READING IS WEAVING

A deconstruction of magazines and an exploration of weaving led to threads of unconscious meaning woven into magazines.

Magazines have been part of the UK's cultural landscape for over 100 years. Woven into our daily lives they are found in shops, discarded on trains, stacked in waiting rooms, hotel lobbies and homes, offering a contemporary social and cultural commentary of our public and private lives. Through an iterative process of deconstruction, I used tools of graphic communication design to disrupt, expose, uncover, subvert, unravel the hidden or unconscious meaning woven into magazines. Themes like feminism, patriarchy, capitalism and commodification emerged, as did notions of tradition, value and meaning through process, form and medium. The interrogation of Post Digital Print, The Mutation of Publishing Since 1984, by Alessandro Ludovico (2012) forces me to reconsider this position of hidden meaning through construction of printed magazines and makes me question if digital is the answer.

Alessandro Ludovico critiques Marshall McLuhan in Post Digital Print examining the premise that with the invention of TV and electric media in the 1960s: "...a fascination with speed and progress was transforming people's perception of time and space, the printed medium seemed simply too slow to allow information to be simultaneously diffused and consumed" (Ludovico, 2012).

The tone and language of Ludovico's writing suggests a line of thought that sees print as inferior to the electric dissemination of information that was new, exciting and fast. He goes on to quote McLuhan: "The slow movement of the eye along lines of type, the slow procession of items organised by the mind to fit into these endless horizontal columns - these procedures can't stand up to the pressures of instantaneous coverage of the earth" (Ludovico, 2012).

Ludovico observes McLuhan's derogative notion that reading is slow. Reading is slow, it takes time and mental space. You sit down and read a book on a comfy chair

with a cup of tea. You read the newspaper over a leisurely breakfast. You buy a magazine for a long journey. Reading comes with dedicated time. A place to be, to relax and slow down Reading is like weaving. Weaving is slow, it takes time and physical space. But with this time and space, value is

instilled. The Ecoist observes weaving as feminist practice stating, "women wove everything by hand, creating undeniable value" (Ecoist, 2022). Anni Albers, a textile artist who wove, celebrated and encompassed a "lasting" value in art; "that is what interests me: the lasting things, and not the [quick] passing of things." (Weber, 1999).



Dat So La Lee, a weaver in Native North America with woven baskets that encompass feminine practice, utility, commerce and artistry.

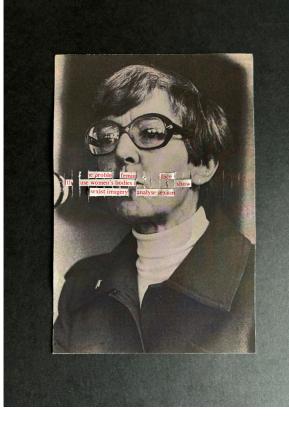


Ancient Writing, 1936.

Anni Albers, Textile Artist,

time and physical space. But with this time and space value is instilled."

"Reading is like weaving. Weaving is slow, it takes



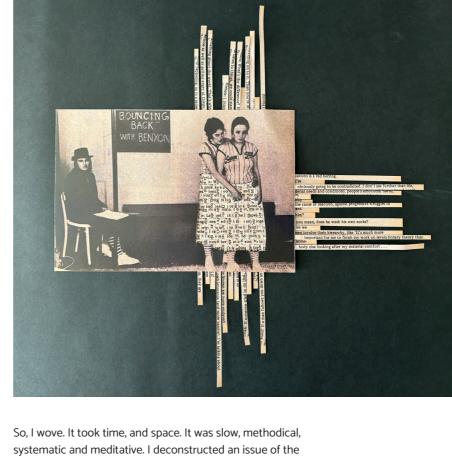
the same issue

Small words extracted

from feminist independent

magazine, Spare Rib (1977)

woven into images from



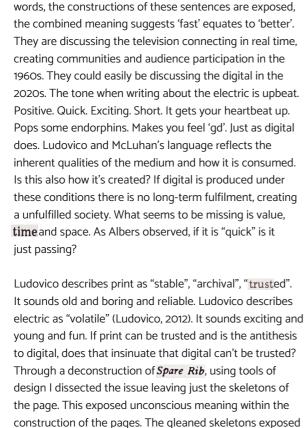
of women from the same issue. I undertook a feminist practice of a feminist magazine. What emerged were reconstructions that were materially textual, layered, that felt they had depth and meaning, history and heritage; that had a past, a present and a future. Visual metaphors of women's voices being lost, silenced, censored, overlooked and marginalised. The small words of women reflecting weaving as a practice that has been "overlooked, taken for granted and disregarded throughout much of history for its economic contributions" (Ecoist, 2022). "The tone when writing about electric is upbeat. Positive. Quick. Exciting.

feminist independent magazine Spare Rib (1977). I dissected

and extracted the small words (picture captions, picture

credits, single sentences) and wove them into the images

Short. It gets your heartbeat up. Pops some endorphins. Makes you feel 'gd'."



The antithesis to reading and weaving is electric and digital.

"transforming"; "simultaneous" with "diffuse and consume". McLuhan uses the word "instantaneous" with "coverage of

the earth". Through dissecting and extracting these small

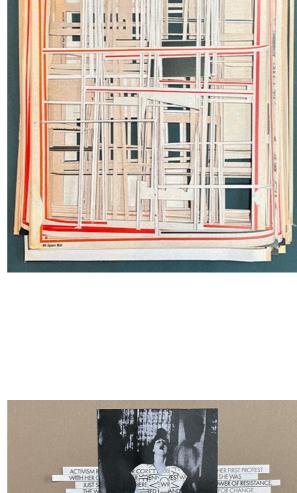
Ludovico uses the word "speed" with "progress" and

the page as a cage or container. Physical containers of information by women, for women, but simultaneously containing women's voices as marginalised and on the periphery. Confined by the boundaries of the physical page, but also the boundary of the alternative, or independent press, suggesting otherness - not mass ideologies. I also found unconscious meaning when deconstructing current commercial women's magazine Elle (2024). Also "a magazine for women, run by a woman" (Elle Boutique, no date). Through dissecting and extracting the small words and images, and reconstructing them through weaving, it emerged that women's voices had become commodified, with the small words detailing designer labels and price tags. More disturbingly the surface level text was saying 'you are enough' and 'be yourself', but this text was consistently situated within the context of celebrity,

appearance and wealth, intertextually weaving a deeper level of subconscious meaning, that you are not enough

an in this kind of job."

and never will be.



Small words from Spare Rib (1977) woven into an image from Elle (2024), and vice versa, to juxtapose and subvert text and image relationships that go unnoticed in magazines.

Small words from Spare Rib

in a four page feature from

Elle (2024). The pages are reformatted to form a

tapestry, giving a new way to

read the feature; a physical

digital page? Spare Rib text woven into the Elle text,

to render the text illegible

text that gets overlooked.

highlighting the context of the

(1977) woven into images

Skeletons extracted from

(1977) stacked up, a visual metaphor for women and

feminist independent

women's voices being

contained or caged,

complex and fragile.

magazine, Spare Rib



Commercial magazines are produced within capitalist

frameworks, whereas independent or alternative media

takes a politically charged non-hierarchal approach, as

Weinmayr articulates: "Let us not look at publishing as

the end of a process during which consolidated thoughts

and enquiries are put into a final brochure, book or leaflet.

Let us look at publishing more as a way to initiate a social process, a social space, where meaning is collectively established in the collaborative creation of a publication" (2014). Weinmayr cites many examples of experimental design of independent publishing, See Red, Workshop 2011 - ongoing, AND publishing, that challenge the social (patriarchal and eurocentric?) constructs of formatting. What I found in Spare Rib was a utilisation of the same construction as commercial magazines and newspapers, which seems to be containing, limiting and censoring women's voices through inherent patriarchal systems of graphic communication design. This implies print cannot be trusted, as Ludovico had suggested, as language, image and page layout create complex combined meaning, leading to a perceived

reading. Our sophisticated understanding of print conventions leave us merely expecting and accepting them, and the interwoven ideologies they mask, unquestioned. "Does navigating unfamiliar design constructions cause an obstruction in reading the content

or an alienating of the hegemonic public?" Contrary to this then is the challenge of familiar/ unfamiliar. Does Spare Rib utilise expected and accepted forms of editorial design to be accepted by a public that it may otherwise alienate through unfamiliar design. Does

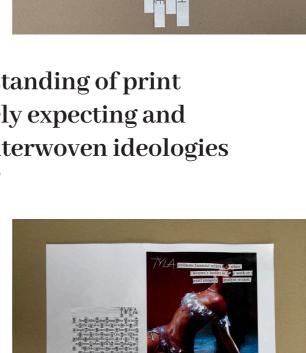
navigating unfamiliar design constructions cause an obstruction in reading the content, or an alienating of the

hegemonic public?

Could it be that digital, being in its infancy within time and space, can negate these sophisticated constructions, that leave the reader and writer tangled in hidden meaning? Our understanding of and "reading" of digital has developed greatly in the last 20 years, but there is no industry standard for digital magazine design. At a recent BSME (British Society of Magazine Editors) event 'The Cover is Now!', a panel of seven art directors concluded that the "technology's not there yet" (Lupton, 2024) and from their discussion neither is a set form, system or way of working within digital.

"In a fragmented world can digital offer a reconstruction of

construction?" Ludovico intersects my practice through preconceived assumptions I had of print and digital, and my practice challenges notions of speed and medium raised by Ludovico. Let's use this opportunity to learn from other cultures and look at new ways of presenting narratives, that are value driven. Let's expose them through scale,



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Museum Publications. medium, context and circulation. Can digital magazine Weinmayr, E. (2014) 'One design be created within an intention of time, space and publishes to Find Comrades*', value, that challenges the hidden ideologies woven into its in O. Klimpel (ed.) The Visual Event: An Education printed relative? In a fragmented world can digital offer a in Appearances. Leipzig: reconstruction of construction? Spectator Books.