

Between The Words, Behind The Recipes

Enquiry

How does the dynamic formation of recipes reflect individual's journey in adapting their new environment?

During my practice in this Unit, my project focuses on the intersectional relationship of food, culture, and personal memory, exploring how recipes function as narrative vessels that carry an individual's journey of adaptation and exploration in a new environment. In Production 1, I began with a collective perspective and gathered culinary experiences relating to cooking home dishes in London, from individuals with migration backgrounds. Based on these shared experiences, I created a guide for making a traditional Chinese dish, wontons, in a foreign context. This project aimed to evoke a sense of shared experience and cultural resonance through a personal perspective.

In Production 2, my focus shifted from collective experience to recipes, as well as my personal engagement with different foods and recipes in everyday life. With an autoethnographic approach, I continued to explore how daily culinary practices reflect cultural identity, personal emotion, and memory. Initially, I constructed a fictional narrative of a migrant navigating food in an unfamiliar culture. However, through the making process, I came to realise that actual experience carries a deeper emotional weight and stronger cultural relevance; therefore, I shifted the narrative toward my own journey

of seeking a sense of memories and home through cooking and exploring food in London—beginning with some handwritten recipes from my grandmother, gifted to me when I left home to live abroad independently. Thus, recipes are no longer just to be considered as cooking instructions; moreover, they carry the temperature of emotional memories and traces of cultural migration, serving as the key element in understanding the process of adaptation.

Context

2 As previously mentioned, my interest in the social, cultural, and personal memories embedded in food was inspired by my own everyday life experience. The handwritten recipes my grandmother gave me when I left home, along with the various foods I engaged with in my new life, are experiences that carry touching emotional depth and human narratives, also reflecting the journey of an individual navigating through a broader socio-cultural landscape. Through my practice, I aim to articulate and give form to these narratives, allowing them to be seen, shared, and reflected upon.

A key text that informed the discourse of my project is *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* by David E. Sutton. In this work, Sutton (2001) illustrates, through numerous ethnographic examples, the profound role of food in shaping individual memory and social culture. As he states, "*cooking is not simply an everyday practice, but an attempt to reconstruct and remember synesthetically,*

to return to that whole world of home, which is subjectively experienced both locally and nationally, if not at other levels as well" (Sutton, 2001).

Situated within the discourse of food, social identity and individual memory, my two projects echo Sutton's proposition by attempting to reveal and communicate the act of the cooks, or in my case, the owner and creator of those recipes, revisiting and reconstructing a sense of "home" and certain familiar social culture fragments emotionally, transforming cooking from a functional routine into a deeply affective and identity-related process.



Figure.01 Sourdough Jacket (Neto dos Santos, 2022)



Figure.02 Yoghurt Jacket (Neto dos Santos, 2023)

In addition, Inês Neto dos Santos' "*travelling, wearable sculptures*" (Neto dos Santos 2022)—Sourdough Jacket (Figure.01) (Neto dos Santos, 2022) and Yoghurt Jacket (Figure.02) (Neto dos Santos, 2023)—have been the key references in informing the conceptual dimensions of my practice. In these works, Neto dos Santos cleverly connects sourdough and yoghurt starters with wearable, travel-oriented garments like jackets, highlighting the act of carrying culturally significant food items during migration. These sculptures serve as visual narratives of how travellers and migrants prepare for and adapt to entering new environments. The starters represent not only the material potential for recreating familiar tastes, but also the symbolic act of transporting ethnic cultural heritage and identity into unfamiliar contexts.

This resonates closely with my approach in Production 2, where I present the handwritten recipes I got from my grandmother when I first relocated to London. Both Neto dos Santos' jackets and the recipes in my project are personal and cultural artefacts that function as vessels of migration—tools through which memory, identity, and a sense of "home" are preserved and emotionally reconstructed through culinary engagement. In my case, cooking from these recipes becomes a way to reimagine the sensory and emotional experience of home, while also reaffirming my connection to the cultural environment I belong to.

However, my practice also diverges from Neto dos Santos' projects. In my publication, I incorporate not only the inherited recipes from my grandmother, but also new recipes that emerged during my adaptation process—recipes created collaboratively with friends or developed through daily observation.

This inclusion reflects how cultural memory and identity are not only preserved during migration, but also iterated and redefined in response to shifting physical and social contexts.

In addition to focusing on the socio-cultural and memories behind the recipes, the emotional value embedded in each dish was also the focus of both my projects. In both Production 1 and Production 2, I used writing as the method to tell the story and emotional connection behind a dish from a personalised perspective, helping to build the emotional layers of the individual journey in my projects.

In a conceptual direction, my practice is parallel to Hugh Corcoran's practice, *Two Dozen Eggs*, a small pocket-sized book containing short stories about food, as well as corresponding recipes that accompany each story (Corcoran, 2024). Similar to my practice, these short stories highlight the human narratives behind the food, while demonstrating the possibility of building a relationship between the audience and dishes they may be unfamiliar with through the storytelling expression of writing. The writing sections about each dish in my project are presented in the form of diary entries that are nestled within each page of the French fold binding, establishing an emotional narrative layer that does not undermine the main body of the recipe, but also conveys a slightly nostalgic atmosphere to the audience through the writing. The publication is intended to be a light entry with a slightly political and cultural perspective towards my identity, experiences and life as an immigrant to the UK.



Figure.03 SPILL vol. 1 at its context (Spill Studio, 2025)

This light entry on identity and cultural perspectives in my project intersects with *SPILL vol. 01* (Figure.03) (SPILL STUDIO, 2025), a publication by SPILL STUDIO, a group of ESEA queer female creative collective that also uses recipes as the main narrative, where they talk about feminism and queerness over dinner while enjoying these homemade Asian food on the recipes. This resulted in the zine *SPILL vol. 01*, which intertwines cultural issues with the familiar and intimate topics of our daily lives, such as food and the entire zine is like a documentation of their dinner, from the beginning of the cooking process to

the content of their conversations. Unlike SPILL, at this stage of my practice I have only taken a through entry through a food journey in my immigrant experience, and have not yet to openly and courageously explore and analyse the issues of individual identity and cultural identity of the immigrant community, which is where I envisage the

Projected Contribution

8 In conclusion, during this Unit I positioned myself from the perspective of a migrant adapting to a new environment, using the handwritten family recipes given to me by my grandmother as the central narrative and material anchor, I explored both the collection and transmission of collective experiences, as well as the personal journey of adaptation across the two projects. Through these practices, and by adopting an autoethnographic lens, I proposed potential directions for how graphic communication design can engage with the discourse of food as a carrier of individual memory and socio-cultural meaning.

Beyond its conceptual scope, this project also marks a significant development in my design practice. Building on my prior interest in autoethnography and cultural identity, this project is my first in-depth exploration into the entanglement of food, memory, and culture. As mentioned earlier, I have only recently begun to explore the

deeper connection between food and my own identity as a member of a migrant community in this project, therefore, in future work, I hope to more thoroughly engage with issues surrounding migrant food cultures, particularly how these communities adapt and evolve their culinary behaviours, and how food becomes a vessel for emotional expression and identity formation within the migrant community.

Moreover, I also aim to explore more creative visual languages and design strategies to translate both collective experience and individual cultural perspectives into tangible, resonant forms in my future practice. Through such work, I aim to evoke shared memories and foster emotional recognition among audiences who share similar lived experiences.

Reference List

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Image Reference List

(Figure.01) Neto dos Santos, I. (2022). *Sourdough Jacket*. [Cotton, linen, Cotton thread, Dry Sourdough starter, Braided Bread hanger, Steel rod.] Available at: <https://ines-ns.com/Sourdough-jacket> [Accessed 22 May 2025].

(Figure.02) Neto dos Santos, I. (2023). *Yoghurt Jacket*. [Cotton, linen, Cotton thread, Dry Yoghurt starter, Metal hanger.] Available at: <https://ines-ns.com/Yoghurt-Jacket> [Accessed 22 May 2025].

(Figure.03) Spillll Studio. (2025) 'ORDER IS NOW OPEN FOR OUR SCRUMPTIOUS ZINE!' [Instagram]. 4 March. Available at:https://www.instagram.com/p/DGyE_O5Cvi_/?img_index=1 (Accessed: 22 May 2025).