

Introduction

In issue #1 of *The National Grid* you find the index on page 37. It unravels as a series of unanswered statements between Luke Wood and Jonty Valentine. As an editorial it sets out their aims, hopes and anxieties for the publication. It's refreshingly honest, and, without meaning to sound cringeworthy, kind of stirring. It contains no proclamations of sweeping surveys or retrospective summarizing, but it's not without ambition (manifestos and evangelism make an appearance). It describes *TNG* as a publication on the periphery of graphic design. Periphery suggests the position of being outside looking in, which is no bad place to be, but it also suggests the point where the edge of something bumps up against something else, and that in many ways explains *TNG* best. It's the blur where things meet and overlap—the intersection of sets in a Venn diagram (artefact #39).

The index sets the tone for how the reader might navigate their way through *TNG*. Each issue seems to orientate itself according to an irrational and undisclosed sense of order, Luke and Jonty explain it via Salvador Dali's 'Paranoid-Critical Method' where links and associations are made between ostensibly unconnected things (bastardized maps and diagrams that look better suited to whiteboards in executive boardrooms reoccur throughout the issues too.) The 'Paranoid Map' is also useful for thinking about how the subject of graphic design weaves in and out of the content, appearing as and when it needs to, indiscernibly linked to whatever comes before and after. *TNG* does away with catch-all mythologies about design in favour of something that's closer to the truth—design isn't sacred, more borrowed than new, it isn't always great and sometimes it's terrible. Design as a verb (as much about failures, near misses and lucky breaks as anything else) constantly in action and importantly not separated from life.

The show *Design and Designers: Artefacts from The National Grid* at Ramp Gallery (for which this issue is a catalogue) kind of continues Luke and Jonty's diagrammatic approach. The show documents the six years and previous seven issues of *TNG*. Armed with a back issue and a guide, you can match an article to its original. Making the link is surprising and satisfying and the images and objects feel large and full of life. Steve Kerr's boring Karapiro Power Station postcard (*TNG* #1) doesn't seem boring at all rendered splendidly in full colour (artefact #1) and the evidence of Luke's stolen typeface (artefact #14) heightens his actually quite gripping account (*TNG* #5) of his anxieties making the font and then witnessing its subsequent uncontrolled leak into public use.

You can learn more about a distinct kind of vernacular New Zealandness in graphic design from looking at the scoreboards (artefact #17, 20) and reading Jonty's explanation of finding them in a shed in the abandoned Carlaw Park, Auckland, (*TNG* #2) than from any piece of theory—and it's a lot more interesting. The poster wall (artefact #18) delivers irrefutable proof of the inseparable relationship between music and design (see also artefacts #21–36) which you'll also find in pretty much every issue of *TNG*.

Design and Designers is a bit like a major connecting point in the Paranoid Map. Content from back issues connect with their counterparts; images, objects, publications. From here links and associations are made back and forth between seemingly disparate parts. It's the view from the outer edges, strange and unholy unions at the intersection points of life—satisfaction surveys to sport, fonts to failure, protest to power stations, one thing leading to another.

Kim Paton
Ramp Gallery Curator