
Abstract 1

Despite living in an information-rich era, access to knowledge is often hindered by barriers such as information overload and algorithm. My personal experience has shown that the information I encounter daily often falls into these categories. This observation led me to explore the potential for publishing content through everyday activities rather than traditional printed or digital media, creating "micro graphic events" where content is experienced during the most relevant activity.

In "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," Ursula Le Guin suggested that one of the earliest cultural innovations was a container (1986). As early humans collected berries and vegetables in bags, they brought home not just sustenance but also experiences, knowledge, and stories. Inspired by this idea, I reflect on how the contemporary methods of obtaining food—through heavily curated commercial experiences—omit the acts of collection and harvesting, distancing us from the imaginative and intimate relationships our ancestors had with their food.

This project seeks to rekindle that lost connection by asking, "What else was once gathered with the carrier bag?" while questioning whether we can access this rich heritage in a more situated way other than through printed books or archive websites.

By collecting and curating folklore about fruits and vegetables, along with imaginative imagery that people have created in representation of their insights towards plants and nature, I aim to overlay these contents through printing on food shopping bags. This approach is intended to create an impression that "the carrier bag does not only carry food, but also imagination and beliefs," situating the content with its most relevant activity and device to initiate a vernacular graphic event within everyday food shopping activities. This project explores how integrating graphic design into daily practices can offer situated entries to unexpected new knowledges.

Context

Collecting, a practice as old as humanity itself, has profoundly influenced my journey in Graphic Communication Design. Over the past two years, my exploration has centered on how the act of gathering and sharing the collected through graphic communication shapes narratives and influences design practices.

Drawing inspiration from Ursula Le Guin's perspective in "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" (1986) that the carrier bag as humanity's first cultural device, this project revisits the primal act of collecting food — fruits and vegetables, specifically. Le Guin suggested that these early acts of collection were not merely about survival but were fundamental to the formation of human culture and imagination. This idea resonates with Michael Pollan's assertion in "Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation" (2013) that cooking was a significant development in human history, marking the dawn of true humanity.

However, he also lamented the modern disconnection from the origins of our food. The contemporary method by which many of us obtain food is through a heavily curated commercial experience. The acts of collection and harvesting are largely absent. Our choices on supermarket shelves are meticulously branded and organized, silently designing and dictating our needs by transforming them into commodified selections.

This project aims to explore the rich and imaginative narratives once created during the food gathering process and compare them with the depictions of food under modern consumerism. To do this, I first delve into both verbal and visual historical records.

For verbal records, I have utilized key references such as "Discovering The Folklore of Plants" and "A Dictionary of Plant-lore," which record numerous plants common in the UK and Ireland along with their associated ancient tales and beliefs. These readings not only resonate with my own cultural background but also introduce previously unknown folklore, making the research both personal and expansive. The writing style of "A Dictionary of Plant-lore" is particularly influential, as it compiles quotes and observations from various sources and times, allowing a multi-dimensional understanding of folklore beliefs. This method inspires me to curate my visual practice similarly, aiming to create a deep and multi-dimensional impression by repeatedly exploring nuanced aspects of a single theme.

For visual records, my research includes examining paintings that depict farming and gathering, folk art inspired by plants, and iconography from pagan nature worship. These sources, ranging from ancient rock art and pottery to folk weaving art from Europe and the Americas and tarot illustrations from the late Middle Ages, showcase a diverse and rich imagination about nature. Their varied depictions of plants contrast significantly with common modern styles and are distinctive in their execution.

In the meantime, Artists like Benedikt Luft and Sophy Hollington have significantly inspired me by how they merge the influence of ancient imagery with contemporary style and exemplify the merging of past and present in graphic design. By studying these artists, I aim to create a similar discourse in my own designs, integrating historical perspectives with contemporary visual strategies, and producing aesthetically intriguing graphics that prompt reflections on our changed relationship with food.

Projected contribution

In this project, I am investigating the potential of republishing visual and textual materials of myths and folklores on shopping bags, empowering the daily food shopping activities into a micro graphic event of knowledge sharing. This endeavor serves not only as an exploration of republishing methods but also reflects my considerations on communication design. Throughout my practice in Unit 3, I have reimagined the dissemination of reading materials in more commonplace and casual settings. Despite living in an information-rich era, access to knowledge is often hindered by various barriers, with affordability and awareness being central to my study.

Affordability primarily impacts print media. The high cost of reading books, driven by production expenses and compounded by consumer reluctance to purchase unengaging titles, restricts access to printed knowledge.

Conversely, awareness is closely linked to digital publishing. Cass Sunstein, in his book “#Republic,”(2017) predicted the rise of “The Daily Me”—a fully personalized newspaper. Today, this prediction has materialized, with algorithms playing a significant role in filtering the information accessible to individuals, often limiting exposure to familiar ideas while obscuring alternative perspectives.

Based on this observation, I have been inspired by the design practice of Boot Boyz Biz. They have developed a method of embedding an expansive archive of citations into everyday objects such as T-shirts, caps, and playing

cards. Their approach leverages visual language as a tool to provoke marginal forms of discourse across a broad social spectrum, thus offering everyday encounters with new and unexpected knowledge.

How Graphic Communication Design can be used to integrate diverse knowledge into the fabric of daily life, allowing people to both encounter and gather diverse insights? How can graphic design extend beyond its traditional boundaries to become an event when situated with the most relevant daily activities? Additionally, contrasting with the systematic and comprehensive knowledge sharing typical of textual media, what are the unique communicative advantages of rapid, fragmented visual experiences? These enquires will guide my continued exploration in the field of graphic communication design.