

SUPERABUNDANT FLOW

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When the mundane
becomes the significant

67,200 LBS
3,950 KGS
8,700 LBS
26,530 KGS

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RESEARCH QUESTION:

Can a study through graphic design of an ordinary, generic object such as the shipping container, reveal wider issues relating to the journey of the commodity and consumer culture?



**'We become what we behold.
We shape our tools and then
our tools shape us.'**

Culkin, Father J. and McLuhan, M. (1967)¹

1. McLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q. (1967) *The Medium is the Message* London: Penguin Books, published as part of the Penguin Design Series (2008)

‘the container is a potent paradigm of the age we live in’

Martin, C. (2016)²

INTRODUCTION

By focussing upon something as seemingly ordinary and commonplace as a shipping container, my intent is to critically address an invention which is actually steeped in relevance and consequence.

The most defining quality of this ‘generic object’ could be viewed in that it has actually fallen beneath the margin of what defines it as a ‘designed’ entity. (Moreno and Oroza, 2010)³ The shipping container can therefore be considered ultimately as a paradox, and it is this very contradiction of the ‘unremarkable,’ yet ‘relevant’ which lies at the heart of this study.

In order to place the shipping container within the context of my research, and use it as a prism through which to embrace the realms of graphic design, I have arranged this paper into three sequential chapters.

In chapter 1, I look at the history and origins of containerisation with the introduction of the steel-boxed container, and how this functional object is invariably entwined in weighty matters of significance such as global economics, capitalism and consumerism.

For chapters 2 and 3, I take the very premise of the ‘ordinary’ and ‘overlooked’ and how these constructs have continually been exploited as a strategy by artists and photographers to reveal the potential in seemingly banal subject matter. My intent here is to encompass methodologies inherent to the realms of moving image and film theory. Whereby lens media, now very much an accessible tool for graphic design, has been previously implemented by filmmakers as a process to bring contextual aspects of ‘the everyday’ into view. My aim is to examine key strategies associated with the moving image, such as documentary, cinéma vérité (truth cinema) and slow, observational essay film.

2. Martin, C (2016) Shipping Container. Object Lessons Series, London: Bloomsbury Academic, An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing.

3. Moreno, G. and Oroza, E. Generic Objects, Journal #18 - September 2010 Available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/18/67456/generic-objects/> (Accessed: 21 August 2017)

'You've got more than enough, but you still want more stuff'

Adams, S.J. (2007)⁴

90% of Everything

You don't have to look far to see how purchasing patterns and developments in the way goods and commodities reach us are continually evolving, affecting our environment and irrevocably changing our daily lives.

An ongoing transformation meant that the once traditional mode of the local high street was surpassed by the larger department stores, followed by the U.S. 'mall model' or simply 'shopping centres' here in the U.K. Culminating to a situation today, whereby our everyday needs (and more) are all available online, just a click away, delivered to our doorsteps. We don't even have to venture outside.

The unstoppable advancement of automation continues abound and sees no sign of abating. It's a flow of 'superabundance' if you like and who knows where, or what it will all lead to on a worldwide scale? Or, what the social implications will be to us on a very localised, personal level, in the not too distant future? These are the key issues, anxieties and underpinnings which lay at the root of my study. As Deyan Sudjic states in his book 'The Language of things' (2008 p.5)...

'Never have more of us had more possessions than we do now, even as we make less and less use of them... They are our toys: consolations for the unremitting pressures of acquiring the means to buy them and which infantilize us in our pursuit of them...'⁵

But whereas Sudjic's book focusses on a fetishisation of the commodity based around the lure and influence of the aesthetic in material goods, my focus is shifted towards an object that is largely noticeable by its very lack of design aesthetic; the intermodal shipping container. An ordinary steel box which functions and operates with such unparalleled success within the global markets and infrastructure of which it complements.

Moreno and Oroza (2010) refer to this contradiction...

'...designed with such programmatic exactitude that spaces accommodating authorial expression are reduced to make room for qualities that foster efficient and competitive performance in commercial processes.'⁶

It is this poignancy inherent in such a commonplace object that has drawn me towards an attempted graphic unveiling and scrutiny of the 'unseen.' Also, my interest is focused upon a potent awareness, of an entity which appears so seemingly banal and ordinary.



Delivery Robot Drone (PA images 2016) Driverless delivery containers are fast becoming a reality today. All in the name of lowering the cost of transit to the consumer and allowing the movement of the commodity to increase. The pilot scheme for these drones was initiated on the Greenwich Peninsula but has recently been introduced to the London borough of Southwark.



'Freshly Clicked' Tesco's current supermarket delivery van livery highlights the online mode through which the order is placed.

4. Adams, S. J. (2007) Love Your Man Love Your Woman
From the album: Hello Love by the Broken Family Band

5. Sudjic, D. (2008) The Language of Things, How we are
seduced by the Objects Around Us London: Penguin Books

6. Moreno, G. and Oroza, E. Generic Objects, Journal #18 - September 2010
Available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/18/67456/generic-objects/>
(Accessed: 21 August 2017)



Malcolm P. Maclean inventor of the shipping container. Maclean was said to have come up with the idea whilst waiting for one of his lorries to be unloaded by a gang of dock-workers. He is alleged to have enquired as to, whether it would not be quicker to lift the whole lorry onto the ship, rather than unload it's contents? Photo: Maersk Line archive (1957)

Arrival of the Box

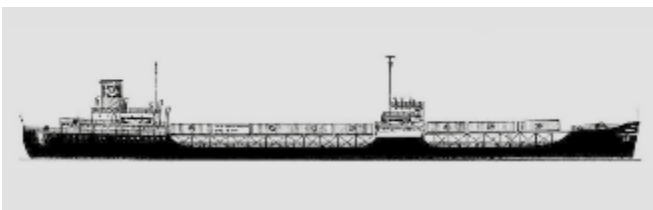
Containerisation can still be viewed as an ongoing process, continually evolving under the auspices of 'logistics' and driven irrevocably onwards by Capitalist free market forces. Whereby from the arrival of the first shipping container to the UK in the mid-1960s, there has been a perpetual streamlining of the process which allows for the packaging and shipment of goods to the customer, ever cheaper, ever faster.

The current mode of ordering online, has seen an exponential growth of late whereby the supermarket home delivery van scurrying through the streets of Britain, has become such a common sight. Highly visible, yet also strangely, notable for it's anonymity. These vehicles themselves are a form of containerisation

(right) One of Malcolm Maclean's early container lorries.
Photo: Dennis Shull Collection



(right) **SS Ideal X**, Converted in 1955 this ship was an ex-World War II T-2 oil tanker, it is recognised as the first commercially successful container ship, commissioned by McLean's Pan-Atlantic Steamship Company. Image: Public Domain, Wikipedia



whereby individual orders are stacked into plastic crates within the van, almost a microcosm of the vast rows of containers arranged upon a ship.

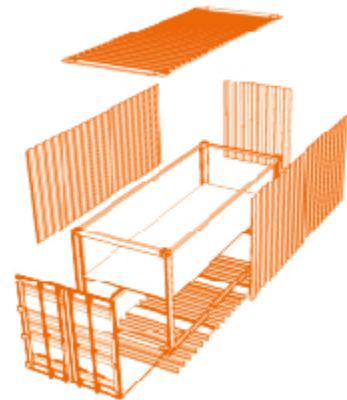
Despite the end delivery taking many different guises, the main constant throughout the global system of trade and distribution is still primarily the shipping container. Nearly everything we own has once travelled in one, but very few people are aware of this fact. This disconnect is allied to an increased feeling of alienation as to an awareness of where things actually come from. In her book titled '90% of Everything' (2013) author Rose George highlights this very phenomenon.

Author Craig Martin (2016 p.58) also claims...

'the reasons the intermodal container has become so powerful an object of contemporary capitalism is precisely due to the fact that it moves so effortlessly without us noticing it. All we see is the blank face of the box'⁷



The **Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit** 'TEU' aka: intermodal shipping container. On the surface, a very simple configuration of six sides of corrugated steel, to allow for strength and multiple stacking. A blank, anonymous box which rarely reveals a view of the contents contained within it. Images: ©Shutterstock



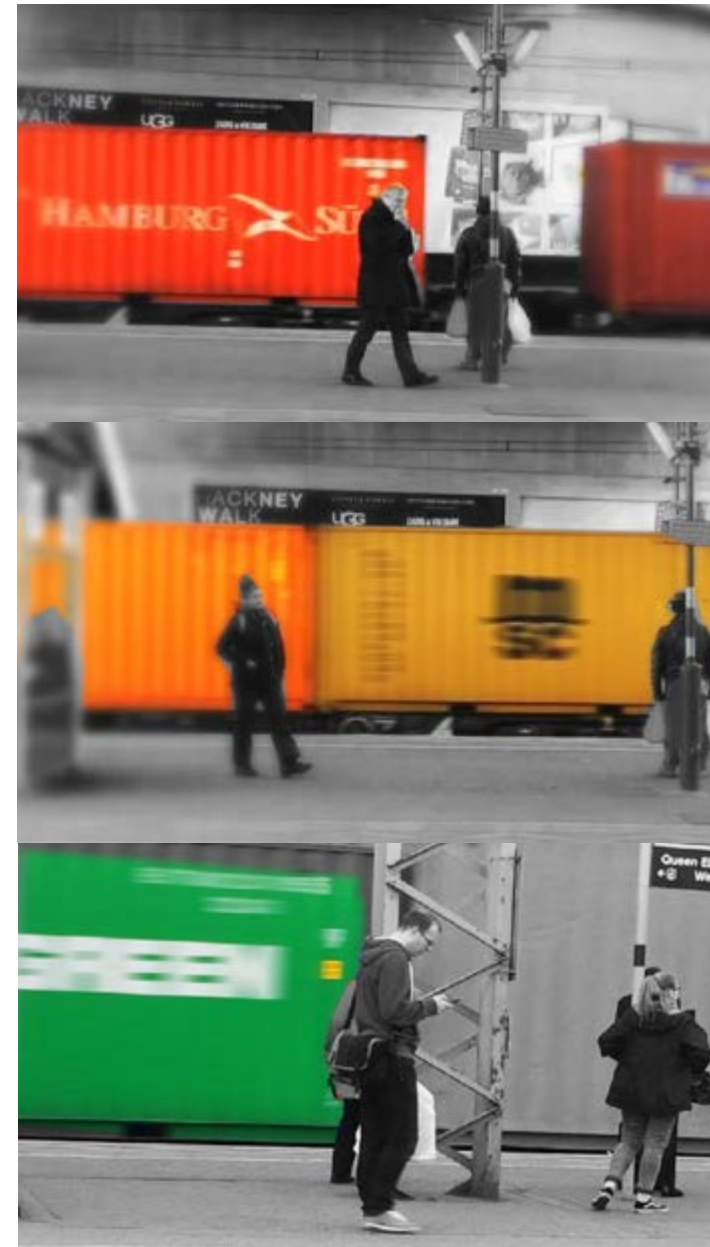
7. Martin, C (2016) Shipping Container. Object Lessons
London: Bloomsbury Academic, An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing.

‘...the fact that it moves so effortlessly without us noticing it. All we see is the blank face of the box’

Martin, C (2016)⁷



An early trial of a container at the Royal Victoria Docks, London. (1964)
Most official sources cite that the first shipping container arrived in the UK in 1966, but this example I found in the study area of the Museum of London, Docklands, pre-dates this by two years.
Photo: ©Port of London Authority



A freight train carrying multiple shipping containers glides through the station at Stratford, London. Largely unobserved and unnoticed. These image stills are taken from my own research footage and form part of my short film **Brentwood [19:23]**

7. Martin, C (2016) Shipping Container. Object Lessons
London: Bloomsbury Academic, An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing.

A12 - The Container Super Highway



Nestled neatly between London and the container ports to the East of the Thames Estuary, Brentwood became a perfect vantage point for me to view cargo freight traffic headed across London and the South East. With Felixstowe, the UK's largest container port, further up the East Coast, currently handling 42% of the shipping which arrives to these shores.

My own personal realisation and awakening as to the phenomena and cultural significance of the container, was through a culmination of events. In one part, a change of location as to where I was living, plus also joining the postgraduate course at the LCC whereby critical debate amongst my peers within the studio environment encouraged me to inquire and nurture an awareness as to socio-economic issues and crucially how they might be encompassed by graphic design.

Having lived most of my life in South East of London, where I was born, I found myself uprooted and relocated to Brentwood, a town past the very boundaries of East London in the county of Essex. Here, I found myself in a geographical position which allowed me to observe at close hand the movement of freight cargo travelling via the three primary modes of transport through which it is carried in the UK; by Road, Rail and Sea.

When I lay in bed, I can hear the perpetual swooshing noise of container lorries as they make their way along the A12 road which runs 400 yards from my window. I have satirically come to refer to this main arterial road as 'The Container Super Highway.' Wet conditions in particular will increase the audio levels of this ever present background soundscape, a continuous reminder of the looming presence of the commodity on the move.

'It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world'

John Berger (2007)⁸

Partly due to it's relative close proximity, I had started to visit Felixstowe early on in this project and stood, perplexed upon the shore, at the sight of colossal container ships gliding in and out of the port. I couldn't fail to be moved by this as a spectacle in itself, yet still I failed to see how I could attempt, through graphic design, to establish a cogent approach to encompass such a vast global subject.

Although it was through analysis of a particular photograph that enabled me to focus upon a possible method to pursue in my research.



A recycled Shipping Container is used as a transport cafe along the A12, just outside of Colchester. There's a kind of melancholy, run down feeling to this establishment. Serving scolding tea in a polystyrene cup, I can't help but view it sadly as a kind of symbolic cast-off in the onward march of supposed industrial progress.



8. Berger, J (1972 p.7) Ways of Seeing
London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.

‘Empirical Research, Investigation into a field of study that is based on direct observation of phenomena’

Noble, I. and Bestley, R. (2016)⁹

Attempting to reveal scale and contemplative awareness as a gargantuan vessel slipped past me, a photo I had taken inadvertently captured an elderly couple also watching in silent awe at the spectacle in front of them (see image right). It dawned upon me that it was through a very human and emotive dimension that I could embrace wider worldly issues. This could only have occurred through getting out in the field to observe, part of what Noble & Bestley (2016) in their book on Visual Research termed as ‘Empirical Research’⁹

The persistence of an observational method of ‘Field Study’ based at Felixstowe also led me to befriend amateur filmmaker and self-confessed ‘shipspotter’ Dean Cable. A proclaimed expert in the field of local shipping and also the global shipping industry in general, Dean observes and records the movement of freight cargo to an obsessive degree. His heightened pursuit of documentation, and my filming of him doing so, opened up possible diegetic narratives relating to an emotive, anthropological dimension to my research.

My strategy was to film his careful documentation, which he undertakes with particular measured precision, of the spectacle which unfolds around the port. By so doing, I hoped to scrutinise and reveal the impact of a highly unnoticed and unexamined phenomena, revealing its true significance on a very human scale.



A photograph I took on one of my first trips to Landguard Point in 2016, located at The John Bradfield viewing area for ships at Felixstowe. This per chance capturing of an elderly couple on the shoreline helped influence the direction of my project.



Shipspotter Dean Cable recording footage of the ‘swinging and berthing’ manoeuvres of container ships at Felixstowe. Dean uploads his work to Youtube and regularly enjoys four figure ‘viewing hits’ for his truly informative films.

9. Noble, I. and Bestley, R. (2016 p.18) Visual Research: An Introduction to research methods in Graphic Design. London: Fairchild Books, An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing

'I'm interested in glorifying something that we in the world would say doesn't deserve being glorified. Something that's forgotten, focused on as though it were some sort of sacred object'

Ed Ruscha (2008)¹⁰

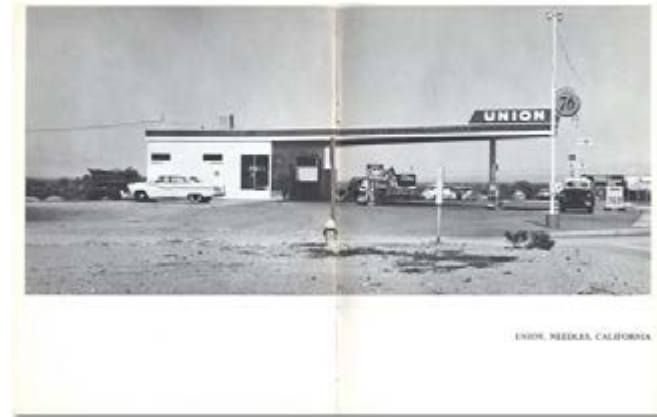
'The hardest things to see is what is in front of your eyes'

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe¹¹

A world hidden in plain view

American artist and photographer Ed Ruscha infamously sought to highlight and draw our focus upon the ordinary and seemingly mundane. He glorified it through his works such as his collections of 'Twenty Six Gasoline Stations' (1963) and the humble apartment blocks captured in the book 'Every Building on the Sunset Strip' (1966).

Ruscha's work and influence can also be clearly seen in the ensuing photographic, typology collections by the German conceptual artists and photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher, which followed a decade later in the 1970s. Whereby they also took subject matter such as industrial buildings and structures, but they also displayed and arranged them into categories and grids in the manner of cased specimens and drawings by Victorian era scientific



Top: **Twenty Six Gasoline Stations** (1963) Left: **Every Building on the Sunset Strip**, (1966) Ed Ruscha's offset lithograph 'art books' exposing the intrigue of the everyday and often overlooked. Ruscha work highlighted and continually embraced themes based around the concept of the ordinary.

analysts. These groupings, or 'taxonomies' invariably enable us to interpret a given image subject differently as to when seen in isolation.

The aspect of 'the grouping' is also crucial to the context of the shipping container when viewed as a 'generic object.' The generic object forces us to view the wider collection of similar objects that surround it, as if they are almost defined in the collective. This is highlighted by Moreno and Oroza (2010)...

'Generic objects draw on the dense fields of repeating specimens for their very definition. It is in the presence of other objects of their kind that they actualize their individual capabilities'¹²

10. Benedictus, L. Ed Ruscha's Best Shot, May 2008 Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/may/22/bestshot.ed.ruscha> (Accessed: 21 August 2017)

11. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe Quotes. BrainyQuote.com, 2017. <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/johannwolf169653.html>, (accessed October 2, 2017)

12. Moreno, G. and Oroza, E. Generic Objects, Journal #18 - September 2010 Available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/18/67456/generic-objects/> (Accessed: 21 August 2017)



Water Towers 1972–2009, silver gelatin print photographs, these are part of a larger collection taken by Bernd and Hilla Becher over a period of more than thirty years
Tate Collection © Estate of Bernd Becher & Hilla Becher



Steffen Krüger & Tammo Rist (2012)
Printed collections of x-rays taken by customs officials revealing the contents of shipping containers. Clearly influenced by the sequential arrangements created previously by Bernd and Hilla Becher.
A common link to all of these black and white photographic references, and key to my research, is the industrial backdrop and setting.

My initial visual research concerning the graphic aspects of the shipping container was partly an attempt to look it through a lens inspired by the photographic work of Ed Ruscha, plus the classification techniques of the Bechers. I applied a methodology of looking closely at the object itself, highlighting it's inherent qualities that drew my curiosity towards it in the first place. Also collecting multiple images and attempting to arrange and display them. These experiments were an attempt to search out an elusive aesthetic which in hindsight was probably more applicable to traditional strategies of photography and graphic design, which couldn't quite translate the themes I was looking to highlight.

Obviously I was drawn towards the specific graphic markings intrinsic to the container. The official adornments and complicated terminology relating to it's capability and specified usage, labelling with words such as MAX GROSS, TARRE, NET, PAYLOAD and CU CAPACITY. Most often this information is set in heavily condensed sans-serif fonts, to allow for incredibly long lists of numbers to follow. Alexis Madrigal, author and broadcaster behind the an extremely influential eight part series titled 'Containers: The podcast about global trade' (2017) suggested, when referring to the steel boxes and the ships that carry them...

'They also encounter the elements, docks and tugboats, weathering occurs, they age. And so, you end up with these gorgeous surfaces that, though they are basically big flat steel planes, take on the feel of a landscape. It is a combination of capitalism and nature and chance and time.'¹³



The prime place to view the 'doors end' of the container is out on the roads. Key identification markings and labelling, with terms such as **MAX GROSS, TARRE, NET, PAYLOAD** and **CU CAPACITY** almost appearing as a language of it's own. Much of this is obviously revealing the carrying capability and performance of the individual containers. Limited research into this aspect early on in my project revealed that the configurations of data and technical information are far more complicated than they at first appear! Although fascinating in it's own right, this wasn't the kind of aspect of the container which I was attempting to examine.

Although very true, applicable, and part of the strange allure of containers with which I can also identify, but any misty-eyed sentiment I held towards them was blown away early in the project when I came across an article by journalist Dan Hancox in Vice, online magazine.

The piece was specifically referring to the development of an improvised shopping development. The project entitled 'Artworks Elephant,' (at the Elephant & Castle, London) consists of multiple stacked shipping containers converted for use as retail units and 'art spaces,' it still stands to this day in 2017.

13. Madrigal, A.C.(2017) Notes from the making of Containers, the podcast about global trade. Available at <https://medium.com/containers/making-something-you-love-c559e817f4da> (Accessed: 3rd October 2017)



If nobody speaks of remarkable things

One of the graphic experiments I carried out as part of observing the everyday movement of goods and commodities—a key aspect of my research—was to attempt a time-lapse photography piece to create a short film intended to reveal a phenomena I had already become increasingly aware of.

I live at the end of a cul-de-sac, and I am always amazed at the amount of delivery vans arriving with incredibly high frequency in my road. A clear sign of the increase in internet shopping. The exercise was partially successful, although rather more interestingly it was the other unexpected details of everyday life that I had inadvertently captured in my recordings that I found of deep interest. Little nuances such as rubbish rolling across the street, people coming and going, the movement of weather systems drifting in and out accompanied by affecting patterns of light. Regular and predictable minutiae of suburban life, but crucially relevant in my seeking and embracing of the ordinary.

This most 'unremarkable' of happenings on my doorstep led me towards to a book which I had previously read upon it's release in 2002. 'If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things' Jon MacGregor's debut fiction novel was nominated for the Booker Prize. I couldn't see the relevance of the book at the time, it's lack of drama, absence of dynamic plot and unconventional style were hard to fathom, that's the trouble with ordinary and slow, I have found that it can often polarise opinion.

One thing that did stick with me was the sullen prose in it's descriptions of an ordinary street, going about it's seemingly unremarkable daily routine.

McGregor claims that his poetic novel was influenced by the death of Princess Dianna in 1997, a huge event, whereby an unprecedented outpouring of grief and emotion swept the nation to create a bizarre massed focus upon the tragedy. Macgregor's intention was to twist the notion of a given thing's fascination and wonderment as to whether it was instantly worthy of attention and newsworthy. His key claim was that many more things closer to our own experience are themselves noteworthy and valid, also that his concept for the book had come about from a similar strategy I was attempting to employ; i.e. observing and analysing phenomena seen from one's own window and immediate surrounds.

The author revealed that the setting for the book was in fact based upon Bradford in the north of England, and the book's title is taken from a speech towards the end of the book where a man is trying to tell his young daughter about the many beautiful 'simple' things in the world and how, if we are not careful, we may miss them.¹⁵

The title of the book can be viewed as a play on words in that 'remarkable' here is clearly referring to something being worth commenting, or 'remarking' upon.

For the purposes of my research, MacGregor's work and the construct it builds in relation to the concept of ordinary is crucial. His suggestion of seemingly ordinary events, experienced by ordinary people, experiencing ordinary displays of weather, plant and animal life, are themselves worthy of attention and focus and are often in fact recognised as 'extraordinary'. This contradiction serves to highlight the conjecture of significance gleaned from the everyday.

'He says there are remarkable things all the time, right in front of us ... He says if nobody speaks of remarkable things, how can they be called remarkable?'

MacGregor, J. (2002)¹⁵

15. McGregor, J (2002 p.239) If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things
London: Bloomsbury Publishing

A Cinematic Truth Revealed in the Slow

The film 'Castro Street' was created by American cinematic artist Bruce Baillie in 1966. This keenly observational 16mm format piece along with most of Baillie's work, is often suggested to evade category or genre.

In the Tate Modern's printed programme for a screening of his work which I attended in 2016, Baillie's work is described as being able to ...

'explore narrative in non-traditional forms, fusing the mystical and the mundane'¹⁶

With a running time of just ten glorious minutes, this film is a fantastic cine-colour saturated delight. A depiction of a simple railroad journey in California, Castro Street, located close to San Francisco, is set against a backdrop of heavy industrial buildings and freight activity. The film was to have a profound affect upon my project and critical thinking.

(Below) **Bruce Baillie's** Castro Street (1966, USA) For me, this piece, with its bold colours and multi-layered compositions, shows the key ingredient of Graphic Design brought into filmmaking, which I was looking to pursue in my own outputs. Available at (36.30) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ou5gBQ9IrKQ>



16. Baillie, B. (2016 p.3) Bruce Baillie: Still Life
London: Tate Publications

The mix of anthropological, historical meets poetical, and a contemplative viewing experience was exactly what I was looking to infuse into my own graphic film and lens media experiments. This helped dictate the overall direction of my research project.

MacDonald (2011) describes Castro Street as...

'a film of remarkable beauty and complexity, a sound-image work that in its unusual combinations offers a provocative understanding of industrialisation itself...'

MacDonald, S (2011)¹⁷

The Forgotten Space

Early in my project I had come across the work of Allan Sekula and his photographic probing of the container industry and its position within the global economy in his book 'Fish Story' (2002).¹⁸ Sekula's work graphically captured aspects of containerisation and the effects upon the people that worked and lived around the port cities and the harsh living conditions many of the exploited workforce endured. But it was his collaboration with film theorist and director Noel Burch and the movie they created inspired by Fish Story, called 'The Forgotten Space' (2010)¹⁹ which enabled me to contextualise some of my own research by looking into aspects such as 'Essay Film' in relation to documentary film making.

17. MacDonald, S. Essay on Castro Street (2011)
Library of Congress USA. Available at: https://www.loc.gov/programs/static/national-film-preservation/castro_street.pdf (accessed 23.10.17)

18. Sekula, A. (1996) Fish Story
Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag

19. The Forgotten Space (2010) [DVD]
Icarus Films Sekula, A. and Burch, N.



(Top) Sekula, A. (1996) *Fish Story* Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag.
(Above) Also the 'Film Essay' version entitled *The Forgotten Space* (2010) [DVD] Icarus Films
Sekula, A. and Burch, N.

Film trailer available to view at:
<https://vimeo.com/14987749>

The key theme of 'Fish Story' and 'The Forgotten Space' is drawn from 'Dismal Science' which is essentially based on a dark prediction that the world's population will always grow faster than the means to support it, leading to a bleak future for mankind. This dystopian forecast is of relevance in that a study of the container shipping industry in relation to global trade and economics can clearly permeate such thinking. Essentially, it is the way that such gloomy and seemingly vast subject matter is handled by the use of film and cinematic technique that was been of keen interest for me. Even if the film itself was quite a labour to watch.

Burch boldly claims in the production notes to 'The Forgotten Space' that he himself was responsible for launching the concept of 'essay film' as a form of documentary filmmaking in the 1960s. Utilizing an admixture of materials and approaches such as fictional footage juxtaposed alongside cinema-vérité (truth film) and hidden camera-work. The key point of 'essay film' is about the conveying of ideas and exposing a cinematic truth even if it can often be an uncomfortable reality.

Recently, there appears to be a general awakening and proliferation of contemporary film and writing which highlights the plight of the world and the unknown future we face if we continue our exploitation of natural resources in order to facilitate mankind's greed through over consumption. Whilst working on her film 'The Story of Stuff' (2007) Annie Leonard identified that of the commodities streaming through the consumer economy, only a tiny proportion were still in use six months after purchase.²⁰

Capitalism demands that over consumption perpetuates. So long as governments, societies and media which support it – associating it with prosperity and happiness – there can be no foreseeable change.

20. Monbiot, G. (2012) *The Gift of Death* <http://www.monbiot.com/2012/12/10/the-gift-of-death/> (Accessed: 3rd October 2017)

'By serving up an unfiltered, real-time, high-definition window on the world, it encourages us to notice and savour the details, texture and fine grain of what's around us'

Carl Honoré (2015)²¹

The Art of Slow TV

Due to the short duration of my three films presented as part of my Major Project, running at approximately six minutes each, they can't truly be considered as examples of 'Slow Film' possessing excessively long shot durations. Although this genre of filmmaking has been a crucial strategy for me, which I have sought to emulate through my own lens media research. My intention is to make my films feel like they are part of this mode of cinematic strategy, through infusion of pace, accompanied by measured, sparing dialogue and an observational slant.



'Metal' (2015) Part of the Handmade series broadcast in the 'BBC Four Goes Slow' season (2015)
Director Ian Denyer worked to a very tight brief on this series of programmes. Stipulations such as no fast cuts in the footage, plus no shots shorter than ten seconds in duration. He claims in his blog on the making of this 'ground breaking television' that he wanted the viewer to just observe and to attempt to understand by watching.
Photo: BBC Worldwide

Denyer, I. *Making Slow Television*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/about-thebbc/entries/a2a7b7a3-19c6-4659-b530-3619a5dcf72b> (Accessed: 3rd October 2017)

21. Honoré, C. *Radio Times* (2015) Available at: http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2015-05-02/why-is-bbc4-broadcasting-a-two-hour-canal-journey-in-real-time-because-slow-tv-could-be-the-future/?fb_comment_id=831486560270530_833142196771633 (Accessed: 3rd October 2017)

'Slow TV' which has seen a recent emergence, is said to have started in Norway in 2009, with epic hours-long journeys of trains and boats through picturesque settings which became somewhat of a sensation and public participation event. Whereby huge crowds would come out to watch the filming take place, almost becoming a part of the happening itself.

This genre seemed to fit nicely into the type of cultural and educational programming favoured by BBC4, and the first of several forays followed over here in 2015. One of the first in a series of programmes was 'All Aboard! The Canal Trip,' a two-hour, real-time narrow-boat journey which was filmed along the Kennet and Avon Canal. The technique involved uninterrupted single, long-take shots, attempting to create a mesmeric alternative to the frenetic pace of modern life. With no soundtrack, no voice-overs, or over-complicated camera work; just a serene experience, gliding through the British countryside.

Opinion amongst viewers was divided; although it recorded the highest audience figures of any previous BBC 4 programmes. Some described it as the most boring TV show ever and others claimed it was oddly soothing and absorbing.

The antidote which Slow TV offers to the fast montage preferred by typical Hollywood style filmmaking, is something which was highlighted by writer and broadcaster Will Self in a talk which I witnessed him

(left) Jane Madsen's 'London Stock' is a ten minute, continuous looped 16mm cine film featuring slowly changing examples of the brickwork of London. I was fortunate to meet her and discuss my project via Academic Support at the LCC, also to attend a screening of her film at an event called 'Analogue Recurring' held at Shoreditch in London. Unfortunately, other than the two silhouetted figures seen against the screen in these pictures, and of course myself, the entire audience missed this fantastic piece of slow, observational, essay film. The organisers had made the strange decision to screen it during the interval, as I've mentioned already here in this paper, this type of film can certainly divide opinion. Is it that a film requiring the viewer to observe and think is deemed as too challenging?

deliver in London earlier this year. Self heralded a problem he cited as the 'Tyranny of Film' claiming that the ubiquity of screens and the sub-standard dirge of material delivered upon them meant the viewer no longer had to think for themselves and challenge anything which they were viewing. A proliferation of montage and high speed cross cuts, forcibly focussing our attention...

'...our eyes become pinioned to the screen in a way that displeases us'²⁰

He spoke of his craving for the long take camera shot to encourage a slow and thought provoking (critical) response in the viewer.

Perhaps the most infamous protagonist of 'The Slow' in filmmaking, was artist Andy Warhol. His forays into films of excessively long duration supposedly started as an attempt to create an unwatchable film. The resulting piece 'Sleep' (1963) was an over five hour long study of a friend sleeping. Despite critical uproar and disapproval he followed this up with 'Empire' (1964) consisting of over eight hours of slow motion footage of the Empire State Building. Regardless of their supposed 'unwatchability' it is of course Warhol's theory behind the work which is of great interest and relevance to my study and – in my opinion – vindicates his thinking...

'My fascination with letting images repeat and repeat — or in film's case 'run on' — manifests my belief that we spend much of our lives seeing without observing'

Andy Warhol (1928–1987)



(top) still from the films 'Empire' (1964) and (above) 'Sleep' (1963) which consists of long take footage featuring John Giorno, a close friend of artist Andy Warhol.

20. Self, W. The Power of Film - How film and moving image can change the world' (2017), Royal Institution, London
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Le43WJxNWU>

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Using the shipping container at the heart of a study ultimately based within the realms of graphic design may at first appear somewhat arbitrary, even possibly remiss. Also, from my final outputs and the accompanying body of visual experimentation, you can also ascertain that traditional somewhat more 'static' modes of graphic communication were deemed as unsuited to answer my proposed research question. And yet it is the very fact that Graphic Design can, and must, look beyond its boundaries in which I claim the validity of my project. Graphic Design by its very nature crosses over into multidisciplinary media, whereby use of film, photography, typography are all part of our accessible tool kit, and collaborative 'outward looking' endeavour is surely the way forward.

In this paper, I have intentionally set out to highlight how the most simple and ordinary of ideas can have profound and far reaching effects. How a craving for simpler, faster, easier access to our consumptive needs, can on one hand be beneficial and instantly gratifying, but this can also have extremely destructive side effects. Every generation claims to live in an age of anxiety about huge world matters baring down them which can only signify a bleak, 'dismal' future. Although I can't help but thinking we could well be heading towards a precipice within my own lifetime as these changes under the auspices of automation are still happening so fast.

In Chapter one, I referred to the beginnings of containerisation and how fifty years after the arrival of the first shipping containers to these shores they still remain the primary driving force behind the supply for our consumer society. The boxes are still everywhere, mobile and visible – if you cared to look – strangely remaining anonymous, but still facilitating aggressive globalisation and an accelerated flow of abundance.

In chapter 2, I have attempted to highlight how previous artists and photographers have embraced and exploited the ordinary and everyday to contemplate upon what is customarily overlooked. Its always been there, the problem is that most people think it's too boring to even consider.

The key notion from Chapter 3 is based upon the strategy of understanding through lengthy observation. Containerization revolutionised not only the way goods and freight are moved around the world but also the dynamics of the

way cities functioned. Container ships couldn't fit into the smaller channels of the rivers flowing through the world's major cities, which meant ports large enough to accommodate vessels of ever increasing size, were located elsewhere. An industry that once employed hundreds of thousands of people came to be managed by far fewer. Answering a certain disconnect of where things actually come from; an ultimate by-product of society's worship of indulgence and consumption, my attempt with this research project is to draw a collective gaze upon the movement and influence of the shipping container. Also to highlight our own involvement in their motion, as every time we scan a barcode, hear that familiar beep, or click 'purchase' on a screen, we are actively participating in the system and helping to send the commodity on its journey.

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With thanks to:
 Rachel Finney and Jane Madsen
 at LCC Academic Support.
 Barry Hurd and Sean Odell
 at Colchester School of Art
 Laura MacDonald

SUPERABUNDANT FLOW

JAMES FRASER MA Graphic Media Design
[Part time] London College of Communication, UAL

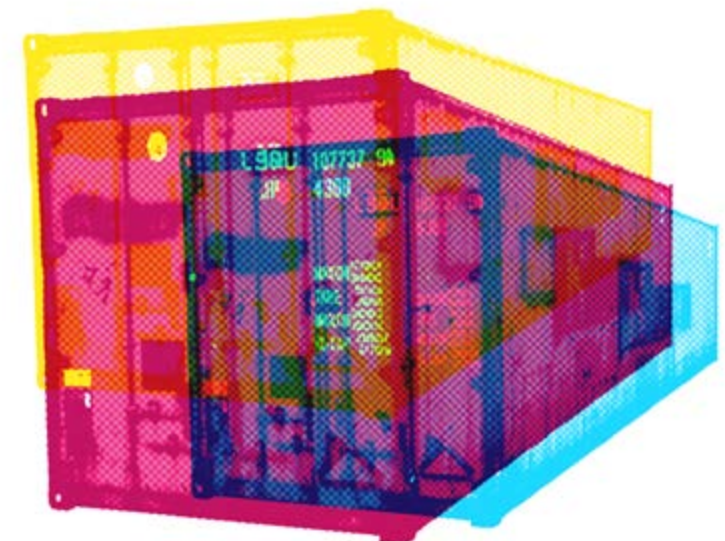
When the mundane
becomes the significant

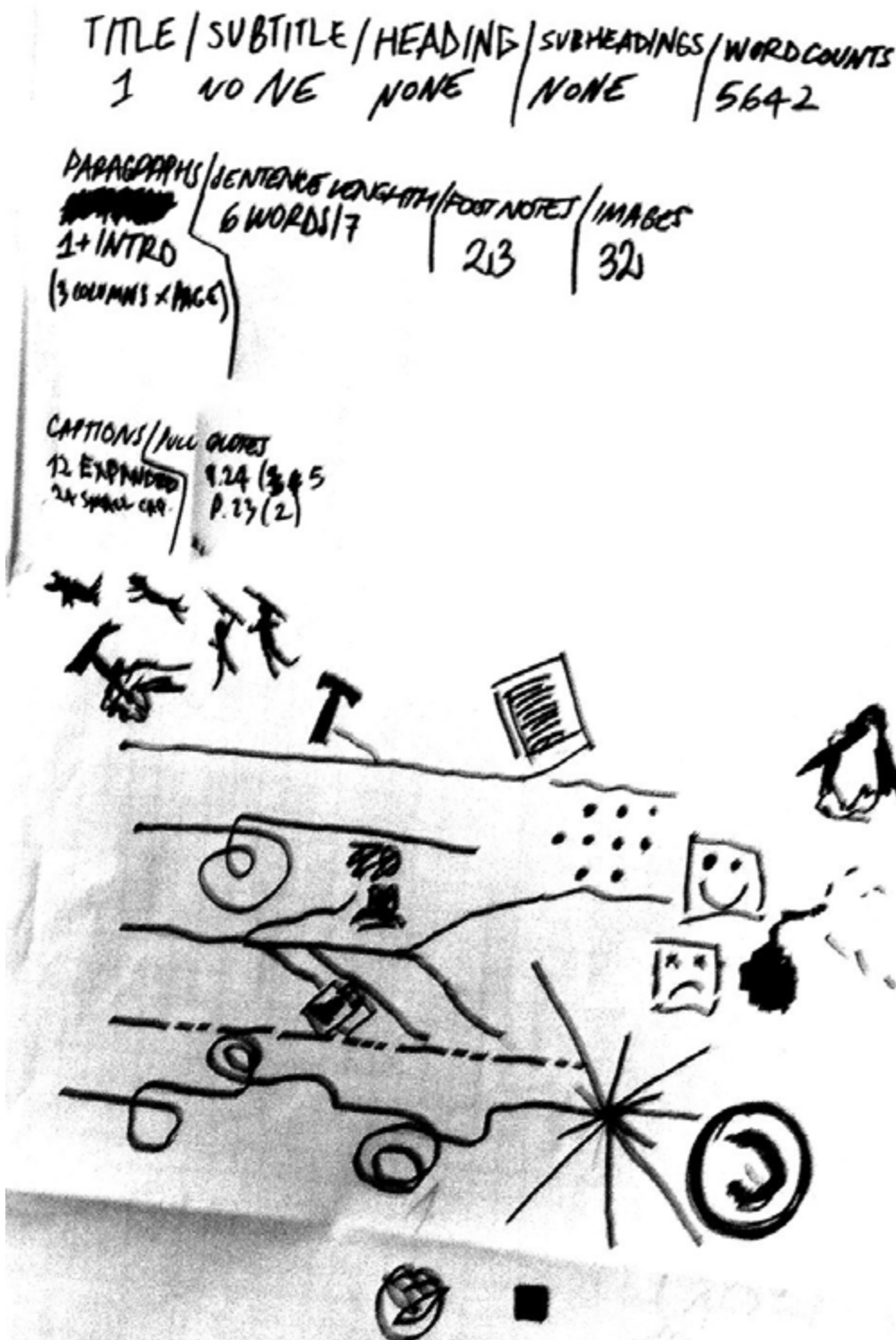
67,200 LBS
3,950 KGS
8,700 LBS
26,530 KGS



“The shipping container turbo-charged world trade and kick-started the modern age of consumerism.”

THE BOX THAT CHANGED BRITAIN, BBC4 (2010)





A key text I was introduced to as part of Unit 1 of the MA Graphic Media Design Course was 'Graphic Design: Now in Production,' (2011)¹ and crucially the chapter within it by Andrew Blauvelt entitled 'Tool (Or, Post-production for the Graphic Designer)'

Blauvelt's piece put Graphic Design at the heart of a wider sociological analysis, and used it as a paradigm of a society forced into change through technological advancement. My full critical analysis of this chapter can be accessed at the link below...

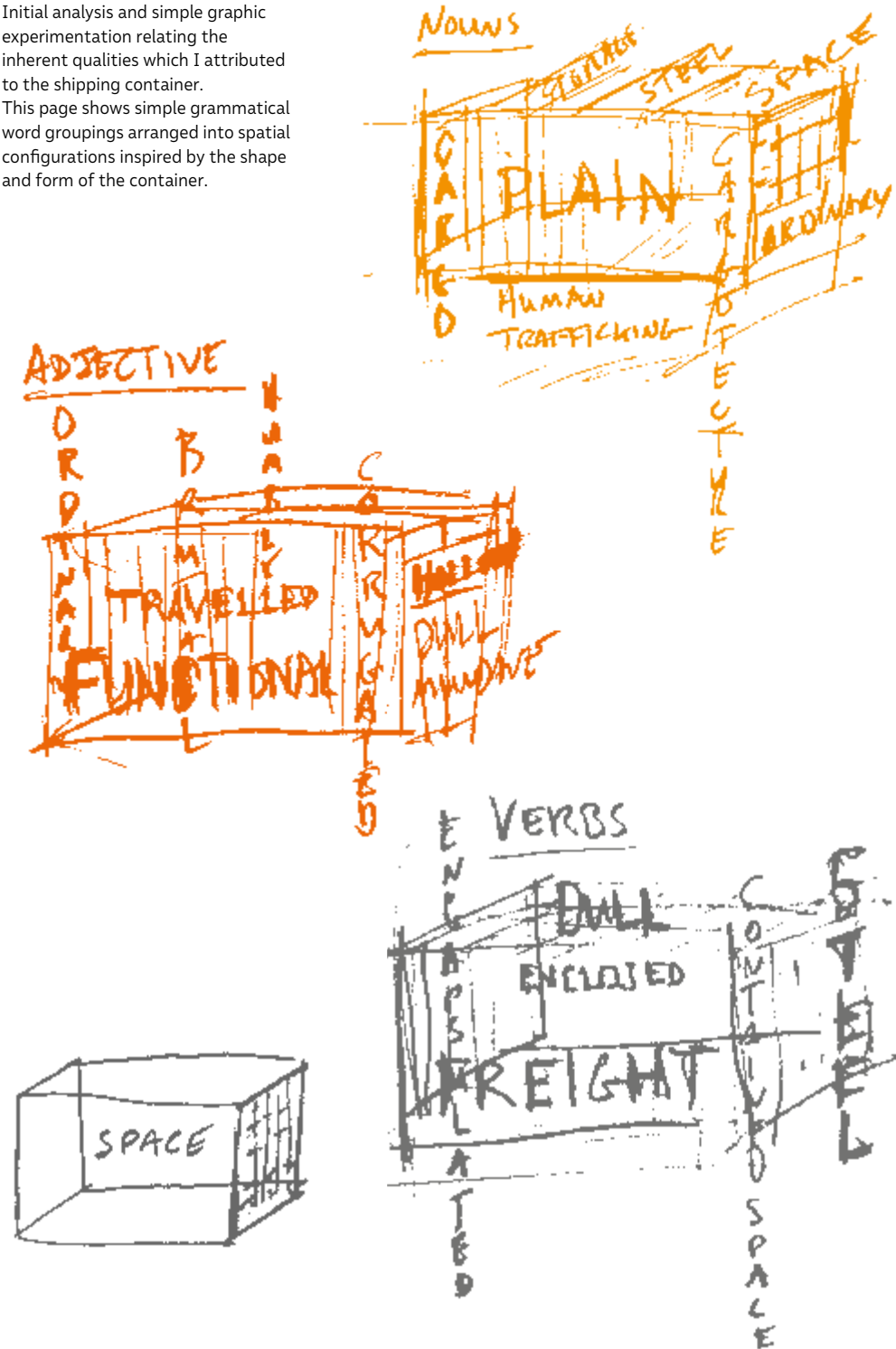
<http://jamesfraserdesign66.tumblr.com/post/137880287645/tool-or-post-production-for-the-graphic>

(above left) Front cover of Graphic Design: Now in Production, (2011)
 (above) opening page of Andrew Blauvelt's essay, Tool (Or, Post-production for the Graphic Designer)

(opposite page) An 'in-studio group session' whereby we analysed Blauvelt's text

1. Blauvelt, A. (2011) Tool (Or, Post-production for the Graphic Designer. Graphic Design: Now in Production, Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre.

Initial analysis and simple graphic experimentation relating the inherent qualities which I attributed to the shipping container. This page shows simple grammatical word groupings arranged into spatial configurations inspired by the shape and form of the container.



Screen printing induction and workshop at the LCC, 13-15th July 2016. I took some of my initial 'associated word' collections to create these x2 coloured A3 prints. These were intentionally redolent of Ed Ruscha's images of gasoline stations, being angular, simple; and of course industrial.

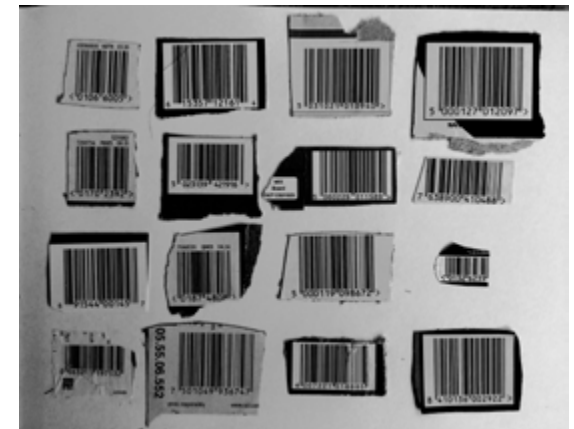
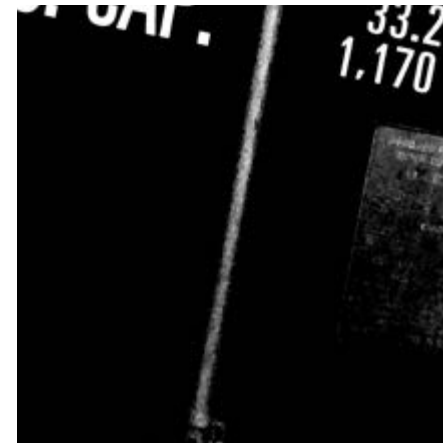




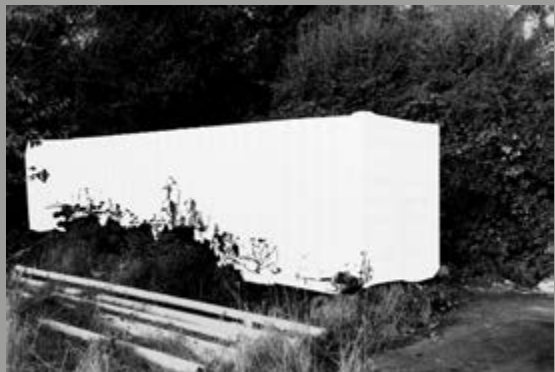
Research experimentation looking at the relationship of the shipping container with the forces that cause the movement of commodities within them. Each time we scan a barcode, or click and purchase online, we effectively assist this 'Flow.'



M.G.W. TARE	30.480 67.200 2.015 4.440 LBS LBS LBS LBS	GROSS WT. PAYLOAD	67.200 LB. 30. 62.280 LB. 28.	CU. CAP.	33.2 CU.M 1.170 CU.FT
GVTU	300007 5 25G1	TARE WT CUBE	4.920 LB. 2. 1.170 FT		
MAX.GR. TARE NET	30.480 KG 67.200 LBS 2.015 KG 4.440 LBS 28.465 KG 62.760 LBS	MGW. TARE	28.480 KGS 65.200 LBS 2.015 KGS 4.440 LBS	MAX.GR. TARE NET	30.480 KG 67.200 LBS 2.015 KG 4.440 LBS 28.465 KG 62.760 LBS
CU. CAP.	1.170 CU.M	NET. CU. CAP.	26.680 KGS 58.640 LBS 67.1 CU.M 2.390 CU.FT.	MSCU	019574 2 22G1



CONTAINED SPACE



FORGOTTEN SPACE







NEGATIVE SPACE

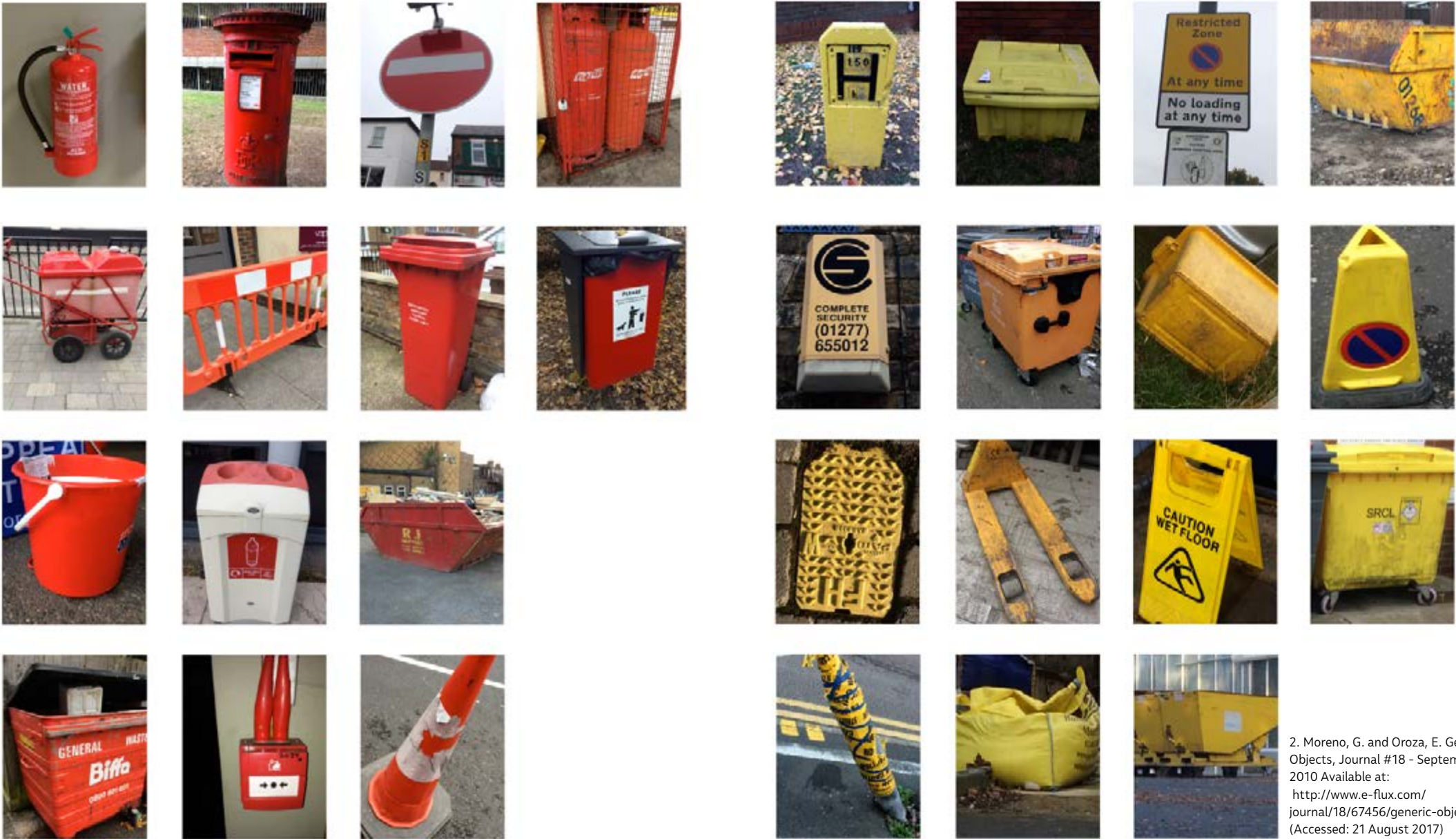


Inspired by Allan Sekula's book *Fish Story* (1996) and its film interpretation 'The Forgotten Space' (2010) I looked to employ some basic design strategies and methods whilst looking at some of my photographs of containers out on the road, including:

- Observation
- Isolation
- Elimination
- Deconstruction

GENERIC OBJECTS	Date	Oct/Nov. 2016
 Found in the Borough of BRENTWOOD 	Colour	Red  Yellow 

A key text I came across online, at this point in my research was by Moreno, G. and Oroza, E. on the subject of 'Generic Objects' (2010)² Once identifying the shipping container as ultimately a generic object in itself, I set about collecting photographs of various other examples which could fit into this genre. I then arranged them through simple colour categories. I created these 'typologies' on a very localised scale intending to highlight the very 'ordinary' and 'everyday' nature of the collections displayed here.



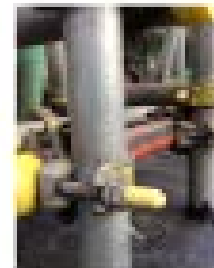
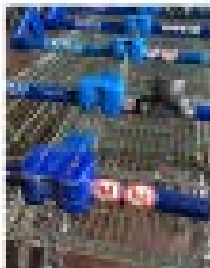
2. Moreno, G. and Oroza, E. Genreic Objects, Journal #18 - September 2010 Available at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/18/67456/generic-objects/> (Accessed: 21 August 2017)



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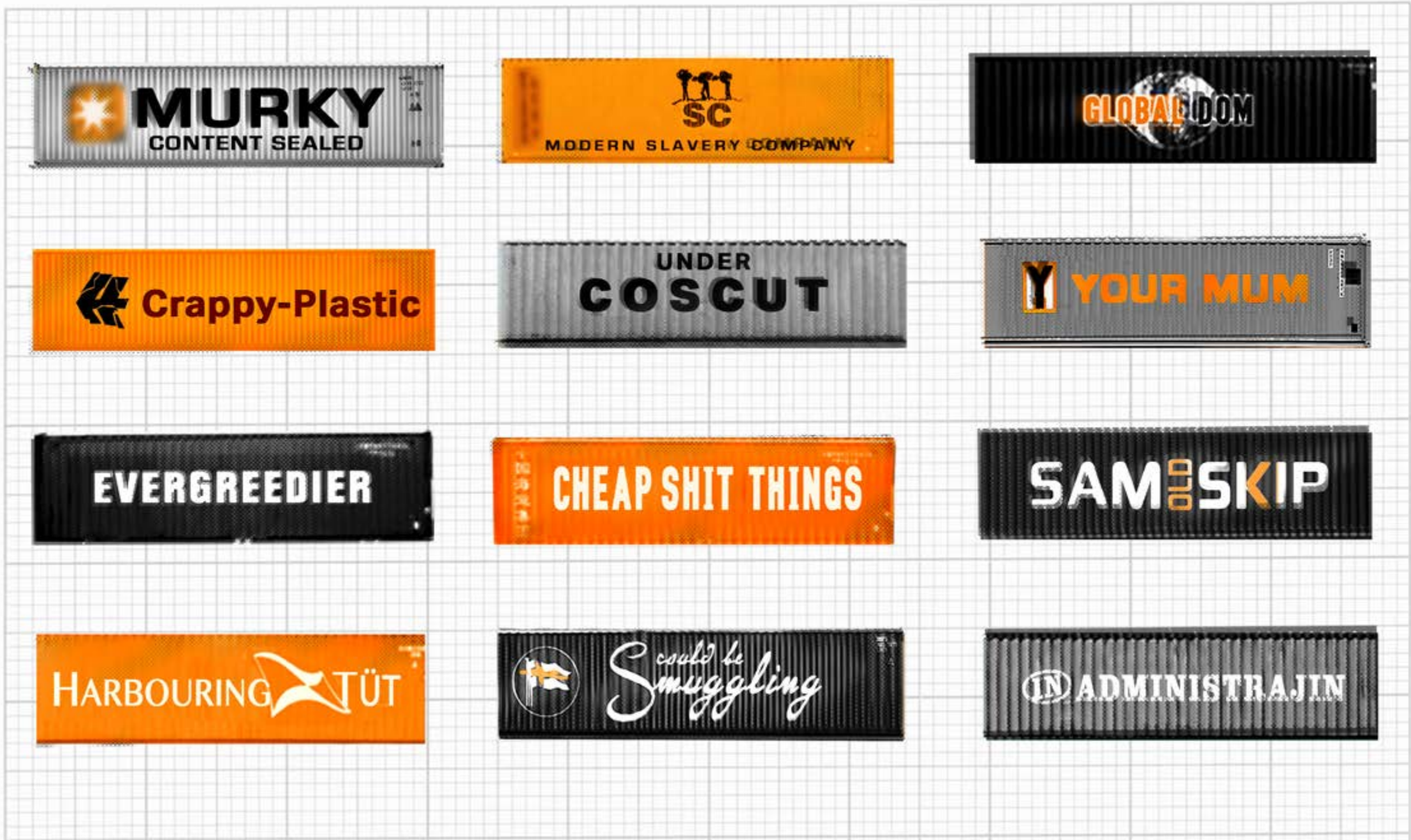
Oct/Nov. 2016

Blue



Moreno, G. and Oroza, E. (2010)³

3. Moreno, G. and Oroza, E. Generic Objects, *Journal #18* - September 2010 Available at: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/18/67456/generic-objects/> (Accessed: 21 August 2017)



An attempt at a graphic critique of Container Shipping Companies. Although these entities aren't really well known enough to apply 'irony, parody or pastiche' I was learning enough of the murky practices and exploitation inherent in the industry to try such a strategy, even if it's success was very limited. Indeed it was this ultimate failure to find a suitable method to what I wanted to convey that led me towards the lens media of my final outputs in Unit 4.



This particular Unit was of key significance in the direction of my wider research and the methodology and strategies I would subsequently apply. Already I had begun to experiment with the moving image and sound as another possible route to explore. Although the making of this short film/interview in close collaboration with fellow course participant Suzanne Green enabled me to recognise that this field of documentary style filmmaking was a crucial route to assimilate into my ongoing research.

[extra] ordinary

Duration: 05:34 mins

Previewed: 16.11.16 | **Submitted:** 07.12.16

click to view: <https://vimeo.com/192281109>

Main footage shot with a Sony A7 MkII Camera using a 55 mm lens

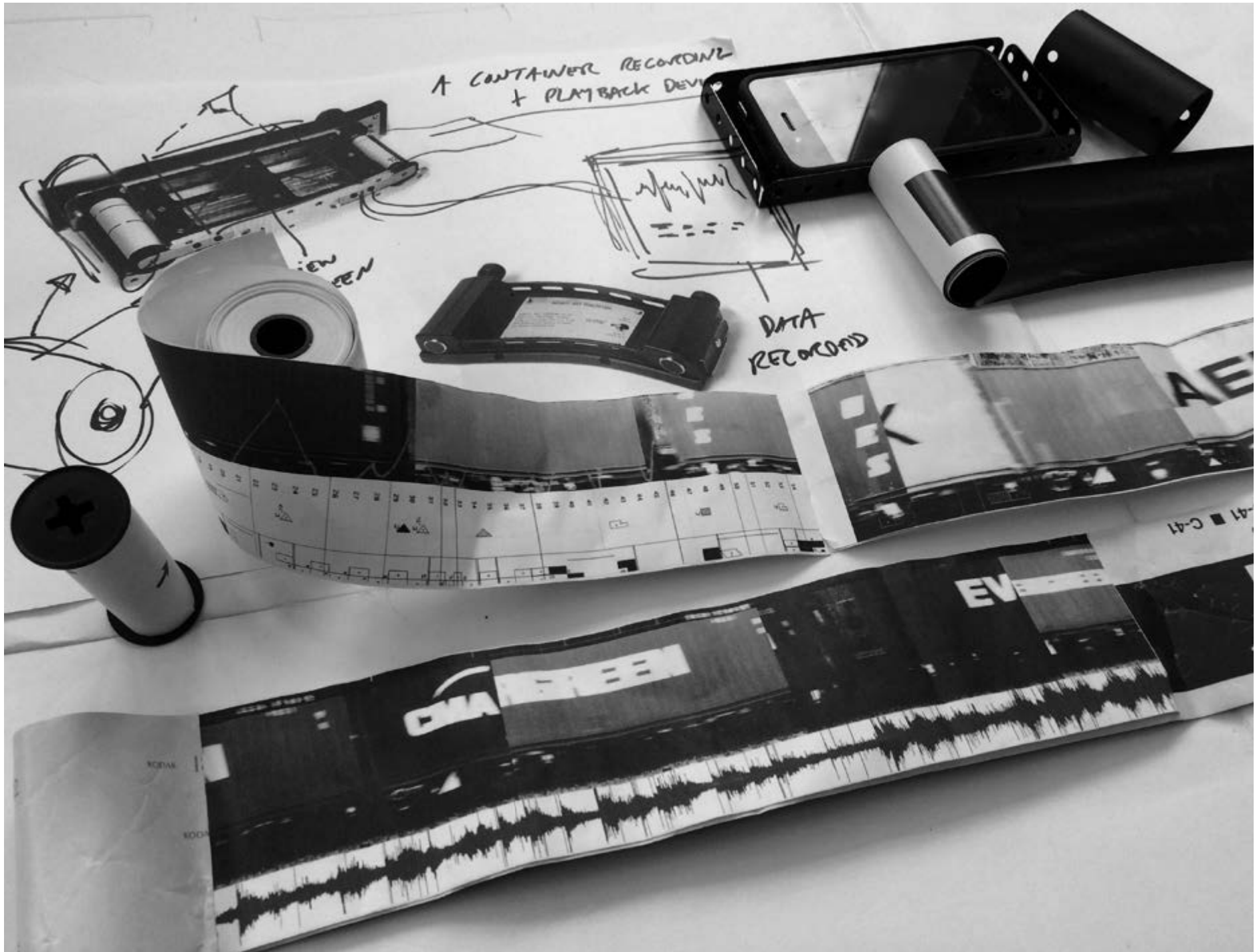
Audio recorded using a Zoom H2n Portable Audio Recorder

Edited with Adobe Premier Pro CS6

Filmed on location, Aug-Oct.2016
at Mary Louise Dry Cleaners,
Hornsey, London N8 7PS



Data stream and printed footage experiment, based upon repetitive filming of train freight cargo.





Heavily influenced by Ed Rushca's photographic work titled: 'Every Building on the Sunset Strip,' (1966) I repetitively filmed a freight train which ran through my local station in Brentwood at approximately the same time [19:23] on a daily basis. My initial strategy here was to highlight the frequency and vast amounts of commodities on the move.

I had intended that the project could take on a more of a slant towards 'data analysis' and 'mapping' from such observations, but this wasn't the key focus I was trying to encompass in my research.



(above) A still from 'Corrugated' a short film showing the undulations on the surface of a shipping container.



Before I came on the GMD course I had made a few films using iMovie, these were all pretty basic. But after discussing my outputs with the staff at the 'Digital Space' here at the LCC, plus attending a few workshops, I set about learning Adobe Premier Pro and applying this to the making of short duration films as part of my ongoing research project.

I found that despite my frustrations in coming to terms with the complicated software, I was able to exploit a wider range of strategies more suited to my objectives.

Corrugated, duration: 01:49

A short film exploring letter-forms upon a corrugated surface in relation to the intermodal shipping container. Available to view at:

<https://vimeo.com/207173258>

The Journey of the Commodity, duration 02:59

<https://vimeo.com/207165017>



(above) Time-lapse sequences from short film, 'The Journey of the Commodity' Focusing on home delivery vans.



'They are, in their boringness, strangely beautiful. They are funny, nostalgic, and utterly eccentric. Their banality fascinates. Actually, they're not boring at all'

BIG ISSUE (2004)⁴



Martin Parr, Boring Postcards, Phaidon, London (1999)



Andreas Gursky, Rhine II (1999)

4. The Big Issue magazine, review of Boring Postcards, Available at: <http://uk.phaidon.com/store/photography/boring-postcards-9780714843902/>

Aa

Celebrate everyday design brilliance
#TheMoMu

Johnston Typeface, 1913

Black cab, 1930s

MoMu

The Museum of the Mundane - or 'MoMu,' by The Partners design group (2014)london.the-momu.org/

Various examples on this spread of; the boring, the humble, the mundane, the overlooked and the plain old ordinary, being utilised by various artists, photographers and designers.



Pentagram Paper (2016)
Overlooked: the art of the humble manhole cover

#idea01

CON TAINERS

CON TAINERS

Hapag-Lloyd

MURPHY

SAMSUNG

2025: Forecasting Futures is an exhibition and series of events conceived and organised by MA Design Management & Culture students from

Urban Trouble — G&A

#idea02

Opening sequence - a solitary figure walks along a well-lit waterfront, looking at the sea - suggests a journey along the coast

Heavily influenced by Bruce Baillie's 'The Ship' - suggests a journey along the coast

More 'location' here you are - welcome to Felixstowe slow motion

The 'motif' of containers continually in the background

Warning home the KEEP OUT! Feeling of this place.

Overhead shot of docks - suggests a journey along the coast - no sign of human activity.

A lone figure on the beach - when looking at the sea, they are looking into the sea - The sea is the only one of the world's largest

Dear walking along desolate beach - suggests a journey along the coast - no sign of human activity.

Ship on a distant horizon - sounds of waves - suggests a journey along the coast - no sign of human activity.

Close up on red model of the built by Dan

TATE FILM PIONEERS

BRUCE BAILLIE:

TATE MODERN STARR CINEMA 25-27 NOV 2016

but returns to Dan - suggests a journey along the coast - no sign of human activity.

STIL

DOWN



Work In Progress Show, Atrium Gallery, London College of Communication, 03.05.2017



Book and format ideas for my output.



'Felixstowe' (working title) was selected and shown as part of a screening of contemporary short films at the South London Gallery on 16.08.2017. This was a real fillip to my project and encouraged me to press on with this type of filmwork as a strategy. Despite some of my technical flaws being exposed as to aspects of sound and continuity, I sensed a captivated audience around me.

#Film 1: The Shipping News from Landguard Point.

Key theme of watching/observing the movement of containers.
All three of my final output films are 'stand alone' yet also designed to work as a film installation alongside each other.

Available to view at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKRGMX0KAuk>



Stills from short film 'The Shipping News from Landguard Point'

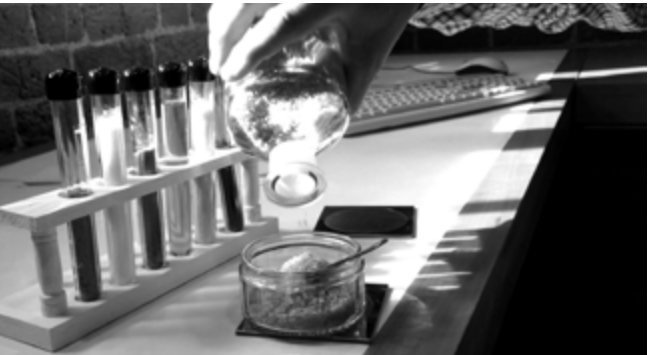
#Film 2: Intermodal Exchanges

Key themes of; the people responsible for physically moving containers, the human aspect, also to view what is actually inside them. Vignettes and conversations from those who handle their movement. Filmed on location at a container port in Harlingen, Friesland, northwest Holland and London Docklands.

Available to view at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2NmDRbf7xI>



(left) stills from short film **Intermodal Exchanges.**



#Film 3: Brentwood [19:23]

Through repetitive filming of this particular service for the past year, my strategy has been to highlight firstly the frequency and vast amounts of commodities on the move. Also, to reiterate the way in which it passes through so effortlessly and largely unnoticed, all part of the 'Superabundant Flow.'

Available to view at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CczwjJFDcRI>



(below) stills from short film **Brentwood [19:23]**



SUPERABUNDANT FLOW

JAMES FRASER MA Graphic Media Design
[Part time] London College of Communication, UAL

When the mundane
becomes the significant



Containers at H.O.V. Harlingen Havens, Friesland.

67,200 LBS
3,950 KGS
8,700 LBS
26,530 KGS

James Fraser

I currently work as a freelance graphic designer, with most of my professional work based around design for the publishing industry. Primarily this involves the creation of cover designs for the mass market, or paperback fiction. For the past twenty years I have worked for some of the largest London publishing houses, including Penguin Random House, Bloomsbury and Hodder. My focus has continually been upon the creation of catchy, commercially viable, contemporary design solutions intended for the most traditional of printed, published forms: 'The Book.'

I have always loved a good story and creating a cover to be wrapped around a cracking yarn has kept me busy for quite a few years, working with a plethora of renowned authors, editors and illustrators along the way. And yet, as we all know, the book in the form of printed paper codex, is under threat. After 1,000 years of evolution and development it now faces an uncertain future. In part, this is what prompted me to return to the academic fold, to see what possible place there is still for 'myself,' and Graphic Design 'itself', in the digital realm.

The simplest and most ordinary of objects and tools can enable us to look at things differently. Primarily, this is what has provoked my research project based around the shipping container. On the surface the epitome of the mundane, ordinary and overlooked. Although when viewed as a harbinger of social change on a massive scale, under the auspices of global trade and consumer society, this everyday object possesses heightened relevance and significance.

The title of my final major project is 'Superabundant Flow' whereby I have attempted to coin a phrase which summarises my outputs based around the journey of the commodity under the auspices of containerisation. The wording is an attempt to highlight society's constant craving for ever faster, easier access for it's over consumptive needs and the possible destructive consequences this could bring.

As an intrinsic part of this project, I have sought to embrace the realms of the moving image and film theory. Utilising lens media as part of a methodology to question and probe the very construct of 'ordinary.' The three short films presented as my final major project, are intended to encompass strategies such as the use of 'slow observation', using techniques such as lengthy shot takes, with a calm meditative slant. This runs contrary to the overuse of fast paced, speedy montages so prevalent in contemporary cinema and television today. The films are intended as 'stand alone' pieces, yet are also designed to work together as a film installation whereby they can be shown alongside each other to embrace their differing aspects, yet very similar themes.

The container looms as a motif in all three of these films, sometimes in the background, and at times filling the entire screen, despite this my intention is to also encompass a very human scale. From vignetted, simple audio monologues by the workers who actually handle the boxes and make them move, to their being watched and catalogued from the windy shore, to the dynamic pulsating rhythm as they pass through railway stations largely unnoticed by commuters.



Stills from (left) **The Shipping News from Landguard Point**, and (right) **Intermodal Exchanges**

More of my work completed on the MA Graphic Media Design Course can be viewed here...
<http://jamesfraserdesign66.tumblr.com/>

A world of Swinging, Berthing and Powered Indirects

26.10.2017, Felixstowe, Suffolk

It's 07:00 a.m. and the OOCL Japan,* one of the largest container ships in the world today, capable of carrying 20,000+ shipping containers is safely moored and unloading her cargo via the huge cranes in Berth 9 at the Port of Felixstowe.

'...We all missed her actual arrival, it was dark anyway...' claims Dean Cable as he comes to greet me and offers a hand-shake. Dean is a self confessed 'shipspotter,' filmmaker and self taught 'outsider expert' in the field of local shipping and the workings of the port.

We are stood on a pier in the shadow of the ship, at a spot known as Landguard Point. It's a piece of jutting land which creates a natural harbour and is the key reason why Britain's largest container port was located there. It also offers an ideal vantage point to view the flow of ships entering and leaving Felixstowe. It is here where Dean fastidiously records them and makes notes which he publishes online along with his films. Here anyone can stop, gaze, marvel and wonder at the seemingly ordinary, but incredible spectacle, which takes place daily.

I have returned to Landguard Point to ask him a few questions about some of the unusual 'swinging & berthing' techniques featuring the relatively small, yet powerful tugboats that pull and push the giant ships around. With the aid of Dean's hand-crafted model of a container ship and my hastily sketched map, chalked onto the small pier, we stand on the wind-swept coastline as he patiently explains the action which takes place behind us. '...You want to ask me about the 'powered indirect'?'... he asks. This perilous looking manoeuvre takes place to the aft, stern, or 'back end' to you and me. I nod and he continues.



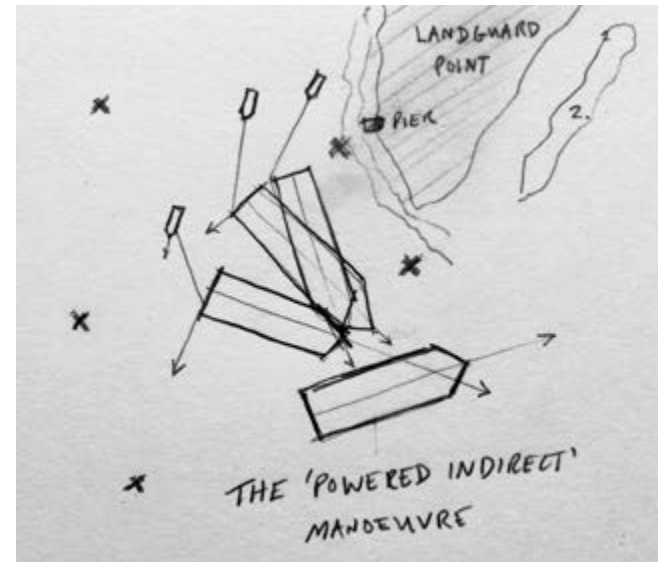
OOCL Japan, Safely docked at Berth 9 Felixstowe, the huge gantry cranes were still moving into place when I took this photo.

'...The tug fast aft of the ship moves out on the starboard quarter (right hand side) at full line load which is around 95-110 tonnes and the tugs produce a 15 degree angle when they assist the ship with a powered indirect. Most of the pilots that take the larger 18000+teu like to have either Svitzer Deben or Svitzer Kent at the stern to help with the corner. Sometimes a second tug would position on the port side and push up at a 45 degree angle to also help steer around the corner...'

I am asking my reader/viewer to look at this flow of technical data and official terminology centred around the movement of containerised cargo and the journey of the commodity. To the average person this is seemingly dull, unfathomable jargon and not worthy of attention.

I am inviting them to stop and think about what is actually being shown and described. A seemingly ordinary, everyday event, but the arrival of 20,000 plus shipping containers to facilitate the nation's need for consumption is no small matter.

* OOCL – Orient Overseas Container Line is a Hong Kong-based container shipping company. The OOCL Japan was launched this year and is one of three sister ships of a planned 6 in total, which are currently the world's largest container vessels.



My rough sketch of the 'powered indirect' manoeuvre as directed and described by Dean.



The set-up was pretty basic and rudimentary, but it did answer a few questions which had been building up in my mind whilst we had been making the film.

I drew the chalk diagram on a viewing pier on the shoreline, we then used Dean's pride and joy, 'The Emma Maersk,' his self-built remote control model, to re-enact the manoeuvres we had been watching. Basically trying to work out who's pulling and pushing? and when?

It's serious business when it goes wrong. We took the harbour ferry to get a closer look at the OOCL Japan, and sure enough he showed me the markings and dents along the side of the hull. On her maiden voyage she had run aground blocking the Suez canal for a short time, it had taken nine tugs to free her, and the bumps and scars were clearly visible.

Many thanks once again for Dean's help and assistance on this project, it really did open a window to a whole new world down there at Felixstowe.

Dean's films of container ships arriving and departing Felixstowe, plus updates on shipping news can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/deancable>

