Open College of the Arts

Tutor report

Student name	**Linda Mayoux**	Student number	**509455**
Course/Module	**Book Design 1**	Assignment number	**Two**

Overall Comments

Part two of the course has concerned itself with the form and function of the book and covered anatomy of a book, book genres, the front cover and approaches to design. Overall your response to part two has been very good in terms of your research and analysis. You've developed some very good ideas and are beginning to find the visual skills needed to communicate them. You're clearly able to develop strong and appropriate concepts for your book covers, moving forward it would be worth allowing more room to test your ideas out visually and to continue to support your learning of desk top publishing software.

Project: The anatomy of a book

This focused on how the book designer can plan a book's structure and your first exercise asked you to create a flatplan for eight pages of a book. Very good research into the anatomy of a book in which you've reflected on how various book designers have worked with layout, format and sequencing. I thought you made a very good comment on the Rethink book about the likelihood of it seeming outdated quickly – yes, there's a balancing act here between innovation and tradition. Designers often use the conventions of book design as a safe starting point to venture off into new territory. In many ways this rethinking of the rules only serves to reinforce the conventions themselves.

Project: Book genres

This project encouraged you to think about the purpose of the book and its intended audience. You were asked to consider books from different genres (excluding children's books) and think about how each form reflects its function. Your photos of the different genre sections in your local bookshop really helped to put this project and your analysis into context. Sober business books, serious politics, predictable travel images, and the nuancing between how to art books, academic art books and subgenres such as photography. All of which showed a very good level of enquiry and identification of key indicators of genres, such the prominence of space and image within coffee table books and the visual structuring through of how to books.

Project: Front cover

You were asked to compare and contrast book covers from different genres and reflect on their use of text and imagery. Then look closely at three books

from three genres and reflect on the intended audience for each, comparing covers for use of imagery, typeface and colour. It's interesting that you identified yourself as a potential buyer of Angelmaker. The sense of intrigue seemed pivotal in this, not in terms of the cover's immediate visual hit, but through a slower burn of interest. You've picked up on an interest point here you may want to develop further through your design work – how do you give your audience enough information but at the same time intrigue them by posing questions? Of course, this approach works very well for literary genres but might be less appropriate for travel or business books. Yes, many of the covers you picked for travel are boring – I wonder whether this is to promote the idea of going somewhere to see for yourself – a lot of the images feel very neutral in their response to the places. Yes, the grey suited covers of the business section do seem to rely on visual gags or dry references to wider ideas.

In the second exercise you were asked to creatively develop a range of thumbnails using the figure as a starting point. Very good range of thumbnails that showed a breadth of approaches as well as subtle nuancing through your choice of composition. I agree that cropping the figure offers an interesting idea for your cover, both conceptually and visually.

Project: Approaches to design
In the first exercise you provide an overview of ten different designers, selecting two to compare further. Very good research into your range of contemporary and twentieth century designers, in which you've picked up on some key figures in the development of book design typography and layout. You could have perhaps made more of the comparison between your selection, picking up on your notes around Eldon's use of the poignant in comparison with Carson's energetic style driven approach.

The second exercise asked you to look at the impact of 4 different designs for 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea and consider their effectiveness and the era they were made. Very good analysis of both content and context of your selection, picking up on some of the dominant visual themes. Your analysis of 1984 followed a similar approach, and as you've pointed out the motifs are perhaps less obvious, maybe because of the more conceptual nature of the book, which lends itself to more typographic and less illustrative outcomes. It would have been good to see you develop your thinking into more visual outcomes by making some rough thumbnail design for a new cover.

Assessment potential

I understand your aim is to go for the Visual Communications / Creative Arts Degree and that you plan to submit your work for assessment at the end of this course. From the work you have shown in this assignment, and providing you commit yourself to the course, I suggest that you are likely to be successful in the assessment.

Feedback on assignment
Creative and analytical thinking, Visual and Technical Skills

The assignment asked you to create artwork for the cover of 'On the Road by Jack Kerouac, developing three mock up versions. Probably not the easiest book to respond to given your extreme irritation with the sexist and egotistical characters, however the sense of still and open spaces was a good angle to approach the book from. Some excellent contextual research into the visual cultures of the period, making connections between the sense of stillness you wanted to portray and abstract expressionism. Your research drew on the motif of the open road within American photography, which allowed you to reference both the period and perhaps pick up on your observation about the sexism within the book, by suggesting a male gaze or male presence through the vehicle / male drivers. Your research also explored the book's history and design more widely.

Of the three covers, the photographic version is perhaps the most accomplished, in terms of it's ability to present the context and content of the book through your choice of image and typography, but also in your technical abilities in bringing these elements together. Not so sure about the drop shadow on the title though, black text on the lighter sky might have been sufficient.

The illustrative version presents a confident composition but the illustration isn't resolved enough to really work. It might have been an idea to scan some of your drawings from your sketchbook to see if these could have worked on the cover.

The typographic version shows a growing confidence in using typography as a visual tool, both in terms of the general typesetting and typography as an illustrative element. There are merits to your white on black layered approach but I though they didn't really communicate your image of the still and open road.

There's a thumbnail version in your learning log of the Lee Friedlander photo of the road with signs that wraps around the front and back covers – I though this was perhaps the simplest but most effective cover. Your choice of image captures the period and sense of openness perfectly and the typography is effective but understated.

Sketchbooks
Research and idea development, Context

I thought your sketchbook was an interesting way of researching book – pulling out images and motifs and visualising them through collage and drawing. Some of your more open drawings worked very well – the black ink drawings, charcoal pieces and experiments with colour and collage. I used the word open because some of the drawings focused on picture making in much more narrow ways, and as you pointed out in your analysis of the Angelmakers cover, intrigue can be a useful strategy.

Learning Logs or Blogs / Critical essays
Research and idea development, Context

Overall, research and contextualization of your work is very good, with some very good idea development in your sketchbooks. It would be good to see more visual exploration of your ideas through thumbnail drawings or testing out ideas digitally. To support this you may want to develop your computer skills further.

Suggested viewing/reading

Most of your viewing has been in support of specific projects so far. It might be worth looking at book design in wider terms, identifying the kinds of books you're interested in and using this research to inform your design thinking. Have a look at the Book Covers Archive http://bookcoverarchive.com/

Pointers for the next assignment
The next assignment explores typographic principles in more depth and asks you to consider what constitutes effective book design and demonstrate your understanding through the making of a book. This is a good opportunity to focus on how typography can effectively communicate concepts as well as dealing with some of the practical issues of organizing text on the page.

Tutor name:	Christian Lloyd
Date	12 December 2013
Next assignment due	6 March 2014