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Form Follows Feeling
Follows Form

A thesis on Living, Documenting,
Reflecting and Making

Harshal Duddalwar
Rhode Island School of Design
Master of Fine Arts
Department of Graphic Design
To anyone who has felt lost, alone, uncertain, or adrift, this book is dedicated to you in the hope that it may offer some solace, inspiration and guidance on your journey.

It took me a long time to realize the reason behind the introspective nature of my work at RISD. I thought I was simply making work based on what and how I was thinking and feeling about things in the very moment. I use the word ‘things’ because it accommodates a whole lot. Not very long ago, a working title for this thesis was ‘When Thoughts Become Things.’

The thing is, I never had a strong reason for pursuing an MFA except for wanting to expand on my skill sets, knowledge, and understanding of the subject and explore mediums. It was only (very) late into my time here that I started questioning what I cared about.

After spending a long time reflecting, interrogating, and talking about everything I have created (and felt) this past year and a half, I've come to realize that I've been using my work as a container and an outlet to express and vent. It took me a while to acknowledge that I've been longing to find my voice, my identity, and a sense of belonging. While connecting with things around me wasn't very difficult, there were times I struggled. My work at RISD reflects my emotional state. It has been a lot about documenting my thoughts and experiences. Making it outward is an effort to explore ways of expression nudging others around me to document and share.

My work at RISD has been a blend of my personal and professional self. And if I remove myself from the conversation, it is a portrait of human beings and their lived experiences. This is what I care about, at least at this point in time, because I think we fail to see things and take them for granted, and at times forget them if we have no one to tell them to.

April 3, 2023
The context of this thesis is autobiographic. It moves through a process of self-reflection documented through a series of journal-like entries. Each entry considers the primacy of my design experience as a foundation for building the social dimension of design. I realize that I am addressing the very problem that subjectivity takes as its point of departure.

Yet, I believe that by directing attention to how I experience my design process, I can build upon these understandings, making them intelligible to others through specific design actions and forms. Specifically, this book documents my journey through graduate school and before, informing the body of work I’ve created at RISD. Writing this thesis has helped me stay sane. I hope it has poignancy for you as you gather a vantage point on what matters to you in your design practice (and life in general).

There are times I wish my thesis was rooted in the subject, that I was more of a facilitator interrogating something in the field of graphic design, that it wasn’t so much about myself. The thing about making personal work is that you really have to feel to write it, and as liberating as it sounds and is, it’s also problematic because feelings don’t always stay the same. There are times when you feel so much, and then there are those when you feel nothing.
In this thesis, I explore ways of expression at the intersection of form, feeling, and storytelling; through my lived experiences. I emphasize the act of documentation, encouraging introspection and reflection as a means of creating a body of personal work. I also talk about developing my visual vocabulary and language to express these narratives, along with strategies and plans for making personal work outwardly visible.

In my lived experiences, I recount certain life events and turning points that have shaped me. These experiences inform the introspective nature of my work at RISD.

In the act of documentation, I talk about developing a journaling practice, why I still do it, and ways of doing it.

In introspection and reflection, I share my experience working with thoughts, feelings, emotions, and vulnerabilities.

In creating a body of personal work, I talk about making work in an emotional state, the role of instincts in creating, and the idea of designing for one.

In developing my visual vocabulary and language, I share my learnings and takeaways as my time at RISD comes to an end, putting out my principles and philosophy.

In strategies and plans, I briefly discuss my intentions to expand upon the work that I have initiated at RISD.
The you that you are now is also little bits of every person you were before now.

Charlie Waltz Rieber, A Manifesto for Growing
As Yet
Writing

A poetic narrative that delves into the events from my past and present that have played a crucial role in shaping me. The piece breaks down deeply personal and vulnerable moments into fragments, removing the specificity of the event or individuals involved, thus emphasizing the occurrence itself. This approach provides insight into the experiences that have molded me while preserving their raw emotion and impact. As a concise summary and an introduction, it sets the tone for the introspective nature of my work in grad school, which draws heavily on personal experience and self-reflection.
Premature birth.
Feeble. Less pressure, lesser expectations.

Growing up.
Growing up in a family of four.
Growing up as the younger of the two.
Growing up in a small town. An orthodox society.
Growing up in a family of doctors. A noble profession.
Growing up as a reputed doctors’ son. An identity.

Living atop a hospital. Home for fifteen years. Work twenty four-seven.
The smell of medicinal drugs from the kitchen fridge.
The sound of my father climbing stairs after his morning surgeries.
The sound of hospital staff at home for a bottle of water, a cup of tea, payments.
The sound of an ambulance from the balcony.
The sound of twelve lovebirds in the balcony.

Growing up in competition. Comparisons.
Growing up as the slow one. Lesser expectations.
Growing up scoring lesser than him, him, her, him; but more than him and her.

Emotional, Sentimental, Attached, Loving, Caring. Human nature.
Family value of being there for others. Doing all that you can. Blurring boundaries. Putting others on a pedestal.
Family values of focus, discipline, punctuality, humility, honesty and hard work.
Family value of sincerity, seriousness. Often overly sincere, critical.
Family habits of keeping thoughts and things to self. Learned behavior.

Pre teen. Making friends. Tuitions, playing cricket, playing guitar, extra classes.


Growing up as the younger one. “Less smarter”. Developing inferiority.
Sibling rivalry. Sibling camaraderie. Cards, apologies.

Teenaging. Becoming individuals. Developing feelings.
Family values of focus, discipline, sincerity, seriousness.
Seeing her feel, fall, hide, focus, fail, try, focus, feel, fall. Distracted, deviated.
Silently spectating. Thirteen years old. But youngest in the family of four.
Tense environment. Keeping mum, keeping things to self. Learned behavior.

Focusing on studies. Studying to become a doctor. A noble profession.
Slow learner. But a reputed doctor’s son, an identity. An orthodox society.
Lack of awareness, clarity and vision. Going with the flow.
Preparing for med school.
Packing things and thoughts.
Moving.

Moving.
Moving to a bigger city. Better opportunities.
Moving in with grandparents. Love, care and pampering.
Moving away from home. Mom and dad.
Moving into a dense competition. Cut throat.
Preparing for medical school. A given.

Spending time with grandparents. Getting close to my grandfather.
Books, extra classes, extra books. Getting into the groove.
One day at a time. Slow learner.
Feeling anxious. Trying to focus. Performance pressure. Stress.

Spending time with my grandfather. Walking three rounds of the park. Opening up.
Competitive environment. Comparison. Results.
A reputed doctor’s son. Expectations, responsibility, pressure.

Feeling overwhelmed. Writing thoughts. Keeping to self.
Spending time with grandparents. Visiting places with my grandfather.
Nervous. Starting to give up.

Tensed environment. Stressed family.
Nearing exams. Inability to focus.
Tense environment. Keeping things to self. Writing them down.
Losing interest in the subject.

Feeling numb.
“You draw so well”, a friend.
Thinking about a creative field.
Animation? “Best design school in India”, a Google search.
Collecting information. Writing to a career guideline in a local newspaper. More information.
The stress of nearing exams. A week to go. Venting out to father.
Dropping medicine.
Pausing. Understanding design. A profession?

Moving.

Moving to a bigger city. Moving to the city of dreams.
Moving away from home.
Moving away from the dense competition.
Preparing for a creative career. A not so noble profession?

Feeling the place, the people, the food, the rush. Chaos.
Visiting places, taking pictures, walking, sitting, gazing, writing. Keeping things to self.

Appearing for design entrances.
Learning design. Product design. No, graphic design.
Making friends. Opening out.
A friend, a good friend, best friend, a very very very good friend, feeling, falling, a girlfriend.
Love. A gush of feelings. Sharing, communicating, thoughts, and feelings.
Family values of focus, discipline, sincerity, seriousness. Pretty clear.
Work first, then family, then friends, and then the relationship. A promise. To self, and to each other.
Hiding it from everyone. Staying focused. Listing things to accomplish.
An affirmative feeling. Accomplishing the list.

Moving apart.

Moving.
Moving back to the city of dreams.
Thinking about grad school. “Best design school in the world”, a Google search.
Preparing for graduate school. Applying to graduate school.
My dad says I am an introvert. I am an ambivert.

Select excerpts from a conversation with my dad.

3:30
Although you were the younger sibling, your approach to the entire thing was very very mature.

8:00
The amount of time I devoted to you was definitely much less than what I should have.

10:00
Those formative years made you more stable as an individual, it made you more independent.

13:10
We as a family are very very emotional; but you moved out.

7:00
Unfortunately yes, I regret it at times now, and I don’t mind sharing it now, but you were the underdog amongst the two.

9:00
Because of her IMPOSING nature, you always took second place, and therefore if there was any situation at times, it was like ‘it’s okay, Harshal will understand’.

11:20
The attention that should have been given to you wasn’t passed on to you, possibly, and SHE took the greater chunk of it and that is a bit of the reason why you became an introvert, not introvert, but self-reliant, I guess.

15:10
I missed the bus there. These are all the times in which I do feel that I could have been a more observant parent, who spent more time with you like how I spent with didi and my practice.
CHANDRAPUR IS WHERE I GREW UP.
IS WHERE MY PARENTS LIVE AND PRACTISE AS DOCTORS.
IS A SMALL TOWN WHERE I WAS EXPECTED TO BE AN ENGINEER OR A DOCTOR.
IS WHERE PEOPLE OPINED I SHOULD BE A DOCTOR.
IS WHERE I DECIDED TO BE ONE.
IS WHERE I DECIDED NOT TO BE ONE.

“I don’t think I can make a good doctor.”

A week prior to my medical school exams, I reached a breaking point and confided in my dad. I made the decision to leave medicine behind and pursue design instead.

“If you fail, you’re to be blamed. If you succeed, you’d be the one congratulated. We’re here to support you, but it’s your responsibility from here on.”

These words from my uncle have stayed with me until this day. I have struggled with feelings of guilt over my decision to abandon medicine.

The box borrows its dimensions from the map of India. The narrative takes its composition from Chandrapur’s location in India.

**Chandrapur is a Small Town**
A narrative on growing up within an orthodox society.
Changing my career trajectory has had a significant impact on the value I place on my work, often prioritizing it more highly than necessary, as well as on my approach to life in general. I have tended to share only positive work-related developments, while keeping personal failures and emotional struggles to myself so as not to burden others.

On the personal front, some relationships began, some ended, and having never really spoken about these things openly, I kept my feelings to myself.

Plants die when watered too much, and I never learned when to stop giving.
Louise Kaufmann

Learning, to my experience while growing up and even in design school back in India, followed a pretty laid out and traditional approach. I see the influence of the guru-shishya (teacher-student) relationship. This also instilled a sense of comparison and competition in me.

In my recollection, assignments in design school lacked opportunities for critical thinking and problem-solving, instead emphasizing direct and straightforward approaches. From my industry experience, design decisions were often based on the visual appeal of collateral rather than strategic reasoning, ultimately prioritizing client desires. This environment led me to adopt a design facilitator role, focusing on catering to client briefs and following a fixed process. As a result, the open-ended briefs at RISD compelled me to look inward and explore personal themes in my work.

The guru–shishya tradition is one where the teacher is considered to be a source of knowledge and wisdom, and the student is expected to blindly follow the teachings and instructions of the teacher. This approach is based on the belief that the teacher knows what is best for the student and has the experience and knowledge to guide them in their learning journey.
For far too long, I’ve let my work and my performance define myself. My time at RISD has come with its ups and downs on the academic, professional and personal front.

Moving halfway across the globe to study design is a privilege. I documented this move and everything it moved.

Atlas Project

Atlas is the first project I designed at RISD. Having moved to the US for grad school, I experienced a feeling of displacement, especially during the first few weeks. Intuitively, I used this project to document the challenges and experiences of leaving home (a familiar place) behind. Through personal anecdotes and reflections, I talk about the challenges and the emotional journey moving brings. I use a circle as the protagonist that travels through the eight spreads alongside a written narrative and images from my phone. Beyond documentation, I intended to express empathy, affirmation, and understanding for those who have undergone similar transitions.
Moving halfway across the globe, nine and a half hours behind the time I’ve lived in to a place ahead of the times.
But more often than not, you move for a purpose, an immediate purpose, that has a bigger purpose. And when you finally move and live it, you find it easier to reject than to accept that it is all happening. Isn’t this what you’ve been waiting for? You question yourself and your purpose. And it is when you start to settle in you start to realize it, gradually. You recognize your role and how fortunate you are to be able to live this, learn this, and gain this.

And privileged to be able to afford this. You then tell yourself not to take it for granted.

You start.

And as you do, you struggle. You’ve struggled in the past, you tell yourself. And that you have to keep struggling because everything around you will be so new, so different that you will not be used to this. It will overwhelm you, but you are here to stay; you affirm yourself.
Take on your path and embrace it.
But don’t forget to halt and breathe.
Float, keep going. Let the wind direct you.

But as you venture into the deep waters, stay anchored;

conscious of your roots, your origin and your purpose.
Bloom, flourish, keep going.
There were times when I found myself going with the flow, immersed in what I was making, without necessarily questioning the broader purpose of my work. Eventually, you’ll become a part of what alienated you, when you started.

One week into buying a new laptop, I hit it on the corner of the table while removing it from my bag, bringing in a dent. I remember how I was upset the entire day. One of my earliest resumes read, ‘You can always find me with my laptop,’ which is true. I’ve spent so much time on my laptop that it’s become a part of me, so much so that during the site selection for one of the projects in Grad Studio 2, I chose the digital interface as one of the sites I spend most of my time in. However, over time, I’ve become overly attached to my devices. The objective was to prompt users to view these digital conveniences as mere hardware and not become overly attached. It aimed to demystify the allure of high-performance gadgets by materializing their features and gestures into tactile materials such as low-quality paper, plastic, and fabric. The book follows my interactions with the laptop, from turning it on to designing a file and browsing the internet with a hundred tabs and just as many desktop folders. The project also sheds light on the issue of digital waste, urging readers to be mindful of their consumption and discard practices. I wanted to strike a healthier relationship with machines by making the digital world more tangible.
Nothingness
Project

A large poster that folds into a booklet, ‘Nothingness,’ explores the actions, containers, and signifiers that have become pervasive in my daily workflow, ranging from empty folders to placeholder texts to fake PNGs. Through this piece, I reflect on the redundancy of these elements and their impact on my creative process. By calling attention to these ubiquitous features, I seek to challenge conventional thinking around productivity. The cluttered composition of these elements on the sides, which is only visible in parts, speaks to the overwhelming feeling these features give.

Nothingness
Project
And then there were times when I found myself in questions, most of which led me no where.

**Chime**

Project

‘Chime’ highlights the vicious loop of social and digital media addiction. The composition draws inspiration from interfaces we use daily. Each frame of the narrative is reduced to its simplest form while still emphasizing how the gestures of these elements contribute to addiction. By highlighting the features that make these apps addictive, ‘Chime’ prompts readers to reflect on their relationship with social and digital media, encouraging them to break free from the vicious cycle.

A gush of dopamine.

Something I continue scrolling endlessly,

Conversations with him, her, her, their, her, them, a group I don’t even remember.

Conversations congratulating someone, for something they don’t even understand, or care.

from the past, lost in the scroll

that take up my phone space, and my headspace.

I find myself in trance, until the chime of a trending article

on deleting social media takes up my screen; nudging me to share it on social media.

I submit my time, more time, every time, my time, more time, watching someone, go somewhere, be something, do something, or nothing, none of which makes any difference to me.

But I still keep at it, until my conscience pulls me out. It only lasts for a moment, before I start consuming again.

Something from someone, I don’t even know, I don’t even remember, or care; until I stumble upon something I like, from someone I like, or once did.

I am tempted to double-tap my heart, to share. Share to speak my mind.

for them to know, because I want to. I read what he thinks, she thinks, they think, he thinks.

I agree with him; no, I don’t know him.

I continue scrolling endlessly, until I am all caught up.

I then switch to conversations.

Conversations with him, her, her, her, them, a group I don’t even remember.

Conversations congratulating someone, for something they don’t even understand, or care.

from the past, lost in the scroll

that take up my phone space, and my headspace.

I find myself in trance, until the chime of a trending article

on deleting social media takes up my screen; nudging me to share it on social media.
The following pages lay out the words on a mobile interface.

I submit

my time
more time
every time

Conversations

congratulating
someone
for something
they don’t even know
or understand
or care to
I am tempted to speak my mind

I read what he thinks

she thinks

they think

he thinks

I agree with him

No, I don't know him

something I like

for a moment

from someone I like

or once did
The you that you are now is also little bits of every person you were before now.
Charlie Waltz Rieber, A Manifesto for Growing
The first thing I recall documenting was a quarrel at home when I was 13. Then fights in school at 14. They remain in my mind.

At 17, I documented in a small blue book how I could not perform in my studies, despite all the hours.

At 18, I documented my days in Mumbai and compiled it into a book I called Finding Myself.

At 21, I created a new email account as a cloud journal to write about a freelance contract I lost. I have 404 entries to this day and 51 drafts.

At 23, I created a WhatsApp group where the only participant was me. I use it to write my thoughts, notes, and things to remind myself of.

I’ve found ways and mediums to document. But I’ve mostly kept things to myself. I don’t recall what led me into this practice, but when I think about it, documenting has helped me stay calm and register my feelings, and the fact that they exist somewhere in some form has given my thoughts and emotions visibility and space. It has been helpful to see how far I have come and how little that ‘far’ is. Documenting has helped me register, process, reflect, learn, and relearn.
I've documented through writing. Writing has helped me document a moment only to be perceived and recalled differently every time I read it.

Compendium Project

At a point in my thesis, I delved into the significance of functionality and visual aesthetics in graphic design, wanting to examine what it truly meant to design something in our contemporary world. I was questioning the ubiquity of branding and its lack of uniqueness. I discuss these topics in my compendium, along with others, such as my experiences growing up in India, surrounded by the work of DTP (Desktop Publishing) Artists and the philosophy behind Muji's design. By writing this compendium and taking this route, I was aiming to discover the ideal balance between form and function in any designed output.
BAD MOUTH
BAD BREATH
BAD ASS.

MAISON DENTAIRE
Sameness in Branding
A spread from the compendium showcasing case study images for various branding projects.
This journal serves as a prelude to ‘Ponder,’ a project that delves into the complexities of my identity. It is a compilation of my diary entries that shed light on my daily routine and habits. Inspired by the mobile phone, I use to write my diary entries, the journal adopts similar proportions, providing an intimate glimpse into my world. The thresholded images RISO printed on the journal mimic flashes of memory, capturing the fleeting moments that shape my daily life. Readers can connect with my experiences and relate them to their lives through this piece, prompting introspection and self-reflection.
Here in New York

Project

‘Here in NY’ is a visual poetry project that seeks to capture the essence of living in New York City. The project takes the form of a collection of visual poems, each one offering a snapshot of a particular moment in time. These moments range from the mundane to the profound, from the everyday hustle and bustle of city life to the moments of quiet reflection that punctuate our experiences. It also offers my personal perspective on what it means to live in this vibrant and exciting metropolis.
I TRAVEL TO MANHATTAN FROM BROOKLYN TO GO TO BROOKLYN

I REMOVE MY SHOES. MY SANDALS TOUCH MY CROCS. MY CROCS TOUCH MY SLIP FLOPS. I WEAR MY SLIP FLOPS.

I OPEN THE FRONT DOOR. THE APARTMENT OPENS INTO THE KITCHEN.
I've documented through pictures. Clicking pictures has let me document a moment, and capture something in time, be it a thousand pictures of strolling at India Point Park, screenshots of video calls with my family, or selfies that I only started taking after hating them for so long, to document how I am doing.

Mumbai Manhattan

Project

‘Mumbai Manhattan’ is a tall book of images that showcases my experiences in New York City, drawing parallels to my memories of Mumbai. Through this piece, I reflect on the similarities between the two cities, documenting the sameness of urban life across different geographies. Each image is carefully selected to highlight the sameness of the city, documenting the subway (in comparison to the local trains), NY-style pizza served on a checkered paper (in contrast to the street food), and the tightly packed buildings of Manhattan (in comparison to the crowded streets and lanes of Mumbai). By removing its association with Mumbai, the book invites readers to appreciate the unique character of New York while also recognizing the universal elements of city living.

Mumbai holds a special place in my heart. My first time living away from home, the events and experiences I had in the city shaped me into who I am today.

Manhattan feels similar– the towering buildings in a tightly packed grid, the sun and wind sweeping through the tunnels creating the Manhattanhenge, the ubiquitous scaffolding, the constant movement of people, the lively hustle and bustle, or the harmonious blend of numerous sounds. Manhattan is a zone.
‘On the Coil @ 323’ is a personal project documenting the meals I cooked in the winter of 2022. As a novice cook who only started cooking after moving to the States, I found myself spending a good chunk of my daily routine preparing meals. This book serves as a visual diary of my culinary journey.
I’ve documented through walking.
Going on walks has helped me document what’s already on my mind. It has given me time and space to process my thoughts better and understand myself.

I’ve documented through collecting.
I still have the receipt from the first Chipotle I had on my first day in the US en route from Boston to Providence, the receipts from Trader Joe’s, Whole Foods, and many other stores, cafes, and the few restaurants I’ve been to. I have the sealing clip from the Sara Lee bread I got at East Side Marketplace.
I've documented through art. As a kid, drawing Warli was something I did occasionally. What was purely for fun and a pastime activity became a research topic during a winter session course. I researched some of these art forms, primarily Warli and Madhubani, only to discover they were drawn to document social, spiritual, and mythological events in these settings. I combined visual rendering styles from Madhubani and Warli and content from modern-day conversation to make this tapestry.

I Am Not A Robot Or Am I?

Project

‘I am not a robot. Or am I?’ is a tapestry that combines Indian folk and tribal art, such as Warli and Madhubani, with system icons and symbols from Google’s Material Design, a design language that has become ubiquitous in our daily lives. By fusing traditional forms and compositions with modern-day communication elements, this project explores the impact of social conversations and technology on our habits and patterns. It embraces and critiques the medium of communication in today’s world, highlighting the need for self-reflection and awareness.
Controlled by my device, by the tags, and the likes.
Blinded by the comments, the shares, and the follows.
I find myself creating for the Gram, for someone new to find, follow and like me.
But I consume more than I make.
Lost in the stories, the reels, the polls, and the infinite scroll.
Drowning in the DMs, the ‘Good Morning’ s, and the many other barren messages
that flood my phone.
What have I subscribed myself to?
What am I, if not a robot?
Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.
Soren Kierkegaard
If I had to list words I’ve frequently used in grad school, ‘feelings’, ‘thoughts’, and ‘emotions’ would top the list. I’ve spent a lot of time thinking and feeling in my head, most of which contributed to the work I was making and how it was shaping. I’ve spoken of having relied on my instincts and intuition to create my work. All these words felt like they addressed my queries I otherwise had no answer to.

On the personal front- longing for my identity, voice, and a sense of belonging seeped into my work. I’ve tried fighting my feelings and setting boundaries, but it only made things difficult. But now that I think about it, what if this was bound to happen? After trying hard to avoid it, I found it easier to accept than to reject that all this work I was doing was to fill the void. Only in the final stretch of my time in grad school did I notice and embrace my vulnerabilities.

TOP Things I keep thinking about.
Reflecting on my time at RISD, I can’t help but wish it had been a little smoother—that I had more clarity on what I wanted to achieve from grad school, and that the classes I took were more intentional beyond simply wanting to learn a skill.

This is also where I hit rock bottom. There was that day, in my undergrad, back in 2018 when I received the Academic Excellence Award in the graduating class of 2018, and then there was this day in 2023 when I received an email from the registrar notifying I was on probation. As someone who had always associated their existence with their work and performance, receiving this email was beyond terrifying. I found myself struggling to do even the smallest of things, and at times, the thought of dropping out or taking a leave of absence crossed my mind. My room got messier. Competition and comparison added to the pressure.

When did what I loved doing start feeling like a burden? Why did it start feeling like I had to prove myself? When did this shift happen?

I was going through all this in the most crucial period. I was in the best place I could have been but also in my poor headspace.

Combining my state of mind with my work felt like the only way out of this. I found a way to talk about my feelings through my work, only to realize that it was something I was doing anyway. I also realized the need to slow down, to focus on what I wanted to say and make.

How can I create something that’ll let me slow down? What does it mean to slow down?
What does it mean to create from your feelings?
How can I create to feel better? To feel visible? To feel validated?
How can I make work to document and preserve?
How can I share without sharing too much?
How can I make work to let go? To move on?
How can I make something so visual that someone only looks at how it looks, but only I understand what it means?
Reflecting on my two years at RISD, here are a few things I wish someone told me when I started. Feel free to add to the list in the available space.

Write about what you are thinking, making, doing, and feeling. Write about what you’re not making or doing. Write about the whys. Ask yourself if you don’t have them. Ask around if you don’t find them.

Go with the flow and connect the dots later. It’s good not to know what you’re doing when you’re doing it. Maybe it gives you a more genuine, honest, thought-through theme to work on. You can only connect the dots looking backward. Go with your gut.

Try and test your ideas. Make them public. Ask for feedback, thoughts, opinions and suggestions. I didn’t do it for the longest time, maybe in the fear of failure.

It is okay if you don’t receive approval right away, things take time, and you will get it in time. Keep looking for your audience.
Document your work as soon as it’s done. Put it out in as many places as you can—your website, your Instagram, LinkedIn, and everywhere else it needs to be.

If you’re about to wrap up and still feel you don’t know, it’s okay. You are only reading this because I am writing it, and I am writing it because I find myself in the same boat as you. I think about everything I could have done differently had I had more clarity about what I was creating here or had someone nudged me. Cause I find myself in the same boat as you.

If you’ve just got here, it is a good idea to analyze and ask yourself, ‘What is the purpose of my work?’ ‘What is the purpose of what I am making?’ It will help you to be more conscious of yourself and your practice.

There’s a lot of fun in discovering and understanding your work. This place is all about that. Try and make the most out of it while you can. It won’t last very long.
Ponder Project

Ponder is a compilation of written works that include questions, counter-questions, answers, affirmations, and musings. These pieces are interwoven to create a narrative that aims to explore and scrutinize my identity as an individual and how it shapes my professional work. Through this process, Ponder also serves as a self-assessment tool that allows me to evaluate my progress and direction, enabling me to check in with myself and gain insight into my current state of being. The fragmented writing has allowed me to remove myself from the conversation, shedding light on human experiences. The form takes its size from calling cards, making the conversation more intimate and personal to the reader. The proportions are then modified to align with different collaterals like receipts, postcards, memos, etc., further emphasizing the personal and introspective nature of the project.
A TEXT
SENT IN ANGER
ANOTHER TEXT SENT IN ANGER
A SERIES OF
FRUSTRATED TEXTS
THAT WERE LEFT
ON
SEEN
WHY DON'T YOU CLEAR IT UP?
COMMENT LIKE SHARE
COULDN'T LOAD IMAGE.
TAP TO RETRY.

A TEXT
SENT IN ANGER
ANOTHER TEXT SENT IN ANGER
A SERIES OF
FRUSTRATED TEXTS
THAT WERE LEFT
ON
SEEN
WHY DON'T YOU CLEAR IT UP?
COMMENT LIKE SHARE
COULDN'T LOAD IMAGE.
TAP TO RETRY.
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WHAT DO YOU NEED?
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I
– SLIPPED
ON
– – –
THE ONE
ON THE OTHER SIDE
– – –
THE GREENER GRASS
THE ONE
– –
ON THE OTHER SIDE
–
I look at myself in the picture I clicked not to see how I look but to see how I am doing. What do you think about when you look at yourself?
WHY DON'T YOU SHARE?

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SHARE?

TAKE YOUR TIME AND FIGURE IT OUT

ARE YOU DOING WHAT YOU THOUGHT YOU WOULD?

WHO ARE YOU WHEN YOU ARE ALONE?

HOW ARE YOU WHEN YOU ARE ALONE?

WHY SO VULNERABLE?

IT IS OKAY TO BE BY YOURSELF

SO WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

WHY ARE YOU ALONE?
Are you critically calling enough?
Are you too critical now?
What are you even chasing?
It is okay to wonder.
Why delay?
Take your time.
It's okay.
What are you doing with your privileges?
Don't overload.
WHY

SO

IT'S FREEING TO

BE

BY

YOURSELF

VULNERABLE

?

WHY FEEL

CONSIDER

YOURSELF

LEFT OUT?
While consuming the ‘feel good’ posts on Instagram, I fortuitously discovered Carissa Potter’s work. What captivated me was her ability to transcend the realm of illustrations and cultivate an inclusive community centered around genuine human connections.

Carissa Potter is the author of I Like You, I Love You and founder of the stationery line People I’ve Loved. She lives in Oakland, California.

Carissa couldn’t make herself available for a conversation, so I emailed her my questions (with some context).

Three Questions to Carissa Potter

**HARSHAL**

*How do you face vulnerability in your work?*

I really don’t want to be preachy. I would agree that my work can be cheesy.

I think vulnerability is super connective for everyone involved. A comforting thought I use is the idea that we are all just human and someone out there must be feeling the same as me, no matter how embarrassing. Perhaps it could also be helpful to think about it like joining a nudist colony. I think about that from time to time. It would be so weird at first, but humans are resilient and adjust to their surroundings rapidly. Also, trust that people will love you and be attracted to you. That is hard, but try. I find that vulnerability is often met with kindness and understanding.

**CARISSA**

I really don’t want to be preachy. I would agree that my work can be cheesy. I think vulnerability is super connective for everyone involved. A comforting thought I use is the idea that we are all just human and someone out there must be feeling the same as me, no matter how embarrassing. Perhaps it could also be helpful to think about it like joining a nudist colony. I think about that from time to time. It would be so weird at first, but humans are resilient and adjust to their surroundings rapidly. Also, trust that people will love you and be attracted to you. That is hard, but try. I find that vulnerability is often met with kindness and understanding.

**HARSHAL**

*How do you respond to your work being perceived as preachy or cheesy; when others can’t relate (maybe they are not your desired audience, but they happen to be in your surroundings)?*

Feeling vulnerable about what I am saying or showing in my work has been the biggest roadblock that has prevented me from creating the ‘body’ of work I intended. I’ve been looking at ways to not bother or think so much about it, but I haven’t been able to overcome this feeling—maybe it is about confidence in my work, maybe it is about acceptance. How would you say, once could go about this? What has your experience been like dealing with and overcoming vulnerability?

**CARISSA**

Both. Mostly they are from my own. But I definitely have times when nothing comes, and I have to make something; which is complicated. I also talk to people about things going on, and sometimes what someone is going through really resonates with me. I am somewhat mindful about using other people’s stories. Like, I try to ask first if I reference them. I am, however, not so sure I believe in authorship—As I age, it is getting harder and harder for me to trust my memory. Also, have you ever had the experience of remembering something as if it happened to you and then finding out that it was in a movie? Sometimes I think I am going crazy. All of this is to say that I try to only tell my own story, but I also don’t worry too much—that our experiences as humans are porous. That everyone lies, everyone cheats, and justifies in the ways they need to to feel like they are a good person. I don’t think you should be aware of doing those things and then choose to do them. I think most people want to be good people. However, I do value honesty. I value trying your best. I value others’ feelings and hopes and dreams and ideas. I just feel like I don’t know if the ideas I have are 100% always my own or some sort of amalgamation of all my experiences including ones I have read and just pushed out through my mind as a sort of attention filter. It is late in the day, and I didn’t sleep last night. This is something I think a lot about because I value being unique. It is a horrible curse. I try my best to be new and innovative, and it is really heartbreakingly not possible. Before I post things, I google them to try to make sure I am actually who I say I am. If the work is not derivative without it being intentional. I hope this total brain vomit is helpful in giving yourself grace and acceptance in making the things you are passionate about and also in taking a break for some rest when you are feeling uninspired.

**HARSHAL**

*How do you craft your narratives? Where do they come from?*

Much of my work has become introspective, where I am drawing inspiration from my lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings—talking about values of position, privilege, purpose, etc. There are times when I find myself ‘out of content’ when I don’t feel anything when I am supposed to be creating something. How do you go about crafting a narrative from these human experiences? Are all these your experiences, or are these your observations?

**CARISSA**

Both. Mostly they are from my own. But I definitely have times when nothing comes, and I have to make something; which is complicated. I also talk to people about things going on, and sometimes what someone is going through really resonates with me. I am somewhat mindful about using other people’s stories. Like, I try to ask first if I reference them. I am, however, not so sure I believe in authorship—As I age, it is getting harder and harder for me to trust my memory. Also, have you ever had the experience of remembering something as if it happened to you and then finding out that it was in a movie? Sometimes I think I am going crazy. All of this is to say that I try to only tell my own story, but I also don’t worry too much—that our experiences as humans are porous. That everyone lies, everyone cheats, and justifies in the ways they need to to feel like they are a good person. I don’t think you should be aware of doing those things and then choose to do them. I think most people want to be good people. However, I do value honesty. I value trying your best. I value others’ feelings and hopes and dreams and ideas. I just feel like I don’t know if the ideas I have are 100% always my own or some sort of amalgamation of all my experiences including ones I have read and just pushed out through my mind as a sort of attention filter. It is late in the day, and I didn’t sleep last night. This is something I think a lot about because I value being unique. It is a horrible curse. I try my best to be new and innovative, and it is really heartbreakingly not possible. Before I post things, I google them to try to make sure I am actually who I say I am. If the work is not derivative without it being intentional. I hope this total brain vomit is helpful in giving yourself grace and acceptance in making the things you are passionate about and also in taking a break for some rest when you are feeling uninspired.

ALSO side note, your observations of an experience is also part of your lived experience, I think. Just being compassionate about how you are making others feel is a kindness you could offer.
How do you go about externalizing your feelings?

As I mentioned, most of my work has become inward, and I am not looking at ways to make this outward, taking away the specificity of 'me' in it. How do you do that in your work?

CARISSA

I think I just notice what I am worried about, or spiral about and then write/draw about it. This is natural to me because I have always been an anxious person. I think I just notice what I am worried about, or spiral about and then write/draw about it. This is natural to me because I have always been an anxious person. And writing them out is a form of release that offers relief. I am not super sure if this is what you mean, but I think most people have the gut reaction to place themselves in the work regardless of the exact details. Or empathize with hard moments. I think this is a strength of humanity, the ability to imagine what it would be like in other people's shoes. I think it becomes a problem when the intention to take advantage of someone else is present, but often it can be such a connective force.

Thanks for asking! I wish you the best of luck. Your website is beautiful.

XO, Carissa

(Sorry I am a mess today, I just rambled. There are probably lots of errors but if you can, try to see through my tired writing and maybe you can find something in it that you can relate to).
MAKING

creating a body of personal work
developing my visual vocabulary and language strategies and plans

Nothing is a mistake. There’s no win and no fail; there’s only make. The only rule is work. If you work, it will lead to something. It’s the people who do all of the work all of the time who eventually catch on to things.

Don’t try to create and analyze at the same time. They’re different processes.

Corita Kent, Ten rules for students and teachers
ROLE OF INSTINCTS IN DESIGN

Just like ‘feelings’ and ‘emotions’ became an answer to where the body of work I was creating was coming from, ‘instincts’ and ‘intuition’ felt like the apt words to describe my process. Instincts play a significant role in the creative process.

“Instincts are natural tendencies or innate impulses that guide our behavior, often without conscious thought or deliberation. In the context of creativity, instincts can influence the way we approach and execute our ideas, as well as the types of ideas we generate in the first place.

For example, when an artist creates a piece of art, their instincts may guide them to choose certain colors or shapes or to experiment with different materials or techniques. These instincts can stem from the artist’s personal preferences, past experiences, or even evolutionary tendencies shared across all humans. Similarly, a writer’s instincts may lead them to write in a particular style or genre or to explore specific themes or subjects.

Instincts can also help creative individuals tap into their intuition and access their subconscious minds, which can be a fertile source of inspiration and ideas. By following their instincts and trusting their creative impulses, artists, writers, and other creatives can often achieve breakthroughs and create work that is unique and original.”

But can instincts be objective, I wondered.

“Instincts are not usually objective because they are influenced by a person’s individual experiences, biases, and perceptions. Instincts are often rooted in emotions and feelings, which are subjective by nature. Therefore, it can be difficult for instincts to be completely objective. That being said, instincts can sometimes lead to objectively good results in certain situations, particularly when combined with skills, knowledge, and experience.”
I learned of the term ‘Exformation’ while reading ‘Designing Design’ by Kenya Hara, and it has helped me provide an objective angle to instincts.

Exformation can be thought of as the “background” information necessary to fully understand a message but not explicitly stated. This can include context, assumptions, shared knowledge, and emotions, among other things. For example, when a speaker uses a metaphor or analogy, they rely on the audience’s exformation to understand the intended meaning. Overall, exformation is an essential concept for understanding how communication works and how meaning is created.

Kenya Hara believes exformation is a critical aspect of design, allowing for deeper communication between the designer and the user. In his view, design should not simply be about providing information but should also leave room for the user’s imagination and interpretation. Hara believes that good design should also strive to create this sense of emptiness and exformation, allowing the user to engage with the product or experience more meaningfully. By intentionally leaving certain information out, the designer can encourage the user to use their own creativity and imagination to fill in the gaps, creating a more personal and fulfilling experience.

Exformation allows you, the audience, to connect with my work.

As designers, we always work for others, catering to external briefs. And this idea of designing for yourself felt liberating. Wait, am I an artist?
I stumbled upon Linus Lohoff’s post about one of his projects, ‘Little Giants,’ on Instagram, where he drew portraits of people (his friends and acquaintances) in abstract forms. It felt affirmative to see another creator doing similar work. I was intrigued to know his intention behind making this work, his approach, and his expectations on how he expected people to perceive it. We had a casual conversation about the same on a Zoom call. Following are some excerpts from our conversation.

**Little Giants** is my personal manifestation of representing people and the relationship with them in a visually abstract way.

I represent human beings in my environment I know and have met - be it family, friends, exes, coworkers or more casual acquaintances - each with one shape and with at least one color.

I believe that the connection we have with other persons gives us a greater sense of purpose, happiness and well-being than any other human experience. This means that the quality of any relationship ultimately determines the quality of my own life.

So, a big thank you goes out to all the people I have had the pleasure of meeting, to the people that I know and to the people that I will meet in the future.

-Linus Lohoff
Little Giants, Barcelona, March 2023

**Chat with Linus Lohoff**

9:30
Drawing in simple shapes is something I have done before; it’s just that I never realized it. They were mostly strangers- someone I bumped into on my way etc. I was conceptualizing it now.

12:00
It is difficult to objectify shapes, so to me; it was just a super personal way of expressing how I feel towards this person. Sometimes it’s just about the form, sometimes it’s the story I have with this person, so it’s like really, really random. I definitely had a grid since I am a graphic designer but other than that, it was a super personal expression.

14:20
Was there any process beyond the grid and the guidelines you had? To me, the theme was important. I’ve moved and traveled a lot in my life so naturally my connections and the people around me is what made any place feel like home to me. It wasn’t so much about the shapes as much as it was about the form, capturing their essence and personality. I wasn’t being very scientific about the forms; it was a very instinctive process. It was also the first work I had done as an artist.
I’ve been thinking about how to make this personal work speak to someone who doesn’t know me. Questions like ‘Why would someone care?’ ‘What am I trying to achieve?’ ‘How do I know if it is working, if it is impactful?’ daunted me. I only realize now that I was already making work from my personal experiences for my class submissions, printing it on a poster, on a website, etc., opening it up for review and critics; I was already making it public.

While some of the work cited in this thesis comes from a place of joy and play, others are more personal. There were moments I felt highly vulnerable even reading some of these things for myself. Reading them out to others only came with difficulty.
On making personal work

I've admired Anthony Burrill for a long time. I reached out to him while working on one of the projects, emailing him a question “How and when does writing what you write (in your work) become a statement that a few words speak more and louder than a thousand?”

Anthony Burrill is an internationally renowned graphic artist, print-maker and designer.

This led to a Zoom conversation where we spoke about making personal work, and making it public and things associated. Our call went on for over an hour. Here are a few excerpts:

Conversation with Anthony Burrill

I think, for me, you know, the work that I do is an extension of me. It’s very personal to me—what I think, and my experiences of the world and how I interact with other people. So I think the best way to think about it is, if you meet somebody for the first time and you have a conversation, it’s like, you’re trying to figure them out. They’re trying to figure you out, you’re trying to make some connection, you’re trying to establish some common ground, and that comes through conversation. And I think it’s the same with visual work as well. But when you put the work out into the world, it’s your statement; it’s coming from you. And I think the more your statement is coming from you, and I think the more honest it is, the more connected it is to who you are and what you think about the world, then the more it’s going to connect on a kind of human level, you know, rather than just seeing, seeing somebody’s work, that uses an attractive layout and a modern typeface. And you know, it’s probably nothing new. I think it’s when you make the work personal, and you present it in a way that is distinctively your own. You know, whether it’s to do with your childhood, your upbringing, where you grew up in the world, your experiences growing up and your experiences, traveling in the world and being in a different place and that, you know, I think that’s those are common experiences that you know, that we all share. We’ve all gone through all of the same human emotions: nervousness, happiness, joy, and connection. And I think it’s when you can make your graphic design and visual communication say those things that it becomes powerful. And that’s when it connects, you know, with people that you’ve never met, right from lots of different backgrounds. But I think for me; it’s about that human connection, you know.
I think you want to, put yourself out there and talk about your experience and hopefully, you know, people will make some kind of connection between their personal experiences and yours, and that, you know, that’s kind of what makes us human, that kind of empathy for others, just like valuing other perspectives and other stories and that everybody’s got their, their individual personal story to tell. Think about the great writers, filmmakers, and storytellers. The more personal it is, the more connected with personal experience, the more genuine authentic attributes. So, I think it’s, yeah, just kind of make it about yourself, but then in a way that it kind of connects with people that, talking about those things that unite everybody, the, the kind of, from whatever, kind of, I suppose political background you from, it’s kind of, I know, it’s I think it’s just been able to talk about things that then connect, you think about music that connects, it’s like, music made by the Beatles in the 1960s talking about human connections and, those simple stories, that still have some kind of connection and think, in my stuff that that’s whenever it makes stuff that I just really believe in. That’s the stuff that connects with people; it’s like, those things can be really, really simple, it’s like, seeing the mural that I did, on the side of a building, that just says ‘You and Me’ and that’s a work that’s connected with people, especially, during the pandemic and all those kind of things, it’s kind of its sort of simple human values. And no matter what you are trying to say, to do work that connects with people and lands with people, you have to be dealing with the world we’re living in. All the connected experiences that we’re all having simultaneously, things like the situation is, with Russia, how that’s unfolding. It’s kind of the way that that is affecting everybody else in the rest of the world. It’s kind of, I think it’s, it’s all about stuff that, as kind of visual storytellers, we need to acknowledge all that stuff.

It’s the kind of, you know, always thinking, Oh, well, this isn’t good enough, you know, I need to, but that’s like part of the creative process. You see, I have that myself. Even in my stage, you know, I’ve kind of, I still have feelings of self-doubt, and, you know, oh, you know, the stuff that I’m making now isn’t as good as the stuff I’ve made before, and what people think about this and it’s like, honestly, nobody cares about that stuff. It’s just your own hangups, and it’s, you know, you’re kind of creating barriers for yourself, and you know, you need to just let the work come out and you know, not worry about it too much. Just kind of no matter what it is that you make, just make stuff. It’s like every day and just like, you know, kind of creating things and making things and just kind of, you know, just getting used to just letting things out.
I think you know, like, as a child, when you’re first experiencing the world, everything’s about you. It’s all everything. It’s about how you interact with things and how you can change the world around you and you can, you know, interact with people and that’s kind of, it’s just a development of your character and your experience and your personality. But yeah, I think it’s, I think, you know, it’s kind of like kind of being honest with yourself and yeah, talking honestly about how you think and how you feel. And, you know, that’s, that’s gonna find its way into your work. You know, I think, I think you can’t, you know, for me, you know, I’ve been doing this for a long time. I graduated from college in 91, you know, sort of 30 years ago, and I kind of loved every minute of it, you know, I’ve kind of loved that kind of journey of discovery and, you know, like, going from working, you know, like as a graduate trying to find work, you know, my career developing, working commercially, and then kind of developing into working more from as an artist really kind of just making my own stuff and it’s kind of, you know, that’s not the kind of stuff I still think of, you know, still got a long way to go, you know, still got more things to discover and more ways of doing things. It’s kind of but yeah, I think it’s, I think it’s like really kind of digging deep into yourself and making you know, finding out how you think about the world and how you connect with people. And you know, what you think and what, you know how you want to or you want to change yourself and you want to change the world and you want to create a network of interesting people to work with and collaborate with, you know, some of this stuff really so I think, you know, the more honest you are and the more direct and you know, you kind of you know, tell it like it is and you know talk about your experience, you know, you think about all the you know the books and films and music that that connect with the most are kind of talking about their experience in a, in an honest way.
Being is a set of tools designed to facilitate documentation, expression, and communication of personal experiences and emotions. The project draws inspiration from an eighteenth-century Burmese tattoo manuscript, which documents ritualistic beliefs and significant moments in an individual’s life. Being explores the concept of tattoos as a form of mark-making and signifying emotions, and feelings that are often difficult to express through words alone. Using basic shapes and glyphs as a starting point, the project enables users to create their unique glyphs, allowing them to articulate their thoughts and feelings in a distinct and personal manner, something only they can interpret, just like tattoos. Being provides a platform for users to reflect on their emotions, document their lived experiences, and communicate with others in a unique visual language.
Translating a body of personal work into applicable framework, I’ve framed some principles for myself.

Designing for an optimal state

Designing in a way that is “just enough” does not imply simplicity or minimalism. It can be cluttered and intricate when necessary, while still maintaining an optimal visual language. Although the term “optimal” is subjective, I can’t help but this of Muji’s brand and design philosophy as a reference point. While their minimalistic aesthetic is well-known, Muji’s design decisions embody an optimal balance of design and functionality.

Structure as a brief

In my design process, incorporating grids, guides, and rulers has become second nature and the preferred method to create designs. It has become “the right way” for me to approach design. I find that using these tools not only helps me align components accurately but also serves as visual briefs and valuable constraints that guide me in crafting effective designs.

Abstraction

I’ve been fascinated by the works of SH Raza and Ikki Kobayashi, particularly in their skillful use of forms and shapes within a composition to create narratives and convey meaning. The embrace of abstraction in their artwork transcends literal interpretations, allowing for heightened recall value and personal associations. By employing abstraction, a designed artwork gains the ability to evoke deeper connections and leave a lasting impression on viewers.

Fragmentation

My vulnerabilities hindered the longing to share my work, but I have discovered a method to overcome this obstacle. Removing myself from the work felt liberating. Textually, this is achieved by breaking sentences into individual words. Visually, I deconstructed shapes into fragments. Through this approach, I aim to nudge my audience to participate in the creative process, enabling them to form their interpretations and imbue the work with personal meaning.

Participatory

Kameelah Janan Rasheed talks about the legibility and illegibility of language, making something either very, very legible or making something very, very opaque and letting the reader do the work of understanding it. This approach allows me to invite the audience to actively participate in understanding and interpreting the design, fostering a collaborative relationship between creator and viewer.
Modularity

Recalling Anne West’s comment that I am a modular thinker, I have embraced the approach of breaking down complex concepts into smaller pieces to facilitate better understanding. As a self-described “slow learner,” this method has allowed me to grasp individual elements independently and subsequently combine them to form a cohesive whole, revealing the bigger picture.

Bethany introduced me to Alan McCollum’s work, specifically, ‘The Shapes Project’ in which discusses designing a combinatorial system to generate unique two-dimensional shapes, such that every person on the planet can have an individual shape while meticulously tracking them to maintain their distinctiveness. However, I ponder the possibility of granting individuals the ability to create their own shape, not only making it exclusive to them but also serving as a reflection of their identity, something that only they can decipher.

Simplicity of Language

Growing up in a small town, I’ve been surrounded by the works of DTP Artists.

“The work of DTP artists floods every street, covering every habitable surface. From large lettered shop signs, to pamphlets thrust onto passengers alighting from local trains, they are ubiquitous, riding on the backs of buses and coiled around traffic signals. Ordinarily, we pay little attention to these posters, which earn at most a passing glance. The posters themselves disappear, sedimenting under others. As time passes, crusts of curdled ephemera come away, revealing a palimpsest. A poster over metal offers coaching for the now suspended UPSC examinations, while on another wall, a poster and memory half effaced poses unanswered questions.

However, they also reveal the unrecognized labor within and contributions to visual culture in India – the work of printers, more specifically, the work of those working in these print shops: DTP artists.
The following pages document some of my work that speaks to the principles mentioned before:
‘What’s the Point’ is an experimental variable typeface inspired by the Night Writing system, which is a tactile writing system used by the French army in the early 19th century for communication in the dark. The typeface features a cryptic composition, where the points move clockwise by one unit on the variable scale to encrypt the script further, creating a new script altogether. I designed this typeface specifically for writing personal events in my thesis, enabling me to share my vulnerabilities. While the illegibility of the script may render it dysfunctional, the typeface satisfies my desire to share my experience in a way that is both personal and something only I can decipher.
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The amount of time people spend on their devices, whether for social media, work, or personal use, is increasing. The emergence of Web3.0 and Metaverse is further blurring the lines between the physical and virtual realms, cementing our dependence on technology. This trend has led to a decline in human consciousness as technology, facilitated by these devices and software programs, gradually takes over. Despite being aware of this irreversible impact on people, social media companies and tech giants prioritize profits over the well-being of their users.

In a world where convenience is abundant, it can be challenging to remain mindful and present. However, it is essential to recognize the potential negative consequences of over-reliance on technology and to take proactive steps to mitigate them. As for brands and companies, it can be difficult for them to speak the truth, given that their primary objective is to sell products and services. Nevertheless, it is essential for them to acknowledge the impact of technology on individuals and society and to prioritize user well-being over profit. What would it look like if they spoke the truth? The following images are a possibility.
Instagram can often encourage users to focus on curating and presenting a specific image or lifestyle to their followers, rather than fully experiencing the moment they are in. This can lead to a phenomenon known as "present-moment amnesia" where individuals are so focused on capturing and sharing the moment, they forget to fully live in and enjoy it. Additionally, constantly checking and comparing one’s own experiences to those of others on the platform can lead to feelings of inadequacy and diminish the enjoyment of the present moment. Additionally, the platform’s algorithm can also contribute to this problem by showing users a never-ending feed of content that can distract them from being fully present.
The internet and social media have brought convenience to our lives, yet they have also introduced an equal measure of chaos. Technology has surpassed our ability to effectively tackle both personal and societal challenges, resulting in a decline of our problem-solving skills. The advertising industry, which operates on the principle of exploiting this mismatch, has given rise to an economy based on capturing people's attention. As a result, we have become vulnerable to the “free” erosion of our humanity, putting our safety at risk. With two billion people subjected to these conditions, the attention economy has transformed us into a civilization that is poorly equipped for its own survival. We have become the commodity being sold in this marketplace.

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Shatter the illusion.

The rapid pace of technological advancement has created a certain level of uncertainty and unpredictability in our lives. As technology continues to evolve and change, it can be difficult to keep up, leading to feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Become conscious.

There's still time.

1984 was perhaps better than 2022 in some ways.

Technology has undoubtedly revolutionized the way we live our lives. It has made our lives easier, faster, and more accessible. However, this increased convenience has also brought with it a certain level of chaos. It's time we look back at our past, for clarity, in this chaos.
TikTok™

THIS SUBSTANCE IS MERELY A PIECE OF HARDWARE—AN ELECTRONIC DEVICE MANUFACTURED FOR STORING AND PROCESSING DATA. PLEASE REMAIN CONSCIOUS OF YOUR ATTACHMENT TO IT.
This project is a response to the Hacker Manifesto, an essay that justifies the act of hacking as a means to go beyond selfish desires. Instead of focusing on the specifics of hacking, this project highlights the broader human desire to obtain something, even if it means engaging in unethical practices. The project explores the intersection of narrative and design, using the manifesto as a framework to create a visual and textual narrative that challenges the reader’s perception of right and wrong. The goal is to prompt the audience to question their own motivations and actions, and to reconsider the consequences of their choices.
I didn't get what I wanted
you truly want
you genuinely need
something else
But I never found it
I wonder what it's like to get something
       to find something
you truly want
you genuinely need
Nice Things
Project

‘Nice Things’ is a collection of traditional graphic collaterals such as tote bags, postcards, bookmarks, posters, and calling cards. Each piece is designed to represent and embody its own form, paired with an affirmative massage. The project encourages individuals to find joy in the simplest of things while embracing traditional print media.

A nice tote bag, like this one, is a medium-sized, open-top bag with two parallel handles that extend from the sides of the bag. It is usually made of nice fabric such as this one, and is designed to carry a variety of items like books, groceries, feelings, laptops, and other such things. Tote bags are popular given their versatility, practicality, and ease of use.
A nice poster, like this one, is a form of advertising and is used to attract attention and convey information in a visually engaging way. This is a poster to remind, motivate, push, inspire, or [insert your verb] you to do the thing you've been wanting to do. Put this on the wall by your desk or right next to your bed so you wake up on time.

A nice postcard is a rectangular piece of paper that is intended for writing and mailing without an envelope. It typically has a picture on one side (this one doesn't), with space on the other side (this one does) for a message and an address. Postcards are often used as a means of sending a quick message or greeting to someone while traveling, as they are easy to carry and don't require the same level of effort as writing a full letter. They are also often collected as souvenirs or for their artistic value. This is a postcard to tell yourself the thing you need someone to tell you.

A nice bookmark, like this one, is a rectangular strip of paper designed to be inserted between the pages of a book, magazine, or other printed material. Bookmarks may feature decorative designs, illustrations, or quotations such as this one which says, "Start where you left off."
RISO Alphabets is a project that emerged from an exploration of RISOgraph printing. The project delves into the construction of glyphs for the Latin script, using modular shapes. The resulting alphabets are striking in their simplicity, yet they maintain legibility and readability, highlighting the potential of modular design.
The Thesis

When everyone is wrapping up, why do I feel like starting?

At RISD, I looked inward.

I wrote about moving behind the time I've lived in, to a place ahead of its times, in hopes of finding and making my space.

I documented the dent on my then-new, sixteen-inch, ultra-thin, super retina display macbook pro and how I, and we, are overly attached to our devices; how swamped we are into our worlds.

I wrote about how I, and we, spend hours on the internet, consuming instead of creating.

I questioned my role as a graphic designer and the profession of graphic design at large.

I questioned the visual aesthetics of designed collaterals and the sameness of branding.

Until I questioned myself what I cared about.

Then

I reflected on my past to understand my present.

I drew parallels between them.

And documented the latter through images, words, and shapes.

I felt vulnerable.

I slowed down, paused, I froze.

I found a way to keep moving.

I found a way to share.

Share without sharing too much - in fragments or by designing a typeface only I could decipher, making space for ambiguity and abstraction.

I didn't necessarily think about my audience or the context of my work, only to realize that I was designing for myself to express my longing for identity, voice, and a sense of belonging.

I didn't necessarily end up doing the things I thought I would. But I realized the things I cared about.

At RISD, I looked inward.

And there was a lot within.
My work here has been a blend of my personal and professional self. And if I remove myself from the conversation, it is a portrait of all of us and our lived experiences.

I consider this the longest project I’ve worked on, which started on the day I applied to RISD and ends today as I deliver this to you.

As I wrap up, I think I have an answer for the sentence I wrote in my statement of purpose, in my application, about feeling a sense of stagnancy in my design process. RISD has taught me an alternative approach: Living > Documenting > Reflecting > Making, letting the form follow the feeling.

After living, thinking, feeling, documenting, reflecting, realizing, processing, and making, my practice now:

- Includes the act of writing as a part of the process.
- Includes the use of words as visual components.
- Make space for ambiguity and abstraction of meaning.
- De-emphasizes the idea of an audience or the context until something is already designed.
- Makes space for self-expression.
- Involves the concept of erasure, distilling complexity to core, essential components.
- Explores what language can be and how it can be read.
- Employs structure as a brief.
- Embraces the idea of fragmentation and of modularity.
- Employs simplicity, legibility, and illegibility of language.

And as I leave RISD, I look forward to employing these principles in my professional practice, alongside continuing this personal practice around documentation, personal expression, and sharing, by building tools, and briefs, for making personal work outwardly visible to see if form only follows feeling, or if it follows something else too?

The End.
Form Follows Feeling Follows Form

Form (noun) refers to a designed collateral, a container.
Feeling (noun) refers to my emotional state.
My work at RISD became introspective and personal. Intuitively, I looked inward for concepts and ideas while making work, letting the form follow the feeling.

Throughout my time at RISD, the focus of my thesis changed. Following are some of the working titles that inform the journey:

- Form, Feeling and Function
- When Thoughts Become Things
- Happy Medium
- Document
- Thinking and Feeling and Making


The Feeling of Things, Matt Mullican
Pirelli HangarBicocca – YouTube

The Shapes Project, Allan McCollum
2005-2006

Designing Design, Kenya Hara, 2003


Exformation, Kenya Hara, 2015

Essex (Details of an Imaginary Life from Birth to Death), Matt Mullican, 1973

Ryan Carl: Inserting Myself into the Conversation, Talk at Type Director’s Club, YouTube

Ryan Carl: Typographic Space as a Playground, Conversation with Morgane VanTorre, April 2021

Ryan Carl: The Artist’s Studio – A Conversation, Interview, Norse Projects, September 2022

Ikki Kobayashi returns with a new train of thought, this time focusing on positivity and interiors, It’s Nice That, January 2021

Ikki Kobayashi’s new series investigates the tension between shapes and negative space, It’s Nice That, December 2019

Make It Now! Creative Inspiration and the Art of Getting Things Done, Anthony Burrill, 2017

Look & See, Anthony Burrill, 2018

Sumayya Vally, Untold Stories and Fragments
Architects, not Architecture- YouTube

Pedro Reyes, Imagining Alternatives
Art21, Interview, 2015

Learning To Love You More
Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July

Things You Wanted To Say But Never Did, Geloy Concepcion
Form Follows Feeling Follows Form is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design in the Department of Graphic Design at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, by Harshal Duddalwar, 2023

Approved by Master's Examination Committee:

______________________________
Bethany Johns
Professor, Graphic Design
Graduate Program Director

______________________________
Pouya Ahmadi
Associate Professor, Graphic Design
Primary Advisor

______________________________
Kelsey Elder
Assistant Professor, Communication Design
Carnegie-Mellon University
Secondary Advisor

______________________________
Keira Alexandra
Partner, Work-Order
External Critic

______________________________
Anne West
Senior Lecturer, Architecture + Design Division
Advisor
Thank You

My Cohort

Ben
Serena
Harshal
Halim
Karan
Zoe

My Cohort

Jack
Jenni
Sadia
Lian
Zach
Sun Ho
Joe

Bethany Johns
Anne West
Pouya Ahmadi
Doug Scott
Eva Laporte
Keira Alexandra

To everyone at Co-Works, Type Shop, The Fleet Library, Portfolio Cafe, and Carr House

Yash, Ingrid, Ananya, Shivani, Vikash, Nikhil, Tina, Priyata, Tanvi, Emilia, Vishakha, Rini

Wei
Jane Kim
All the RISD custodian and caretakers
All the students I had the opportunity to teach
Kevin Ju and Sabrina Ji
Emily Oberman and team at Pentagram
The cohort of 2022, 2024, and 2025

Ben
Serena
Harshal
Halim
Karan
Zoe

Dougal
Moritz

Baba
Mom
Didi
Chachi
Chachu
Aji
Dad
Didi
Kaish

To everyone at Co-Works, Type Shop, The Fleet Library, Portfolio Cafe, and Carr House
Hi there!

My name is Harshal. I am a designer from India working at the intersection of branding, systems and experience design.

This is my thesis.

I've shared my journey with you in this book, hoping that it helps you in some way. Feel free to share your thoughts, feedback, suggestions, or project ideas or reach out.

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