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My Research in Practice essay will act as a proposal for my final year dissertation. This essay will be based on 3 key words with much importance to me and how they all intersect with the subject of Graphic Design. These key words being: Physical Media, Nostalgia and Rave Art. This essay will be structured to gradually build toward a final question instead of traditionally answering a fixed question. The first section will assess Nostalgia in a design context, and how it can achieve an emotional reaction, mainly looking at the works of Svetlana Boym. I will also look at the importance of Physical Media and the parallels new age technology forms using work from philosophers like Marshall McLuhan. Finally looking at Rave Art, showing how the culture at the time was a form of escapism for many young people, and how the art that came out of that time reflected this, using writings from Mark Moore and Chelsea Louise-Berlin to support this, as well as the work of Junior Tomlin to visualise it.

Physical Media

Modern society has taken away the need for Physical Media but is this something that is essential to the development of our culture. Often broken down into things like CDs, Vinyl Records, Ticket Stubs or Magazines, these are things that people can gain attachment to and form an emotional bond with, something that is rarely found with Digital Media. Physical Media is currently having a massive resurgence among younger people, some would argue due to the overconsumption of content and digital media currently being displayed online. It has been described by journalist David Sax “analog is becoming ‘cool’ again” (Sax, 2016, quoted by Lhowe, 2018). Sax found that humans are now choosing physical forms of media over their digital

counterpart as almost a reverse of what should be expected of current standards, he described it as “on the way to Digital Utopia, we’ve begun to fall back in love with the very analog goods and ideas that the tech gurus insisted that we no longer need” (Sax, 2016). As a collector of forms of physical media like Vinyl and Ticket stubs, the preservation of this act is important to me as I can attach memories to these devices, as well as being able to take inspiration and notes from past works to implement into my own design work.

Graphic Design has always played a massive role in Physical Media, which is what I have always been drawn to aside from the tactile nature of the product. While not intended, Design on pieces of Physical Media can have one of one mark which add personality to the project, a feature which cannot be seen or held within a screen. Physical Media also promotes ritualistic attachments which cannot be accessed digitally, whether that be unwrapping a brand-new vinyl, or being handed your ticket for a concert or festival, it is a feeling which the digital age cannot replicate. Growing up in an age where physical practices are becoming more prominent has really helped me develop as a designer as I feel I have good knowledge, understanding and attachment to both forms of design. My favourite examples of practices like these being used are by record label Hausu Mountain. Hausu Mountain is an independent record label hailing from Chicago, boasting a multitude of musical genres on its roster. Hausu Mountain’s style is rooted in praise for Physical Media and is shown by the care for detail in the design of their record covers and cassette tapes. Often designed by one of the label’s founding members, Maxwell Allison, Hausu Mountain’s design work has been described as “a kaleidoscopic riot of bright

colours, pixelated video-game stills, and occasionally nightmarish imagery”

(Sherburne, 2021)

It is important to understand the distinction between the design and the medium it is printed on, but it is also important to understand that these two things are also inseparable. Martin McLuhan proposes in his 1964 book that “medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1964). This quote reminds us that part of the message that a design is trying to send is within the medium it is printed, whether that is the quality of paper a ticket is printed on, or the slight bends and creases left in a vinyl sleeve, every version of those prints will tell a different story, something I think is integral to stories within design. It boasts its imperfection and permanence, something that digital design cannot replicate.

To conclude, I think the need for Physical Media in design is not only necessary but deeply valuable. It offers recipients a chance to engage with a tangible piece of design, carefully created with intentional details only to be noticed by a physical user. On the other side of the spectrum, things like E-Ticketing and digital art are forgettable and always replicable whereas Physical forms of media are everlasting and allow design to exist in more than just sight. In an era of consuming content at a rapid rate, is Physical Media a way of pausing time and appreciating design for more than just sight, or is it a form of rematerializing nostalgia, to which we should continue and look for the beauty in digital design.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia can be defined as “a wistful desire to return in thought or in fact to a former time in one’s life, a sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place or time” (2025). Tapping into nostalgia as a design tool can be an effective way at creating a memorable and timeless piece that can be held to a meaningful and significant standard by a person looking back for years to come. From my experiences, nostalgia has had an extensive influence on my design practices, mostly in things like colour, text and pattern that is reminiscent of things I have seen from the past. An excellent example of tapping into nostalgia as a designer is the design of the original Instagram logo, as seen in Figure 2, is best described by how “they tapped into people’s sentimental attachment to physical photos at a time when digital was becoming dominant” (Bassett, 2023).

Artist Svetlana Boym breaks Nostalgia into 2 different categories in her 2001 book *The Future of Nostalgia*. These being Restorative Nostalgia and Reflective Nostalgia. Restorative Nostalgia aims to “rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps” whereas Reflective Nostalgia is “the imperfect process of remembrance” (Boym, 2001, p41). I think that Reflective Nostalgia is the form that best applies to modern design, and the attempts by designers to reinstate past trends and techniques. This is currently best seen in the resurgence of grunge and Y2K styles in design, both held in high esteem within their respective communities, but also two styles that will provoke memories in recipients of their deliverables. Restorative Nostalgia in design does not try to restore the past as it was, but rather it “signifies a return to the original stasis” (Boym, 2001, p49). For me as a designer,

returning to past works and using what made them significant to boost my own practices is an incredibly important part of my process. Original ideas are hard to come by nowadays, so being able to take inspiration from designers of the past and creating a nostalgic feel in my own works is a thing of beauty in my opinion. It is being able to pay homage to the past and create a feeling of remembrance which makes modern Graphic Design so special.

Looking at Nostalgic forms of design has led me down a rabbit hole of modern companies aiming to create a vintage feeling for their modern branding, an effort that is obviously rooted in attempts to keep older audiences connected to the roots of their brand while also keeping a modern approach for younger audiences. A great example of these efforts by widespread companies is Adidas Football's reintroduction of the 'trefoil' logo into their kit designs, seen in Figure 3. Adidas made this design choice to celebrate 75 years of sportswear, but the design choice also adds another layer with it being a throwback to shirt designs from the 80s and 90s. This design choice clearly worked for the company "apparel sales increased by 5%" according to Footy Headlines (2024). This statistic clearly backs up the idea that tapping into nostalgic values in design markets can boost a company's profits or increase user engagement.

In my opinion, the continuation of using Nostalgia within design will be a tool that is seen much more in coming years, especially with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence and ideals of progressing with new ideas in all fields within the design world, it is clear that the use of Nostalgia, or even 'Vintage' forms of design can be

an effective tool in creating memorable design that keeps audiences engaged in a similar way that using Physical Media does.



Figure 1, Original Instagram Logo, Instagram



Figure 2, 2024/25 Adidas Elite Third Kits, Adidas

Rave Art

Rave Art is a unique style of design which is backed by a huge underground culture of rebellion, anti-establishment and psychedelia. Most prevalent during the late 80s and 90s, Rave culture and more specifically the art that came out of it represents a large group of British youth. Driven by secrecy and unity, the art to come out of the rave scene had a strong guerilla art feel to it, something that was only amplified by changes to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act in 1994, which effectively aimed to wipe illegal raves in the UK out in one swoop, this was obviously not effective to the youth at the time, and only drove them to larger events, which in turn gave us greater pieces of design to come out of these events. Aided by the use of MDMA and Ecstasy at the time, the art that came out of the rave scene was one of a kind in how it created a sense of euphoria and attachment to the event without even having to be there.

To fully understand the importance of the art that came out of this scene, it is vital to understand the culture itself. The explosion of dance music in the UK can be credited to many different factors, but a major player in this was the “Ibiza Four” consisting of Paul Oakenfold, Nicky Holloway, Danny Rampling and Johnny Walker. All of whom took a holiday to Ibiza in the summer of 1987, and became fascinated by the world of House Music, accompanied by the use of ecstasy. In an interview with The Guardian, Danny Rampling explained how the experience changed his perception of raving and how they should bring it back over to the UK, “All four of us changed that night. I can remember saying I think we may be on to something here” (Rampling, 2007). After that experience, they came back to the UK and opened Spectrum, The

Trip and Shoom, three legendary nightclubs in the rave scene, and ultimately what kickstarted a brand-new subculture in the UK. With rave flyers and the art that has come out of the scene being a physical artifact of the spirit of Rave Culture.

The beauty of the deliverables and bits of art that came out of the culture was how they were received. “In a street, after a rave, or cluttering up tables and shelves at your local record shop” (Louise Berlin and Moore, 2020, p.7). If you were to receive one of these flyers, then that was your own piece of memorabilia that offered far more than just decoration. Ideologically, rave art represents a shared visual language which celebrates collective euphoria and technological transcendence.

One of the most famous designers to associate themselves with rave culture is Junior Tomlin. Tomlin has been deemed the ‘Salvador Dali of Rave’ (Velocity Press, 2025) for his work with futuristic concepts, surreal landscapes and sci-fi elements in his career. Most popular for his work with Dreamscape, a rave promoter from the 90s, Tomlin’s main medium was an airbrush. He would use sci-fi imagery against bright psychedelic inspired backgrounds, it gave a real insight to what rave culture was like, by only looking at a small flyer.

Rave Art represents far more than just trippy artwork, it represents the sense of community that the subculture has created, the artwork promotes unity and eternal euphoria, which is everything that Rave Culture stood for.

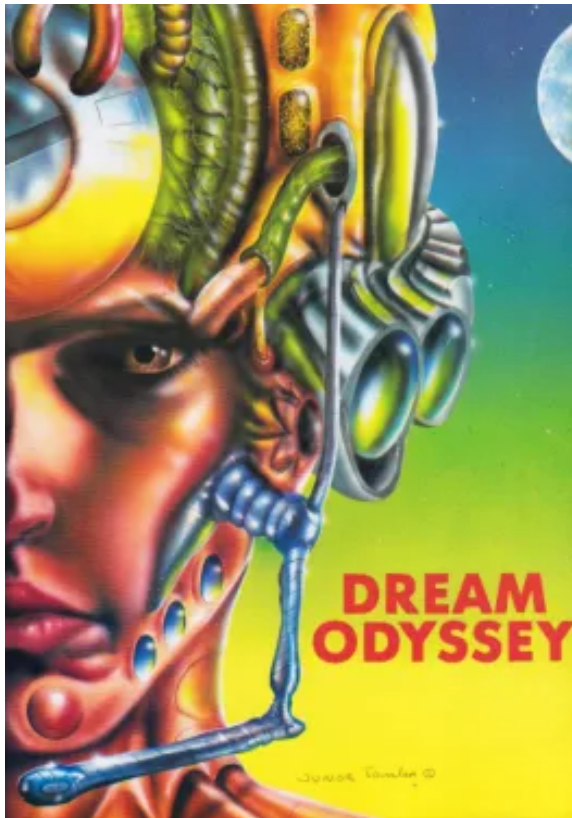


Figure 3, Dream Odyssey, Junior Tomlin

Conclusion

Looking at these keywords has given me much clarity on who I am and want to be as a designer. The three keywords, Physical Media, Nostalgia and Rave Art at face value all sound wildly different, however there is a lot of common threads between the three the further you investigate them. Physical Media at face value is a very one-dimensional topic, however when you start to consider the emotional response someone can get from holding your design in their hands it becomes a lot deeper. Nostalgia is extremely broad topic but applies to design in so many ways. Whether it be through trends coming back off the influence of past designs, or how a piece of design can make you feel or what memories you have attached to it.

Rave Art is the uncommon factor, because it is already a very design-based keyword. It does still overlap with the other two keywords when you look at the attachment that people can have to some of the art that came out of that culture, whether that be attaching memories to a certain rave just by looking at the flyer, or seeing a record sleeve and remembering where you were the first time you heard that song, there is an overlapping theme of connection and remembrance through all three keywords.

This leads me to the conclusion of my proposal, and where I would like to look for my area of study next year. I plan to continue to look at attachment through nostalgia in design, linking this to physical media by creating a debate format for physical and digital media, potentially using rave and festival culture as a case study. The final question I would like to propose is: **Does the loss of Physical Media in modern rave and festival culture effect how the event is remembered?**

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