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DO WE NEED A HISTORY OF GRAPHIC DESIGN IN GREECE?

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For a country so enveloped in history and defined by the remains of it, the course of Greek graphic design seems to play only a small role among its marble siblings, though it has much to show.

Graphic design, as the whole field of design, is undergoing change under the pressure of the current socio-political, cultural, ecological and economic environment. Boundaries between traditionally well-defined design disciplines tend to dissolve. Outcomes of graphic design practice are not anymore restricted to tangible products such as objects and images but they also include processes that respond to societal, humanitarian and environmental challenges. Similarly fluidity has become a characteristic of current design activity as professionals are regularly requested to "traverse, transcend and transfigure disciplinary and conceptual boundaries."

Language usually reflects the occurrence of change in a field. This is clearly shown in a series of recent initiatives where linguistic changes were adopted in order to indicate a broader interpretation of the graphic design discipline. In 2014, the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (Icograda), which was founded in 1963 in London, changed its name to International Council of Design (ico-D). The main reason for removing the word "graphic" was to "reflect its new strategy for increasing the dissolution of boundaries between disciplines."[2] The change of name also acknowledged the emergence of a new kind of design profession, where practitioners are expected to respond to multifaceted demands imposed by new technologies and media, as well as a new professional environment. Currently, graphic designers "are working within complex, globalized environments that required them to research outside of their field and to synthesize entirely new concepts and solutions in order to engage people with their environment and community in potent ways."[3] Following the same line of thought, the official publication of the International Council of Design was relaunched under a new title. Communication design, interdisciplinary, and graphic design research replaced iridescent, for the term "better describes and supports a range of new kinds of practices, processes, and methods," "better reflects where contemporary design practice and research is heading, and it allows space for the definition to evolve."[4] Even more recently AIGA Design Educators' Community response to change was the inauguration of Dialectic, a new scholarly journal with the aim to provide "a gathering place for those who wish to critically and thoughtfully propose, question, and argue about the ideas, systems and processes central to the nature of design education and practice."[5] Both the title of the journal and the publishing project indicate the critical need for addressing design education issues in a period of constant change.

In a globalized world Greek graphic design cannot but experience the impact of the change the field goes through. This is probably more obvious in professionals' every day practice as well as in publications, exhibitions and conferences. In times of change, historical knowledge can help us understand the evolution and complexities of the discipline and underpin decision-making, planning and strategies for the future. The aim of this article is to suggest that we now stand at

a critical point where initiatives should be taken towards researching and compiling the history of graphic design in Greece. As design practice tends to be entangled in a variety of modern day pursuits and its conventional boundaries are regularly transcended, any strategy about how to move forward needs to be grounded on the knowledge and critical assessment of past experiences. My main aim is to raise questions than provide answers, to inspire discussion, reflection and critique about the past of Greek graphic design. From the standpoint of a design educator and researcher I would like to look at what we now consider as history of Greek graphic design and propose new ways forward in order to start exploring and studying it as a distinct subject.

Discussions about various issues in graphic design, such as its practice, theory, research or history, start with questions about terminology. However, this is complex in the case of Greek graphic design, since there is an additional need to address how the term "graphic design" has been translated in Greek, and which are the Greek language terms employed when talking about graphic designers, their practice and the outcome of their work. The ambiguity that surrounds the relevant terminology is obvious in cases when either the English term graphic design is not literally translated, or editors and authors use the term "graphic design" in the titles of Greek editions. Examples can be drawn from both past and present.

Themata Chorou ke Technon, issues 1 (1970) and 4 (1973).

Themata Chorou ke Technon (Issues of Space and the Arts)[6] is a long-standing bilingual journal and one of the first which among architecture, interior design, industrial design, and visual arts discussed issues of graphic design practice. In its first issue of 1970, the Greek section devoted to graphic design was entitled *graphikes technes* (graphic arts) and the English section graphic design (in English). Similarly, in the title of the only, until now, anthologized reader on the theory and history of graphic design that was published in Greek, the editor and translator chose to keep the term graphic design in English;[7] his decision could probably be justified by the fact that all texts he chose to translate were written by

European and American authors. The tactic adopted by graphic design magazines published at the turn of the century, to use variations of the English term,[8] confirm that a widely accepted translation of "graphic design" in Greek is still pending and it will probably never exist.

To the best of my knowledge academic research on the use and evolution of graphic design terminology in Greek is very limited. Marina Emmanouil addressed the issue in the first chapter of her significant research work on the history of Greek graphic design during the post-war period underlining that discussions about design terminology preoccupied researchers in many countries in Europe and elsewhere.[9] Artemis Yagou contributed to the discussion about the use of the general term "design" in Greek language as early as 2001.[10] From the above becomes evident the need for a complete and retrospective survey which will inquire how and when the related terminology started to be used, questioning how different terms are used in different contexts such as everyday practice, education and publishing, both by practitioners and academics.

An additional issue that emerges when attempting to discuss graphic design history, is how we define "graphic design history" or what "graphic design history" is about. However it is not within the scope of this scholarly article to address the scholarly literature that was developed around both the definition and the need for graphic design history. It suffices to remind of the starting point of discussions, at least for the Anglo-Saxon research community in 1983, when three significant events occurred: 1) The first symposium on the History of Graphic Design entitled *Coming of Age* was held at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Its organizers, Barbara Hodik and Roger Remington, sought to initiate a formal study of graphic design history which, consequently, would point out a step forward for the graphic design profession;[11] 2) Philip B. Megg's book *A History of Graphic Design*, the first ever publication where the words "history" and "graphic design" co-existed in a book title,[12] was published with the aim to: "construct the legacy of contemporary designers working in the United States."[13] According to the author a legacy "could help designers understand their work, comprehend how and where the semantic and syntactic vocabulary of graphic design developed, and aid our field in its struggle for professional status."[14] 3) The academic journal *Design Issues* was founded by a group of designers and design educators at the University of Illinois (Chicago) with the aim to create a forum for "ongoing deliberation" on design.[15] For the purpose of my argument graphic design history encompasses, in addition to the history of the graphic artefact and the designer, an understanding of the social context where graphic artefacts are produced, distributed and consumed as well as of the cultural context within which graphic design practice takes place.

To begin with, I would suggest that we could use two factors in order to map the current state of graphic design history in Greece: education and publishing.[16] The following approach is by no means exhaustive but it can serve as a starting point.

EDUCATION:
WHAT HISTORY DO STUDENTS OF GRAPHIC DESIGN LEARN?

It is widely acknowledged that graphic design history is closely linked to the education of practitioners. The same applies to Greek graphic design education; although there is no university degree in design history, let alone in graphic design history, some relevant modules are being taught in both secondary and higher education. Thus graphic design history is treated as a "service" module since it has a value only "as long as it services design education."[17] For educator and design writer Steven Heller "knowing the roots of design is necessary to avoid reinvention and (...) plagiarism;"[18] at the same time the history of the field provides designers a legacy on which to build and transform. For Heller a grounding historical knowledge is more necessary for graphic design students especially in the digital age where changes in the traditional graphic design practice occur. In secondary education graphic design is taught as a vocational course in the vocational lyceum. The history of graphic arts was first added as a module in the second cycle curriculum of the old Technical Vocational Schools (Technika Epagelmatika Ekpaedeftiria—TEE) in 2001. At present vocations are organized in different subject domains and each domain includes a number of specialties. According to the most recent educational regulations "graphic arts" is one of the six specialties offered in the domain of applied arts.[19] The curriculum consists of general and specialized modules, the latter being mainly practical with the exception of art history and the history of graphic arts.

At the Technological Higher Education the relevant department was founded in 1977; it is now called Tmima Grafistikis (department of graphic design) and constitutes part of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design of the Technological Educational Institute of Athens. This is the only public institution offering four-year studies and practitioners are educated at an undergraduate and postgraduate level. At an early stage students are introduced to art history; the history of graphic design is then taught in two terms in the third year covering the development of graphic arts from the 17th until the 20th century. Moreover a Master's degree in Graphic Arts and Multimedia is offered as a distance learning program by the School of Applied Arts at the Hellenic Open University. "Art and Communication in Graphic Arts" is a course which consists of three units, the first focusing on the history of art and the history of graphic arts.

Besides the public institutions, graphic design programs are also offered by a number of private education organizations which, however, are not qualified with a higher education status by the Greek Ministry of Education. Although their contribution to the evolution of Greek graphic design practice is acknowledged by professionals, it has not been yet properly evaluated. Overall the history of graphic design education in Greece still remains a long-awaited research project.

Allow me now to plunge into the pages of the textbooks used to teach graphic design history in order to answer the question in the title of this section, namely "what history do students of graphic design learn?" History of graphic arts[20] was introduced into the second cycle of the Technical Vocational Schools (TEE) in 2001. Two editions appear in the catalog of the National Library of Greece (2001, 2003). The copy which is available on the Internet is a reprint of 2011. The main purpose of the book is summarized in a short preface written by Vika Gizeli, architect and at that time advisor for the applied arts at the Pedagogic Institute: "the book presents the major events in the evolution of written communication, from the use of writing in ancient times and the Middle Ages, to the invention of printing, the use of photolithography and finally computers."[21]


g.a. Graphic Arts, Greek monthly review, issue 120, September–October 2009.
+design, issue 74, October–December 2011.

The book's contents suggest that Philip Megg's, *A History of Graphic Design*, first published in 1983, was probably used as a model. In the late 1990s Megg's work was already in its third edition. It had been established as one of the leading textbooks used in design schools worldwide, and accordingly, it set an example for the Greek edition too. Following Megg, the author adopted a "far-sighted" view adhering to the notion that "the essence of graphic design is giving visual form to human communications."[22] The narrative follows a chronological sequence. In the first half of the book, the account starts with the Lascaux cave paintings and the history of writing, moves on to the manuscript era and the origins and development of printing, and concludes with the history of technologies that had an impact on the evolution of graphic design—such as lithography, wood and copper engraving, and photography. The second half concentrates on graphic design in the 20th century through the presentation of "art-based" design movements such as the Arts and Crafts, Russian Avant-Garde, the Bauhaus, incorporating only one reference to design practice in relation to advertising. The emphasis is on well-established, noteworthy historical personalities and graphic artifacts

in the history of western graphic design and typography. How is Greek graphic design positioned in this account? The few references and visual examples are restricted to artifacts such as Byzantine manuscripts, lettering on mosaics and buildings, newspapers, advertising posters, and Greek typefaces for computers. Currently the book is used for teaching the history of graphic arts at the third year of the Vocational Lyceum.[23] The recommended curriculum is still based on that initially introduced in 1999.[24] The official decision to reprint the book for the needs of students in the academic year 2016–2017 without any revision constitutes a gloomy announcement for graphic design education.[25] Albeit a critical evaluation of the book should consider the prescriptive context within which it was conceived. At the time it was written, but even today, authors of state textbooks are obliged to strictly follow the official curriculum which is defined by the Pedagogic Institute.
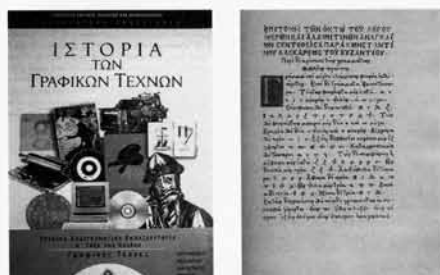
M. Vythinos, *History of Graphic Arts*, Athens: Organismos Ekdosisi Didaktikon Vivlion, 2011.

Konstantinos Laskaris, *Epitomi Ton Okto Tou Logou Meron*, Milan, 1476. Library of the Hellenic Parliament.

Art History / History of Graphic Arts[26] was published by the Hellenic Open University, a public university offering distance learning, degree-level education. The book first appeared in 2002 and has been used consistently thereafter. Students are taught a combination of art history and history of graphic arts. The unit on history is part of a broader course entitled "Art and Communication in Graphic Arts." In the book's preface the content of the unit is briefly described as follows: "Reference is made to art history, graphic arts history, and the history of Greek publications. Students study the role of writing and of graphic arts in communication and the development of printing technology from Gutenberg until today. Graphic arts in recent times are also discussed, as well as the future of print, digital publications and multimedia products."[27] As the title of the book indicates graphic arts are presented as an extension of art history. The emphasis is mostly on the evolution of printing technologies from wood engraving through letterpress to silk screen and intaglio and reproduction methods from metal typeset-

ting to desktop publishing. Graphic artifacts are praised at the end of the book, where a list of "Important Greek Printed Material" is presented in chronological order. Thirty nine printed items are shown as examples of "good design" starting with the first book printed entirely in Greek in Milan in 1476, *Epitomi ton okto tou logou meron (Compendium of the Eight Parts of Speech)*, and finishing with the publication of the two-volume work *Monastery of Vatopedi (Μονή Βατοπεδίου)* in 1997. Other items include newspapers, broadsheets, posters, stamps and a map. According to the authors these items were selected on the basis of their semantic significance and quality in typographic design; those published in the 20th century, primarily, for their artistic value. Unfortunately they are presented totally disconnected from their "social roots"[28] and without any reference to the diverse circumstances that most probably gave rise to them. It is clear that although the book addresses future practitioners it does not offer them the history of their practice in a national context.

The content of both textbooks reflects, to some extent, the state of graphic design history in its infancy when it "was scattered among the pasts of art, printing, typography, photography, and advertising," and scholars almost unanimously acknowledged the need to "move away from art history" and start working towards "a design history that took into account other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, aesthetics, politics, economics ..."[29] The narrative is also indicative of two characteristics of Greek graphic design, at least during the longest part of the 20th century: its positioning in an "interstitial place between the graphic art and more established fine art sectors,"[30] and its influence by the western design canon as Greece is a country lying in the periphery of Europe. Thus Greek students' understanding of graphic design history is shaped by their exposure to a general history of western graphic design where the Greek alphabet and Byzantine manuscripts are acclaimed as significant contributions to European culture. As future practitioners, they acquire a broad knowledge of the field, but they totally ignore the evolution of Greek graphic design in the 20th century and how it may relate to the broader narrative of graphic design history.

PUBLISHING ON GRAPHIC DESIGN HISTORY

The market for graphic design titles in Greece is dominated by imported English language titles. Most of these books are how-to practical guides, as well as monographs presenting the work of a designer or a design studio. Graphic design history is also totally absent from the general book publishing production. Traditionally, the number of graphic design titles in Greek, translations from foreign editions mostly, was quite limited; now it is even worse due to the current financial conditions. A quick search in the BiblioNet Database (the Greek Books in print)[31] and the online Politeia bookshop (one of the most up-to-date bookshops

in Greece), using graphic design history (ιστορία γραφικών τεχνών) as keywords, produced no results. One of the main reasons could be the limited number of courses offered at a higher educational level and the small number of students studying graphic design. Moreover the centralized state control on the adaption of textbooks throughout the whole public education system remains a true barrier for any commercial publishing venture. An in-depth and diachronic study of the publishing activity with regard to graphic design would be a significant contribution to the history of the field. In such an environment two works on design history stand out and deserve appreciation. Although not yet published in book form, I would like to mention Marina Emmanouil's PhD thesis, since it offers an until now unique, in-depth exploration and insightful approach to the modernization of Greek society after World War II through the lens of graphic design. Based on the examination of the electricity and tourism promotion Emmanouil ascertained that the post-war history of graphic design in Greece is "the history of a belated modernity with uneven development, but also of struggles, ambitions and incomplete initiatives, or priorities of survival that defined the choices made over the design outcome, of the limitations of freedom for experimentation and imagination, and of how the profession can (rather than should) operate."[32] The publication of Emmanouil's thesis in a book form would offer the Greek graphic design community a groundwork that could move the study of the history of the field forward.

Similarly, the publication of Artemis Yagou's monograph entitled *Fragile Innovation: Episodes in Greek Design History* (2011), the culmination of her research of over a decade on the history of Greek industrial design, is a significant and almost rare contribution to Greek design history. Using a series of case studies, the author casts light on some common themes, which run throughout Greek design history, from the Interwar period until the late 20th century, namely authenticity, modernization and national identity. Both works have proved that there is considerable material in archives, libraries and in collections and repositories waiting to be explored and interpreted by researchers.

THE PAST AS AN IMPETUS FOR DESIGN TO MOVE FORWARD

If in Europe and America graphic design history is a relatively new academic discipline, it is still in its infancy in Greece. A closer look at the papers presented at the past six ICTVCs (2002–2016),[33] revealed hardly any historical approach related to Greek topics. Furthermore, it was noticed that the few contributions on Greek design history addressed the history of Greek printing and typography rather than the history of graphic design practice and artifacts. Similarly, in the 16 issues of *Hyphen*[34] that have been published until now, the number of articles on historical aspects of Greek graphic design is small. The presence of graphic

design history in Greek periodical publications needs further research in order for a reliable interpretation to be possible. However, it has to be said that the predominance of typographic and printing history over graphic design history is a well-recognizable pattern already identified by researchers. Teal Triggs has noticed that "graphic design history has always had difficulty in being seen as an established field of study"[35] in contrast with printing and typographic history, which are more firmly represented by research conducted in a range of disciplines such as bibliography, book and cultural history.

Apostolos Rizos, *The 6th ICTVC, Thessaloniki 5–9 July 2016*. Poster.

The aim of this article was to argue for the need of the compilation of a history of graphic design as it developed in Greece. Paraphrasing Triggs I would suggest that Greek graphic design needs to start searching for its past.[36] Students studying to become professional designers need to become aware of how graphic design has evolved as a professional activity in Greece and how graphic artifacts were produced, received and used in particular social contexts. Having a historical perspective of the field will enable future practitioners to face challenges by making informed decisions and envision new forms of practice. It is now time to ask how a history of Greek graphic design might look and try to identify its starting point. Towards this direction a first step would be to try to locate and record what Andrew Blauvelt has called the "proto-discipline"[37] of Greek graphic design history referring to the books and articles already written both by researchers and practitioners, the exhibitions organized, and the archives that have been studied no matter how limited this material might be. Such a survey could throw light and bring together the isolated endeavors which have been, so far, initi-

ated by practitioners and researchers towards a discussion of historical facets of graphic design in Greece. This insight could prove that the profession has already started to search for its tradition.

Hyphen, A Typographic Forum, issues 15 (2012) and 16 (2014–2015).

There is no doubt that the compilation of graphic design history constitutes a demanding intellectual venture. For this reason, it would be advisable to take advantage of the knowledge and experience accumulated in other countries where researchers have already addressed the problems and pinpointed the difficulties through conferences and publications. For example, we should try to adopt an expanded view of graphic design, which will be more inclusive instead of approaching it as the accumulation of the work of "heroic designers" and their achievements or as just a sequence of styles. The driving principle underpinning our approach should be to understand graphic design in its social dimension, since social relations are an intrinsic component of graphic design practice. The field goes through a long process of change and historical knowledge can be a valuable tool since the "discussion of future roles for design cannot take place in a historical vacuum."[38] In a society where graphic design lacks university academic status, with an extremely limited postgraduate education, and a complete absence of academic publications, pursuing historical research seems almost utopian. However, if we agree with Clive Dilnot that "design history arises as a response to particular problems" and not "artificially for the sake of itself,"[39] at this very moment when Greek graphic design practice goes through a process of change, interrogating and contemplating its past may illuminate the road forward.

1   P. A. Rodgers and C. Bremner, *The Concept of the Design Discipline*, 2017, Dialectic, 1 (1), p. 22.

2   ico-d.org/about/history#legacy [accessed May 10th 2016].

3   Ibid.

4   T. Triggs, *Research Notes: Communication Design*, 2015, Communication Design, 3 (1), p. 1.

5   K. M. Owens and M. R. Gibson, "It's time to stir the pot...," 2017, Dialectic, 1 (1), p. 7.

6   An interior design and architecture annual review, which was first published in 1970 by Orestis V. Doumanis. The first two issues appeared as *Themata esoterikou chorou/Etesia epitheorisi (Interior design in Greece/Annual Review)*; it was renamed in 1972 with the publication of the third issue.

7   M. Fragopoulos (ed), *Introduction to the History and Theory of Graphic Design, a Short Anthology*, Athens, 2006.

8   Trade magazines such as *GA Graphikes technes* (1999–2010) (editor: Lia Fakinou), *ΔD/ +design* (1998–2011) (editor: Dimitris Fakinos), *grDesign* (2013–) (editor: Panos Konstantopoulos).

9   M. Emmanouil *Graphic Design and Modernization in Greece, 1945–1970*, 2012, PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, p. 32–52.

10 A.Yagou, "What is design?" The issues of Greek terminology in industrial design, 2001, third Conference on "Greek language and terminology," Athens 1.–3. November 2001.

11 T. Triggs, *Designing Graphic Design History*, 2009, Journal of Design History, 22 (4), p. 326.

12 S. Heller, *The First Graphic Design Text Book, Updated for the New Design World*, 2012, The Atlantic, 2nd February 2012.

13 S. Heller and E. Pettit, *Design Dialogues*, 1998, New York.

14 Ibid. p. 89.

15 V. Margolin, *Design issues*, 1984, Editorial, 1(1), p. 3.

16 Rick Poynor has considered book publishing as a key indicator of the field's health in R. Poynor, *Out of the Studio: Graphic Design Distory and Visual Studies*, 2011, Design Observer designobserver.com/feature/out-of-the-studio-graphic-design-history-and-visual-studies/24048 [accessed April 10th 2016].

17 D. J. Huppatz and G. Lees-Maffei, *Why Design History? A Multi-National Perspective on the State and Purpose of the Field, Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 2012, 12 (2–3), p. 325.

18 S. Heller and G. Balance (eds), *Graphic Design History*, New York, 2001, p. 8.

19 Government gazette 1489/B/26.5.2016.

20 Written by Manolis Vythinos an architect by education and for many years the director of the School of Applied Arts and Artistic Studies at the Technological Educational Institute of Athens.

21 M. Vithynos, *History of Graphic Arts*, (reprint), 2011, Organization for the publication of teaching books (Organismos Ekdosis Didaktikon Vivlion-OEΔB).

22 P. B. Meggs, *Design History: Discipline or Anarchy?*, 1985, AIGA Journal of Graphic Design, 3 (4), reprinted in: S. de Bondt, C. de Smet (eds), *Graphic Design History in the Writing (1983–2011)*, London, 2012, p. 12.

23 Government gazette 1481/B/25.5.2017.

24 Government gazette 2321/B/31.12.1999.

25 Ministerial decision Φ1/87395/Δ4/30.5.2016.

26 A. A. Lyberakis, M. Vithynos, *Art History/History of Graphic Arts, Vol. 1*, Patra, 2002. In the preface of the book Gombrich's *The Story of Art* is recommended as a complimentary study.

27 bid. p. 15.

28 C. Dilnot, *The State of Design History*, 1984, in V. Margolin, *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, Chicago, 1989, p. 237.

29 T. Triggs, *Graphic Design History: Past, Present, Future*, Design Issues, 27 (1), 2011, p. 3.

30 Emmanouil, *Graphic Design and Modernization*, p. 196.

31 See *biblionet.gr* [updated last 2012].

32 Emmanouil, *Graphic Design and Modernization*, p. 195. See also "Modern" Graphic Design in Greece after World War II, Design Issues, 30 (4), 2014, p. 33–51.

33 A conference organized since 2002 by ISTVC and the only one in Greece which encompasses presentations with a focus on research in typography and visual communication. The 6th ICTVC took place in July 2016 in Thessaloniki.

34 Klimis Mastoridis (ed.), *Hyphen, A Typographic Forum*, 1998. *Hyphen* is a bilingual journal with an interdisciplinary approach to typography and graphic communication.

35 T. Triggs, *Designing Graphic Design History*, 2009, Journal of Design History, 22 (4), p. 339.

36 T. Triggs, *Graphic Design History: Past, Present, Future*, Design Issues, 27 (1), 2011, p. 3.

37 A. Blauvelt, *An Opening: Graphic Design's Discursive Spaces*, 1994, Visible Language, 28 (3), p. 206. The term is used to describe the group of all these activities which have taken place in relation to graphic design, but do not constitute yet "a coherent body of autonomous knowledge which would be a prerequisite for any disciplinary status."

38 C. Dilnot, *The State of Design History. Part I: Mapping the Field*, in V. Margolin (ed) (1989), *Design Discourse*, Chicago, p. 227.

39 Ibid. p. 218