we're rerturning to celtworld

Return to Celtworld is an artistic practice and fictional Irish folklore brand. The project takes inspiration not from Irish folklore itself but the educational amusement park Celtworld, which briefly operated in Tramore, Co.Waterford during the early 1990s. The practice prioritises a found-object approach, using AI-generated imagery and clip art to examine the construction of cultural identity in a global world.

This process is a continuation and expansion upon themes prevalent in my work during Unit 2. Throughout my explorations, a focus on materiality and artefact emerged. I was, and continue to be, interested in our relationship to the physical objects and intangible data which complement human existence.

As this line of enquiry evolved, I came to focus on the role data and objects play in memorialization. Indeed, we often do not consider the sentimental value conferred unto artefacts until the time of death. Upon a person's passing, it is the items and online remnants left behind that speak of their erstwhile existence. Through death their value is transformed. Pursuing my enquiry into this new territory, I experimented with forms linked to traditional Irish funerary customs. These experiments led me to consider wider cultural questions surrounding the values (or lack thereof) which we place on certain objects and aesthetic choices.

Oral histories play a chief role in this, and form much of the source material upon which my work is based. Throughout Unit 2, I have employed a range of techniques from collage (using personal belongings) to interviews, in order to gather and retell personal stories. This human element grounds my work, allowing me to question the artefacts and aesthetic choices we deem as worthy vessels for our tales.

Return to Celtworld embodies all of this, contextualising it within a project that speaks to Ireland's emergence as a modern nation on the world stage. The project's use of found clip-art and stock imagery evokes a circular, mutable model of cultural creation whereby icons are produced, disseminated, and reconfigured . An example of this might be...

The original cultural icon is...

recontextualized in a global setting...

before being reintegrated and deployed within its original national context

Text-to-image generators exemplify this as they are trained using an unquantifiable stockpile of online sources. Thus they may be seen to act as a creative filter which can deliver distilled versions of a limited range of cultural forms. The synthesization of a cultural icon via collation.

Such icons are disseminated via domestic, low-brow forms. *Return to Celtworld*, as a merchandise brand, plays with the notions of value and taste that are, as such, part of this dissemination. By evoking these forms as a valid medium through which to tell personal histories, the practice challenges preconceptions of which objects are deemed artistically and intellectually significant. Can a cheap t-shirt speak to the inherent complexities of a state, its postcolonial insecurities and unsure footing in the world?

In all of this, the personal recountings that adorn the range of *Return to Celtworld* merchandise play a key role. Grounding it in sincerity and putting foremost emphasis on the real lives and lived experiences of the people who (might) interact with such objects on a daily basis. If such forms cannot speak to wider cultural epochs, then perhaps they can at least allude to those who live through them.

Photos:

General Mills (2022) *Lucky Charms* [Cereal].

Paddywagon Tours (2022) *Paddywagon Tours* [Logo]. Available at: shorturl. at/imtGN (Accessed: 8 Nov 2022).

Unknown (1900) *Leprechaun Engraving* [Engraving]. https://commons. wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leprechaun_ engraving_1900.jpg (Accessed: 8th Nov 2022).

*Return to Celtworld* T-Shirt featuring an AI-generated graphic.

Back detail featuring a quote taken from a *Return to Celtworld* interview.

Playing with Tradition: Clay pipes were once an important part of Irish funerary customs. The pipes above contain NFC chips that embed a song into each object to create a memorial playlist.

100 iterations of a 3d pot

Making 100 iterations of the same 3D-rendered pot can be dull. This is, in itself, valuable as it frees the mind to wander and discover trains of thought one may not usually consider. In creating version upon version of this same vessel, my mind kept returning to questions of value, and the values we place upon certain objects. How these are linked to the materiality which constitutes their forms, but also the fluctuating cultural contexts in which these forms occur. Macro considerations, which constitute the micro personal relationships we project upon, and navigate through, the objects which define our lives.
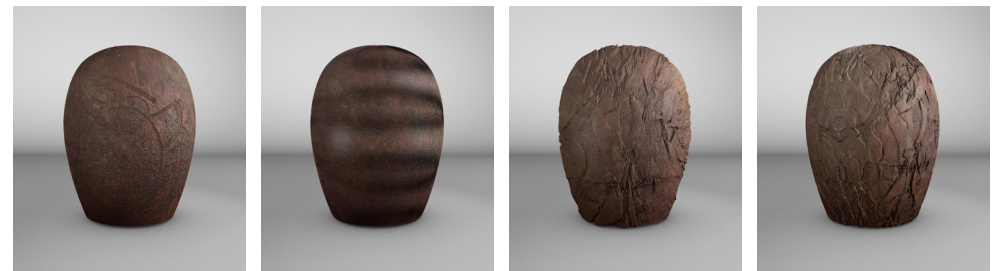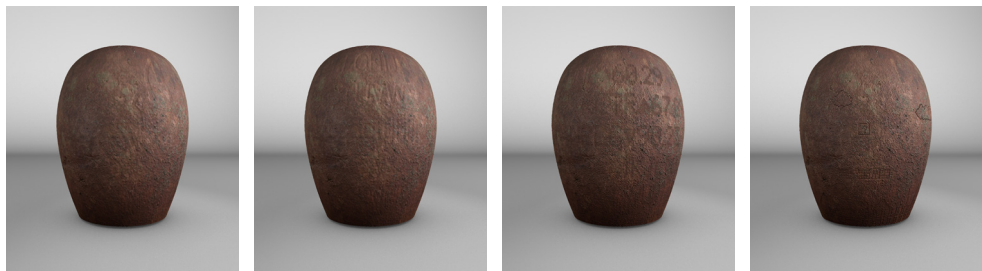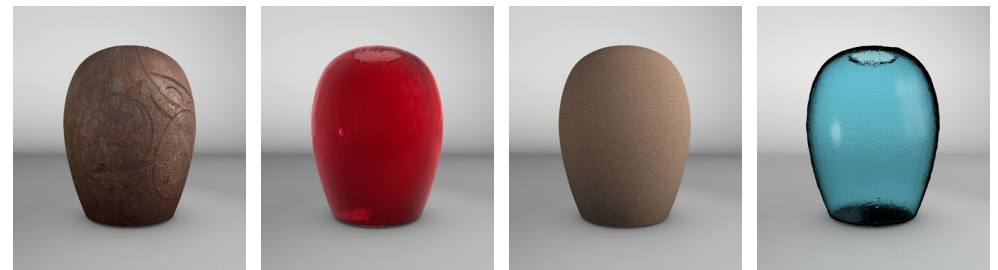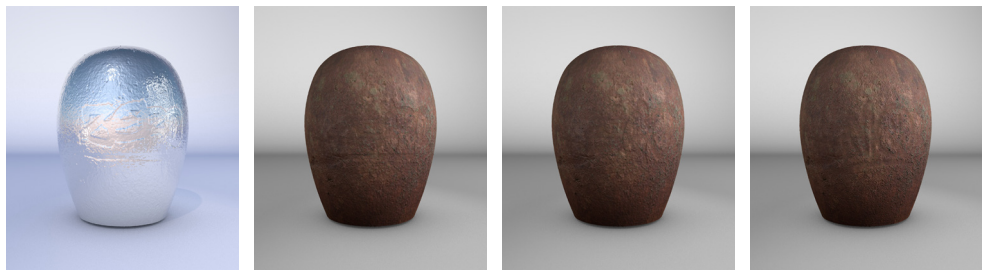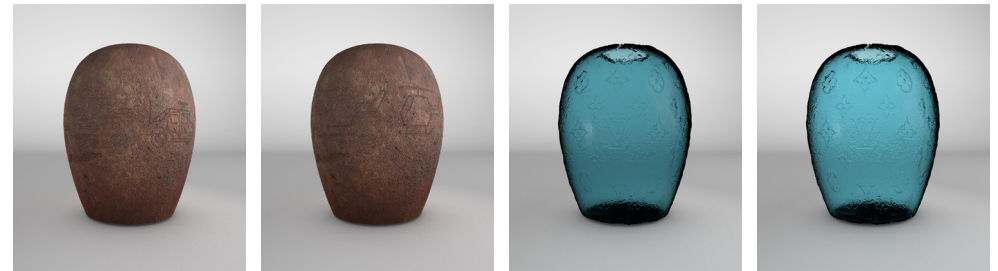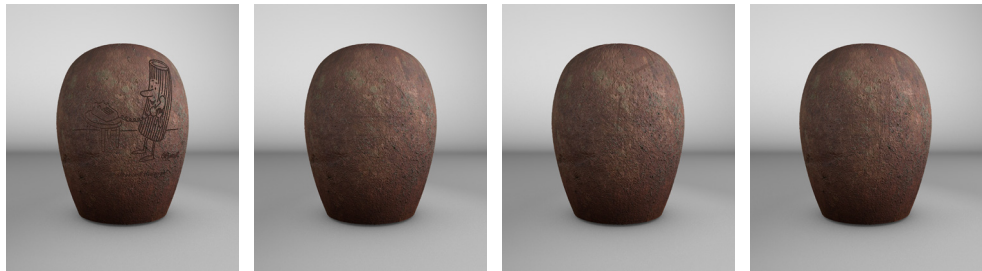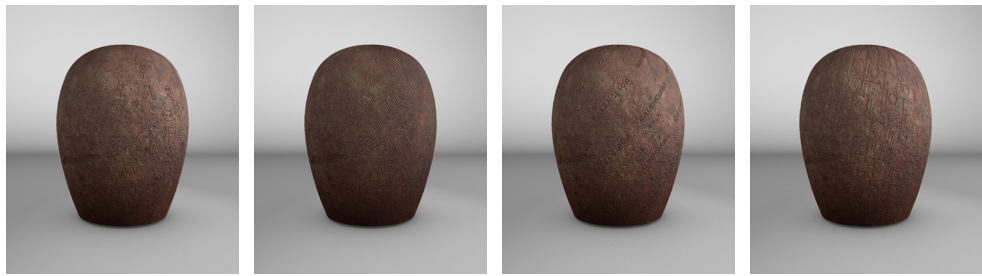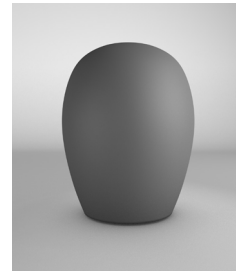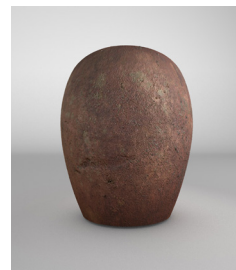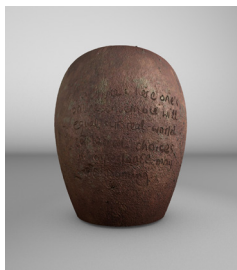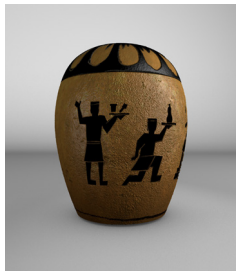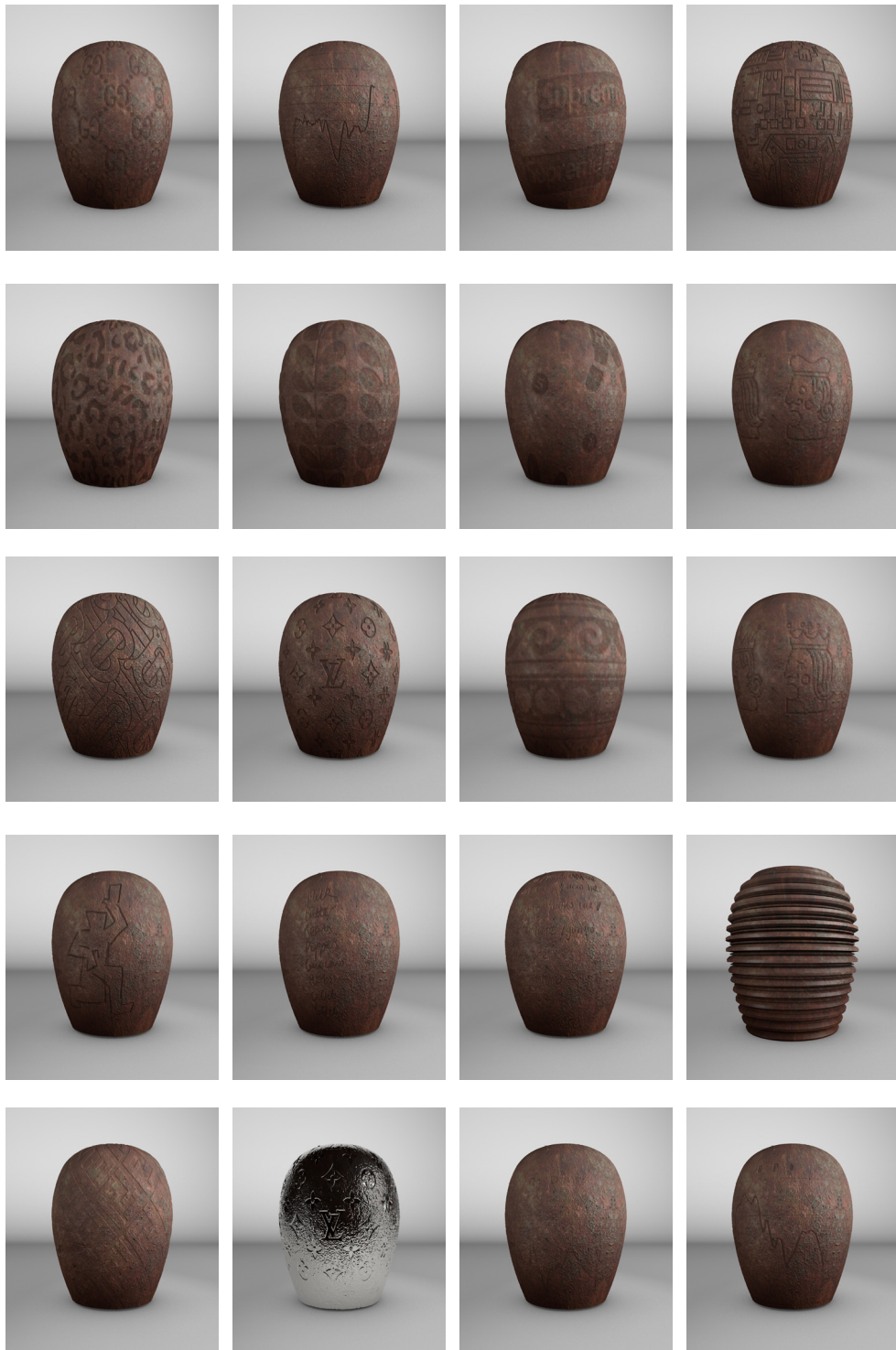
Previous Work : Morrison, D. (2017) *Triggers.*
Each participant was asked to bring an item which recalled a person from their
life. The publication consists of interviews about these remembered figures
alongside photos of said objects.

David Morrison

extended critical analysis

Arnold, M, Gibbs, M, Kohn, T, Meese, J, & Nansen, B. (2017)
Death and Digital Media.
London : Taylor & Francis Group. Available at: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/UAL/detail.action?docID=5185493# (Accessed:26 /05/22).

Death and Digital Media constitutes a comprehensive primer on a field that is seldom discussed yet increasingly relevant to us all. As life moves evermore online, we may wish to reflect upon the consequences that such a shift portends for our conceptions of death and the traditions surrounding it. This book presents such issues in a concise academic form, examining the most common me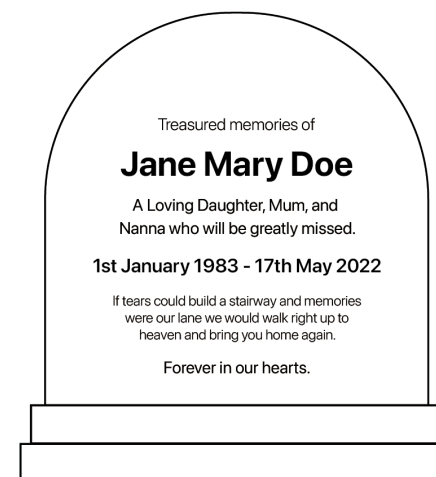diums and media we interact with on a daily basis - including the social media sites that define our age. The wide-reaching implications of said research are reflected in the rhetorical tone of the text, which eschews overtly academic writing to find a more balanced voice that is direct and comprehensible. One wonders if such a choice was consciously influenced by the direct applicability of the book's subject matter to daily life and a desire to render its content more accessible. In considering such content, this analysis shall focus on one of the text's primary concerns: an examination of the materiality of online spaces and their suitability as sites for mourning and remembrance. The implications for the field of graphic design in relation to this are significant, if not simply due to the role designers play in moulding digital frameworks.

Contemplating materiality and endurance, one might assume that dematerialized and decentralised information lasts longer than any offline physical totem. 'Once it's on the internet, it's there forever', is a phrase that is often taken as a truism. Arnold et al. are quick to quash such a notion, noting that "Internet Service Providers and other internet hosts go out of business, domain names expire, network protocols change, mark-up languages such as HTML come and go" (pp. 35). Underlining this declaration of decay is a mutability in form; a disposition towards change which, when viewed through the lens of visual communication, inculpates the field of graphic design.

To suggest the involvement of graphic designers in the wider arena of the afterlife online is a purely aesthetic matter would, of course, be myopic at best. Throughout the many facets of this subject that Arnold et al. tackle, one can see the role of a designer implicated in nearly all. Designers play a role in creating websites such as Goodtrust, who guide the still-living through the task of creating a will for their online data. MyHeritage.com surely enlisted the help of designers to create their (rather ghastly) online tool for animating photos of the deceased. Perhaps more perturbing again, a company Eterni.me proposed building an online digital avatar of the deceased with which descendants can converse; a project that would, one can be assured, require some sharp webdesign based upon a firmly established company style guide. For the sake of brevity, however, let us return to a more baseline example that illustrates the role of graphic designers in all this.

In the physical realm, gravestones and other memorial markers most-often stand unchanged until eroded by the passing of time. The typographic choices inherent in such artefacts are literally set in stone and tend to conform to a certain aesthetic mode. In contrast, the social media accounts we leave behind are fast becoming memorial markers in their own right; something acknowledged by Facebook itself which now allows the preservation of profiles as memorial pages to the deceased. The typographic choices at play her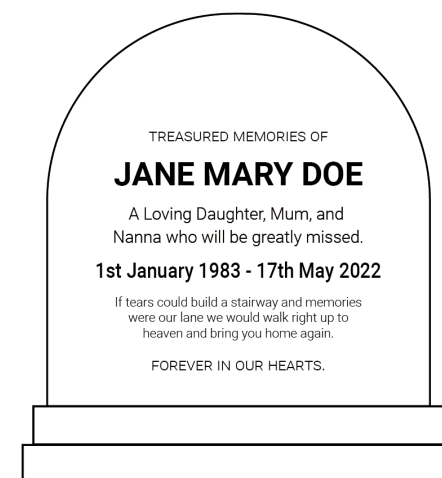e are, in contrast to traditional graves, not static. Indeed a designer creating the new company style guide for such a company could be seen as making a typographic choice for the digital gravestones of millions of users. This constitutes an example of how, as Adam Greenfield points out, modern life (and now it seems death) necessitates entanglement in a global corporatised network. The implication of graphic designers in this network serves as an example of the often discussed conflict between criticality and commerce that stalks the discipline. As supranational corporations become the primary mediators of our modes of remembrance, what are the ethics at play when we design on their behalf?

Treasured memories of

Jane Mary Doe

A Loving Daughter, Mum, and
Nanna who will be greatly missed.

1st January 1983 - 17th May 2022

If tears could build a stairway and memories
were our lane we would walk right up to
heaven and bring you home again.

Forever in our hearts.

iOS Standard

Treasured memories of

Jane Mary Doe

A Loving Daughter, Mum, and
Nanna who will be greatly missed.

1st January 1983 - 17th May 2022

If tears could build a stairway and memories
were our lane we would walk right up to
heaven and bring you home again.

Forever in our hearts.

Youtube Logo-Standard.

Treasured memories of

Jane Mary Doe

A Loving Daughter, Mum, and
Nanna who will be greatly missed.

1st January 1983 - 17th May 2022

If tears could build a stairway and memories
were our lane we would walk right up to
heaven and bring you home again.

Forever in our hearts.

Twitter Standard.
(271 characters total)

TREASURED MEMORIES OF

JANE MARY DOE

A Loving Daughter, Mum, and
Nanna who will be greatly missed.

1st January 1983 - 17th May 2022

If tears could build a stairway and memories
were our lane we would walk right up to
heaven and bring you home again.

FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS.

Android Standard

TREASURED MEMORIES OF

Jane Mary Doe

A Loving Daughter,
Mum, and Nanna.

WHO WILL BE GREATLY MISSED.

1st January 1983 - 17th May 2022

If tears could build a stairway and memories
were our lane we would walk right up to
heaven and bring you home again.

Forever in our hearts.

Geocity Tech

[TREASURED MEMORIES OF]

JaneMaryDoe

A Loving Daughter,
Mum, and Nanna.

Who will be greatly missed.

1st January 1983 - 17th May 2022

If tears could build a stairway and memories
were our lane we would walk right up to
heaven and bring you home again.

Forever in our hearts.

Geocity Blogger

Askin, C. (2021) *Cameron's World***. Available at: https://www.cameronsworld.net (Accessed: 25/05/22).**

Cameron's World proffers a return to the aesthetics of the earlier internet; a web page defined by violent colour, chaotic typography, and a dizzying range of GIFs dancing out of step. Moreover and more importantly, the site constitutes an archiving practice that eschews contemporary design conventions to engage with the formal and aesthetic qualities of its subject matter. Scrolling through Askin's page, we are invited to explore manifold embedded links in a manner that feels random and playful. Here signs and signifiers are cast asunder as users have no real clues as to which of the many images and animations will cause their mouse pointer to invite further enquiry. All-in-all the site does a great job at evoking the sense of newness and potential discovery of the earlier internet, as well as its lack of a potent overarching design philosophy.

It is this latter point that I would like to examine in further detail, particularly as it relates to the role of graphic design in an mutable online world. Regarding the aesthetics of the by-gone internet, one can see a distinct emphasis (at least in the realm of blogs) on individuality, experimentation, and self-expression. The overall impression is one of vernacular design, of local parishes that may share some commonalities with other sites of a similar theme. The internet-of-today presents an entirely different story; a cleanly designed, organised, and functioning adult to the disorderly teenager of yesteryear. A disorganisation, but also a creativity and form of expression, that graphic designers have helped quash in the name of standardisation.

Indeed such a contrast provides a neat visual example of the encroachment upon all of our lives by the corporate world. As noted above, our existence as mediated through technology (but really even without it) is now inherently linked to a supra-national web of actors ranging from inter-governmental entities to tech companies. Leaving all judgements aside (many people, I'm certain, love the Corporate Memphis style), one

==does have to ponder what has been lost in this transition.==
The foundational mythos of the internet could be described as libertarian in ideology, a free flow of ideas without boundaries - a conception that engenders many problems to be sure. Does such a description still hold, however, when speaking of the internet-of-today? Could one claim such when entities such as Facebook can claim near monopolisation of the internet in many countries? What was lost in such a transition and was it worth keeping intact?

==Graphic designers may wish to ponder upon such questions, given that the profession can be seen as a facilitatory force in this evolution.== In such a context, sites like Cameron's World are able to provide valuable spaces in which to reflect upon changes to the internet as a whole. Changes which are, of course, reflective of the society that created them and the values it holds dear.

Bibliography - Extended Critical Analyses:

Greenfield, A. (2017) *Radical Technologies.* London: Verso, pp. 9–30.

Laranjo, F. (2014) 'Critical Graphic Design: Critical of What?', *Modes of Criticism*. 18 April. Available at: https://modesofcriticism.org/critical-graphic-design/ (Accessed: 29/05/22).

Wallace,S.(2020) '*In the Developing World, Facebook Is the Internet*', Medium. 6 September. Available at: https://medium.com/swlh/in-the-developing-world-facebook-is-the-internet-14075bfd8c5e (Accessed: 29/05/22)

annotated bibliography

Annotated Bibliography.

Reading List.

Fritsch, M. (2015) *The Story of Technoviking: Short Version.* **Available at: https://vimeo.com/140265561 (Accessed 26/05/22)**

Ari Stillman's 2014 article Virtual Graveyard: Facebook, Death, and Existentialist Critique promotes an idea, in the context of social media, that identities are collectively constructed. Matthias Fritsch's work offers ample evidence for such a theory, delineating the story of an unnamed individual whose identity becomes subsumed by that of a meme. Interestingly, due to legal reasons, Fritsch is unable to show the true 'Techno Viking' throughout the film. This presents a creative opportunity - how does one convey and characterise an individual's likeness without showing them at all? In my own practice I took a similar approach, using objects and music (artefacts traditionally associated with mourning).

Greenfield, A. (2017) *Radical Technologies.* **London: Verso, pp. 9–30.**

In the first chapter of his book Radical Technologies, Adam Greenfield examines the dematerialization of everyday objects whose functions have been subsumed by the hegemony of our smartphones. My work started by playing with this notion of dematerialization; relating it to the mundane objects that we interact with on a daily basis. By digitally cataloguing such items, I am examining the creation of data which, whilst nebulous, does require a physical storage space of some manner to exist. In doing so, I hope viewers will consider how everyday objects may act as narrative devices which tell the story of their existence. In a similar manner, the throwaway photos we upload online can also be seen to constitute a comparable form of narrative data.

Greenfield goes on to speak about the inherent involvement in our lives of the networked market and the supranation-

al companies who underline it. Tied to the network, even in death we can no longer escape this fact. I considered graphic design's role in this by examining the typography of the memorial markers we leave behind. Where once a gravestone stood unaltered until eroded by time, now the aesthetic of one's online memorial conforms to whatever current style guide is being adopted by tech's big players.

Haraway, D. (1988) 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies* **(Vol.14, No.3), pp.575-599. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066 (Accessed: 05/05/22).**

Haraway is critical of the unexamined ideology of scientific objectivity that informs our society and its technological advances. In contrast, she argues for a situated stance in which meaning exists in an active space between subject and object. Through my own practice, I have explored such a rhetorical space by examining the intersection between personhood and standardised forms of media and technology.

In my 3D experiments I have created sculptural works using my own body as a creative tool, as well as using scanning to catalogue the unremarkable items which define our lives. In this way, a sense of the self can be garnered and amplified by digital means; a practice which becomes important as we consider the afterlife online. Here the conflict between the situated-subject and the objective (digital) world interplays with tensions between institutional and personal modes of remembrance; made more complicated still by the role tech companies play in our existence.

As data is perhaps the primary byproduct of said existence, I engaged with my own biometrics in a subjective, tactile manner. Interfaces, such as those for interpreting medical information must conform to standardised forms in order to facilitate widespread use. This does not, however, speak to the personal nature of data nor the manifold, personal ways in which people process it.

David Morrison

Steyerl, H. (2021) *The Wretched of the Screen*. **Berlin: Sternberg Press. pp. 31-45.**

The digital degradation at the heart of Steyerl's composition provoked me to reflect further upon the tension between our subjective selves and the purportedly objective frameworks that mediate our lives online. For Steyerl, the degraded JPG reflects a shared, collaborative artefact that decays due to the very fact of its proliferation. I found this concept to be deeply humanising and emotive, and sought to incorporate it into my work. We tend to think of digital spaces as permanent. In reality, such spaces are far from eternal. Indeed, they are contingent on a vast range of variables including (decaying) hyperlinks, (outdated) markup languages, (unmaintained) servers, and many more. I explored making such digital decay visible in my website prototypes. A digital funeral pyre acts as a shared space in which 3D objects can be collected, only then to be deleted upon a set date. In another, a web page solicits donations in order to remain active; rendering clear the economic and structural imperatives that underline it.

Own Reading.

Arnold, M, Gibbs, M, Kohn, T, Meese, J, & Nansen, B. (2017) *Death and Digital Media*. **London : Taylor & Francis Group. Available at: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/UAL/ detail.action?docID=5185493# (Accessed:26 /05/22).**

This comprehensive overview of an emerging field provided ample food for thought and informed my practice as I narrowed my focus to on the afterlife online. Providing insight into a wide breadth of topics, from the practicalities of dealing with the data of the departed and innovations in the funerary world, the book illuminates several overarching themes that informed my projects. The work's focus on the spatial qualities of the online world, its limitations and possibilities as a site of remembrance, led me to consider notions of materiality and immateriality as they relate to personhood and mourning.

I was also taken by the book's contrast of vernacular and institutional modes of mourning; the former being naturally promoted by the medium of the internet. Responding to this, I sought ways to merge traditional and more individual modes of remembrance in ways that combined tactile and digital materials.

Harbisson, N. (2016) *The Renaissance of Our Species* **[Speech]. MuseumNext New York. November. Available at: https://www.museumnext.com/article/the-re- naissance-of-our-species/ (Accessed: 05/05/22).**

In his 2016 talk The Renaissance of Our Species Neil Harbisson expounds upon his desire to "become technology", a process he has pursued with maximalist vigour via a literal incorporation of hardware. The world's first legally recognized cyborg, Harbisson's most prominent sensory extension allows him to hear colour and experience this facet of sight which we take for granted in novel ways. As a diabetic who wears a (albeit removable) chip in my arm, I find Harbisson's embrace of technology as a creative medium fascinating.Through a combination of his pre-existing biology and incorporated hardware Harbisson is essentially able to use his body as a tool for art by creatively interpreting data.

In my own practice, I have followed a line of enquiry that explores this intersection between physical biology and immaterial data. By posing my own body and using 3D-scanning equipment, I have experimented with a form of sculpting that is immediate, direct, and near-tactile in technique. My iterations using my Libre-Link sensor have involved reinterpreting my blood sugar data into a form that is more personal and subjective to me. In doing so, I chose to render the results in the form of a flipbook as this felt in-keeping with my background in literature and my practice as a whole.

David Morrison

Lapper, E. (2017) 'How Has Social Media Changed the Way We Grieve?' In U. U. Frömming, S. Köhn, S. Fox, & M. Terry (eds.), *Digital Environments: Ethnographic Perspectives Across Global Online and Offline Spaces*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, pp. 127–142. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1xxrxw.12 (Accessed 25/5/22)

Ellen Lapper writes of the "digital traces" (pp.128) we leave behind, comparing them to physical tokens of remembrance. Reading this affirmed the direction my work was already taking and further reading gave me a vocabulary by which to better define my practice. Lapper goes on to cite Ari Stillman's notion of "collaborative identity construction" (pp. 136), which is based upon a person's Facebook wall. This is an idea I explored directly, collating a host of objects from a deceased person's instagram to populate a predetermined poster template. Such an exercise confronted the possibilities of knowing someone via a truncated definition of their life, whilst also offering a potential avenue for mourning by functioning as a printable funeral pyre. As my project continued I further explored this capacity of digital traces to function as characterising devices, tying them to physical tokens of remembrance. In this respect I found playlists / mixtapes to be of particular interest, as immaterial phenomena that have conveyed personal meaning whether consumed via digital or analogue means.

Tait, A. (2019) 'What happens to our online identities when we die?', *The Guardian*, 2 June.
Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/jun/02/digital-legacy-control-online-identities-when-we-die
(Accessed: 05/05/22).

The entanglement of our lives with technology is a truism, a melding that goes unquestioned as we live our days partly through a screen. In volume, our online data comprises a vast inheritance that we leave to the world upon our passing. Yet such a collection of information is, by definition, immaterial and therefore this fact hardly feels concrete.

David Morrison

funeral pyre.
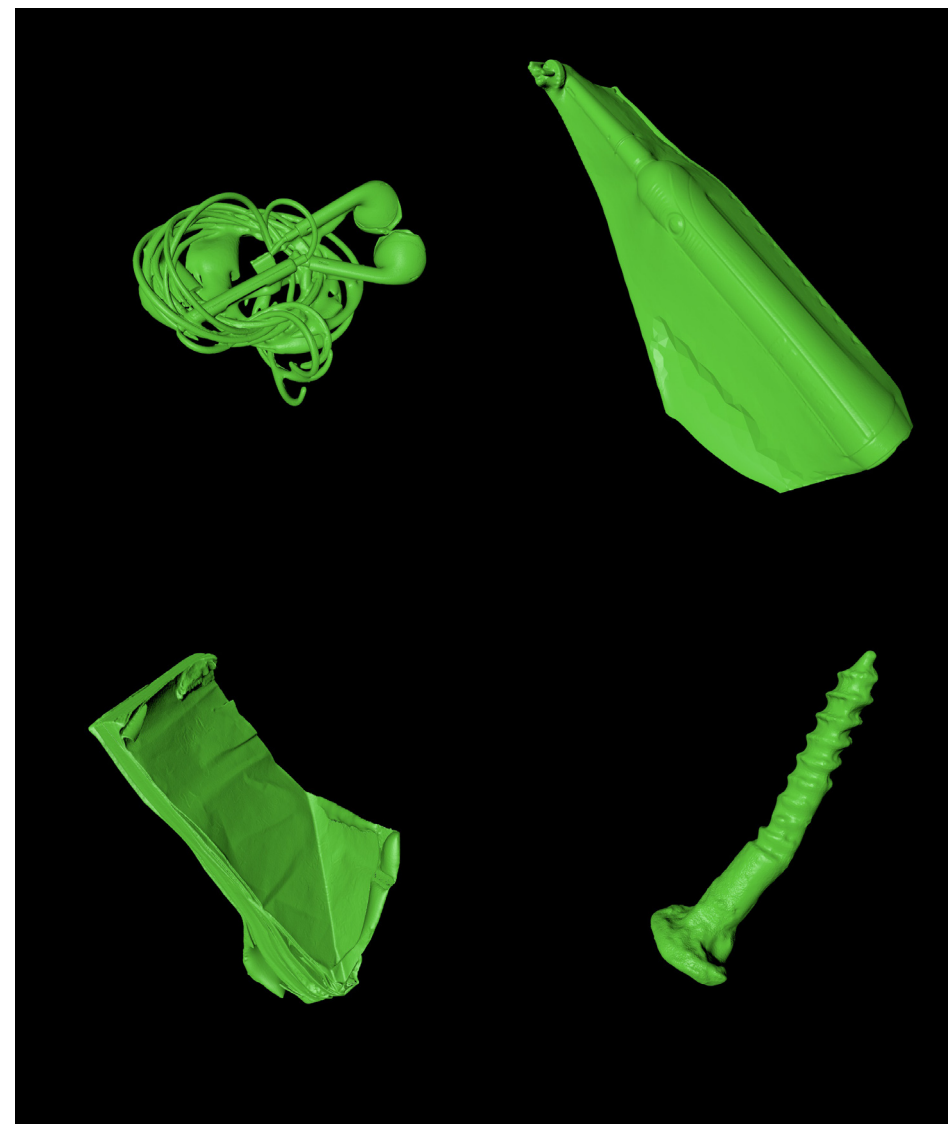
Thinking about the physical reminders we leave behind, often the mind is drawn to the tokens which represent us best. Upon the grave of a keen footballer one might expect to find a pair of boots and memorabilia of the deceased's club of choice. During our lifetimes however, our day-to-day interactions are often defined by thoroughly mundane, disposable items which we cast aside without thought. Such detritus is perhaps a more comparable fit for the pages of data we upload on a daily basis. By rendering such physical items in a 3D space, I am playing with this notion of permanence; changing unremarkable physical objects into immaterial data. By using the typographic aesthetics of the early web and its current form to redesign headstones, I explored how our identities are now tied to a suprastructure that is at once impersonal whilst facilitating an expression of the self.

Practices and Projects.

Askin, C. (2021) *Cameron's World*. Available at: https:// www.cameronsworld.net (Accessed: 25/5/22).

Cameron's world constitutes a cataloguing practice focusing on the Geocities websites which presaged social media. This evocation of the flourishing creativity which defined early blogging provided inspiration for my own work. When contrasting these visually idiosyncratic sites with the cleanly designed modern internet, certain themes become starkly evident. Chief amongst these is the receding of personal expression and individuality in favour of standardisation and ease of use. This theme informed my thinking throughout my practice and particularly influenced the Geocities and Web 2.0 gravestones series for my project on the afterlife online. Made evident by contrasting these sites is the hand of the maker; the overstimulating aesthetics of the early web highlighting contemporary design choices which often go unremarked. In all of this, the role of the graphic designer is key; a realisation which forced me to reflect on my position when engaging with such content.

33

Berrow, A. (2021) *A Tale of the Tarot* **[Ceramics]. Timothy Taylor Gallery, London. (Viewed: 20 August).**

Alma Berrow's 2021 work A Tale of the Tarot constitutes an ode to lived experience in tactile terms. In depicting the remnants of a dinner party through the medium of ceramics, Berrow invites viewers to play detective and piece together a scene-that-was. By shifting the materiality of the everyday objects at hand, most of which are spent cigarette ends, we are prompted to reconsider their position in relation to ourselves. We tend to consider great works of art as the objects which most represent the cultures in which we live, and by extension consider them as the objects most worthy of preservation. In truth, however, the articles with which we interact the most, those that define our lives as consumers, are comparatively more mundane. Often it is objects such as these to which we attach personal meaning.

In my own practice, I have been exploring the use of 3D-scanning towards a similar end. By creating a gallery of everyday objects (found discarded in various tote bags), I am establishing a record of the detritus that the banality of life leaves behind. In translating the materiality of each object to a 3D space, I render them immune from physical decay to a form comparable to the uncountable quantities of data we generate online each day.

Jamie Llyod, C. (2021) *Acts of Control* **[Publication]. Available at: https://graduateshowcase.arts.ac.uk/projects/223213/cover (Accessed: 05/05/22).**

Cara Jamie Llyod's final BA project follows a similar line of enquiry to my own, with the designer creatively interpreting her own blood sugar data to create a biodata-led publication. Given that Cara works in the publications workshop at Central Saint Martins, it may seem surprising that I was unaware of her project until it came time to print and bind my own book (a process she guided me through). Once more, one would be forgiven for assuming a certain level of disappointment on my part at being pipped to the post. However I

believe the contrast in our publications speaks volumes. That two designers could interpret data from the same application interface in visually divergent ways, for me, hints at the tension between human 'subjectivity' and technological 'objectivity'. As mentioned above, the technological interfaces we navigate daily are by necessity static and designed for the median user of a broad audience. However, the experience of those who use them is situated in a space where these UI structures and our preexisting characters combine.

Mattes, E, and Mattes, F. (2016) *Fukushima Texture Pack* **[Texture Pack]. Available at: https://0100101110101101.org/fukushima-texture-pack/ (Accessed: 26/5/22).**

Eva and Franco Mattes' 2016 collection of texture maps directly inspired my own practice investigating the material (and immaterial) implications of death in the internet age. Interestingly, the Mattes' own work can be seen as a digital translation of a near-literal dead zone, granting access to micro-portions of a restricted site. This access, however, also acts to destabilise the value of the original locale by rendering it replicable and commodifiable. When space, of any size, can be collapsed or extended to near-infinite degrees our relationship with it fundamentally changes.

Mimicking their method I created similar PBR materials from a local graveyard. I speculate that my own files could be used to lend verisimilitude to future digital memorial markers online, perhaps in a world culturally dominated by the metaverse. In doing so, I am raising questions surrounding concepts of authenticity and the suitability of intangible modes of congress to act as sites of memorial.

David Morrison

As David Llyod's piece *The Recovery of Kitsch* is textual in nature, this essay will focus more on its substance rather than its presentation or formal qualities. For the benefit of the reader a number of its key points are here summarised. Readers should be aware that these are, of course, communicated via my own understanding of the text and therefore apt to suit the thesis at hand.

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the recovery of kitsch

1. That the declension of national cultural artefacts to kitsch is an inevitable byproduct of the means by which such ephemera are produced and the manner in which they are circulated.

2. Kitsch objects, existing in gross contrast to their normative surroundings often highlight, allegorically, the impossibility of harmony in our modes of living within a fractured modernity.

3. Due to the irreverence and mutability of kitsch forms, such items can be readily modified to new creative and political ends.

Unit 2 Triangulation.
Reference: The Recovery of Kitsch by David Llyod.

My triangulation project started by exploring myth and folklore contextualised within a framework of national culture and globalization. Initially, my work focused on the postcolonial context which informs Ireland's relationship both to the world and its own history. Starting with Maeve Connoly's examination of Joep Leerssen's writing on 19th-century Celticism, I explored this notion of a Gaelic Ireland "characterised by its pastness" and "configured as a living fossil" (p.253). A society whose national myths have become exoticized and othered following a loss of language and culture. My suspicion was that this othering laid the groundwork for such cultural artefacts to be repackaged and resold (from within or abroad) in commercialised forms. This was, perhaps, the case of the educational amusement park Celtworld which came to be a focal point of my enquiry. Such a reading is, however, a bit too straightforward. As with all countries partaking in the market for global tourism, denizens of Ireland are happy to peddle shamrocks, round towers, and the most jovial of leprechaun-based memorabilia to visitors. As a small country with a large global diaspora, one may even argue such to be an imperative. Indeed, in the postmodern era the construction of culture is often an act of cyclical transaction with a hyper-connected globe.

What one may observe with comparable clarity is a level of kitsch in such representations of national cultures. A kitschification all the more interesting when the culture being sold stems from the target audience itself. For David Llyod, this process is neither solely a response to globalised tourism nor simply facilitated by a colonial distancing of people and heritage. Rather Llyod views the process by which cultural artefacts are constructed as tied to the modes of mass production inherent in consumerism. Icons, whether images of the Sacred Heart or Che Guevera, are often "borne by commodities whose circulation encompasses the whole national territory" (p.90). Such wide dissemination, via often highly domestic forms, allows these to be rerooted in the collective consciousness.

This is an interesting point of view that grants me a new vocabulary with which to speak about my topic in focused, process-led terms. One that ties into the merchandising forms I have been working with, which tend to flirt with the boundaries of kitsch. Nevertheless, even within the remit of Ireland, such a focus is overwhelmingly broad and unwieldy. Thankfully, however, Llyod does point to the expressive potentialites of kitsch within national contexts and

Ceremony Pants - Passage Tomb

Heresy Rune Socks - Heresy London

beyond. In a passage that may prove fruitful moving forward, he notes that the "gaudy contrast [of such ephemera] to the objects of everyday life are allegorical for the impossibility to integrate religion, nationhood, art etc...with the fragmented and fractured nature of modern existence" (p.91). This technique, of using the aesthetic contrast of such objects to their surroundings in order to recontextualize both, is something I may consider in future work. Indeed, one might already frame the play between personal stories and commercial forms in my work as such an exercise.

I am, however, somewhat critical of such a design philosophy. Underpinned as it is by qualitative notions of taste. Indeed, why should the worth of such items stem from comparison to a Platonic value of refinement? And whose defines said value anyway? Undoubtedly the aesthetic values of these such artefacts link closely to class and, in turn, to the environmental contexts in which they appear. A 'gaudy' porcelain doll appearing in the context of the work I am undertaking at Central Saint Martins purports a different set of values when compared to its earnest deploy in a domestic setting. My Nan, for the record, had such a set of cheap porcelain dolls which sat in earnest upon a shelf in her caravan in Kerry. She liked them just fine - and this is something I'm bearing in mind as I delve further into my line of enquiry.

This train of thought caused me to revisit and reevaluate the oral histories that form a key part of my practice. Llyod's focus on aesthetics made me aware of the choices I had made when developing my fictional range of Celtworld merchandise. Trend-orientated (but equally valid) design choices, no doubt influenced by contemporary folklore fashion brands such as *Heresy London* and *Passage Tomb*. I feel somewhat wary that working with kitschy imagery and merchandising forms smacks of a cool detached irony. The superior mode of knowing as described in parts of Mark Grief's 2016 critique *What was the Hipster?*. Speaking about the Celtworld project to one of my interview participants, I sought to explain my process saying it examined "commodified, kitsch forms [and that] Celtworld was, in some ways, a potent example of this - but also a very real place that may be remembered by very real people in very human ways. By digging for these stories, I'm hoping to connect to this human aspect and create something of a sincere letter to Ireland's recent past." A hastily contrived description no doubt, but one that I feel bears the essential truth of everything I am doing. The difficulty in all this lies in the fact that to intentionally create kitsch, or to work with 'lower' forms in an academic setting, engenders a level of detached knowing. In previous work, I often found myself focusing on the mundane objects which define our everyday existence; contrasting these

Celtworld Logo - Jim Fitzpatrick

in a similar fashion to the types of ephemera that we prize from society on high. I feel the marriage of dialogue and design in *Return to Celtworld* follows a similar trajectory. I hope that by centering my process on human experience I can avoid falling too deep into this trap. I also felt that an aping of Celtic-kitsch aesthetics could be disrespectful to Jim Fitzpatrick, designer of Celtworld, and the style in which he works.

Moreover, I'm still not entirely sure where my project sits in discussions on kitsch; nor if such discussions can truly be said to form its backbone. Truly the project perhaps runs parallel to such aesthetic questions, with a more thorough focus on the objects / mediums through which they are often enacted. I do know that by utilising these forms, such as tea towels to keyrings, questions arise concerning the objects and creative endeavours we deem artistically valuable and worthy of intellectual consideration.

In the closing section of his essay Llyod points towards the power and creative potentiality of kitsch aesthetics. Possibilities that stem, in part, from an irreverence towards the constraints of prescriptive taste. He points to the examples of John Kindness, particularly his *Ninja Mutant Harp* (1991), as liberating "from aesthetic judgments much the same wit and mobility which allows subordinated cultures to rediscover in 'kitsch' a rich repertoire of resistance" (p.94). I would broaden such a viewpoint to include low-brow forms and

Ninja Mutant Harp - John Kindness

materials, which I use to tell micro as well as macro histories.

Moving forward, I see the potential to further utilise such forms in my work. For now, Llyod's writing makes me aware that there is a tension in my work between these mass produced artefacts and their low-brow connotations with the more 'designerly' aesthetic I have chosen for my project. I find this interesting as these two aesthetic considerations (gaudy kitsch and hipster cool) probably engender more polemics than most others.

An acceptance of the knowing reflexivity my designs embody, inherent to their function as critical practice, might prove grounding as I move forward. As I'm sure will a continuing focus on personal stories and oral histories to explore culture and our relationship to the past.

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