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Design Thinking: An in-depth analysis of the creative process behind designing visual identities.

by

Ben Kemp

Canterbury Christ Church University

**Thesis submitted
for the Degree of MA by Research**

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Acknowledgements

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Submission Inventory

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 - Production Journal - 6022 words
- Practical Element
 - Air
 - [<http://benkempma.squarespace.com/air/>]
 - [www.benkemp.co.uk/masters/air]
 - Salt & Pepper
 - [<http://benkempma.squarespace.com/salt-and-pepper/>]
 - [www.benkemp.co.uk/masters/saltandpepper]
 - Love Lumber
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 - [www.k-works.co.uk]
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 - Research Blog - Depository for all written and practical work for the course, with accompanying blogs and dedicated project pages
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Abstract

Design Thinking is a term that relates specifically to a designer's intuition in relation to their creative work. However the definition of Design Thinking is ambiguous and varies from designer to designer, but it is important to strengthen our understanding of the term for its creative potential as a psychological design tool. This MA by Research specifically looks at Design Thinking in relation to visual identities, specifically examining a designer's sensibilities and choices throughout the creative process. This is examined through the creation of six visual identities; each with a different creative brief varying in client, audience and scope. The process of creating these visual identities is documented on a research blog, which will act as a depository for all research, practical and written notes/production journal, in order to reflect on this later. The combination of practical work and reflection will conclude in a stronger definition of Design Thinking and highlight the importance of its use. As well as this, a creative process will be considered, which describes how to integrate Design Thinking into the practicality of designing visual identities. The research concludes that by improving the designer's mindset and making informed creative decisions through the process, will result in visual identities that consider empathy, communication, efficacy and creativity, and as a result of this visual identities become stronger, more innovative representations of their brand.

Design Thinking: An in-depth analysis of the creative process behind designing visual identities.

Design Thinking is an ambiguous term that considers the relationships between a designer's cognitive thought processes and the solutions to a design problem. This is not to be confused as the notion that designers do not think, but rather it underpins the fact that design has the ability to impact on all elements of society, and should not be seen as a logical manufacturing process but an experimentation to achieve the best solutions. Through preliminary research of this term, it can be argued that the definition is unique to the person identifying with it and its application. For example, Tim Brown suggests "Design Thinking is applying the methodologies and approaches of design to a broader centre of issues and problems in business and society" (*Design and Thinking, 2012*). This is a relevant starting point for this thesis since the premise of this statement is that design has the ability to create a larger outcome than the final visuals of a product and that design has much more of an active purpose. Ultimately, this thesis, combined with analysis of practical work, will firstly attempt to define 'Design Thinking' in my own terms within the design specialism of visual identities. Furthermore, by better understanding what I believe Design Thinking to be, I will attempt to incorporate this definition into a descriptive analysis of my own creative process, with the potential to be of relevance to other designers.

In terms of visual identities, designers examine the questions proposed within a creative brief and make intuitive creative decisions that answer these questions visually through design. In a design school context, we are taught a foundation knowledge of applied visual elements such as colour theory, composition, layout, type etc. but it is down to the intuitive, cognitive and psychological decisions that are learned through practice that shape these elements into a design that not only is aesthetically pleasing, but communicates its message to its desired audience effectively. A working definition of Design Thinking therefore, involves the thought processes behind the choices and decisions leading towards a final result. By reviewing current literature of the term 'Design Thinking', and comparing these with a reflection of my own practice based research, a deeper understanding of a creative process can be hypothesized which includes Design Thinking. In particular, this will refer to visual identities, and will result in a guideline or series of questions that will encourage Design Thinking throughout the process. The reasoning for specifying this to visual identities is both personal and professional; through initial research it can be argued that Design Thinking has been more developed within product design, but I think it would be beneficial to apply the same methods in terms of branding. Visual identities include all the visible elements of a brand, and so careful consideration needs to take place in understanding that brand and the messages it communicates to audiences, in order for that design to be successful.

It is easy to think about graphic design in terms of a finished production but graphic design is foremost a process. Throughout this process, designers use creative techniques to translate meaning into visuals physically, but distinct from this is the mental intuition, the choices and thoughts that determine practical actions. A designer's ability to read a brief and move dynamically through a creative process with thoughts concerning empathy, integrative thinking, experimentalism and problem solving have an impact on the aesthetics, which will

create a more informed visual identity design. The importance of this is to allow a brand to communicate successfully its desired messages to its audience. As Lockwood states,

“The term Design Thinking is generally referred to as applying a designer’s sensibility and methods to problem solving, no matter what the problem is. It is not a substitute for professional design or the art and craft of designing, but rather a methodology for innovation and enablement” (2009, p. 11).

This thesis will develop such ideas as Lockwood’s by attempting to understand the relationship between a designer’s intuition and these design methods and sensibilities. Through primarily case studies and reflection from my own work, combined with a literature review, this thesis will attempt to outline such a methodology for designing visual identities and attempt to articulate Design Thinking within this dynamic process. It is important to remember that art and design differ from other experiments such as scientific ones, in the fact that there is no defined logical or linear process for designing brand identities. Rather there are key stages and elements that are common in all design practices, but requiring unique approaches determined by the brief. Each designer’s methodology will vary from one another’s and this is not an attempt to define them, but by outlining a creative process we can better understand Design Thinking at particular points amongst that process.

What is important about the term Design Thinking is that anyone can design and think creatively, but there is an extra intuitive ability that can be practiced which enables a designer to think specifically in terms of problems and solutions, and to analytically question the goals of their creations throughout the creative process. Through a literature review and practical research then, this thesis will allow the development of a descriptive creative process that will acknowledge not only the techniques of designing for visual identities, but include my own definitions of Design Thinking.

Through analysis of key texts on Design Thinking, and the processes of notable designers including Massimo Vignelli and Tim Brown, there seems to be a tendency for their arguments and methods to fall into three categories which I have personally defined - These are psychological design, practical design, and personal design.

I define psychological design as the mental processes that take place when designing, and the designer’s mindset as they move through the project. Such mental processes are the designer’s innate understanding of articulating language through design elements, and to make informed decisions based on these in relation to the client/user communication. This is the combination of design knowledge and the response to unconscious intuitive design decisions.

Massimo Vignelli, notes that, “I have always said that there are three aspects in design that are important to me: Semantic, Syntactic and Pragmatic” (2010, p. 10). In Vignelli’s book ‘Canon’ (2010) he uses these three times as a method of dissecting the psychological properties of design methods. ‘Semantics’ is the

search for meaning in the design brief, and although he establishes that this involves physical acts such as learning the history of a brand or understanding its audiences, the key here is to place the designer within a specific mind set. By understanding what is required and by whom, you are more mentally prepared to successfully approach the creative brief. 'Syntactics' is referred to as the discipline of proper construction and articulation of language. In terms of designing visual identities this refers to the designer's ability to understand not specific attributes of design but relationships, making choices whilst having the previous idea of a 'mind-set' active. Vignelli's third aspect of design then is 'Pragmatics', in reference to the final product. If the designer has successfully understood the audience, the design context and made effective design choices, then the design will work. Vignelli's three terms seem to be an evasive definition of Design Thinking, but it does successfully appreciate the mentality of the designer within the project. By having the relevant mind-set throughout the project, which considers the brief, combined with the appropriate knowledge of design elements, then the designer will be able to use that mind-set to appropriate the visuals that they create.

Another aspect of psychological design is creative thinking - the processes of ideation and use of imagination. Vignelli points towards having the correct mind-set as we move from the brief, but being able to think creatively and innovatively is also a key aspect for generating ideas. To build upon Vignelli's formula for design, it can be combined with William Altier's fundamental steps to creativity. "Forget everything you know (the relationships). Remember everything you know (the pieces). Rearrange everything you know (same pieces, new relationships)" (1999, p. 200). Applying these steps to creating visual identities, it requires the designer to mentally forget all preconceptions or experiences with a brand and then re-educate themselves on the brand's ideologies, market, and products etc., i.e. the pieces that create the brand. By doing this, the designer then has then placed his mind-set in correct position to intuitively appropriate their designs and will have a better foundation for building the correct new relationships with an audience.

Maintaining this focus on creativity in terms of psychological processes rather than physically making, Martin Holloway suggested that, "The creative approach - the right approach - is deceptively simple: Avoid commonplace; try something different" (1998, p. 139). This is a simple premise, to get the most out of an idea requires experimentation, but what is important is a psychological ability to avoid commonplace. He goes on to mention, "Trying change for the sake of change is not a meaningless exercise for the creative person, it is a systematic method for achieving better results" (1998, p. 139). So comparing Altier's steps to creativity and Holloway's views there becomes the notion that unfamiliarity and experimentation are key catalysts for Design Thinking.

Tim Brown puts this in the context of an adult's mind. During a TED talk (2008) he asked the audience to quickly draw a 30 second sketch of the person sat next to them, after which the audience were laughing with embarrassment. He makes the point here that children do not suffer the same embarrassment since they are more open-minded. As adults, we are quick to categorize what works and what fails, and this process of censorship and containment causes a conservative mind-set. By taking risks and opening up the mind to exploration can lead to ultimately better results. All of this ultimately leads to the idea that if we force ourselves to become uncomfortable we will have new experiences, new ideas, new concepts and a more innovative approach to a brief.

Practical design refers to the attempt to understand the specific ways in which designers articulate our thoughts and experiences of a brand into the aesthetics of a final design. Designers are not unknown to share their design process, for example Austin and Doust (2007, p. 87) suggest the following steps: brand strategy > concept creation > concept visualization > look and feel exploration > page level design > style guide > marketing assets. This is a great example of how a project develops but the non-linearity of the workflow or design choices could be expanded upon. In such descriptions the creative process appears more so as a fixed method rather than experimental process. Another text that builds on this is David Airey's 'Logo Design Love' (2015). Although a book described as a guideline to creating brand identities, it does not declare a process or consider an order to creating visual identities. Rather, Airey articulates key elements, thoughts and activities within the design process to better understand them. Although it is hard to avoid the linearity of a book format, Airey dissects key stages of the design process with little regard to order. This is noteworthy, as previously mentioned the creative process moves at varying tangents and paths that unifies towards an end product.

Visual identities are all the visible elements of the brand, and in the preliminary stages of the project a brief is created with the guidelines for what you are designing, and specifics as to the clients' requirements. The brief is a crucial element to get correct as it will act as the focal point for the entire project. Getting this information wrong will mean that final designs will be on a complete tangent to the client's needs. This is what needs to be made clear within the design process, that to solve a problem, the designer first needs to define that problem, i.e. the designer needs to understand what the client wants to achieve.

"The nature of this process of defining a design problem is to draw upon the context for direction in determining a performance that will enhance that context. This follows precisely the ideal cycle of design, where a culture is understood well enough to develop contributions that will change that culture in a sustainable way. By developing and exercising design problem definition capabilities, designers and decision makers can participate in a culture with thoughtful, sensitive, and responsive design processes" (Bennett, 2006, p. 226).

This quote outlines the basis of all practical work throughout a project. By defining what is needed, examining the brief and defining relationships, aspirations, culture etc. then experimentation can occur under the scope of the briefs parameters. By doing this, the experimentation, concept creation and final designs can act in nonlinearity, allowing for an unforeseen outcome that will still resolve the brief.

When mentioning the practicality of designing, this is not in reference to specific aesthetics. This is intentional, simply because if there existed a specific aesthetic guideline that would create a viable visual identity, then all identities would look the same. Aesthetics are a relevant and important part of the design process, since they are the visible elements that the audience interacts with. However, understanding the purpose of the visuals, and experimentation with these, progresses conceptual schemes into final ideas and helps develop turn those visuals into relevant designs that satisfy a creative brief.

Aaron Draplin of Draplin Design Company (*lynda.com, 2014*), examines the importance of the function over form, whereby his visual identities attempt to resemble those from a pre-digital era. The thinking here is that design is most successful when it is understood, shifting the focus from not only representation of message, but communication of that message. Design Thinking relates to this in terms of the thought processes behind our actions and decisions. Draplin tries to re-create non-digital design as it considers function before form. I.e., by employing Design Thinking, the creative choices and artwork that we create are more directly related to the design brief.

The hybridity and crossover of my previous two categories - psychological design and practical design - reflect on Design Thinking by acknowledging both mental and physical roles within the creative process. Personal design is the third category that I have identified within the design process and relates to Design Thinking in terms of the designer as an individual. As previously mentioned within psychological design, the designer has to replace existing personal ideologies and knowledge of a brand with that which the brand wants us to communicate in order for communication to be as efficient as possible from brand to audience. However, as much as the designer changes the relationship between themselves and what they are designing they are still the authors of the design. Although designer's could follow a specific methodology to creating visual identities, signature styles, abilities or characteristics of their design's will remain present.

“A client might choose to employ a graphic designer because they have a particular visual style or method of working that would work in tandem with their message or product.” (*2011, p. 22*).

This is the essence of personal design, the characteristics and Design Thinking ability that separate designers within industry. Looking philosophically, John Locke's notion of the tabula rasa coincides with the premise of a designer's life.

“Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any ideas. How comes it to be furnished? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this answer, in one word, from experience” (*Locke, 2013, p. 74*).

The notion here is that our life experiences however small or seemingly insignificant, shape our ability for reasoning and knowledge. This translates into visual identities in the same way; through our experiences with studying design in a specific culture and environment, in education and in visual research we manufacture different processes for creating design. Excellent examples of this are simply the visual identities of brand identity designers themselves. If all designers thought, acted and reasoned the same way through the design process there would be no reason to try and brand themselves as they would all produce the same things, but by suggesting they are unique through their identities suggests that they try to produce unique work.

There is also the matter of physical progression through the design process. Each studio or designer will have different resources and methods, but what is common amongst all is the intuitive design skills to use them. For example, one designer may choose to create an identity primarily through a sketchbook, where as another designer may not have adequate sketching ability so would elect to create prototypes digitally, but what should result is both designers experimenting with concepts, thinking and creatively and empathetically, and making intuitive design choices.

Design Thinking is about questioning work as it progresses, being critical of the brief and the problems that we are designing to solve and these questions and thoughts depend on the individual designer. A relevant example of this is a lecture by Sara Beckman (*Design and Thinking, 2012*), who suggests that if you were asked to build a bridge you could simply design a suspension bridge or a cantilever bridge, but if you ask why the answer might be because there is water to cross. The design could then turn into a boat, a tunnel or a plane, and by asking why you reframe the problem and therefore the solution. Depending on how the designer asks questions and the answers that they receive, can ultimately affect the thoughts throughout the project, developing Design Thinking as a personal attribute.

Personal design refers simply then to a designer's input on the visuals, but what needs to be made important is the role of Design Thinking that should still be in place to acknowledge key things; the audience, the brief and the client. As well as this Design Thinking allows for the examination of visuals for their innovative, experimental, and empathetic qualities, to allow these designs to function and communicate effectively but also be unique and creative in presentation

The reasoning for dissecting the literature review into three categories - psychological, practical and personal design - is due firstly to the majority of background reading that I have undertaken have studied either graphic design theory, graphic design aesthetics or attempted to describe a specific design process. As well as this, during reflection of my own practical work, I discovered that I was looking at and critiquing my work either for their functional values and their ability to communicate, or their aesthetic values and how they visualise the brand I was working with. I also took note of my psychological thought process, whereby I was analysing the relationships between function and aesthetics. Therefore, these three categories offer an effective method of constructing a creative process that acknowledges Design Thinking, and will be reinforced by the critical reflection of my own practical work.

The first drafts of research questions when starting this project were very personal, examining my own ambitions as a graphic designer to create viable brand identities. The reason for this is that strong brand identities tell stories, makes audiences feel certain emotions, and it is the centre point for all of a brand's visual communication. However, there was motivation to take advantage of the freedom of the independent study and to build on what I had learnt at undergraduate level and create a basis for all my future professional designs. Thus emerged the research area of creating a process for designing brand identities. All briefs are unique, each project

has a different client and no two designs are the same, so with all these variables is there still a workflow that can influence the success of a visual identity? The methodology I used for answering such questions was to create visual identities, from brief to finished product that upon reflection, describes and produces evidence of Design Thinking and hints towards a process. The evidence was foremost from notes during each project where I was trying to articulate certain choices, and this was further demonstrated through photographs of during the projects, of key sketches of influences. As a result, I have various examples of design processes and thought, but this needs to be further articulated in terms of my own definition of Design Thinking.

I began firstly with three microbrands, which are 'condensed' visual identities meaning that they only consist of a limited amount of visuals or design outputs, primarily a logo and another identifiable design element, for example a graphic, photograph, typeface or in the case of my work - a website . At the start of the research there was a clear ambition for exploring experimentalism and innovation. One function of design is to tell a story and communicate effectively to the audience; hence I constructed 3 microbrand briefs for seemingly 'unbrandable' everyday objects - Air, Salt and Pepper and Trees. Referring back to Altier's method of creativity - forget all the relationships you know, remember the pieces and rearrange the pieces into new relationships - I began with such innate objects because it would require a lot of experimentation and consideration to portray these things in a particular way to an audience, when the majority of the world's population understands what these are. Beginning with 'Air', I constructed a brief that was to sell bottles of air, to create an impactful image of the harm humanity has on air pollution.



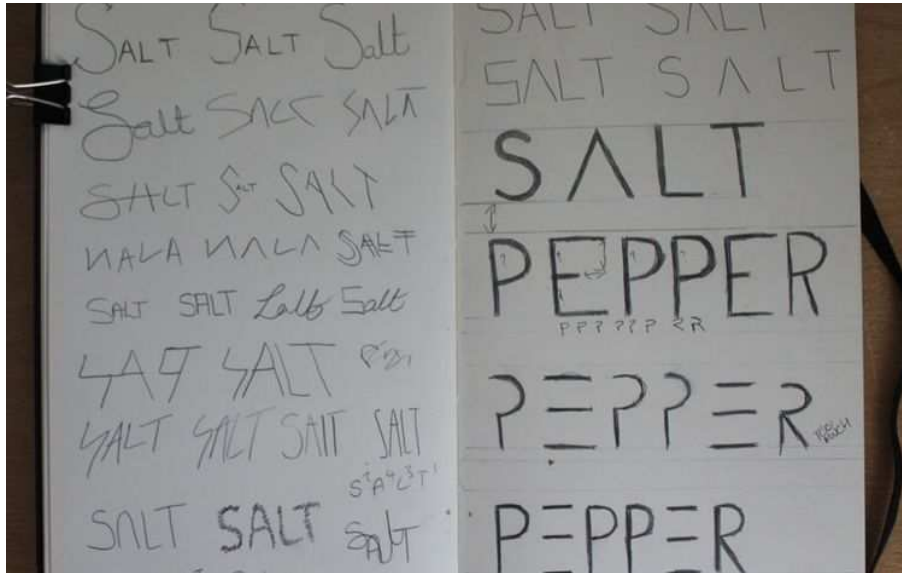
Within the Air project, primary visual research and description of the brief led to images of air being represented through the sky, soft imagery and frequent use of the colour blue. Thinking about the design qualities it was clear that for this design to be impactful, such as a public awareness campaign, it needed to be contradictory to the profound knowledge that audiences may have of air. This led to experimentation of block lettering and symbols, darker colouring and higher contrast imagery. This was a key stage within this project, as without this deductive thought the project would have ended up similar to so many images and representations of air, and thus failed to emerge within public awareness and fail as a design. This became a very early key

notation from the research, that awareness of what the design should not be, should be very clear within the designer's mind.



This primary thought changed the direction of the Air project resulting in an identity that was solid and clearly represented the pollution of air, which could have been viable within industry. In terms of process and Design Thinking, my first choice in the project was trying to understand my direction. I specifically chose to move away from common knowledge of air and experiment with visualising such things as particles and pollution, which was a specific design choice because I was aware these would have to force me to think creatively and experiment in the early stages. Ultimately this led a stronger ideation process, as I sketched many different ideas and began understand the relationship between the message of pollution and the designs aesthetics, thus incorporating empathetic values because if I could see this relationship then the audience should too. This early stage of acknowledgement for the vision and aims of the project was the catalyst for all the concepts that followed, and I felt this had the potential to be an expansive project.

The second microbrand was Salt & Pepper, the brief here being to create a method of communication that gives audiences reasoning as to the use of the everyday seasonings. As well as this it could potentially be a packaging label for many salt and pepper products, possibly as a signifier of quality. Primary research on this gave me a clear idea of the properties of these products, and a sense that many current designs treated it as contrasting objects, in particular black and white. Similar to the Air brand, my first thoughts were what considerations as to what design pathway did I want to take to make sure the brief was fulfilled. Because I wanted to reflect the rocky properties of Salt and Pepper without being literal, I chose to experiment with blocky sans-serif typefaces and lettering as well as low poly geometric shapes.



Apart from aesthetics, I began thinking about the semiotics within the design - what the audience would understand - and in result would communicate most effectively. The Salt and Pepper project I actually feel did not work, and this was a great learning curve. Looking back through my sketchbooks I can see that there wasn't enough experimentation, and I did not disconnect from my preconceptions of Salt and Pepper being rock-like contrasting minerals. Upon reflection I can see that I followed the same process as the Air project, by firstly outlining the vision of the brief, and then conducting various visual research, but during the ideation stage, I was thinking too literally about Salt and Pepper, not allowing myself to think more disconnected from the product and more closely related to the aims of the project.



Had I re-attempted this project, firstly I would return to the experimentation within the sketchbook to hypothesize a potential logo and conceive a better method of transmitting this message. The typeface only logo did not communicate effectively enough that this is an informative design about these products. In simplest terms, the final design did not meet the initial brief, although it had potentially good visuals and design elements; it was not strong enough to work as a visual identity. However, making the mistake lead to more experimentation and reflection within the design process on the projects that followed, which also lends to the idea that mistakes are profitable within the creative process.

The third microbrand I created was for Trees, a fictional brand called 'Love Lumber'. The brief followed similar requests to that of Air and Salt & Pepper in the idea that it was to inform an audience about an aspect of

an everyday object - with this project it was deforestation. This was the strongest of all the micro brands, which clearly benefitted from plenty of visual research, sketching and a more unique symbol rather than a generic typeface. Again I employed similar thought patterns when beginning the project - Who is the audience? What am I trying to communicate? What is the tone of the brief? As a result of this I had an almost entire disregard for the obvious when reading the brief and my preconceptions of trees were almost non-existent. Instead, I began thinking about the visualisation of non-physical ideas such as love, protection and growth as these were the key messages and emotions that needed to be visually communicated. Not only this, by acknowledging these key messages I was then thinking about the empathetic values for the audience.

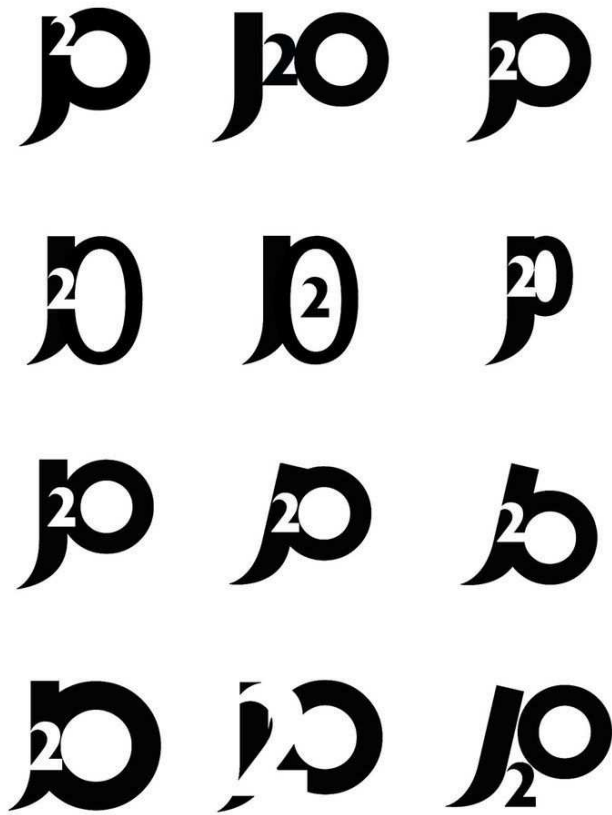


With sketching, I began constantly asking myself whether any of my sketches had the potential for crafting this empathy or communicating this message. Ones that I felt had the wrong emotions weren't neglected but experimented with, constantly expanding my initial ideas and in turn spawning new ones. This method of experimentation is basic design methods, but the process of reflection seems seldom touched upon. Looking through these sketches and choosing which ones become a better draft or digital composition requires a good analytical eye for comparing the potentials of that idea in comparison to the questions of the brief. In terms of this project I felt I chose correctly, since the heart shaped tree rings concept invoked the correct emotions, visualised the aim of the brand and the semiotics of the brand would be understood by a majority of audiences. Even at this early stage, I was in-turn, putting myself in the mind-set of the audience and then the client, to see what concepts would be coherent to the brief.



Taking these designs further into digitisation then led me to experimenting further with the final aesthetics that led me to final design, but what is key is that the messages, emotions and properties of the brief remained in the back of my mind throughout the process, as reflection on my work did not happen at one particular stage but throughout. This I found to be another aspect of Design Thinking. The commonly referred to reflection stage near the end of the project should be simply a refinement stage, as with each concept, each final design, I was constantly reflecting on whether the design was successful in its function.

The following project was a brief taken from a student competition for beverage company J2O. This was the first live brief within the project and its requirements were to rebrand J2O to attract an older age demographic (18-30) and be a competitive alternative to alcoholic beverages. This is the only rebrand within my portfolio so it is worth noting primary research for this project was not drafting a mood board or seeking design inspiration like the previous projects, but was a more direct analysis of the current visual identity, trying to establish strengths and weaknesses. I also physically went to a bar and assessed what people around me were choosing and assessing the design of their chosen competitor products. I began noting that people in the same age demographic as the target audience were choosing things that were simple in design, had a limited colour palette and had strong geometrics in typefaces and label design. Although this is a gesture to aesthetics it is also an acknowledgement of these other companies' methods of constructing empathy and using semiotics to appropriate their designs successfully to their target audience. I then began my typical visual research both offline and online, looking at trends in bottle designs and other designs that attract a similar age demographic. Now experimentation was more constricted through this process as the result could not differ too much from the original visual identity, in order to ensure customer recognition from its current market. However, the previous acknowledgements of garish colours, geometrics and minimalist designs were things I did experiment with.



In focus with trying to understand Design Thinking, throughout this project I kept mindful about creativity through experiment of these attributes and user-centred design through making the correct choice as to which ideas to pursue. Again this isn't a linear pathway, as it can be seen that when I felt like I had a strong sense of identity created through the label and packaging designs, I decided to go back and further experiment with colour. This can be seen as another attribute of Design Thinking - the constant critiquing of work that allows the adaptability of the workflow due to assessment of a design's viability to fulfil the brief.



Expanding the scope compared to previous projects is the K-Works project. This was the first in a live brief from a real client, a local blacksmith in need of a consistent visual identity and accompanying website and stationery. Upon receiving approval for this project and meeting to construct a brief with the client, I was permitted to see his workspace and see some projects he had been working on. This was a great experience and shows the value of experiencing the client's product or work that you are designing for. Because this was the centre for all of the blacksmiths work It seemed apparent that this would be the cornucopia for all design inspiration and visual research for the project. Ultimately, this resulted in myself spending two days shadowing the client, seeing how he worked and allowing his workshop environment to inflict upon my senses. Also, further questioning and conversation with the client resulted in a stronger sense of cause, which in turn resulted in me, the designer, having a closer understanding to that which the client wants.



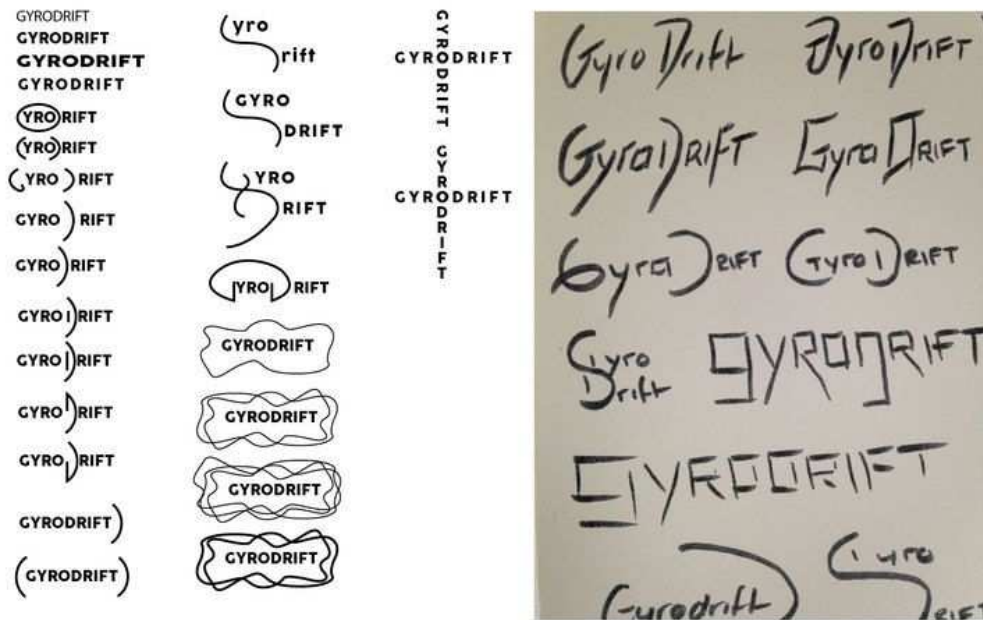
After this the aforementioned research process took place; research from primary sources, design research and inspiration both offline and online, and surveying competition and market research. The initial design phase then took shape as experimentation through sketches and digital prototypes began to form and then from this I began to narrow down the tests to a final, most appropriate design. This is the most basic form of the workflow that seems to take place within design visual identities, but I outline this specifically in relation to Design Thinking. I felt this project was stronger than the previous ones for a simple reason, my Design Thinking ability was improving. Throughout the project I began being more critical of everything I was creating, asking myself whether it was suitable enough as a final design. Again, I was asking obvious questions such as would it be appropriate of its target audience? Does it meet the design brief? But more analytical, tangible questions became apparent. How could I visualize the senses within his workshop? How can I manipulate my sketches to reflect the balance of strength and structure as well as artistry and uniqueness? One strong example is the laurel wreath I

decided to use; when I first presented the client with the idea he liked it but was uncertain and thought it required more detail. I argued, stating that the minimalist leaves reflected professionalism and yet the boldness reflected the strength of his product. Also the logo would be more adaptable for signage, clothing and other uses, as it work be consistent in quality in any size. The client then agreed, and although this is a reference to my design knowledge of the balance between shape and space, what it really exemplifies is my improving ability of Design Thinking.



Because I had an empathetic approach for the audience and also had the mind-set of the client and his possible uses for this identity, I knew I had successfully fulfilled the needs of the brief. Not only this, because I had experimented with the logo, I had already conceived of a more elaborate logo and deduced that it would not be as viable, and this is a prime factor of a designer's ability: to make a design that is suitable to serve its purpose, as well as being aesthetically pleasing.

The final project, Gyrodraft was the second live brief. Of similar size and ambition as K-Works, Gyrodraft had a similar brief but was focused in the world of racing sports and mechanics. Again with this project I went to his garage and track days to get a sense of the values and audience of the brand. I wanted to fully immerse myself within this culture, so I spent a few days at a local race track just looking at all the visual and other sensory triggers within this sport. This quickly formulated into a multitude of ideas for visualising this brand, but most importantly it gave a sense of tone, attitude and culture for which should mould these designs, comparative to that which I experienced.



I began the same way as the K-Works, project, looking at first hand research, then second-hand both offline and online at similar businesses in the market. However, what developed from the final project was a stronger sense of design for empathy. During experimentation with sketching and preliminary prototypes I had four very strong ideas that I felt all visualised the company but in contrasting ways. Design Thinking here was the critical analysis of each idea, specifically the logo, looking at the strengths/weaknesses to determine which was a more appropriate visualisation of the brand and would be more applicable. What resulted was a reimagining of the logo that took aspects from each, resulting in by far the strongest version.



Empathetic design was absolutely key within this project, considering the manoeuvrability of the logo and other design elements. The client wanted them to be a sellable item, in the form of a car sticker or decal, but would also worked within a professional format such as a business card. When designing this visual identity then, rather than thinking about how to make a sticker, I sketched the logo first. Experimentation was important because I wanted the designs to be truly reflective of the brand values, so by sketching first and then having the sticker as an afterthought allowed me to diverge all of my ideas, and then use design intuition to appropriate the designs into something that worked with the brief. This is what I feel a very broad sense of Design Thinking,

thinking beyond the goals of the creative brief to establish innovation and empathy, and then making design more concise, so that they fit the scope of what the client required.

As a result of this practical body of research I have improved my own design ability, this is both practically, psychologically and professionally. Through the development and exploration of Design Thinking I have developed my skills for sketching and ideation as well as thinking critically and analytically about my own work. As well as this I have a better grasp on design methods to move from brief to finished product with the ability to place myself in the clients and users' mind-set as well as my own.

Design Thinking then, appears to be the methodology of combining psychological process with the physicality of design methods. Design is about defining and solving a problem, and in terms of visual identities, it is the venture to find a suitable design that both represents a brand and markets it correctly. This can be aided through aesthetics, promotional material and brand marketing but outstanding visual identities are attempts at innovativeness and experimentalism. In the early stages of a project, research and experience with the brand/product, market and visual research create an intellectual base for Design Thinking. This will then allow for empathetic, unbiased and versatile thinking. If a correct understanding of the brand and the audience are created in the very beginning of the project, then this will become an intuitive thought that is always considered when analytically reflecting on future designs. In the early stages of the process, Design Thinking is almost a contrasting term to analytical thinking; rather than trying to deduce a best method of visual identification, as many avenues as possible are explored which requires input from various sources. In terms of Design Thinking, experimentation allows ambiguities and potential faults surrounding the possible identity to be identified, which can expose unexplored design ideas, thus allowing innovation to occur. After experimentation, the design will begin to take shape into final prototypes and at this point it is design intuition that causes the designer to make certain choices as to which designs to pursue based on previous knowledge from experimentation. The stages that follow will be production stages, whereby prototypes and test identities are considered then either put to one side or finalized. During this stage the designer needs to think more analytically in terms of how the aesthetics compare with the message that the identity is trying to communicate. Although a designer uses design techniques such as colour, shape and space, the Design Thinking process here would be in reference to our design ability of analysing how well these aesthetics articulate the problem defined within the brief.

Design Thinking is hard to define explicitly because of its non-linearity. If a designer employs Design Thinking, then intuitive processes take place amongst the entire process, not at one singular stage. Moving forward to hypothesizing a creative process outline that incorporates Design Thinking, it will not be necessary to outline the specific processes I used within the projects in my portfolio but I will be taking key aspects from each as to reflect the nonlinearity.

“Design thinkers know that there is not one best way to move through a process. There are useful starting points and helpful landmarks along the way, but the continuum of innovation is best thought of as a system of overlapping spaces rather than a sequence of orderly steps.” (Brown, ,p .2012 16)

I will be outlining a creative process in similar terms that Brown describes; a series of landmarks that outline the basis for Design Thinking during a basic process. This is coherent with my practice based research as each project had a faint recognition of similarity in process, but all had recognizable points whereby I was employed Design Thinking in terms of experimentation, research, or presentation of final designs.

The initial primary research question was to attempt to better define Design Thinking and integrate it within a descriptive workflow for creating visual identities. The reasoning for this is that I felt I already had strong design knowledge and artistic ability, but through more recent creative endeavours I began acknowledging more psychological roles in my design activity. Throughout the design process, I was being more conceptual and experimental in ideation and then more critical during the final designs, which was ultimately a result of better experience with designing visual identities allowing more critical thinking and psychological engagement with my designs. Primary research allowed me to discover Design Thinking as a graphic design theory, and I wanted to progress this in relation to the physical process. Thus far I have explored literature surrounding Design Thinking and reflected on my practical work and designs throughout the degree. 'Design Thinking' is still a relatively new term in the design industry, but what this research has enabled is a better understanding of the relationship between how a design can create and how they think. Looking upon the combined reflection of the practical work and the literature review then, I have created a methodology for the creative process behind designing visual identities, which incorporates characteristics of Design Thinking which I have personally identified.

VISION → RESEARCH → IDEATION → CREATION → FINALIZE

Vision

Each project begins with an initial meeting with the client, a request for a design or possible solution to a problem. This initial phase is purposefully titled vision because brief adheres too much to a physical set of rules, which is only part of the preliminary work on a project. David Rockwell describes a creative brief as "a short form or communication tool from a client or that you develop with a client to set out the mission" (*Bassett & Partners, 2014*), and the choice of words here are critical because 'mission' outlines that there is a goal or responsibility that this design should fulfil. Looking back at the literature review then, Altier's fundamental steps to creativity can be applied here. If for example we are designing a visual identity for a company selling a product, we must first forget everything we know about that product, then be re-educated by the client as to what their product means to them. Then once knew understanding of the product is formed it needs to be clear of who the consumer is and the context upon which the design is to be placed. Visuals do not need to be thought about at this juncture as this process is to place the mind-set of the designer into the particular company, to better understand its audiences and mission, i.e. the vision.

When meeting a client, prior to constructing a creative brief the designer needs to better understand the company. This can be done by understanding both the professional and personal needs of the client. Asking professional orientated questions improve the designers understanding of the personality and aims of the business, for example, what are the company's values/products/services? What are the company's competitors? What does the company want to achieve? Where/who/what is the target market? This is important because it then allows the designer to have the ability think in the mind-set of the business. Secondly, personal questions help develop an understanding of the business owner or client, allowing you to make decisions to satisfy their requirements. Questions may include what companies influence you? What does the business mean to you? What do you feel the company offers?

From these questions a brief can be developed that will reflect both the expectations of the client and from the designer. The information gathered creates a guideline for the designs to accumulate under and the designer to constantly refer to to maintain the vision of the project. As Airey states, "the design brief exists to provide both of you with concrete reasons for making decisions throughout the process" (2015, p. 43). Asking questions and creating the brief is a very physical description but referring back to Design Thinking, this initial stage is to allow the designer to fully understand all primary knowledge to base their design decisions, which will allow alternative, innovative thinking moving through the project whilst remaining relevant to the client and context.

Looking at my own work, most reflective of this is the 'K-Works' project. During this project I spent a few days with the client, shadowing him while he worked and having recurring conversations regarding his business and how he wanted it to grow. This enabled me to not only understand the nature of the work but by immersing myself within his work environment I felt I had a better understanding of what my designs needed to communicate and the emotions the audience should feel. Not only this, the extra conversations between the client and I developed his answers from the fundamental questions. For example, when first asked, his target audience was a middle-aged male demographic, but then I began to learn the client wanted more work in London, that was primarily artistic based. This extra context for design placement radically changed the way I thought about his company and my designs began to reflect this.

Research

This stage consists of all the fundamental primary knowledge required to begin the project. This is slightly crossed over with the vision stage as the first research comes from defining the vision and the goals of the identity which we are trying to visualize. After establishing these goals, wider research can take place. "A graphic design project can be viewed as a series of choices - the more informed the choices are, the stronger the outcome will be" (Leonard & Ambrose, p. 6, 2012). With the huge amount of potential resources for research, especially the seeming limitless internet, designer's have an access to abundance of information at even the earliest stage of the project. Because of this the designer can look at various different design disciplines for inspiration, have access to tutorials and media to learn new approaches or techniques and have easy access to many market research documents. Design research comes more so from visuals, as it is the search for ideas concerning visual communication, articulation of messages, and problem solving. These visuals can come from

primary, secondary and tertiary sources, and this very much refers to the physicality of design research. In terms of Design Thinking however, it is the choices of where and what to look for from these sources that can define the project. Design Thinking in terms of research then, is firstly the questioning of the brief. Asking why? what? where? who? etc. about the brief will make the designer think careful both about the specific problems that needs to be communicated and the design methods surround this. When these question have been considered, the research will be more appropriate to the required solution and as Leonard and Ambrose mention previously, the outcome will be stronger.

In terms of visual identities, research does not simply consider other visual identities in comparison. Although this is a great starting point, design covers a wide range of disciplines, and inspiration can be drawn from all of these. Brown noted that, "Design Thinking is applying the methodologies and approaches of design to a broader centre of issues and problems in business and society" (*Design and Thinking, 2012*), and research is a reflection on this. By looking at these broader range of issues, we can witness evidence of Design Thinking from other designers and thus draw information, inspiration and ideas from that.

The strongest example of this from my portfolio is the Gyrodraft project. When I began the project and met the client I quickly gained a sense of vision because of his passion for the project and his desire to expand. However, what I lacked as a designer was the knowledge of this sport, which is where I began my research. This came from primary sources of visiting tracks on race days and visiting the workshop however this quickly developed by further questioning this company's niche. What is the purpose of this sport? What visual signifiers do other companies use? How can I visualize the emotions and sensory responses surrounding the sport? What resulted apart from the primary research of the sport was visual research taking inspiration from such examples as the atmosphere and lighting in bars, the photography of other active sports, the variances in culture with which this sport takes place and the marketing material of other mechanics. This resulted in not only a better understanding of the company but a better sense of the visual identity that I needed to communicate. As well as this, it started a very fuelled ideation process because of the vast amount of knowledge I had resulted in more starting points for concepts.

Ideation

Ideation involves the conceptual schemes during the early stages of the creation process. What has been recurringly mentioned through the literature review and the reflection is the importance of experimentation. Expansive thinking will question the ambiguities of the project and the brief, and will help develop innovative, empathetic concepts. With the previous section of research already taken place, the designer's mind will be filled with both knowledge and emotional experience surrounding the project, which will be able to generate a great deal of tangible alternatives. This would be done through brainstorming, sketching, note-taking and the exchange of ideas between these. This will then develop into more focus sketchwork, but the importance of this stage of the process in relation to Design Thinking is the productive direction that is made clear. Experimentation with ideas allows for an abstract view of articulating a visual identity, and by exploring as many tangible routes as possible, there will be a better selection for later further development.

Design Thinking here is the acknowledgement of the designer to think expansively, not necessarily trying to solve the brief explicitly at this point, but rather explore possible avenues for further design. Although it is expansive, it is not an unstructured activity, as Design Thinking allows for the previous experience of vision and research to focus and appropriate the ideation. As well as this, at this stage it is important to think about adding to each idea rather than seeking alternatives. By building on each idea, it refers back to the questioning involved in Design Thinking, constantly asking how each idea can be expanding upon results in new ideas.

Firstly, expansive thinking allows for a very expressive, abstract conceptual creation process that ignores the constraints of a design project but rather keeps the key goals in sight. Secondly, empathetic thinking about the end-user allows us to reflect on designs and then think about how to make potential ideas viable within those constraints. This is a specific aspect of the definition of Design Thinking and is almost quite a logical process - By firstly imagining everything you can rationally think of, then eliminating the improbable, leaves the strongest ideas on how to reach a solution. This, in terms of visual identities, is precisely the same - by exploring concepts even within other design disciplines, such as product design or advertising, we can then think about how to concentrate these into a visual identity.

Although all my projects had a very experimental ideation stage, I will expand more upon the Gyrodraft project. As mentioned previously within the research stage I looked at bar designs, car designs, cultures and action photography, my sketches all reflected this. When sketching my first ideas were simply to visualise the name Gyrodraft and explore typography in relation to my experience with attitude of the company. Then I began thinking about reflection of culture - since this sport has its roots in Japan, I explored combining Japanese typography and logo design. These two initial stages then led to even further expansive concepts, thinking about the visualisation of the mechanical, electrical and customisable nature that the company is involved with. Ultimately then this was the process of simply mark-making, which when reflected on, allows a better look at the options that would be viable for a visual identity. The point here is that Design Thinking is the ability to think abstractly about the project in order to conceive of possible routes, and then make informed decisions as to which creative approach is the most appropriate in terms of scope, applicability, aesthetics and messages.

Creation

Creation does not refer specifically to the creation of an exact design that will act as the final product, but it refers to a stage whereby the direction of the project begins to take place. The first aspect of Design Thinking within this stage is the assessment of the practicality and potential for the preliminary ideas in the ideation stage to be taken into further development. It is key to take note of the non-linearity of the workflow here, as experimentation will take place within this stage too. Therefore, I define the creation stage as the production of a 'first-draft' set of designs, whereby the outcome will be a number of potential visual identities that are not refined or completed. This is an important design method, as firstly it allows the vision of the project to be put into the first key visuals. Secondly it will allow focus is on the strengths of each design, which saves time trying to achieve perfection and will allow problems with the design to be acknowledged and possibly resolved.

The second aspect of Design Thinking within this stage then is the critical assessment of these mock up visual identities. This is the psychological aspect of determining if designs have the potential to be a collaborative,

empathetic solution to the project's brief. Questions within the designers stage would be, for example, is it innovative? Does it communicate? What are the strengths/weaknesses? If there are multiple designs then question would be asked as to which have the greatest potential, or could strengths of each be married or experimented with to create a unified strengthened identity.

Ultimately the application of Design Thinking within the creation stage of designing a visual identity is the practice of turning direction and experimentation into possible solutions. It is the selection of potential ideas in acknowledgments of their empathetic, innovative qualities, and the refined and improvement of these ideas into a first draft of a whole visual identity.

The Design Thinking within the creation stage I feel is improved with design experience and practice. Rather than look at a single project from my research, It will be first worth examining the progression of my own projects through the year. With each project's completion, I was improving in Design Thinking ability, which meant that within the project that followed I was able to be more critical and experimental. This was due to practice of experimenting and creating mock-ups and my ability to think about the viability of them as a complete visual identity. As a comparison, if we compare my first project Air, with that of my last, Gyrodraft, it is evident that there was far more sketches to base my creation stage on, which resulted in more prototype identities, and then in turn resulted in what I feel a stronger idea of a visual solution to the brief.

Finalize

The purpose of creation is to establish unfinished designs that work in relation to the project brief. Finalisation is required to refine this stage, and focus all efforts on the harmony of design elements based on design knowledge. At this stage prior Design Thinking, if effective, will have moulded the visuals that the designer has created into a visual identity that has considered the client and the end user, has attempted innovation, and is an aesthetic representation of the brand it is trying to represent.

Design Thinking at the stage takes place in the form of critical reflection and iteration. The prior stages turn broad concepts into final ideas, and at this final stage it needs to be question whether the brief has been adhered too. Do the goals match that which the client asked for? Is this a successful visual representation of the values outlined within the brief? Does the design meet the requirements for applicability? Will the audience get the messages? Can it be improved? When the designer is satisfied with the design, and feels that it successfully matches the brief requirements in may be presented to the client, and if correct Design Thinking has been employed throughout the process, then the design should be accepted. If, in contrast, the client does not accept the design, then Design Thinking was not employed successfully, as the client-user relationship is the main consideration throughout.

This examination of Design Thinking within the creative process of designing visual identities has not only helped a personal definition of Design Thinking but has also helped develop my own design skills. In reflection of my practical body of work, I have pushed my own boundaries of unfamiliarity and learnt the benefit

of exploration surrounding concepts. Using informed decisions based on my knowledge of the visual identity I am attempting to design, I have better utilised artistic abilities in relation to design knowledge for the creation of better productions for an end-user.

Design Thinking, by my own definition, is the constant assessment throughout the creative process of whether the aesthetics of our design have the ability to innovate, empathize and communicate effectively. Design is a function, in terms of visual identities, it is the representation of a brand and a method of communication to its audience. Design Thinking therefore is important for designing visual identities because it allows for the identity to become more viable in its purpose.

If I could expand on this project, there would be a greater examination of the designer-client relationship, with more documentation concerning this. Due to the time restriction of the MA by Research, it was not feasible to find more collaborators in terms of clients. However, I treated each brief with the same professionalism of which I would in industry, which enabled the strongest possible examination of Design Thinking with these restrictions.

“The process of the design thinker, rather, looks like a rhythmic exchange between the divergent and convergent phases, with each subsequent iteration less broad and more detailed than the previous ones. In the divergent phase, new options emerge. In the convergent phase it is just the reverse: now it’s time to eliminate options and make choices.” *(Brown, 2009, p. 68)*

My analysis of the creative process with reference to Design Thinking adheres to Brown’s notion of the process of the design thinker, as I establish the importance of exploration and ideation, and then the importance of informed design choices through creation and presentation. Ultimately, when designing for visual identities, it is evident that through thorough exploration and experimentation of ideas, and employing Design Thinking to appropriate these ideas and refine them into final products, leads to a final visual identity that has empathetic qualities, represents brand values, shows innovation amongst its competitors, and finally is a method for visual articulation for all brand messages.

Word Count – 9900 words

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Journal

First Post - Initial Ideas (14/10/14)

Since this is my first post at the start of the program, I'm going to assume it will probably be one of the lengthiest since my ideas are very rough and I have so much I want to explore.

Over the summer between graduating from my undergraduate degree and starting my postgraduate research, I was really struggling for ideas for a potential subject matter. I then came across this quote by Pablo Picasso -

"I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it."

This quote I believe sums up my personality, and it got me thinking about what my weaknesses are in relation to design and how I can improve them. However, simply trying to improve my own skills wouldn't make for sufficient breadth in an academic situation such as a masters degree, so with that in mind I went back to the internet, journals and design books in search of some form of inspiration.

What I found myself constantly seeing are beautiful logos, perfectly laid-out websites, innovative advertisements and asking myself what steps did the designer take to reach this outcome. I wished I could see the sketchbooks or the WIPs that led to these final pieces.

What then clicked in my mind is that this quote in a way sums up the difference of being a good designer and a great designer. Anyone can open up Photoshop or InDesign and start typing, choose a pretty font and publish it as a design, but what makes for better design is experimentation, research, reflection on early ideas and constant learning and expansion of your own abilities and understanding.

Although this has not given me a solid idea, it has given me a foundation for my research. I want to show the importance of sketchbook work and experimentation in order to get to a final product. This can include a manner of subtopics, for example -

- Can improving traditional artistic ability likewise improve digital designer's productions?
- Can the 'sketchbook' be remediated, i.e. is drawing on an iPad the same as pen and paper.
- Can the Work in Progress towards a final design offer as much artistic value as the final design.

At this stage it is too early to pinpoint the exact direction in which this project will go, but I know that the main research area I want to examine is the importance of experimentation and discovery within design and visual communications.

Further Initial Ideas (18/12/14)

After weeks of research and meetings with various researchers my ideas have evolved and I have better idea of what I want to achieve from the program.

My initial ideas concerned discovery within design, primarily looking at how experimentation with ideas can lead to better creative outcomes. Stepping back and assessing my own ambitions and personal interests, I've decided to move away from such an 'inventive' approach to design methods. One of the main reasons for this was that it was hard to come up with any innovating new arguments or hypotheses surrounding design methods, as most designers keep sketchbooks and journals and I do not want to state the obvious. I want to be more subjective and innovating with my subject matter, as to push the boundaries of my own work and to contribute new ideas to the design world.

What I shall consider looking at then is not too far from my first journal entry. Discovery in design is almost a prerequisite to what I now have planned. In the design industry, successful designers are not known primarily for their ability to sketch or their design methods, but reputability is earned through the marketability of the brand image they have created. What I propose to examine then is the relationship between brand image and brand identity. If we look at Nike for example, the famous 'tick' has come to be associated with power and strength. This is not simply due to the logo but the brand association of all the various marketing strategies, brand campaigns and sponsorship that have all accumulated to be represented by this logo.

Successfully creating a logo then is one important aspect of the design process, but to make the productions that I create marketable, they must have a visually communicated message with a coherent brand image. What I propose to do then is to use the research of my initial ideas of design discovery to create the best possible brand identities through experimentation and research. I will then expand on this to examine how these brand identities can become 'industry marketable'. I started this MA with the ambition of becoming a better designer, what this means is not artistic ability but problem solving ability.

Some questions and themes to consider:

- Society is becoming a very business driven place with advertising and branding across many things within public view, how far will this go? What can and cannot be branded?
- Strong art direction requires awareness of trends in design and innovate methods of thinking, how can I push myself, and my designs to create something new.
- There are many articles on the aspects of good design and good marketing, but can there be an exclusive set of rules admiring to both.
- What are the differences between brand image and brand identity.

From an academic point of view these are the questions I am going to answer through practice based research. This will take place in various outputs. An outline of what I plan to create would be:

- A series of sketchbooks, journals and blogs to keep inspiration, research and design awareness.
- 3 Microbrands of everyday objects
- Evidence of a rebrand
- Evidence of an unconventional brand - an organisation with ambiguous messages
- Evidence of a final major brand identity that will cover all aspects of digital media.

Reflection on previous revision & In-depth Tasks (4/1/15)

Since last revising my ideas and attempting to narrow down my practice based research, I have been reviewing current literature and other practices by designers to get a more thorough argument or method of analysis. Something that has always been of in my mind since starting the masters is the creative process, and since understanding this I have attempted to create a link to professional practice.

Doing a review of my resources, I've seen many methodologies and processes on how to best design for corporate identities and how to best sell a brand from a marketing standpoint. What I believe is there is a lack of methodology from approaching both. Designer's design for clients - and clients use those designs to sell a product. To create a successful brand identity then, one must design almost with the ambition to sell something - but how can this be done whilst remaining creative. What I want my practice to do is to look at gaps in the market, poorly designed business or simply creative outputs, and to then define the problem, understand what that brand is trying to do, and then create an identity that is both visually creative and problem solving. In essence, how can design ensure empathy?

A proposal for practical elements then is as follows.

- End of January - 3 Microbrands - Taking everyday objects and branding them. More and more things are becoming 'branded' so by taking everyday objects that are familiar, I will have to think hard about defining a problem related to that object and try to solve it through design. This will almost force me to think creatively too, since creativity thrives in experimentation and the unfamiliar - needless to say everyday objects are not unfamiliar.
- End of February - Rebrand of an Organisation - What this will allow me to do is use a weak example of a current organisation's brand and try to improve it. By using a real organisation, I can attempt to understand the needs of the audience and likewise the client, to make much more unified brand visuals, which would then strengthen the marketability of the brand.
- End of March - Innovative Design - Novel Ideas add to the viral qualities of a product or company. What I propose for this project would be to create something more conceptual, to push the boundaries of my own creativity and design abilities. An example of this would be a musician's website and visual identity. Since brand communication's can take many forms, combining the sound artist's music with visual representations can help to create a coherent identity for that artist.
- End of April - Public Campaign - Brands are made not always to sell a product but simply to promote an idea or unite people under one entity. Some ideas for this would include creating a public logo for protest or an idea to promote awareness for a problem such as smoking. Some influences for this could be the THINK adverts for drink driving and the Black Fist symbol to represent black minorities.
- May/June - Live Project - Leaving this until later in the year so I have time for preparation, I will attempt to find a live client with a requirement for a new or refined identity.

- End of July - Final Major Project - To expand on my knowledge and ability to design, but to furthermore expand on my ability to define and solve ideas creatively I will attempt to design with the intention of changing perceptions. As for now, an initial idea is to create a fictional golf company with the intention of getting younger people into golf; to change the perception that golf is an older man's sport.

Re-assessment of Abstract (12/1/15)

My previous proposal concerned the marketability of brands, but looking at this slightly more subjectively it will be harder to assess the qualitative outcomes of my practice based research without linking my work to real-life clients. However, still looking at how to create successful branding, this will change to looking at problem defining for the best creative solutions. Successfulness is a vague term and it is this that I need to narrow down in order to create better more original research. Thus, I believe the work should follow a theme of problem defining, and to discover and attempt to prove a method of creating creative brand identities that aesthetically portray the visual mission of the brand in question.

What will be the recurring theme of these projects then is how to best visually brand a product or organisation to encapsulate that brand's image and missions.

Time Schedule:

Having completed the first project and looking closer at what other projects are to come, I have self-initiated deadlines for my projects.

- Air - 6th February (2 weeks)
- Salt and Pepper - 23rd January (2 weeks)
- Love Lumber – 20th February (2 weeks)
- Band's Conceptual Brand - 6th March (2 weeks)
- J20 rebrand - 27th March (3 weeks)
- Zombie Survival Guide - 17th April (3 Weeks)
- Digital Media Brand - 8th May (3 weeks)
- Oak on the Green - 5th June (4 weeks)
- Hashtag -3rd July (4 weeks)
- Golf Brand – 31st July (4 weeks)

I feel splitting the year into many small projects will be beneficial to strengthening my ability of designing efficiently - defining the problem and then solving that problem visually.

Each brand above will try and tackle something new in terms of visual identities and approaches, but since this is still early, I will try and find live briefs if possible and those above are subject to change.

Revised more In-depth Timeline (20/1/15)

Plan for Practical Research

Air (Complete)

A condensed visual identity (or 'microbrand') that is a satirical take on selling bottles of air. This will serve as an awareness campaign for the pollution of our planet. This will include a logo, website and advertising stationery.

Salt And Pepper (Complete)

Another microbrand to serve as an infographic for audiences concerning the correct use of these seasonings. This will include a logo, website and advertising stationery.

Love Lumber

Third microbrand that attempts creatively represent a charity that protects and grows trees and forestry. This will include a logo, website and advertising stationery.

J20 Rebrand (Due 13th March)

This is a student competition however the brief guidelines are a strong example of my intended research. Popular soft drink Company J20 would like a reimagining of their current logo and packaging, which would help draw in an older target audience.

Gavin DeGraw Music Brand (Due 03rd April)

Bands are a growing representation of visual identities and are often misrepresented through logos or other aspects. This will be an experimental project whereby the design is influenced directly from the music in order to attain a creative representation of the artist.

Digital Media Brand (Due 24th April)

The BA Digital media course at CCCU is a growing course and from experience there was a vague understanding of the course from entering students. By giving the course a visual identity of its own, it may help to not only attract new students but to inform those entering the course.

Zombie Survival Kit (Due 15th May)

This may be a very fictional based project but this could be required in order to show that visual identities can be given in theory to any project. Design Thinking is not only about meeting clients brief but to explore creative values and this will allow a clever collaboration between the two.

Golf Brand (Due 12th June)

A larger project, this will encompass all aspects of design to create a complete visual identity for a fictional brand. Golf is seen by many as an older man's sport, and this will be a creative endeavour to conceptualise a visual identity and campaign that will encourage younger people to get into the sport.

Hashtag (Due 10th July)

Global protests have always sparked creative outcomes; one example would be the black fist. With current technology people protest on social networks, creating online communities. The recent Charlie Hebdo attacks led to a widespread online gathering under the Hashtag 'Je Suis Charlie'. This project will aim to create a symbol or single flag to represent and unite these global protests with reference to togetherness that technology and social networks provide.

February Update – Microbrands and Being Critical (3/2/15)

With the conclusion of the three Microbrands to kick off the practical based research, I have felt I'm attacking the research too loosely, and need a better set of definitive research questions to pursue in order to keep the research in tangent with my ambitions. This will be something to note in the coming weeks as careful consideration will be taken into account, as these will likely be the one's I follow through to the end of the year. What I have begun to think about is the psychological processes when I am designing. The Microbrands were difficult because it is hard to think creatively about such common objects, but even with these three projects under my belt I see progression. The love lumber is by far has the strongest potential for a viable visual identity, and this is because I experimented more with the previous two, and was more critical in trying to perfect it. What I'm questioning in reflection however is why? Why was I more experimental? Why was I more critical when trying to refine it? What I can say with certainty is that experimentation and reflection are important into the viability of a brand, so the research questions will definitely consider this.

March Update - Key Disciplines and Objectives (10/3/15)

Design Thinking: An in-depth analysis of the creative process behind designing visual identities. [Working Research Title]

Problem - Graphic design is a combination of a creative process and design intuition. I want to explore my own methods of creative production specifically within branding to encourage a stronger understanding of my own design methods and a better capability of Design Thinking.

What's out there? – Massimo Vignelli's Canon, Robin Landa's Graphic Design Solutions and Michael Janda's Burn Your Portfolio are among just a small selection of literature that attempt to dissect the creative process. As well as this many designers and agencies such as Jacob Cass, Sean Wes and Airside share their creative process online displaying differences in their methods.

Approach - Visual Identity briefs, exploring business, public awareness and creativity will allow me to best explore my own methods. A range of different objectives and requirements will lead to a quantitative research methodology, whereby the processes I will attempt to define will perhaps differ from project to project. As well as this, having different briefs will require me to look differently at each objective, strengthening my Design Thinking abilities.

Result - (See Thesis plan and practical projects plan below) Through exploring my own creative processes for designing visual identities and having a better design intuitiveness, I will have a portfolio of work that embodies the professional applications of my research and a thesis that will define the key disciplines within this process. This will also analyse my final designs in reflection of my research questions.

Research Questions

- What are the key disciplines and stages within my own design process?
- Apart from aesthetic properties how can I improve the viability of a visual identity?
- Design Thinking is a very intuitive process, how closely can it be defined to enable it to be integrated within a descriptive workflow?
- What are the key constituents to a brand identity; is a logo enough or must it be outputted to as many media outlets as possible?

Review Meeting Key Notes (17/3/15)

- Focus on more literature to date, comprehensive analysis of work, case studies of other designers, and further literature review.
- Clarify my own definition of 'Design Thinking'; explain how aesthetics operates and my methodology in conjunction.
- Brand Identities are mechanisms to persuade, internal semiotics - creating a pre-linguistic set of iconic imagery.
- Roland Barthes psychology methodologies.
- Look at methodology strategies, ways of analysing work and looking at my own projects in comparison with other designer's workflows.

- As well as previous point, critically analyse others workflows, pick apart and examine pros/cons and utilize them within my own work.
- Other designer's work. Examine projects and cognition, why are they working?
- Joseph Boyce - Essays by Art.
- Relationship between designer>client>user. Put more emphasis on the end point not product.
- Re-examine the briefs, need to be more client based.
- Neville Brody, design sensibility.
- Meet with people surrounding briefs as well as subject choice. E.g., golfers, sportsmen, musicians etc.

Adjustments to projects (8/4/15)

Since the Review I have examined what my peers said about the level of interaction between the client and myself, the designer, being an important role in the design process. Previously I have been thinking greatly from a creative point of view, but think it would be advantageous to implement this idea. After talking to a few potential clients I have had to be picky about which to pursue, since this is a Master's Degree I need to find the balance freelance work and academic research. I have since spoken to a creative partner at an advertising agency and discussed what to do in this situation.

The new plan for the work then would be as follows.

- Establish more client-based projects. Eliminating ideas I had with no client side prospects (for example the 'Hashtag' Project)
- Research the creative brief process and how designers write them.
- Set myself those briefs as if I was a business owner with no design experience, therefore taking considerations to the consumer message and corporate values I have to portray.
- Carry on with projects as I was but with the shaping of a more professional and strict creative brief that resembles live projects.
- The assignments I had proposed earlier in the year were great ideas for creative endeavours but resembled more personal projects than professional. Since designing visual identities is a very business orientated task, it would be best to use this method of having a fictional client as well as a fictional brief.
- Like I mentioned previously, many of the clients I did find that were possibilities for re-branding were very strict in terms of what they required in terms of technology and when they required it. Although this is the industry, I would not have been able to balance all these clients at once as well as the academic responsibilities of this Masters.

Client Based Projects (12/4/15)

In the previous journal entry I mentioned the plan of creating my own briefs that would be industry standard and representative of a real client. Since then I have re-examined my projects and timeline.

K-Works Blacksmith [April]

[Real Client] A local blacksmith is lacking a website and any form of brand identity. He is looking for more customers and to be seen as a reputable business so I have offered him my services. The main considerations he wants to take into account are the fact he creates bespoke items of metalwork than can be artistic and does not want to be represented as a manufacturer or a metal sculptor. I have agreed to work with this client because he is aware of my academic situation and is happy to fit this work around that.

Digital Media Course [May]

The Digital Media course at CCCU is one that promotes digital outlets of art, media and advertisement but they lack most of those in seeking their potential students. This project will be for the University course and aimed at potential students so that they can best market and inform that course to potential students.

Smoothie Shop [June]

Inspired by a company that I attempted to work with this will be a site that tries to promote a shop that sells freshly made smoothies using organic ingredients. The target audience would be a young adult demographic, 18-30 so needs to be trendy and sophisticated in its design. One key element needs to be highlighting the use of fresh nutritious ingredients within the company.

Project 4 – TBC [July]

Currently in talks with a gym owner to potentially redesign their company.

Golf Brand [August]

In talks with another potential client - A golf course currently has a membership organisation with no brand identity. The golf course is owned by the council but the membership runs separately and would require a brand identity and website. If this falls through a similar idea would exist with a fictional client, trying to aim a golf brand at younger audiences.

K-Works Update & Gyrodrift [Real Client] (30/4/15)

Since my last journal entry the K-works project has been well underway and nearing what I see as completion. Since this was a real client it was a great experience to try and both create a brand identity both my client and viewers would enjoy. The client has been very forthcoming with feedback and very supportive about

the designs I've employed. There were certain aspects he felt were key, for example he wanted to include an anvil in his final logo. I experimented with this and simple typographic ideas to simply give him an idea but he felt this was mandatory. I could see in some of my sketches that the logo were becoming overcrowded so came up with the idea of dissecting the logo into segments, each that could work together or singularly. This idea of secondary brand marks is something that is quite common in clothing-lines for different t-shirts, but applying it to construction made it very dynamic and I'm pleased with the results, as is the client. There will be an extensive write-up and analysis of the project in the coming days.

Moving forward to the next project then I have managed to secure another real client and live brief. I was in talks with a local gym but after talks we agreed that they were looking for someone to work more permanently within the company. However, I have found an alternate client called 'Gyrodrift'. A local mechanic specialising in modified cars and racing is looking to expand his horizons through a visual identity. The company has an amazing social media following with over 10,000 followers on Facebook, but lacks any visual identity at all. The client is keen to establish something now whilst the company is in prime growth so that it is something he can advertise and expand as a business. This will be an exciting project since there is a lot of creative potential in the brief that we have discussed and the positioning of my designs will be available as stickers and car decals, which is something I haven't previously explored. Although I had my doubts that this would be an immature project, meeting with the client and understanding the professionalism and the commercialism they are trying to employ make it something I see as worth doing. Not only this, when proposing my initial idea for the masters I proposed creating a sponsorship style branding such as Monster, Coca-Cola and Red Bull; although not in remotely the same revenue region there is a lot of promise for the future of the project. The brief will be available on the project page.

K-Works nearing completion, Questioning Client based projects processes. (4/5/15)

The K-Works project is nearing completion and the client is over the moon with it. He did let me have a lot of creative reign over this project so I felt I could really sink my teeth into it and offer something that he would truly love. An In-depth analysis can be found on the project site, which describes all of the client-talks, changes and results of this project.

He did want the site to be spot-on and there are quite a few things I need work out how to code in order for them to be presented this way. Unfortunately this has cut time-scale back a week or two and the stationary is yet to be completed. Rather than dwell on this, research is going to begin on my next project and the stationary will be completed in due course, as the client has no urgency for this.

I found with having a client there was a slightly different process at hand. Although it did not differ from my previous glimpses into analysing a workflow, it had more key stages that would needed to be included. As always, the initial design and research had to acknowledge the brief at all times, but when creating something for a client it seemed to be the final designs that ended up being manipulated and scrutinized more. Not to say what I had created is bad, but there was a need to keep the client informed about my design decisions, and a

to-and-fro conversation about how to tailor that to what the client had in mind. In simple terms, on a solo project I would be happy to say the logo was finished; with a client project, there was an extra stage of liaising in the final drafts to get to the final, polished and approved identity.

I felt though because this was the first comprehensive website I have built during this year; my workflow was more defined than the micro brands. I felt there although the visual identity is interlaced, there was distinguishability in the order of design elements. Although my research combined every aspect of the brand, I can almost certainly say it was the logo design that I felt the need to get perfect first. The logo is just part of a brand identity of course, but I knew if I could understand what this company is about, what it makes, what its values are and represent that successfully within the logo, then the rest of the brand assets should start to emerge (colour, shape, composition). When I had the logo almost complete, I felt that I could move on to the other design aspects of the website and stationery simply because I understood how and what to convey.

Semiotics / Smoothie Shop Research and Brief (10/5/15)

Theory

This week I've been trying to understand more about semiotics. The further I read and get involved with the design process the more I find the connection with semiotics. Semiotics is of course the study of making meaning, which is essentially what visual identities try to do. As a designer, I try and create a logo or set of symbols and typography that become symbolic of the brand I am designing for. Now that this is not ground-breaking knowledge I am trying to better understanding the process for doing this and trying to analyse my workflow in terms of semiotics, since this will allow me to better evaluate my process in the thesis. I've already established a basic workflow, but I need a clearer understanding of the particular choices I make in terms of establishing meaning within design. I have often coined this term as "Design Thinking" because within the creative process of coming to the final design I make certain choices that cannot be applied to a general descriptive workflow. Instead they are project specific, but have a representative of an underlying skill that I have learned to be able to recognize what design choices might lead to better visual communications. Looking at my next project, this is something I'm going to be thinking about considerably throughout the project, i.e. questioning myself more interrogatively to better describe the choices I make when designing. For example, it may be easy to get someone to learn to use Adobe Illustrator, but it's the mental processes whilst using the program that really defines the outcome of the design.

Practice

Foremost, due simply to timing of events and photography, I have switched my two projects of Gyro drift and the Smoothie Shop around. This was simply to save time and more efficiently manage my time. Whilst looking for clients I called a smoothie shop local to me. Unfortunately they were almost completing a rebrand so did not need my assistance, however they did offer some insights into their brief and their aims as a company which helped greatly. Firstly there was the problem that people preferred milkshakes and junk food

other healthy smoothies, so they wanted a brand that appeared trendy and cool as to invite younger audiences in. Secondly there was the problem that some people thought they were using diluted ingredients, so the importance of making it clear that fresh ingredients were used and all smoothies were made to order was important. The full brief, which I have created for my fictional smoothie shop, will be found on the project page.

My research for this project was at first fairly straightforward. I began by looking up competitor's designs and companies that have been profitable in the past and examine their design choices. Then I looked at general designs for the restaurant and bar sector as a whole since this would offer wider variety in design inspiration. However I began to think about trendy design, and trying to look unique in a high-street situation, so rather than looking at specific companies I began searching for unique colour and dynamic designs. My recent case study of Nordkyn was a great starting point and think this will be the direction that this project will go in. More research will take place as the project gets underway but the research so far has sparked me to do something more creative and adventurous with the next brand.

Meeting with supervisors – Re-establishment of goals and project (7/6/15)

Meeting with my supervisors and talking about the finished K-Works projects we all agreed that having real clients was more demanding on time, however they were more valuable as a project. Not only this, looking at my timetable and my prospects of research questions, it may prove a better solution if I were to make the projects with clients a priority and consider writing a more comprehensive thesis. This would give me a chance to make these projects the best I could, and result in a more critical reflection in a thesis format. Looking forward then, I shall be keeping the Gyrodrift and K-Works projects only, and be looking to write a final written element starting around August. This way I can refer back to my research questions and present a formal method of concluding the practical research.

Student Feedback and Seminar Brainstorming (12/6/15)

This week was an opportunity to share with fellow students on the MA course my WIP and current completed projects. I received really great as well as constructive criticism.

Some keynotes on my work were:

- Accentuate the Client's feedback, show in writing responses and conversations that led the project.
- Look at other ways of presenting work, the website works great to show the linearity of the process, but think big and incorporate things like video and motion graphics, or even the presentation of the final piece.
- Consider an end of year show/book/leaflet/website
- Consider focusing on one or two projects and expanding them. With visual identities it might be better if quality exceeds quantity (Refer to previous journal entry)

These are points I will raise with my supervisor as I think they could develop the project further. Moving forward from this I will have to take into account my practical work timetable as an end of year show would require me to start the final thesis early. Adhering to my supervisor's advice and the previous journal entry, adding video elements or expanding projects might require me to remove one or two projects from my previous plan due to time constraints.

Plan for summer – Limited supervision (28/6/15)

Practical

- Complete Gyrodrift project
- Image brochure for referencing in thesis
- Consider end of year show and design of this

Written

- Final Thesis
- Analysis of Gyrodrift project
- More Case Studies
- Journal entries during thesis period

Summer Timetable

- 10th July - Gyrodrift project complete, All analysis of projects done
- 17th July - Comprehensive thesis plan, 1000 words of thesis
- 31st July - Analysis Section of thesis complete
- 31st August – Creative Process section of thesis complete
- 5th September – Thesis Complete, at least first complete draft sent to supervisors
- 30th September - All final adjustments made, everything documented and photographed, all work ready for submission.

Gyrodrift reaching completion/ Essay starting (15/7/15)

The Gyrodrift project will be finished in a couple of days and the client is very pleased. There was a lot more correspondence concerning the direction of the project since the client has never had a solid identity before. He liked the ability to change the way gyrodrift looked and when presented with the logo ideas he actually like most of them. I had to dictate slightly and say why the chosen design is the best but this is where Design Thinking comes into play, as it is the intuition of understand the potential of a design that separates

myself from the client. There was a lot of struggle within this project for timing, since there was a lot of conflict between my availability and his. Not only this, I haven't been able to get the photography yet. This is for two reasons, firstly there are no media technicians on campus to be able to hire equipment, and more importantly, the car the client would like photograph is not finished. However, if anything, I see this as a great exercise; having problems will ultimately make me better at improvising, and not only this, I'm having to think more conceptually about the final design.

Rather than panic, I have begun drafting my final thesis. Looking at a quick reflection of my work in comparison to my research questions I have determined a method for analysing the year's work. Firstly, through analysis of literature and what's out there. This will form a basis for argument into defining and describing the process of Design Thinking. Secondly will be a critical reflection of the practical portfolio. This will act as a distinguisher between the visuals of my designs and a thorough description of my thought process during each project. Thirdly will be a description of a creative process that acknowledges Design Thinking. This will encourage my own definition of Design Thinking and help extrapolate key aspects of it.