

Bryleigh Draycott

2003629

BA Graphic Design

Module: ADAD5004 Research in Practice

Word Count: 2,506

Tutor Name: Donna Williams

Three key words:
Imperfection, Disrupt and Mistake

In my proposal for my dissertation, I will be exploring the meaning of imperfection, disrupt and mistake within graphic design work and processes. graphic design has been a quick developing subject and has become more important in the modern age. The rush of design work being produced, and the development of new digital software has made me question if we have lost the desire to create expressive and creative work. I question if we have lost the value in design work and processes as it feels so commercialised. This leads me to want to discover what creates boundaries in graphic design and how different practitioners have overcome these boundaries. My keywords can show a different outlook to design and understand the limits that designers in the modern age can feel. It is my goal to use knowledge and research collected by these key words to discover a final question for my independent inquiry. Imperfection:

The aesthetics of imperfection emphasises spontaneity, disruption, process, and energy (Bloomsbury, 2022). Imperfection is defined as the state of being faulty or incomplete (Oxford dictionary, 2022) and when considering this in modern graphic design this would not be a desirable outcome for a piece of work. The assistance of computers and software has given the ability to create perfect geometric shapes and clean lines in our work (Gosling, 2019). We can find examples of perfect graphic design at a push of a button and replicate it with ease “digital” is an attempt to label the graphic style which emerged in the 1990s because of the revolutionary changes in computer technology (Ellis, 2018). The digital era has provided an endless amount of inspiration and development in design, and we keep striving for cleaner, perfect, better design. But will Graphic Design continue this way?

Elliot Jay Stocks, A creative director who writes about typography (Stocks, 2022) declared in an interview that designers have stopped dreaming. That we have

stopped being creative due to the ease of finding ideas online. He talks about the push to be perfect, and how machines follow this recipe so most work ends up being similar (Bunborg, 2016). Computers do not have an imagination and cannot produce original and meaningful ideas. Elliot Jay Stocks suggests that there will be or should be more of a push to create unique designs and after reading this article I wanted to investigate if there was still value for imperfection or human error regarding graphic design.

James Victore is an artist, mentor, guide, and guru (Victore, 2022). When exploring the term imperfection, his book 'F*ck Perfection' highlights the hindrance of perfectionism on designers and how to break away from perfection. I found his ideals and creative thinking valuable and helpful. The book was an enlightenment to my research and when exploring more about imperfection I would want to focus on James Victore to generate more questions and better understand the word imperfection.

Designers are not born with a perfectionism trait; it is something inherited once they immerse themselves into design. Perfectionism can lead to an obsession or an urge to make perfectly good things better. It affects a designer's work, and daily life and can cause designers to go overboard and miss the purpose of a project (Karwani, 2018).

James Victore states that Perfectionism seems like a professional advantage and a creative accelerator but really it "hits brakes more than gas." Perfectionism leads to overthinking and striving for perfection can stop the creating progress. It makes us feel that we can never finish a project as it is never right (Victore, 2019, p.47). So, I wanted to further discover how we can become more creative and remove the pressure of perfectionism. James Victore pushes the importance of play and

explains that new and innovative work comes from unexpected places not the “right” answer (2019, p.28). So, if imperfection is considered wrong despite it being what develops creativity and helps ideas develop why do graphic designers feel the need to be perfect, if perfect is so limiting?

After exploring the effects of the digital era on design I discovered that James Victore also agrees that the digital era has distracted us. He explains that our phones take us away from critical thinking time which helps us develop creative ideas and distract us on getting started on these ideas (p.22). We compare ourselves and are our worst critic and ideas and talents are silenced due to the idea of perfect success. We are quick to compare ourselves to those we see online. Accepting imperfection as a designer and making mistakes and failing will make them more successful and develop as a practitioner (2019, p.82) after looking at the effect of digital era and the on graphic design outcomes and designers themselves I recognised the importance of imperfection and pondered if imperfection would soon thrive in an age that emphasises the cleanliness, control, and digital workflows.

Disrupt:

I was interested in the word disrupt after investigating my first word imperfection. I wanted to discover more about breaking away from the modern way of design and how designers do this. Disruption can be defined as disturbance or problems which interrupt an event, activity, or process (Oxford dictionary, 2022). Disruption in design is about doing things differently or breaking things like rules (Shayler, 2017. p.9) I wanted to investigate the word disruption regarding rules and practices in graphic design as I want to discover its effect on designers' creativity. Graphic design has rules that can be followed to create effective and appealing outcomes. But what if graphic designers disrupted these rules and just created work based on intuitively?

After discovering an interview with Creative business coach Keir McLaren (2018) where he called “disrupters” people who come into a field with a unique way of looking. I learnt that most disrupters are people who are new or not specialised in that subject but are still incredibly successful as they are not limited by a bubble of old rules that keep them locked in. Keir McLaren's statements made me want to instigate how learnt rules in design can be limiting? In TATE'S book 'A brief lesson in rule breaking' it is explained that Following rules and routines can lead to getting stuck in a creative rut (2019, p.25). Rule breaking artists and designers are some of the most inspiring and inventive thinkers. Their methods can reinvent design work and inspire other designers to be bolder and braver with their work (TATE, 2019, P. 07) so do we even need rules in graphic design if breaking them creates better outcomes?

Breaking creative rules can lead to the most interesting and refreshing work (The porch, 2016). When researching into designers who are known for their disruption in design, David Carson's work is unparalleled. David Carson is known for his ignorance of rules and his work disrupted the commercial print medias professional reputation (Poynor, 2003. P.13). I wanted to focus on David Carson because his whole reputation is about how he disrupts the rules in graphic design and how he expresses his creative freedom.

David Carson suggests that chaos and disruption in graphic design work is more attractive and engaging to a reader as they can spend time deciphering what they are looking at (UAL, 2022). Disrupting the rules can create a variety of creative outcomes. I wanted to look more closely at the outcomes that David Carson has created to get a better understanding of my key word.



Figure 1. Carson, D. (2019) *Typography*.

David Carson is an American graphic designer. He is best known for his innovative magazine design, and use of experimental typography (Carson, 2022) His unconventional and experimental graphic style revolutionized the graphic designing scene in America during 1990s and Figure 1 shows the main characteristics of his work. His work could be recognised by the chaotic typography and pattern it embodies, disarray of photos overlapping each other. (Famous Graphic Designers, 2022.) Examples of rules in graphic design include making sure words are legible, avoid colour discord and maintaining alignment (Delane, 2019). In figure 1, Carson's work is the opposite of these rules showing how he disrupts the typical thought process being making design pieces and shows the importance of play and enjoying the design process.

Carson has always explained how he was self-taught (Khan ,2019) so he was able to disrupt traditional ways of designing before he understood them. He used other

mass communications and expressions of subcultures as his rule book (Blackwell, 2000, p.02). like Keir McLaren explains Carson is a disruptor, someone who was new in the field so did not have any rule limits. Carson's boldness disrupted the development of slick corporate design and loosened up the boundaries of graphic design. After researching my key work and David Carson's work I questioned do we need to push and consider more disruption in traditional graphic design outcomes?

Mistake:

Mistake can be defined by the Cambridge dictionary (2022) as an action, decision, or judgment that produces an unwanted or unintentional result. I discovered the word mistake when investigating my key word imperfection as designers often make mistakes when striving for perfection. Mistake in graphic design is a word that has mixed reviews, some designers hate it and some designer's whole portfolio is inspired on mistake and randomness. After finding this result I wanted to discover the consensus on the word mistake in graphic design.

In Anna Gerber's book 'all messed up (2004, p.205) there is an interview with Stefan Sagmeister, an Austrian graphic designer, storyteller, and typographer where he explains that what is interesting and appealing about mistakes is that it allows exploration of new avenues. In the same book April Greiman, a digital graphic designer, was also interviewed where she stated that mistakes are simply different outcomes of an idea just because the outcome was unexpected does not mean it is not successful (Gerber, 2004, p.204). these famous designers all thought of the word mistake as an opportunity and was a common statement within successful designers. Mccune (2020) made a similar comment stating that mistakes encourage designers to create new ways of thinking and doing. Viewing mistakes as creative

and innovative can shift the mindset and provide more positive energy to discover something new and better (Mccune, 2020). It was clear that mistakes can end up working to a designer's advantage and after reading these interviews, I wanted to investigate if we could accept failures and mistakes? By doing this, could designers' approach to projects be more experimental and expressive.

I questioned why do designers avoid mistakes? Doing more research into my key word it was common to find that mistake is often paired with the word failure which is defined as a lack of success (Oxford languages, 2022). I was intrigued by this as previous researching into design and mistakes it was suggested that making mistakes were important and desired. It was apparent the word mistake has a stigma surrounding it and the idea of failure seems to be attached to making mistakes, this means mistakes are something designers must avoid at all costs. Some designers are more aware that mistakes are how designers improve and learn but some designers give up instantly. The idea of mistakes being failure is unnecessary pressure to the designers as making mistakes is not failure but just trying as many things as possible (Tiburca, 2017.) so, is there a way to change this stigma?

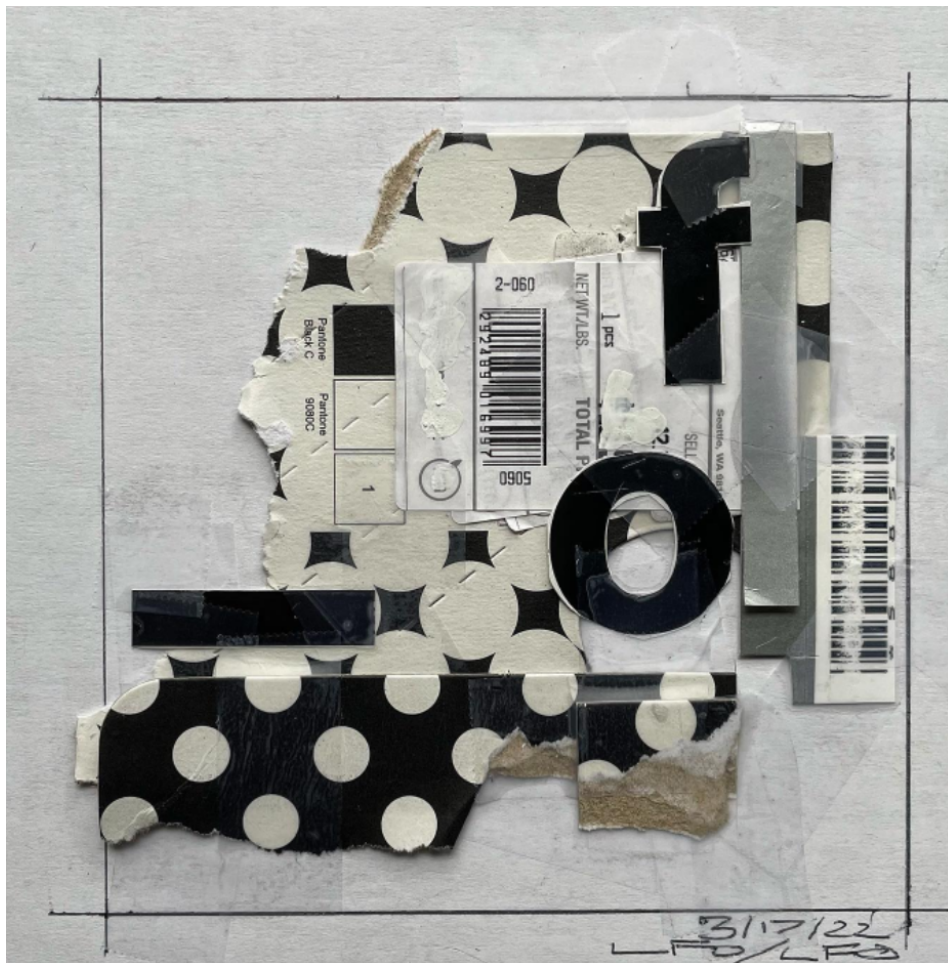


Figure 2. Ashworth, C. (2022) *Typographic Sketch*. Soundtrack: LFO / LFO.

After questioning the stigma around making mistakes I discovered Chris Ashworth, a graphic designer whose hands-on typography work is created with imperfection and randomness in mind. his “typography sketches” (figure 2) were inspiring and showed the value of mistakes and imperfection.

In an interview with Maeken (2022) he talks about his hands on work that creates hugely flawed and beautifully imperfect typographic works. Chris Ashworth opened about not doing much personal work from 1999 to 2018 as he “lost the ich.” he was able to become re-inspired through tinkering and not being concerned about mistakes. His typographic works stands out with its texture, expression, and

experimentation in a time where cleanliness and control are so emphasised. It shows that mistakes can create a variety of different outcomes and helps with creativity.



Figure 3. Ashworth, C. (2022) *Typographic Sketch*. Soundtrack: Joy Division / *These Days*.

He started sharing his hand rendered Typography sketches (Figure 3) work on Instagram, he was able to rediscover his flow and creativity again through making mistakes and experimentation where he now states that he enjoys his work again and even find it therapeutic. In a separate interview with The Futur Academy (2019) he explains how being creative frees you mind and spirit and making mistakes are the best, emphasising that his best work has come from mistakes. Chris Ashworth is a designer that I would focus on when discovering more about my key word mistake. He isn't afraid to try new things and embraces mistakes to create unique design work

and shows that you can be more creative by doing so. His ideals and work will be a great asset in answering questions regarding mistakes in design.

After contextualising my three key words it can be summarised that the relationship between my keywords and research into these key words has created a focus point on how we are losing an unbelievably valuable way of working. My keywords criticise the new way of working and highlights the concern of graphic designers losing their creative freedom and the effect it is having on their work. Practitioners like David Carson and Chris Ashworth were able to thrive when it came to expressive design work but it can be argued that they emerged when experimentation and graphic design was developing. But their work still is valued today so does there need to be more of their type of work in modern design projects?

My research suggests that we are losing expressive a creatively free design work due to the increase in digital tools, rules that only cater to a specific style of graphics and the increased pressure on designers. It made me question when this all originated and what can we do to change it. James Victore's reminders and observations could express the link of my three words and answer a lot of questions regarding the change in designer's attitudes, so I still want to investigate his theories more in my independent project next year.

After exploring my three key words, the question "are designers losing their creative workflows due to the modern expectations on design?" is the one I propose for my independent project. Sub questions can be developed from this proposed question that could have emerged in my research such as 'how has the digital era affected the creative process?', 'Do we still value human error?', 'Why do we need rules in graphic design?', 'What is the importance of play in graphic design?'

The concepts of consequences, development, expression, freedom, time, and creativity have been considered for further investigation next year while also including my original three key words.

Bibliography

Blackwell, L. (2000) *The end of print: the grafik design of David Carson*. London: Laurence king publishing.

Bloomsbury. (2022) *The Aesthetics of Imperfection*. Available at:
<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk> (Accessed: 13 April 2022).

Brunborg, E. (2016) *Is The Internet Killing Creativity?* Available at:
<https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2016/01/is-the-internet-killing-creativity/>
(Accessed: 13 April 2022).

Cambridge Dictionary. (2022) *MISTAKE definition*. Available at:
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mistake> (Accessed: 9 May 2022).

DeLane, J. (2019) *10 Graphic Design Rules You Should Never Break*. Available at:
<https://digitalbrandinginstitute.com/graphic-design-rules/> (Accessed: 26 April 2022).

Ellis, M. (2018) *A brief history of graphic design*. Available at:
<https://99designs.co.uk/blog/design-history-movements/history-graphic-design/>
(Accessed: 18 April 2022).

Famous Graphic Designers. (2022) *David Carson*. Available at:
<https://www.famousgraphicdesigners.org/david-carson> (Accessed: 25 April 2022).

Gerber, A. (2004) *All Messed up*. London: Laurence king publishing.

Gosling, E. (2019) *Mid-century modern graphic design: a designer's guide*. Available at:
<https://www.creativebloq.com/features/mid-century-modern-graphic-design-a-designers-guide> (Accessed: 15 April 2022).

Karwani, S. (2019) *Obsession of 'Perfectionism' in Designers*. Available at: <https://medium.com/@sanyakarwani/obsession-of-perfectionism-in-designers-4a4d3fb48273> (Accessed: 11 April 2022).

Khan, Z. (2019) *David Carson on the spirit of being anti-grid*. Available at: <https://www.stirworld.com/inspire-people-david-carson-on-the-spirit-of-being-anti-grid> (Accessed: 29 April 2022).

MAEKAN. (2022) *Chris Ashworth's Swiss Grit*. Available at: <https://maekan.com/story/type-of-graphic-chris-ashworths-swiss-grit/> (Accessed: 4 may 2022).

Mclaren, K. (2018) *How Outsiders Break Rules & Create Disruption* [video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ittd4gieExk&t=273s> (Accessed: 25 April 2022).

Oxford Dictionary. (2022) *Definition of words for research*. Available at: <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/> (Accessed: 15 April 2022).

Poynor, R. (2003) *no more rules. Graphic design and postmodernism*. London: Laurence king publishing.

Shayler, M. (2017) *Do/ Disrupt/ Change the status quo or become it*. London: The do book company.

Stocks, E. (2022) *About me*. Available at: <https://elliotjaystocks.com/> (Accessed: 25 April 2022).

TATE. (2019) *Brief lesson in rule breaking*. London: Octopus publishing group.

The porch. (2016) *Breaking the Rules of Graphic Design*. Available at: <https://bbrcreative.com/2016/10/breaking-rules-graphic-design/> (Accessed: 21 April 2022).

Tiburca, A. (2017) *How Does Embracing Failure Make You A Better Designer*. Available at: <https://webdesignledger.com> (Accessed: 30 April 2022).

The Futur Academy. (2019) *Embracing Randomness & Imperfection in Graphic Design & Typography w/ Chris Ashworth* [video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSDTTTO5Pw> (Accessed: 19 April 2022).

UAL. (2022) *Breaking the Rules of Graphic Design*. Available at: <https://abulpitt0420171.workflow.arts.ac.uk/commune-1> (Accessed: 21 April 2022).

Victore, J. (2019) *Feck perfection*. California: Chronicle Books.

List of artwork

Figure 1: Carson, D. (2019) *Typography* [Collage] Available at: <https://www.thelogocreative.co.uk/designer-interview-with-david-carson/> (Accessed on 04 May 2022)

Figure 2: Ashworth, C. (2022) *Typographic Sketch. Soundtrack: LFO / LFO* [photograph] Available at: <https://www.instagram.com> (Accessed on: 08 May 2022)

Figure 3: Ashworth, C. (2022) *Typographic Sketch. Soundtrack: Joy Division / These Days*. [photograph] Available at: <https://www.instagram.com> (Accessed on: 08 May 2022)