

# THE DISCURSIVE AGENCY OF PRODUCTIVE AMBIGUITY.

This proposal introduces a printed poster to be considered for exhibition at the conference. The piece of communication design embodies and communicates the outcomes of a research study that explores the subject of sharing practice-led design research. Specifically, the study took a research-through-design approach to exploring the potential of research artifacts that align with the values of the design community rather than deferring to the values of the science or humanities communities.

## SITUATING THE POSSIBILITY OF PRODUCTIVE AMBIGUITY

The poster posits the statement “the discursive agency of productive ambiguity”, to introduce the outcomes of the research study while also engaging the viewer to experience the implications of the statement being introduced. This proposal further illuminates how and in what ways communication design might take on the challenge of disseminating the outcomes of practice-led research in a way that resists conforming to the dominant research paradigm that privileges repeatability and unambiguous results. The poster, alternatively respects the potential of visual

communication to design material that seeks to actively engage the audience—not as a passive bystander, but as a participant in the dialogue the research elicits. In this study viewing images is understood as a collaborative, active exercise, where critically conceived communication design artifacts operate at the nexus between designing, engaging and reflecting (Burnett, R 2004).

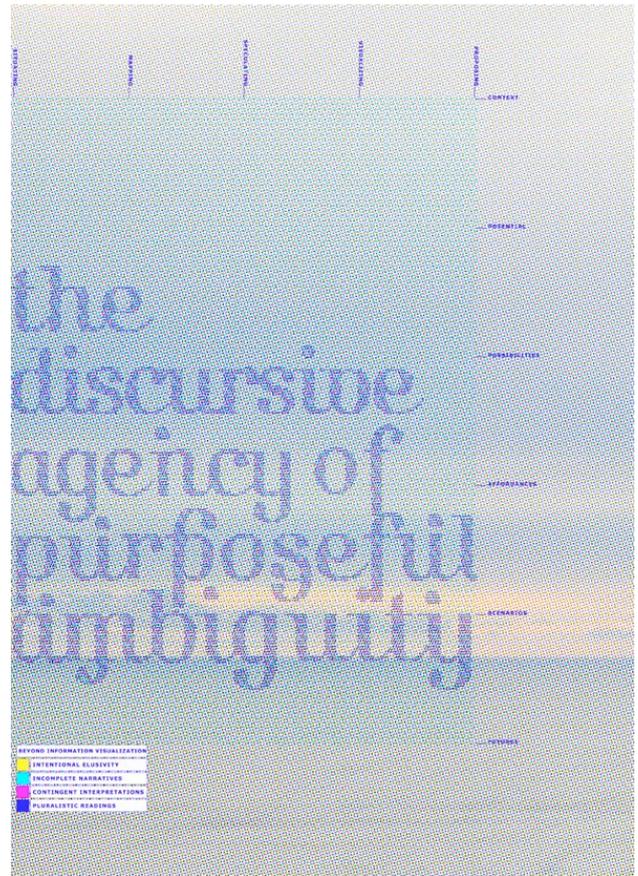
In ‘The Discipline of Noticing’ Mason highlights that key to engaging someone to learn from another’s situated experience, is to ensure that the experiences resonate with the reader (Mason, J 2002). Mason, asserts that to invite more than a critique of a specific situation the researcher must focus on promoting potential. With Dilnot’s claim that design is about the realm of possibilities, it seems appropriate to explore the potential of open-ended research artifacts that can address Mason’s issues of engagement, relevance and resonance (Dilnot, C 1998).

## THE PROJECT

The research study references the agency of ambiguity by situating the research in relation to various related fields of creative practice. The interpretational and pluralistic work of visual artists whose work presents a practice (dissimilar to communication design) that intentionally

generates multiple meanings. A perspective that encourages the artist to create multiple entry points into the work, drawing the active participant in and democratically opening up and inviting the audience to construct their own reading (Rust, C 2007). Graphic novels and comics present another practice that consciously explores this idea of inviting readers into a narrative. Beyond simply exploring image-text relations the study was interested in the role of the gutter in comics: the blank space between frames. The creative act of closure that the reader has to engage in by reading into this invisible space seems one of the most explicit examples of making an audience participate in constructing the narrative (McCloud, S 1993). In addition the term Critical Design also captures a practice that critiques the status quo through designs that stimulate discussion and debate (Dunne, A and Raby, F 2001). The ambition is to elicit alternative readings from design research artifacts so as to promote potential by inviting debate and further reflection.

## THE POSTER



The study references the discursive agency of research artifacts that engage audiences by being intentionally ambiguous. In considering the sharing of design-led research projects the dissemination material seeks to ask carefully crafted questions as opposed to presenting closed, definitive findings. The decision to embed within the design work a commitment to ongoing critical reflection for the designer and audience, highlights a desire to directly engage the design community to speculate on the potential of the research beyond the specific situation investigated.

The poster creates an experiential space that further plays out the purchase of the ambiguous artifact. At full scale (84cm x 119cm) the poster conceptually manipulates the clarity and interpretation of the statement dependent on the audience's physical engagement with the artifact. The details operate at differing scales, the typeface is embellished with new ligatures and the text only

comes into focus as one steps back from the poster. The poster, like the research, sought to enact a critical design practice that moves between or beyond theory so as to speculate, provoke and create new questions, new understandings. (Rosenberg, T 2006).

## REFERENCES

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