (Willems et al. 2016). In this contribution, Min Choi was invited by editors Roger Willems, Helen Ku, and Lim Kyung Yong to write about Roma Publications (Roma for short)—a well-known publisher of artist books from Amsterdam—on the occasion of an eponymous retrospective exhibition held in Seoul, Korea, initiated by the editors. The way Min Choi chose to approach this was to quite literally read and write about the information presented on Roma's website, which for some time has been a "simple construction with [a] tabular index organised like a spreadsheet" (Choi 2016) (fig. 14), where each column describes an aspect of each title (e.g., issue number, title, artists/authors, and other technical details). This matter-of-fact presentation that strongly contrasts other bookseller or publishers' often visual- and image-oriented websites is likely something that interests Min Choi. He mentioned that the idea of writing his contribution this way was to see if any insights about Roma's body of work may surface from such a reading. However, instead of reading it horizontally like how one would normally do with a spreadsheet (to retrieve information of each book), Min Choi chose to read the information *vertically*—to read all the titles, formats, issue number, authors, etc., as *independent* units of information. This resulted in a written piece that surprisingly introduces many otherwise unseen questions or eccentricities of Roma's publishing practice, ranging from the way they title their publications (e.g., longest title being 14 words and the shortest being the single digit "3") to how they acknowledge who the "artists" of each publication are (they included the names of designers, editors, producers, etc., as "artists" of the publications), or even insights on the range of formats and sizes across Roma's publications. Unlike conventional text contributions, Vertical Reading does not present any obvious cohesive argument or conclusion but "accidental" insights—or more often, questions—that arise from this unusual examination. It does, however, clearly communicate an idea that is, again, underpinned by *how* the text was written. Min Choi's approach was to start with an idea based on a process of interpretation more than a body of contents; instead of setting out to write about a certain aspect of Roma's publishing practice, Min Choi set out to experiment with a way of *reading* Roma's publishing practice. This decision to start with an open-ended process and to let that almost entirely determine and form the contents is something familiarly similar to general design practice—something better described as "making as a way of thinking".[125] What may be communicated through this chosen idea-approach, on top of the specific insights or questions that surfaced from this "vertical reading", is Min Choi's assertion of the atypical or curious nature already present in independent art publishing that is particularly found in Roma. There is no need for Min Choi to describe or discuss Roma from an external viewpoint but to—in a way—let Roma describe itself.

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[124] They also do not directly address the future or contemporary condition of graphic design. The text requires the reader to further interpret what Sulki and Min are saying about graphic design through notions of the Infra-flat and Ultra-deep.

[125] This also bears resemblance to the idea of "design as research".

Roma Publications

	TITLE	ARTIST(S)	PAGES	SIZE (in cm.)	IN COLLABORATION WITH	YEAR
382	Notes on Representation Vol. 1-10 (Special edition box)	Irene Kopelman	10 books + drawing	29 x 8.5 x 21.5		2020
381	Postscripts	Jalal Toufic	160	11.5 x 17	Moderna Museet, Stockholm	2020
380	Let's be honest, the weather helped	Walid Raad	196	21.5 x 28	Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam / Moderna Museet, Stockholm	2020
379	Composition with Yellow Verticals	Mark Manders	112	11.5 x 17	Bonnefanten, Maastricht	2020
378	Kerselare Drawings and Photographs	Bart Lodewijks & Jan Kempenaers	e-books			2019-2020
377	Shadow Studies	Mark Manders	144	21 x 27	Van Lanschot Kempen	2019
376	Borrowed Space	Marc Nagtzaam	24 + card	34.5 x 48	art3, Valance	2019
375	Full Scale False Scale	Experimental Jetset	276 + 24	11 x 18		2020
374	Fragments of a Conversation with a Counterfeiter	Diego Tonus and Anonymous	160	16 x 24		2019
373	Interne Correspondentie Issue 2	Experimental Jetset	envelope + 6 items	33 x 26		2019
372	Re-Printed Matter	Karel Martens	280	17.3 x 23.2		2019
372b	Re-Printed Matter (black and white edition)	Karel Martens	280	17.3 x 23.2		2019
371	Hands Make Mistakes	Ariel Schlesinger	136	19 x 25		2019
370	The Serving Library Annual 2019/20 (Bruno Munari Obvious Code)	Francesca Bertolotti-Bailey, Stuart Bertolotti-Bailey, Vincenzo Latronico, David Reinfurt (editors)	144	21 x 29.7	The Serving Library	2019
369	On Gestures of Doing Nothing	Sander Breure & Witte van Hulzen	128	22 x 28	Marres, Maastricht	2019
367	The World Is All That Is The Case	Arthur Ou	56	18.5 x 26.5		2019
366	Hexamiles (Mont-Voisin)	Batia Suter	256	24 x 30.4	Musée de Bagnes, Le Châble	2019
365	NON	Paulien Oltheten	64	20 x 25		2019
364	Into the Air	Marinus Boezem	112	23 x 30	Oude Kerk, Amsterdam	2019
363	:	gerlach en koop	376	17.5 x 17.5	Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht	2019
362	The Plant Collection	Inge Meijer	112	21 x 29.7		2019
361	Better be watching the clouds / I want to be able to welcome my father to my house	Walid Raad	leporello + 12 p	21.5 x 28	Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam	2019
360	Tomorrow's Sculpture	Katinka Bock	400	21.5 × 29	Kunst Museum Winterthur, Mudam Luxembourg, IAC Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes	2019
359	Black Mat Oriole	Suki Seokyeong Kang	240	22 x 29	ICA, University of Pennsylvania	2019
358	high up close by	Misha de Ridder	64	24 x 34		2019
357	World Without Us	Geert Goiris	172	21.3 × 25.5	Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp	2019
356	Regular Features	Marc Nagtzaam	272	21.1 × 27.9		2019
355	Belgian Colonial Monuments	Jan Kempenaers	72	22 x 22	MuZee, Oostende	2019
354	Bollenveld	Erik van der Weijde	32	17 x 24		2019
353	Entropy	Ari Marcopoulos	64 + poster	24 x 33		2019
352	Bühnenbilder	Silke Otto-Knapp	128	22 x 28	Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis	2019
351	Cardinal Points. Notes on Representation Vol. 10	Irene Kopelman	84	21 x 28		2019
350a	Floor with Notional Newspapers	Mark Manders	box with 10 newspapers	35 x 24 x 2.5		2019
350b	Table with Notional Newspapers	Mark Manders	box with 10 newspapers	35 x 24 x 2.5		2019
349	Pocket Folklore	Shirin Sabahi	196	14.5 x 21.5	Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst, Oldenburg	2019
348	The Photographic II: Signal or Noise	Martin Germann, Tanja Boon (editors)	64	20 x 27	S.M.A.K., Ghent	2019
347	Cloud Service	Batia Suter	104	19.5 x 28.5	Printed Matter Inc.	2019
346	Bill 2	Julie Peeters (editor)	184	23 x 31		2019
345	Reference Guide	Michiel De Cleene	176	24.5 x 32	HOGENT, Ghent	2019
344	A Die with Twenty-Six Faces	Louis Lüthi	104	13 x 20	Lectoraat Art & Public Space, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam	2019
343	An Attempt at a Personal Epistemology	Jeff Weber	524	11 x 18.5	Kunsthalle Leipzig	2018
342	Great Temptations / Grote verleidingen	Dominic van den Boogerd	392	17 x 23		2018

Figure 14. A screenshot of Roma's website. (Roma Publications. Accessed May 7, 2020. Screenshot by author. https://www.romapublications.org/Roma201-400.html.)

In Infra-flat / Ultra-deep and Vertical Reading, the idea, intention, and method behind these texts are what lends meaning and relevance to its written contents. Insights pertaining to what these texts addressed surfaced from the way the authors approached it. Sulki and Min "designed" these texts in ways they were already familiar with in design practice; text and writing became a different "material" to work with in their design practice rather than something that is only supplementary to it.

This way of handling and working with text is also seen in other projects where the duo does not directly author contents. Cases where they are simultaneously involved in designing and editing contents reflect a mutually interdependent relationship between design and content. Print: The Trash Issue (2012) (fig. 15A) is one of such projects where they were involved as guest designer-editors—more specifically for a special section in the issue on the theme of "trash"—and where they intervened both in terms of content and design, text and form. Sulki and Min's contribution was built around an open-ended idea of what trash is or can be. This is captured in the introduction they wrote for the issue. One of the lines mentioned: "Rather than treating trash as a residue of otherwise perfectly good and sustainable activities, the contributors to this section look at diverse aspects of trash's ever-returning life. In the course of its circulation, trash inspires us, haunts us, speaks to us" (Sulki and Min in Silverberg 2012). The main additions that relate and respond conceptually to this idea were a custom font they designed called Galaxie Ecosmic (2012) (fig. 15B), and a significant amount of tiny "margin notes" that run parallel to the general articles in the special section.

Figure 15*A*. Cover and selected page spread of *Print: The Trash Issue* (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Print." Sulki and Min. 2012. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/print/.)

Figure 15*B*. *Galaxie Ecosmic*, digital typeface. Custom typeface for *Print: The Trash Issue*. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Galaxie Ecosmic." Sulki and Min. 2012. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/galaxie-ecosmic/.)

Galaxie Ecosmic, the custom font they introduced, is based on Print magazine's standard typeface Galaxie Polaris designed by Chester Jenkins in 2004, except that they added ink-saving spaces within the characters, an idea borrowed from Ecofont, an application program developed by a Dutch firm SPRANQ in 2009 that automatically inserts small holes within characters of fonts to reduce ink consumption. Instead of ink-saving holes, they were replaced with readable text set in Comic Sans[126] within the characters of Galaxie Ecosmic[127] that were excerpted from Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* (1980), a reference that appeared several times across Sulki and Min's other works. As a result, Galaxie Ecosmic can be described as an "eco-friendly" version of the original Galaxie Polaris fittingly designed for this waste-conscious issue.

Sulki and Min described the margin notes they included in the inter-column and outer margin spaces of the special section as "parallel universes of trash". The contents of these margin notes—placed systematically across the spreads—were obtained from seemingly random information sources inconsequential to the main contents. For example, there were tiny logos of recently bankrupt banks, past seasonal colour trends from Pantone, comments from a specific YouTube cat video, and heavy metal song titles that were computer-generated (see fig. 15*C*). Although these non-constructive additions are meant to be humorous—they are described by Sulki and Min as "garbage"—they do reflect conceptually relevant ideas both through its design

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[126] Sulki and Min playfully chose Comic Sans as the typeface because it can be considered the "polar" opposite of the generally neutral Galaxie Polaris (notice the wordplay), as well as what most graphic designers would consider as the ultimate "trashy" font, therefore appropriate for this issue.

[127] Galaxie Ecosmic is a name put together from "Galaxie Polaris", "Ecofont", and "Comic Sans".

and contents. It is conceptually relevant in terms of *design* when Sulki and Min fill up, or more precisely, "recycle" spaces that are normally unused or considered useless—the space within letters and gutters. Similarly, it is also conceptually relevant in terms of *content* when much of the information found in the margin notes are "recycled" from Sulki and Min's practice since these are loosely connected to some of their interests or previous projects.[128]
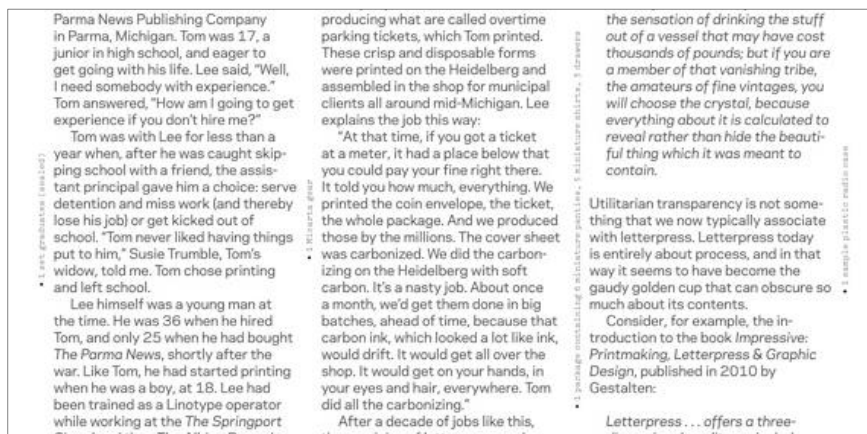
Figure 15*C*. Detail of selected page in *Print: The Trash Issue*. Random information are placed in the inter-column space. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Print." Sulki and Min. 2012. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/print/.)

Seen together, these additions from Sulki and Min expand on themes of "repetition, recycling, and renewal" in design, but they also playfully pushed their editorial idea of the "ever-returning" life of trash—that they do not really disappear but carry on circulating around us. This is achieved not by supplementing design with texts or contents or vice versa (hence treating them as separate components), but by incorporating ideas and contents directly in designed form in unexpected and clever ways, like ink-saving spaces within font characters or tiny notes squeezed in margin spaces. There is a symbiotic correlation between how their ideas exist as written text and as designed form; both work together in a dexterous manner to communicate—in this case—Sulki and Min's interpretation "trash".

From this section, we saw Sulki and Min's purposeful engagement in producing contents through various ways, whether it is through writing, designing, or—more importantly—both as an integrated whole. This also happens across various project settings, whether they are commissions (e.g., Score by Score, Print: The Trash Issue), collaborations (e.g., MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z), those they directly author (e.g., Diagrammatic Writing, The Power of Color, Infra-flat / Ultra-deep). We also saw how Sulki and Min's committed interest in contents and discourse is affected by—and affects—their design-based work. It is clear that these engagements with content were done in close or interdependent relationship to their processes and understanding of design, even and especially in cases where they are primarily working with the text medium (e.g., Vertical Reading). The wide range of examples discussed in this section further emphasised Sulki and Min's sensibility, commitment, and dexterity in working across design and content production, thus reflecting the kind of integrated authorship described in the beginning of this subsection. This form of authorship that integrates language and design— while still maintaining a focus on design-related processes and sensibilities—forms the necessary foundation for a "research-driven" critical and artistic practice.[129] It better reflects—quoted from the earlier chapter—the

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[128] For example, Sagan's *Cosmos* was mentioned earlier. Despite being a work completed a few years after this (in 2017), it is possible that this particular book was already an object of interest for Sulki and Min. Also, they had several other projects that made use of Pantone's seasonal colour information (e.g., Pantone Color Forecast, 2005–2010 (2011)) and an interest in heavy metal as a subculture or musical genre (see Heavy Metal (News) Around the World (2008)).

[129] Although this forms the necessary foundation for a research-driven practice, it does not yet equate to one. How Sulki and Min's practice can be seen as research is addressed in the next and final section.

"kind of thinking that happens through design rather than only through words", and is clearly seen in The Power of Color and Exercise in Modern Construction Part 3 for example. Moreover, for Sulki and Min, this also applies to the way something is written. As will be seen in the next section, this kind of authorship in graphic design is essential to enabling the shift from the "designer as author" to the "designer as researcher" posited by Laranjo and van der Velden in chapter three (subsection 3.2.2). Sulki and Min's dexterity in navigating between form and meaning, design and content, potentially contributes to the intellectual basis that allows for design to be a reflective space for producing and thinking about ideas, theories, logics, and implications *in and through* practice rather than treating "research" in an auxiliary manner (see Redström and Mazé 2007, 7; 11). With this, the next and final section of this case study explores how Sulki and Min's practice, through such a form of authorship, further engages with discourse and possibly research.

5.4   Engaging broader discourse through hybrid roles, auteur approach, and expanded practices

To this point, we have seen the multifaceted nature of Sulki and Min's practice—the span of approaches, breadth of subject matter, and extent of commitment towards contents across projects. We have also seen, to a considerable extent, how their body of works already reflect the kind of critical and artistic nature delineated in the third chapter. This last section further develops and stresses this connection by highlighting key encompassing characteristics of Sulki and Min's practice by discussing *bodies* of related projects rather than individual or single set of works (with the exception of subsection 5.4.1). It draws out more specific intentions and meanings in these bodies of works to discuss Sulki and Min's agency and intentions in addressing ideas in relation to society. In doing so, this final section also brings together various aspects of their work as already discussed in earlier sections to propose how their *overall* practice can be likened to, if not reflect, graphic design research as outlined in the second chapter—one not bound by scientific or rationalist conventions, involves design practice as an integrative whole, and considers its role and agency in society.

This section is organised in three parts. The first one discusses examples where Sulki and Min take on hybrid roles across and within projects. The second part highlights consistent sets of interests or approaches that surface from their practice and reveals an "auteur" approach of Sulki and Min. The last part discusses Sulki and Min's broader ideas and intentions about their practice in relation to the expanded roles and involvements they have around and outside of design. The resulting insights reveal how Sulki and Min's *overall* practice engages with discourse and hence take form as graphic design research.

5.4.1   Hybrid roles

Seen previously, Sulki and Min often collaborate with editors, artists, curators, or writers, but they also often switch between these roles themselves (Schwulst 2017). Although the work examples mentioned so far mainly consist of publication-based works, graphic design-related formats, text-based works, and some artworks,[130] there are other works that take the form of exhibitions, curatorship, research, installations, video, etc. These projects, particularly those that involve them taking on multiple roles at once, show their cross involvements across projects, sometimes as designer-editors, artist-curators, writer-researchers, or anything in between. The following paragraphs very briefly present three of such examples.

Karel Martens: Still Moving (2018) is a retrospective exhibition of Dutch (artist-)typographer Karel Martens. For this exhibition, Sulki and Min were commissioned to design a graphic identity for the exhibition that was adapted across a set of items, including the exhibition catalogue. Min Choi was also involved as one of the discussants with the artist Karel Martens in a talk that was transcribed and published in the catalogue. This

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[130] Even in these formats, there were different roles and approaches; many of them were distinct from each other in terms of function and contexts.

simple information show an immediate example of how Sulki and Min are often conversant around the ideas or subjects in the projects they are designing. Similar instances apply to many Specter Press publications, where they are also involved as editors, translators, etc., on top of design.

The next example is Min Choi's self-initiated solo exhibition <u>Kinross, Modern Typography (1992, 2004, 2009)</u> (2009) (fig. 16*B*) that coincided with the launch of the Korean edition of typographer and researcher Robin Kinross' book, *Modern Typography*, translated by Min Choi and published by Specter Press (see fig. 16*A*). For this exhibition, Min Choi wanted to show, in an exhibition format, what was not able to be shown or experienced in the translated book, as a way of "extend[ing] the translation in a different form" (Sulki and Min 2020n). Two of the works in this exhibition were thin booklets each containing text chapters of the first English edition that were not included in this Korean edition.[131] The main work in this exhibition were printouts of a book chapter containing visual examples of book or printed typography in full colour, selected and used by Kinross in the book as scaled-down illustrations (see fig. 16*C*). These were enlarged and reproduced in their original size by Min Choi and shown in the exhibition as framed prints. A curious detail of this work is that the texts found inside the illustrations (the visual examples of typography in books) were also translated from English to Korean; these were printed as documents that accompanied the framed prints.

Figure 16A. Front cover and selected page spreads of *Robin Kinross' Modern Typography, Korean Edition*. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Modern Typography." Sulki and Min. 2009. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/modern-typography/.)

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[131] The Korean translation is based on the second English edition.

Figure 16*B*. *Kinross, Modern Typography (1992, 2004, 2009)*, Solo exhibition of Choi Sung Min. Photos by Lee Jongmyung. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Kinross, Modern Typography: Exhibition." Sulki and Min. 2009. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/kinross-modern-typography-exhibition/.)

Figure 16*C*. Selected prints of *Kinross, Modern Typography, Korean Edition, Chapter 14, "Examples"*. Offset printing, 25 pieces, 400 × 600 mm each (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Kinross, Modern Typography, Korean Edn., Chapter 14." Sulki and Min. 2009. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/kinross-modern-typography-korean-edn-chapter-14/.)

Projects that contain multiple involvements are also seen in larger graphic design project commissions like in the graphic identity they designed for BMW Guggenheim Lab in 2011 (fig. 17*A*). In this work, Sulki and Min designed a flexible "participatory" or "interactive" system that auto-generates BMW Guggenheim Lab's wordmark—the letters L-A-B—in real-time based on short text contributions from visitors of the space (fig. 17*A* & *B*). For this project, they also wrote a journal article titled From Representation to Participation: Graphic Identity of the BMW Guggenheim Lab (Choi and Choi 2016) that was published in *The Design Journal*. In this article, Sulki and Min discussed the work's conceptual background and described the design process in detail. It was a theoretical and practice-based "critical account" of the work that took into context and addressed the

"larger shift […] in our technologically mediated visual culture", where Sulki and Min touched upon fields or points of interests like "corporate identities", "semiotics", "branding rhetoric", "participatory design", and also broader ideas like democracy and empowerment of the public.

Figure 17*A*. Graphic identity for BMW Guggenheim Lab. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "BMW Guggenheim Lab: Identity." Sulki and Min. 2011. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/bmw-guggenheim-lab-identity/.)
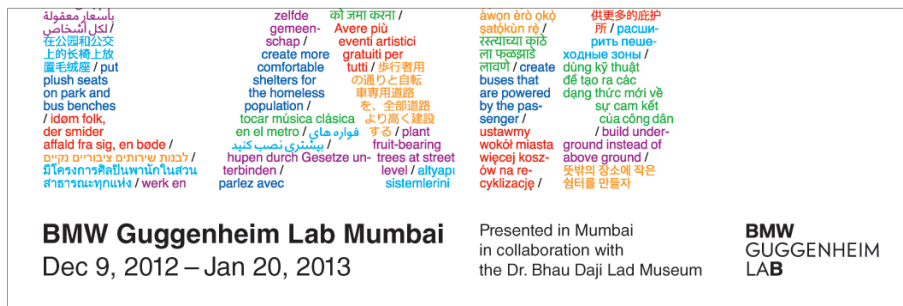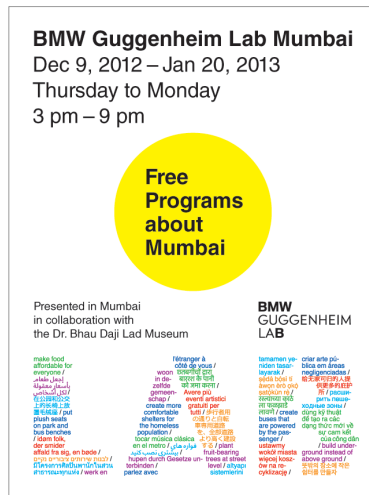
Figure 17B. Selected applications of BMW Guggenheim Lab graphic identity in BMW Guggenheim Lab Mumbai. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "BMW Guggenheim Lab Mumbai: Signs." Sulki and Min. 2012. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/bmw-guggenheim-lab-mumbai-signs/.)

Together, these three works show the varied yet interconnected roles Sulki and Min take on not only *across* different projects—as already seen in the single-work examples in earlier sections—but also *within* single projects containing multiple types of outcomes. These show their adeptness with—or intention to navigate—the theoretical (e.g., BMW Guggenheim Lab's identity design), historical (e.g., Kinross' Modern Typography), and professional (e.g., Karel Marten's retrospective exhibition) contexts around their work, given their ability to knowledgeably discuss or communicate ideas around and through them, across public, cultural, or academic settings. Different sets of activities or formats result from single projects, whether by request or self-initiation, to engage with ideas around their practice. This again emphasises the "discursive" nature of critical and artistic graphic design practice, where outcomes do not exist as standalone objects but are often coupled with contextual content situated through specific discourses in different formats. These range from, as seen above, an academic essay to an exhibition—both of which are discursive in different ways. From Representation to Participation: Graphic Identity of the BMW Guggenheim Lab for example, engages directly with theoretical or historical implications of the identity they designed as a way of addressing the broader practice of designing graphic identities whereas Kinross, Modern Typography (1992, 2004, 2009) simply "translated" the contents

from the book into an extended experience—a spatial and visual one,[132] which shows how the "discursivity" in critical and artistic practices could occur through the exchange of ideas in visual form or aesthetic experience, beyond traditional discourse that is built on language.

Like many of their works, Still Moving and Modern Typography are also projects where they are both personally and professionally invested in as *designers* and not artists, writers, researchers, etc.[133] This easily overlooked difference is important since the exploration of ideas within or parallel to design practice contributes to "design research" as a compound activity rather than a separate design *and* research practice.

5.4.2   Auteur approach

A key characteristic of Sulki and Min's practice lies in how they explore *consistent* sets of ideas—themes, subjects, or areas of interests—*across* projects. This is a key factor that contributes to research given that depth—rather than breadth—is often a closer attribute of meaningful research activity; consistently exploring similar ideas across projects better allows for that than the broadening or expansion of ideas across projects. A connection can be drawn to the model of an "auteur",[134] where the designer's *practice* reveal consistent set of interests or issues explored across different projects, and in Sulki and Min's words, one that happens "not only through authoring the contents, but also by the *treatment* of given ones [which] certainly affected the way we approach our practice" (emphasis mine) (Sulki and Min 2014; see Rock 2004; McCarthy 2013). There is again an emphasis on how designed form, by embodying "content", equally contribute to "discourse" alongside written or verbal communication, therefore contributing to "research through design". For Sulki and Min, many consistent sets of ideas in their practice reveal an attention towards broader issues of society and culture, sometimes concerning personal interests, yet stemming from the field of design. The following paragraphs discuss three approaches that reflect Sulki and Min's approach as "auteurs". The first point highlights what some of these ideas are and how Sulki and Min consistently approach them in design. Expanding on this, the second point describes an "inversed" relationship: how Sulki and Min use similar or consistent "design gestures" instead to repeatedly explore ideas or concepts. The final point then looks briefly at a group of works that, despite being visually contrasting and differ largely in nature or format, reflect a consistent process or underlying way of thinking. Altogether, these three approaches reveal Sulki and Min as "auteurs" who navigate and explore consistent sets of ideas through forms and processes in their practice.

One of the ideas or concepts that Sulki and Min ongoingly explore through several self-initiated or independently completed projects is contained in the earlier discussed Infra-flat / Ultra-deep (2016). These include,

- Concept Drawing series (2016) (fig. 18*A*), which was exhibited in one of their solo exhibitions 7½: Cryptographic Imagination 4 (2016) (fig. 18*B*) curated by Oh Sunyoung,

- most of the works shown in their third solo exhibition Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513 (2017) (fig. 19*A*) which includes Ephemera series (2017) (fig. 19*B*), the book Cosmos, 3rd Korean Edition, 1981 (2017) (fig. 12), and

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[132] Sulki and Min described that as much as the exhibition was about typography and its history, it is also about translation between text and image (Sulki and Min 2020n)

[133] For example, Martens was their former tutor who has a significant influence on their practice (Butler 2015) and Kinross' work is something Min Choi spent over a decade with since he started translating it.

[134] The idea of an auteur model in graphic design practice is closely related to "design authorship" or "graphic authorship", a concept that was more popularly discussed around the early 2000s. Although design authorship does have connections with critical design practice— quite clearly explained by designer and educator Steven McCarthy in his book *The Designer as Author, Producer, Activist, Entrepreneur, Curator & Collaborator: New Models for Communicating* (2013)—this case study puts more focus on the element of "research" in graphic design practices, which already includes or requires some form of authorship and autonomy as described in chapter three. This explains why the term "auteur" is used here to support the idea of the "designer as researcher" rather than "designer as author".

- the series of prints in Technical Drawing series (2014) (fig. 4*B*) created for the Hermès Foundation Misulsang nominees' exhibition (fig. 4*A*).

In this body of related works and projects around the "infra-flat", Sulki and Min applied the same blurred-out graphic treatment but they were all created quite differently. Described earlier, Cosmos, 3rd Korean Edition, 1981 and Technical Drawing were made from existing or found materials—the former is a book replica-object and the latter are large framed C-prints. The Ephemera series is a re-interpretation of their past graphic design works which mainly consist posters and other printed matter they designed for other occasions. The Concept Drawing series, existing as large digital prints on fabric hung in vertical orientation (like a curtain divider), is made using sample charts from a diagram-drawing application ConceptDraw.
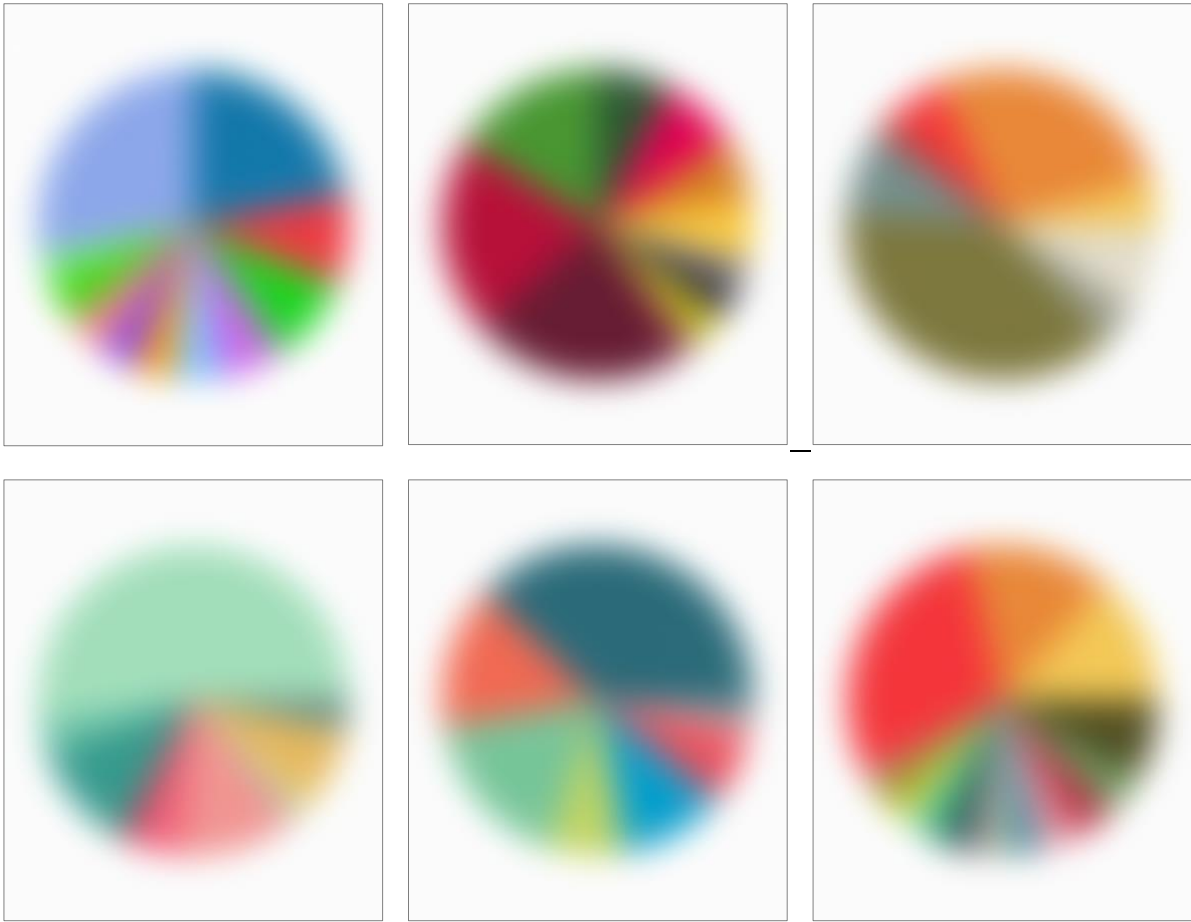
Figure 18*A*. *Concept Drawing* series. Digital printing on fabric, six pieces, 180 × 210 cm each. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Concept Drawings." Sulki and Min. 2016. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/concept-drawings/.)
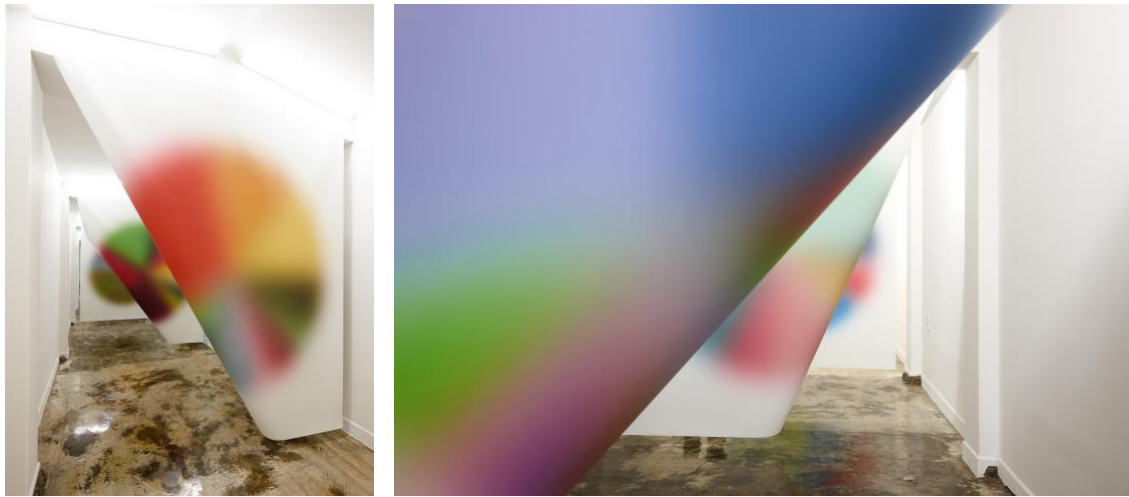
Figure 18*B*. *7½: Cryptographic Imagination 4—Sulki and Min*. Exhibition at Song Bok-eun Foundation. Photos by Nam Kiyong. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "7½: Cryptographic Imagination 4—Sulki and Min." Sulki and Min. 2016. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/cryptographic-imagination-4/.)

Figure 19*A*. *Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513* exhibition at Perigee Gallery. Photo by Nam Kiyong. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513." Sulki and Min. 2017. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/sulki-and-min-perigee-060421-170513/.)
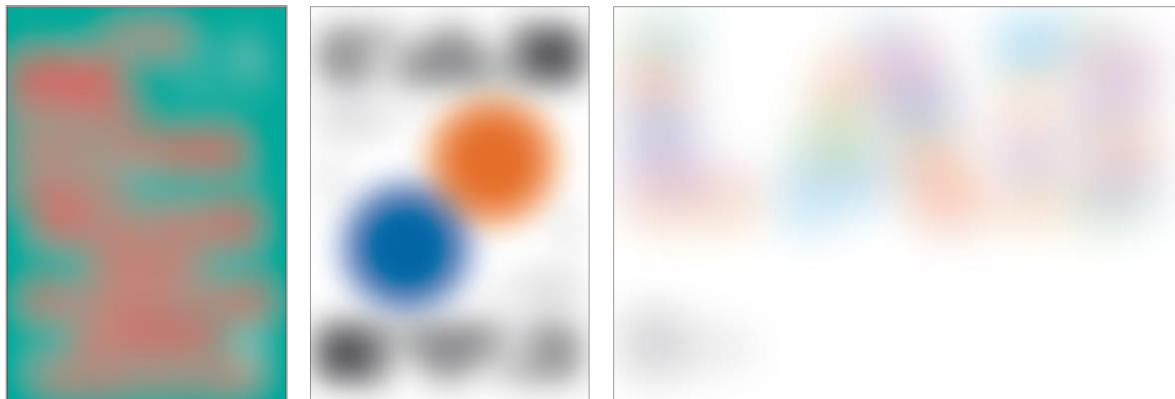
Figure 19*B*. Selected pieces from the *Ephemera* series. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Ephemera." Sulki and Min. 2017. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/ephemera/.)

The notion of the "infra-flat" is something Sulki and Min first formulated when working on Technical Drawing. It is a reference to Marcel Duchamp's "infra-thin", a slippery term that Sulki and Min refer simply to as "a subtle, nearly imperceptible difference" between things. "Infra-flat" is an equally intangible equivalent of "infra-thin" but one specific to our experience of the world caused by the "flattening" force of technology (Sulki and Min in Z-won 2015). According to Sulki and Min, "infra-flat" could be described as a dystopic experience of seeing this world as a "3-D version" of a "2-D" reality (or vice versa). It is a "sense of reversed depth created by the same force that has been flattening the world" and is driven by, for example, our "obsession with instant communication and data collection mediated by ubiquitous connectivity" (Sulki and Min in Z-won 2015). Of course, given its reference to Duchamp's "undefinable" term, it is reasonable to expect infra-thin to be indefinable through language to some extent; Sulki and Min's description in Infra-flat / Ultra-deep seems like an elusive comment on the contemporary condition of graphic design (what they responding to with this keyword). Yet, it is possible to understand this concept through direct experience by viewing and thinking through the works they created around this notion.

In the examples listed earlier, the blurring of all visual and textual information in existing materials reimagines them—across the various formats and sources—as artefacts directly affected by this "flattening" force. This is supported by their description of the works being "diagrams or sample documents" of the infra-flat concept; Sulki and Min described these reimagined artefacts as mere simulations of something before it could mean anything—they described Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513 as a simulation for an actual exhibition like a sample document or stock photograph (Sulki and Min 2020o).[135] On other occasions, these works were also described as stimulations for suspicion and confusion or obstacles to communication.[136] Based on this idea, these works do not communicate any immediate content—Sulki and Min also did not intend for them to do so—but it is still possible to consider the intentions and motivations behind these works as where meaning surfaces. The act of further and *literally* obscuring (i.e., blurring out) visual images this way resembles the kind of pseudo-depth they were describing, where actual depth is being flattened beyond the threshold of total flatness—like how an image can be "flattened" beyond its physical form into its digital one. Here, this pseudo-depth or reversed flatness is manifested visually into a confusing viewing experience when viewers intuitively try to optically focus on the shapeless forms despite already mentally registering their blurred-out appearance, as if "seen from too close a distance" (Minnie and Sulki 2017). The experience of viewing these "amorphous" prints or objects are also especially disorientating when they are seen against the perfect focus of its surroundings—the frames that hold the prints, the edges of the book-object, walls and tables, etc (Minnie and Sulki 2017). This experience perhaps tangibly reflects the perilous counter-productivity of "flattening" technologies like "universal connectivity and instant access" and asks the question: what happens *after* we achieve *complete* connectivity and access (i.e., successfully "flattened" out our world)?

As explorations of the "infra-flat", this body of related works can also be read as a single whole. The effect of this graphic "reverse-flattening", when we consider the contrasting range of materials Sulki and Min used in this body of work—found material, past works, ready-to-use graphics, etc.—point towards a worrying homogenisation of form, contents, and even meaning, at least in the field of graphic design. When viewing Ephemera (series) and Cosmos for example—both exhibited together in Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513—it is not immediately obvious that Cosmos is based on another object and is unlike Ephemera, which were based on past works designed by Sulki and Min as in Ephemera, especially when Cosmos is shown amidst many works from the Ephemera series that quite obviously resemble Sulki and Min's past works (for those familiar with their works) (see again fig. 19*A–C*). If we imagine a continuous application of this graphic treatment to subsequent items Sulki and Min create or encounter, it would eventually reach a point where it is no longer possible to distinguish original sources and intents, where they become mere "simulations" rather

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[135] The fact that they signed off the text they wrote for this exhibition with fictional names (Minnie and Sulki) further emphasises the point of this exhibition as a "simulation".

[136] The entire Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513 exhibition was described as a stimulation for suspicion and confusion. The body of work in the exhibition 7½: Cryptographic Imagination 4, which includes Concept Drawing series, was described as obstacles to communication.

than objects with their own history and (original) meanings. When more materials are graphically reversed-flattened (i.e., blurred) into things we can no longer keep a balanced distance from, we are no longer able to maintain proper focus on them (whether object or subject) since they would either be too near or far, or in other words, ultra-deep or infra-flat.

In this set of works, it is also possible to see the consistent graphic treatment—rather than the idea or concept expressed in text form—as where the idea or concept lies or originates; the digital blurring of their past works in Ephemera would consequentially result in a different meaning compared to the same thing done to ready-to-use diagrams in Concept Drawing as large printed sheets for viewing from afar, or to an existing book in its entirety in Cosmos, 3rd Korean Edition, 1981 as an object to hold and "read". Within this lies an inversible relationship between concept and form; as much as a concept can be consistently explored and applied through a formal gesture, a formal gesture could also be used to consistently explore and apply concepts. To illustrate this, I briefly discuss each of the works in more specific relation to the question that broadly underlie these works, which is, what happens after we achieve complete connectivity and access (i.e., successfully "flattened" out our world through universal connectivity and instant access)? Each work asks or addresses the question and the notion of the "infra-flat" differently. Cosmos could be addressing the result of such effects on popular beliefs or knowledge, Technical Drawing directs attention to questioning the nature of information and the idea of its objectivity,[137] Ephemera positions Sulki and Min's own work as artefacts that are also subjected to the same conditions and hence explores the effect of this "flattening force" on graphic design practices,[138] and Concept Drawing highlights a specific phenomenon of universal connectivity and instant access—that of the template-ready, auto-generated forms that pervades visual communication today.

The same "idea" when applied across different materials and formats is able to stretch or explore possible meanings or experiences, despite their visual similarity. Instead of seeing the graphic blurring as a convenient graphic treatment applied sporadically across their projects without intention or meaning, they reflect how Sulki and Min explores a consistent idea that is treated both as a concept and form (in this case, a visual gesture). This again shows how such a practice is closer to design research as a compound activity when a design gesture (e.g., formal treatment) becomes as much of an "idea" as one that is explained or communicated through language. This is not one done for the sake of achieving desired visual outcomes but one that allows us—whether the designers themselves or viewers engaging with it—to think *through* and to arrive at possible interpretive understandings.

The approach of applying consistent "design gestures" across different projects and contexts as a way of exploring an idea can also be observed from another set of works that feature a typographic texture Sulki and Min described as a "cacophonous landscape"—a visually complex and busy, or "cacophonous", motif caused by overlapping a very large amount of graphic shapes. This was first seen in two works that Sulki and Min contributed in the form of flag designs Earth Here (2017) (fig. 20*A*) and Earth Now (2018) (fig. 20*B*), the first one exhibited at Flags of the Earth that was part of Design Biennale Zurich and the second one in Elephant in the Room at Jarkarta History Museum. It was also later seen in a site-specific work Home (2018) (fig. 21) that was commissioned by an architectural firm, in an exhibited poster contribution Us and Them (2019) (fig. 22), and more recently in a self-initiated editioned piece titled Book (2019) (fig. 23) that Sulki and Min produced on the occasion of Singapore Art Book Fair 2019.

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[137] This idea was explored earlier in the section 5.2 when Technical Drawing was first discussed.

[138] This idea is explored further in a later point within this subsection.
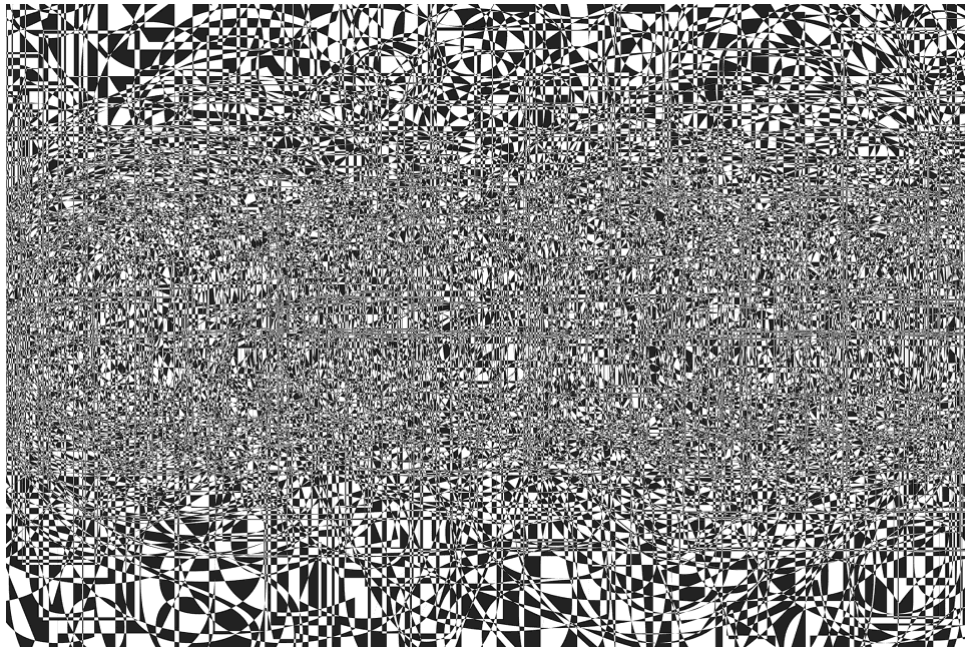
Figure 20*A*. *Earth Here*, 150 × 100 cm (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Earth Here." Sulki and Min. 2017. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/earth-here/.)
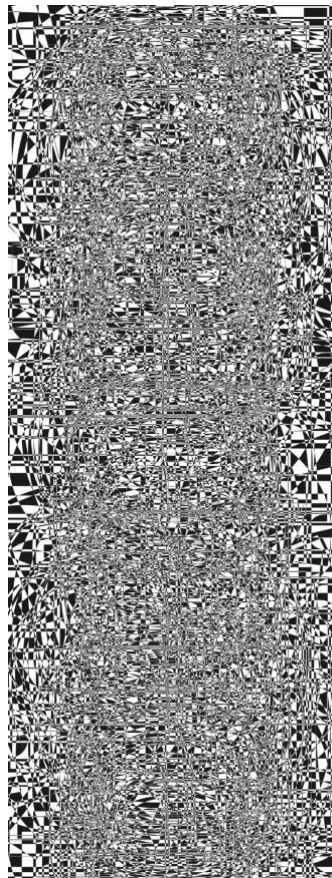
Figure 20*B*. *Earth Now*, 780 × 2080 mm (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Earth Now." Sulki and Min. 2018. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/earth-now/.)

Figure 21. *Home*. *Left to Right*: rooftop billboard: 578 × 301 cm; elevator door: 70 × 220 cm. Photos by Nam Kiyong. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Home." Sulki and Min. 2018. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/home/.)
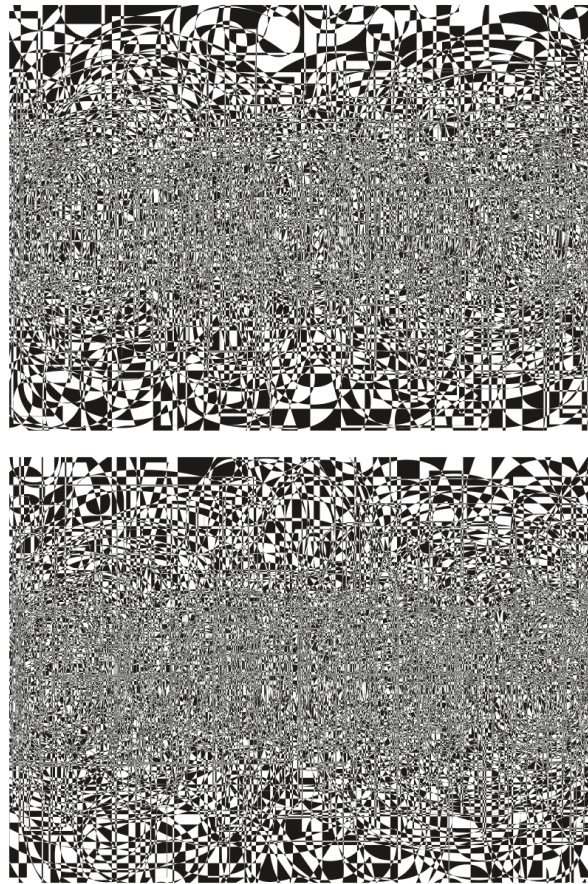

Figure 22. *Us and Them*, 610 × 914 mm. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Us and Them." Sulki and Min. 2019. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/us-and-them/.)
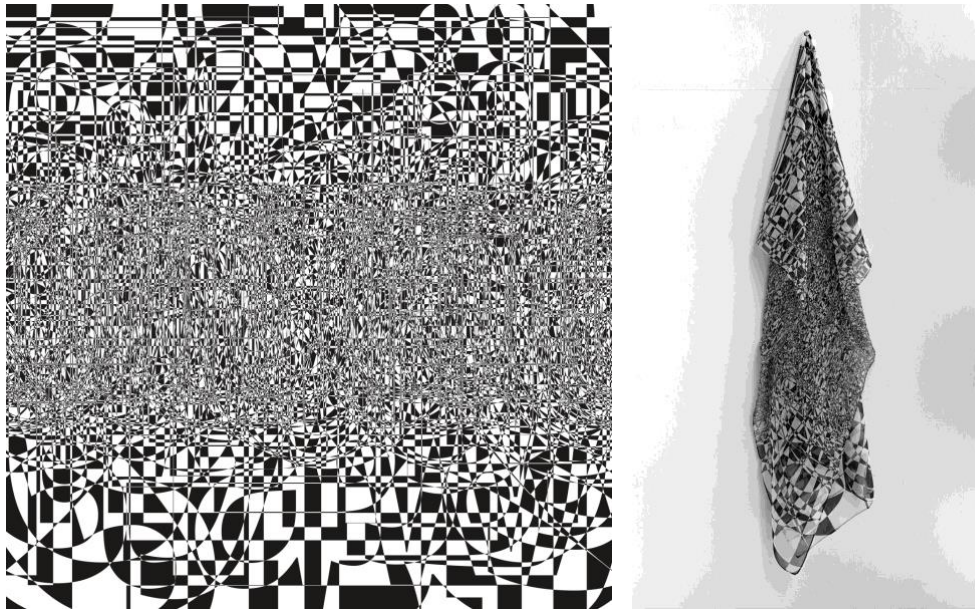
Figure 23. *Book*, 910 × 910 mm. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Book." Sulki and Min. 2019. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/book/.)

This visual treatment is achieved by visually overlaying and "collapsing" an unusually large amount of the same word in different languages, often up to a hundred or more (see Sulki and Min 2020p). In these works, the chosen word is always one that corresponds to a certain subject matter or theme that is also communicated in part through the work titles (e.g., home, earth, book, etc.). Instead of overlapping them as opaque typographic shapes, each addition reverses out the positive (or negative) areas of the previous word (i.e., typographic outline). Over a hundred of these overlays would then interlace into a "white-noise-like" image that loses any visible trace of the original word(s).

When this visual gesture was first designed and used in Earth Here, Sulki and Min were responding to an almost impossible task of designing a "flag for the earth" that should "reflect […] the society of the future" and "focus […] on what connects us" amidst conditions where "nations are building walls rather than collectively facing up to urgent future challenges" (Sulki and Min 2020p). For this work, Sulki and Min responded with the word "here"—also as an idea—for how it interestingly suggests both an intimate relation anyone could have with where they are (on earth), yet denotes something that is indefinable unless given a specific context. The meaning of "here" is also subjective to whoever is speaking and this is what Sulki and Min find fittingly descriptive of how we occupy space—something that happens "concretely and indeterminably" (Sulki and Min 2020p). When applied graphically, the laden meaning of Sulki and Min's interpretation and explanation of the word "here"—understood here also as a chosen word-emblem of the earth—is amplified multiple folds through the collapsing and overlaying of over a hundred of earth's languages and its resulting cacophonous motif. The outcome reflects an intricately difficult interlace of an unmanageable amount of ideas subjective to all of earth's people.

In the same way, the other works in this group also deal with similar momentous notions. Earth Now uses the word "now" to address how we occupy time and history, Home examines the idea of a "home" through the public art canvas of an architectural firm's office building, Us and Them responds to the theme of community and belonging by applying the same idea to the words "us" and "them", of which the distinction between the two is deliberately left unclear. In all of these instances, the words chosen are by nature subjective towards whoever the subject is, similar to that in Earth Here. Yet, the resulting image for these different works are strikingly analogous in form and texture and it is difficult to distinguish between, for example, Home and Us and Them. This perhaps reveals something about the futility of combining or synonymising subjective word-concepts that deal with wide-ranging experiences, identities, or beliefs.

This body of work also show another of Sulki and Min's approach as "auteurs" when they connect related interests or subjects across various unrelated commissions or projects using a single design gesture rather than a specific word-concept like in the earlier body of works surrounding the "infra-flat". It returns to describe how an auteur equivalent in graphic design can find conceptual potential in visual treatments as much as through language (Sulki and Min 2014).

Other than exploring consistent sets of ideas across projects based on a single concept (like with "infra-flat") or between projects that applies a consistent visual gesture (like with Earth Here, Home, Us and Them, etc.), Sulki and Min also does that through something that is more difficult to pinpoint, which I will refer to as "attitude". In their practice, certain set of works reveal a consistent approach or underlying attitude that are often also themselves subject of interests or explorations for Sulki and Min. For example, there has been an evident interest in the nature of information and systems, which includes looking at simple systems in graphic design, cryptographic or coded information, or even exploring the idea of systematically generated accidental arrangements. Works that involve this interest take a wide range of forms and formats, for example, the essay Vertical Reading (2016), an exhibition and reader Off-White Paper: On the Brno Biennial and Education (2014) (fig. 24A and B) that they did for Brno Biennial 2014, a series of video loops titled The Book of Chances (2011, 2013, 2016) (fig. 25A–C), a solo exhibition Really? (2010) (fig. 26) by Sulki Choi, and a Monospaced Font Test Patterns (2002) (fig. 27) poster template, just to list some. These are works that differ very much in terms of contents and form but are connected by the attitudes that underlie them and have similar processes of conception.
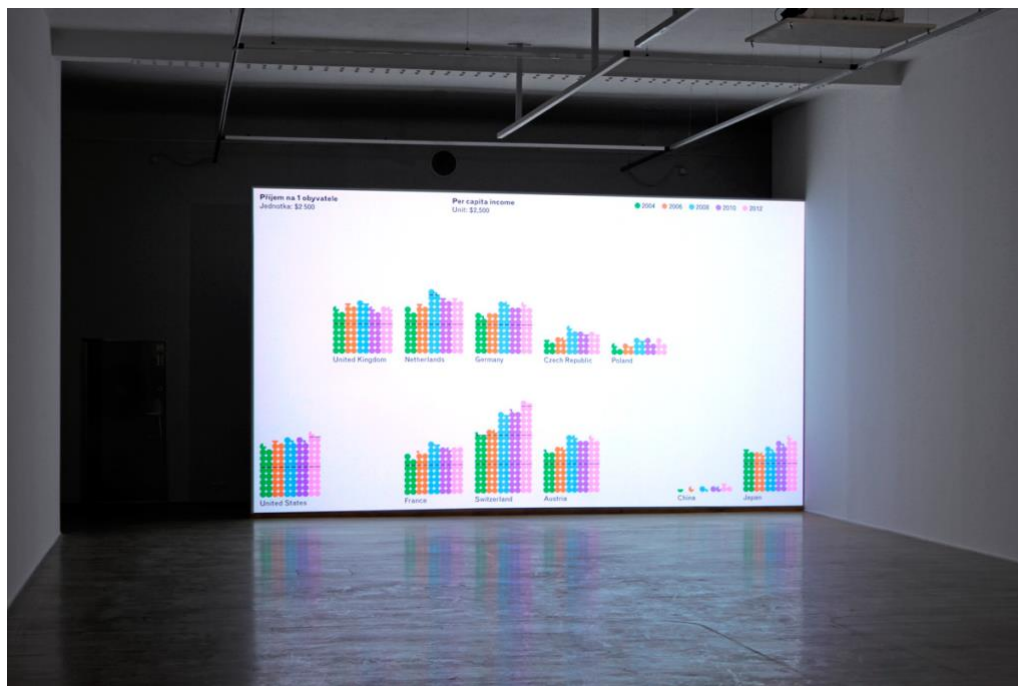
Figure 24A. *Off-White Paper: On the Brno Biennial and Education*. Single-channel video, 25 minutes 52 seconds. Photo © 2014 Brno Biennial. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Off-White Paper: Exhibition." Sulki and Min. 2014. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/off-white-paper-exhibition/.)

Figure 24*B*. *Off-White Paper: On the Brno Biennial and Education*. Offset printing, saddle-stitching with cover, page size 296 × 216 mm, 72 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Off-White Paper: Exhibition." Sulki and Min. 2014. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/off-white-paper-publication/.)

Figure 25A. Stills from *The Book of Chances*. Computer-generated video loop, duration unlimited. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "The Book of Chances." Sulki and Min. 2011. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/the-book-of-chances/.)

Figure 25B. Stills from *The Book of Chances, Revised Edition*. Computer-generated video loop, duration unlimited. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "The Book of Chances, Revised Edition." Sulki and Min. 2013. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/the-book-of-chances-revised-edition/.)

Figure 25C. Stills from *The Book of Chances, 3rd Edition*. Computer-generated video loop, duration unlimited. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "The Book of Chances, 3rd Edition." Sulki and Min. 2016. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/the-book-of-chances-3rd-edition/.)

Figure 26. *Really?*, solo exhibition by Sulki Choi at Space Hamilton, 16 April–6 May 2010. Photos by Kim Sang-Tae (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Really?" Sulki and Min. 2010. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/really/.)
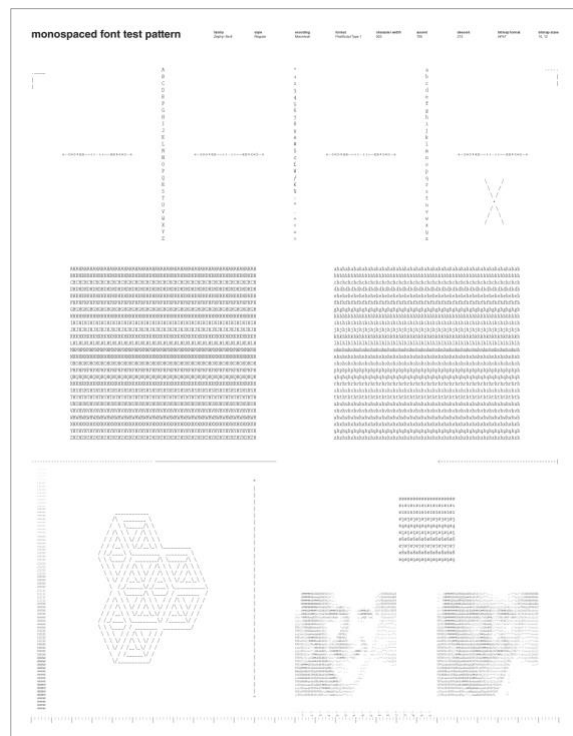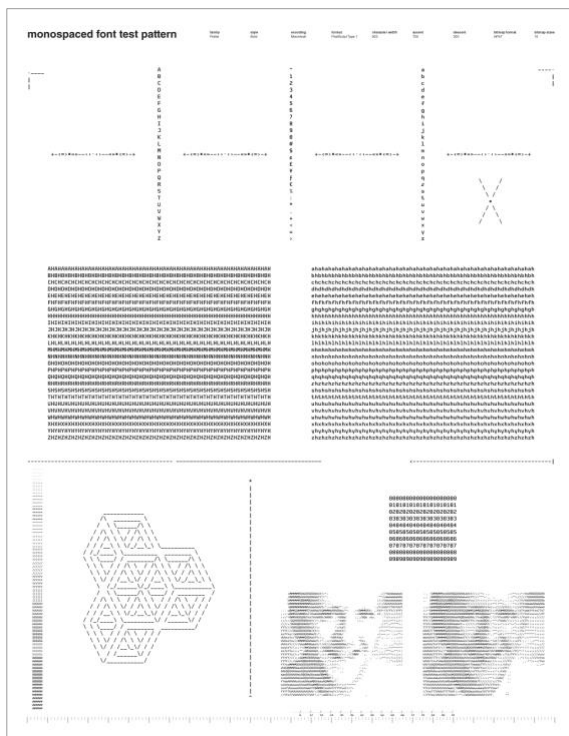
Figure 27. Selected posters from *Monospaced Font Test Patterns* by Choi Sung Min. Digital printing, 711 × 914 mm each. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Monospaced Font Test Patterns." Sulki and Min. 2002. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/monospaced-font-test-patterns/.)

The earlier mentioned essay Vertical Reading uses a systematic reading of the spreadsheet-like information from Roma Publication's website to uncover otherwise unnoticed information that became the final contents of the essay contribution by Min Choi. The second work, Off-White Paper: On the Brno Biennial and Education (Off-White Paper for short) is a booklet and exhibition response Sulki and Min created as part of the Brno Biennale 2014, a well-known graphic design biennale in Czech Republic since 1963, when they were invited to make an accompanying reader for the exhibition which was focused on schools and education that year. This work presents a series of visual "statistical charts" attempting a "quantitative analysis of the history of the Biennial" (Sulki and Min 2020q) through the format of a roughly 25-minute single-channel video and a simple booklet. These visual charts showed, for example, the nationalities, age, country and school of study, etc., of the profiles of designers who were involved as exhibitors in the biennale in the last five editions from 2014. The third example, Book of Chances, is an independent work that Sulki and Min originally shown at the

exhibition Vitality: Young Design Korea in 2011 that was held in Italy.[139] This work is a video loop that reconstructs Sulki and Min's past print works by using a software-system to mix and rearrange the individual C-M-Y-K channels of each work in different combinations to create an almost infinitely permutating "book of chances". Lastly, Sulki Choi's solo exhibition Really? was one that explores her "long-time curiosities about the diagram" and pushes the idea of diagram from being an abstracted form of reality to something that is closer to reality itself. This effectively makes any of such self-referential and self-reflexive diagrams—that were exhibited as artworks—useless other than for the purpose of representing itself within a three-dimensional space.

Unlike the two groups of examples earlier, the consistency of this set of works lies in their underlying approach rather than their subject matter or visual quality—one that can be compared to an investigative attitude towards "systems and information". In these works, Sulki and Min devised simple "systems" as tools to generate content or solutions; they designed methodical or "systematic" (sometimes systematically non-systematic) ways to approach a particular brief—whether self-initiated or commissioned—that also became or directly informed the resulting outcomes. This is not only seen in designed works but also in written texts, like in the case of Vertical Reading, where the sensibility and attitude towards examining the visual organisation of information directly informed its contents. Likewise, The Book of Chances was also a result of this approach where Sulki and Min devised a way to remix their past works to form endless permutating accidental possibilities. This extended the work from being one that simply showcases their past works[140] to one that more intentionally communicates ideas around their practice, which they pointed out as an "enduring interest in the relationships between systems and accidents" (Sulki and Min 2020r).

In these works, Sulki and Min are not overly concerned about whether these contents need to always make sense, appear a certain way, or be clearly interpreted (Sulki and Min 2014). The focus is not on finding measurable or clear findings (e.g., Off-White Paper) or on carefully planned or directed outcomes (e.g., Vertical Reading or The Book of Chances), but to find or realise interesting perspectives or insights through these "systems" of looking. What is apparently consistent in these works are their reflexive application of "interest as method".[141] Nonetheless, it is also this interest and sensibility towards the nature and organisation of information and systems of representation that resulted in the unconventional project objectives: to study unmentioned statistics behind the 26th Brno Biennial, to visually read and write an essay on Roma Publications' website, or to create an exhibition that is solely based on exploring diagrammatic representations of itself. The ideas underpinning these works—as much as they may rest on the themes and subjects the works directly address—lie also in how Sulki and Min approached them. These works therefore demonstrate Sulki and Min's interests consistently explored through analogous approaches across different projects.

Altogether, these three sets of works discussed show how Sulki and Min consistently maintain and develop specific lines of inquiry across their practice through concepts (e.g., "infra-flat"), visual gestures (e.g., in Home, Earth Now, Us and Them, etc.), and approaches (e.g., in Vertical Reading, The Book of Chances). This span across publications, artworks, exhibitions, and writings—whether commissioned or independently completed. From this, Sulki and Min's overall practice compares to that of an "auteur", but one specific to the field of "design research" since they do it symbiotically through design and writing. More importantly, Sulki and Min acknowledges and develops their *entire* practice—as opposed to independent or individual projects— as part of graphic design discourse; the way they run their studio and approach their projects directly comments on or interacts with ideas on the role and purpose of graphic design. Their practice does not only engage other ideas *through* the discipline of graphic design but also ideas *about* the discipline. Most of the time this is embodied in their works and writings but there are also occasions where they overtly address such ideas. The

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[139] Other iterations of this—one called a "revised edition" and the other the "3rd edition"—was later also exhibited in two places, one in Artists' Portfolio at Savina of Contemporary Art in 2013, the other in Shifting Objectives at M+, Hong Kong in 2017.

[140] This was likely partly the purpose of the several iterations of The Book of Chances given that two of the exhibitions were focused on showcasing, one for "portfolios" and the other for "young designers".

[141] This idea of "interest as method" is possible, and particularly so in this case because "systems" can both be a subject of interest (i.e., a noun) or a mode of exploration (i.e., a verb) in the field of graphic design.

last subsection that follows highlight such cases by discussing examples of their curatorial involvements, writings, and exhibitions that clearly forms an expanded graphic design practice. This last point on how Sulki and Min's practice contributes to graphic design research—through engaging and shaping the role and purpose of graphic design—draws a close to this section.

5.4.3   Expanded practices

When asked a question about graphic design and society, Sulki and Min responded that since graphic design is part of society, "any change in graphic design [would] be a change in society too" (Choi and Offermanns 2016). They argue that limiting changes in society only to things that deal with "ecological and political awareness" is "missing the point" because small changes in the way graphic design is practised could very much affect or inform social dynamics or interactions. However, this position also means that anyone who is involved in graphic design is to some extent, "changing" society. The difference here then lies in intentionality, on whether the practice is directed critically towards thinking about how the discipline affects society, rather than simply adopting immediately profitable models or making works around trends. Such an intentionality is already hinted at through Sulki and Min's broad-ranging engagements with contents and discourse. This final subsection draws a close to how Sulki and Min's practice contributes to graphic design research by discussing the broader involvements they adopt and the larger intentions behind them. This is again done in three brief parts. The first part look at a small body of work they completed as artist-designer collective SMSM and highlights possible intentions of this collective in engaging with societal concerns. The second part discusses how Sulki and Min approach the overall documentation and communication of their practice as a way of "engaging" graphic design discourse. The last part simply reiterates and adds unto, as a whole, the broader curatorial involvements or written ideas by Sulki and Min discussed thus far. Together, these points highlight how Sulki and Min maintain an expanded practice that directly engages and question the role and purpose of graphic design.

The collective SMSM, through their small body of artworks, installations, and publications, have produced "criticism on design related to the 'well-being' lifestyle" (Bo et al. 2012, 15). Some examples include installation-based works Ideal Dining Tables (2012) (fig. 28) and Energy! (2011) (fig. 29*A* and *B*), and a series of works related to Dr Morton Walker's ideas in *The Power of Color* book, which include a site- and device-specific video The Power of Color 7017 (2017) (fig. 30) and a site-specific mural installation simply titled The Power of Color (2009) (fig. 31). These projects consider the role of graphic design, or more broadly, visual culture, in society by thinking about their connection to the promotion of social myths, with a witty balance between humour and criticality.

Figure 28. SMSM, *Ideal Dining Table*. *Above*: Exhibition view, *below left*: Ideal Dining Table for the Designer Mr. K, *below right*: Ideal Dining Table for the Designer Ms. R. Mixed media, 120 × 85 × 73 cm each. Photos by Nam Kiyong. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Ideal Dining Tables." Sulki and Min. 2012. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/ideal-dining-tables/.)

Figure 29A. SMSM, *Energy!*. Exhibited in the "Named" section of Gwangju Design Biennale 2011. Photos by Kim Sang-Tae. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Energy!" Sulki and Min. 2011. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/energy/.)

Figure 29*B*. Collection of energy drinks in *Energy!* exhibition. Photo by Kim Sang-tae. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Energy!" Sulki and Min. 2011. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/energy/.)

The two works produced under "The Power of Color" are public installations that simply display pure colour (see fig. 30 and 31)—The Power of Color mural was installed and shown in a health centre from 2009 to 2010 and The Power of Color 7017 video was shown on a large-scale screen display on a building façade that measures 29 by 7.7 metres. Both of these works optimistically embrace the belief or desire that the viewing of colours does create a physiological impact despite knowing the possibly contentious credibility of that theory. It speaks about and therefore opens up for dialogue the same kind of, sometimes equally contentious, belief on how art has a positive effect on society (Sulki and Min 2020s). In the work Ideal Dining Tables, which consists two parts titled Ideal Dining Table for the Designer Mr. K and Ideal Dining Table for the designer Ms. R, SMSM imagined and created plastic food replicas that reflect the generally "recommended" ideal diets based on the profiles of two designers whose identities were left anonymous. These food replicas, permanently fixed on two dining tables as what Sulki and Min described as "custom-made furniture", were created to visually and symbolically realise the "ideal" diets for "Mr. K" and "Ms. R" that, according to Sulki and Min, are not easy to "put into practice or sustained in the real lives of designers". By pretending to be fulfilling the otherwise unattainable standards, these plastic replicas also confuse the user when differentiating between these "ideal" dishes and their own food. This could be a critique towards what Sulki and Min describes as our "contemporary obsession with health and food"; they also described it as a genuine but futile attempt at "narrowing the gap" between ideals determined by society and the "exhausting lives of designers" (Sulki and Min 2020t). In the other work Energy!, the duo explored the visual language and mythology of energy drinks—which are popular in Korea—by mixing all the 77 different drinks they collected on the way when travelling from Seoul to Gwangju and presented them as a "Super Hybrid Energy Drink" for exhibition-goers to sample during the exhibition at Gwangju Design Biennale 2011. The collection of drinks with their bottle packaging were also arranged in various sequences based on popularity, price, calories, etc., as part of the installation work (see fig. 29*B*). A part of this work comments on "how irrational expectations could be created by design", both within this installation and also in the wider context of health and consumption (Sulki and Min 2020u). In all of these works by SMSM, there is the constant awareness of design's already interwoven relationship with issues of society. Still, there is an intention to further reveal these interwoven relationships to the general public, and in the above cases, on how certain myths and expectations are perpetuated through design (e.g., in Energy!), how design can (hope to) contribute to our well-being (e.g., in The Power of Color), or the tensions between design labour and societal ideals (e.g., in Ideal Dining Tables).

Figure 30. SMSM, *The Power of Color 7017*. Site- and device-specific video, 5 minutes 51 seconds. Presented in Seoullo Media Canvas Opening Exhibition, organized by Seoul Metropolitan Government, Manri-dong Square, 21 September–20 December 2017. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "The Power of Color 7017." Sulki and Min. 2017. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/the-power-of-color-2017/.)

Figure 31. SMSM, *The Power of Color*, Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art Handspan Gallery Health Center Project, Ansan Danwon Health Center, 2009–2010. Photos by Kim Sang-Tae. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "The Power of Color: Mural." Sulki and Min. 2009. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/the-power-of-color-mural/.)

On top of making works, Sulki and Min are also diligent archivists and communicators of their practice. This happens through organised documentation and frequently speaking about their work through various platforms, evident from the wide range of sources referenced in this case study so far (e.g., books, lectures, essays, interviews, etc.). Although such efforts may also be motivated by intentions to promote or market a graphic design business, Sulki and Min's efforts in this area self-evidently reveals a deeper intention to engage broader ideas within and extending from their practice. As seen in their various engagements, Sulki and Min's work intently builds a body of connected ideas and contents about itself, the field it occupies, and the issues it addresses or explores. For Sulki and Min, although documenting and communicating their practice definitely helps sustain their practice commercially, that is likely not the primary or only motivation. What is of

importance is how these efforts are directed towards building or contributing to discourse.[142] The following examples elaborate on some of the approaches and outcomes of Sulki and Min's archival and documentation of their practice.

The way Sulki and Min documents and articulates their practice occurs through a wide range of approaches and formats. In their website www.sulki-min.com, there is a page titled "Notes on this Website" that reads more like an editorial note in the colophon of a book. This note positions the website and provides technical information on the website's contents, for example, information regarding how the images published on the site might contain reproductions of other people's work, or how they approach the formatting or translation of the titles for each work entry. This subtly frames the website as an archive of information as much as a repository of works; users of the website are exposed to broader practices and ideas extending from their works. Such a positioning is a clear emphasis when contents on the site are made accessible through a functional navigational system that sorts their works into well-organised categories and sub- or cross-categories, additional links to related sources within each work, a well-documented bibliography of exhibitions and publications they were involved or mentioned in, and especially the consistently written descriptions for every work. In a lecture at Walker Art Center where they presented some of their works (Sulki and Min 2016a), there was an effort to organise and communicate work examples in a way that communicates broader ideas and positionings on graphic design instead of simply moving from one project to another like in a portfolio showcase. For example, there was a section titled "performative books" which included several of their book design examples completed across different years which uses relatively unusual design decisions to explore and incite behavioural and interactive responses from readers (e.g., earlier mentioned Ob.scene 1, Ob.scene 4, The Power of Color (book))—an idea Sulki and Min proposed in response to the often (over-)repeated "mantra" of a book's "materiality" (Sulki and Min 2016a).

Figure 32. Cover and page spreads of *Explained*, Korean (top) and English (bottom) editions. Offset printing, sewn paperback binding, 105 × 150 mm, 160 pages. (Reproduced by permission from Sulki and Min, "Explained." Sulki and Min. 2017. Accessed May 7, 2020. © 2020 by Sulki and Min. http://www.sulki-min.com/wp/explained/.)

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[142] In this sense, all graphic design practice that self-evidently engages broader ideas or issues are contributing to graphic design discourse. This again challenges the assumption that graphic design discourse is one that only exist through writings and not practice.

Sulki and Min also produced Explained in 2017 (fig. 32), a book that contains only the written or verbal descriptions of over 200 of their works without any image references. As with how this book could be compared to a "monograph" of Sulki and Min's practice, the earlier mentioned Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513 (fig. 19) exhibition could also be considered a "retrospective" of their past works since Ephemera (a series of prints based on Sulki and Min's past works) forms the largest body of work in that exhibition. In these two instances, Sulki and Min documents and presents their practice with an additional layer of interpretation, whether through recontextualisation or direct manipulation. In Ephemera particularly, since the notion of Infra-flat—as a visual gesture—is directly applied to their past works, it is possible to consider what this might communicate about Sulki and Min's ideas or positioning of their practice. By presenting *yet* obscuring their works in what could be considered a "retrospective" survey, it possibly intents for its viewers to look at Sulki and Min's body of works, not for their graphic design—i.e., technical proficiency or visual characteristics—but at the ideas driving them, both literally (the notion of Infra-flat) and figuratively (other broader ideas underpinning their works). A similar intention is emphasised in Explained when Sulki and Min isolates and presents their works in text form, again without clear visual representation of their past works; such a gesture deliberately forces the reader to engage and consider the ideas underpinning their works instead of, or on top of, any aesthetic appreciation. Together, these examples show Sulki and Min as both the authors as well as active interpreters and communicators of their work. We see this in how they organised, communicated, and translated groups of related projects into specific ideas about graphic design like in the case of the lecture, how they recontextualised their body of work through Explained to emphasise or question the role language plays in graphic design practice, or how they reinterpreted their past body of works to take on extended meanings or ideas in Ephemera, where their past works become materials directly used for thinking about ideas related to graphic design.

There are also involvements of Sulki and Min that directly express opinions and ideas about concerns or issues of graphic design in more public settings through larger projects initiated by others. For example, Sulki Choi was involved in co-curating an exhibition The W Show: A List of Graphic Designers (2017) that addresses the prevalently male-centred graphic design discourse in Korea by building an ongoing archive of women graphic designers in Korea. Min Choi's involvement as a co-curator in both Graphic Design, 2005–2015, Seoul (2016) and Typojanchi 2013: Seoul International Typography Biennale (2013) brought together, in the former, graphic designers with "alternative" small-scale practices that gained high visibility and influence within design communities or related cultural fields (Choi et al. 2016) and in the latter, typographic works that "actively engage in the production and distribution of […] text[s]", where typography is examined as a form of literature in its own right (Typojanchi 2013). In curatorially directing these large exhibitions or biennales, Sulki and Min addresses specific interests or concerns in graphic design discourse and practice that is equally embedded and explored in their own practice—the lack of awareness and recognition of women designers in Korea in The W Show,[143] the contemporary phenomenon of small-scale alternative practices in Korea that has an equal significance in contributing to the field despite their relatively marginal nature, and typographic-driven practices or works that reflect the idea of "design or form as content". Other than these curatorial involvements, they are also part of literature around critical graphic design practices, for example, in their written contributions to *All Possible Futures* (Sueda 2014) and the project *Forms of Inquiry* (Kyes and Owens 2007) (both mentioned in Chapter 3). Together with the earlier examples in this subsection, they show Sulki and Min's engagement with discourse through an extended practice that explores or involves issues between design and society, documents and interpretively communicate their body of work, and broader activities like curating and writing that extends from graphic design.

As a whole then, this last section discussed three ways Sulki and Min's practice potentially contributes to discourses within graphic design and those extending from it. The first subsection (5.4.1) described the hybrid roles and formats they adopt part of their design practice and therefore show their adeptness with and intention to navigate the theoretical, historical, and professional contexts around their work. The second subsection (5.4.2) showed how they draw interconnected explorations and engagements with consistent set of ideas or

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[143] The lack of Asian women designers was also something Sulki Choi pointed out for their quantitative survey for Brno Biennale in their Off-White Paper project.

issues throughout their entire practice, both through design and related activities like writing, curating, research, etc., as a symbiotic whole. The last subsection (5.4.3) described Sulki and Min's broader involvements in projects that speak to a larger public and address ideas that are also explored in their practice or works. The result of these engagements produce contents that reveal or speak about specific ideas or issues they address as well as about graphic design as a broader subject and discipline in society. Sulki and Min's intentionality in contributing to broader discourse—which therefore positions their practice as a possible form of research—is further supported by their efforts in documenting and articulating their practice, alongside their curatorial involvements or contributions to key exhibitions or projects around graphic design.

5.5   Summary

Altogether, this case study focused on four main components of Sulki and Min's practice that are arranged in an order that progressively discuss how and why their practice can be considered critical and artistic as well as contributes as graphic design research. The ideas presented and discussed in these four subsections were led and supported by examples of Sulki and Min's works across various formats, both individually and as sets of related projects. At various points in the case study, the discussion of these examples were contextualised against specific characteristics mentioned in the third chapter which further show their relevance and application in real-world practice.

As a summary, key points are condensed here in list form, organised into four main areas based on the structure of the case study, which can be loosely be referred to as the (1) sensibilities and attitude, (2) model of practice and intentions, (3) research and authorship, and (4) role and agency in Sulki and Min's practice. Also, for clarity, the keywords identified earlier in chapter three—those describing the nature of critical and artistic practices—are italicised here whenever they appear.

Sensibility and attitude (section 5.1)

- Sulki and Min's practice critically and productively balance between approaches and sensibilities in both (or are more common to) "art" and "design", one distinct example of which is navigating between qualities of "clarity" and "obscurity". In this sense, their works are also often hard to categorise; commissioned designs may reflect *artistic* qualities and artworks may reflect ways and processes of thinking in design or vice versa.

- Obscurity, as an example of a quality or sensibility more commonly associated with art, can be realised through unexpected or unconventional design decisions and qualities of clarity through careful explanations and descriptions of processes and contexts.

- Clarity, as an example of a quality or sensibility more commonly associated with design, is not exclusive to works of design even when functionality is of concern. Similarly, obscurity is not exclusive to works of art even if they still embody an open-ended discursive quality. In other words, "obscurity" in design does not necessarily lead to arbitrary (and therefore meaningless) outcomes and how "clarity" in autonomous or artistic works do not only point towards a one-dimensional interpretation, although both of those outcomes are often the intentions of artworks and design respectively—i.e., artworks to be open-ended, designs to be purposed.

- Balancing sensibilities and characteristics in art and design reflect Sulki and Min's larger intention to alter or affect viewers' interactions or engagements with its form or contents as a way of drawing further attention to related subject matter or themes through design (in other words, to result in *para-functional* outcomes).

- Intentionally incorporating certain *artistic* qualities into graphic design works reflects Sulki and Min's *dissidence* towards general graphic design practices that often reinforce rather than challenge the status quo.

- This characteristic in Sulki and Min's practice reflects a kind of *multidimensional* criticality when there is critical awareness and deliberate exploration around the nature and assumptions of graphic

design, as much as towards the contents and subjects they may explore through graphic design.

Model of practice and intentions (section 5.2)

- Sulki and Min do not intentionally distinguish between commercial and non-commercial, commissioned and independent work; they approach both with as much experimentation or limitation as they would for either. With this, they challenge the needless distinction between graphic design works meant for "provocation" (i.e., experimentative, explorative) and that for "problem-solving" (i.e., functional, pragmatic).

- The kind of experimentation more commonly associated with "free" or "independent" work is what Sulki and Min want to directly integrate in general practice; they see their original site of practice as where critical explorations and interests could equally occur and develop. This reflects a kind of *marginality* when compared to the general field of graphic design, where commercially driven works are often less exploratory or experimental.

- A closely collaborative and consistently iterative process characterises Sulki and Min's projects, whether they are commissioned or independently completed. There is a synergistic relationship between the two; commission works can reflect free experimentation more commonly found in independent work and independent projects can tap on strictly defined ideas or systematic processes more commonly found commission-based projects, or vice versa. The two types of work also feed into each other. This describes how *autonomy* is developed and where it is found in their practice (i.e., not only in independent work).

Research and authorship (section 5.3)

- Sulki and Min's keen and committed interest in contents (i.e., related ideas, texts, or discourses) resulted in their participation in creating content. They shape, affect, or develop texts and contents as graphic designers in various ways through and alongside designing. Together, these reflect an integrated *authorship* where Sulki and Min author contents through design (e.g., typography, book design, etc.) and language (e.g., writing, editing, translating, etc.) as a symbiotic whole (i.e., designing form and text as content).

- Sulki and Min approach form-giving as opportunities for meaning-making (i.e., designing form as content), whether it is in translating, affecting, or embodying ideas. In these cases, the resulting contents or meanings that Sulki and Min explore or author lie both in the how it is designed and how the design communicates the information it holds; the graphic design can directly become the contents, directly inform or address a subject, or become the counterpoint for making sense of the information it holds.

- Sulki and Min approach writing as opportunities for meaning-making (i.e., designing texts as content), whether it is in writing text contributions or through editorial involvements. In these cases, the resulting contents or meanings that Sulki and Min explore or author lie in how the texts are written as much as what was written. Rather than treating language and writing as activities that supplement their works and practice, these became "materials" that Sulki and Min directly work with in their design practice. This way of working with texts is also sometimes interwoven into or alongside designed elements.

- Sulki and Min's approach towards designing form and texts as contents reveal how their ideas exist symbiotically across written texts and designed form and how they dexterously and purposefully engage with and produce contents in different ways. This allows their works to take on *epistemic* and *discursive* qualities; viewers can "dialogue" with and think through the ideas and contents embedded in their works, both through its form and text.

- The contents that Sulki and Min author through this process is also largely informed by or done in close or interdependent relationship to processes and understandings rooted in design and graphic communication; there is a reflexive relationship between the contents they author and the works they design. This forms the necessary foundation for a *research-driven* critical and artistic practice that better reflects a kind of research that happens through design and not alongside or part of design; it

contributes to the intellectual basis that allows design to be a reflective space for producing and thinking about ideas, theories, logics, and implications in and through practice.

- Again, such forms of authorship are not only exclusive to independent or commissioned work. It is present across different types of works, albeit in varying extents.

Role and agency (section 5.4)

- Sulki and Min often take up multiple or hybrid roles and have cross involvements within and across projects as designer-editors, artist-curators, writer-researchers, etc. Their ability to knowledgeably discuss or communicate across public, cultural, or academic settings reflect their adeptness with, or intention to navigate, the theoretical, historical, professional, etc., contexts around their work.

- The outcomes of these involvements—other than conventional graphic design formats—sometimes take the form of exhibitions, installations, talks, or published writing or research, which more directly and intentionally address ideas in public settings within specific discourses. The *discursive* nature of their works is further supported by the active engagements and involvements they have in these areas. This also reveals how their practice *mediates* between other fields of practice or knowledge where they work with, borrow from, or infiltrate into extended fields.

- Across Sulki and Min's practice, consistent set of interests, themes, or issues can be identified across different projects and many of them reveal attention towards broader issues in society and culture. This reflects Sulki and Min as auteurs who explore, draw, and develop consistent lines of inquiry across both commissioned and independent works and initiatives.

- These lines of inquiry are not only connected by or explored through predetermined concepts but also by and through formal design gestures or underlying processes or ways of thinking. In other words, for Sulki and Min, the starting point for exploring an idea need not be a fixed mental concept but can also be a design gesture (e.g., consistent graphic treatment) or a design process (e.g., a particular approach to reading information).

- As much as these explorations surface through engagement with graphic design, they also often directly address the field or discipline of graphic design (nature of graphic communication, history of typography, etc.). Contents resulting from these explorations are also sometimes not meant to be quantifiably measured or understood; they provide alternative perspectives and insights not possible through conventional (i.e., non-designerly) approaches.

- Sulki and Min see graphic design as something that is necessarily part of and therefore affects society. Their broader involvements and engagements outside of traditional graphic design projects (through exhibitions, curatorial involvements, making of artworks, etc.) reflects an expanded practice that directly engages and addresses the role and purpose of graphic design in society (e.g., through the collective SMSM).

- As diligent and intentional archivist and communicators of their practice, Sulki and Min's efforts in this area take on a variety of approaches and outcomes. They are active interpreters and communicators of their practice when they subject their works to (re)contextualisation, where for example, their past works become material they use to create new works and to explore and communicate ideas related to graphic design.

- Sulki and Min's active involvements in curatorial roles and large-scale exhibitions—most of them thematically related to the phenomena of critical and artistic graphic design practices—allow them to address specific interests or concerns in graphic design discourse and practice that is equally embedded and explored in their practice.

Altogether, these key points across the four sections showed how Sulki and Min navigate boundaries of design, operate across different professional settings and opportunities, commit themselves to content production, and contribute to research through engaging with discourse through design practice. All of these responded to the initial case study question that asked how Sulki and Min's practice is "critical and artistic", how they approach and develop such a practice, and how this practice contributes to the kind of graphic design research described

in chapter two. Following this, the final chapter reasserts some overall key findings and their broader significance for general graphic design practice as well as present proposed directions for further research.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Key findings

The main question set out at the beginning of this dissertation was: what are critical and artistic graphic design practices and how might they contribute to graphic design research? There were also other related secondary questions: What are the other qualities and characteristics of graphic design beyond it being a commercially driven or largely pragmatic activity? What is the relationship between research and graphic design? What is the role of practice in graphic design research?

These questions were motivated by my interest in critical and artistic graphic design practice as well as a reasonable premonition that the value of such practices and graphic design research lies beyond aesthetic inclinations or highly pragmatic applications. Building on the theoretical positions from chapter two and three, the in-depth case study of Sulki and Min's practice not only demonstrated and substantiated this postulation but also revealed further specific and generalisable insights on how critical and artistic graphic design practices could be developed and studied, therefore answering the questions above and provided some directions for further research. Here, I list them as a synthesis of key findings from this research. For brevity, "critical and artistic" are abbreviated as "c./a." below. When practitioners or researchers are mentioned, they are mentioned in reference to critical and artistic graphic design practice (i.e., practitioners or researchers of c./a. practices).

- C./a. graphic design practices are important to the field of graphic design and are not unnecessarily "experimental" practices that fall outside of the definition or activities of graphic design; they should be understood as equally significant practices that contributes to the broad spectrum of design despite not falling within dominant definitions or classifications of graphic design.

- The larger value of c./a. graphic design practices lies in their parafunctional ability to engage viewers in critically thinking about our relationship with the man-made environment and therefore making better and more informed decisions with regards to how we create, consume, interact, learn, etc., through and in relation to graphic design and communication.

- The field of c./a. graphic design practices contain rich opportunities for further developing or studying graphic design research in a way that recognise and emphasise criticality, the inherent nature of design (e.g., artistic, messy, open-ended), and practice as an important component in research—all of which are highlighted as key focuses and developments in design research discourse. Such practices has the potential to provide the intellectual basis for "research through design".

- Because c./a. practices are quite complex and multifaceted in nature, looking at single outcomes or individual types of outcomes from such practice may not necessarily reveal how such practices engages with broader issues or interest. It is important to look at these *practices* as a body of works with interconnected works and ideas and not "portfolios" consisting independent pieces of work.

- Outcomes of c./a. practices contribute as research through its discursive and epistemic nature, supported by contextual content or information; they engage viewers in dialogically thinking through certain points of interest or discussion (that extends from design). This means that when studying c./a. graphic design practices, it is important to purposefully and actively read or interpret outputs in relation to any contextual information or knowledge.

- C./a. graphic design practices need not only occur only through independent projects or initiatives but could and should also be developed through commissions and collaborations. For practitioners, there is a need to intentionally find opportunities within such spaces for imbuing forms of criticality whether in form or contents. When studying or evaluating such practices, there is a need to consider how or whether this is taken into account. Doing so ensures that such practices do not eventually become isolated from the profession and lose its purpose or autonomy in shaping graphic design practice.

- C./a. graphic design practices (should) contain a kind of self-reflexivity that—as it explores issues and interests stemming from the discipline—examines graphic design's role and purpose in society. Researchers studying such practices should consider what might be communicated self-reflexively

through a body of work. Early practitioners could pay attention to incorporate or embed such introspection in and across their works, supplemented with textual explanations when needed.

- C./a. practices may contain characteristics that may seem contradictory or counterintuitive to commonly accepted principles in design (e.g., the element of "obscurity" in Sulki and Min's works) for various reasons tied to its parafunctional nature. When studying other examples of such practices, it is useful to identify the other ways this is articulated or represented. This will further strengthen our understanding of how these practices are "artistic" in their own ways.

- Research and meaning making in c./a. graphic design practices can and should happen through design and form as much as through texts, often a combination of both. Formal gestures, experiments, developments, etc., could be a way to explore and develop ideas and vice versa. When studying such practices, equal attention needs to be given to reading or analysing both form and texts, design and content. "Form" also refers to the way a text is written or designed.

- It is not uncommon for practitioners to take on broader involvements or hybrid roles in c./a. graphic design practices, in writing, editing, curating, production, publishing, etc. These may provide more immediate avenues for overtly expressing ideas and intentions about graphic design or individual practice. Outputs from such involvements will also be contextually useful for understanding and interpreting a certain practitioner's body of works. Early practitioners can consider how to shape these involvements as part of or alongside their practices.

- When practitioners of c./a. graphic design practice diligently and consistently archive and communicate their body of works in a publicly accessible manner, the outcomes become useful resources for the public to engage with their "research" (i.e., what was done in the case study of Sulki and Min's practice). This is a productive way to further our understanding and learning of such practices and what they contribute to in graphic design discourse. Researchers can put together simple repositories of such practices, their outcomes, and any contextual pieces of information for developing other studies.

The next section highlights the broader relevance of this research by drawing connections to other relevant ideas or subject areas that this research would have otherwise explored if not for its limited scope as potential departure points for further research.

6.2 Broader relevance and directions for further research

The most challenging aspect of this research is not only in establishing the connection between graphic design research and critical and artistic graphic design practice, but to do so for two fields or areas of practice that are still to some extent uncertain, where clear definitions of both are difficult to resolve given the wide and sometimes contrasting range of voices and opinions. Because of this, the intention of this research is not only to argue how critical and artistic graphic design practices can and should be forms of graphic design research but also to bring further clarity to each of these individual fields. As much as the focus of this research is on critical and artistic graphic design practice, it is also on graphic design research, and this is where the broader relevance of this research lies. Understanding how critical and artistic graphic design practices can be forms of graphic design research allows us to learn more about what "research" in graphic design is or can mean.

Specifically, through this research, three interconnected areas of focus—on practice, criticality, and the artistic (hence critical and artistic practice)—underpin the kind of graphic design research articulated and argued for in this dissertation. From here, I briefly state broader ideas that relate to these three areas as a way of outlining the broader relevance of this research, as well as the possible directions for further research into critical and artistic graphic design practice or graphic design research. These are ideas or literature that either surfaced more

recently (nearing the completion of this research),[144] or they lie further outside of discourses around graphic design and did not make it into this dissertation.[145] They are nevertheless important to the development of the ideas mentioned thus far and will better serve lines of inquiry extended from this research.

The space between design and art as one that is productive for developing design-related knowledge and research is receiving more attention both in academia and in professional practice. In 2019, a research compendium titled *Undesign: Critical Practices at the Intersection of Art and Design* was published by Routledge. The contributions focused on design practices and conceptual approaches that "challenge the traditional notion that design should emphasise its utility over aesthetic or other non-functional considerations" (Coombs et al. 2019, back cover) and explored the notion of "undesigning" our designed world to rethink needed trajectories in design, particularly in relation to art. In another recent book *Design by Accident: For a New History of Design*, curator and researcher Alexandra Midal (2019) explored a counter-history or new historiography of design by re-examining and re-evaluating the canons of design history and theory in search for a history of design in its own terms rather than one sandwiched between architecture and fine art. In this search, she considered the artistic leanings and radical origins of design practice as a key component of this new history as well as to reassert design as an autonomous field. Such an acknowledgement provides a better historical foundation for thinking about critical and artistic graphic design practice as one that is not "marginal" in design practice, but central to its formation as an autonomous discipline.

To explore further possibilities in clarifying or expanding on this productive space, it is useful to look to the adjacent field of "artistic research", an area of interest and field of practice that shared certain origins with design research but has departed to embrace notions of research that are more exploratory and open-ended in nature. Contributions from key works in the field from authors like Graeme Sullivan, Janneke Wesseling, Henk Borgdorff, James Elkin, Mika Hannula et al., Danny Butt, etc.,[146] are useful references to think about the necessary foundations for a critical and artistic practice specific to the field of design. The space between "design research" and "artistic research" would naturally be beneficial for rethinking the kind of research that falls within the productive space between art and design, especially considering the current limitations in design research discourse. In this sense, it is useful to consider "artistic research" as a field that may contribute further to the foundational theory (as put forth by Galle) of critical and artistic graphic design practice.

To further support this, ideas from theorist and researcher Irit Rogoff on what she refers to as "new" or "contemporary" research forms an interesting parallel. She described this as a form of research that neither belongs to the realm of "universally acknowledged formal learning" (i.e., institution-based or recognised scholarship) or "pure self-expression" (i.e., entirely isolated experiences and pursuits) and especially not the former because of how they often have "instrumentalist [and] pragmatic ends in order to have reasons for expansion and variety [for] satisfy[ing] public sector demands […]" (Rogoff 2018, 51). With this, Rogoff proposed to look at "new forms of [hybrid and imaginative] research in the art world" that may provide ways of "exiting the older formations of knowledge" and to move into "new models of research" that considers the wide range of different artistic practices. With Rogoff's call for a "new" research, the idea of looking into the

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[144] The continual publication of titles around these topics also validates these areas of research as ones that are important or of interest in the field of design.

[145] Ideas on criticality, the artistic, and of practice in research explored in this dissertation were mainly kept to voices around and within the field of design or graphic design. This was needed to maintain a reasonable and manageable research focus given the fragmentary state of literature around the subject.

[146] I briefly state the key contributions of these authors: Sullivan provided frameworks to consider, design, and develop art practices as research (2005). Elkins discussed ideas for structuring art-based doctorates (2009). Borgdorff discussed criteria for assessing artistic research in the context of academic research (2012). Hannula et al. presented suitable methods and methodologies for artistic research (2014). Wesseling described the workings of artistic research, on how sensory perception and reception results in the exchange of meaning and transform actions (2016). Butt presented how the role of artistic research would displace the role of science as the organising paradigm for knowledge (2017).

"artistic" realms for design research does not seem too unusual a proposition and there is much to draw from in such discourses for the field of critical and artistic graphic design practice.

Rogoff's notion of research is also closely connected to her ideas on criticality, which leads to the other area of focus—criticality in graphic design research. Specifically, Rogoff's idea of an "embodied criticality"—which she distinguishes from "criticism" and "critique" [147]—well describes the kind of criticality articulated in this dissertation for graphic design. She puts it this way:

> Criticality is […] a recognition that we may be fully armed with theoretical knowledge, we may be capable of the most sophisticated modes of analysis but we nevertheless are also living out the very conditions we are trying to analyse and come to terms with (Rogoff 2006).

This aligns with the kind of criticality in graphic design practice where the critical approach does not act as a tool one uses to analyse other subjects or issues as if these are external to oneself, but also produced by acknowledging these subjects and issues as conditions and limitations the designer has to work with(in). Criticality in graphic design practice and research is not only present in the outward examination and analysis of related subjects or contents, but also in an inward examination and awareness of foundations and histories of design. This overlap between Rogoff's notion of criticality and that of critical and artistic graphic design practice is one worth exploring further, particularly also because Rogoff's description of criticality is, in fact, a call to remove the false separation we have assigned to theory and practice, to thinking and acting, to that which is being studied and those who are doing the studying.[148] At this point, it is also useful to mention, in passing, an early definition of "critical theory" by Max Horkheimer (2002), where he distinguished and pushed for over what he calls traditional theory—the former rooted in practice and the latter is what alienates theory and knowledge from value and action (208). He asserted the thinker's responsibility as one that is to do with changing society as a whole and not in a "fragmentary fashion", that is, treating thinking as a fixed vocation separated from doing, which he regards as a betrayal of the "very essence of thought" (242).[149]

This position on emphasising the role and importance of practice is shared by and underpins several other related efforts in studying and developing practice in design as avenues of and for research, like in recently published titles *Politics of Things: A Critical Approach through Design* (Christensen and Conradi 2019), *Practice-based Design Research* (Vaughan 2019), and *Making Design Theory* (Redstöm 2017). Editors of *Politics of Things*—one of the recent publications from BIRD on design research—described this volume as a "practice-based design theory project", where there is a focus on designers' practice and perspectives presented in tandem with theoretical reflections based on these ground-up explorations. *Practice-based Design Research* pulled together contributions that examined the relevance of such practice-based efforts in contexts of PhD programs in design. *Making Design Theory*, written by Johan Redström, proposes that theory is and can be something made in and through design, or what he calls practice-driven research. Although these works may differ in approaches and content, they all present rich fields of discussion that are not only beneficial for

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[147] Rogoff distinguishes "criticality" from "criticism" and "critique"—the former is a form of fault finding and act of exercising judgement and the latter is the examining of underlying assumptions behind what may appear as convincing logic, both of which positions the researcher-subject as someone who is outside of the issue that is subjected to criticism or critique.

[148] She described it as such—that "it is not possible to stand outside of the problematic and objectify it as a disinterested mode of learning" (Rogoff 2006).

[149] The connection between critical design and this tradition of critical theory is well considered and explored by Brad Haylock in his recent article What is Critical Design? (2019). It is useful to note that his view that critical design should tap on literature in critical theory and the Frankfurt School (a view also shared by Laranjo) is something Dunne and Raby intentionally avoided. Although I agree that this field of literature should not be entirely omitted from efforts in thinking about and developing critical design practices, there is also the danger of over relying on this area as the major foundation for such practices (the limitation of which was revealed in chapter three with regards to Laranjo's work). Critical theory and critical design practices are fundamentally different in nature even if they share the same intentions and motivations. One example is how critical theory would logically and reasonably avoid qualities of subjectivity and ambiguity in its communication, as any critical form of writing would, and this contrastingly differs from the kind of communication and discourse that occurs through critical design practices. Seen this way, critical design practices can and should be informed by critical theory discourse but should not solely rely on them as the only foundational theory.

thinking about the role of practice in design research but also how such practices can be critically directed to re-examine the nature of research in design and vice versa.

From these broader connections, we see that the three areas of focus underpinning graphic design research—on practice, criticality, and the artistic—are interconnected areas that build on each other. It is not possible, for example, to pursue criticality in graphic design without involving practice, to pursue the kind of graphic design research posited in this dissertation while ignoring equivalent developments in the artistic fields, or to pursue practice-based design research without considering how design works critically and artistically.

Other than these theoretical connections, it is equally constructive to build on the ideas in this dissertation by doing in-depth studies on other practices that might be also considered critical and artistic, particularly those that fall outside dominant discussions but yet reveal themselves to be valuable and rich in information and insights. This dissertation's focus on a practice primarily based in East Asia is an effort in that direction and there are likely more of such practices when researchers consider non-Western or Eurocentric examples that may be documented or discussed in non-English languages.

Through the case study in this dissertation, we saw how a single case study advantageously allow for a rich portrayal of insights and understandings interpreted within a defined context, which is crucial for the elusive field of critical and artistic graphic design practice that has more theoretical and opinion-driven writings (that focus on what such practices are) rather than close investigations and descriptions of actual practices (that focus on how such practices work).

Qualitative case studies, as a way of researching, also contrasts scientific methods of or approaches to research and has an equally important role in the pursuit of universally relevant understanding.[150] Recognising the importance of doing in-depth case studies in the field of critical and artistic graphic design practice is a not only significant step towards understanding such practices but also reaffirming their value—i.e., the value of alternative ways of research—in the broader design field, particularly for graphic design research. The case study in this dissertation gave insight into the uniqueness[151] of a "particular" practice and therefore communicated critical and artistic graphic design practices as practices that are valuable for that reason—their uniqueness. Critical and artistic graphic design practices are—in fact, like most design practices—practices that cannot be formularised or reduced to unidimensional approaches, outcomes, or intentions.

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[150] This does not mean that case studies are not useful for scientific research.

[151] Simon further explained that "in our search for general laws, we not only lose sight of the uniqueness and humanity of individuals, but reduce them in the process, failing to present their experience in any 'real' sense" (2014, 467). In the case of this study, the uniqueness lies in *how* Sulki and Min approach general concepts like creating meaning through form, embracing subjectivity in communication, etc., in relation to specific subject matter and interests, rather than the general concepts themselves.

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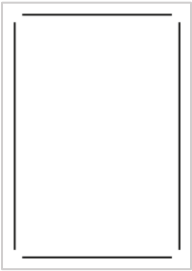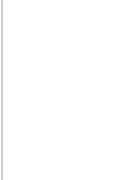
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8. APPENDIX: SELECTED WORKS OF SULKI AND MIN

All information in the table below is retrieved and compiled from their website: https://www.sulki-min.com/wp/. The selected thumbnail image(s) that accompany each entry is/are only representational; their inclusion aids identification and navigation.

Title	Information	Description
Obscene 1 (2011)	Kim Haeju, Kim Namsoo, Kim Seonghee, and Seo Hyun-Suk, eds., Ob.scene, no. 1, Specter Press, 2011. Offset printing, sewn paperback binding, page size 200 × 285 mm, 154 pp. ISSN 2234-5108. Text in Korean. Out of print.	Ob.scene is a performing arts journal focused on the "things out of the stage." The text, images, and notes of each article are separated from each other and regrouped into different sections (and linked by graphic marks), as a way to force the reader to "perform" the reading. The front cover is left blank, as a luxurious — obscene? — gesture of commercial indifference on one hand, and as a reference to the interest of the magazine (off-stage) on the other.
Ob.scene 2 (2012)	Kim Namsoo, Kim Seonghee, and Seo Hyun-Suk, eds., Ob.scene, no. 2, Specter Press, 2012. Offset printing, paperback binding, page size 140 × 222 mm, 224 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. ISSN 2234-5108. Text in Korean.	The loose theme of Ob.scene, no. 2 is "copper mirror," which is acknowledged in the pages playing with symmetries and reflection. The blank front cover is continued from the first issue as a unifying element.
Ob.scene 3 (2014)	Pahng Haejin and Hyun Seewon, eds., Ob.scene, no. 3, "Ob.scene/Other.scenes," Specter Press, 2014. Offset printing and silkscreen (cover), paperback binding, page size 140 × 240 mm, 224 pp. Designed by Shin Shin. ISSN 2234-5108. Text in Korean.	The third issue reflects on the "voice," which has been neglected or excluded in the history of visual arts and their discourses — forced, as it were, to move out of the stage.
Ob.scene 4 (2015)	Seo Hyun-Suk, ed., Ob.scene, no. 4, Specter Press, 2015. Offset printing, sewn paperback binding, page size 120 × 182 mm, 304 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. ISSN 2234-5108. Text in Korean. Out of print.	The blank front cover is continued from the first issue as a unifying element. Ob.scene no. 4 was conceived with the theme of "walking in the city." The issue is solely composed of quotes from other sources. From Benjamin to K-pop songs, from Yi Sang to a Naver webtoon, the fragments of the borrowed texts and images pass by, intermingle, and clash with one another—just like pedestrians in the city. The elements on each spread are randomly rotated, providing an experience similar to walking with a compass (or a smartphone map application). The front cover flap opens to reveal a map of Montevideo, Uruguay: the closest city to the direct opposite of Seoul on the globe.

Ob.scene 5 (2016) 	Seo Hyun-Suk, Kim Seonghee, and Sulki and Min, Ob.scene, no. 5, 2016. Site-specific, mixed-media installation, dimensions undefined. Exhibited in Void, curated by Jeong Da-young and presented at National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, 12 October 2016–5 February 2017.	"Published" as part of the exhibition Void at the MMCA Seoul, the Ob.scene 5 is unfolded — performed — in the physical space rather than on printed pages. Instead of reading a book in hand, the reader is guided to visit the twenty "pages" set up on various spots in the museum, empathetically experiencing the space while listening to the prepared sound or gazing upon some unexpected installations. The reader is invited to create solitude moments for oneself in the busy museum and to meditate on the past memories still lingering around the site.
Ob.scene 6 (2016) 	Kim Seonghee and Seo Hyun-Suk, eds., Ob.scene, no. 6, Suwon: Specter Press, 2016. Published in conjunction with the exhibition Void, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. Offset printing, saddle-stitching, page size 297 × 420 mm, 24 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. ISSN 2234-5108. Text in Korean.	Ob.scene no. 6 is a printed response to the previous issue, which took the form of an installation-performance in a physical space. The text is a collage of quotes from other books, films, or songs. The sources range from Bataille and Bejamin to Barthes and Badiou, from Reich's musicology to Kim Jong-il's architectural theory, from Matsuo Bashō's seventeenth-century haiku to Baudelaire's nineteenth-century poem, from Lewis Carroll's nineteen-century novel to Borges's twentieth-century novel, and from Antonioni's twentieth-century film to Herzog's twenty-first-century documentary. The fragmentary texts and images grope for the meaning of the void, trying to imagine its impossible forms. If the text partially responds to the space of the museum, the incompletely mimetic typography partially responds to the text.
Ob.scene 7 (2017) 	Seo Dongjin, Seo Hyun-Suk, and Kim Seonghee, eds., Ob.scene, no. 7, "Ob.scene/Other.scenes," Suwon: Specter Press, 2017. Offset printing, paperback binding, page size 138 × 204 mm, 224 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. ISSN 2234-5108. Text in Korean.	The seventh issue commemorates three interrelated anniversaries: the 150th anniversary of Marx's Das Kapital, the 100th of Lenin's Bolshevik revolution, and the 50th of Debord's La société du spectacle. The pages presents a montage of quotations from various texts, films, videos, and songs, all somehow related to the three historic moments. The exterior follows the identity of the journal, the blank front cover. The interior typography attempts at a situationist practice of détournement, or a re-appropriation of it. The typeface, unusually sentimental and comically kitschy for the serious content (history!, struggle!, revolution!), is something widely used by amateurs (the "ones who love") for various purposes from fried chicken advertising to, indeed, revolutionary political flyers. A Korean equivalence of Comic Sans, it's probably the most hated typeface among the designers. But what do they know about the people?
Ob.scene 8 (2018) 	Kim Seonghee and Seo Hyun-Suk, eds., Ob.scene, no. 8, Workroom Specter, 2018. Offset printing, paperback binding, page size 90 × 125 mm, 496 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. With contributions by Kwak Yung Bin, Kim Eun-heui, Nam Seung-seok, Royce Ng, Vijay Prashad, Seo Hyun-Suk, Adachi Masao, Yoo Un-Seong, Igor Sevcuk, Lee Nara, Jon Jost, and Christopher Connery. ISSN 2234-5108. Text in Korean. 22,000 won.	The eighth issue explores the theme of May 1968. The small format was appropriated from Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung, the so-called "Little Red Book" that appeared as an important fetish object both in the Chinese Cultural Revolution and May 1968 events in Paris. The black pages refer to the Yugoslav Black Wave film movement, also discussed in the issue. While the blank front cover continues the visual identity of the journal, the spine of this issue shows, instead of text information, the joining hands of protesting students from May 1968 — a symbol of solidarity.
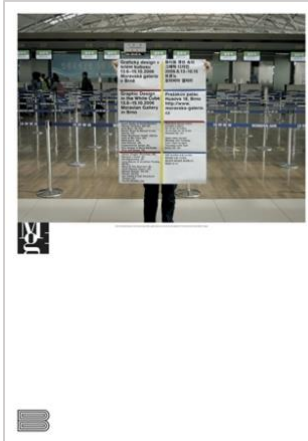
Graphic Design in the White Cube (2006) 	Poster for the exhibition Graphic Design in the White Cube, 22nd International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno, Moravian Gallery, 2006. Offset print, 1,000 × 1,414 mm. Exhibition curated by Peter Biľak.	We thought that the premise of the exhibition [commissioning the invited designers' posters to advertise the exhibition itself, and actually putting them out in the streets as well as showing them in a gallery] offered an interesting way to deal with the problematic situation of showing graphic design in a gallery. And we wanted with our contribution to push the deliberate conflation of the outside and inside, the real context of design work and the isolated place of presentation, a little further. We decided to make a poster for an expanded — "real" — audience: not only the pedestrians in Brno, but also some others that we can more directly reach — people in Seoul, Korea. We'd make printouts of a poster for the Brno exhibition, and put them in places in Seoul for a certain period. Our contribution to the exhibition itself would simply be a photograph of one of the posters on site: a kind of poster with a frame narrative. But where could we find the potential audience? It shouldn't be just anyone in Seoul — it would have been absurd to show the poster to those who couldn't afford an overseas trip, for example — but those who were actually planning or intending to visit the Czech Republic during summer. Recently, the Czech Republic has become a popular holiday destination for Koreans. Last year, there was a popular soap opera called Lovers in Prague, set partly in the Czech city — but not showing any real Czech life, the city providing just another "exotic" backdrop. There are some travel agencies specialized in Prague "package tour" programs, flourishing partly thanks to the success of the TV show. The offices of the agencies would be perfect for our posters. We started contacting them. At the same time, we began to consider the design of the poster. Although the poster's appearance itself wasn't a primary concern, it had to be designed anyway in order to be produced. For this job, we set up some additional constraints for ourselves. First, the poster should include the Korean translation of the given text. Secondly, it should have all of the information, not part of it, so the content of the poster would be identical to other posters for the same exhibition, and everything (except, perhaps, the logos) would be present in a single photograph in our final contribution. Finally, it would have to be "photogenic": all the information needed to be legible in the photograph as well as in the print (so the people in Brno would be able to read the text in our final poster). To achieve the legibility, the poster should probably be purely typographic, with the smallest type in the largest size possible. With these self-imposed constraints, we quickly made a sketch. We adopted neutral and objective typographic language, partly for functional reasons, but also to create some contrast with other seductive posters in travel agency offices. Then the first crisis came, as we hadn't received any positive answers from the travel agencies we had contacted until the last week before the deadline. Probably there was something wrong with our letters, or it was simply too strange a request to take seriously. We had to find alternative sites, and the Incheon International Airport came to our mind. We decided to go out to the airport a few hours before the departure of a Korean Airlines flight to Prague, and promote the exhibition by showing around our poster. The second crisis was economical. We originally planned to digital-print the poster in a large size, but the cost turned out too high for our budget. An alternative was to use our own black-and-white laser printer, which could produce only up to A3-size documents. We had to adjust our design so that the whole poster could be neatly divided into eight A3 tiles without disrupting the text. We actually liked the idea of structuring elements
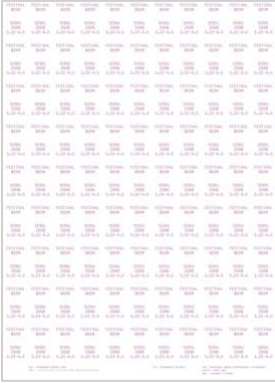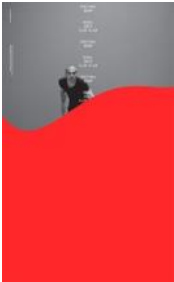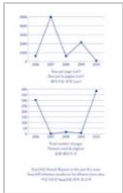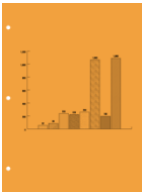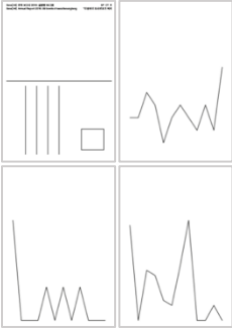
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by small production units — it seemed to provide a more solid rationale for the design.

So we made the print-outs, put them together with pretty, colorful masking tape, and arrived at the airport three hours before the departure of the KE935 flight to Prague. During the three hours, one of us was holding up the poster, and the other taking photographs. We came back to our studio with a load of photographs, and a few of them seemed acceptable in terms of sharpness and legibility.

Two ideas of organization competed until the last minute. One was to use multiple photographs to document various moments of the "performance"; the other was simply to show one exemplary picture in a very poster-like, almost monumental, way. We decided on the second because we liked the idea of a conventional-looking, but slightly odd, poster. The result resembles a typical exhibition poster: a single large picture of work and a white space reserved for the title and other important information. Except that the division in our poster isn't quite working that way. To us, it appears to disturb the relation between the work to be shown in a gallery and the work to promote it — in a way, a literal translation of the irony of the exhibition, Graphic Design in the White Cube.

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Functional Typography

(2006)

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Silkscreen on paper;

Functional typography on a Christian Dior Fahrenheit perfume package: 788 × 1,091mm;

Functional typography on a Hegaon PurePlus Organic Orange Juice 245 ml bottle: 788 × 1,091mm;

Functional typography on a Crabtree & Evelyin Summer Hill Hydrating Body Mist Spray 100 ml bottle: 1,091 × 788mm;

Functional typography on a power supply adapter for Macintosh G3 PowerBook: 788 × 1,091mm;

Functional typography on a Bic Mini gas lighter: 788 × 1,091mm.

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Functional Typography is a series of posters that show the typographic codes abstracted from the surface of products and packages such as an orange juice bottle or the bottom of a Bic Lighter. The codified letters and numbers, often printed or inscribed in a small size, must be important for manufacturers and suppliers, but we as consumers would never know what they actually mean. What is interesting for us about these codes is not just that they are completely incomprehensible. It is also the fact that they seem very meaningful, yet there's no way for us to know their meaning. They look very confident and determined, making it clear that they are not arbitrary signs. But their incomprehensibility provokes what the literary theorist Shawn Rosenheim calls "cryptographic imagination," which is an attitude towards language that acknowledges its opaqueness and slipperiness, endlessly inquiring what actually is behind visible surfaces.

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Technical Drawing (2014)	Technical Drawing series, 2014. C-print;	"This time, we wanted to try something different in terms of approach and effect: something less articulate and more atmospheric, something more difficult to rationalize or contextualize," say Sulki and Min about their series titled Technical Drawing. Certainly, the new work addresses similar themes that they have explored, and an obvious parallel can be drawn with the Functional Typography series from 2006: "It's about celebrating the invisible and the incomprehensible. But this time it's not as confident or optimistic, perhaps because our belief in the mystery of the world has weakened."
	Untitled-1-17, Untitled-1-2, Untitled-1-11, 150 × 180cm each.	
	Untitled-1-5, 270 × 180cm; Untitled-1-12, Untitled-1-20, 270 × 180 cm each.	"Clarifying is our business, obscuring is our pleasure" — this being their motto, Sulki and Min see the communication of given contents, messages, information or meaning as their primary task as graphic designers. But they are also aware of the sickening aspects in the contemporary compulsion to clarify everything, to reveal every last retreat and communicate the most intimate feelings: "Thanks to smartphones and constant connectivity, the world of the instantly knowable has arrived, making the legendary 'knowledge' impotent either as source of pleasure or power. Any piece of knowledge nowadays is no more than a pretext to post another Tweet or Instagram picture."
	Untitled-1-26, 150 × 180 cm.	
	Exhibited in the Hermès Foundation Misulsang nominees' exhibition, Atelier Hermès, 19 December 2014–15 February 2015.	Sulki and Min are conscious of the role that graphic design has played in constructing a world so banally transparent. Since the modernity, graphic design has been part of an enlightening project. Like the streetlights erected in Paris after the French Revolution, it was once seen as a force of goodness that would cast light on any dark corners of irrationality, and help everyone communicate with each other equally and clearly. But at a time when even the most private inside of an individual can be brought to light by will, it is not easy to keep a good faith in graphic design as an agent for "more light!" — although this doubt, to be fair, can be extended to any form of social communication.
		As a reflection on this development, Sulki and Min would try to leave certain "shadows," some "residues" that cannot be dissolved into "communication." One strategy has been to find and highlight clues that seem to suggest the life's remaining incomprehensible mysteries. Functional Typography, for example, took the small, enigmatic codes inscribed on the surface of products or packages, and dramatically enlarged them as posters. The Exercises in Modern Construction series from 2008 onwards has attempted to explore and, indeed, construct, the forms and visual orders that they believe—or want to believe—inherent in certain surfaces or structures. They call the attitude underlying these projects "the cryptographic imagination." Stemming from the tradition of secret writing, and developed as a theoretical concept to explain the particular pleasures associated with mystery novels, it refers to an attitude toward language that acknowledges its opaqueness and slipperiness, endlessly inquiring what really is behind the apparent meaning of a text. What matters here is not the content of any hidden meaning, not even its actual existence, but the suspicion itself, through which we are re-enchanted with the world.
		As the title suggests, each Technical Drawing zooms in on a small detail of another image of a precisely technical nature, and turns it into large and blurry shapes, "as if we are too close to it, or just passing through it." Sulki and Min refuse to share the original sources of the details, except saying that each is "merely a minute part of a much larger and meaningful existing drawing." This compares with how they explicitly stated the sources of Functional Typography in the name of each piece: "With Functional Typography, we wanted to articulate our encounters with what seemed to trigger the cryptographic

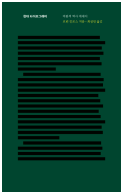|		imagination. But Technical Drawings are not a record of anything. Rather, they are a set of manipulated images. They don't show much interest in what actually exists. They don't expect so much. It's in this sense that we say the work is less optimistic."
		While conceiving this work, Sulki and Min came up with the notion of the "infra-flat." If Marcel Duchamp's "infra-thin" refers to a subtle, nearly imperceptible difference, "infra-flat" describes a sense of reversed depth created by the same force that has been flattening the world, once it has crossed the total-flat threshold: "it might be too much to compare it to a black hole created by excessive gravity. No, it's more like a pseudo-depth dramatized by a vision that sees the world as a "3-D version of the 2-D." Our world has been flattened to the point where the depth is defined by the distance between a selfie pod and the subject. Infra-flat is about a negative depth possibly created by a selfie-pod vision once it has finally reduced the distance to minus degrees."
		It does not mean that their Technical Drawings are proposed as a concrete illustration of the world seen from some abstract selfie pod. Rather, the images simply recognize the possibility of such a vision, and hazily indicate its nature. "Can you imagine a perspective painting in a non-dimensional world? Not that we can, but it would be fantastic," they suggest. Now, one may wonder if they really know what they are talking about. There is something pretentious, if not deceptive, in the way Sulki and Min are evasive about their work. Indeed, there is a slight sense of fictitiousness to the Technical Drawings, as if they were just props for a film set in an infra-flat world. Sulki and Min:
		"Well, it wasn't our intention to construct any specific narrative. But we do think there has always been some fictionality, or theatricality, to our work. Maybe it's to do with the "obscuring is our pleasure" part. You may find it in our work itself, but also in the way we present it, how we talk about it. It applies to this conversation, too."
		— Rhee Z-won, "Technical Drawings," Hermès Foundation Misulsang 2014 (Hermès Foundation, 2015), exhibition catalogue.
Festival Bo:m 2008 — Graphic identity (2008) FESTIVAL BO:M SEOUL 2008 3.22–4.5	Graphic identity for Festival Bo:m, interdisciplinary performing arts festival, 2008. Festival directed by Kim Seonghee	The logo for the new, ambitious performing arts festival is unpredictably light and cautious, almost fragile like a new shoot ("bom" can mean "spring" in Korean). For some reason, it was decided that the logo should maintain a certain size throughout the printed applications: it would be repeated, rather than enlarged, to reinforce its visual presence. Thus, there is only one logo on the business card, but there are ninety-nine logos on the poster.

Festival Bo:m 2008 — Poster (2008) 	Poster for Festival Bo:m 2008, interdisciplinary performing arts festival. Offset printing, 605 × 840mm. Festival directed by Kim Seonghee.	The logo for the new, ambitious performing arts festival is unpredictably light and cautious, almost fragile like a new shoot ("bom" can mean "spring" in Korean). For some reason, it was decided that the logo should maintain a certain size throughout the printed applications: it would be repeated, rather than enlarged, to reinforce its visual presence. Thus, there is only one logo on the business card, but there are ninety-nine logos on the poster.
Festival Bo:m 2010 — Program (2010) 	Program for Festival Bo:m 2010, interdisciplinary performing arts festival. Offset printing, saddle-stitching with cover, page size 220 × 360mm, 64 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. Festival directed by Kim Seonghee.	[No description]
Festival Bo:m 2011 — Poster (2011) 	Posters for Festival Bo:m 2011, interdisciplinary performing arts festival. Offset printing, 460 × 740mm each. Printed by Top Process. Festival directed by Kim Seonghee.	[No description]

Festival Bo:m 2012 — Poster (2011) 	Poster for Festival Bo:m 2012, interdisciplinary performing arts festival. Offset printing, 460 × 740mm. Printed by Top Process. Festival directed by Kim Seonghee.	[No description]
Festival Bo:m 2013 — Poster 	Posters for Festival Bo:m 2013, interdisciplinary performing arts festival. Offset and silkscreen printing, 440 × 720mm each. Printed by Top Process. Festival directed by Kim Seonghee.	Exhibited in Koea Now! Craft, Design, Fashion and Graphic Design in Korea, Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris, 19 September 2015–3 January 2016. Included in the collection of Musée des Arts décoratifs.
Sasa[44] Annual Report 2010 (2011) 	Specter Press, 2011. Offset printing, paperback binding, page size 78 × 126mm, 384 pp. Text in English, Korean, and Spanish. Edition of 250. Out of print	The fifth-anniversary special report: "In 2010, Sasa[44] consumed 79 bowls of seolleongtang. … For the past five years, Sasa[44] consumed 587 bowls of seolleongtang: 52 bowls in 2006, 245 bowls in 2007, 125 bowls in 2008, 86 bowls in 2009, and 79 bowls in 2010."
Sasa[44] Annual Report 2006 (2007) 	Yongin: Specter Press, 2007. Offset printing, paperback binding, punch holes throughout, page size 213 × 290mm, 304 pp. ISBN 978-89-957810-7-4 93600. Text in English and Korean. 30,000 won.	Since 2007, Sasa[44] has published personal annual reports that show eight indexes of information related to his daily life, ranging from how much jajangmyeon he eats to how many phone calls he makes. Each report takes a unique form, and the first one is the most straightforward: all the receipts and documents he collected during 2006 were simply scanned, and presented with summarizing charts.
Sasa[44] Annual Report 2014 (2015) 	Specter Press, 2015. Offset printing, folded and enveloped, 257 × 364mm each, folded to 257 × 182mm. Printed by Top Process. ISBN 978-89-93061-37-6 93600. Text in English and Korean. 10,000 won	Exhibited in: Take ( ) at Face Value, curated by Kim Kim Gallery, Korean Cultural Centre Australia Gallery, Sydney, 28 June–27 September 2019; Megastudy, curated by Off School, Audio Visual Pavilion, 22 May–28 June 2015. Published for an exhibition about education, Sasa[44] Annual Report 2014 takes the form of a test. "In 2014, how many mobile calls did Sasa[44] make?" So far, there has been one reader who got all eight questions right.

Sasa[44] Annual Report 2016 (2017) 	Suwon: Specter Press, 2017. 8 postcards, offset printing, 105 × 150mm each. Printed by Top Process. Text in English and Korean. Edition of 300. 8,000 won	How many bowls of seoulleoungtang and jajangmyeon Sasa[44] consumed in 2016, how many movies he saw, how many books he bought, how many transit card transactions and outgoing mobile calls he made, how many studio attendance records he got, and how many people in line he had before him in the year, this report does not readily tell you. For the first time in the series, Sasa[44] Annual Report 2016 is published as a set of postcards. And not for the first time in the series, it failed to obtain an ISBN: "This is to notify that your application for ISBN has been rejected. By regulation, the Agency does not assign ISBNs to personal documents or transient ephemera such as housekeeping books, journals, diaries or records. Thank you for your cooperation."
Sasa[44] Annual Report 2009 (2010) 	Specter Press, 2010. Offset printing, page size 394 × 545mm, 4 pp. ISBN 978-89-93061-20-8 93600 Text in Spanish, English, Japanese, German, Korean, Dutch, Czech, and Hebrew. 5,000 won	The statements are given in eight languages — Spanish, Korean, English, German, Dutch, Japanese, Czech, and Hebrew — that are spoken in all the countries where Sasa [44] has ever exhibited his work.
Sasa[44] Annual Report 2012 (2013) 	Specter Press, 2013. Offset printing, saddle-stitching with cover, page size 210 × 297 mm, 8 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. Text in English and Korean. Edition of 300. 8,000 won	A blurry report on a blurry year.
Sasa[44] Annual Report 2007 (2008) 	Yongin: Specter Press, 2008. Offset printing, 594 × 840mm. ISBN 978-89-93061-02-4 93600. Text in English and Korean. 10,000 won	There was very little budget for this year's report, so it was published as a poster instead of a book.

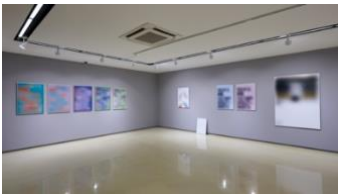|		
Sasa[44], Rehab 150116–160115 (2016)	Specter Press, 2016. Offset printing, paperback binding, page size 105 × 150 mm, 368 pp. ISBN 978-89-93061-38-3 13600. Text in English and Korean. Edition of 365. 36,500 won	Exhibited in Sasa[44]'s solo show Rock, Paper, Scissors, Audio Visual Pavilion, 4 April 2016. Cover photos by MeeNa Park. This publication documents Sasa[44]'s daily diets during twelve months as part of the artist's self-imposed rehab program.
Oh Min, Score by Score (2017)	Workroom Specter, 2017. Offset printing, sewn and clothed hardback binding, page size 138 × 213mm, 144 pp. Printed and bound by Screengraphic, Paju. With contributions by Kim Jaelee, Kwon Lyon Eun, Nam Hwayeon, Park Bona, Zhana Ivanova, Hans Roels, and Hong Chulki. ISBN 978-89-94207-85-8 03600. Text in English and Korean. 20,000 won	Score by Score was conceived as an extension of Oh Min's study of score, which she has maintained in parallel with her work with video and performance. She interviewed seven other artists who actually make and use scores in their practices, and with each conversation, she discusses "perspectives coming from several fields spanning music, dance and visual arts," exploring the possibility of expanding the notion of score. Two inks are used in the bilingual book for distinction: black for the conversations, and dark green for the score examples. The monospace-looking typeface (Panama by The Temporary State) creates a slightly unfamiliar sense of irregular modularity. Titles of different kinds (books, exhibitions, performances) are differentiated by specially designed punctuation marks.
Johanna Drucker, Diagrammatic Writing (2019)	Korean edition, translated by Choi Sulki, Workroom Specter, 2019. Offset printing, section-sewn paperback with dust jacket, page size 138 × 213 mm, 36 pp. Printed and bound by Segeoleum. ISBN 979-11-89356-22-4 03600. Text in Korean. 15,000 won	This book examines, by its own typography as well as text, how the form of the book contributes to the production of meaning. "Diagrammatic Writing is a poetic demonstration of the capacity of format to produce meaning. The articulation of the codex, as a space of semantically generative relations, has rarely (if ever) been subject to so highly focused and detailed a study. The text and graphical presentation are fully integrated, co-dependent, and mutually self-reflexive" (Onomatopee website). The design of this Korean edition attempts to "translate" the form of the original book as well as its content. Co-designed by its translator, the text evidently shows how the verbal translation has been affected by the need to find matching visual arrangements.
MeeNa Park: Drawings A–Z (2012)	Specter Press, 2012. Published in conjunction with the exhibition MeeNa Park: Drawings 1998–2012, Doosan Gallery. Offset printing, sewn hardback binding, page size 225 × 300 mm, 304 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. With an essay by Hyun Seewon. ISBN 978-89-93061-31-4 93650. Text in English and Korean. Edition of 400. 60,000 won.	In this retrospective volume of Park MeeNa's drawings, the same body of work is represented four times: first, the entire set of over 300 drawings is reproduced as small thumbnails; in the second round, about half of them appear at 33% of the original size; next, about a quarter are shown at 66%; finally, an even smaller selection is presented in the real size. The selections were made mechanically: for each round of presentation, images were sampled at an equal interval from the same array of drawings, sorted in alphabetical order — hence the title. We wanted the selections to be completely objective, independent of any of the artist's original intentions. The titles of the drawings were used as a key because she had never consciously planned them in advance — they had been grouped chronologically or thematically, but never alphabetically. The resulting selections are rational, yet ultimately arbitrary, depending on a chance element.

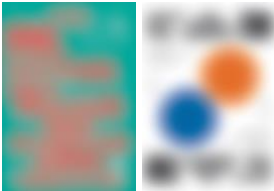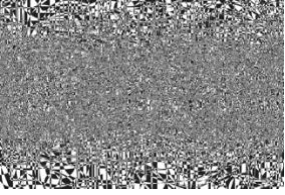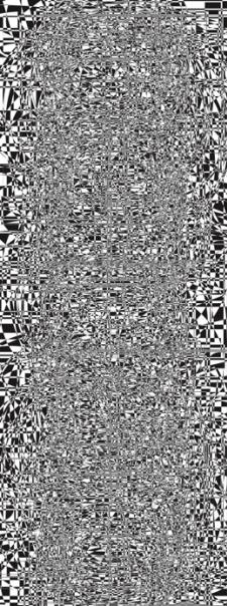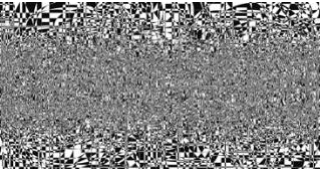|		
Technical Problem = Geumhyung Jeong × Chungwoo Lee × Jackson Hong (2010)	Specter Press, 2010. Offset printing, saddle-stitching with insert, page size 176 × 244mm, 64 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. Photography by Kim Sang-Tae. ISBN 978-89-93061-25-3 93600. Text in English and Korean. 20,000 won.	This book documents Technical Problem, a collaborative performance work by Jeong Geumhyung, Jackson Hong, and Lee Chungwoo. Following the invitations of Lee Chungwoo, a critic who initiated the project, the designer-artist Jackson Hong selected various pieces of equipment as "props" for the choreographer and performer Jeong Geumhyung, who then performed an interplay with the objects onstage. The book embodies a few "failures" in its own design and construction. There is, for example, no "cover" to this saddle-stitched booklet. To be more precise, the "cover" is folded in the middle of the interior, as if the entire booklet is physically reversed, inside-out. The text typeface, Gill Sans, has become a "broken script" here, with all the characters' curves reduced to jagged straight lines.
Cosmos, 3rd Korean Edition, 1981 (2017)	Sulki and Min, Cosmos, 3rd Korean Edition, 1981, Suwon: Specter Press, 2017. Offset printing, paperback binding, size 170 × 240 mm, 480 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. Exhibited in Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513, Perigee Gallery, 9 March–13 May 2017. ISBN 978-89-93061-42-0 97600. Edition of 100. 100,000 won.	As the name indicates, it's a version — an infra-flat one — of a Korean translation of Cosmos, published by Munhwa Seojeok in 1981. Apart from the fact that the pages are unrecognizably blurred, all the other aspects of the book, from the format to the extent, printing, paper, binding and the content, are exactly the same as the original: 170 x 240 mm, 480 pp, four-color offset printing on rough-grain uncoated paper, paperback with red endpapers, "An astonishing profile of the great universe, unfolded vividly and arrestingly, with more than 250 colorful plates, by the best planetary investigator of our century, the Pulitzer-winning writer Carl Sagan." Even an accidental flaw has been replicated: the missing page 63 (where a section about the life-determining DNA is supposed to begin), which was torn out from our copy at some point in its 36-year history.
Exercise in Modern Construction, Part 3 (2008)	Sulki and Min, Exercise in Modern Construction, Part 3, Yongin: Specter Press, 2008. Offset printing, saddle-stitching, page size 210 × 297mm, 32 pp. Exhibited in Sulki and Min: Kimjinhye 080402–080414, Kimjinhye Gallery, 2–14 April 2008. ISBN 978-89-93061-04-8 93600. Edition of 250. 10,000 won	This booklet is part of an exploration of the classification and arrangement of forms. The pages show abstract patterns created using plastic drawing templates as stencils.
Print: The Trash Issue (2012)	Cover and special section of Print, "The Trash Issue," Blue Ash, OH, August 2012. Offset printing, page size 216 × 276mm, 48 pp. Edited by Michael Silverberg.	We were invited to work on the special issue of the American graphic design magazine Print as a guest designer. The following is the introduction we wrote for the section. Just when we think we're done with something, that we've finally trashed it forever, it begins its endless afterlife. Trash returns: reprocessed, recycled, reinforced, rediscovered, reappropriated, and repurposed. It comes back into our lives and makes itself useful until it's trashed once more — only to return home again and again. Trash is the theme of this special issue, which is about much more than the environment. Rather than treating trash as a residue of otherwise perfectly good and sustainable activities, the contributors to this section look at diverse aspects of trash's ever-returning life. In the course of its circulation, trash inspires us, haunts us, speaks to us. We often discover unexpected treasures in trash and salvage them, only to realize that they're of no value after all and trash them anew. Then

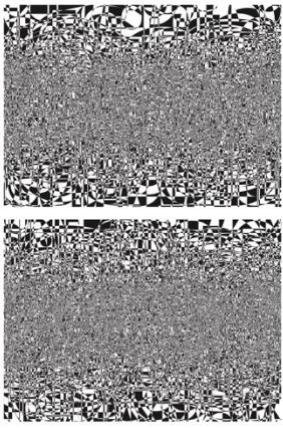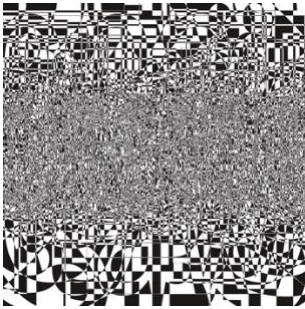|		we miss them, mourn them, and try to rescue them all over again. Sometimes we find the things we treasure trashed by others. Other times, we feel that the only thing left to us is trash — then we somehow find a way to work with and within it.
		We designed this special section, and we also made two additional contributions. First, we inserted tiny notes in the page margins — they hint at what we'd like to call "the parallel universes of trash." From ephemeral pop-culture clichés to a very forward-looking preservation project (6,101 years into the future, to be exact), the notes are meant to expand on the themes of repetition, recycling, and renewal — in the realm of design, in the broader culture, and in paranoid, megalomaniacal historical efforts.
		Our second contribution involves what might be called (to modestly extend the cosmological metaphor) "the inner spaces of trash." We created a custom typeface for this section called Galaxie Ecosmic. It is an eco-friendly version of Galaxie Polaris — one of the standard typefaces of Print, designed by Chester Jenkins. Borrowing the idea of Ecofont (developed in 2009 by the Dutch company Spranq), we designed Galaxie Ecosmic to employ tiny, ink-saving holes in the characters — except, in this case, the holes take the form of excerpts from Carl Sagan's classic 1980 science book, Cosmos. The embedded quotations are set in Comic Sans, the polar opposite of the neutral Galaxie Polaris and the ultimate "trashy" font, according to many designers. Hence the name Ecosmic — a somewhat ironic celebration of both the noble intention of Ecofont and the incredibly optimistic, almost kitschy words of Sagan. After all, the cosmos is much bigger than the galaxy, not to mention our own ecosystem. If these tiny holes can help save this tiny planet, then why not also let them carry infinitely big ideas?
Galaxie Ecosmic (2012)	Digital typeface, 2012. Custom typeface for Print "Trash" special issue (2012). Based on Galaxie Polaris (2004) designed by Chester Jenkins.	[No additional description]
Modern Typography, Korean Edition (2009)	Robin Kinross, Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History, Korean edition, translated by Choi Sung Min, Yongin: Specter Press, 2009. Offset printing, paperback binding, page size 135 × 216mm, 320 pp. ISBN 978-89-93061-09-3 93600. Text in Korean. 18,000 won	"A brisk tour through the history of Western typography, from the time (c.1700 in France and England) when it can be said to have become "modern." A spotlight is directed at different cultures in different times, to trace the developments and shifts in modern typography. Attention is given to ideas, to social context, and to technics, thus stepping over the limited and tired tropes of stylistic analysis." (From the website of Hyphen Press). While the overall design is loosely based on what the translation is made from — the second English edition (2004) — the cover nods at its first edition (1992), which was designed by the author himself and displayed a vivid expression of its defiant spirit.

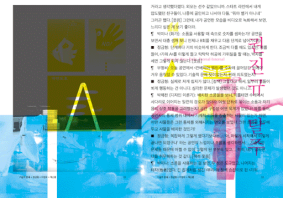|		
Kinross, Modern Typography (1992, 2004, 2009), Choi Sung Min's solo exhibition (2009) 	Exhibited at Gallery Factory, 13 March–5 April 2009.	This is the first solo exhibition of Choi Sung Min, who has been working with Choi Sulki as a graphic design partnership Sulki & Min. For him, this exhibition is an unusual opportunity to look back at where he started: typography and its history. For the last fourteen years, Choi Sung Min has maintained an obsessive relationship with a book: Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History by Robin Kinross (first edition 1992, second edition 2004). Since he first started to translate the text in the summer of 1995, he has produced more than five different translations, as well as over twenty designs for the imaginary Korean edition of the book. Now that the actual Korean edition is to be published by Sulki & Min's own Specter Press, this exhibition is to celebrate the realization, as well as extend the translation in a different form. Or maybe it is that he just wants to suspend the finalization of what has become a small part of his life. The work in the exhibition attempts to show what cannot be shown in the published book. Choi Sung Min is particularly interested in the "Examples" reproduced in the publication. The series Kinross, Modern Typography, Korea Edn., Chapter 14, "Examples" applies the process of translation to the images: it wants to "read" them, as well as see them, by showing the reproduced artifacts in real size, and even by translating the text within the artifacts. Two small publications, Kinross, Modern Typography, First Edn., chapter 12, "Modernity and Modernism" and Kinross, Modern Typography, First Edn., Chapter 13, "Examples" are Korean translations of the chapters, which had been completely revised by Kinross for the second English edition, so had not been made available in the Korean edition that was based on the second English edition. In this way, Kinross, Modern Typography (1992, 2004, 2009) is not only about typography and its history, but also about translation: from one language to another; from the text to the image and to the text again. — From a press release about the exhibition (Gallery Factory, Seoul, 2009).
Kinross, Modern Typography, Korean Edn., Chapter 14 (2009) 	Choi Sung Min, Kinross, Modern Typography, Korean Edn., Chapter 14, "Examples", 2009. Offset printing, 25 pieces, 400 × 600 mm each; accompanying text pieces: xerography on paper, 25 pieces, 210 x 297 mm each; overall dimensions variable. Included in Sung Min's solo exhibition Kinross, Modern Typography (1992, 2004, 2009), Gallery Factory, 13 March–5 April 2009.	[No additional description]

BMW Guggenheim Lab — Graphic Identity (2011) 	Graphic identity for BMW Guggenheim Lab, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, 2011. Project curated by David van der Leer and Maria Nicanor.	BMW Guggenheim Lab was "a mobile laboratory about urban life that began as a co-initiative of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the BMW Group. From 2011 to 2014, the Lab travelled to New York, Berlin, and Mumbai. Part urban think tank, part community center and public gathering space, the Lab's goal was the exploration of new ideas, experimentation, and ultimately the creation of forward-thinking visions and projects for city life." As graphic designers of the BMW Guggenheim Lab, our initial task was to create a strong visual identity system. The Lab's word-mark was designed as a persistent component of its identity. It expresses a fundamental characteristic of the project: it is a collaboration between the two important organizations. The typography of the word-mark shows how the two prominent brands, each set in its own corporate typeface, lend their visual identities to the "LAB." If the word-mark was intended as a static, reliable seal, then the role of the variable Lab logo was to be more expressive of its ideas (and ideals): in fact, it is just a visible part of a larger participatory system. The logo itself was constructed as an empty text frame; its substance would be contributed by the people. On the Lab's website, visitors were invited to submit their thoughts on the theme of the Lab directly to the logo. The appearance of the logo constantly changed to reflect changes in the content, which would show diverse opinions in a wide range of languages in real time.
BMW Guggenheim Lab Mumbai — Signs (2012) 	Sign graphics for the BMW Guggenheim Lab Mumbai, 2012. Various mediums and dimensions.	[No additional description]
Concept Drawing series, 2016 (2016) 	Digital printing on fabric, six pieces, 180 × 210 cm each. Exhibited in 7½: Cryptographic Imagination 4 — Sulki and Min, Song Bok-eun Foundation, 27 August–1 October 2016.	These are from an ongoing work about "infra-flat," a term we developed to describe a sense of reversed depth created by the same force that has been flattening the world, once it has crossed the total-flat threshold. The Concept Drawing series is based on some of the sample charts provided by the diagram-drawing application ConceptDraw.

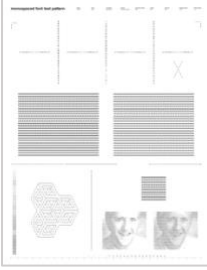| 7½: Cryptographic Imagination 4 — Sulki and Min (2016)	Exhibition at Song Bok-eun Foundation, 2016. Exhibition curated by Oh Sunyoung.	The works shown in this exhibition were loosely centered around the theme of visual exposure and concealment. The exhibits include five new projects: Concept Drawings, Gray Letters, These Won't Melt, List of Exhibits, and Notification Muzak. Each piece took a set of conventionalized and codified forms, stripped off or displaced any clues necessary for their decoding, turning them from a means of communication to an obstacle.
Perigee 060421–170513 (2017) 	Exhibition at Perigee Gallery, Seoul, 9 March – 13 May 2017. Curation by Shin Seung-Oh	Perigee 060421–170513 is a deceptive exhibition. Although there are real works by real artists shown in a real physical space, it doesn't intend to provide — not, at least, directly — any real sensual, emotional satisfaction or intellectual insights. Instead, what we want through the superficial visual and verbal stimulation is to arouse suspicion and confusion, thereby hiding the lack of meaning and interests. An exhibition like a sample document or a stock photograph bundled with a graphic software; a show without meaning, without anything to say about the world; something that appears to be merely simulating a possibility of an exhibition — this is what we want. The title follows the format we came up with in 2006 for our first show: name of the venue followed by duration. Except, of course, that the "060421" of Perigee 060421–170513 does not indicate the actual opening date of this show. The title that implies a eleven-year time span may suggest a small retrospective exhibition of the two graphic designers, Choi Sulki and Choi Sung Min. But the relationship between what we have actually done since 2006 and the works in the exhibition is neither clear nor consistent. And there are some irrelevant elements mixed among the exhibits: pointers to the popular science classic Cosmos (1980) by Carl Sagan. In the gallery, there are things that may look like — from their familiar formats — printed promotional materials, such as posters, flyers and postcards, all neatly mounted and displayed in rows. It's a series entitled Ephemera, which, in turn, belongs to a larger thread of our work related to the notion of "infra-flat." Inspired by Marcel Duchamp's "infra-thin," it suggests a sense of reversed depth created by the same force that has been flattening the world (for example, the obsession with instant communication and data collection mediated by ubiquitous connectivity) once it has crossed the total-flat threshold. Here, the actual exhibits work as diagrams or sample documents to help understand the concept of infra-flat. The blurry images — amorphous as if seen from too close a distance — make a clear contrast with the crisp materiality of their supporting structures (such physical apparatuses as paper, frames or tables). The subtitles — Poster, Seoul, 2007 or Postcard, Berlin, 2010, for example — seem to convey some straightforward facts, but they don't impart any useful information. In the same gallery, there is one piece that resembles — in physical construction — Ephemera, but is actually legible. It's called List of Works, and we make similar thing for every exhibition (although it has been made only once before). An exhibition label elevated to a work in its own right, it enumerates information (the title, medium, size, and the year) pertaining all the works in the show, including itself.

		On the tables, there are copies of a book called Cosmos, 3rd Korean Edition, 1981. As the name indicates, it's a version — an infra-flat one — of a Korean translation of Cosmos, published by Munhwa Seojeok in 1981. Apart from the fact that the pages are unrecognizably blurred, all the other aspects of the book, from the format to the extent, printing, paper, binding and the content, are exactly the same as the original: 170 x 240 mm, 480 pp, four-color offset printing on rough-grain uncoated paper, paperback with red endpapers, "An astonishing profile of the great universe, unfolded vividly and arrestingly, with more than 250 colorful plates, by the best planetary investigator of our century, the Pulitzer-winning writer Carl Sagan." Even an accidental flaw has been replicated: the missing page 63 (where a section about the life-determining DNA is supposed to begin), which was torn out from our copy at some point in its 36-year history. Somewhere around the gallery, there should be a piece called p. 63. It's the page 63 taken from a book, enlarged and framed in part or in its entirety. We haven't decided on the exact spot for this work: we probably won't be able to throughout the exhibition. From the reception desk, a visitor can borrow a copy of Explained. It is a book that compiles verbal — only verbal — explanations of 207 projects from our ten-year professional career. One might want to bring the copy to the gallery of images, reading the text in comparison with the pictures on the wall, although it may prove futile an attempt to make sense. In the ground-floor lobby, "The Cosmos Is Like Two Pies" is being screened. The computer-generated video loop deconstructs and endlessly create random reconstructions of pie charts that show some trivial aspects of our past work (such as the medium, volume, and related disciplines). On this sequence of images, quotations from Cosmos are occasionally superimposed: sentences like "If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe" are displayed as "subtitles." It has been said that if an exhibition could not be properly explained, it's not a good exhibition. It took us a while to realize that, when people are curious about a work, it is not its invisible principles or structures, but the intentions or motivations of the artist that they really want to know. Why do we make such a suspicious and self-closing exhibition? The simplest possible answer may be: because we can. And we're not sure if we have a better explanation. It's possible that we are trying to jump on the bandwagon of alternative facts, in this post-truth age of fake news, but it can't be all. — Minnie and Sulki, 2017
Ephemera series (2017) 	Digital printing on paper, 19 pieces, dimensions vary. Printed by Top Process. Exhibited in Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513, Perigee Gallery, 9 March–13 May 2017.	This series belongs to a larger thread of our work related to the notion of "infra-flat." Inspired by Marcel Duchamp's "infra-thin," it suggests a sense of reversed depth created by the same force that has been flattening the world (for example, the obsession with instant communication and data collection mediated by ubiquitous connectivity) once it has crossed the total-flat threshold. Here, the actual exhibits work as diagrams or sample documents to help understand the concept of infra-flat. The blurry images—amorphous as if seen from too close a distance—make a clear contrast with the crisp materiality of their supporting structures (such physical apparatuses as paper, frames or tables). The subtitles — Poster, Seoul, 2007 or Postcard, Berlin, 2010, for example — seem to convey some straightforward facts, but they don't impart any useful information.

Earth Here (2017)	Digital printing on fabric, 150 × 100 cm. Exhibited in Flags for the Earth, organized by Postfossil as part of Design Biennale Zurich, Alter Botanischer Garten, 7–10 September 2017.	We were invited to design a flag for the earth, "reflecting the society of the future and focusing on what connects us," when "nations are building walls rather than collectively facing up to urgent future challenges." Our flag depicts a cacophonous landscape of the earth's languages. The white-noise-like image collapses the words in 145 different languages that mean "here": from the Spanish "aquí" to the Chinese "这里," or from the Ainu "テタ" to the Zulu "la." "Here" — the word and the idea — is interesting as it suggests the speaker's intimate relation to her or his place, while the meaning is often vague outside a specific context. We think it captures something about how we occupy this place, concretely and indeterminably.
Earth Now (2018)	Digital printing on fabric, 10 pieces, 780 × 2,080 mm each. Exhibited in Elephant in the Room, a 7½ project curated by Oh Sunyoung and presented at Jakarta History Museum, 2–31 October 2018.	These flags depict a cacophonous landscape of the earth's languages. The white-noise-like image collapses the words in 145 different languages that mean "now": from the Spanish "ahora" to the Chinese "现在," or from the Afrikaans "nou" to the Zulu "manje." "Now" — the word and the idea — is interesting as it suggests the speaker's intimate relation to her or his time, while the meaning is often vague outside a specific context. We think it captures something about how we occupy our history, concretely and indeterminably.
Home (2018)	Digital printing, rooftop billboard: 578 × 301 cm; elevator door: 70 × 220 cm; elevator interior: 368 × 220 cm. Commissioned by Mass Studies.	Installed on the public art canvas of the new Mass Studies office building — and extended to its elevator — Home reflects a cacophonous landscape of human languages. The white-noise-like image presents the word 'home' in 117 different languages, from Afrikaans to Zulu.

Us and Them (2019) 	Digital printing, edition of 15, 610 × 914 mm. Exhibited in CommUNITY, San Francisco Design Week, Pier 27, The Embarcadero, 20 June 2019.	The poster displays two common words used to divide people, represented in two cacophonous images. The top shows "we/us" in 107 different languages around the world, merged into one; and the bottom, "them/they." Or is that the other way around? We can't be sure.
Book (2019) 	Digital printing on fabric, 910 × 910 mm. Edition of 10.	Book depicts a cacophonous landscape of human languages. The white-noise-like image collapses the word "book" in 145 different languages. Celebrating a gathering of books in the occasion of the Singapore Art Book Fair 2019, this Book is meant to worn, but it can also be read.
Off-White Paper: Exhibition (2014) 	Off-White Paper: On the Brno Biennial and Education, 2014. Created as an exhibition to accompany the 26th International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno, Moravian Gallery in Brno. Single-channel video, 25 minutes 52 seconds. Research contribution by Jeon Hyeon-woo. Brno Biennale 2014 curated by Radim Peško, Adam Macháček, and Tomáš Celizna.	[No additional description]
Off-White Paper: Publication (2014) 	Off-White Paper: On the Brno Biennial and Education, Brno: Moravian Gallery, 2014. Published in conjunction with the 26th International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno 2014. Offset printing, saddle-stitching with cover, page size 296 × 216 mm, 72 pp. Research contribution by Jeon Hyeon-woo. Biennale curated by Radim Peško, Adam Macháček, and Tomáš Celizna.	The curators of the Biennial originally asked us to make an accompanying reader for the exhibition, which this time was focused on education and schools. In response, we proposed a quantitative analysis of the history of the Biennial itself, presented in a series of statistical charts following the tradition of the Isotype (International System of Typographic Picture Education). Education is about the individual development of skills, knowledge and understanding. And it is also about social mobilisation and the distribution of resources. Off-White Paper, conceived as a visual reader for the 26th International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno 2014, focuses on the latter.

		Since 1963, the Brno Biennial has showcased excellence in graphic design from around the world. This book attempts to chart the educational background of this recognized excellence, using the profiles of the designers selected for the Biennial's last five editions as a starting point. Who are they, in terms of nationality, gender and age? Where did they study — in what countries and cities, at what schools, under what economic realities? And how has the Biennial's composition in any of these terms changed over a period of ten years? Off-White Paper presents its findings with a series of visual charts that reveal some of the fundamental facts of graphic design and education as they have been manifested at the Brno Biennial during the last decade.
The Book of Chances (2011) 	Computer-generated video loop, duration unlimited. Exhibited in Vitality: Korean Young Designers, curated by Choi Kyung-ran and presented at Triennale di Milano Design Museum, 28 October 2011–19 February 2012.	The Book of Chances is a video loop that deconstructs pages from the books we designed, and reconstructs them in a nearly endless series of page-images. We selected about 300 double-spread pages, split each image into four color channels (C, M, Y, and K) following the standard offset printing process, and then made the channels from different sources randomly overlap each other using a simple computer software. The work reflects our enduring interest in the relationship between systems and accidents, and, as an extension, a generative system.
The Book of Chances, Revised Edition (2013) 	Computer-generated video loop, duration unlimited. Updated and expanded version of The Book of Chances (2011).	Exhibited in Artists' Portfolio, curated by Kang Jae Hyun, Savina Museum of Contemporary Art, 20 March–24 May 2013.
The Book of Chances, 3rd Edition (2016) 	Computer-generated video loop, duration unlimited. Another updated and expanded version of The Book of Chances (2011).	Exhibited in Shifting Objectives, M+, Hong Kong, 30 November 2016–5 February 2017. Included in the collection of M+.
Really? (2010) 	Sulki Choi's solo exhibition, Space Hamilton, 16 April–6 May 2010.	In this exhibition, Sulki Choi is focused on her long-time curiosities about the diagram. What would happen when, as an abstracted form of reality, the diagram gets too closer to reality, to such an extent that it becomes the reality itself? What if the diagram acquires its own existence in the messy and arbitrary "real world," not just in its rationalized and consistent world of abstraction? What if the diagram begins to show a certain self-consciousness? The diagrams exhibited in this show is mostly self-referential and self-reflexive. Like Borges's 1:1 map, the meta-diagrams undermine and complicate their own potential as representations. Their formal construction

		is so simple, and any meaning they may signify is so self-evident, that trying to make sense of them can be a rather frustrating or uncomfortable experience. It is as if the diagrams want to assume a certain pseudo-subjectivity by claiming the obvious: "I don't want to represent anything but myself."
Monospaced Font Test Patterns (2002) 	Choi Sung Min, Monospaced Font Test Patterns, New Haven, 2002. Digital printing, 711 × 914 mm each. Exhibited in Yale University School of Art Graphic Design MFA Thesis Show 2002, Holcombe T. Green Jr. Gallery, New Haven.	Some elements of these charts were originally made to aid the design of monospace typefaces, to help judging their spacing. Arranged together in a single plane, they form a universal template for the specimen posters of monospace fonts, effectively revealing their qualities. One peculiar function of the monospace font, its usefulness for ASCII graphics, is also acknowledged.
Ideal Dining Tables (2012) 	SMSM, Ideal Dining Table for the Designer Mr. K and Ideal Dining Table for the Designer Ms. R, 2012. Mixed media, 120 × 85 × 73 cm each. Diet prescriptions by Kim Se-won and Kim Hye-ryeon. Food models by Jung Jongil. Woodwork by Yu Ju-yeol. Exhibited in Life A User's Manual, curated by Kim Sungwon, Culture Station Seoul 284, 14 September–4 November 2012.	Composed of Sasa[44], Park MeeNa, Sulki & Min, SMSM is an applied-art collective devoted to health and happiness. Ideal Dining Table for the Designer Mr. K and Ideal Dining Table for the Designer Ms. Rpresent "ideal" diets realized in the form of custom-made furniture completed with plastic food replicas. Based on profiles of existing designers, they will symbolically and visually realize the ideal diets, which is not easy to put into practice or sustained in the real lives of the designers. The diners will eat their own unorganized food alongside with the ideal food already on the tables, mistaking the ideal ones as real and vice versa. In doing so, they may take a look back on their lives and reflect on their negligence and haphazardness. Or, they might be able to get some relief while looking at the fake foods that are made only with plastic. On one hand, the ideal dining tables are a work that tacitly indicates our contemporary obsession with health and food. On the other hand, however, it is a genuine attempt to contribute to the narrowing of the gap between the ideal presented by discourses on health and the exhausting lives of designers. Moreover, it takes the prevalence of manufactured goods that are represented by Ikea in domestic space to an extreme, extending the notion of readymade from a tool on which we lay out foods to the food itself. Purple top: Mr. K is a 34-year-old, self-employed graphic designer living and working in Seoul. He stands 176 cm and weighs 94 kg. He loves food, especially meat. He smokes 1 pack of cigarettes per day, and drinks at least once a week, about 7 glasses of soju each time. He does not exercise. He works 66 hours per week, usually sitting in front of his computer. He commutes to work by public transport. His monthly income is irregular, the average being 1.2 million wons. Standard weight for Mr. K's height is 68.4 kg, which means his obesity is 137.4% (obese). The optimal calories per day for Mr. K (his actual weight [94] multiplied by coefficient for obesity [25]) is 2,350 kcal. White top: Ms. R is a 40-year-old graphic designer living in Bundang. She stands 163 cm and weighs 52 kg. She maintains a well-balanced diet, and eats regularly. She does not smoke, and drinks about twice a month, roughly three glasses of wine each time. She works out at a gym twice per week, for one hour each time. As a full-time employee (design director) of a design studio in Seoul, she works 55 hours per week, usually sitting in front of her computer or having meetings. She drives

		to work. Her monthly income is about 3 million wons. Standard weight for Ms R's height is 56.7 kg, which means her obesity is 91.5% (normal). The optimal calories per day for Ms. R (her actual weight [52] multiplied by coefficient for normal weight [30]) is 1,560 kcal.
Energy! (2011) 	SMSM, Energy!, 2011. Collected energy drink bottles, LED displays, mixed media, dimensions variable. Exhibited in the "Named" section of Gwangju Design Biennale 2011, curated by Cho Minsuk and Anthony Fontenot.	Composed of Sasa[44], MeeNa Park, and Sulki & Min, SMSM is an applied-art collective devoted to health and happiness. Energy! for the Gwangju Design Biennale 2011 explored the visual language and mythology of energy drink products, which are very popular in Korea. The piece consisted of several elements: all the energy drink products we were able to buy at the highway service stations from Seoul to Gwangju, arranged in different orders such as by calorie, by mass, by popularity and by price; the LED screens showing all the slogans used to advertise the products; and the Super Hybrid Energy Drink we created by simply mixing all the seventy-seven different drinks we had collected. At the opening performance, we offered the samples of the hybrid drink to the visitors. But before taking the samples, they had to sign a liability release agreement, so that they wouldn't hold us responsible for any physical or mental damage that might occur to them after consuming the drink. We advertised that our hybrid drink was the "ultimate power drink," but obviously the claim was unfounded. The product was about imaginary functions, and how the irrational expectations could be created by design: the exhibition context, the presence of the artists, and the way the product was handled and talked about.
The Power of Color 7017 (2017) 	SMSM, The Power of Color 7017, 2017. Site- and device-specific video, 5 minutes 51 seconds. Presented in Seoullo Media Canvas Opening Exhibition, organized by Seoul Metropolitan Government, Manri-dong Square, 21 September–20 December 2017. This video was commissioned specifically for the newly installed Seoullo Media Canvas, a large-scale display screen on a building facade facing the Manri-dong Square and the Seoullo 7017.	Can a work of public art in urban space make people healthier? Beyond giving a sensual pleasure and symbolic expressions, can it actually improve physical happiness of the people? In his book The Power of Color, Dr. Morton Walker argues that colors can help correct imbalances of the body and mind: a so-called color therapy theory or cromatherapy. Color therapy is considered pseudoscience, not supported by scientific evidences. But it seems to share certain beliefs in the positive values of visual arts with some fundamental urges of public art. The Power of Color 7017 reflects a long for healing and recovery through public art: what if we have a gigantic color therapy machine in the city? What if we use the 7017 media canvas as a means to improve the people's physical and mental well-being?
The Power of Color Mural (2009) 	SMSM, The Power of Color, Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art Handspan Gallery Health Center Project, Ansan Danwon Health Center, 2009–2010.	This is the first realized work by the collective SMSM: Sasa[44], Park MeeNa, Sulki and Min. The Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art Handspan Gallery Public Health Center Project The Power of Color articulates the issues of site-specificity, public and private health, art and the public. Installed on a wall of the Ansan Danwon Health Center, it was developed from our interest in abstracting and recontextualizing commonly experienced colors in public spaces. The palette we employed this time is based on the color therapy theory developed by Dr. Morton Walker in his book The Power of Color (1991). Color therapy sees color as a physiological element, directly affecting the human body, not simply as an aesthetic, symbolic factor. Certainly, Dr. Walker's theory remains, as the theory of color therapy in general, contentious. What we are interested in is not any scientific plausibility of the theory itself, but the desire embedded in the system,

		the wish for healthy and happy life. That said, we do hope this work help healing and preventing diseases, as well as make the experience of the health center more enjoyable.
Explained 	Sulki and Min, Explained, Korean and English editions, Suwon: Specter Press, 2017. Offset printing, sewn paperback binding, page size 105 × 150 mm, 160 pp. Printed and bound by Top Process. Exhibited in Sulki and Min: Perigee 060421–170513, Perigee Gallery, 9 March–13 May 2017. English edition. ISBN 978-89-93061-41-3 93600. 12,000 won. Korean edition. ISBN 978-89-93061-40-6 93600. Out of print	Explained presents verbal-only explanations of more than 200 projects from the career of graphic designers Sulki and Min. If a work of art is not to be explained but to be experienced, then this book proposes a reversal of the adage: if we don't need an explanation in order to appreciate a work, can we appreciate the explanation without the work?