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*Editorial*

Education: it's a futures business

Laurene Vaughan

## A G D A

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## *Editorial*

# Education: it's a futures business

Laurene Vaughan

Laurene Vaughan is the Director of Research and Innovation in the School of Applied Communication at RMIT University. She is also a Research Leader within RMIT's, Design Institute. Originally coming from an art and design education background with a major in sculpture, Laurene has melded a career of practicing artist, designer and educator in Australia and internationally. Since 1995 she has been a lecturer and research supervisor at RMIT for both Masters and PhD students. She has supervised 25 research students to successful completion. Within her practice Laurene endeavours to explore and present comment on the interactive and situated nature of human experience, particularly creative practice. Her PhD research in this field is entitled 'Anfractuous: an exploration of creative practice.' Laurene has published, presented and exhibited work across these diverse areas and continues to pursue a trans-disciplinary perspective.

Once upon a time we learnt on the job, it was a form of situated training, then came diplomas and certificates, which were quickly followed by degrees and then higher degrees. Design education is an ever evolving beast that, through every stage of it's development has brought with it concerns about the separation between the theory, the practice and the every day application of knowledge within the profession.

Graduate education within the design fields is a relatively young domain within educational practice and development. Although some institutions have offered master and doctoral programs in the design fields for some time, we can still classify this as an emerging area of design education. Discussions about the role, the form and the methodology of such qualifications are the focus of international conferences, symposia and discussion lists. The outcome of which is an emerging and sometimes heated discourse about pedagogy, practice and discipline domains, underpinned by a perceived tension

1 between the expectations of the academy and the needs and interests of industry.

This special edition of *visual:design:scholarship* (Research Journal of the Australian Graphic Design Association) explores this issue of the role, expectations and experiences of graduate education within graphic design, both locally and internationally.

For the past 15 years, as a student and as an academic, I have been actively involved in graduate education across design and associated professions. I have watched and participated as this field of graduate education has begun to mature and slowly establish a sense of its own identity and expectations. The various contributions to this edition contribute to this evolution, in form and understanding, by the academy, industry and in practice.

In Australia graduate degrees can be clustered as two types of degrees, which reflect two different approaches to learning: these are coursework and research degrees. A simple definition would be that a coursework degree uses a 'delivery model' of learning (i.e. particular courses are taken in classes under the guidance of lecturers), and usually involves some self-directed research. In contrast, a research degree can be described as a 'student or self directed' learning model, whereby the student undertakes a self directed research study for a specified period of time depending on the degree. Occasionally students within research degrees will take specific coursework units if required. I must emphasise that this is a broad yet simplistic definition, and there are numerous variations to how these degrees are structured and the types of outcomes they produce depending on the institution and the specific field of design practice that they exist within.

Degree structure is one way to understand and classify graduate programs. Another, is to endeavour to understand what the program of study enables the individual (the student) to know and do on completion of their studies, and the application of this knowledge to a broader context (industry and/or professional practice). The impact of graduate education on the field of graphic design practice varies depending on the focus of the study and is one of the exciting things about this area. Studies within the field span from historical and contextual investigations which have contributed to the broader discourse about the field of graphic design and its role and contribution to the evolution of societies, and more recent developments in the fields of research through design practice, which focus on investigations into the meaning and the methods of the field, in order to propose new ways and new contexts for the practice of graphic design. All these approaches rich bodies of knowledge, in text, image and artefacts, and help to define, communicate and extend the local and broader understanding of the important contributions of graphic design to contemporary and historic cultural development have emerged.

My own involvement in graduate education has been diverse and extensive. It has included both coursework and research degrees; and as I reflect on the students, the projects and the outcomes of their studies, I am particularly excited by not only the discoveries, but of the communities of practice that have emerged as a result of their involvement in education. These connections have and continue to be between the students as well as with their supervisors or teachers with whom they have undertaken their study. Within the programs I have been involved with there has been a strong emphasis on experienced practitioners undertaking study in order to advance, further or deepen their career and practice of design. Many of the students are significant contributors to their fields, they are leading and award winning design practitioners, yet they have found that the space of learning, provides the space they need to experiment and think beyond the limitations of professional practice. Through the two to six years that their study may take, they make connections with other practitioners who may live in

the same city or be from another part of the world. These communities are not always based on a shared area of practice or aesthetic style etc., but in a shared interest in learning. This social connection that is created through shared experiences, and in the case of RMIT, regular public critique, has the potential to transform the methods and outcomes of practice.

Over recent years I have become increasingly interested in the potential of design research to impact, improve and transform the field of graphic design practice. I have observed, assessed and been involved in research projects undertaken through design practice and what has become apparent through this is, that there is great potential and a need for us, as field of knowledge, to claim and extend this knowledge as academically valid. Design practice is diverse; it involves a range of literacies (text, image, sound for example) and practices (methods, tools and processes) that are only in the early stages of being accepted as valid research practice. Sadly this acceptance is as much by us as a field as it is by the broader academy; yet at the same time there is a rise in arts based research occurring in other professional fields (management, education and nursing) which is drawing on and re-inventing the very practices we use on a day to day basis. This to me is the challenge and the tragedy. When I encounter colleagues who are validating their own work through reference to these new fields, (who are adopting our practices) rather than referencing those within our field, or through the necessary critique and critical inquiry of design as a method, I cannot help but wonder, what will it take for design to feel the assurance that our colleagues in the sciences and humanities have. What is happening in the field of academic research, mirrors that of professional practice. Too often I hear designers lament the loss of design recognition within design companies, as they hold on to the promises of management theory and marketing analysis over rigorous design exploration. To my mind and from my experience in design based graduate research, I can see that this need not be the case. Critical inquiry through design, provides us with an holistic and perhaps sustainable way of engaging in the practice of graphic design in diverse contexts.

The articles within this edition of the visual: design: scholarship reflect the diversity of the field of graduate graphic design education globally. These include the challenges of teaching and learning, discussion of different literacies of research outcomes and their applications, and the broader implications of graduate education on the field of the graphic design practice. Stephen Banham, in his opinion piece, reflects on his own experience of graduate education, whilst also positing the benefits design research to benefit the industry. Gavin Melles discusses the role of 'genre-based' approaches in the increasing and yet diverse, field of doctoral design education. John Calvelli, tells us a tale about the evolution of design and its contribution to the 'stuff' of life, and proposes that design education is fundamentally about the design of designers. It should be noted that this article uses a particular 'narrative style' of academic investigation, requiring a different academic structure to the normal format of the journal. Ian McArthur reflects on his experience of teaching graduate programs and the challenges, success and failures that occur as we work in this dynamic domain. Yoko Akama and Neal Haslem, take us to the other side and share with readers their experiences of undertaking graduate design research programs, through a critique of a collaborative project undertaken with peers from within their program area.

3 From observations to propositions and personal accounts, the contributions to this edition

of the journal provide us with interesting and sometimes challenging, perspectives on the role, contribution and complexities of graduate graphic design education.

Education is a futures industry. Education is not about now; it is always about the skills and knowledge that we are enabling people with for tomorrow, five or ten years from now and beyond. It is too easy for those of us within the field to think about the present when we design programs of study or critique students through the process, this is true at both under and postgraduate levels of study. This is also true for members of industry, when asked what they think needs to be included in graphic design education programs, often their focus is on what they need today rather than the long term future.

Graduate design education contributes to the field of graphic design practice, including graphic design education at all levels, in profound ways. Beyond the content or focus of the study, in the contemporary knowledge economy training and guiding people in the practice of thinking and critique is essential. New technologies, the speed of change and the blurring boundaries between local and global contexts, require us to have a toolset for engagement. What we know is important. Our ability to find, create and communicate that is essential. The graphic designer of 2020, no matter what their age, will find themselves working in ways and contexts that we have only just begun to imagine. Graduate education is one way that we, as individuals and as a field of design practice, can find ways to navigate our way into these new and exciting times.

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**visual:design:scholarship** is a fully refereed, online journal that aims to stimulate, support and disseminate design research with a focus on visual communication design in the Australian context. The journal seeks particularly to encourage contributions that speak to, and on behalf of, the visual communication design industry in Australasia. The aim is to include contributions from students, practitioners and academics. A range of research approaches, methods and forms of presentation is anticipated.

**visual:design:scholarship** is published online continuously, as articles become available. All of the articles in any given calendar year will comprise a separate volume. Special editions will be published as additional numbers within each volume.

## Types of Contribution

Refereed Articles (minimum 3,000–5,000 words or equivalent, no maximum). Original and previously unpublished scholarship in visual communication design of a research or developmental nature, including: case studies, student dissertations, minor theses, research reports, new methodologies, substantial position statements, reflective analyses, critical reviews, visual essays, experimental practice and curriculum developments. This is an opportunity to have a scholarly work internationally blind refereed for academic publication.

## Format Requirements

We are interested in a variety of formats for refereed articles. All submissions require the following:

- a separate page indicating a Title for the article/statement/view, the Full Name for each Author with their current affiliations, a Contact Address listing email and telephone details. Please avoid the identification of authors within the manuscript.
- an abstract or short summary of 100–200 words.
- 3–6 keywords that identify the main issues for the readership.

- the main document should be clearly organised with a hierarchy of headings and sub-headings that structure the presentation. The style should be clear and concise, presented for an Australian graphic design audience. In general, please avoid the use of footnotes and endnotes. Referencing should follow the Harvard Style (reference in the text by author, name and date, cited at the end in alphabetical order), and all tables and figures should have descriptive captions (including source information). A short (100–200 word) biography of each author for reader information would be appreciated. We also encourage authors to submit examples of their own practice, student work or other examples that generally illustrate and support the tenor of the article. Such examples of work will be published along with the biographies.

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