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HOMELESS, STICKY DESIGN.

STRATEGIES FOR VISUAL, CREATIVE, INVESTIGATIVE PROJECTS.

DERIVING AND APPLYING COLLECTING, ORDERING AND POSITIONING AS A CRITICAL LANGUAGE AND A DESIGN APPROACH BETWEEN VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN AND VISUAL RESEARCH.

HELEN BOX

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2007

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY
CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Helen Box
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This work is dedicated to my dear friend Tom, 1977 – 2003.

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ABSTRACT

My research takes place against the backdrop of the design research debate ongoing since the 1990s. This debate highlighted the potential contributions that design artefacts and practice could make in a scholarly and professional research context. Despite numerous interesting possibilities, the discussions taking place in the design research community largely do not attend to contemporary Visual Communication Design practices and outcomes.

In this research, I specifically focus on outcomes taking place at the margins of the Visual Communication field, which, though peripheral, are both admired and engaging, and what this research entitles ‘sticky’. Eleven projects are examined including, for example, one that collected the ephemera serving as the impromptu bookmarks in the books shelved in a university library, yielding the meticulous inventory of three hundred scraps of paper listed by Dewey decimal classification number.

Despite their ‘stickiness’, I found that these outcomes are in fact only partially accounted for by key authorities in Visual Communication Design: despite a strong graphic language these projects are not concerned to convey an unmistakable message directed to a particular audience. Instead other discussions taking place in the sociological sub-field of Visual Research, which values the open-ended inquiry of the observable features of everyday subject matter, seemed more relevant. Ultimately however, in view of other expectations – a theoretical framework and sustained textual analysis – these ‘sticky’ projects similarly confound Visual Research.

Consequently I realised that these ‘sticky’ projects are ‘homeless’ and, to indicate the partial explanations provided by Visual Communication Design and Visual Research, I tagged them ‘creative, investigative, visual projects’. This research thus sets out to derive a language to attend to such ‘sticky’ but ‘homeless’ creative, investigative, visual projects.
I explored diverse literature and additional visual work – on topics such as the origins of the encyclopaedia, the tendency to make lists, psychological explanations for keeping personal collections, scientific visualizations, French Poetry, experimental travel, where to file UFOs in a picture archive, information management, the anatomy of the human heart, documentary photography and post-modern cartography.

By bringing this interdisciplinary analysis to bear on the set of ‘sticky’, ‘homeless’, creative, investigative, visual projects, I derived a language of Collecting, Ordering and Positioning. From this tripartite model a design strategy was then extrapolated which I applied to produce an original creative, investigative, visual project, called BikeWork, which involved the participation of sixty-five cyclists and production of a series of three posters. This research concludes by speculating that the value of a creative, investigative, visual approach – vivid and systematic though fragmentary and approximate – is its agency. Accordingly I finally recommend that future ‘sticky’ researchers further explore the distinctive appeal of a vivid and fragmentary approach.
THE ‘HOMELESS’, ‘STICKY’ DESIGN IN QUESTION

Eleven key projects are discussed.

Collecting
Lipstick (Greene 2001)
Why Are All These Books Orange? (Siegel 2004)
The Last Periods of Some Books (magnified 4266%) (Buchanan-Smith 2003 [2002])
The Bicycle, Cross, and Desert (Weed 2005)
A Coming Of Age Reading Checklist (McMullen 2004)
The Readers Before Us (Waller & Beard 2002)

Ordering
Periodic Breakfast Table (Weese & Halpern 2001)
Endcommercial: Reading the City (Böhm, Pizzaroni & Scheppe 2002)
I [heart] [heart] (Daly 2007 [2005])

Positioning
Newsmap (Weskamp 2004)
NameVoyager (Wattenberg & Wattenberg 2004-2005)