Abstract What is your enquiry? How have you engaged with it through studio practice (methods, media, etc.)? Who is this question relevant to (whether from inside or outside the field of graphic communication design)?

Communion (2023) and *St. Patrick's Day in Ballybeg* (2023) are two projects in a studio practice focused on identity as collaborative construction. The projects concentrate on Irish identity and are archival in nature, using interviews conducted with Irish people as their source material. The interviews are interpreted via diverse methods of publishing; employing various forms and media to interrogate the material means by which culture is disseminated. Through this methodology, the practice reflects upon the decentralised nature of cultural authority in our contemporary epoch. Ireland, as a country whose diaspora wildly outnumbers its meagre population, provides a lens through which this enquiry may be understood.

Communion concentrates on a specific time period by gathering oral histories from Ireland at the new millennium and the height of its Celtic Tiger greed. Focalised through the ritual of Holy Communion, a key rite of passage in traditional Irish life; the project examines the tipping point at which the country turned from its conservative, rural past to embrace a modern future. One fully defined and precariously dependent on globalisation.

St. Patrick's Day in Ballybeg embraces a wider scope, taking inspiration from the New York City St. Patrick's Day parade; perhaps the world's most ostentatious show of Irish identity. The project adopts banners from the parade and reconfigures them using snippets from its source archive. These personal reflections contrast the platitudes of pride that usually accompany such pageantry. In doing so, the work questions how Irish national identity is defined and who gets to define it.

Context. What *specific* practices and discourses are key reference points for this work? What *specific* systems or networks is this enquiry situated within? What are the *specific* practical, theoretical, or professional conditions of this work?

My work is situated within a tradition of archival practice, with each project starting by gathering material via interview. As Chantal Wong and Janet Chan of the *Asia Art Archive* expound, such a practice is not passive, but a subjective exercise in power. In facilitating, designing, and projecting an archive, choices must be made as to the form and content of the information presented. In response to this, AAA proposes an embrace of multiple perspectives within the archiving process, calling for a praxis that is "collective and collaborative [...] from research to annotation" (2012). My practice responds to this discourse, eschewing the goal of 'objective' representation for collaboration and creative interpretation.

Communion and *St. Patrick's Day in Ballybeg* share this approach, exploring questions of (Irish) identity as a collaborative construction in the context of globalisation. Both communicate their findings via détournement-inspired means, co-opting artefacts which express, enact, and disseminate identity to examine the material basis for its construction. David Lloyd's text *The Recovery of Kitsch* is seminal to my process; with both projects embracing his notion that national identity is "borne by commodities" (p.90). For Llyod, such commodities are often domestic and low-brow in nature, rooting grand questions of identity in the personal and prosaic. My practice responds to this focus on low-brow artefacts in its unprecious approach towards its materials; drawing attention to their communicative power via irreverent text-based interventions. In doing so, an emphasis is placed upon the experiences of those immersed within the culture at hand. This focus finds much in common

with Judith (Jack) Halberstam's work on low theory and his embrace of popular media. Halberstam's lack of apprehension towards "frivolity, silliness, or jocularity" (p.20) also speaks to my practice and echoes Llyod's writings on the potentiality inherent in irreverence (p.94). An irreverent approach is paramount to my work and, once more, underpins the humorous outlook on life that often characterises Irish identity.

One cannot consider the links between artefact and identity without considering the traditions and folk practices that underpin them. In this, my work echoes the anthropological *Folk Archive* (2005) of Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane. Deller and Kane's archive, compiled for the British Council, sheds light on contemporary folk practices throughout the United Kingdom. Vast in breadth and diverse in outlook, it excels at conveying the individuality inherent in each of its chosen materials. A conveyance of the personal is equally central to my practice, wherein individual expression is contrasted with forms that disseminate fixed, overarching notions of identity. *St. Patrick's Day in Ballybeg,* in particular, is interesting when considered in a folk context. The St. Patrick's day parade, and its attendant artefacts, originated as a tradition amongst 18th-century North American Irish immigrant communities. Now, in the 21st-century, the festivities have spread to international prominence. Their customs and artefacts have morphed into branding tools that convey a certain idea of 'Irishness'TM.

Global branding meets local folklore in the *McDobo's Food Truck* (2005) [Photograph], Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane.

In exploring such ideas, my practice takes a somewhat ready-made approach to artefacts and materials. I engage with these via text-based, print-oriented methods that embrace their original forms. Through this exploration, I find my practice converses with the work of Corbin Shaw. Shaw's poetical texts contrast the blunt mode of projection embodied by his chosen artefacts, which serves to highlight and subvert the ideologies that underline their histories. His approach has provided a rich vocabulary for understanding my own work and has helped me to clarify my methodology. In addition to Shaw, my practice can also be viewed as part of a long tradition of text-based art.

I Could Have Been a Contender (2020) [Cotton Flag], Corbin Shaw.

This material-led ethos extends to the consideration of photography in the project *Communion*. Here I see my practice engaging with Hito Steyerl's writing in *In Defense of the Poor Image* (2009). Steyerl treats digital imagery in material terms, examining the qualities of an image in order to glean information about its circulation. My own project interrogates its images with a similar mindset. The majority of its participants provided whatever Communion photograph was easily accessible, and many had to do some digging to find any image at all. Pondering these images, one sees a lack in the type of traditional Communion portrait which once adorned the mantlepiece of most Irish homes. This absence, perhaps, reveals the decline in value that Irish families place on such mementos.

Finally, my practice is evolving in response to questions of 'Irishness'. This is again succinctly highlighted in *Communion,* as an oral history project focusing on the Celtic Tiger - the apex point in Ireland's march towards globalisation.

Such a change preceded an ongoing crisis in Irish identity - a theme so large and unwieldy as to resist neat summarization. Fintan O'Toole's personal history of the state nevertheless provides a key frame of reference in exploring this narrative. As the title of his book (perhaps melodramatically) states, *We Don't Know Ourselves*.

Projected contribution. What is the significance of this question to graphic communication design (practically, theoretically, or professionally)? How will this project contribute to your practice beyond the limits of the course?

My practice touches upon an ongoing discussion around globalisation and its effects on culture and identity. The work engages with these questions via processes that reflect contemporary issues in archival practice, particularly the field's embrace of multiple perspectives. Each project is centred upon the individual experiences of its participants. In this way *Communion* and *St. Patrick's Day in Ballybeg* are participatory in essence. Works which facilitate space into which collective understandings of shared histories may emerge.

This facilitatory element of my practice is complemented by the design choices made in its publication. Chiefly, the irreverent adoption of materials and artefacts through which culture and identity are disseminated. This approach sheds light on the role graphic designers play in crafting culture via everyday design decisions.

The specific focus of my enquiry engages with Irish culture through an examination of its designed artefacts. Inherent in my work is a platforming of Irish typography. Both projects earnestly embrace Irish type design, from the contemporary glyphs of Dublin's Signal Type Foundry to the historical digitisations of Vincent Crowley. Such type design is often considered in lesser terms; characterised by designer Oscar Torrans as a "million bastardised

faces [that] exist mostly made for American-Irish pubs" (2022). Amongst these, however, are some truly beautiful gems that my practice presents for reconsideration.

Through these projects I have found my subject matter and established a working methodology. The bedrock of my practice, as it stands, is a process that can be delineated in simple terms:

Archive (Interview) > Interpret (Make) > Reflect (Write)

Moving forward, I shall continue to apply this process to new projects that explore Irish identity and history. I am interested to see how it shall develop in response to future work. In practical terms, I am applying for funding to publish my work *Communion* to a wider audience. As such, my practice during my time on the course has provided a launch pad from which I hope to find opportunities to expand and continue such work.

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