

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

The influence of design on consumer culture is a fascinating thing. Design has the power to reinforce or subvert pre-conceived notions and societal values. Design can be direct, telling people what they should do, but it can also be very suggestive, indirectly leading the audience to their own conclusions. Ultimately, regardless of the path taken, design has the ability to create or change people's behavior.

This is an aspect of design that I find most intriguing, but also very concerning. The implementation of design can have what I see as adverse effects on consumer culture. In the broadest sense, design has helped foster the creation of demand for superfluous goods and the planned obsolescence inherent in these unnecessary iterations of goods and services that ultimately leads to a throw away culture. Design can also affect specific industries in detrimental ways such as the promotion of negative body image in the cosmetic industry or the marketing of processed products in the food industry.

Therefore, ethically I think it is our responsibility as designers to take an active role in controlling the perceptions we create through design. If the professionals creating the designs that affect culture in so many different ways do not take responsibility for the reactions they are creating who then will the responsibility fall to? Thus, ethical considerations greatly affect my perception of the design disciplines.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

The problem that I have chosen to focus on in the realm of design's adverse cultural influence is that of the marketing of processed products in the food industry. The science of artificial food production is being sold to the masses using emotional and physical responses to food as triggers to get people to consume. In certain age groups, the average consumer knows more about how satisfying processed food is rather than how potentially harmful "too much of a good thing" can be. One of the age ranges this is most prevalent is in young adults aged 18-25. (Victorian Government Health Information)

This is a highly researched and written about issue, however the resources that vend this information do not market it towards young adults. As a result, on one side there is a highly developed and designed communication system marketing products to every age group by playing off their visceral responses, and on the other there is an under-developed wealth of information marketed only to specific audiences that favors the dispassionate relay of facts.

These gaps left in audience consideration create important design opportunities as these neglected age groups, specifically young adults aged 18-25, are particularly vulnerable. At this stage in life, young adults are typically transitioning from a dependent (living with family) to independent (living on their own) lifestyle and therefore forming their own habits. Herein lies the premise for my project. Creating an information resource that targets young adults will help them form healthy eating habits as they begin their adult lives. Establishing habits where none exist is less challenging for an individual than trying to change familiar routines. Therefore, the design challenge becomes engaging and informing young adults so that they take an interest in what they are eating. (Holland, Aarts and Langendam)

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Healthy eating campaigns are becoming more and more popular, with influence from political figures such as Michelle Obama and her “Let’s Move” campaign for fighting childhood obesity (Oches) as well as celebrity chef Jamie Oliver’s “Food Revolution” targeting food served in elementary and high school cafeterias (JamieOliver.com). And even more widespread campaigns can be seen abroad with the United Kingdom’s Change 4 Life website resource that helps parents create healthy lifestyles for their children with the motto “Eat well, Move more, Live longer” (Change4Life). The Australian Government’s Department of Health and Aging has even instituted the “Go for 2 and 5” ad campaign which targeted young families by encouraging parents to serve their children two servings of fruit and five of vegetables everyday (Australian Government Department of Health and Aging).



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Though these other countries seem farther ahead in promoting the development of healthy lifestyles through government initiated campaigns that encourage the public to live better, in all cases government still wont take direct action against the food industry. Governments avoid making legislation that puts restrictions on fatty, sugary, or salty products citing that “Government programs cannot force people to make healthy choices,” and “that individuals must take more responsibility for their choices.” That point is self defeating, however, as it disproves their argument since the existing approach is government programs therefore the next logical step would be legislation. Regardless, officials still insist on keeping companies free from the ‘burden of regulation’ and inviting them to take on a greater role in public health. (Borland and Mcdermot)

“IT’S NOT ABOUT GOOD FOOD OR BAD FOOD BECAUSE THAT WAY, YOU JUST CLOSE COMPANIES OUT. IT’S ACTUALLY ABOUT A GOOD DIET OR BAD DIET, GOOD EXERCISE OR LACK OF EXERCISE, IT’S ABOUT PEOPLE HAVING A RESPONSIBILITY.”

Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health, England (Borland and Mcdermot)

Therefore it would seem apparent that ultimately the consumer is left with the sole responsibility of protecting their own health when it comes to processed foods and that these various programs are the only means by which they can receive help or guidance. If that is the case, then these programs need to be expanded to address more than just families, parents and children. All individuals need to be able to make these decisions for themselves and it could be said that the designer has a responsibility to make information for healthy living choices readily available and appealing to all audiences.

DETERMINING CONTENT

Determining what information to include in this new resource for young adults required a survey of the issues at hand. Questions such as the internal and external influences that shape the decisions people make about food as well as what is in the food itself that attracts consumers all bared exploration and research.

Ultimately, external influences such as culture, society, and habits as well as internal influences such as psychology and physiology proved most compelling as subject matter in this new resource. Relating issues regarding food to individual experience makes it possible for audiences to create personal connections with what they are reading and therefore more likely to implement the strategies they learn. Studies show that forming implementation intentions engenders greater change in unwanted habits than does forming goal intentions (Webb, Sheeran and Luszczynska). Furthermore, the subjects of internal and external influences on what we eat create opportunities for a more human centered design approach that ties into more hard data topics.

DESIGN RATIONALE

With the goal of targeting young adults aged 18-25, I will design a printed resource that blends important information with the emotional marketing tactics used by the food industry to promote consumer awareness. I hope that taking this approach of mimicking existing marketing tactics will help engage my audience but also create a sense of awareness that will encourage them to interpret existing media influences more accurately. Ultimately, I am exploring ways of blending information and emotion to convey a message in a way that makes it more appealing to my audience but also encourages them to consider marketing campaigns with a grain of salt.

This involves reinterpreting existing representations of food in culture in order to create social change. Based on the nature of the content and my intended audience a satirical tone would lend itself to affirming my point as humor is a well established marketing tool in the processed food industry for products such as chips, snacks, alcohol, and chewing gum. (Gayatri)

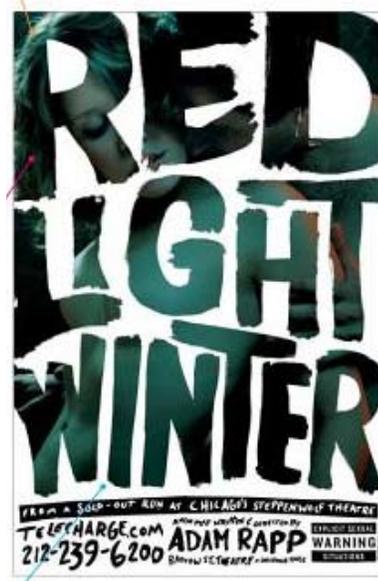
CONCEPT EXPLORATION

CONCEPT I:

REVERSE FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY AND FOOD TYPOGRAPHY

DESIGN INFLUENCES

Sagmeister, *Poster*
Stephan Sagmeister
Red Light Winter,
Poster
Darren Cox
(Heller and Ilic)



Here I am exploring the idea of taking on existing methods of advertising and bending them to my own use by presenting visuals that oppose what people expect to see in association with food marketing. I would do this through “reverse food photography” by visualizing ingredients and mutilating food so that it more accurately represents what it does to our bodies. For example, mulching and mixing food so that it looks like the fat in our bodies, or using food or food residue to create typography. Essentially food stripped of the showmanship associated with food photography and presented as something unpleasant or undesirable.

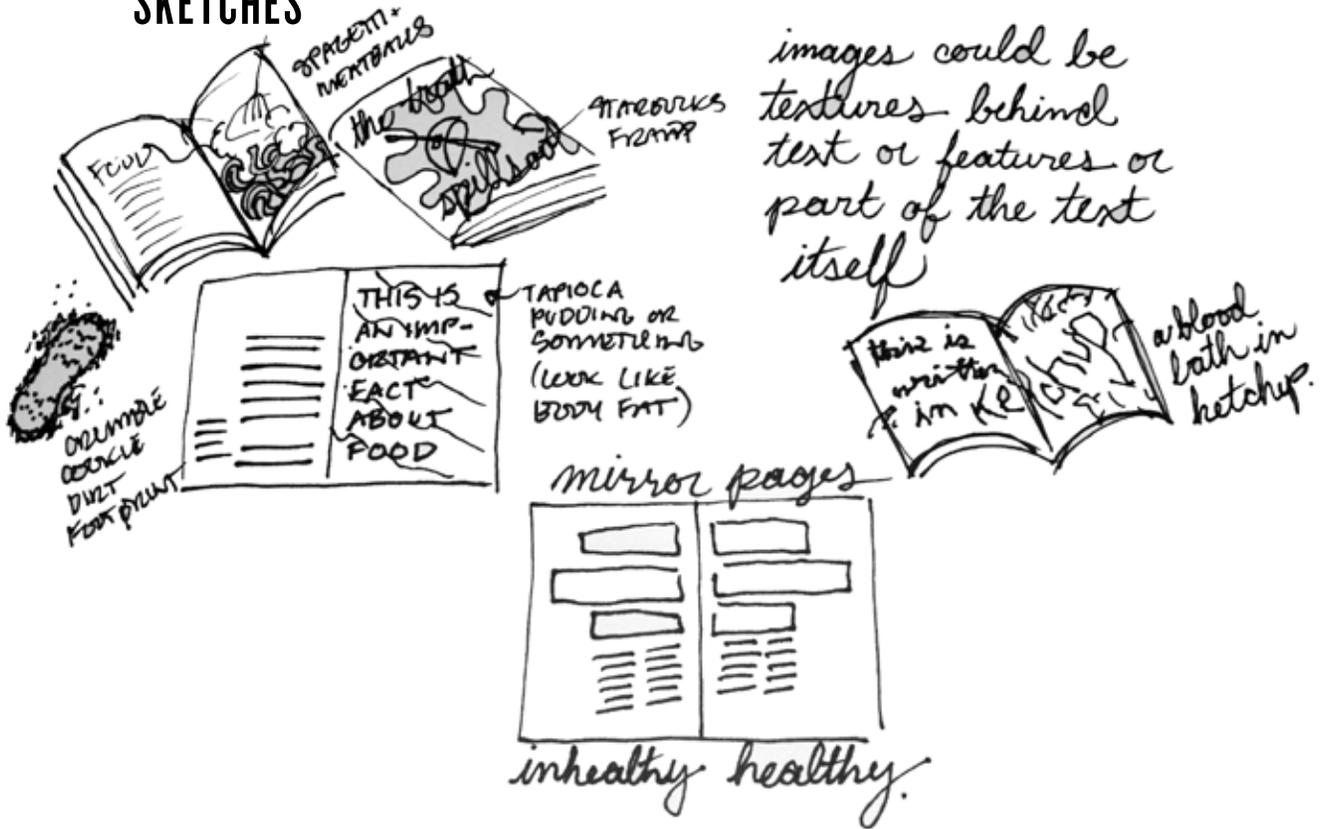
CONCEPT EXPLORATION



The book, *Food*, edited by John Knechtel is a compilation of artist interpretations of food in their everyday lives. It includes photo essays of food imitating household items (spaghetti tablecloths, salami shower tiles, fried egg throw rugs) as well as depictions of food rituals and photographs of food advertising on the side of container trucks. There is a common photographic style contained in the various works that implies an air of criticism or awareness of problems existing in current food practices.

CONCEPT EXPLORATION

CONCEPT I: SKETCHES

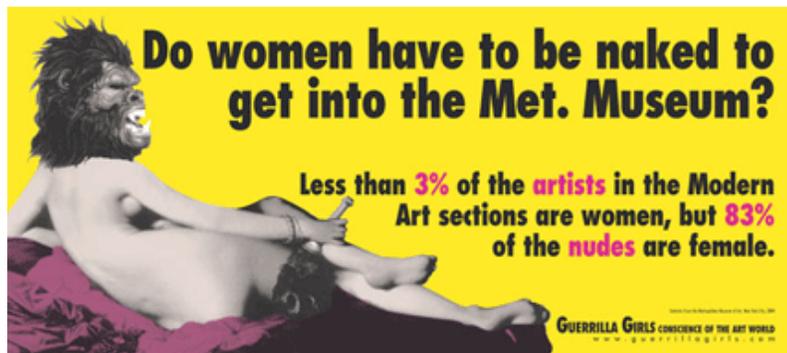


CONCEPT EXPLORATION

CONCEPT 2:

JUXTAPOSING TRADITIONAL IMAGES OF FOOD WITH CURRENT FACTS

DESIGN INFLUENCES
Do Women Have to be Naked to get into the Met Museum?
Campaign
Guerrilla Girls Inc.
Stay Away from the Corporations That Want You to Lie for Them, *Billboard*
Jonathan Barnbrook
(Heller and Ilic)



This idea entails taking existing representations of food in culture that illustrate the traditional associations we have with our food and juxtapose that with current facts about its production. Here the intention is to play off preconceived and deep seated notions of food that are no longer true to create pause for thought and consideration of what we assume is the truth.

CONCEPT EXPLORATION



The book, *Food Mania: An extraordinary visual record of the art of food, from kitchen garden to banqueting table*, by Nigel Garwood & Rainer Voigt is a historical compilation of traditional food illustration that celebrates conventional perceptions of food. “The manners, rituals and obsessions of cultivation, preparation and consumption – all enticingly displayed” (Garwood and Voigt).

CONCEPT EXPLORATION

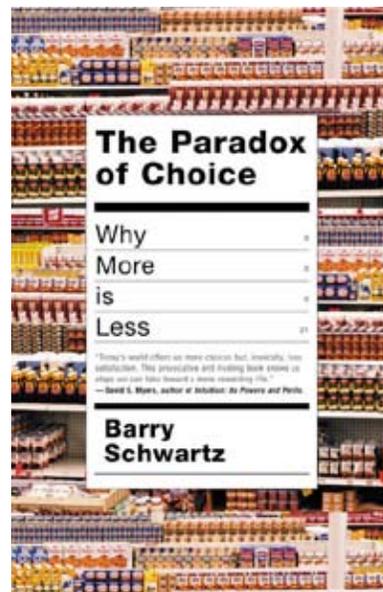
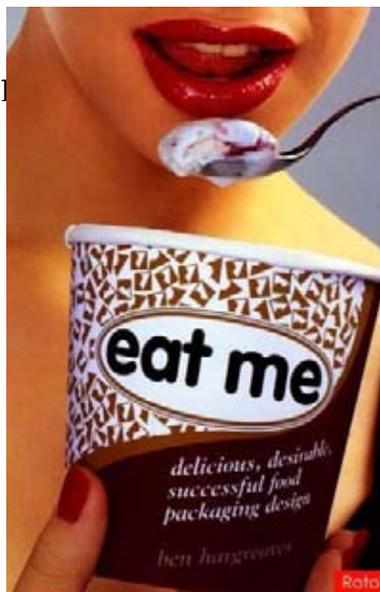
CONCEPT 2: SKETCHES

<p>MONSIEUR RETORNEE</p> 	<p>this what could permit a nuclear holocaust</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>comparision</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="828 735 974 966"> <p>a cake 50 years ago...</p> </td> <td data-bbox="974 735 1136 966"> <p>A CAKE IN PRESENT DATE...</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>a cake 50 years ago...</p>	<p>A CAKE IN PRESENT DATE...</p>
<p>a cake 50 years ago...</p>	<p>A CAKE IN PRESENT DATE...</p>			
<p>THEY EAT LARD BECAUSE THEY'RE UNHAPPY</p> 	<p>POOR NUTRITION IS LINKED TO STRESS WHICH IS LINKED TO SLEEP LOSS WHICH IS LINKED TO ABUSE OF CIGARETTE + ALCOHOL</p>	 <p>yes, it is as inappetizing as it looks</p>		
<p>she wouldn't be so excited if she knew</p> 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	 <p>ingredients heart disease high blood pressure etc</p>		

CONCEPT EXPLORATION

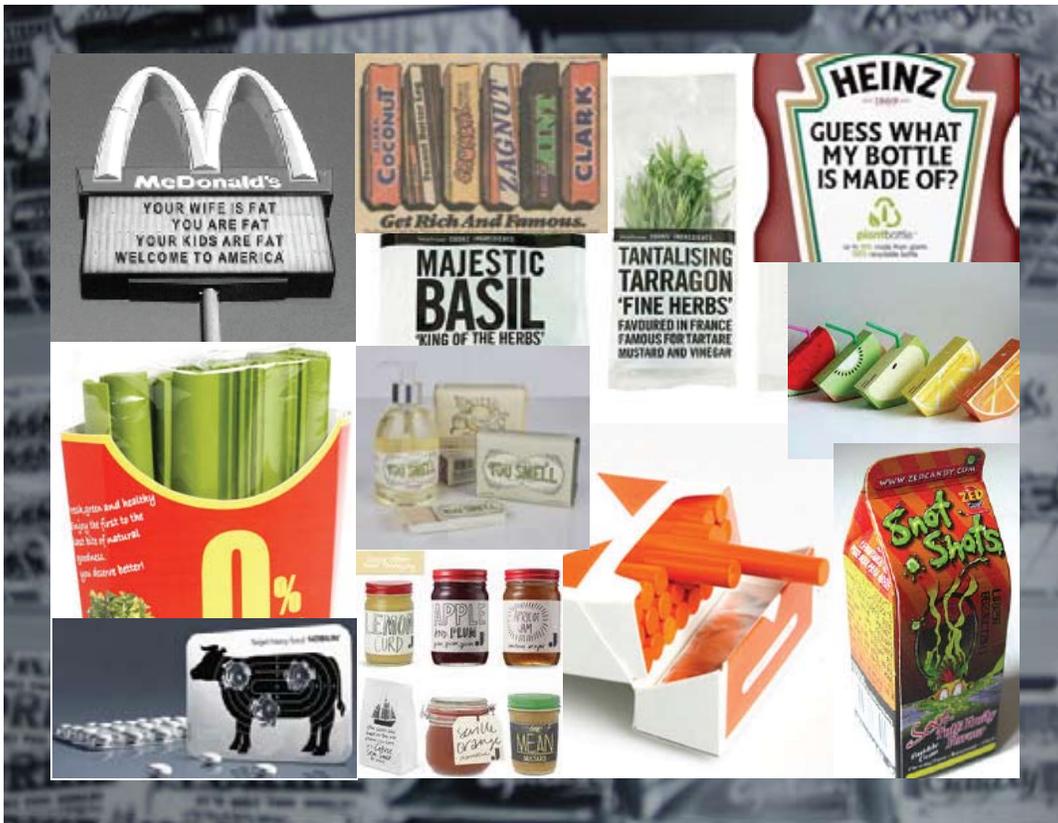
CONCEPT 3: PLAYING OFF THE EXISTING ICONOGRAPHY OF FOOD

DESIGN INFLUENCES
Eat Me: Delicious,
Desirable, Successful
Food Packaging
Design, *Book Cover*
Ben Hargreaves
The Paradox of
Choice, *Book Cover*
Barry Schwartz



The concept here is to design typographic layouts that mimic well established processed food packaging but replacing the existing text with facts, information and quotes about the food production, the health effects of eating these foods and the food industry. Essentially playing off the existing iconography of processed food to call attention to its hidden qualities.

CONCEPT EXPLORATION



The book, *Eat Me: Delicious, Desirable, Successful Food Packaging Design* by Ben Hargreaves looks at a wide variety of food packaging from traditional Heinz Tomato Soup can labels to avant garde wine bottle labels. It is a catalogue of existing and up and coming iconography in food packaging.

CONCEPT EXPLORATION

CONCEPT 2: SKETCHES



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