

Written Response – method of contextualizing

Part 1

This exploration is a valuable experience throughout which I was able to gain deeper understanding about sight loss and the life experience of the blind individuals, at a level of depth I have never had before. I learnt to see disabilities as different types of perception and ways of experiencing the world, seeing them as a part of diversity rather than something “special”.

Designing within this specific context of visual impairment also forces me to critically examine my engagement with visual medium—being able to access visual information and using vision is in fact, a huge privilege. In identifying potential barriers within our familiar mediums, I also realized that in the field of Graphic Design and creative industry in general, how insufficient attention the visually impaired group has been given. While we aim at enriching the world through the visual, we must ask ourselves at the same time: are we spoiled by the visual?

Providing better information access will be an important consideration in my future practice. I would like to get in touch with the community to understand their experiences more. I recognize that the needs of disabled individuals varied, meaning there is no one-size-fits-all method. But what I can and will certainly do is always keeping the disabled community in mind and be as inclusive as possible in how I communicate.

Part 2

Texts from the reading list

- 1) Maurer, L. et al. (2013) Conditional design workbook. Amsterdam: Valiz.

The idea of conditional design has been a key guiding principle throughout our project, especially in our early stages when we struggled with indecision on the outcome. Given the accessibility context of this brief, we could easily fall into the position of problem-solvers, thinking backwards from the desired outcome/solution. But referring to the workbook, we shifted our approach to be driven by our processes. The idea that “constraints sharpen the perspective on the process” has been also inspiring to us, as it not only hints our working method but also resonated with our standpoint on disability—the lack of senses or body functions is often seen as constraining defections, however, we see it not as “inability”, but conditions where greater possibilities can be generated. In our later stages, the discussion of

subjectivity in design also prompted us to reflect on the “methods” and “tools” we came up during the process. It encouraged us to consider what processes we can control and how that control might mean. From the beginning to the end, the idea of working under conditions largely shaped our workflow and decisions.

- 2) Rock, M. (2019) Designer as author, 2x4. Available at: <https://2x4.org/ideas/1996/designer-as-author/>.

Who we are to disabled people, what can we do, and what should we do? We kept thinking about these questions during the project. Not being a part of the disabled community, we have realized that we need to remove ourselves from our own perspectives to approach a more neutral “author” role. However, what we didn’t realize is that we can also choose to withdraw from some of our roles in being the “author”. As suggested by Rock, design is a “multivalent activity”. When mentioning our chosen medium publication, his description of a designer’s actions as “one contiguous whole”—simultaneously being writer, editor, and a form-giver—is exactly what we attempted to do. But in this project where we discuss who can and cannot speak for oneself, if we claim all these roles, what do we really gain? We do not need a mark of ownership of this project or claim it to be our artistic achievement. Instead, we could choose to be a “director” who decides where narratives happen, allowing the participant to take ownership of authoring their own story. The multiplicity of a designer’s roles offers flexibility to choose, and design means making choices in which of these rights to use, which standpoints to take, and responsibility to assume. While we can choose to take on each of these roles, anonymity is also an option for us.

Texts outside the reading list

- 1) Diaz Merced, W. (2020) ‘How a Blind Astronomer Found a Way to Hear the Stars’, in *Disability Visibility : First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Diaz’ experience can serve as a powerful refutation of the common misconception that visual information is meaningless to the blind. The difference between the blind and the sighted is not the matter of “good” or “bad” visual quality. Rather, we perceive the world from different angles, therefore we are equal in the access to all forms of information. When discussing the vital role of information access in enabling greater personal choices, Diaz presents an ideal vision of what society should offer. What the disabled “can do” depends on what the society believes the disabled are capable of. Viewing inaccessibility due to blindness as a “personal issue” rather than a societal problem, society often only see what the disabled individuals cannot do. However, there should be nothing “impossible” for the disabled community to be—scientists, astronomers...and more. The real limitation and barrier lie not in one’s vision or mobility but in the society’s

mindset. Diaz's dream that "science belongs to everyone", and "if people with disabilities are allowed" should not be just a dream or an "if". As individuals living in this world, we should all have the right to explore the universe and make choices for ourselves.

- 2) Pichler, M. (2022) Publishing manifestos: An international anthology from artists and writers. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

The author examined current publishing environment and the role of publishing in both contemporary and historical context. It reminds us to discuss and view this medium within its broader context, rather than merely viewing it as a carrier of content or tool for distributing information. The discussions unfold a complex eco system that is made up with the activities of writers, creators, printing houses, publishing studios, administrative support, libraries, bookstores, book fair, art spaces, cultural institutions.....and more. What are graphic designers' roles in it, and do disabled people play any role here? By considering these questions, we recognize that accessibility issues in publications could not be addressed without examining this large network, and the "material conditions" it involves. Meanwhile, the growth of self-publishing communities worldwide suggests it to be a chance to make the disabled community visible. Self-publishing has historically been a channel for activism and self-empowerment, as opposed to other top-to-down approaches for revolution. Nowadays, it still provides us as independent individuals, with great agency, power, and potential for making a difference, therefore we hope to introduce more disabled individuals into this field.

2 Design Practices / Projects

- 1) Reynolds, C. and Buggle, S. (2024). See The Person | Conversations between...Clarke and Steve | Being an artist | RNIB. RNIB. 2 January. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7dWSWuOOWY>.

The insights of this visually impaired artist on the creative industry prompt me to concern about blind people's career and professional choice, especially in fields deeply connected to vision and creativity, which graphic designers are actively participating in. In an environment where "vision" is the center of communication and fully surrounded by sighted people, we tend to fall into a kind of "Ableism" of vision—take it for granted that healthy vision is a normal, or even a necessary condition to be a part of this creative community. We might have not noticed that in this seemingly inclusive field, many invisible misconceptions actually exist, but as a member of it, it is our agency to bring changes to it. This form of "interview"—hearing the honest voices and understanding the first-person point of view of the disabled individuals—also inspired our idea of a participatory event. We see the potential of "designing with" functions in similar way, fostering dialogues and bringing attention to individual voices. At the end of interview, the artist says,

he “find it exciting to shock people” by his art. No tool can be more powerful than such a shock in people’s mindset. And we hope to make that happen through our project.

2) The Accessible Icon Project. Available at: <https://accessibleicon.org/>.

This project is not just about providing a "solution" but serves as a form of activism with the power to inform and influence the public. Its approach highlights that addressing accessibility issues goes beyond improving certain functionalities; it should also provide care and respect to the dignity of people with disabilities. From such a perspective, we see that “humanity” should also be an integral part in any form of design. Further, the project also effectively utilizes the flexibility and replicability of digital resource and printing. By offering template files such as icons, the project allows idea to spread, extend, breaking the constrain of time and space and creating far-reaching influence. It also imbues the medium with a spirit of internationalism, through which, it fosters a sense of global networking and community within its participants. This reminds us to take advantage of the unique characteristics of print media to “duplicate ideas” and reach broader audiences. Studying this project motivate us to take “actions” through design, not just offering a final product.