

Methods of Contextualizing

Written Response

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As a group, we used our collaborative studio explorations to further contextualize the Primark Trousers included in the V&A Rapid Response Collecting, which are manufactured in 2013-2014. We approached the object from various perspectives, including environmental responsibility, labour rights and the social and cultural history of modernization.

We employed a range of exploratory techniques, beginning with on-field research in Oxford Street, where we recorded black trousers and accompanying information from various fast fashion brands. We then catalogued the collected images based on our personal perspectives and interpretations, discussing and comparing our findings. Additionally, we conducted experimental writing that incorporated both our theoretical and practical research.

Through our explorations, we were able to deepen our shared and personal positions with their formal presentations. For example, some of us became more aware of how large fashion companies manipulate language on labels and in advertisements to shape the narratives seen by their customers, while others came to a greater understanding of the power dynamics at play within the global trade. As a group, we concluded that it was

vital to respect the complexity of the fast fashion industry and its supply chain within the context of globalization.

As a response, our collective efforts reflected our exploration of visual languages to form the complexity, and in a way of contextualizing our positions within contexts. A major technology we used is paper weaving, which has a metaphorical association with the garment industry. It allowed us to experiment with how different perspectives of the concept can be visually woven together to create new knowledge, and how the formal quality of the information shape our understanding of them. By providing contextual captions that clarify the components of the illegible and complex woven images, we aim to invite audiences to carefully observe and interact with the labels, making efforts to identify detailed information hidden in the complicated patterns. By means of this experience, our objective is to convey the necessity for a thorough examination and contemplation of the intricate connections among diverse parties involved in the garment industry within the framework of globalization, which is presently being covered under brands' simplified and cherry-picked information dissemination.

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***Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* by Donna Haraway**

Upon reading the excerpt from this book and visiting the V&A Rapid Response Collecting, it became evident that the main argument put forth by the author resonated strongly with our insights. One notable curation strategy that we observed during our visit was the inclusion of objects that represented various perspectives pertaining to a particular topic, thereby creating a multi-dimensional understanding of the concept at hand.

We found this approach to be particularly commendable from a feminist perspective, as it embeds inclusivity into objectivity. This approach was especially insightful to us during the initial stages of conceptualization, as it allowed us to approach the object of study from numerous angles rather than limiting ourselves to a singular definition. By embracing multiple perspectives, we were able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the object.

***Critical Graphic Design: Critical of What?* by Francisco Laranjo**

As we investigated our object, we actively contemplated two potential forms of criticality in design, as proposed by the design researcher Ramia Mazé. The first form involves “addressing pressing issues in society”. Given the tragic backstory of our object in relation to the Rana Plaza disaster of 2013, we challenged ourselves to probe deeper into this event and identify our personal and collective positions on the social issues it represents.

The second form of criticality entails being “critical within a community of practice or discipline”, in our case, graphic communication design. During our research process, we observed that fast fashion brands exert a significant influence on their customers’ perception of their products and even the whole industry through the labels attached to each garment. As a result, we decided to challenge how these labels convey messages and how they shape consumers’ knowledge of the fast fashion industry.

Gallery label of Trousers

In Rapid Response Collecting, the caption that accompanies an object plays a crucial role in the curation process. By providing supplementary information about the object, the caption contextualizes the formal qualities of the object and imbues it with new meanings that are relevant to a specific period in human history. The caption is therefore instrumental in empowering the object to carry a particular significance and communicate a message to the audience.

We have observed that the tone of the caption in Rapid Response Collecting is typically informative, with a focus on presenting factual information rather than subjective commentary. This approach to caption writing is particularly effective in ensuring that the object is presented in a manner that is accessible and informative to the widest possible audience. We have applied this insight to our own experiments with text, striving to maintain an informative and engaging tone while avoiding didacticism.

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Rana Plaza (2021) **by Clean Clothes Campaign**

The campaign page provided a detailed and comprehensive overview of the Rana Plaza tragedy, which occurred in 2013, and the subsequent response by activists working to address the issues facing the garment industry.

Through the information presented on the page, we were able to gain a better understanding of the most pressing industry issues, as seen from the point of view of the activists involved, which we believe is an important perspective relating to our object. It helped us to become more aware of topics that we may have been less familiar with, thereby enabling us to develop and articulate our own positions more effectively.

Overall, the page was a useful and insightful resource that provided an in-depth look into the garment industry and the ongoing efforts to address its challenges, including issues related to worker safety, environmental sustainability, and the complex impact of globalization on developing countries.

Instagram account **by Sho Shibuya**

The Instagram account created by Sho Shibuya is a fascinating example of how design can be used to subvert and recontextualize existing forms of communication. By adopting the visual language and layout of The New York Times, Shibuya creates a sense of familiarity and immediacy, while at the same time inserting his own symbols and imagery to represent significant international events.

What is particularly intriguing about Shibuya's approach is his decision to appropriate a form that was originally designed to document and communicate real-time information. Instead of simply replicating the newspaper's content, he incorporates abstract and symbolic visual languages to address relevant messages. This creative hijacking of a traditional medium is a powerful reminder of the potential for design to challenge established norms and conventions.

This innovative approach prompted us to explore the potential of labels as a medium of graphic communication design. Labels are a ubiquitous feature of the fashion industry, used by brands to communicate information about the garment's origin, composition, and care instructions, as well as promote the brand's narrative. We decided to hijack the form of labels to communicate the relevant yet untold context of the garment industry.

Memento **by Samin Ahmadzadeh**

The project Memento, created by Samin Ahmadzadeh, utilizes the art of paper weaving to represent his diverse cultural experiences growing up. The woven images serve as a powerful visual language to convey the intricate nature of situations that are influenced by multiple factors and the relationships between them. This kind of complexity is precisely what we aim to encapsulate in our own work.

Through our paper-weaving iterations, we sought to experiment with various perspectives on the fast fashion industry and its intricate supply chains. By visually disrupting the oversimplified terms often found on garment labels, such as "Primark cares", "We take action" and "Made in Bangladesh", we aimed to expose the multifaceted nature of the industry and the competing interests of various parties involved.

Throughout the decision-making process, as we selected different images and edited accompanying text, we were also prompted to delve deeper into the cultural and historical contexts surrounding issues of environmental responsibility, global trade, labour rights, and their interconnectedness. This method helped us explore around and highlight the complexity of these pressing issues and calls for a more nuanced understanding of their implications.