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Unit 2
Positions Through Contextualizing
Written Response
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Ahmed, S. (2017). 'Introduction: Bringing Feminist Theory Home' *Living a Feminist Life* Durham: Duke University Press. Pp. 1-18

> "A concept is worldly, but it is also a reorientation to a world, a way of turning things around, a different slant on the same thing. More specifically, a sweaty concept is one that comes out of a description of a body that is not at home in the world … A sweaty concept might come out of a bodily experience that is trying. The task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty." (Ahmed, 2017)

Sara Ahmed's introduction proved a helpful read in pinpointing the difficulty of describing, presenting, and unpacking feminist concepts, which she refers to as 'sweaty concepts'. Ahmed underlines moving away from a demanded immediate response. I have had a hard time defining and narrowing my stance on the male gaze and from where I want to approach it. Ahmed validates the reorientation to a new world that comes with 'sweaty', undefined conceptual work. Her writing helped me in avoiding getting caught up in an exact end goal response and keeping the line of questioning open.

Ahmed describes the 'home' as our society and the 'body' as feminist concepts and the point of view of not being at home in the world. This struck home in the way the male gaze alienates the woman and denies her ownership of her habitat. This 'sweaty concept' surrounding eviction from home as a result of the male gaze is something I began to uncover in my second round of iterations and want to explore further through the coming weeks.

Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of Seeing*. New York, Viking Press.

"But the essential way of seeing women, the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed. Women are depicted in a quite different way from men — not because the feminine is different from the masculine — but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him. If you have any doubt that this is so, make the following experiment. Choose from this nook and image of a traditional nude. Transform the woman into a man. Then notice in your minds eye or by drawing on the reproduction. Then notice the violence which that transformation does. Not to the image, but to the assumptions of a likely viewer."

Berger's book was the driving force of much of my work, specifically in the second week. The final paragraph with a call to action to reproduce famous works demonstrating the male gaze guided my second set of iterations, and as a result, generated many of the critical questions that came out of my exploration. Bergers' unpacking of the gaze, which parallels Laura Mulvey's take, helped me understand the breadth of impact the male gaze has beyond just media. It is embedded in the way society functions and the way women have been instinctively trained as the passive 'viewee''.

In rewriting/reproducing my set of works, it revealed, as Berger suggests, a violence of sorts and a level of intense discomfort when the female is converted to a male yet the position of the viewer remains. It immediately provides visual queues to make the viewer assume the subject is in some form of drag or is highly feminine – solely through vulnerable body language. Why does a man in a vulnerable and 'on display' position immediately appear homosexual in nature? This question goes back to Bergers' inquiry surrounding the social constructs society has created and their irrevocability.

Lee, P.M. (2011). *OPEN SECRET: THE WORK OF ART BETWEEN DISCLOSURE AND REDACTION*. [online] Artforum. Available at: https://www.artforum.com/features/open-secret-the-work-of-art-between-disclosure-and-redaction-197372/.

> "The secret in itself an ideological contrivance; it's withholder — its visible withholding — is as critical to its power as whatever content we might imagine it conceal." (Lee, 2011)

In my initial iterations exploration using redaction and censorship to simultaneously take away but also highlight the male gaze, this project helped me to define the use and impact of censorship, especially in the context of screenprinting, which was where my initial iteration stemmed from. When I first came across using screenprinting to redact, I was drawn to the way it often turned into a highlight due to the transparency of ink. This calls out the notion that when something is redacted, you want even more to know what is underneath. Redacting also amplifies. Applying this to my iterations, I aimed to both call attention to the male gaze through transparent ink redaction while also attempting to reverse the objectification of women by covering them with traditional black ink censor blocks. Through this method, I wanted to explore the duality of the two and its effect on the viewer.

Harraway, D. (1988). 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' *Feminist Studies,* 14(3). Pp. 575-599

> "The imagined "we" are the embodied others, who are not allowed *not* to have a body." (Harraway, 1988)

> "Vision is *always* a question of the power to see – and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualising practices." (Harraway, 1988)

Harraway's excerpt correlated interestingly with a thread from John Berger's book, *Ways of Seeing.* In both, they mention the violence situated within vision and the 'looker'. In my second week of iterations I explored the effect of the gaze before and after it being flipped on its head. While Berger points out the violence in flipping the gaze through gender transformation, Harraway speaks to the violence that exists in the male gaze from the start. I began to recognize the perverseness in the subjects and the way they were painted as a vehicle to provide a sense of power and ownership to the viewer. On the reverse, when the female forms are converted to male, another layer of uncomfortability arises with the taboo nature of visualising men in such vulnerable and feminine postures. The duality of complex viewpoints underlines the overarching importance of the eye when considering the male gaze and even the female gaze.

In an alternate way of considering perspective, Harraway's excerpt reminded me of the importance of collective viewpoints and sourcing opinions. While I am a woman who has experienced the male gaze, I am not the only one and my experience and opinions on such differ from others. My output in this project will lose its impact if I claim to see from others positions. Moving forward, I want to focus on gathering others perspectives and experiences to further enrich my inquiry.

Mulvey, L. (1975). *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. London Afterall Books.

"In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*." (Mulvey, 1975

While more specific to film than fine art, Laura Mulvey's article defined for me the complexities built in our society surrounding the objectification of women in media. Unpacking the roles of the viewer (male) and the subject (female) aided in further understanding the way in which women have been positioned in society as an object for male pleasure, dating back to male scientific cognitive fear and desire. This places women as something to be used. For emotional reassurance, gratification, validation, base need to reproduce, and then once no longer able to provide these pleasures, is labelled obsolete. Reading this unpacking of the way this has been represented in media and this instilled in the way society functions lit the fire to call it out, understand it, and begin to dismantle it.

White Cube (2024). *Tracey Emin, Bermondsey (2024)*. [online] White Cube. Available at: https://www.whitecube.com/gallery-exhibitions/tracey-emin-bermondsey-2024.

Like A Cloud of Blood, 2022

This fall, I visited Tracey Emin's exhibition at White Cube, and it was my first introduction to fully considering the female gaze. In such raw and intense representation of the true female form in its most vulnerable, and in this case hurting, state, I began to think about the lack of such representation in mainstream art. Yet the female form is consistently prevalent in art across centuries. Why do we not see the female body represented in uncomfortable yet authentic ways such as this? Once I began to consider within this inquiry the male gaze and its counterpart of the female gaze, Tracey Emin's work served as the other end of the scale when it comes to the gaze. This began to gather even more meaning when considering the common positioning of a woman's body in a bed, often 'awaiting' the viewer. This is a prime example of countering the male gaze with the reality of a woman in her most vulnerable state and place.

Barthes, R. (1977). The Death of the Author *Image, Music, Text.* London: Fontana Press. pp.143-148

"The reader is the space on which all the questions that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." (Barthes, 1977)

"To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing." (Barthes, 1977)

"by refusing to assign a 'secret', ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an acitivity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases -- reason, science, law." (Barthes, 1977)

The Death of the Author felt useful to my work in its discussion of culmination of other works that come together to form your own and the lack of singular authorship that is involved. Much of my work thus far has been lead by sourcing of materials authored by others or concepts such as the male gaze or the female gaze. While these are not my ideas I think there is a lot to unpack and explore and this reading helps connect and bring unity to these stances their final 'destination' which ultimately is defined by the reader.

Riviere, J. (1929). Womanliness as Masquerade. International Journal of Psycho-Analysis Vol 9 pp. 303-313

"Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it — much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods." (Riviere, 1929)

While I went into reading this with the assumption the concepts would be outdated, the notion of putting on a mask to conform to society (still commonly a male dominated one today) feels incredibly existent even today. This is something I have experienced myself in business school where most of my professors and classmates were hypermasculine men or even working in the south United States where traditional gender roles are still heavily upheld. Beyond conformity to gender roles in today's world there are norms when it comes to sexuality, religion, race, beliefs, etc. where people find themselves putting on a mask to fit into a particular environment. This 'masquerade' in society is a concept I want to either center my project around or use to inform further exploration.

Stefania Sorrentino (2014). *SUBVERTING THE MALE GAZE*. [online] CuratingtheContemporary (CtC). Available at:
https://curatingthecontemporary.org/2014/11/07/subverting-the-male-gaze-femininity-as-masquerade-in-untitled-film-stills-1977-1980-by-cindy-sherman/.

"the function of the female gaze should primarily be a parodic exposure of the traditional image repertoire assigned to women by the patriarchal perspective. Deconstructing the vision of the male gaze means actually subverting its power and blurring the gender boundaries. The only solid conclusion we can draw is that femininity is not fixed and should be not enclosed in cages, as the stereotypes are. A woman may not own the notion of the gaze, but she can control and maneuver it at her liking." (Sorrentino, 2014)

This article served as a great culmination of perspective on the male gaze as well as use cases and references of artists who have interacted with and showcased the problematic nature of the male gaze. There are endless opinions and interpretations of the male gaze and I wanted to not just consider those that have books or published journals. This added to the layers of what the male gaze means and how it can be viewed, informing my project as it progressed in terms of my position. I began to consider how to represent the perspectives of real people and their interactions with the male gaze in everyday life. While this line of inquiry did not progress it is something that I want to reconsider in the future.

makemepulse (2022). *The Female Gaze*. [online] Makemepulse.com. Available at: https://www.makemepulse.com/case-study/the-female-gaze [Accessed 6 May 2025].

"This online WebXR experience (also available in VR at the Charlottenborg Museum in Copenhagen in September 2022) lets users create their own version of the iconic art piece Young Girl Preparing Chanterelles (1892) by Danish artist Peter Ilsted, by plunging them into a 3D version of the artwork. The experience is intended to raise awareness of and facilitate reinterpretations of how women have been portrayed in art history. " (Makemepulse, 2024)

While using virtual reality is not something I was ever planning on exploring, this reference was a unique application of the female gaze and transforming existing works into something new. This did also rub me slightly the wrong way in the way that the viewer still controls the subject and is still 'using' her in a way as the 'gazer'. At the same time its interactive qualities work quite well to me and engage a less passive view of the female gaze. This was still a great case study on ways in which the gaze can be represented and reworked to appeal to and engage an audience and lead me to want to explore something slightly interactive.

Cindy Sherman - Photographer

Graf, S. (2021). *How Cindy Sherman's Artworks Challenge the Representation of Women*. [online] The Collector. Available at: https://www.thecollector.com/cindy-sherman-iconic-representation-of-women/.

Untitled Film Still #2 by Cindy Sherman, 1977, via MoMA, New York

"The photographs of Cindy Sherman often capture iconic representations of women while offering a critical approach. They can be interpreted as questioning gender norms through the lens of feminist art." (Graf, 2021)

Cindy Sherman's work is another great example of playing both sides of challenging and exploring the male gaze. This also correlated in some aspects to the work I did in the previous brief in terms of translating / recreating the male gaze from the female perspective. This flipping of the male gaze on its head is a challenge and one that Cindy Sherman does very well - taking the implications of her reference and challenging them through her own eyes as both the subject and the author.

While my work strayed away from the subversion of existing examples of the male gaze, this was another helpful reference in how to challenge and question the gaze.
Caroline Walker - Artist

Lesso, R. (2019). *Caroline Walker: The Female Gaze - The Thread Blog*. [online] The Thread. Available at: https://blog.fabrics-store.com/2019/10/27/caroline-walker-the-female-gaze/.

In Every Dream Home / Caroline Walker / 2013

"I'm interested in .. the relationship between women, or how women perpetuate their own position in a patriarchal society." (Walker, 2019)
"Walker's female gaze breaks apart the traditional male view that has dominated art history for centuries, opening up a fascinating discussion on how women view each other in daily life, and where the male view fits into this equation." (Lesso, 2019)
"It is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult."(Lippard, 1976)

Caroline Walker's works paint even more layers to the concept of the male / female gaze which was an interesting portfolio to look at. Much of her work highlights the way women take part in the male gaze and a patriarchal society. These depictions both challenge and expose creating a duality that is hard to decide a stance on. Her work is highly critiqued as both feminist and anti-feminist - perpetuating the male gaze but also challenging it through the female gaze. This duality was something I had been considering and struggling with defining in terms of my position on it. This lead me to consider new definitions I could write in terms of these concepts. There seem to be so many grey areas - male vulnerability, women partaking in the male gaze, women employing the gaze on men, etc.

Paula Rego - Artist

Farrell, J. (2024). *The Deeply Political Art of Paula Rego - The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. [online] Metmuseum.org. Available at:
https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/the-deeply-political-art-of-paula-rego.

Mist II, Paula Rego, 1996

"She created psychologically complex works using various techniques and styles that challenged stereotypes, countering narratives, histories, and viewpoints of men that have dominated (and continue to dominate) art."
(Farrell, 2024)

Paula Rego's work serves as an exploration into the representation of the female gaze before it was the buzz word / topic that it is now. The subtle challenge and protest to the male dominated world in her works feels disguised and only visible if you know to look. While this may hide the importance of the gaze, I think this plays into the concept of womanliness as a mask from Riviere. This shows behind the mask which you may only know to look for if you are one that experiences the wearing of the mask.

Design Council (2018) 'The Design Economy 2018 - the State of Design in the UK', pp. 17

" 78% of the UK's design workforce is male. This is higher than the percentage of men in the wider UK workforce (53%).This is also despite women making up 63% of all students studying creative arts and design courses at university. The overall ratio is skewed by the male dominated subsectors of product and industrial design (95%), digital design (85%), and architecture and built environment (80%). Even when employed in design, women earn less. For example in the multidisciplinary design subsector, women working as product, clothing and related designers earn 18.3% less than men in that subsector despite making up nearly two-thirds of that design subsector (64%). Women are also less likely than men to be in senior roles, with only 17% of design managers being female."

This excerpt above ended up being the launching point into the final destination of my exploration. Upon reading this it evoked quite a lot of emotion, anger and frustration at not just the facts but the way in which they are presented in the report. Hidden among pages of splashy graphics and data visualization, this was neatly tucked away and labelled just a 'challenge' of the design world. This propelled me into translating these unseen discrepancies and I started asking around to see if anyone was aware of this, which of course was a no. Additionally, a lot of conversation arose around the facades that so many agencies and corporations promote surrounding gender balance, diversity, and equal pay. No one I talked to had actually experienced a workplace that acted on those practices, further showcasing the drastically inequitable underbelly of the design world.

Libby Sellers (2018). *Women Design*. London: Frances Lincoln.
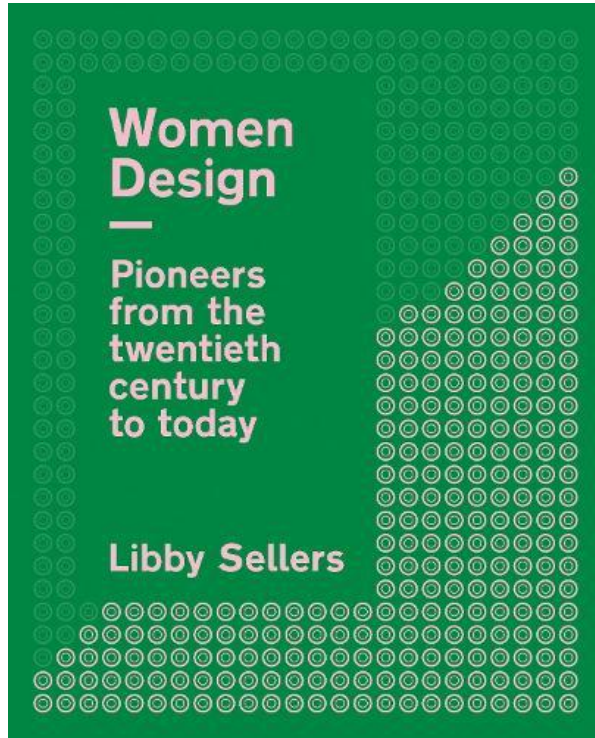
Women Design served as a reference point and example of a publication designed to showcase womens work in the world of design. Within the book there are many embedded symbolic nods and design decisions that highlight both women in design and showcase data without being overt. This lead me to more deeply consider how a publication is made and the meanings of its 'ingredients' including typography, color, symbolism, etc. This then helped to inform the 'hidden' aspects within my publication and the unpacking that can happen as the reader progresses through a publication. In addition, to someone new to publications this was a useful use case for layout, typography, image use, etc.

Nathalie Miebach. (n.d.). *Nathalie Miebach*. [online] Available at: https://www.nathaliemiebach.com.
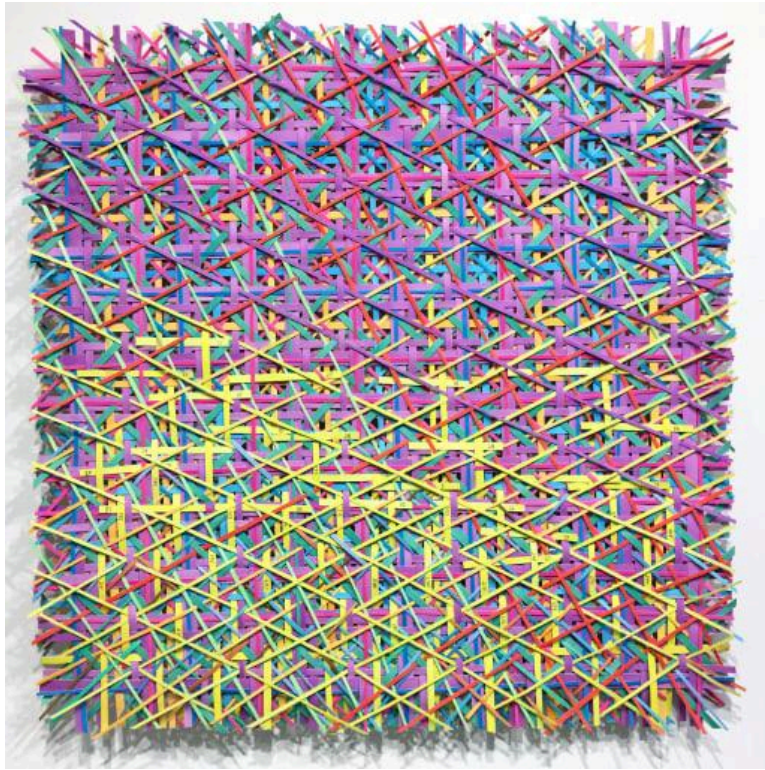
Nathalie Miebachs data visualization is perhaps more geared toward where my project can go in the future as I consider more physical and large scale presentation of data. Her projects are often beautiful works of art upon first look but as you investigate further you discover patterns and intricacies that represent various data sets and trends. While my project may need to display facts in a more bold and explicit way, it could still be coupled with hidden data to create layers in which the audience can either interact, or not. This journey of discovery / unearthing of facts is something I want to continue to explore.

Critical Analysis

Riviere, J. (1929). Womanliness as Masquerade. International Journal of Psycho-Analysis Vol 9 pp. 303-313

"Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it — much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods." (Riviere, 1929)

In *Womanliness as Masquerade* by Joan Riviere a concept is presented and analysed in which the author describes the way in which women alter themselves and present a facade to accommodate a male dominated world. She describes the purpose of this masquerade as a method to hide the taking of space in the world and to not damage the male ego. In order to personally inhabit a world in a more masculine capacity – that is partaking in anything beyond traditional womanly duties – the woman must not let the man grasp or see her encroaching role. She deceives the man through her projected womanliness. Riviere describes this act as a theft of sorts with women in the role of the thief constantly being asked prove she has not 'stolen goods' – that being the possession of masculinity.

Riviere uses in her writing many analogies and comparisons to represent this concept. I think this aids the reader in fully understanding the breadth of impact this concept has in relation to other commonalities in the world. This method engages the reader and creates relatable comparisons which I imagine would be particularly important in explaining this to a man - should he be reading this in the 1930s. I think this can also translate to the way in which stark data and information can be represented in today's world to further connect with the viewer. Bold concepts such as this that call out societal issues are often overlooked for their perceived outlandishness but bringing it into ones realm of reality and making it relatable is a helpful way to drive a point home – coupled with strong design elements, my hope is it will be even more seen. This method of presenting information will be a useful tool to consider in translating *The Design Economy 201*8 by the Design Council as a new publication.

When I first read this writing from Riviere I didn't fully grasp its relation into today's societal landscape. However once I tried to relate it into today's world the commonalities arose. In today's society so many people alter themselves to conform to societal norms whether that be in terms of sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. The more I unpacked it the more I began to see the way I have experienced this myself from dumbing myself down to not step on fragile toes in business classes full of egotistical finance bros to client meetings in the design world where being a woman in the design world is 'applauded'. Why does it need to be congratulated as if it is so beyond the norm?

This realization drove me to want to engage further with the gender inequalities in the world and more specifically the design workplace. In addition to this I wanted to bake in the concepts that Joan Riviere presents in her article and consider how this can help drive the narrative in exploring gender gaps. Bridging two inequitable realities from almost 100 years apart that are all too similar

paved the path to the final outcome of this brief which I imagine is only just the start of this exploration.

Design Council (2018) 'The Design Economy 2018 - the State of Design in the UK', pp. 17

The Design Councils, *The Design Economy 2018 - the State of Design in the UK* is an in depth report focusing on the value designers create within the UK economy. It serves as a tool to showcase the way design drives growth and innovation and proves the design sector an indispensable valuable. The report is a heavily data driven publication with a mix of statistical paragraphs, infographics, and large call outs of important facts. Within this 45 page report I happened upon page 17 in which the topic of the 'design diversity challenge' is brought up. This 'challenge' with one paragraph on ethnicity and one on gender is described through a half page spread of 12 point font with no major call outs or graphics to help the user understand the main points. We flip the page to discover a massive call out quote from a prominent white male architect. Yet on the previous page should the reader look into the small paragraph they would discover the fact that only 20% of the built environment and architecture industry is female.

The way in which the information in this report is represented (or lack thereof) feels like a huge missed opportunity. The infographics don't tell the true story and don't showcase facts effectively, splashy graphics distract from small font size, and key points are not highlighted. This leaves a huge gap to fill in terms of communicating highly important statistics that the design community need to be made aware of. This disregard only drives home the hidden inequality within the design workforce in terms of gender and race. On top of this it shows the unfortunate use of design as a tool to suppress, hide, and warp point of view to drive a particular narrative.

This has completely challenged my understanding of the world of graphic design. These facts discovered in the report have opened my eyes to inequities I didn't think existed. I thought compared to the business world I would be entering a much more equitable realm of more open minded thinkers and employers. After learning these facts I began to ask around and question if I was the only one unaware of the massive gender gap. Most assumed there was some but nowhere near the scale that is reported. Additionally, in conversation with others I began to see a trend in the facade (another masquerade!) that corporate entities promote in terms of an equitable workplace. It all looks pretty from the outside but almost everyone's experience was that once you're in it the illusion fades and those practices are almost never executed. This just goes to show how deep rooted and inescapable the gender roles and inequalities are within our society.

This revelation then drove my making in the later half of the brief. I began to experiment with ways in which I could take these facts and represent them in ways that actually got the point across and exposed on a larger scale these inequalities. In the first week I explored large scale poster mock ups that shouted the facts for the public. In the second week I wanted to weave back in Rivieres work and consider how form can relay the 'hidden' qualities of the topic and its history. Through this a small and seemingly innocent publication came to be. The purpose in this was to then have the reader discover these eye opening facts on their own and simultaneously feel the progression of frustration for the reality they are discovering. While this is one method, in the end it may still be too quiet. In further iterations I hope to explore projecting these facts in a much louder way that is

inescapable and unavoidable. Hidden facts and discoverable realities can still be baked in but in the end perhaps the main goal here is awareness and forced exposition.