

Key Words: Graphic Design, Future Employment, Technology

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Proposed question for Independent Inquiry: 'Graphic Design: What was it and how will the rise of technology impact the future of the discipline?'

Within my writing I will explore three keywords, supported by three images and three key theorists, who I have researched to build upon my ideas. I will be analyzing the three key words; Graphic Design, Future Employment, and Technology to theorize on the ideas of how Graphic Design is constantly changing, what it was in the past and what does its future hold. These ideas will relate to Quentin Newark and his suggestions on what Graphic Design actually is, Adrian Shaughnessy's theories of artificial intelligence replacing designer's jobs, and Eric Yuan's interpretations of what the future of office jobs will be following the Coronavirus pandemic.

Graphic Design

Graphic Design is everywhere. From posters and logos, to instruction manuals and maps, the list is never-ending. But what actually is Graphic Design and how is it constantly changing? Quentin Newark, the co-founder of design company 'Atelier Works' and a key theorist throughout my research, states that "Trying to reduce such a wide-ranging and variable activity into a brief definition, or one portable phrase, is difficult to say the least." (Newark, 2007). This is because "Graphic Design is the most universal of all the arts" (Newark, 2007), its wide range of functions and applications means that it is nearly impossible to make a solid conclusion on what the art form is. Newark suggests a method of forming a definition is "to take little bits from other attempts, in the hope that these

fragments might add up to some kind of whole” (Newark, 2007). One way of doing this is to look into what design was in the past. “The term ‘Graphic Design’ was coined in 1922” (Newark, 2007), making it almost 100 years old. By analyzing parts of this history, we may be able to understand what Graphic Design is today.

Figure 1: Howard Miller, J. (1943)

We Can Do It!



One of the most notable uses of Graphic Design in the past is government propaganda during the war. Throughout WWII, propaganda posters were created and used with the intent of creating “social change and progress” (Twimlow, 2006). This can be seen in the well-known WWII poster ‘We Can Do It!’, which not only aimed to raise the female work morale during the war, but was also used to promote feminism in the early 1980’s. During the war, the poster design intended to create progress by lowering the “likeliness of labor unrest or a factory strike” (Andonovska, 2016) as well as motivating the women to work hard and help their country. The poster became more popular after the war, when the design was used for self-empowerment, campaign promotion and advertising. The overall

design served as “an advocate for women’s rights in the workforce” (Andonovska, 2016) and still does to this day. From looking at this design, it is evident that during the war, Graphic Design was used as a tool for persuasion, to encourage women to work harder, as well as a catalyst to social change and powerful movements. It can therefore be inferred that Graphic Design is used to influence people’s actions and thoughts on important moments in society, which can be used to help build an understanding of what Graphic Design actually is.

However, this is not the only thing Graphic Design was used for in the past. One of the most widely used forms of Graphic Design is packaging. Newark describes packaging design as “storytelling in a compressed area” (Newark, 2007), suggesting that packaging is used to communicate to the consumer, the story of the product as well as, “mark out and differentiate the product from competitors” (Newark, 2007). Today, designs on packaging are seen as normal and brands are well recognized across their products, however it took over 150 years for packaging to evolve to what it is today. One of the first brands to identify their product was the National Biscuit Company who designed packaging for the Oreo Biscuit in 1912. The company wanted to identify themselves and stand out from the plain paper bags or tin cans that were seen on shelves at the time. From looking at packaging design, it is evident that Graphic Design is used as a form of identity, communication and a way for products to simply look aesthetically pleasing in the hopes of attracting the consumer. From using Newark’s method of creating a definition by looking at certain parts of the discipline, we have formed an understanding of some of the functions of Graphic Design, from creating change, to persuading, through communication and visual appeal. However, Graphic Design is constantly changing and evolving. I have explored examples of design in the past and understood how these have contributed to a definition of design now, but what will Graphic Design be in the future and how will this impact designers?

Future Employment

When we think about the future we think of technology, but perhaps the more important thing is how will this technology impact future employment for Graphic Designers? Young designer's actions today are focused on their want of a job in the future and the role that they will have as Graphic Designers. Adrian Shaughnessy, a self-taught Graphic Designer, and another key theorist throughout my research, hints at a designer's future job being replaced by Artificial Intelligence, in his article for Computer Arts. "It may seem that automating the design process is impossible" (Shaughnessy, 2018). How will a robot be able to think creatively and make art through visual expression, when technology is based around data and statistics? Shaughnessy believes "the process is already underway" (Shaughnessy, 2018).

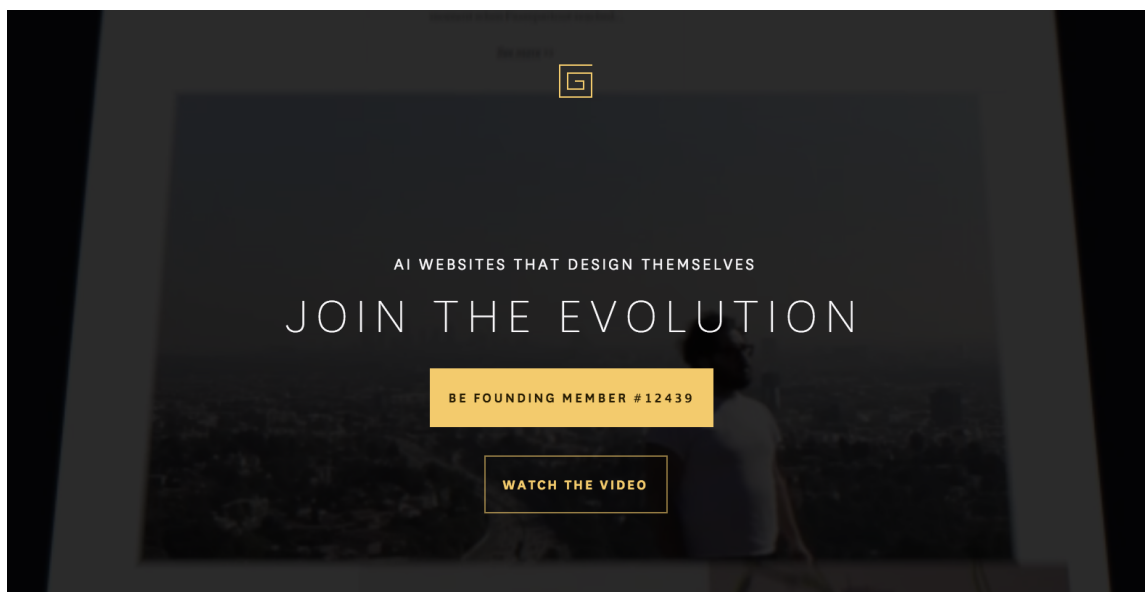


Figure 2: Wulf, A. (2014) *The Grid.io*

There is evidence of Shaughnessy's claim that robots are replacing the jobs of designers, for example the world of web design is already being automated by AI. A company called 'The Grid', is "a service to build basic websites which makes design decisions based on artificial intelligence" (Nouvel, 2015). The technology is able to detect the best layouts, fonts and colours etc. for a client's website. So, what does this mean for the future of web designers? If the automated system continues to grow, it is unlikely that human input will be needed for web design. Automated systems mean clients will not be waiting for their designs to be made, and they are able to have endless re-designs without the extra cost. It can therefore be suggested that web designers will be employed at a much lower rate in the future, as companies will be able to get technology to do the job for them. This will be a disadvantage for designers in the future, as those who are passionate about web design are likely to have their dream job replaced by AI. However, this is not the only area of Graphic Design that designers will have the option to work under. Some of the world's design leaders predicted the future careers of designers in an article by Fast Co. Design. Director of Android and Chrome, Glen Murphy suggests the job role 'Avatar Programmer' will become a popular choice for designers within three to five years. The job will be centered around celebrity clients who "will need help in representing themselves best in virtual scenarios such as VR, mobile games, and movies" (Labarre, 2016). Designers in this role will be required to create realistic versions of celebrities that can be used in VR and mobile games as these grow more popular with the general population. Another example of an upcoming design job in the future, suggested by Gadi Amit, is the 'Human Organ Designer'. "Human organ designers will be experts in bio-engineering and design, fitting newly created organs and artificial limbs to humans." (Labarre, 2016). This job role explores the wide range of design jobs that will become available in the future. Although certain design jobs will be replaced with AI,

many more employment opportunities will become available for designers in positions they may not have even known exist. Therefore, it is clear that the increase of robots taking jobs, is not a complete disadvantage for designers as it is evident that more jobs are becoming available that do require human input. In order to survive the change within the design world, Shaughnessy states that “just as human beings have learnt to do since the introduction of industrialization, we must adapt” (Shaughnessy, 2018). I believe as humans and designers, we are capable of adapting to extreme changes, something that has been seen recently with the Coronavirus pandemic.

Technology

The pandemic has meant, the way we work and the technology we use to work has had to change drastically. Instead of leaving our homes to go to work at an office or workspace, we have been forced to stay home and work online, through programs such as ‘Zoom’ and ‘Microsoft Teams’. But will this continue to be the future of office jobs after the pandemic? Founder and CEO of the application ‘Zoom’, Eric S Yuan, one of my key theorists throughout my research suggests, “In the near future, some organizations will adopt a hybrid-work model, with certain days in the office and others remote” (Yuan, 2020). Yuan also believes “Other companies will use video communications to be completely remote” (Yuan, 2020).

Working through a virtual space has meant employee engagement has increased, with many people feeling more involved in meetings compared to in-face meetings. Because of this, instead of going back to our way of life before the pandemic, it is becoming evident

that we will instead be subject to a combination of working in an office space and working online. This is hinting at a future of technology becoming the underlying element of all workspaces. However, in order for the remote workplace to work more technology needs to be introduced and innovation needs to increase. Yuan suggests “instant translation tools to allow speakers of different languages to converse” (Yuan, 2020) and “autonomous cars so that your vehicle can become a moving workplace when commuting back and forth” (Yuan, 2020) should be introduced. But what will this increase in technology mean for the future of Graphic Design and the designers themselves?

Ryle, J. (1995)

In memoriam: The Typewriter



In the past, the invention of new technologies has led to old methods being abolished, for example the typewriter, which was replaced by the desktop computer, is rarely seen today. This replacement of old technology in the past, could be implying that the design methods we use today will be disregarded and replaced in the future. If the future of work is focused on entirely working over a virtual space, then the traditional design methods that we use today, such as screen-printing and letterpress could be completely overlooked by clients, as these printed methods use no digital technology and cannot be sent to a client digitally.

However, an article looking at the 'Graphic Design USA 48th Annual Print Survey' found that "93% of respondents claimed to have worked on print design projects in the last year, compared to 71% for online projects" (Johnson, 2011). These results show that printed methods are still being used regularly to complete design projects, with many people choosing to work with print rather than work online. Therefore, it can be inferred that traditional print design methods are still widely used by designers and may continue to be used in the future. The statistics from this survey were, however, from almost ten years ago and so further evidence would be needed to support this point. In terms of the designers themselves, it is clear that virtual meetings and remote working have become challenging for many people's mental health, and therefore allowing people to constantly work from home would be a disadvantage for all. As designers, we need social interaction and benefit greatly from communicating with clients, or showing our work and ideas in a studio environment. Human interaction is vital to the designer's creativity and productivity. It can therefore be suggested, that Yuan's suggestion of a hybrid-work model will be a much more suitable change for the workspace, rather than the over-reliance of online technology. It is difficult to make a solid conclusion on what the future of Graphic Design will be, especially since the discipline is constantly changing, which we have discovered from analyzing parts of the history of Graphic Design. However, the Coronavirus pandemic has given a clear avenue of the direction in which design and design jobs are headed, and may have started one of Graphic Design's biggest paradigm shifts.

From exploring these three key words, I have discovered many questions which could be researched further. There is a clear connection between Graphic Design, future

employment and technology, how the past can be used to predict the ever-changing nature of Graphic Design, and the increase of technology can lead to changes in the design jobs we see today and the methods we use to create designs. The research question 'Graphic Design: What it was and what it is becoming' may act as a starting point for my writing, which can lead into a number of sub-questions. These sub-questions can all be explored in depth, such as 'What were the most notable events in Graphic Designs history and can these help to explain what Graphic Design will become?', 'How will the hybrid-workplace psychologically affect designers in the future?', 'Will traditional print methods be forgotten in the years to come?', 'What other design jobs will be available to Graphic Designers in the future and how many of these will be replaced with AI?'. One of the larger sub-questions that I would be interested in touching upon in my future writing is 'Is Graphic Design a suitable name for the practice?'. I feel this links in with the concepts I discussed in the beginning of my essay, such as 'What is graphic design?' and 'How do we form a definition of Graphic Design?'. These questions and concepts have all been considered for further evaluation in my future writing, and can be combined to create a piece for my question next year. This has led me to the question 'Graphic Design: What was it and how will the rise of technology impact the future of the discipline?'

Figures:

Figure 1: Howard Miller, J. (1943) *We Can Do It!* [online] Available at https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_538122 [Accessed 13 April]

Figure 2: Wulf, A. (2014) *The Grid.io* [online] Available at <https://medium.com/@austinwulf/the-grid-io-builds-incredibly-slow-websites-24ca1980c8f2> [Accessed 18 April]

Figure 3: Ryle, J. (1995) *In memoriam: The Typewriter* [online] Available at <https://johnryle.com/?article=in-memoriam-the-typewriter> [Accessed 6 May]

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