

Unit 3 Writing

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Abstract

This project explores how the seemingly insignificant aspects of daily life—such as routines, objects, and emotional traces—resist erasure during the process of moving. It focuses not on what we physically bring or leave behind, but on what lingers in our experiences and how these traces can serve as evidence of our presence. Instead of viewing home relocation as merely a process of loss or closure, the project reinterprets it as a space for narrative emergence, where overlooked items and habits reclaim their significance and meaning.

To investigate this, I developed two interlinked components: a checklist and an archive. The checklist contrasts official, object-focused records with a more intimate, sensory account of presence. It reclaims the language of architectural floor plans and inventory reports by layering them with lived memories, personal annotations, and sensory mappings. I also created QR-linked sound-activated animations that enhance the depth of this evidence. Printed on semi-transparent paper, the checklist reveals its evolution from the original floor plan, merging logistical structure with personal memory.

The archive is housed within an acrylic box and contains fragments of 65 emotionally significant objects, assembled based on memory rather than functionality. This concept aligns with Hal Foster's notion of the "archival impulse" in contemporary art, where personal artefacts act as vessels for unofficial history. Inspired by the publication *The Ways We Live Singapore 2* (Temporary Press, 2022), my archive rejects a hierarchical structure. Instead, it invites viewers to engage with a layered and unfinished record of home. This collection is created through methods of investigation and iteration, using the form of the moving box as both a structure and a metaphor for the fluidity of home.

This project may resonate with designers, archivists, sociologists, or anyone navigating the emotional entanglement of home, memory, and change. It invites a broader reflection on how graphic design can document lived experience—not as a system of facts, but as a sensitive form of storytelling.

Context

Last semester, I explored the question: "How does our perception of 'home' change over time?" My project began to focus on the evolving concept of home. During that period, my landlord frequently conducted viewings of my apartment with potential tenants. This action served as a subtle reminder of the impending necessity to vacate the property. This personal experience marked a turning point in my research, prompting me to shift from a broader reflection on the evolving meaning of home to a more focused investigation of the act of moving. Moving signifies a moment where belonging and loss intersect, highlighting the fragility and resilience of what we refer to as "home." The experience of moving made me realise that the three words—time, presence, and ownership. These reflect something significant, so I began to explore them further.

Time enables presence to form.
Presence proves we were there.
Ownership decides whether that presence remains or is erased.

Time, in this project, is seen as accumulative rather than chronological. The home is viewed as a surface marked by daily actions, such as scuffs on the floor or the outline of a removed calendar, reflecting the repetition of life. As Do Ho Suh explains, “I’m trying to show the layers of time” (Suh, 2016). These layers emerge not from dramatic events but from the subtle details of everyday life.

Presence is not something claimed; it’s what space retains, traces left through repeated actions, not legal status. It goes beyond mere occupancy to encompass residual inhabitation.

Ownership is a system of control that decides what stays, what is erased, and who gets to decide. My experience of enforced property viewings exposed the tension between the lived experience of home and the legal frameworks that govern it. Ownership extends beyond legal rights to include authority over memory.

Studio Practice

The project unfolds through two design formats:

1. The Checklist

A layered, poetic reworking of bureaucratic property records. Four interlinked spreads— Inventory vs. Lived Memory, Emotional Floor Plan, Moving Checklist, and Mapping the Intangible—transform the form from a tool of order into a map of presence, which challenges the limitations of standardised property records.

The first page, "Inventory Report vs. Lived Memory," contrasts the landlord’s objective list, like “Two grey dining chairs. Good condition”—with subjective notes such as “A calendar hung here for a year. When I removed it, the paint behind was brighter.” This juxtaposition questions the report’s neutrality and reveals the emotional aspects of living that are often overlooked.

The second page features the original floor plan, a diagram outlining the property’s boundaries. This visual framework is the foundation for layers of lived experience, including annotations, choices, and sensory traces, that accumulate and interact.

The third page, "Moving Checklist", transforms a standardised format into an open-ended exploration of presence. It records what was left behind, what was kept, and what changed. Personal language, such as “Emotional weight, sensory traces, and memory density were not measured, but they remain,” emphasises the emotional aspects that defy formal classification. This approach is inspired by projects like the V&A’s "Pandemic Objects" (2020), which highlight the social and emotional significance of everyday items.

The fourth page, Mapping the Intangible: A Sensory Record of the Space, extends the checklist into a multi-sensory map. White dot trajectories trace routes I frequently took, while AR-triggered

soundscapes capture the unique noises of home, like the laughter of children from the kindergarten below and the rumble of passing trains. These intangible sounds can't be listed or packed; they echo the presence within the space.

The use of semi-transparent paper allows these elements to coexist visually, showing how the checklist evolves from the architectural floor plan, blending logistical frameworks with sensory memories and highlighting the gradual passage of time in a space.

2. The Archive

This collection is shaped through methods of investigation and iteration, using the form of the moving box not only as a structural framework but as a metaphor for the **instability and impermanence of home**. Just as a moving box is designed to carry belongings from one place to another, this archive holds memories in a state of transit—unsettled, exposed, and not yet resolved. Its acrylic body, chosen for its transparency, resists the opacity of closure and instead invites prolonged looking, echoing the project's commitment to delaying finality. The standard shipping symbols, such as "Handle with Care" and "Fragile", take on new meaning here, pointing not only to the delicacy of physical contents but to the emotional weight carried by everyday objects and images. The pull-out structure features semi-transparent prints that are photographs of the four walls of my apartment. These images have been digitally processed to appear empty and ghostly, evoking the atmosphere of a space once vacated. When the box is pulled out, the book inside can be reached. Once the inner layer returns to its original position, the semi-transparent layer enables viewers to see through and gain insight into what's inside the home. Drawing inspiration from Koh Myung Keun's "A Blending Space"(2017), this blending of layered photography creates an immersive and almost architectural fragment of a room that cannot be easily packed away. In doing so, it reimagines the moving box as more than a container: it becomes a site of transition, a vessel for fragmented memory, and a fragile architecture of what home leaves behind.

At the heart of the archive lies a publication: a collection of 65 objects, not categorised by function or room, but assembled through emotional proximity, memory, and repetition. This approach was inspired by projects like *The Ways We Live Singapore 2* (Temporary Press), which documents domestic life through fragmented, iterative layers, resisting linear or functional systems in favour of affective storytelling. Inside the publication, items like a towel, a charger, and a door stopper each carry a trace of my experiences. They are not merely props; as scholar Wenn-Chieh Tsai notes, they serve as "potential cues that can trigger our autobiographical memories" (Tsai & van den Hoven, 2018). This attentiveness to the emotional resonance of everyday objects shapes the content of the archive itself. My archive similarly rejects rigid classification: each object is presented as a singular "evidence" of presence, carrying a piece of the space's temporal and emotional residue. In this way, the archive becomes not just a record of objects, but a living map of memory, which is fluid, affective, and truly personal.

The checklist and archive are not simply a division between objects and space; instead, they represent two parallel systems of evidence. The checklist captures the behavioural and sensory traces of living in a space, while the archive gathers the material remnants of life. Together, they

examine how time accumulates to create a sense of presence and how ownership influences what is preserved or discarded.

The decision to use the checklist and moving box (archive) as containers is intentional. Both are familiar, transient tools for relocation, but in this context, they are repurposed to highlight what traditional systems often overlook. They emphasise the fragility of home, not as something fixed, but as contingent; not solely owned, but experienced; and not permanent, but provisional.

Projected Contribution

This project demonstrates how graphic communication design can document lived experiences, not merely as a collection of facts, but as a sensitive form of storytelling. By intervening in standardised systems of property documentation, such as check-in reports, inventories, and floor plans. Rather than focusing solely on clarity, categorisation, or efficiency, this project explores how checklists and moving boxes can be reinterpreted to hold emotional and narrative value. By intervening in standardised systems of property documentation, including check-in reports, inventories, and floor plans, it expands the potential of graphic communication design to include presence, memory, and the passage of time, offering a more nuanced form of storytelling.

The project invites reflection on how graphic design can serve as a method for highlighting what is often overlooked: the sensory, emotional, and ephemeral aspects of home that resist simple listing, packing, or ownership.

Beyond the course, this research will inform my ongoing practice by establishing a methodology that blends critical research with sensory mapping, iterative material exploration, and poetic interventions into existing systems. It opens pathways for applying graphic communication design in socially engaged contexts, such as housing rights, participatory archives, and the documentation of displacement and migration. Ultimately, it repositions design as a form of witnessing: a practice that makes visible the subtle, enduring marks of life that persist even as spaces are emptied, rearranged, or erased.

In summary, this project repositions graphic design not as a neutral tool but as a deeply situated and emotionally intelligent practice.

References

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