

## POSITIONS THROUGH CONTEXTUALISING

### REFERENCE LIST

#### Playtime | Jacques Tati

I was immediately captivated by this film; I find "Playtime" to be incredibly intriguing and whimsically logical as film material. It appears to have a fixed context and protagonists yet seems to contain multiple narratives unfolding simultaneously. This resonates with my practice, albeit exploring different methods from the director's. Nevertheless, I am drawn to the humorous structuring and restructuring, as well as the exploration of order and disorder evident in Tati's film. Moreover, the film serves as the reference that I will be responding to within this brief. The diverse narrative within it provides rich possibilities for my visual explorations. I am able to delve into the purely contextual and narrative aspects without the need to disrupt or convey any political messages.

#### Pictures For Rent | J Abbott Miller

I quite agree with the concept presented in this article regarding stock photography as an often overlooked foundational element in graphic design. Stock photography is frequently viewed as lacking artistic merit, serving as commercially driven visual imagery that creators often avoid or even disdain in their personal work. As a result, we tend to overlook the historical and societal context behind stock photography. Considering my current practice stage, I am struggling to explore the possibility of moving away from the concept of political messages and instead anchoring my visual explorations around a theme. After reading this reference, I believe the context behind stock photography could serve as

intriguing material for my decontextualisation and recontextualisation efforts. I believe that there are many more narratives to explore regarding stock photography.

#### Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems | Edward Snow

Unlike many female perspectives reflecting the male gaze, this article explores the male gaze from a male perspective, critically reflecting on women's understanding of the male gaze. What is insightful about this article is that it made me realize that overly surface-level discussions and criticisms of men as objectifiers or as treating women as objects are biased. Snow mentions that under the lens of excessive criticism, "Male" almost becomes an entirely negative term. At this juncture, I am not yet certain whether to delve into the theme of the gaze in my practice. However, I strongly agree with Snow's point mentioned above. I realize that if I were to explore the gaze, I should not portray this perspective as an extreme opposition to men. Some of the image processing techniques I used in earlier iterations, such as cropping, magnification, and polarization, were overly simplistic in provoking emotional opposition. My visual language should serve as a more gentle guide.

#### Personalising The Elements And Principles Of Graphic Design: An Exploratory Autoethnographic Case Study | Doreen Esther Van der Walt

This article mentions the autoethnographic approach in graphic design communication, which I find deeply inspiring. In my previous practices, I have consistently attempted to incorporate personal experiences and expressions. With this perspective in mind, I revisited my iterations and realised that my handling and recontextualisation of existing images were also based on subjective interpretations. Therefore, I believe that recontextualisation through a self-ethnographic approach can help bridge the gap between my practice and position. At the current stage, I have only identified my interested position within design methods but have not successfully

established it on a conceptual basis. Thus, the conceptual position requires exploration through a more personalised, autoethnographic path.

### Dragonfly Eyes | Xu Bing

"Dragonfly Eyes" serves both as the title and a metaphor for the work, aligning with my interest in reassembling and processing existing materials. Xu and his team constructed a narrative based on collected CCTV footage, exploring the experiences of a woman killed by her boyfriend. I find it very inspiring how the artist can uncover a narrative within ordinary clips, challenging my understanding of existing materials. This realisation made me aware of the strong historical and social context these materials carry, akin to a treasure hunt. Consequently, in my response to the "Playtime" brief, I approached the film as existing material, aiming to uncover the context and narrative within the footage. I also experimented with removing the context from the images to explore the visual space created by the slow-moving background.



Figure.01 Dragonfly Eyes (Xu, 2017)

### Hands of Bresson | Kogonada

This reference has guided my interest in the visual language of video in terms of medium and methodology. Throughout my iterations, by employing cropping and other tangible and intangible visual processing techniques on scenes featuring Anna May Wong portraying roles laden with racial and gendered gazes alongside the male protagonists of the film, I've been exploring the factors contributing to the stark inequality in identity and status between the male and female leads within the visual environment of the film. This reference, a short film by Kogonada compiling and re-editing shots of hands from Bresson's films, has inspired me to extract narrative elements from the original content in my iterations. This aligns with my experimentation in weaving text and images to explore: how text reinforces the meaning of images, how distortion alters the meaning of images, and how cropping alters their context. Upon re-evaluating my work, I've realised that the relationship between text, image, and content brought about by these visual processing techniques is of greater concern to me.



Figure.02 Hands Of Bresson (Kogonada, 2014)

### Dragonfly Eyes | Xu Bing

Xu Bing's *Dragonfly Eyes* is a video artwork set within the realm of contemporary art. It circulates among audiences outside the conventional film industry. What deeply attracted me to this reference is the artist's achievement in re-contextualising collected CCTV footage through the creation of a textual script, thereby connecting originally meaningless fragments and imbuing them with message and context. In this production process, the artist's position is that of a mediator of materials, capturing and enhancing the subtle narratives that each piece of footage might carry. The form and method of production in *\*Dragonfly Eyes\** are sophisticated; I believe that the artistic approach to its creation surpasses the content of the film itself, although it also presents an engaging narrative akin to a murder mystery. The artist's design of voiceover and editing aims to convince the audience that the entire film is a coherent story performed by a single actor, whereas it is actually a montage of fragments from different individuals.

This project, through the re-contextualisation of materials, illustrates the artist's role as a bridge and medium, highlighting my current interest in exploring graphic communication design as a means to collect, analyse, and communicate the context and narrative behind found materials. Reflecting on my initial exploration of my personal position, in my 100 iterations, I experimented with visual processing techniques and the use of text to enhance the underlying intentions behind the images (in the film about the discriminated Asian American actress Anna May Wong that I selected, the intention was the racial stereotypes and male gaze she faced). Returning to this reference itself, Xu's intention here is based on social topics within the Chinese cultural context, such as plastic surgery, gender transformation, live streaming, and sexual harassment etc.

I have been undecided about whether to incorporate a specific theme in my personal practice. At this stage, I believe Xu's incorporation of a theme is appropriate here, yet such a fixed theme may not be suitable for every found material. For instance, while working with another reference, *\*Playtime\**, I found it challenging to reconstruct the film around a new theme. In another reference that related to stock photos, the author, Miller, notes: "The catalogues and archives of the stock industry provide an index of how images communicate in the context of mass media." This made me realise the historical and social contexts hidden behind past stock images, and the distinct visual texture and communication they possess compared to contemporary stock images. These insights framed my position towards exploring and re-contextualising the historical information embedded in obsolete visual materials.

### Pictures For Rent | J Abbott Miller

In this article, Miller introduces and discusses his understanding of stock images, prompting me to seriously consider stock images, one of the most fundamental elements in graphic design, for the first time. Given that stock images often serve commercial design purposes, they are rarely mentioned, leading me to overlook the historical context and the role they play in visual culture. As a byproduct of design, stock images not only fulfill their primary function but also demonstrate how visual communication operates in mass media, reflecting the social norms and values at the time of their creation. I agree with Miller's analysis of stock images in mass media communication, especially his distinction between past and contemporary stock images in terms of shooting style, conveyed messages, and, more importantly, their visual quality. Miller mentions that the development of stock images entails aesthetic evolution; thus, their effective use requires consideration of the current societal context. Compared to contemporary stock images, those from the past possess a stronger narrative quality and communicate more about the era and society, shaping my understanding of my position in contemporary practice. As Miller suggests, as a graphic communication designer, one can reinterpret stock images through recontextualisation, creating new narratives

and meanings and transforming images into powerful tools of communication. My practice aims to explore how stock images can realise their narrative potential through the recontextualisation within graphic design.

On the other hand, the author also mentions that the use of stock images is a double-edged sword. While they provide visual consistency and help establish a coherent visual language, they can also excessively define the visual tone of a work. Therefore, I believe that graphic design must address the issue of how to use visual techniques to dismantle the stereotypes inherent in stock images. This involves deciding which elements to decontextualise and which to recontextualise. The values embedded in old stock images may need to be decontextualised, while the era-specific symbolic features these images contain can be dissected and recombined. Reflecting on the analysis I conducted in *Dragonfly Eyes*, I considered whether incorporating a social issue as a concept in recontextualisation is necessary. I believe this requires a careful selection of stock images, considering the current social context during the process of reworking them.

Moving forward, if I am to continue exploring the captivating narratives and visual quality of old stock images, I need to establish selection criteria to clarify the direction of recontextualisation. Combining my previous iterations of exploring text and images, I realise that text can also become a tool in this exploration. Text can describe intentions, create a hypothetical space of awareness for the audience, and help change the way we perceive images. Building on the approach provided by Xu Bing's film project mentioned earlier, I will continue to explore the way we interpret old images from a graphic design perspective. By integrating textual elements, I aim to further investigate how these images can be recontextualised to reveal new narratives and meanings, thereby transforming them into impactful tools for communication.

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(Figure.01) Xu, B. (2017). *Dragonfly Eyes*. [Film] Available at: <https://vimeo.com/681414334> [Accessed 23 May 2024].

(Figure.02) Kogonada (2014). *Hands of Bresson*. [Digital Art] Available at: <https://kogonada.com/portfolio/hands-of-bresson> [Accessed 23 May 2024].