

Positions through contextualising
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Written response 230525

1. Annotated Bibliography

Annotated bibliography

Reference 1

Traboulsi, J. (2010) Sorry for not Attending. Available at: <https://janatraboulsi.site/Sorry-for-not-Attending> (Accessed: April 2025).



Official documents are functional but powerful hierarchical devices that mediate movement. Paper that represents a person and their right to be.

The embellished passport created by Lebanese artist Jana Traboulsi reinvents, enriches and educates as part of a broader comment on movement. By manipulating my passport using simple techniques of graphic communication design, I have translated a dry and functional document into a vehicle for discovering positions. Inherent in this is its materiality and hence its lo-fi methodology, by using collage and illustration, the artist is claiming the document for something other than its original function. An act of protest though (re)making.

Annotated bibliography

Reference 2

Keshavarz, M. (2015) 'Material Practices of Power – Part I: Passports and Passporting', *Design Philosophy Papers*, 13(2), pp. 97–113.

I took identity documents for granted. A passport was a means to travel and be identified, something necessary to be a functioning adult in the country I was born in.

Keshavarz places passports in a much broader context and deepens my understanding which in turn will encourage further query. They introduce the very first forms of a passport in a timeline, which helps me recognise the enduring features of these documents including the significance of wax stamps but also the inherent privileges of their ownership by people who were self-appointed.

In the same way as those first documents, my passport is 'a form of identity creation' that certifies and recognises me as a citizen of the UK. It is also an agent in a hierarchy that I am beginning to open my eyes to. The document I carry to travel carries with it a history I need to understand, 'Material Practices of Power' is the prompt for this. I can unwrap the duality in its ownership, the privilege of an ability to be able to travel where others cannot. Is there an anti-version of a document of privilege?

Material practices of power – part I: passports and passporting

Mahmoud Keshavarz

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Annotated bibliography

Reference 3

TRANSCESTRY: 10 YEARS OF THE MUSEUM OF TRANSOLOGY (2025) [Exhibition]. Lethaby Gallery, London. 11 March - 11 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.museumoftransology.com> (Accessed: April 2025).



This exhibition is full of items that have been augmented with personal contexts. The exhibition design itself leads with a postal label motif, one of which comes with all majority of items in the archive.

Various government documents feature in the collection, including a Deed of Change, Council letters, Medical correspondence, all given added importance and context. For example, the passport you see above simply comes with the note 'The identity I left behind'. The more "official" the document, the greater the effect of the labels. By embellishing them with stickers like the Deed of Change, or simply displaying them as a group in this exhibition, the curators and owners of the documents add power and emphasis to them. Sterile, impersonal pieces of printed matter become narrative.

These examples show the innate value in foregrounding personal identifying documents by putting them in personal contexts using methods of graphic communication design. Their owners reclaim them as Traboulsi does in *Sorry For Not Attending*. The embellishments say "this is mine", and documenting them in a collection reinforces this.

Annotated bibliography

Reference 4 (reading list)

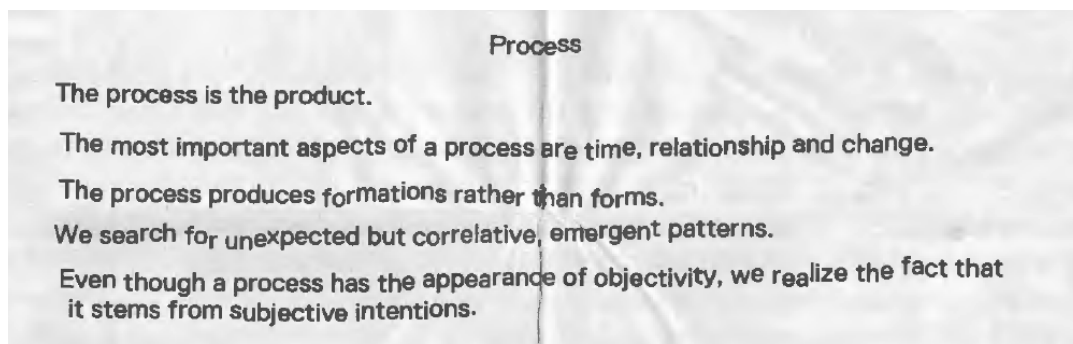
Blauvelt, A., Maurer, L. Paulus, E., Puckey, J., Wouters, R. (2013) Conditional Design Workbook. Amsterdam: Valiz

'The process is the product.'

As an Art Director and Designer of twenty-five years experience in book design, my process has always been focused on an effective commercial outcome. This has often been at the expense of experimentation and play. An intuitively iterative approach has been uncomfortable for me but I am unlearning gradually and building trust in design that unfolds.

Conditional Design Workbook gives me permission to let outcomes emerge organically within a framework. Like the fictional neighbourhood of Banguit, where conditions of construction were set to allow for growth and interpretation, I set up a framework and conditions at each stage of this brief to encourage a forward but fluid momentum. This framework included a timetable that allowed for natural progression, where I could leave an iteration overnight and return to it with fresh eyes. Through this cycle of act-and-reflect, I could assess how appropriate a tool or medium was and enjoy the unexpected results of something set in motion that takes its own path.

The passport is the vessel, lo-fi and desk-based Graphic Communication Design were the methods, together they highlighted the topics and questions that I answered with an iterative approach. This process was the product.



Annotated bibliography

Reference 5 (reading list)

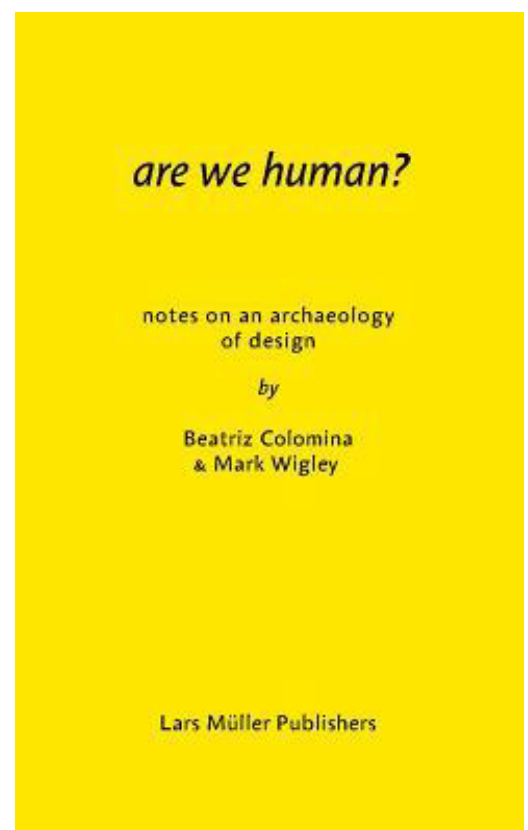
Colomina, B. and Wigley, M. (2019). Are we human? Notes on an archaeology of design. Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers.

'Design is what you are standing on. It is what holds you up. And every layer of design rests on another and another and another. To think about design demands an archaeological approach. You have to dig. Dig into the ground, underground, beneath the seabed, and deep into the Earth. Dig into the things sitting on the ground - buildings, cities, treetops, and antennae. Dig over the ground - into the air, clouds, and outer space. Dig even into the invisible layers – data storage, formulas, protocols, circuits, spectra, chemical reactions, chemical reactions, gene sequences, and social media posts. Digging, documenting, dissecting, discussing – digging, that is, into ourselves. '

Each project so far has been archaeological. Whether it was Methods of investigating, where I dissected and classified graffiti tags at my local skate park, or Methods of translating where I uncovered and illustrated shared memories behind photography of and interviews with my Father, I have been digging to find something.

By combining these methods of exploration with an intensely personal enquiry, I am excavating myself. Design is not just a profession or a creative activity, it has a link to my being.

My latest iterations made me realize that design in turn designs me, working with a passport brought out long-buried opinions on monarchy, environment and privilege. I found personal insight through interacting with a document. If a piece of paper can invoke such meaning, can graphic communication design have a therapeutic function?



Annotated bibliography

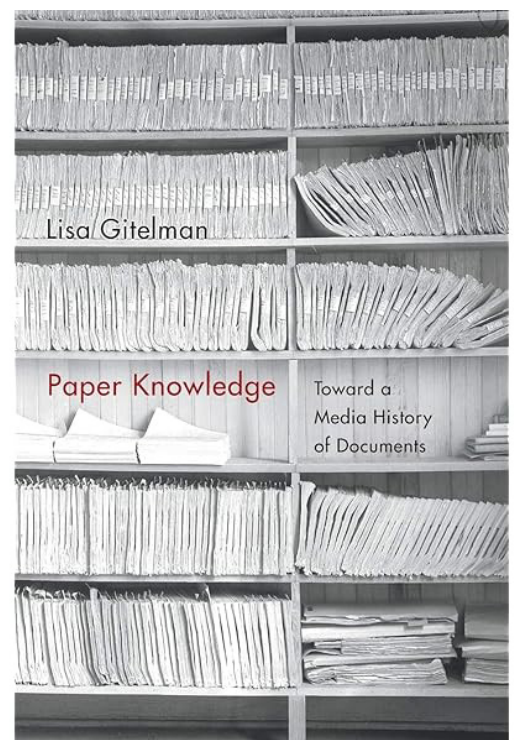
Reference 6 (reading list)

Gitelman, L. (2014) Paper knowledge: toward a media history of documents. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1–20.

In her analysis of documents, Lisa Gitelman (2014, p.1) suggests that the document exists in order to document and its occurrence on paper 'bearing semiotic traces is not merely the most typical case, it is also the most salient, since the affordances of paper and the function that defines documents have become inextricable from one another' and 'documents are important not because they are ubiquitous . . . but rather because they are so evidently integral to the ways people think and live. The epistemic power of the know-show function is indisputable, and the properties of documents matter in all kinds of far-reaching ways.' (Gitelman, 2014, p.4)

The underlying historic and epistemic power of documents (Gitelman, 2014, p.4) is intrinsically linked to hierarchies and conversely, those who find themselves at the bottom. Graphic Communication Design is therefore an agent for those hierarchies, most acutely where government documents and the welfare of a country's citizens is involved. From the first recorded UK passport to my own, a piece of paper tells me where I can and cannot go. Through references such as the NSK and Sealand, I can conclude that these documents use the same visual language but the messages are completely different. They can look the same, but their intentions differ, both positive and negative. Therefore, there is a moral imperative on the issuer or the document and the Graphic Designer who produces it, a supply chain of responsibility.

Gitelman's account gives me a fresh perspective of the definition of a document, offering the opportunity to question the assumption that 'Paper serves as a figure for all that is external to the mind'.



Annotated bibliography

Reference 7

Żmijewski, A. and Warsza J (2012) STATE OF PALESTINE. Available at: <https://bb7.berlinbiennale.de/en/projects/state-of-palestine-by-khaled-jarrar-2-20395.html> (Accessed: May 2025).

Subversion has long been a tool of Graphic Communicators and Artists to resist. Khaled Jarrar's passport stamp and postal stamps for the non-existent state of Palestine is an elegant example of subtle yet powerful activism.

He takes a banal passport stamp and repurposes its design, materiality and context to develop a simple campaign of non-violent resistance. By travelling and stamping other people's documents (240 to date), the idea physically circulates widely, the documents' owners at risk of action against them. The same symbol of the Palestine sun bird is circulated using the Deutsche Post AG service, further propagating the idea.

This remediation of a passport and postal stamp shows yet again that hijacking, repurposing, subverting, translating or manipulating documents of power can dramatically change their effect from something every day into something more. Is their everyday quality what makes these statements so powerful?

Whilst making my initial response to Positions through contextualising, I felt a power whilst working with the physicality of my expired passport. It was dangerous cutting into and repurposing such an important document. Would I do it to a valid, current document?



Annotated bibliography

Reference 8

https://passport.nsk.si/en/the_NSK_passport (Accessed: May 2025).

'The NSK State is an abstract organism, a suprematist body, installed in a real social and political space as a sculpture comprising the concrete body warmth, spirit and work of its members. NSK confers the status of a state not to territory but to mind, whose borders are in a state of flux, in accordance with the movements and changes of its symbolic and physical collective body.'

It is curious that the NSK State has a self-generated passport made by the artists collective, which uses the same visual language and paper form of conventional passports.

In contrast to Traboulsi's project, Khaled Jarrar and the NSK take an opposition to the negative meaning of passports by using expected methods to produce them. The stamps look like stamps, the passport photograph is posed expectedly, the page perforated with a number. How important is the form of the subversion? Is it more effective to subvert using opposing methods of production or fitting in? In my final response for Positions through contextualising, I produced two versions of my passport that try to mimic, hiding the colonial message inside it. Is this subtlety more powerful than an overtly collaged, personal, lo-fi document?



Annotated bibliography

Reference 9

Mahmoodian, A. (2010) Title of website. Available at: <https://amakmahmoodian.com/Shenasnameh> (Accessed: May 2025).

Mahmoodian's comment on the homogenisation of Iranian women in their passports translated into a book, an exhibition installation and two films.

This translation into other media could work with my project, nodding to the work on Methods of Iterating response where I reclaimed ink from a page.

The most engaging for me was the publication, which the artist demonstrated in a poignant and performative film. Pages were ripped, forms were filled in, stamps added and then the book sealed into a bag using a red wax seal, cementing the individual's ownership of the book and the issue it speaks of.

The reimagining into a book using passport characteristics and standard methods of graphic communication design inspire me to evolve my enquiry cross-media. Working in Gitelman's position that to document is to frame something, not necessarily using paper, is there a way to translate identity documents into a new form?



Annotated bibliography

Reference 10

METAHAVEN (2010) 'Sealand' Uncorporate Identity. Place of publication: Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers

Similar to NSK, the self-proclaimed micro-nation of Sealand produced its own passports in the same visual language. The document in this case acts not only as a claim to the country's very sovereignty, but also as a way of branding it. I note again that the same document can be used in various ways across these references, both positive and negative, perpetuating power or resisting against it. The document itself, its physical form in paper, and the devices it uses such as stamps are caught in the middle. They are the vehicle, the responsibility with the 'epistemic power' of documents (Gitelman) lies with their bearers or issuers.

The situation of documents at this intersection of politics (governmental and personal), identity (national and personal) and Graphic Communication Design is a place of contradiction. Design seems to operate beyond aesthetics, seeping into and echoing the motives of the designer.

Metahaven uses passports to question how much of what we consider "official" is rooted in design conventions and symbolic authority rather than actual legal power.



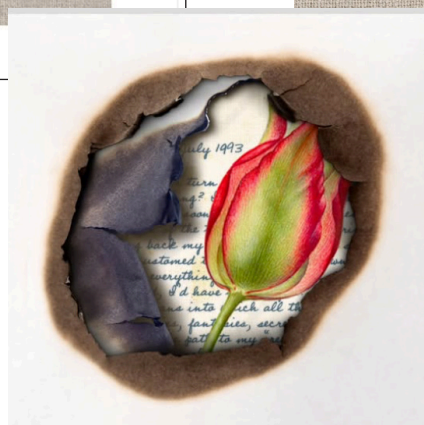
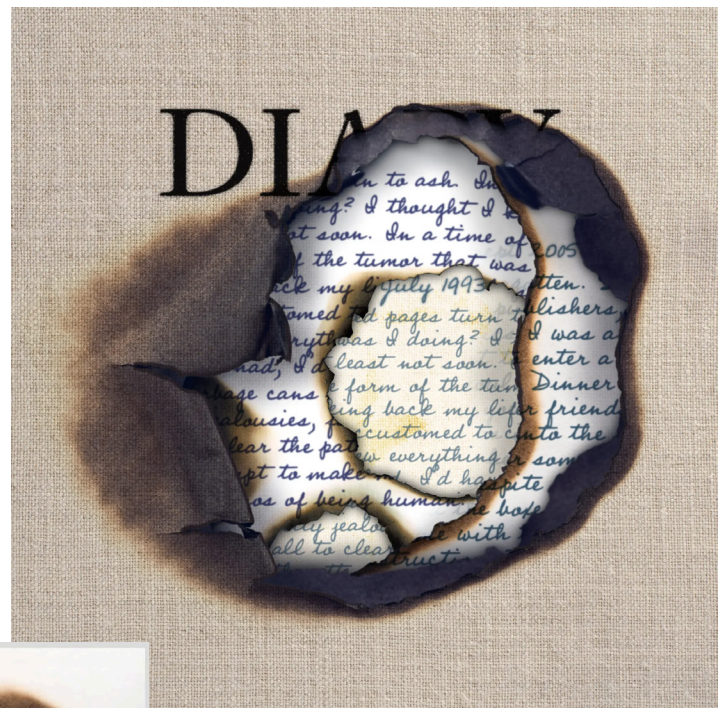
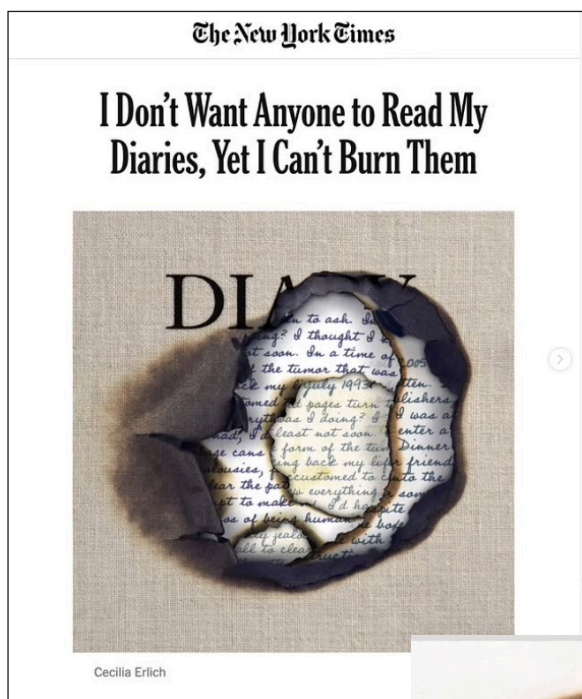
Annotated bibliography

Reference 11

Erlich, C. (2025) Instagram. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/cecierlich/> (Accessed: May 2025).

The work of typographer and designer Ceci Erlich is both static and moving. She reveals messages and hides them using both simple playful animations and textured photography. The example plays with themes of digging into the past, and represent the never-burned diaries of someone who was diagnosed with severe illness. The layers offer insight into a deeper message, and Ceci's other work shows that the medium need not restrict moving from static imagery into something interactive.

The performative quality of my Methods of iterating and Positions through iterating output is a starting point for this and I look forward to reducing the messaging down to its most important parts whilst retaining the innate, personal impact of shared narrative.



Annotated bibliography

Reference 12

Guillermou, T. (2017) Karel Martens: the impression that matters. Available at: <https://www.grapheine.com/en/history-of-graphic-design/karel-martens-graphic-designer> (Accessed: May 2025).

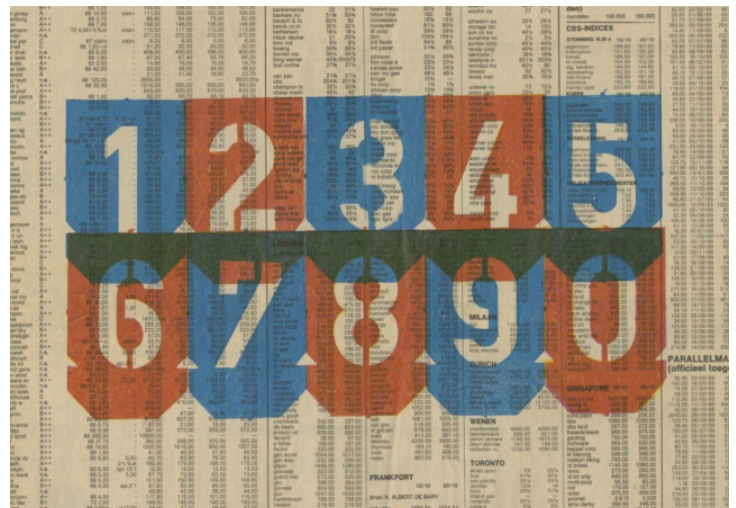
Similar to the Conditional Design Workbook, Karel Martens' values process for outcome:

'In his work as a designer, typographer or artist, the notion of constraint comes up very often. On the other hand, this constraint is not imposed: on the contrary, it is added to creation to become a source of new design solutions. He even says: "Limitations are an important thing in design in general because they offer solutions." Constraints are important in design in the broad sense because they raise solutions. The obstacle becomes challenge.'

At the outset of this project my guiding principle was to return to the process repeatedly, acting and reflecting until the very end. This discipline made the output more method-based, I sought and found answers through experimentation, iteration and reflection.

In the first stage of the project, I worked into an expired passport using the lo-fi methods already mentioned in order to seek positions. As I mimicked my chosen reference's process, answers came through that engagement. In that first stage, I made sure there was time for each part of the passport to be made and reflected upon, including designing, ordering and experimenting with machine-produced rubber stamps and iron-on image transfers. By allowing the time to both produce and then look back, the process became the product and positions came from that end-product in order to proceed to the next stage.

In the final presentation, I produced two passport iterations. One worked with an authentic document, one was a copy. Again, various factors were considered such as binding time, paper stock, rubber stamps, dummies. I was so close to the outcome in the end, that I missed the subversive nature of my preferred iteration. By intervening in an official document, it was a claim but also a positive act of subversion to highlight that the content of official documents don't always align with the bearer's belief system.



Annotated bibliography

Reference 13

Buckle, H (2013) Birth certificates by IWANT for Icon magazine. Available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2013/04/19/birth-certificates-by-iwant-for-iconeye-magazine/> (Accessed: April 2025).



By redesigning the UK birth certificate in 2013, east London studio IWANT directly addressed the authority of an official document, whilst making it a more authentic representation of the individual.

Their rework with complimentary on and off line components include unexpected content such as a birthstone or lunar cycle. The layout, seasonal colour palette and styling give it a fresh feel whilst respecting the old with appropriate production value in the physical iteration.

This work situates my practice in questioning official documents and I can conclude that making a digitally augmented iteration of an official document is appropriate.

Is there a way of adding a printed element to my current digital iteration that shows the same emotional depth and historic context? Does representing emotion have a place on this kind of document?

2. Extended critical analyses

Extended critical analysis

Reference 1

Traboulsi, J. (2010) Sorry for not Attending. Available at: <https://janatraboulsi.site/Sorry-for-not-Attending> (Accessed: April 2025).



Jana Traboulsi's *Sorry for Not Attending* (2013) is a passport that critiques the geopolitical barriers faced by Lebanese citizens. Created after the artist was denied a UK visa to attend her own exhibition at the Tate Modern, London, the work incorporates actual visas, stamps, maps, photographs and drawings.

It grants hypothetical visa access to four destinations including a fictional Asteroid B612 where travel is restricted for her. She transforms it into a form of artistic resistance, critically commenting on individual rights, mobility, identity and power structures. Through this, Traboulsi exposes the document as an exclusive mediator of state control. The premise of this work is resistance, highlighting the 'unjust global situation' of visa entry regulations.

Masquerading as an official Lebanese passport sleeve, accompanying text cards slipped into the plastic cover explain the book's proposition. But it is the "lo-fi" methods that really make a statement. These documents are usually machine printed and embellished with sophisticated security techniques including specific paper stocks, bleeding inks, security chips and ornate guilloché patterns. This document by contrast is hand made and the artist reclaims the narrative by making it themselves demonstrating ownership.

For example, on pages 2-3 (above right), we see a physical description on the recto page including height, eye colour as well as details of who accompanies the bearer. Note the subtle misogyny in the assumption of 'Son', 'His wife' and 'His children'. This is all provided in three

languages: English, French and Arabic. This page, that uses low cost papers used in photocopying in their typical colours, is overlaid by a super-sized stamp containing the word 'annulé' ('cancelled'). The verso page holds a self portrait disguised with a line and a parenthesis. Below is a image of a woman in a consiliatory pose that looks like she is worshipping the opposite page. Interestingly, the form is blank, perhaps it is the form itself that is being annulled by the stamp placed upon it.

By sending the passport ahead to the exhibition she couldn't attend and then on to exhibitions in Greece, USA, Lebanon and Germany, this travel document has travelled without its bearer to make a statement about their absence. This is an example of the epistemic power of the document, our relationship with them and the power structures they represent.

By investigating identity documents by dissecting and collaging into my own passport, I have found hidden layers of meaning, context and new connections in Graphic Communication Design. Through iterative experimentation with "lo-fi" methods similar to Traboulsi's, I formed new positions on monarchy, climate change and colonialism in British identity. The Graphic Communication Design that I once saw as a profession, can be a vehicle of control and conversely, resistance. The very methods of Traboulsi's work permeate with claiming their space, as I wish to claim mine through the documents that define me.

I pose the questions: How can something as mundane as a passport stamp have political power? How else can identity documents be subverted and/or circulated to highlight and resist political injustice? What methods are appropriate to propagate this going forward?

Extended critical analysis

Reference 2

Gitelman, L. (2014) *Paper knowledge: toward a media history of documents*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1–20.

In the first chapter of *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*, Lisa Gitelman introduces the “know-show” function of documents and how they both convey and constitute knowledge. The author suggests that mass-produced everyday documents, most common in paper form, play a role in bureaucracy and shape social interactions. And that it is the materiality and reproduction of documents that is central to understanding their historical and cultural significance.

The author asks, what is a document? Is it something *else* not made of paper? She draws attention to the properties of documents as material objects intended as evidence, processed or framed.

The idea of the “know-show” function of documents is reflected in how Gitelman organises her writing. By analysing receipts and the like, she demonstrates an awareness of their knowledge, and she is showing this by describing it. “Know-show” exists in the text itself through describing mundane, relatable examples and how they sit in the world. This is assisted by the historical positioning and reflecting on the definition of a document. Gitelman also pays attention to materiality by highlighting the physical qualities of paper documents like type and layout, which in turn assert their validity. This aligns with the “show” part of the “know-show” function of documents she describes.

This reference allows me to question my assumptions of documents, their form, function and relevance to my identity and positions. Instead of assuming that a personal, official document should appear as a paper artifact, I am reconsidering their form. What is the best medium for a specific document? What should that document communicate if it refers to personal identity? Can they transcend their given function towards something different? ‘Paper serves as a figure for all that is external to the mind’. Therefore, do we *embody* ourselves in documents?

This reference also introduces me to the idea that they can be both a reflection of authority but also challenge it and that they are tied to specific settings. The methods of Graphic Communication are the bridge between the authority and their intention.

Traboulsi and Jarrar’s projects were circulated without them, out of the artists hands they took on added medium as travel documents that move without their bearers even in an exhibition setting. Jarrar’s output was particularly prolific in its circulation. This is echoed by Gitelman:

‘Since reproduction is one clear way that documents are affirmed as such: one of the things people do with documents is copy them, whether they get published variously in editions (like the Declaration of Independence, for instance), duplicated for reference (like the photocopy of my passport that I carry in my suitcase), sort of or semipublished for internal circulation (like a restaurant menu), or proliferated online (mirrored and cached like the many documents in Wikileaks).’

The reproduction of documents add values to them and their message, circulation affirms the intent of who issues them or who subverts them.

This analysis underscores the significance of materiality and reproduction in the evolution of documentary practices. Analysing my documents’ physical presence and the quality of attention

needed to digest it, will inform how I take this theme forward. Not only has Gitelman made me reconsider the very definition of a document, but also how that document can circulate when published or placed into a setting.

