Deshna Mehta Notes

I took my project in to date, in its printed form, to talk Deshna through where I was at and what I had explored so far.

I surmised each part of what I did and what I found out to give her an overview.

I highlighted the parts I found most interesting. The largest of these had come right at the end of my project and my own realisation that my work was very straight, structured and commercial, and although I had wanted to take it back into that space, I hadn’t known why, other than to make it relevant to my industry and my career past this course. Being enlightened as to why commercial design was like this by Annoushka Kaladwana’s workshop on Ways of Seeing, exploring how we see as a construct that is influenced by the Enlightenment, colonialisation and culture. Combined with my exploration of Affordance and how the environment works on us. I understood I design as I do as a result of my environment, education and culture. I felt I could finally break out of this and design in a more experimental way, prompted by Annoushka’s provocation of “how would a woman design it?”

This personal revelation prompted me to select Deshna as my preferred practitioner as through researching her work, I found it based in values and humans. This is very close to my own heart and I wanted to learn more as to how she managed to navigate this in a commercial, capitalist world.

I mentioned this to her and she kindly told me her personal story that prompted this position, which is different to mine in fact, but holds the same in motivation. Family. She asked me what was beneath my research and project, the deeper motivation or driving force, which I knew was lurking, but had never articulated out loud to another human, which made me emotional. Rooted mainly in my ten year old daughter and the issues her and her friends face, now and in the future, are challenging as a mother, but equally, are concerning for my fourteen year old son in a directly opposing way. A conflict.

My reaction surprised me, and Deshna, but I chose a few years ago to refuse to apologise for having physical emotional reactions. In the spirit of my project and female representation, I no longer view crying as a form of weakness or embarrassment, but a form of expression. In our default male culture crying is a weak, female trait and viewed derogatively. I am pleased that my motivation is so deep and real.

Deshna was kind enough to speak with me about some projects that are asking questions on female representation:

KADAK: a design collective of eight Indian female graphic artists who redefine narratives through graphic storytelling, challenging preconceived notions about femininity and sexuality. The zines have “a sense of drive, purpose and meaning, which is really motivating” (Janine Shroff, 2024).

Typographic Posters: a collection of posters from 42 different countries. I love this reference as it opens my mind to design from other cultures that I can draw inspiration and ideas from of how to break my own work for better.

Sold Out Publishing: a platform for authors and content that “ask what is left out from the curricula in academic and practical spaces within Graphic Design. The question is what is excluded and why, who is producing knowledge and who is distributing it? In an attempt to connect these knowledge gaps and fill the material and structural inequalities we hope to create reference points through published materials within Graphic Design.” (sold-out.net, 2024). I am particularly interested in this reference as the irony is not lost on me, that myself and my practice, is a product of the environment and context I situate myself in (my University), as well as my life long environment and context, being what I am investigating. I am interested in how to challenge academia and its construction, form and contexts, through the exploration of editorial design, and the wider world, within the environment and construction of a university setting. Sold Out has a focus on gender and minorities, and using making and medium as the message, both of which are areas I want to develop and explore further. Boundaries has come up a lot in my practice, boundaries of the page, screen, publisher, author, audience, distribution systems and so forth, and exploring how to push these boundaries literally is exciting and something I am keen to explore further through form and materiality.

One of the themes that emerged from my project was the contradiction of interior v exterior. The cover, the exterior, as a mask, interface, medium, skin, the appearance of the magazine, projecting a perceived ideology through stereotypical, derogatory and dumbing down of cover lines and imagery, that contradicts the values hidden within the magazine. Its values being, strong female opinions and positions, on cultural, economic, political and societal issues. It was interesting that Deshna picked up conditions such as familiar / unfamiliar: constant / changing: to help me develop my work further. These felt so strongly intwined in my practice I was keen for her to expand. Challenging what is familiar with what is unfamiliar, having enough of the familiar to know what it is (affordance of sorts) with enough unfamiliar to challenge it. Deshna felt I had done this with the content of the work, but not the elements of design, which was my own realisation, on reflection, of my own work. Having this thought validated and expanded on by Deshna is a intriguing and solid foundation for me to move my practice forward. We discussed constant things in editorial design, the grid, page number placement, hierarchy, etc. and how we can challenge them, by changing or disrupting them. Looking at the skeleton of editorial design and asking how can I disrupt it? I liked the word ‘disrupting’ and can connect with that practically.

She dangled two carrots in front of me. Carrot 1: Defamiliarization within the art world. Carrot 2: Coincidences.

Defamiliarisation “is the artistic technique of presenting to audiences common things in an unfamiliar or strange way so they could gain new perspectives and see the world differently” (Wikipedia, 2024) and something I will investigate further. I preferred the Wikipedia definition more to the Oxford English Dictionary who said “Defamiliarization: In literature and other forms of artistic production: the effect or technique of disrupting the reader's or audience's habitual perception of the world and making familiar elements in a text, play, etc., seem strange and fresh, esp. by means of drawing attention to the language or formal devices used.” Wikipedia is more concise, emotive, inspiring and speaks to my creative nature than the functional dictionary definition, which is interesting in itself. I recognise that I react to the more emotive definition, despite both of which have identical fundamental meanings. Equally, creating an emotive response through my work is something I strive for.

Coincidences was intriguing… Deshna described coincidences as familiar things that are unfamiliar. Coincidences are anchored in what you know, but happen in an unexpected way, or environment. This is something I will hold onto and lean into through the development of my project. This concept challenges what I thought coincidences were/are and connects deeply with my other thoughts and values on how the body has *felt* senses, that know something the mind doesn’t, that are ignored and undervalued and something we should pay more attention to, which plays into the themes on aura in my Methods of Iterating from Unit 1. This blurry world of felt sense and senses, familiar and unfamiliar is intriguing to me and my practice as I turn to other cultures for ideas and inspiration on how they design, view design and the processes they use, in comparison to patriarchal, colonized design. Drawing on Japanese horizontal storytelling methods courtesay of Annoushka, and the eco-feminism movement and women’s connection to nature and cycles from Climate Justice of Unit 1, draws me to start to think of editorial design from the starting point of desire lines, cycles, the natural world, non-linear storytelling, that all merges with how thoughts and dreams emerge and brings me back, in a cycle, to the struggle I had to put my blurry, abstract, criss crossing, simultaneously emerging work into a linear format for A. an editorial design B. copywiritng and C. my university essay / assessment.

<https://kadakcollective.tumblr.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/kadakcollective/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csynbr>

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/bystander/the-bystander-anthology>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_bender>

<https://sold-out.net/>

<https://www.typographicposters.com/archive>

Own references

KADAK

Kadak defines not only their purpose but each of the eight women—strong, severe, sharp.

Conceived by Aindri Chakraborty, Janine Shroff, Aarthi Parthasarathy, Garima Gupta, Pavithra Dikshit, Kaveri Gopalakrishnan, Mira Malhotra and Akhila Krishnan.

Janine Shroff

<https://www.platform-mag.com/design/kadak.html>

Sold Out quote

https://sold-out.net/about/?contact-form-id=widget-block-16&contact-form-sent=1520&contact-form-hash=d28091c0d0df46017bf1c29cbaa2f37df70e434b&\_wpnonce=3fccd697cd#contact-form-widget-block-16