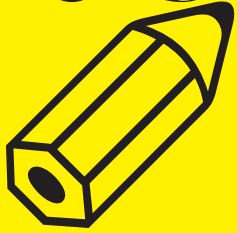


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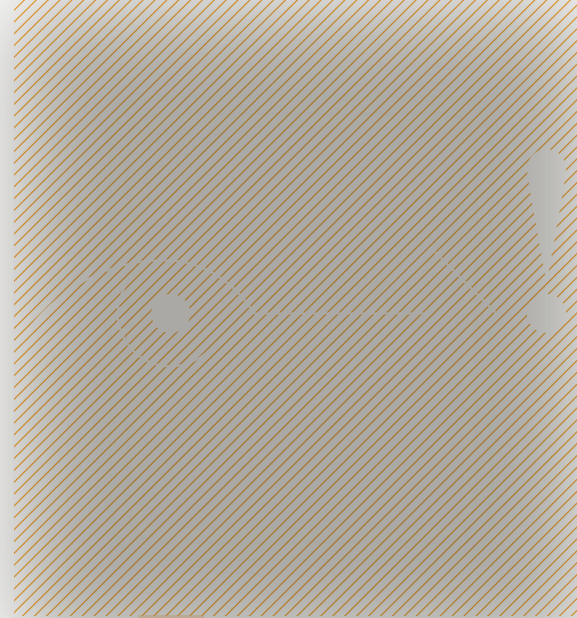
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the journal of visual communication research

december 2018



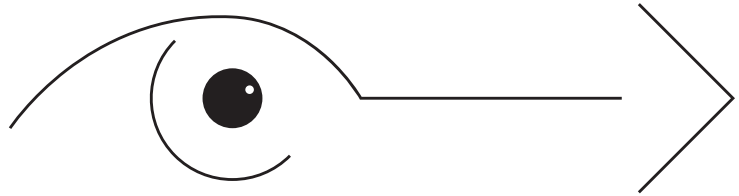
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Visible Language

the journal of visual communication research

Student Special Issue

december 2018



Before there was reading there was seeing. *Visible Language* has been concerned with ideas that help define the unique role and properties of visual communication. A basic premise of the journal has been that created visual form is an autonomous system of expression that must be defined and explored on its own terms. Today more than ever people navigate the world and probe life's meaning through visual language. This journal is devoted to enhancing people's experience through the advancement of research and practice of visual communication.

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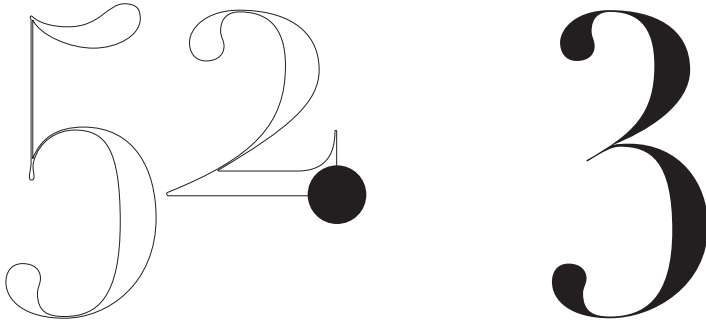
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Visible Language
Student Special Issue



the journal of
visual communication
research

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Maria dos Santos Lonsdale

December 2018

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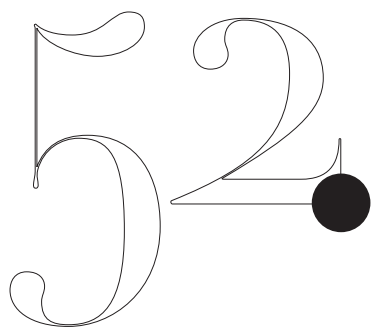
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Editor's note:

All the articles for the Student Special Issue went through our standard double-blind peer-review process. The only concession to our normal research publication standards was occasional allowance for fewer research participants than might otherwise be necessary.

We hope to repeat this student special issue at various times in the future as a way to support our mission of advancing communication design research and scholarship.

mz



Student Special Issue

Visible Language is happy to present a Student Special Issue that includes articles on student research into Typographic and Graphic design involving user-centered research methods. The importance of focusing on user-centered approaches emerges from a need identified through years of experience as a lecturer, researcher and design practitioner. Design solutions that are driven merely by opinion and intuition, without having involved the target user throughout the different stages of the design process, nor having been tested and developed through several stages of iteration and re-design, might be prone to failure. Design that is developed for the user and with the user stands a greater chance of high and long-term impact.

The objective of the Student Special Issue was to support early career scholars by giving them an opportunity to experience the publication process, and to encourage supervisors/tutors to be involved in the publication process with joint authorship where appropriate.

In this Student Special Issue we have included a wide range of research themes that show the potential of the field of Typographic and Graphic Design to produce novel user-centered design and research solutions that are directly applicable to real life contexts. These include research on: the interrelation between handwriting and personal branding; children's engagement with health and safety posters; the effectiveness of two-dimensional versus three-dimensional museum guide maps; the appropriateness of different styles of illustration for visual resources used in combination with assistive technologies for people with aphasia; the effects of reading from paper versus an eInk display on recall and reading speed; the potential of garment label design and companion information to communicate fashion sustainability issues to young consumers; the application of digital drawing within remote Indigenous contexts; the documenting of live art by locating and empowering the document user.

The publication of this Student Special Issue would not have been possible without the support of Mary Dyson (Department of Typography & Graphic Communication at the University of Reading, UK), the hard work of a strong body of reviewers from various parts of the world, and the patience and skill of Mike Zender, editor of *Visible Language*, in making sure the layout and images were a good representation of the research and design outputs.

Maria dos Santos Lonsdale, *Guest Editor*

How can the principles and practices of information design help us produce useful live art documentation?

a unique user-centered, experience-design challenge

Rosanna Traina

This article presents the background to, and findings of the design development and testing of a prototype Live Art Information Document (LAIDoc), designed to address the desires, needs and preferences of postgraduate live art students researching past live art works. The building and testing of the LAIDoc comprised the final stage of a doctorate study undertaken at the University of Reading, entitled: *An information design approach to documenting live art: locating and empowering the document user* (2017).

Background

Summary of thesis

The doctorate study (titled above) explored the affordances of applying the principles and practices of information design to the task of documenting and sharing information about past live art works experienced by an audience. In doing so, the study raised an unusual challenge for information design practice and research, namely: how to manage, design and present data such that the meaning to be elicited from it remains open-ended and undetermined. In other words, an attempt was made to present information so that readers might explore and apply that information according to their own criteria, context and needs, and where the *knowledge gained is shaped by the end users*. This is atypical in information design projects where design solutions are more likely to be devised for a specific application and/or require a single clearly defined message to be relayed and understood consistently, as is necessary in projects managing wayfinding or relaying information for administering medicines, for example.

The study was centered around the following query:

— What should the content and design of live art documents be like, if they are to meet the desires, needs and preferences of the live art document user, and more specifically the postgraduate live art student researcher?

The study comprised a set of qualitative research activities with postgraduate students, followed by the building and testing of a prototype Live Art Information Document (LAIDoc). As such, the research also reads as a user-centered, experience- design project. From a broader graphic/information design perspective, it also considers the role and contribution of 'subjective experience' as valid, informative data. With this in mind, and in the interests of this journal's concerns, the article focuses on the design development and rationales for the typo/graphic strategies that the LAIDoc finally employed, and discusses the findings emerging from its final testing with postgraduate students.

Broadly, the study findings asserted that despite the very different means by which 'art' and 'information design' may communicate, information design offers us a range of strategies for sharing art works to interested readers that enable us to establish a new, user-driven approach to producing useful art documents. What the study framed most startlingly however was the very powerful extent to which design communication negotiates our understanding and interpretation of the *meaning* of art works for all future interested readers. More specifically, findings from the final LAIDoc testing identified document and data transparency and rich descriptions as key user demands of live art documentation.

Summary of the user-centered challenge

Live art works (also 'performance art works', 'actions', 'happenings') represent a creative discipline that resists definition. Between them, key commentators (custodians, artists, academics, teachers, facilitators) suggest the discipline is better understood through a case by case study, and understand live art as: process over product; representing 'presence'; foregrounding the experimental; being unconstrained by medium; and as not-easily disentangled from its 'audiences' (see Heathfield 2004; Heddon 2012; Keidan 2014; Klein 2012; Sofaer 2014).

The live art community can access information about past live works through a variety of documents and documentation, but it might be argued that it is the *designed printed published* live art document that pervades what is available, and is used by a wide range of live art interested readers (artists, academics, researchers, students, employees within the live art sector). Traditional documents of this kind typically adopt a top-down interpretative approach to communicating a past live work. In other words, they present the 'truth' of a live work's meaning, generally as per the artist's explanations and the document producer's precise agendas, and in line with key discourses on the nature and effects of documentation established by live art academics. The study, by contrast, sought to pioneer an alternative 'bottom-up' approach based on the needs of the postgraduate student user, inspired by post- structural thinking, and established and guided by the principles and practices of information design.

Postgraduate live art student researchers were selected as the key participants primarily for their position within an early career research journey: they were therefore likely to have already been exposed to a diverse range of live art documents, and also likely to be in the process of establishing their academic voice, perspective and preferred methodologies so may have a heightened sense of what would be useful to them in their work.

Groundwork to building and testing the LAIDoc:

1. Reviews

Research leading up to the LAIDoc began with a 4-part review, each part with a different function. These established the entire study's rationale and laid the groundwork for the qualitative research activities and prototype development to follow.

The first stage conducted an empirical review of the varying nature, forms and content of traditional live art documents, focusing on typical approaches in producing designed printed published live art documents – the rationale being that this category represents the most ubiquitous form of documentation exerting the strongest and widest ranging influence on live art interested readers. The review identified that within this

category, documents generally adopt an 'interpretative approach' to relaying information about a past live work. This could be seen evident in the way that live works are described in words (few descriptive details about what actually happened, or the 'materiality' of the work as it was experienced), and in the way that documentary photographs are designed and presented (for dramatic effect and to support relay of concepts, ahead of profiting from their rich descriptive potential). As such, the interpretative approach embodies two characteristics that the review identified as being potentially problematic for the document user, and particularly those undertaking historical research, namely: a lack of descriptive details; and a lack of value ascribed to audience reception and/or commentary. Both of these lacks were directly readdressed within the content-decisions of the final LAIDoc, in order to explore their advantages and disadvantages for the user, as compared with the interpretative approach.

The second stage reviewed live art academics' key perspectives on the notion and effects of 'documentation' on our understanding of live art broadly. While recognising its crucial role of documentation in sustaining the legacy of live works, academic debate has focused on the ideological conundrums of producing it at all, given the nature of 'live' action. One view centres on the notion that a live work (and our experience of it) remains 'in-flux', in the moment, disappearing when the performance ends, while a *document's* content and messages are fixed and enduring, and therefore incongruous to the nature of live art (Phelan, 1993). Others have argued that the live moment itself is mediated as much as any document, and on the basis that 'pure truth' can never be accessed (even perhaps for the artist, in the live moment), we should celebrate the different ways in which live works remain nonetheless (Schneider 2001; Auslander, 2008; Jones, 1997). The debate has inspired both artists and academics to investigate alternative approaches to documenting live works that may be more in sync with the ever-shifting nature of 'live', for instance: through physical traces left in the environment and artist's body after the work has finished, or intangible traces in our memories and shared experiences. Such 'performative documents' or 'living archives' (*Living Archives Symposium*, 2010), are themselves subject to change and transformation over time, and provide more tangential (but nevertheless documentary) material to work with, and often more tacit ways of knowing and understanding a past live work. One early suggestion by Phelan in 1993 anticipated this: she suggested artists and writers suspend their preoccupation with highly visual forms of documentation, such as photography or video, to focus more strongly on subjective reflections, observations and explorations of our live experiences in any mode. This was adopted as an overall guiding endeavor in the LAIDoc, and participants reflected on the usefulness of this approach in the final prototype testing.

These two initial reviews established 2 key observations. Firstly, the co-ordinates through which academics continue to assess the most appropriate documentary approaches are centered around conceptual concerns, not the practical needs of those using live art documentation. How appropriate then, was the dominant interpretative approach for those researching past live works, and for the tasks they wish to undertake? Live art academics Roms and Melrose indeed suggest that the process of interpretative writing is in fact incongruous both to the way in which artists make work, and the way in which audiences experience them (Roms & Melrose, in Roms, 2010). Secondly, the literature review confirmed a lack of research into live art 'user needs' per se. Some consideration of user needs has begun in universities and institutions needing to manage their own archives of live art documentation (Stephen Gray & the PADS project, University of Bristol, via interview, 2010, and the Digital Dance Archives project at the University of Coventry, most recent web access 2017). While promising, these projects still retain a top-down perspective however, driven by the needs of primary stakeholders such as the artists being represented, or the agendas of the institution driving the project.

The third and fourth stages of the review responded to these observations. The third stage sought to creatively brainstorm potential alternative approaches to the typical interpretative one. Sontag's 1960s text *Against Interpretation* (Sontag, 2009), makes a useful, user-centered argument on the affordances for adopting a descriptive approach to relaying art works (or past live works). The challenges and affordances of such a descriptive approach would be put to the test in empirical research activities the prototype building and testing.

The fourth stage reviewed the principles and practices of information design that would scaffold the remainder of the research journey, offering methodologies for: eliciting user need; informing user-driven document content decisions, design strategies and design development; user-testing. This review had 2 functions. Firstly it secured the rationale for employing information design as a guide for the prototype building and testing. Secondly, it established an understanding of information design for the purposes of the study – as a *process, ethos* and user-driven *practice* centered around co-design, as opposed to simply a discipline or paradigm for describing design artifacts.

The review explored a range of information design writing by Frascara (2005), Horn (1999), Jacobson (1999), Sless (1994), and Waller (1979) among others. It identified the information design tools that would provide a practical approach to designing live art documentation as an alternative to the ideological ones offered by through documentation discourses. But the review also anticipated 3 key challenges of applying information design in communicating live art: 1) the incongruity between the two disciplines regarding how ideas and messages are communicated (via clear communi-

cation versus via suggestion and tangent); 2) the challenge of creating an information document in which the final message is to remain open, not prescribed or constrained; and 3) the impossibility of employing a 'subject expert' or 'communication expert' (as often argued for within information design) in the context of managing audience 'experiences'. The final LAIDoc testing enabled a reflection on these challenges.

Groundwork to building and testing the LAIDoc: 2.

Qualitative research activities

Drawing guidance from the reviews, 3 empirical research activities (all qualitative) were devised and undertaken to elicit a good understanding of postgraduate live art student researchers' desires, needs and preferences. Each activity was given ethical approval by the University of Reading. The activities comprised inviting participants to: 1) undertake a set of documentation tasks using writing and photography, exploring the nature of audience perception; 2) take part in 2 day-long group workshops to understand expectations and needs of live art documents and attitudes to document design; and 3) engage in one-to-one interviews (7 in all), evaluating a recent designed printed published live art document (*Access All Areas*, LADA, 2012), in order to observe real-time practical document use in tandem with users' reported documentation desires. Each activity engaged a different cohort of participants.

Given the lack of co-ordinates on the nature of live art document user needs in the field, the workshops and interviews were structured around using think-aloud protocols (e.g. Schriver, 1997). This sought to ensure that the elicited responses would be participant-led, and shaped directly by their own criteria and concerns, as opposed to the researcher's. Any pre-prepared semi-structured interview questions were issued after the think-aloud protocol, again to allow the respondent to lead in the first instance. The semi-structured questions allowed sufficient flexibility to allow the interviews to probe participants more deeply, but based on what emerged naturally, but also ensure that key research queries could be addressed where they were not raised directly. In the interviews these questions also provided the opportunity to cross-check what participants had already reported as pressing needs as they consulted the selected designed printed published live art document. All activities were audio-recorded and transcribed. A constant comparative method was applied, generating a set of codes, which were then grouped together to identify linked themes. These generated Key Findings and a set of Action Points (guided by the principles and practices of information design) that would need to be addressed within the content and design of the final prototype¹.

In sum, the research activities suggested a dichotomy within a postgraduate researcher's key concerns. On the one hand, they wish to unearth the real objective 'truth' of both what happened during a past live

work, and its meaning, despite acknowledging that achieving such objectivity was impossible. At the same time, they desire freedom of interpretation and the opportunity to draw their own conclusions (often creatively) about what a live work means to them personally. In search of the desire to support both goals, participants first sought rich, reliable and rigorous descriptive data about 'what happened' during a live work (thereby supporting the user's ability to interpret the work for themselves); and second, welcomed good document and data transparency (see below for examples). These transparencies had two knock-on effects: they helped users to determine the relevance of a document to their own research criteria (again supporting freedom of interpretation); and they secured document credibility and appeared to counteract negative preconceptions typically associated with *subjective* data (e.g. audience commentaries). This increased credibility appeared to instill a sense of confidence in all kinds of data being presented, and also in the users' own readiness to use and apply data they may not previously have drawn from. All 4 activities identified the crucial role that design plays in influencing how we access, consume, comprehend and interpret data in live art documents, and how strongly participants shared a desire for well-crafted, clear and functional document design that enabled their easy access to the documentary data.

LAIDoc prototype building and design development

Summary of approach

The prototype building and testing sought to evaluate one possible broad alternative approach (to the traditional interpretative approach) in its earliest stages of development. In other words, this initial research foray would first address the concept, feasibility and potential affordances of pioneering a descriptive, user-centered live art information document for postgraduate live art student researchers, through qualitative methods. More quantitative methods would be ideal for subsequent research in relation to further design development, testing and evaluation of individual document elements, or more comparative testing of two or three very different broad alternative approaches.

Method

Key Findings and Action Points from the research activities were reviewed in tandem with insights drawn from stages 3 and 4 of the literature review, in order to guide content and design decisions in building a prototype 'Live Art Information Document' (LAIDoc).

¹ Details of the coding process are available in the study's thesis titled: *An information design approach to documenting live art: locating and empowering the document user*, available via the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading.

The prototype employed subjective audience descriptions and artist-commissioned documentary photographs as its core data for documenting what happened during a selected live work. In the attempt to create a document that foregrounded ‘the descriptive’, a decision was made to omit the artist’s commentary entirely.

It was decided the prototype should document a real live work, so that the feasibility of the LAIDoc approach could be tested from start to finish, to identify practical issues arising. With the support and advocacy of the Live Art Development Agency, the LAIDoc prototype documented established live artist Ron Athey’s *Messianic Remains: Incorruptible Flesh, Part III (IFMR3)*, which was performed in London, in May 2014. A documentation task with 6 participants was undertaken directly after Athey’s live performance, generating 3 subjective audience descriptions. The artist agreed to forward a set of 8 artist-commissioned documentary photographs contributing to the core descriptive data. All participants agreed to their comments being audio recorded, transcribed, reproduced in the prototype, and reported in the final thesis.

The core descriptive data (photographs and audience descriptions) were presented with, and scaffolded by good document and data transparency, throughout the prototype. Content-wise, *document transparency* was offered primarily through a ‘How to use this document’ section (Figure 1) and an ‘Aims & Agendas’ section (relaying the prototype’s unique non-interpretative stance, described above).

Content-wise, *data transparency* was offered through the provision of *data provenance* information for all primary and secondary data (sources, any data manipulation, e.g. for the audience descriptions, see Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3), right through to providing an interview with the documentary photographer about their creative vision and the nature of Athey’s commission.

FIGURE 1

‘How to use this document’ section of the LAIDoc. An example of an element in the prototype relating to document transparency.

LAI Doc (Live Art Information Document) RARE! Ron Athey / *Messianic Remains: Incorruptible Flesh* (Part III) Part 4 - About this document - how to use it

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

1. QUESTION THE LANGUAGE.

Interrogate each describer's language and be aware of how it guides your understanding of the live work. Compare this with what you see in the photograph yourself, and think about what words you might use instead.

Keep in mind that the language and terms chosen by contributors to describe this work can only be suggestive, and their choices might be thought of as interpretative, incorrect, or reduced by other readers and/or audience members not represented here. Examine: Have used the terms lying in a general idiom, may have chosen interpreted or loaded etc. Have disambiguated the work in a way different to the subjectivity? Is generally neutral and unimpartial? Describers will likely use the first words that come to mind. Additionally, a subjective choice of words may reveal useful insights to how the work has been received (as opposed to what was intended – see below). An objective non-judgemental language would have to be worked on purposefully and in tandem with non-problematic words that doubts what is right and for whom?

2. PUT ASIDE THE ARTIST'S INTENTION FOR NOW.

Use the essential data presented throughout this document to think about what it was like to experience the work, before you read up on what was intended.

The artist's intention is important, but their intention may not have been related during the work, something other may have emerged in the live moment. Looking at how the work was received, can also contribute to your understanding of the artist's intention. Researching their intention is useful for checking key ideas in the work that will undoubtedly be repeated in the audience descriptions, but leaving this until later allows your own ideas on the materiality of the live work to emerge without distraction. Examine: None of the describers seem to rely information about the speaker's role in the live work. This text is in a way part of the work's creation, but it is not possible to only rely on a desk, can we find any evidence to explain why that was the case and about what was experienced? How should this now be thinking as we build our own interpretation?

3. BUILD YOUR OWN INTERPRETATION OF THE LIVE WORK.

Use the essential data presented here to interpret the work for yourself, before reading others' ideas. This document has been designed so you can negotiate the data in a way that suits your interpretative choice.

Talking about a live work's meaning suggests there is a singular or fixed code to crack, but the world's meaning is itself anything. A work may be about, or mean many things, and different things to different people, each of those contributing rich ideas to live art discussion. This subjectivity of meaning may be threatened if we continually return to previous writers for answers, as opposed to exploring and building our own.

4. QUESTION EACH CONTRIBUTOR'S FOCUS.

Cross-check the 3 audience descriptions for gaps and contradictions.

Keep in mind that in describing a particular part of the live work, other aspects of the work may have been left out, completely (intentionally or not), or simply by being more than a little on the periphery. Consider other things he is doing at that moment. For instance, he also has a book that he's reading, but this was omitted by two describers. Parts of the descriptions that may be seen to be wrong, or missing information according to others (including the artist) may be useful for the researcher in identifying what was hidden to view or ambiguous to the audience.

5. ALWAYS CONSIDER WHO IS SPEAKING AND WHO THEY IMAGINE THEY ARE SPEAKING TO.

Look at the embedded role of the contributors being analysed or what parts they read, their contribution and the type of language being used, in order to fully understand what is being presented for yourself.

Who is speaking, and to whom – is just as important as what is being said. Be aware to the speaker's gender or other factors that may be influencing what they say, whether intentional or not. A contributor by a word choice will be very different to others (the artist, producer, photographer, video manager, or audience members) and so on.

LAI Doc (Live Art Information Document) RARE! Ron Athey / *Messianic Remains: Incorruptible Flesh* (Part III) Part 3 - Audience description

audience description A

description by Anonymous, aged 25-35, interviewing, lighter skin, wearing a black t-shirt.

caption of work Describes how the artist performed in a way that was both... (text continues)

date recorded 20th May 2014, around 10pm, in a room at the back of the performance... (text continues)

location Courtyard area at the back entrance to the Backstage building... (text continues)

tags Black regular t-shirt, not indicating what interview questions first... (text continues)

date edited 21st May 2014, around 10pm, in a room at the back of the performance... (text continues)

image This thumbnail image represents a large image which was... (text continues)

FIGURE 2.1

1 of 3 Audience Descriptions, each one a 4-page booklet. Figure 2.1 displays the front page and the data transparency information relating to Audience Description A;

audience description A

In as much as you can give a description of what happened during the performance... (text continues)

audience description B

In as much as you can give a description of what happened during the performance... (text continues)

audience description C

In as much as you can give a description of what happened during the performance... (text continues)

Additional dialogue (Audience description B)

Additional dialogue: I was talking with some friends and some acquaintances, and getting really bored and frustrated... (text continues)

How can the principles and practices of information design...

FIGURE 2.2

Figure 2.2 displays the middle pages, and provides an example of data contextualisation where links between the describers' details and the documentary photographs have been made (through embedding thumbnail photographs);

FIGURE 2.3

Figure 2.3 displays the final (back) page of description.

LAI Doc (Live Art Information Document) RARE! Ron Athey / *Messianic Remains: Incorruptible Flesh* (Part III) Part 3 - Audience Description

audience description A

audience description B

audience description C

Additional dialogue (Audience description B)

Additional dialogue: I was talking with some friends and some acquaintances, and getting really bored and frustrated... (text continues)

How can the principles and practices of information design...

FIGURE 3.1

Front and reverse of 1 of 8 artist-commissioned documentary photographs. Figure 3.1 represents the front side, reproducing the photograph as large as is comfortable within the A3 card dimensions, and with no other documentary data being presented on the same side, to encourage undistracted engagement the photograph's rich descriptive and documentary data.

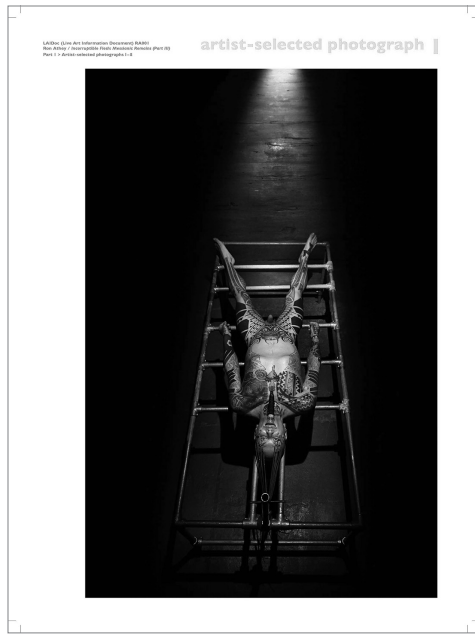
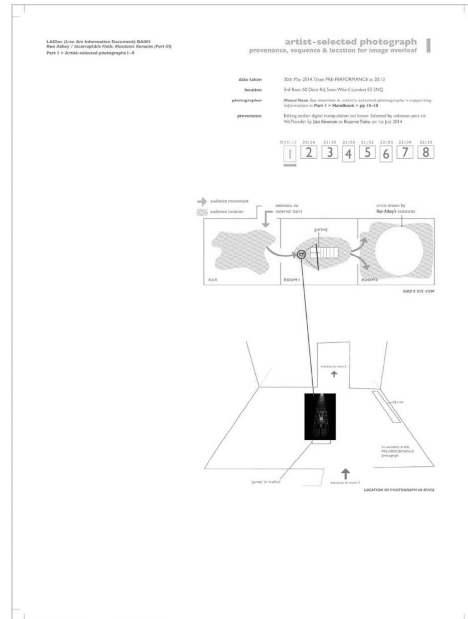


FIGURE 3.2

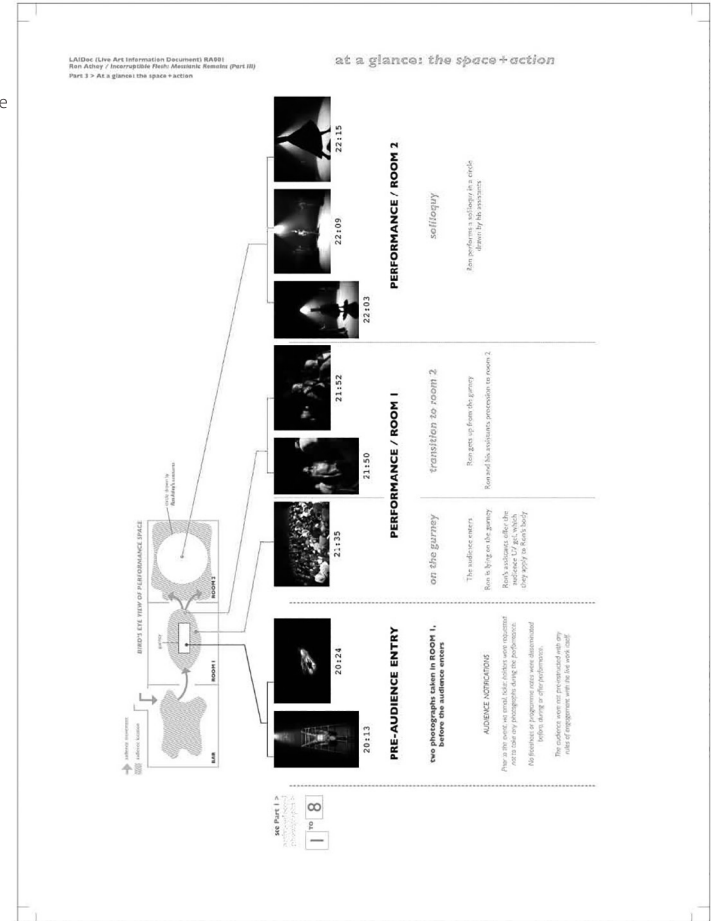
Figure 3.2 displays the reverse side of documentary photograph 1. An example of data contextualisation. The documentary photograph is visually contextualised in space by embedding the photograph in a schematic illustration of the performance space. The photograph is also time-contextualised through positioning it within chronological order (documentary photographs 1-8, above the maps). Data provenance information is presented at the top right of the page.



Visible Language 5.2.3

FIGURE 4

'At A Glance' sheet provides an overview of the action sequence of the performance (what happened), structured around the documentary photographs.



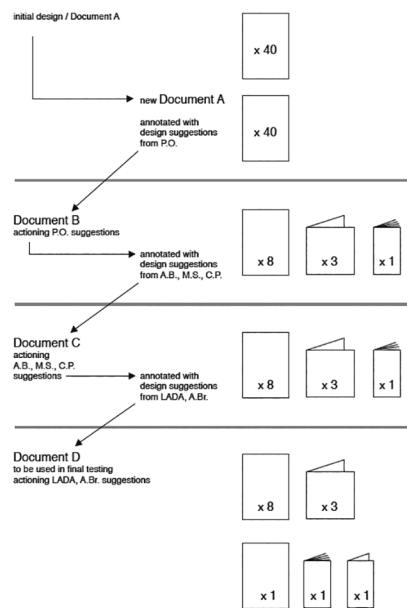
activities. The LAIDoc's final modular document structure (5 parts, 4 of which were unbound) sought to encourage users to explore the document according to their personal interests and needs. Documentary photographs were reproduced both as large as possible and alone (no additional data being presented on the same page) to encourage users to more deeply mine the rich descriptive data that these images provided (Figure 3.1). A key focus within the prototype design development was to find ways to facilitate users' easy access, navigation and use of the new (and atypical) document and data transparency information elements described above. Design-wise, the attempt to achieve *data transparency* was also sought through the provision of *data contextualisation* of primary data wherever possible, including: visual contextualisation of documentary photographs in space (using a map and room schematic) and time (using a visual timeline, see Figure 3.2 for both); provision of an overview of the sequence of actions in the performance (see the 'At A Glance' section, Figure 4); and by making clear links between the photographs and audience descriptions (e.g. see Figure 2.2.), in an attempt to encourage data cross-referencing and data critique.

LAIDoc Prototype building – design decisions

All the LAIDoc prototype design decisions were guided equally by: 1) general design considerations for supporting the user offered by information design principles and practices (e.g. use of access structures or simplification techniques; colour coding for navigation; ways to support strategic reading) and 2) the Action Points generated during the data analysis of the research

FIGURE 5

Diagram representing design development stages of the LAIDoc, beginning with the initial design and working through 3 design iterations, to reach Document D, ready for final testing with live art postgraduate student researchers.



Design development

The LAIDoc prototype underwent 4 consecutive tranches of small-scale testing with subsequent design iterations, to bring the prototype to an appropriate stage for testing with final participants. During this process, individual critiques of the prototype were undertaken with 5 information designers (4 industry, 1 student) and a key stakeholder, the Live Art Development Agency. These critiques sought to identify and eliminate any content or design decisions that might present as stumbling blocks in practically consulting the LAIDoc generally, or any that might prevent elicitation of the participant responses that the final testing aimed to gather. *Figure 5* maps the stages, designers and an overview of the format the LAIDoc took from initial design through its 3 further iterations.

Final LAIDoc prototype testing

The end users selected to respond to the final LAIDoc prototype design were 4 postgraduate live art student researchers: 2 PhD and 2 MA level students. None of the participants had taken part in the initial research activities, or were known from previous engagements. Both those who had, and those who had not attended Athey's *IFMR3* work were welcomed, and of the 4, one had attended the work. All agreed to their comments being audio recorded, transcribed, and reported in the thesis. While it is recognized that this constitutes a small number of participants, this appeared to be sufficient for this early scoping stage of investigations, which focused first on identifying if this particular alternative approach to live art documentation production was worthy of further pursuit. In addition, the 4 responses were strongly consistent with each other.

The final testing aimed to evaluate the success of the LAIDoc's broad approach in meeting the desires, needs and preferences of post-graduate live art student researchers. Again, the testing applied a think-aloud protocol to elicit an open response to the LAIDoc, supplemented (afterwards) by semi-structured questions, in order to draw responses to the following 5 key queries:

1. Was the LAIDoc's broad descriptive, information design-led approach welcomed?
2. Did the LAIDoc meet participants' desires, needs and preferences with regards its new content?
3. Did the LAIDoc meet participants' desires, needs and preferences with regards its design decisions?
4. Did the LAIDoc present as practically and conceptually feasible within the live art field?
5. Did the LAIDoc's broad approach empower the user to interpret the meaning of a past live work for themselves?

Results & Discussion

All numbers in square brackets following quotes indicate participant number [1-4]

Responses to questions 1-3 :

(broad approach, content and design)

Overall, the LAIDoc approach was welcomed. Its attempt to resist offering any interpretations, including the artist's own explanation, was initially seen by all participants as surprising and controversial:

"I mean this is really controversial - all this stuff [re the 'aims & agenda']. I think it is interesting to put aside the artist's intention." [3]

Participants also confirmed both the employment of in-depth subjective descriptions of audience members' experiences of what happened during a live work – and the presence of audience commentary per se – as uncommon in traditional live art documentation, but nevertheless strongly welcomed. For instance, they considered recording audience information and members' subjective descriptions:

as a valid 'research method':

"The only way I have to reconstruct [the works I am researching...] is going back to people who were involved, and interviews. So this idea of [...] testimonies, or through multiple voices is something that I'm interested in exploring." [1]

as providing useful data (not normally on offer):

— *"[Having access to an audience 'profile'] is really good stuff to know about a performance, that would usually not be documented."* [2]

In summary, the prototype contents and design were deemed successful on the basis that:

1. It offered new 'forms' of desirable documentary content, particularly noting those elements providing key document and data transparency. For example, in response to including an interview with the photographer (data transparency), as part of the LAIDoc contents, one participant commented:

— *"There is an ethics here that I think that is lacking in most of whatever's done [by] the documenter - you take the photographer for granted, like you never ask yourself about the authorship of the image, so I think this is really important."* [1];

2. The design decisions were seen to support: good accessibility to the document and data (such as the size of the photographs and their visual contextualisation in time and space); participants' ability to read strategically (e.g. on account of its modular structure); ease of navigation through the document, for instance, with regards the inclusion of the 'At A Glance' section:

— *"I really like [the 'At A Glance section'] it is definitely thinking about the experience of the user, and acknowledging the fact that it's actually helpful to have somewhere you can get the [...] content at a glance [including...] how the work works [spatially]."* [1];

— *"Ahh, [the 'At A Glance section'] is what I was just asking for: about positioning the photographs within the action of the performance [...] awesome!"* [3]

3. The prototype's combined content and design features heightened their critical awareness of the document construction and the nature of the data being presented. Content-wise, for example, the 'Aims & Agenda' section, sought to bring this to the fore:

— *"I think it would be wrong to seek authenticity, instead [the Aims & Agenda section is] very knowing."* [4];

and design-wise through attempts to provide data-contextualisation, and encourage data-cross checking:

— *"I haven't seen a picture [in the doc images] of a woman with coloured hair [...] that's quite interesting because to me that seems like to [all the describers, by contrast] that was quite a vivid image."* [2];

— *"I am a fan of having different kinds of documentation that conflict about a single event [...] scores at different levels [or different responses] or different scales [each providing different content & functions]."* [3];

Perhaps, as a direct effect of encouraging heightened data-critique, participants astutely noted that the LAIDoc's aim to offer description over interpretation could not be achieved in full:

— *"Any sort of description, and any sort of text is inevitably going to be [interpretative], [Quoting from Audience Description A:] - 'it was repulsive, it was horrible' - which kind of clouds how you work with it."* [4]

Clearly, the process of producing documentation is inherently interpretative at every stage, from collating and managing data to making minor typographic decisions: all would influence readers' consumption and comprehension of the document. It is important to note here, that during the pre-prototype research activities postgraduate researchers were seen as very accepting of the interpretative approach typically employed in designed printed published live art documents. However, exposure to the LAIDoc's new approach and features during their consultation with the prototype instigated a shift in user demands and expectations: participants now reported rich descriptions and document and data transparency to be almost a basic pre-requisite for them as researchers.

Additionally, the pre-prototype research identified creativity and conceptual thinking as underscoring much of the postgraduate activities and ambitions *as they research* past live works. The LAIDoc appeared to activate both of these preoccupations, with participants reflecting on alternative creative approaches to document production, which seemed in part to be supported by the LAIDoc's unbound, modular structure encouraging users to find their own 'way in' to the document:

— *"It's good that we have the floor [to spread the LAIDoc out], because I pretty much want to have this multiple view - as well [with the photographs...it is] resisting an easy conception of [the*

work...] here you really are required to spend some time with the document." [1]

While participants welcomed the LAIDoc's foregrounding of document and data transparency information, equally, they did report concern over its strong 'presence', (too much, and too upfront), which distracted them from engaging with the live work itself, and contradicted the LAIDoc's primary aim to simply describe what happened during the live work. They felt some of the transparency information may be unnecessary, and that the more useful transparency information might be better presented in a more discrete location. However, since the concept of introducing document and data transparency was strongly welcomed nevertheless, and on the basis that these were design issues that could easily be addressed through additional design iterations and further testing with postgraduate researchers, it was concluded that these features should remain core to any LAIDoc contents.

Response to question 4:

Feasibility

All participants assessed the LAIDoc approach and its contents as being reliable and valuable for the researcher. This credibility was seen to instil participants with confidence in the documentary data and in turn encourage them to own and shape the data according to their personal research queries and criteria. This sense of credibility and validity appears linked to a variety of LAIDoc features: from its overarching approach (as per its 'Aims & Agendas'); the types of data offered; the aesthetics employed; to the added value offered by the of document and data transparency.

Further research would be necessary to identify the exact root of this sense of credibility.

The key issue potentially affecting feasibility of the LAIDoc in the live art field appeared to be the foregrounding of subjective audience descriptions as key primary data for documenting a past live work, in place of relaying the artist's interpretation or explanation of the live work's meaning.

— *"So I am wondering [even if we put the artist aside] why what the audience has to say about the work is more important than what the co-performer has to say?"* [1]

Acceptance of the LAIDoc approach would be dependent on a more positive reevaluation of the contributions of audience reception in the process of academic interpretation. However, on the basis that:

- 1. the LAIDoc prototype appeared to transcend typical negative preconceptions regarding subjective data, with participants here recognising the affordances of audience descriptions for the researcher;
 - 2. the LAIDoc would potentially exist as a *supplement*, not substitute to the many interpretative documents still available to the researcher; and
 - 3. documentation not initiated by the artist themselves can and does already exist (mainly in the form of the independent academic 'Review') –
- the LAIDoc approach presents as entirely feasible.

In the interim, in order to maintain utmost respect for the artist as originator of a live work, and in recognising traditional interpretative approaches to documenting past live works, the LAIDoc's approach should be clarified as an attempt to 'document the *experience* of the work', not the work itself (Keidan, via interview, 2015).

Response to question 5:

Empowering user-interpretations

The final prototype testing did not ascertain a sufficiently clear understanding of whether or not the LAIDoc had been successful in supporting users to draw their own conclusions about what the presented live work meant to them personally. This was not a weakness of the LAIDoc design decisions being guided by information design but likely rather to be a consequence of participants having to respond to a whole range of new, atypical content and design features during the testing process. The findings did suggest however, that the LAIDoc appeared to have been successful in laying the groundwork for supporting participants to nurture their own interpretative response, in time. Evidence for this could be seen in:

- The way participants freely sculpted their own document experience in accordance with their own criteria and concerns;
- The extent to which the LAIDoc features encouraged self-reflection on their behaviour as they consulted the document; and
- Heightened critique of the LAIDoc document structure and content.

It is clear however, that further research is necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes 'an interpretation'; how and where interpretations of live works are commonly established dur-

ing the process of research; and what other factors may support or influence a researcher's ability to draw their own conclusions about a live work's meaning, independently.

Conclusions & Implications

Despite differing communicative approaches seen to be adopted by 'art' and 'information design', the principles and practices of information design here proved to be a successful facilitator in establishing a new, user-driven approach to producing useful live art documents for interested readers. For this study's specific selected end user, the postgraduate student researcher, information design not only provided key strategies for eliciting user need, but also for identifying desirable documentary data content, and managing, designing and presenting that data. Crucially however, what this study unquestionably proves, is that both design and the designers managing 'art data' *are custodians of art history*, on account of the powerful way in which design influences how we access, consume and interpret art data. In short, design and designers control and negotiate the *meaning* of art works. The findings of the prototype testing suggest that the LAIDoc's attempt to support the user through presenting rich descriptive data content; providing document and data transparency; and exploring design decisions that foreground ease of user access – together lay the groundwork for empowering users to take better ownership of the documentary data, and interpret it for themselves.

Key to note from an information design perspective, is the finding that it is possible to create an information document in which the messages arising from information being communicated may remain open, or may generate a whole array of equally valid messages. The research found that the usual information design requirement of working with 'subject experts' in order to let the data '...find good order, both for the sake of the material itself and for the sake of the people reading and using it' (Neurath and Kinross, 2009, 77-8 cited by Walker, 2017) may not *always* be necessary, particularly where the designed document is successful in supporting the user in reaching their personal goals, and where it asserts a strong sense of credibility. Both of these qualities appear achievable through foregrounding good document and data transparency information. The potential of creating an information document open final message may prove useful in a range of contexts (besides the arts), where the information designer has the responsibility to manage, design and present *but not interpret* data for the end user, perhaps for ethical reasons, or in instances where function of the information document itself is to elicit new unbiased user responses.

In addition the project reflected anew on the importance of document and data transparency for supporting *knowledge empowerment* across all information documents, based on the notion that good document and data transparency appears to facilitate deeper and freer user engagement with a document's contents. This finding may be of use for all kinds of communicative endeavors across a range of teaching and learning contexts and projects, in the arts and beyond. The precise affordances of document and data transparency, and/or how to relay, achieve or maintain good transparency through document design have not yet been established, research into which is now due within the information design field.

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