

PHANTASTIC: DESIGN JOURNALISM VIA AN ANIMATED WEB SERIES

by

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DEDICATION

For Jypsy Jonas, my mom. The strongest, most hard working person I know.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“The immediacy and ephemeral nature of graphic design, combined with its link with the social, political, and economic life of its culture, enable it to more closely express the Zeitgeist of an epoch than many other forms of human expression”.

—*Meggs’ History of Graphic Design*, 4

Graphic design comes in many forms, though regardless of its media or venue, its primary purpose is to communicate the subtleties of a time and place, to tell cultural and visual stories, and to clarify an item’s purpose or echo an idea’s message (Poulin, 9). The legacy of design has evolved over time. *Meggs’ History of Graphic Design* begins with the advent of writing 40,000 years ago and covers design milestones leading up to the “digital revolution and beyond” (Meggs, 4), which is the time we live in currently. Nearly everything a person will encounter in everyday life includes at least some form of design in one way or another; this can include printed advertisements, television commercials, street signs, websites, books, magazines, and much more, created to convey a message. Some notable designers who have contributed to the advancement of the practice in the United States are Paul Rand who designed many well known identities for companies such as IBM, UPS, and ABC (Rand); Milton Glaser, recipient of the National Medal of the Arts in Design and co-founder of *New York Magazine* and Pushpin Studios; and Muriel Cooper, a recipient of the National Medal of the Arts in Design. Cooper is also the founder of MIT’s Visible Language Workshop — a class created to introduce students to graphic design — and co-founder of the MIT Media Lab — an interdisciplinary research laboratory spanning several different mediums (qtd. in AIGA, “Muriel Cooper”). Work by talented designers like these has been involved in the cultural progression of human-

kind since it became necessary to convey information to an audience. Success or failure of that conveyance was contingent upon how the message being conveyed resonated with its audience, or how palatably it fit with the taste of its epoch. This determined what elements would continue to be used in further communications, helping to form visual languages and styles that have changed over time. As time goes on, these visual symbols and languages change and take on new meanings (Champagne); all the while being simultaneously formed based on the success or failure from the day before and followed by the evolution of graphic design, constantly in pursuit of the days to come after. The following research is an attempt to add to the continuance of this evolution of communication design.

The Current State of Graphic Design Journalism

In any profession, one of the best ways to hone a craft is to step back and evaluate what already exists within the discipline. In graphic design, one way to gain perspective on the state of the discipline is to subscribe to several of the different journalistic and scholarly mediums available, such as newspaper and magazine articles, books, blogs, and podcasts. Examples of these include *Print* and *I.D.* magazine, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*, as well as books about popular designers such as Milton Glaser, Irma Boom, Tibor Kalman, Stefan Sagmeister, and many more. Other resources include DesignInquiry.net, a non-profit educational organization dedicated to researching design issues (Hall) and Debbie Millman's *Design Matters*, which describes itself as "the world's first podcast about design and an inquiry into the broader world of creative culture

through wide-ranging conversations with designers, writers, artists, curators, musicians, and other luminaries of contemporary thought” (Millman). It takes the form of a podcast, in which she interviews designers about subjects having to do with their work, as well as past, present, or future design events.

While *Design Matters* is strictly an audio-based program, there are other forms of new media that are used to inform designers about new thinkers and developments in the discipline. Usually found on a personal website or hosted by a website featuring articles by many writers, a written blog is one medium available for design journalists and critics. *Design Observer* is one example of a resource where many design journalists can present their thoughts and opinions (Design Observer). In this form of design reporting, the audience can take in a combination of text and images which express an idea or relay a message. Another format that is used in the realm of public design discourse is the video blog. Similar to a podcast, a video blog can be used to feature both audio and video, allowing the viewer to observe visual stimuli and receive audible and visual information simultaneously.

With such a variety of methods in which to deliver information, the question arises: “Which is the most efficient means to relay information to the audience?” In the course of preliminary research regarding information retention and learning with new media, a study by Popova, Kirschner, Joiner (2014) indicated that information presented to test subjects audibly rather than in text allowed them to “better understand the topics,” “think more deeply,” and consider “the possible applications of the subject” (Popova, Kirschner, Joiner, 335-336). Another study found that learning by observing pictures with

accompanying audio resulted in more successful retention of the information provided, than when subjects were asked to learn without a supporting audible element (Glaser, Schwan, 1006). Further investigation into learning with supporting imagery showed that an average person's sequence of cognition recognizes images faster than text, and that images are more likely to remain in long-term memory (Baker, 2). With this information in mind it was surmised that the most effective method of relaying information to the audience would be the option that will more fully engage viewer attention: a form of design journalism incorporating an audio transmission of the information to be broadcast as well as a visual element to reinforce the information being provided.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Framing the Problem

One method available for delivering design journalism is the written blog. In this time of readily available social media outlets, and platforms that allow the user to create and style their own websites, any person wishing to project their thoughts into the public realm need only to create an online account and begin dispatching their thoughts and ideas to anyone who is interested. The problem for some amateur journalists is, with this democracy of communication and the integration of technology in everyday life, their voice can become lost in the cacophonous din that makes up the countless voices already speaking through this media. Also, there are what might be considered more efficient and enjoyable ways to take in information through new media; leaving them with the choice to either adapt or continue, and risk being considered outdated or contemporarily irrelevant. With this in mind, this thesis project will not be limited to a single, sustained structure; but based on presentation methods and principles that research has found to be the most effective for the time — such as how it will be shaped in the course of this thesis project, in relation to the research conducted.

With the strengths and weaknesses of the written format in mind, the next step in the echelon of design journalism would be that of the audio-based podcast. One study found that its test subjects preferred an audible conveyance of information as opposed to written because it added a “human element.” Senior lecturer at the School of Information Technology, Dr. Esyin Chew found that audibly relaying information made it “unique and interesting to listen to” (Chew, 127). Popova, et al. showed that information

presented to test subjects audibly rather than in written format allowed them to “better understand the topics”, “think more deeply”, and consider “the possible applications of the subject” (Popova, Kirschner, Joiner, 335-336). Also, Caroline Crawford and Marion Smith’s findings assert that applying the use of storytelling as a method of information delivery makes that information more memorable because it allows the audience to better understand a subject’s nature and intentions. This allows the audience to further fathom the deeper meaning of the story presented (Crawford, Smith, 26). While these findings indicate that a podcast is more successful in effectively and efficiently delivering information than a written blog or article, the resources required to publish a written piece are more easily accessible, requiring only a computer or word processor to record the writer’s thoughts and opinions, and an internet connection or printer to distribute them.

Even with the success of an audible conveyance, there is still room for improvement in relaying information. Babette Park and her team conducted an experiment to examine “the influence of emotions on learning with multimedia” by presenting subjects with information both with and without anthropomorphisms — objects or illustrations that have had human characteristics imposed upon them — “to induce positive emotions and facilitate learning.” The results of the study found that when subjects were presented with anthropomorphisms while in a positive emotional state, it resulted in “the highest learning outcome and longest fixation on the relevant information” (Park, 30). Another experiment, conducted by Manuela Glaser and Stephan Schwan in *Explaining Pictures: How Verbal Cues Influence Processing Of Pictorial Learning Material* “examined whether learning is better with a multimedia presentation in which pictorial information

is verbally referenced than without such referencing.” They also explored the effectiveness of learning with “pictorial information” in scenarios where an image is verbally referenced as opposed to one where it is not referenced. Their findings concluded that the pictures with accompanying audio in which elements of the picture were identified, were better learned (“free recall, multiple choice, visual recognition”) rather than the pictures with elements that were not named through an audible element. Also that, “within a single presentation, named elements were better learned than unnamed elements” (Glaser, Schwan, 1006). Another experiment by Glaser and Schwan tested “whether the multimedia effect is due to a shift of attention toward the elements presented multimodally and away from those presented unimodally.” Results showed longer fixation times for elements that had been identified in the accompanying audio and shorter fixations times for elements that were not identified in the imagery presented. Also, “gaze synchrony of the learners” was found to be greater in regard to “time points of naming pictorial elements than for time points of no naming” (Glaser, Schwan, 1006). With these findings regarding visual stimuli combined with the results of the research on an audible conveyance of information, it could be argued that the most effective means of relaying information to an audience is one that combines both audible stimuli as well as anthropomorphisms to reinforce the ideas conveyed. And with the implementation of a compartmentalized show structure with clearly defined audible and visible cues between segments, it will support the organization of the information being taken in (Vinh, 13) and allow the user to engage in “deep-learning” (Wang).

Thesis Description/Objective

The creative outcome of this project will be an animated web series featuring stories about historical and contemporary design. It will also include interviews with top designers such as Charles S. Anderson of CSA Design Co, a recipient of the American Institute of Graphic Arts Centennial Year Medal; Dr. Mariana Amatullo of *Art Center* College of Design and co-founder of *Design Matters*, a design initiative for global, social impact; and Peter Hall, who is a well respected design journalist and critic, as well as other groundbreaking design professionals. The proposed series will be presented in the format of a talk show. Every episode will have an overarching theme that is conveyed through three segments: a section on historical design, an interview, and finally a segment on a work of contemporary design. The primary platform for distribution will be a website where viewers will have access to each episode, citations for the information provided, and links to further information about the episodes, featured guests, and topics. With an ever-growing and diverse population entering the graphic design profession in the United States, it is important to be able to appeal to a wide range of potential audience members. To insure that this web series will be readily equipped to suit the needs of its audience, it will be crafted by taking cues from existing design-journalistic productions, based on their perceived strengths and shortcomings. To complement the desirable aspects found in each, this web series will incorporate the use of visual stimuli (Park, 30), an audible delivery of information (Chew, 127) implementing storytelling as a device for transmission (Crawford, Smith, 26), and a compartmentalized show structure (Vinh, 13) to more efficiently and effectively deliver information to its audience.

While this series can be considered a video blog, labeling it a “web show” or “web series” may allow for some departure from already existing productions, so the audience might leave behind any preconceived notions or expectations established by other programs. Also, the animated element — aside from being unique as an approach to a graphic design centered source for design journalism — allows for a fully curated experience, unencumbered by the limitations of a budget for props and set construction, much less the restrictions of physics when portraying elements of the show or making transitions. This enhanced flexibility also permits a more free interpretation of the content depicted through anthropomorphisms, or even adding alternative context in cases where an interviewee is in a different location; that person could be depicted as “live via satellite” due to the difference in each speaker’s background noise. Adding these elements will distinguish from existing modes of design journalism.

Hypothesis

By creating an animated web series for the graphic design community, this project will help to expand design journalism into a new and innovative format; which is uniquely suited to efficiently and effectively engage and inform its audience through the use of visual stimuli to more successfully hold the audience’s attention (Park, 30); storytelling so the audience might make personal connections to the information being presented, facilitating a more successful recollection of the information later (Ribeiro, Moreira, da Silva, 180); and a compartmentalized show structure to allow for easier mental organization of information (Vinh, 13). Focusing on these aspects in the production of this web

series will make the information more palatable, allowing the show and its content to deliver a more effective transmission of valuable information, and hence promote information retention as well as contribute to the discourse surrounding contemporary graphic design practice.

III. EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

Information Retention via New Media

Visual Stimuli

In *Multiple Intelligences*, Gardener discusses the misconception that every person's intelligence is something that can be measured on the same scale, and how an individual's level of intelligence can vary and be specialized to specific areas of expertise, based on genetics and life experience. He goes on to describe the methods in which young children learn to interact with a "spectrum classroom," a classroom in which students are "surrounded each day by rich and engaging materials that evoke the use of a range of intelligences" (Gardner, 92). When discussing how the students learn to interact with different sections of the classroom, Gardener stated "It is highly desirable for children to observe adults or older peers at work or play" so that they will "come to appreciate the reasons for the materials as well as the nature of the skills that enable a master to interact with the materials in a meaningful way" (Gardener, 92). Learning through interpreting visual cues and using visual stimuli to make connections is something that humans can implement throughout their entire lives, across numerous forms of media. A study of college students in Saarbrücken, Germany, tested to see the effect of anthropomorphisms in multimedia learning, by tracking the eye movements of its subjects. Each participant was presented with information that either included or excluded anthropomorphisms, and then were tested to see how much information each student had retained. The results of the study concluded that those who were presented with anthropomorphisms while learning "showed the highest learning outcome and longest fixation on the relevant

information of the multimedia instruction” (Park, 30). In providing visual stimuli to accompany the information being delivered audibly in the presentation of the proposed web series, the audience is expected to gain further focus and enjoy a deeper level of recall and understanding.

Storytelling

One of humanity’s greatest and most enduring traditions is that of storytelling. Whether relayed verbally, graphically, or legibly, storytelling is an effective means used by societies all over the world and throughout time to inform and educate an audience. Some of the earliest evidence of storytelling can be found in the Lascaux caves in France, dating back to approximately 35,000 years ago and takes the form of paintings which were created by primitive people; likely “made for survival, and for utilitarian and ritualistic purposes” and even “magical rites” (Meggs, 4). Thanks to the evolution of the technology allowing humans to relay messages, today, there are countless resources in which humans can receive information through one form of storytelling or another. Books, television, magazines, social media and all other forms of broad-spectrum communication people use every day have accelerated the process of transmitting thoughts and ideas by being able to reach more people, more quickly and sometimes combine elements of transmission by simultaneously relaying both audio and video, audio and legible text, or any combination of the three. In *Digital Storytelling As An Instrument Of Learning: Storytelling As A Primary Form Of Communicative Learning Through Mobile App Books*, Caroline Crawford and Marion Smith state that “Stories are effective as educational tools

because they are believable, rememberable, and entertaining.” They maintain believability’s value “stems from the fact that stories deal with human or human-like experience that we tend to perceive as an authentic and credible source of knowledge,” and that “stories make information more rememberable because they involve us in the actions and intentions of the characters,” and as the audience “we are engaged with the story on both levels, and it is through this dual involvement that we enter into the minds of the characters and into the deeper meaning of the story” (Crawford, Smith, 26). The storytelling format allows the audience to make intimate connections with the narrative, by “personalizing” the information being presented. This allows the audience to relate key points in the story to their own experiences, making the information easier to take in and recall later (Ribeiro, Moreira, da Silva, 180). By relaying information through storytelling on the proposed web series, it is likely that the knowledge being transferred to the audience will be more palatable, and thus, more likely to be absorbed.

Compartmentalized Structure

In Koi Vinh’s *Ordering Disorder*, he talks about grids in relation to usability and how they not only help to make design more successful and orderly, but also how humans interact with grids and organized information. In chapter two, he states: “They [grids] lay a foundation through which a designer can create solutions to problems large and small, and in doing so help readers, users, and audiences find that which all humans seek: a sense of order within the disorder.” He goes on to say that in general, the layman will “tend to look for order less critically, at least in the visual realm.” Looking for a “sense of

order, and not necessarily for the *fact* of order” (Vinh, 2011). Because this project takes the form of a web show rather than that of a website or a printed page, the audience will need to rely on audible and visual cues to differentiate each segment. In applying this idea of an organized delivery of information to an audience, the proposed web series will contain three separate sections — a segment on graphic design history, an interview with a prolific designer, and then a segment on contemporary graphic design — in which information from each will be presented with defined parameters exhibited by transitioning between scenes with a “fade-in, fade-out” effect with occasional audio cues following the conclusion of a story or interview. The goal being that this structured approach will provide a clear and organized transmission of the information being provided, enabling the audience to learn more deeply, as in the experiment conducted by Jui-Sheng Wang (Wang).

Competitive Audit

There are many different resources for design journalism available to the public. The following examples were chosen based on the criteria found to be effective in the preliminary research outlined in the previous sections regarding information retention and learning with new media. *Design Matters* by Debbie Millman is an example of a widely distributed design podcast. Being an audio-based podcast with no visual component can leave some gaps in terms of audience focus and retention of the information provided (Park, 30). In this fast moving world, an audience member might be likely to attempt listening to an audio-only podcast while carrying out distracting tasks such as working, driving, or doing other activities that generally accompany ambient audible entertainment, rather than sit quietly, undistracted, and listen to the complete interview, giving it their full attention (Ross, par, 9). With this in mind, the proposed web series will incorporate visual stimuli along with audio so that the audience will be more likely to have their full attention engaged by the program (Park, 30), and consider the information, and how they might apply it in their own life (Popova, Kirschner, Joiner, 335-336).

99% Invisible by Roman Mars is an audio-based design podcast, but differs from *Design Matters* in that it is centered around storytelling rather than focusing on one-on-one interviews. Ribeiro et al. assert that storytelling allows an audience to make intimate connections with the narrative, by “personalizing” the information being presented, making it easier to recall and apply later (Ribeiro, Moreira, da Silva, 180). The *99% Invisible* website usually features photographs or supporting static imagery. These images help to add some visual interest and context while listening to the program, but they and their

accompanying text only help to support the overall theme of the story, and do not help to communicate the contents as they are presented through the progression of an episode's transmission. To reinforce the progression of an episode, the proposed web series will feature 2D stop-motion animation throughout, helping the viewer stay focused on and engaged with the subjects presented through the use of audible (Popova, Kirschner, Joiner, 335-336) and visual stimuli (Park, 30). The implementation of storytelling to make the information more "real" and "personal", appealing to "a natural and organic" form of education for the audience (Lawrence, Paige, 66).

An example of a video blog with a large viewership is *Humble Pied* by Mig Reyes. While the show provides valuable advice for beginning designers, an episode is generally between 2-4 minutes long and the interviewee only answers a single question about what advice he or she would give to other designers, then the show is abruptly concluded. This does not allow time for the audience to get to know the designer or understand the influences that support their thoughts and opinions, and provides little opportunity for the compartmentalization of the information being presented. In an interview for the proposed web series, a variety of questions will be covered so the audience may get a better understanding of the designer, their reasoning behind certain advice or opinions, and the context that influenced their responses. Each episode will be organized into three separate segments featuring storytelling or a formal interview; each contributing to an overarching theme, which will allow the audience to make mental separations — compartmentalize the information — through audible and visible cues (Vihn, 13), while following the progression of the episode.

SWOT Analysis: Comparing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

SWOT analysis is a tool often used in graphic design to identify an idea or project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for growth or improvement, and threats to its development or progression into the marketplace (Baycheva-Merger, 1192). By implementing this process of identifying the strong and weak points of a given problem, the designer may anticipate and correct any elements that might stand in the way of developing a successful idea or product. The following is a SWOT analysis (table. 1) which studies the design related podcasts and video blog covered in the competitive audit. This SWOT analysis confirms that current vehicles for design journalism do not replicate the proposed format for this project, and identifies areas for improvement in terms of audience engagement and information retention.

Competitive Audit: SWOT Analysis Table

Table 1. Competitive Audit: SWOT Analysis Table

	Design Matters	99% Invisible	Humble Pie
Strength	Well known interviewer and subjects, large number of episodes	Interesting subject matter, supporting background noise, storytelling	Short and to the point, Interesting subject matter, Prolific Designers
Weakness	No visual element, 30min+	Only static images to represent audio, long duration	Very short, lacking depth of conversation, curation
Opportunity	Add visual element, create a headline for interview subject	Add slideshow instead of static single image, take show to actual location where subject took place	Could be precursor or piece of another program
Threat	Audience distraction due to multitasking	Audience distracted due to multitasking, or background noise	Potential misinterpretation of interviewee's response

In considering the perceived positive and negative attributes of the examples featured in figure 1, the proposed web series will be crafted to incorporate the more desirable traits of each, while avoiding any weakness or ineffective aspect gleaned in reviewing these examples.

Design Matters features interviews with well known figures in the design community presented audibly, which can make an interview more “unique and interesting” to listen to (Chew, 127). However there is no visual element, which could lead to distractions, drawing focus away from the information being relayed (Ross, par, 9). Also, though

the duration may vary, each episode is over thirty minutes long, which might be a larger commitment of time than some viewers are ready to make.

99% Invisible covers a variety of subjects in its audio based transmissions through the use of storytelling; which can make information more palatable and easy to relate to, thus making it easier to retain (Ribeiro, Moreira, da Silva, 180). Though, as with *Design Matters*, there is no visual element to guide the audience through the progression of the podcast, disallowing the potential for maximum engagement and fixation on the information being relayed (Park, 30).

Humble Pied is a video blog consisting of both audio and video elements, featuring short interviews with a variety of designers. Though this video blog contains visual stimuli, the imagery depicted is that of real life: the setting of the host, and then of the interviewee. This allows for limited curation on the host's part, only being able to control the look and feel of where he is, and not that of the interview subject. Also, because each episode only features a single question and is between 2-4 minutes, it does not leave much opportunity for the audience to organize and compartmentalize the information being presented, preventing the audience from engaging in deeper learning (Chew).

Identifying Desirable Attributes for Communication and Retention

After reviewing the SWOT Analysis Table in figure 1, it was decided that in order to create a web series — a collection of episodes featuring audio and animated video, set in a talk-show style format — that will inform and entertain members of the graphic design community, this project will implement visual stimuli, storytelling, and a com-

partmentalized show structure. Each of these elements were decided to be fundamental in developing the series based on their individual strengths. In *How Many Words Is A Picture Worth? Integrating Visual Literacy In Language Learning With Photographs*, Lottie Baker states that cognitive research has shown that the human brain processes images more quickly than it processes words, and images are more likely than text to remain in our long-term memory (Baker, 2). She goes on to say that incorporating imagery to complement instruction “will appeal to digital native learners, those students who grew up in a world where using smartphones, laptops, and social media is part of everyday life” (Baker, 2). To capitalize on this assertion, visual stimuli will be incorporated as part of the presentation of this web series. Further research has shown that visual stimuli increased the likelihood of focus and recollection by the viewer. Analysis of data found in an eye-tracking study that tested to see the effect of learning with anthropomorphisms indicated a higher learning outcome and longer fixation on subjects depicted (Park, 30). This is beneficial because by using illustrated anthropomorphisms to help convey the ideas being expressed, the audience will be more likely to focus on what is being presented, and retain the information there-in. In *What Our Ancestors Knew: Teaching And Learning Through Storytelling*, Randee Lipson Lawrence and Dennis Swiftdeer Paige describe storytelling as “a natural and organic aspect of adult education as it taps into the experience of the learners”. They go on to say “the eliciting of personal stories makes the curriculum content more, real, more immediate, and more personal” and that “storytelling is a collaborative nonhierarchical process that involves the learners as active agents in the learning process rather than as passive receivers” (Lawrence, Paige, 66). By allowing for

this interactivity, storytelling is a useful tool in recalling previously obtained information because it allows the audience to relate key points of the story to their own life and experiences; making them easier to recall later (Ribeiro, Moreira, da Silva, 180). A compartmentalized show structure will allow the audience to feel “that which all humans seek,” a sense of order (Vinh, 13). By exhibiting the separation of each segment in an episode, it grants the audience the opportunity to more easily absorb the information within. A study by Jui-Sheng Wang, and their team analyzed data from “a longitudinal, 17-institution sample to determine the total, direct, and indirect impacts of perceived overall exposure to clear and organized classroom instruction and the use of deep approaches to learning on four-year growth in critical thinking skills and need for cognition.” Through their research, it was found that “clear and organized classroom instruction had individually significant and positive indirect effects on fourth-year need for cognition through all three deep approaches to learning: higher-order learning, reflective learning, and integrative learning”, meaning “exposure to clear and organized classroom instruction was uniquely linked to increased student use of deep-learning approaches which, in turn, positively influenced four-year growth in need for cognition” (Wang).

Table 2 is designed to compare the three examples analyzed in the competitive audit, based on the three desirable traits for making an effective web series. This will help to further identify any strengths or weaknesses, and what aspects should be emulated, disregarded, or improved upon.

Competitive Audit: Pro and Con Table

Table 2. Competitive Audit: Pro and Con Table

	Visual Stimuli	Storytelling	Comp. Show Str.
Design Matters	Pro: able to multi-task, valuable info Con: take in less, easily distracted	Pro: interviews w/ interesting guests Con: less storytelling, less engaging	Pro: able to elaborate on subjects Con: one large piece, no separation
99% Invisible	Pro: some imagery provided Con: does not support details of story	Pro: conveys story well, authentic Con: no supportive imagery	Pro: full scope of story, ads at end Con: Intro and outro end take too long
Humble Pied	Pro: full video, engaging Con: no eyecatching imagery	Pro: valuable info for audience Con: short interview, no context	Pro: short and to the point, simple Con: one single segment, short

Evaluating Analogous Modes of Design Journalism in Relation to Desirable Attributes

In the Pro and Con Table in figure 2, each example of current design journalism profiled in the competitive audit was evaluated in relation to the three desirable traits on which the web series will be built.

An episode of *Design Matters* features interviews with well known designers containing information that can be received while an audience member completes other tasks; that same audience member could increase their likelihood of retaining that information were they also presented with visual stimuli to focus on while the information is delivered (Glaser, Schwan, 1006). And though an audible conveyance has shown to be more effective and enjoyable than a version delivered through text (Chew, 127), *Design Matters*' interview format doesn't necessarily include storytelling; which would allow the audience to become an "active agent" in the learning process, rather than a "passive receiver" (Lawrence, Paige, 66). This would allow the audience member to make connections to their own experiences, making the information easier to recall later (Ribeiro, Moreira, da Silva, 180). Also, while the podcast's duration allows for elaboration on interview topics and a broader context for the information to be framed, it might be difficult for an audience member to compartmentalize the information being taken in and organize it — an interview being one long piece — making it difficult to incorporate "deep levels of learning" (Wang).

While 99% *Invisible* includes a representative image for each episode, that image only helps to give an idea or "tease" of the subject matter each episode might contain.

As with *Design Matters*, were the audience to be presented with visual stimuli to sup-

port information as it is being presented, the likelihood of retaining the information given could be increased. *99% Invisible* uses storytelling as the main vehicle for the delivery of information in each episode. This allows the information to be “more, real, more immediate, and more personal” (Lawrence, Paige, 66), making it easier for an audience member to digest and retain. And while each episode consists of three separate segments— which could promote the compartmentalization of the information presented (Wang) — the first and last sections do not necessarily always pertain to the central theme of the episode, having more to do with the show as an entity.

Humble Pied features both audio and video in each episode; the audio adds a human element (Chew, 127) while the video allows for increased focus on, and retention of, the information being relayed and the imagery that is there to support it (Park, 30). Each episode consists of a single question answered by a member of the design community, and then the episode is abruptly ended. The information being presented is minimal in comparison to that given in the other two examples featured in the competitive audit. This leaves little opportunity for the compartmentalization of the information provided; due to the fact so little is given. Also, because of the simple “question and answer” format, storytelling isn’t always implemented which might be more likely to allow the audience to apply the themes or ideas featured to their own knowledge base (Ribeiro, Moreira, da Silva, 180).

IV. METHODOLOGY

To facilitate information retention, and ensure that the web show is being delivered in the most effective and enjoyable way possible, this web series will be designed according to Hugh Dubberly's *Model of the Creative Process* (Dubberly). The first step involves reflecting on what the basic needs of the project are. The second step is to make a prototype version of an episode and show it to a focus group style audience. The third step is to receive feedback from that audience about their feelings in regard to how the show was presented and how it might be improved. This process works in a continuous fashion where the thoughts and criticism from the focus group are considered and then applied to a revised version of that episode. Individuals involved in focus group testing, along with a select group of industry professionals will be asked to share their feelings with a short survey (Appendix A) about the show's presentation. Once all criticism has been received and considered, adjustments to the show will be made accordingly, and the process repeated until the show has reached an acceptable and engaging format.

Methods of Evaluation

One aspect of the creative process is receiving criticism so that a piece or project might reach an optimal level of execution in its final form. In *Lost in Translation: The Emergence and Erasure of 'New Thinking' within Graphic Design Criticism in the 1990's*, Julia Moszkowicz talks about McCoy's description of postmodern art criticism as being part of the "Cranbrook mix" and how "new influences" built upon existing interest and became a part of "a larger re-evaluation of graphic expression" (Moszkowicz, 249).

To craft the most successful rendition of the show possible, it will be honed by creating and revising the presentation of the program based on criticism from members of the design community. The individuals supplying this criticism will be members of the design community at varying stages in their career who are asked to share their feelings on the presentation of the first episode by filling out a survey (appendix A).

Afterward, the focus group will be divided into three groups where they will review either an episode of the proposed web show consisting of audio and video featuring anthropomorphisms, an audio only version of that episode, or a typed transcript of the same episode. To test the level of information retention after receiving the same information in these three ways, the focus groups will be asked to answer questions from a quiz (Appendix B) containing the same questions regardless of the method in which the information was delivered.

V. GENERATIVE RESEARCH

Logo

After some consideration, it was concluded that the word “fantastic” best represented the fun and exciting, positive, and whimsical nature that needed to be expressed; the definition being “...conceived by an unrestrained imagination; odd and remarkable; bizarre” or “fanciful or capricious, as persons or their ideas” (Dictionary.com). Some members of the audience may recognize that spelling “fantastic” with a “ph” harkens back to the Renaissance, when the spelling of the word was more common (Lieberman, 2012); this was included as a nod to the historical aspect of the show, and how elements of a bygone era can be reused to make something new. To introduce a sense of urgency or excitement, the “i” was replaced by an “!” and made bright red to attract the eye. To inspire a sense of fun, the letters were based on a pre-existing typeface called “Knock-out”, but rendered in a way that makes them seem more illustrative and vibrant than if they consisted of digitally generated typography. In addition, the phrase “fantastic” can be used diversely in normal speech to mean different things, and is implemented in the show in instances such as *The Phantastic Continental Tour*, a *Phantastic* interview, or a

The logo for 'Phantastic' is displayed in a large, bold, black, sans-serif typeface. The word 'PHANTASTIC' is written in all caps. The letter 'i' is replaced by a bright red exclamation mark '!', which is also in all caps. The exclamation mark is a solid red color, contrasting sharply with the black text.

Figure 1. *Phantastic* Logo

Phantastic Prize Giveaway. Or the host can use it as a device to indicate the end of an interview “...well this has been *Phantastic*, thank you for joining me....”

Characters/Framing Devices

To capitalize on research which found that subjects learning with anthropomorphisms showed the “highest learning outcome and longest fixation on the relevant information” (Park, 30) and avoid any awkwardness or apprehension from the host or interview subjects about being on camera, the show and guests are portrayed in a less restrictive way through the use of illustrated versions of themselves, and shown in an illustrated “talk show” style setting.



Figure 2. Characters

Those characters based on actual people are illustrated to look as close to their actual likeness as possible while fitting in to the whimsical nature of the illustration style, and are approved by the person the illustration is based on before being published. Because there is always the potential for unexpected background noise, or technical difficulties, certain elements have been created to help explain any intrusions or interruptions. Shown on either side of the host in figure 4 are the band leader (left) and the producer (right). Should there be any sudden noise or equipment malfunctions, they can be referred to as the cause, and asked to fix the problem. Another device used to make sense of disparate background noise is achieved by placing the interview subject in an old fashioned television set where they communicate with the host “live via satellite.” These devices have been put in place in case an interview goes too long, or the host makes a mistake in asking a question in the original interview, this more easily allows for changes to be made in post production.



Figure 3. Character Placement

Set

The main setting for this web show will always display the host sitting behind a desk with a small turtle sitting on it; the turtle always facing the speaker or subject of speech if there is only one human depicted at the time — this is so the audience will always know who is speaking, or what is being referred to in conversation. Then to add depth to the frame, there is a couch and background image which can be seen through windows in the backdrop. In the first segment of the show, the historical segment, everything but the host, desk, and the items on the desk turns to black making a flat plain so images pertaining to that segment can be shown with little distraction from non-related background imagery, while including a few, constant, elements to maintain the context. Supporting images can be shown while the host shares a monologue about an event or figure in graphic design history.

Once it is time for the interview portion of the show, the regular set returns and there is either an empty couch next to the host or a television with a blank screen sitting on the couch (fig. 5) — the television being a device that can be used when the background noise for the interviewee and host does not match up due to location or editing issues; allowing for some visual sense to be made in conjunction with the disparate audio. If the television is present, the set will turn on revealing the guest as the introduction for that guest begins. Otherwise, the guest would just be shown sitting on the couch next to the host until the introduction is complete. The image shown through the windows of the back drop would be unique to each episode, referring in some way to the body of work done by the interviewee, to give the audience a sense of their design personality or style.

For instance, the background image shown in figure 5 repeats the word “awesome”, referring to Armin Vit’s “Austin Initiative for Graphic Awesomeness”.



Figure 4. Set Display: Act 1



Figure 5. Set Display: Act 2

Color Palette

Because *Phantastic* will feature such a diverse array of designers and design works, it is important for the show to be visually dynamic, but recognizable. As mentioned previously, each episode would feature a background image that shows through the windows of the backdrop of the set. In order to keep the setting aesthetically pleasing, the color palette of the furniture, carpet, and wall would change to suit the image in the background, as seen in figures 6-8.



Figure 6. Color Palette #1



Figure 7. Color Palette #2

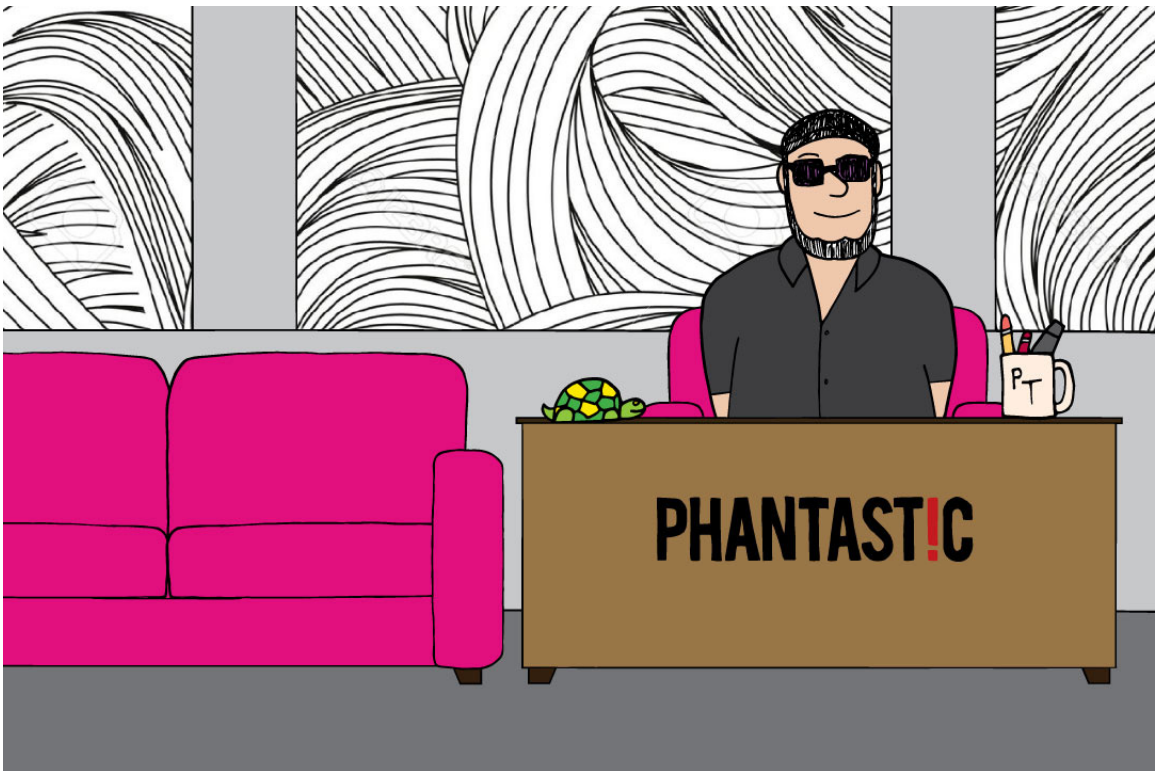


Figure 8. Color Palette #3

Pilot Episode

Figure 9 shows a storyboard of the *Phantastic* first episode featuring a profile of Hugo Ball's *Cabaret Voltaire*, an interview with Armin Vit on the “Austin Initiative for Graphic Awesomeness”, and suggestions for design based communities in Austin, Texas.



Figure 9. Storyboard: Act 1

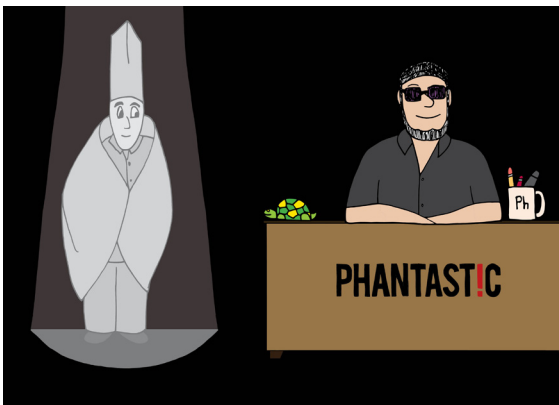
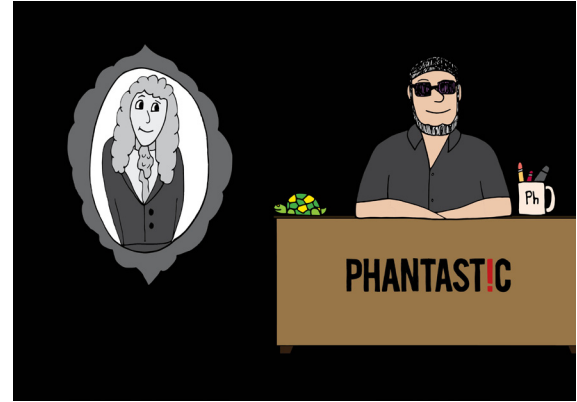
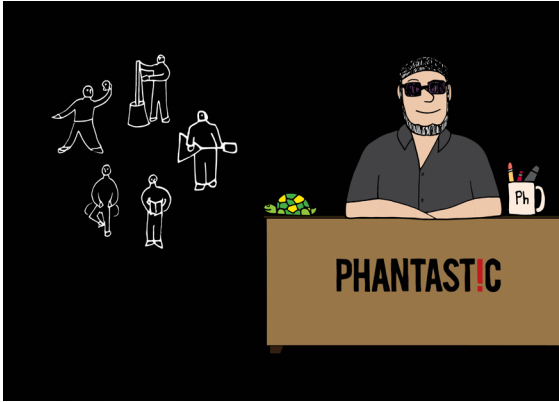


Figure 10. Storyboard: Act 1 and 2

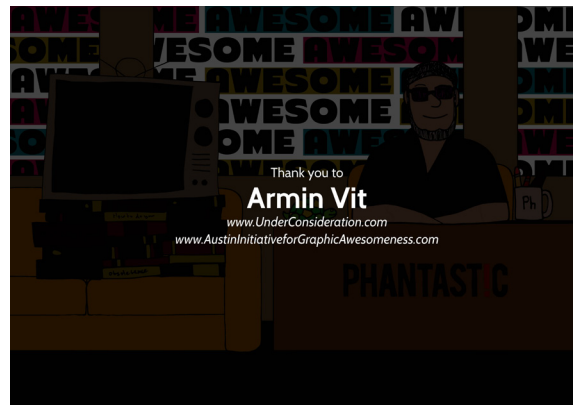


Figure 11. Storyboard: Act 3

Website

In order to distribute the *Phantastic* web show, a web site was designed to make each episode readily available for a potential audience member (fig. 12). By following Koi Vinh's assessment of every person's need to find "order in disorder" (Vinh, 13), the show's website has been designed so the user may access each episode with ease and convenience. In the home page header, there is a logo and two navigation options. At first glance, the logo lets the user know that they have arrived at the correct website, and then to its right in red, the first navigation option lets them know that this is the section where they can access episodes of the *Phantastic* web show. Separated from that by a forward slash is the option for the "about" section where the user can learn more about the show.

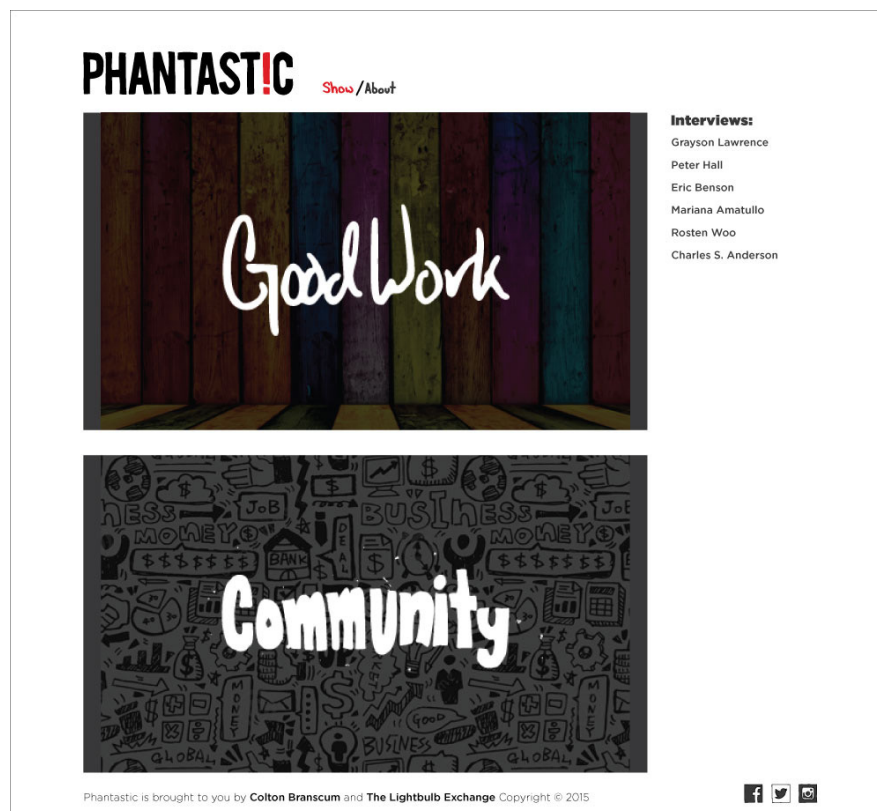


Figure 12. Website: Home

In the body of this page on the left are representative images for each episode with a word or phrase that describes the overarching theme of that episode, allowing the user to quickly identify the subject covered within. Each image's background would be used in the backdrop of the corresponding episode. To the right of those images is a column where a list of designers who have been previously featured on the show is arranged so the user can select one of the names and will be taken to the episode in which they appeared. Shown in the footer section of the page are credits and links to websites for the host and design initiative that the web show is associated with, as well as a notice of copyright and links to social media related to the *Phantastic* web show.

After finding the desired episode, the user can click the image (left) or name (right) and will be taken to a secondary page (fig. 13) where the actual episode is found. On this secondary page is the selected episode as well as a short description of its contents. Below that are options to share the featured episode on social media, and a button labeled "Sources" which activates a drop-down area where the user can view sources for the information provided in that episode.

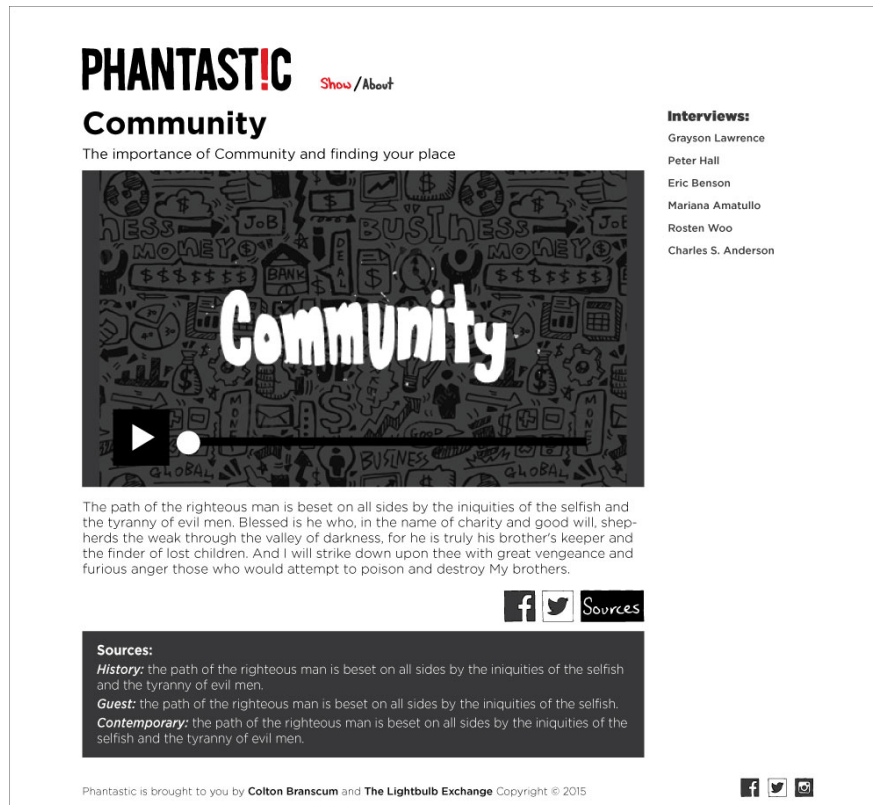


Figure 13. Website: Secondary

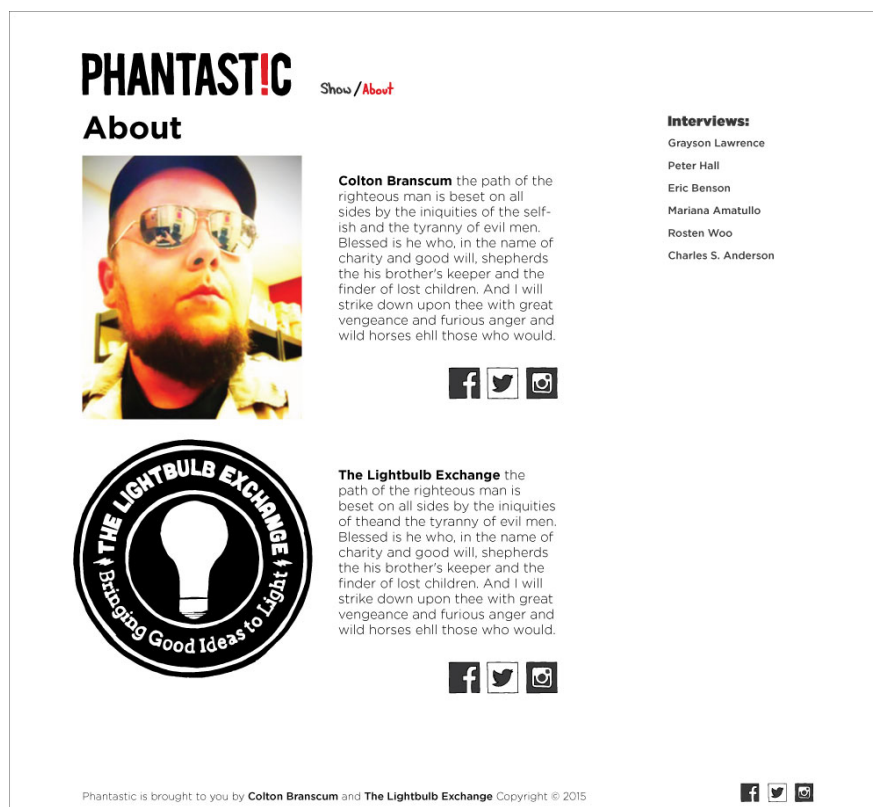


Figure 14. Website: About

If the user would like to know more about the show, the host, or related initiatives, they can click the “about” button found in the header navigation as the option furthest to the right. This page (fig. 14) provides information about the web show’s mission and background information about the host and related initiatives or websites.

VI. EVALUATIVE RESEARCH

Criticism

So that the *Phantastic* web show might more thoroughly entertain the audience and successfully relay information through the use of visual stimuli, storytelling, and a compartmentalized show structure, several professional designers were asked to view the first episode of *Phantastic* and give a critique of the show and how it might be improved for future episodes.

After watching the first episode and considering its various aspects, the overall consensus was positive. The animation style was referred to as unique, and entertaining; though it was suggested that more illustrated elements could be added to increase visual interest. The show's content was well received, being described as interesting, inspiring, and informative. And the overall format was said to have a nice and thoughtful progression, and was well structured.

Focus Group Results

After being shown the first installment of the web show, a focus group of 10 audience members from the design community were asked to share their feelings about the episode (appendix A). 80% responded positively, indicating that they enjoyed the method of presentation, and that the show contained valuable information. The other 20% of the audience surveyed expressed that the animation style was the leading factor in their dissatisfaction with the episode. Similar to the criticism from the previously mentioned design professionals, it was suggested that in order to remedy this aversion to the animation,

more movement might be implemented, and illustrative elements added which would enable the show to be more visually interesting.

In order to test the effectiveness of the delivery of information to the target audience, 10 individuals were divided into three groups, each group being asked to take in the information provided either by reading a transcript of the *Phantastic* first episode, listening to the episode's audio only, or viewing the episode with accompanying audio. After being quizzed (appendix B) about the information they just received, the results showed that while those who either read or listened to the information presented in the episode without visual stimuli exhibited a similar amount of recollection and enjoyment; those who received the information via visual stimuli and audio showed the highest rate of information recall, and 100% responded positively when asked to rate the experience. These focus group responses confirm that the animated web show format promotes enhanced information retention; being more effectively engaging and efficiently informative compared to the existing text-only or audio-only formats.

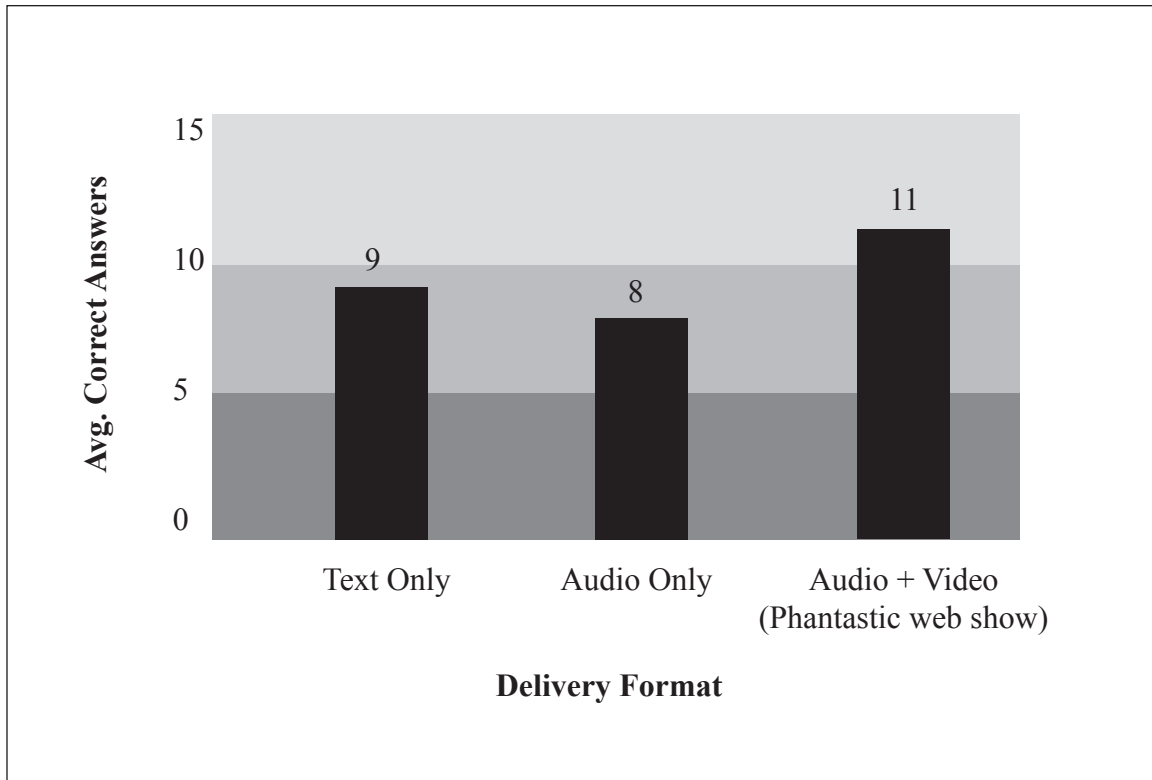


Figure 15. Testing Results

Competitive Comparison

To identify successful or problematic areas of the *Phantastic* web show and its production, and identify any favorable similarities or differences from the programs profiled in figure 1; a second SWOT analysis table was created (table 3). Building upon the positive aspects of the programs mentioned in the competitive audit, the *Phantastic* web show was constructed with them in mind. To garner interest from the audience, the show features prolific graphic designers, and covers an array of topics relevant to the discipline. In order to hold the attention of the audience, the *Phantastic* web show has a video element, similar to *Humble Pied* by Mig Reyes; *Humble Pied* however, is not animated.

SWOT Analysis Table: Phantastic

Table 3. SWOT Analysis Table: *Phantastic*

	Design Matters	99% Invisible	Humble Pie	<i>Phantastic</i>
Strength	Well known interviewer and subjects, large number of episodes	Interesting subject matter, supporting background noise, storytelling	Short and to the point, Interesting subject matter, Prolific Designers	Visual stimuli, storytelling, compartmentalized show structure, variety of subjects, interviews with important designers
Weakness	No visual element, 30min+	Only static images to represent audio, long duration	Very short, lacking depth of conversation, curation	Lengthy production period, budget, delayed event information due to duration of production.
Opportunity	Add visual element, create a headline for interview subject	Add slideshow instead of static single image, take show to actual location where subject took place	Could be precursor or piece of another program	Could become part of large events, potential sponsorship from AIGA, experimental presentation methods
Threat	Audience distraction due to multitasking	Audience distracted due to multitasking, or background noise	Potential misinterpretation of interviewee's response	Dislike of animation style, interviewees aversion to being depicted as illustrations

Pro and Con Table: Phantastic

Table 4. Pro and Con Table: *Phantastic*

	Visual Stimuli	Storytelling	Comp. Show Str.
Design Matters	Pro: able to multi-task, valuable info Con: take in less, easily distracted	Pro: interviews w/ interesting guests Con: less storytelling, less engaging	Pro: able to elaborate on subjects Con: one large piece, no separation
99% Invisible	Pro: some imagery provided Con: does not support details of story	Pro: conveys story well, authentic Con: no supportive imagery	Pro: full scope of story, ads at end Con: Intro and outro end take too long
Humble Pied	Pro: full video, engaging Con: no eye-catching imagery	Pro: valuable info for audience Con: short interview, no context	Pro: short and to the point, simple Con: one single segment, short
<i>Phantastic</i>	Pro: engaging, illustrates ideas Con: animation unconventional	Pro: gives contexts, elaborates on story Con: a lot of info	Pro: organized, easy to navigate Con: could use better transitions

VII. CONCLUSION

In creating this animated web series, the objective was to expand design journalism into a new and innovative format, which was uniquely suited to efficiently and effectively engage and inform its audience. Doing so allowed for information to be more palatable, permitting the show and its content to deliver a more effective transmission of valuable information; promoting information retention. By achieving this, the *Phantastic* web show will be able to effectively contribute to the discourse surrounding contemporary graphic design practice.

The number of correct answers from audience members who received information via combined audio and video as opposed to those who received the same information through audio or text-only, indicates that with the implementation of visual stimuli, or animation featuring anthropomorphisms to attract and hold their attention, audience members showed a level of enhanced information retention (Park, 30) (Glaser, Schwan, 1006). And may reaffirm Baker's assertion that this approach of incorporating imagery while learning "will appeal to digital native learners" (Baker, 2). The use of storytelling afforded audience members the opportunity to make connections between the information presented and their own knowledge and experiences, adding increased context to the information being received (Ribeiro, Moreira, da Silva, 2014) making it believable, memorable, and entertaining (Crawford, Smith, 26). These testing results also indicate that the compartmentalized show structure presented the viewer with a palatable organization of the information being presented by separating each segment using audible or visible cues (Vinh, 13). This allowed the viewer to apply deeper methods of thinking to receive,

evaluate, and apply the information being taken in (Wang). Audience responses indicate that the *Phantastic* web series has achieved its goal and has made available a new, more efficient and effective avenue for design journalism, suited to engage and inform the design community.

Future Research

To ensure that the *Phantastic* web show may be ever more effective in reaching its audience, and disseminating valuable information, this project's research will be ongoing. Because of the enthusiasm expressed in regard to the unconventional style in which it is depicted, the *Phantastic* web show will continue to push boundaries, experimenting stylistically with different aspects of the show; making improvements when the opportunity becomes apparent. By implementing components such as web analytics to keep track of user traffic and habits, the *Phantastic* website will be able to adapt and fully cater to the needs of its viewers. And by periodically surveying its audience, this web show will be able to accommodate the needs of the audience in regard to content or presentation. Eventually, an eye tracking study will be used to gauge the level of focus and determine what elements of the show are more successful in engaging an audience member's attention.

The first season of *Phantastic* will be available in its entirety by the end of 2016, consisting of six installments, featuring Armin Vit, Eric Benson, Peter Hall, and more; covering a variety of topics. To garner interest, and keep audience members informed, there will be a social media campaign beginning a week before the release of the first episode that will continue through the entire season. The goal being to direct audience

members to visit the *Phantastic* website for information about the show and what to expect; and mark their calendars for upcoming episodes and events. The last three episodes will feature interviews from the *Phantastic Continental Tour* with Rosten Woo, Dr. Mariana Amatullo, and Charles S. Anderson. To gain notoriety, and establish its place in the design community, *Phantastic* will be presented to design conferences and events in the form of a “pop-up” style booth where interviews can be held between events, and information about the web show can be disseminated.

Though the *Phantastic* web series was created with the graphic design community in mind, the research and method of delivering information in this thesis could be applied to other disciplines or subjects beyond the realm of design. Also, the *Phantastic* web show could be featured on resource and tutorial websites like Lynda.com, or Learnable.com. Whatever the application, the model applied to the *Phantastic* web show is an engine that will engage and inform its audience efficiently and effectively.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: Phantastic Survey for Design Professionals

PHANTASTIC

Survey

Did you enjoy this episode? Why or why not?

Does this program seem likely to help inform or inspire inexperienced designers?

How did you feel about the method of presentation? Was it successful in keeping your attention?

How would you suggest the show be improved?

Figure 16. Phantastic Survey for Design Professional

APPENDIX B: Phantastic Quiz

PHANTAST!C

Quiz

What was the host's name? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Josh Davidsonb. Colton Branscumc. Collon Brownd. Jeff Green	What does AI for GA stand for? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Austin Initiative for Graphic Awesomenessb. American Institution of Grand Artc. Amazing Instances of Graphic Artd. Awards for International Graphic Artists
What was the theme of this episode? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Communityb. Sustainabilityc. Budgetingd. Portfolio	How long has it been around? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. 1 yearb. 6 yearsc. 2 yearsd. 5 years
What design movement was covered in the first section? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Futurismb. Modernismc. Dadaismd. Cubism	How many AI for GA events has the host missed? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. 0b. 1c. 2d. 5
Who Started the Cabaret Voltaire? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Hugo Ballb. Wassily Kandinskyc. Francios Voltaired. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy	Where is the group Civilization from? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Austinb. Los Angelesc. New Yorkd. Seattle
How were Zurich artists invited to join the Cabaret? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Word of mouthb. A letterc. Large postersd. A Newspaper	What is described as "a vehicle for discussion on corporate branding and identity?" <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Brand Newb. AI for GAc. Phantast!cd. Civilization
What did the founder dress as when reciting his famous phonetic poem? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. A bullb. A Shamanc. A police officerd. A Sheep	What talk series features "mostly Austin designers"? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. AI for GAb. Phantast!cc. Under the Radard. Brand New
What was the name of the Poem? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Untitledb. Kolaloc. The Pend. Karawane	Who holds a monthly "Crit Club"? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Texas State University's AIGAb. Under the Radarc. Make ATXd. Brand New
Where was Armin Vit? <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Austinb. Bostonc. Seattled. Chicago	

Figure 17. Phantastic Quiz

APPENDIX C: Phantastic Season 1

Episodes in the Phantastic first season:

Ep.1 - “Community” - Armin Vit

Ep.2 -”Sustainability” - Eric Benson [in production]

Ep.3 -”Make/Do” - Peter Hall [in production]

Ep.4 - “Design for Social Impact - Global” - Mariana Amatullo [in production]

Ep.5 - “Design for Social Impact - Local” - Rosten Woo [in production]

Ep.6 - “Make/Do and History” - Charles Anderson [in production]

APPENDIX D: Phantastic Episode 1

To view episode, please visit <http://www.PhanasticShow.com>

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