

Written Project Brief

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Working Title: Memory for Later: A Visual Memo to My Future Self

Design Goal

In a time when many young people feel caught between accelerating expectations and a blurred sense of direction, this project begins with a pause. It invites a slower way of thinking and feeling.

Memory for Later is a personal and emotionally driven visual publication that captures fleeting and often intangible experiences during periods of change. It is framed as a series of visual memos written to a future version of myself, turning unspoken feelings such as fear, confusion, tenderness, and resilience into visual form. Rather than aiming to solve a specific problem, the project explores how communication design can act as a tool for emotional archiving, introspection, and speculative self-dialogue.

Through a careful combination of text, image, and material sensitivity, the project asks how design might preserve inner emotions that often go unnoticed in fast-paced, result-oriented culture. Instead of being functional or commercial, it reimagines design as something quiet, poetic, and therapeutic. This approach challenges dominant ideas about productivity and performance by offering something slower and more reflective. The aim is to create a space where design becomes a way to hold feelings that are unfinished or hard to explain, allowing them to exist without needing to be resolved.

Theme

The core theme of Memory for Later lies in the emotional and temporal distance between the present and the imagined future. It asks how unspoken thoughts and unresolved feelings might be expressed not through fixed narratives, but through open-ended fragments, sketches, and traces. The project views design as a space for emotional preservation, where memory can take on quiet, symbolic forms rather than literal ones.

It draws on practices such as diary-making, zine culture, and conceptual storytelling, positioning itself within the expanded field of communication design. Ideas of “quiet design” are central here, where ambiguity, restraint, and softness are embraced rather than avoided. These strategies allow for emotional depth without demanding

clarity or closure.

The theme also responds to the current moment. Many young people are navigating a sense of disconnection from both the speed of digital culture and the pressure to always appear composed. In this context, the project becomes a way to hold space for vulnerability and emotional uncertainty. Instead of creating solutions or products, it offers a more caring and reflective approach to design, where personal contradictions and quiet emotions are given time, form, and attention.

Insight

For many young people today, the future feels uncertain. The pressure to define a clear path, stay emotionally stable, and appear successful often leads to quiet anxiety. These feelings are not dramatic but persistent, shaped by transitions, social comparison, and a fast-moving digital world. They are also difficult to express, which is why they often go undocumented.

This project grows from personal reflection during a period of change—studying abroad, approaching graduation, and facing questions about identity and direction. I began writing letters to my future self as a way to hold onto thoughts I could not yet name. In doing so, I noticed that this kind of reflection helped create emotional continuity. It gave shape to feelings that were real but otherwise unspoken.

The project also takes inspiration from zines, personal notebooks, and speculative archives. These formats embrace the fragmentary, the unfinished, and the imperfect. They show how design can be a space for processing rather than explaining. Insight here lies in treating emotion not as something to overcome, but as something to observe and carry forward. Through this lens, design becomes less about communication with others and more about creating dialogue with the self.

POV

My point of view as a designer is shaped by the desire to create space for what is often overlooked in contemporary design practice: emotional ambiguity, personal reflection, and quietness. In a culture that prioritises clarity, efficiency, and performance, I am interested in what design can offer when it turns inward and embraces slowness and uncertainty.

Memory for Later reimagines design as a form of letter writing. It is personal, reflective, and nonlinear. Rather than creating for an external audience, I design through myself and for a future version of me. This inward process becomes a

method of emotional inquiry, allowing design to act as both mirror and memory. I am drawn to conceptual and speculative approaches that see the designer not as a problem solver but as a storyteller, a question asker, and a witness to emotion. This perspective shifts the focus from outcome to process and from solution to resonance. It encourages attention to texture, atmosphere, and emotional presence. In this project, communication design becomes a tool for inner conversation. Making is not only about producing results. It is also about holding space for what cannot always be explained and allowing that space to matter.

HMW

Main HMW: How might we turn unspoken personal feelings into a visual system that archives emotional fragments for the future self?

Secondary HMW: How might printed media and quiet storytelling create a space for reflective self-dialogue in a fast-moving digital culture?

This project begins with a question: how might we turn unspoken personal feelings into a visual system that can be revisited by a future self? Many emotions are hard to articulate, especially during times of change. Rather than trying to explain or resolve them, this project focuses on how they might be gently held through design.

Visual tools such as colour, texture, fragmented text, and symbolic layout are used to create quiet containers for emotions that do not always fit into words. These elements work together to build a system of emotional archiving that feels intimate, tactile, and slow. The goal is not to produce clarity but to honour emotional complexity in a quiet and poetic way.

A second question asks how printed media and reflective storytelling can offer an alternative to fast digital communication. In contrast to the endless scroll and instant feedback of online platforms, print invites slowness, solitude, and repeated touch. It creates space for deeper reflection and more personal connection.

Together, these questions support a design approach that values care over speed, softness over spectacle, and inner conversation over public performance. The aim is to expand what communication design can hold and how it might feel.

Project Report– Memory for Later: A Visual Memo to My Future Self

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This project report reflects on the conceptual and practical development of Memory for Later, a design project that explores memory as both fragile and reconfigurable. Framed as a series of visual memos addressed to my future self, the work investigates how design can serve as a form of emotional archiving. Instead of aiming to solve a specific problem, the project seeks to create a reflective space where text, image, and materiality converge to hold what is often left unsaid. Using the DIEP framework, this report outlines my design journey, drawing on relevant academic, cultural, and artistic references to contextualize my decisions.

At the core of Memory for Later is the question: how can design become a medium for recording unspoken emotions and fleeting thoughts? My process began with fieldwork and visual research in Winchester Cathedral, where I encountered participatory activities such as magnet poems inspired by Jane Austen. Visitors rearranged words to form temporary sentences, mirroring how memory itself is fragmentary and constantly reconfigured. This experience became an important reference point for my experiments with cut-out words and later their digital transformations.

I conducted material explorations with cut-paper typography and binder-style structures. Inspired by publications such as Sum of Parts, I experimented with non-linear sequencing, folded inserts, and loose-leaf binding systems. These physical trials mirrored the unpredictable shifts of memory, with moments that could be hidden, revealed, or reassembled when pages were unfolded or rearranged.

Through these experiments, I began to notice how similar the act of handling paper felt to the act of remembering. A folded sheet could resemble a memory held back from view, while rearranging loose pages echoed the way recollections surface in different orders depending on context. Working in this way reminded me that memory is not a fixed sequence but something fluid, unstable, and sometimes contradictory. This recognition encouraged me to choose formats that allow for flexibility and imperfection, so the book could remain an open space rather than a closed narrative.

Practical experimentation played a vital role in grounding these ideas. I began with hand-cut words, simulating fragments of thought physically. Later, I translated these

cut-outs into Illustrator, creating digital versions that retained the visual qualities of cut paper while avoiding the roughness of manual cuts. Inspired by the cathedral activity, I developed my own set of magnetic poems by attaching words to flexible sheets, which could be rearranged within the book format. Alongside this, I tested binding methods, particularly two-ring binders with hard covers, which provided both durability and the freedom to reorder content. Each of these choices echoed the project's conceptual concerns: memory as fragile, mutable, and always in flux.

From a theoretical standpoint, my work draws upon multiple strands of thought around memory, design, and narrative. Andreas Huyssen (1995) describes memory as "an act of mediation rather than retrieval," suggesting that memory is constantly reconstructed in the present rather than retrieved as a fixed object from the past. This perspective aligns strongly with my project's approach: instead of presenting memory as stable, I sought to build a structure that foregrounds recombination and reinterpretation.

In reflecting on my own experiences, I found this idea deeply resonant. When I look back on certain moments, whether it is a fragment of conversation, a small object collected during travel, or even a word cut out in one of my experiments, I realise that these memories never return in the same way twice. Their shape shifts depending on where I am, what I am feeling, and what I am searching for at that point in time. Designing Memory for Later became a way of embracing this instability instead of resisting it. Practically, this meant creating a format that welcomes change, allowing readers to reconfigure fragments within their own context. What mattered most to me was not fixing memory onto the page, but recognising its movement, its fragility, and its capacity to generate new meanings each time it is revisited.

Johanna Drucker (2009) proposes the idea of performative materiality, where the form of a text or an object is not neutral but actively shapes its meaning. This perspective helped me to think of my project not only as a container of memory but also as something that performs memory through its material qualities. The cut-paper words, the translucent sheets, and the binder structure each become performative in their own right. They do not simply carry meaning but embody it through texture, fragility, and movement.

In my own making process, I noticed this very clearly. When I worked with tracing paper, the way light passed through it felt like the hesitation of memory, revealing only part of a story. Similarly, when I translated hand-cut words into digital simulations, I realised the shift in medium did not erase their tactility but changed

how that tactility was perceived. For me, this confirmed Drucker's point: material choices are never passive but part of the meaning-making process. It also reassured me that using digital refinement does not have to undermine the emotional resonance of the handmade, as long as the design is attentive to what the material communicates.

Claire Bishop (2012) emphasises how participatory art and design redistribute authorship, creating spaces where meaning emerges collectively rather than being imposed by a single author. Her thinking gave me confidence in leaving parts of my project deliberately open. By allowing readers to rearrange magnetic words and construct their own phrases, I accepted that the work would never speak with a single voice. Instead, it becomes a conversation between my fragments and the reader's own interpretations.

When I tested this with peers, I noticed that people often made unexpected connections between words, forming sentences I would never have thought of myself. At first this felt strange, almost as if I was losing control of the narrative. But gradually I saw it as a strength. It reminded me that memory, too, is never fully private. It is shaped in dialogue, in exchanges, in the ways others recall or reinterpret the same events differently. Bishop's ideas encouraged me to treat this openness not as a weakness but as the very point of the project. What matters is not preserving my memories intact but making space for them to resonate and transform in the hands of others.

Furthermore, the project intersects with ideas of "quiet design" (Gaver et al., 2004), which values subtle, reflective interactions rather than efficiency or performance. By slowing down the pace of expression and asking readers to physically engage with fragile and shifting fragments, the project embodies this ethos. In this sense, it stands in contrast to the speed and permanence often associated with digital communication, instead reclaiming slowness, fragility, and incompleteness as design values.

The project's experiments revealed both strengths and limitations. On one hand, the use of magnetic words within the B5 format successfully embodied the mutability of memory, allowing for recombination and reinterpretation. Feedback from peers during testing confirmed that this interaction evoked feelings of playfulness but also contemplation, as users reflected on how fragments of language could come together to form personal meanings.

Digitising the cut-paper aesthetic in Illustrator was another effective decision, striking a balance between tactility and refinement. The imperfect quality of hand-cut paper often appeared visually messy in photographs, but when translated digitally, these qualities became intentional and legible. This taught me that digital tools need not strip away materiality; rather, they can reframe and amplify it.

The binding tests further strengthened the conceptual framework. The flexibility of the two-ring system not only supported the physical durability of the object but also metaphorically reinforced the project's theme of memory as unfixed. However, I also recognised limitations here: while the structure allowed for reconfiguration, it introduced practical bulkiness, which risked disrupting the intimacy of the object.

Another challenge arose in balancing openness with coherence. While the magnetic poems encouraged participation, there was a risk of the work becoming too arbitrary, losing its connection to the emotional core of the project. I resolved this by carefully curating the word choices, ensuring that even in rearrangement, the fragments retained a poetic and reflective tone. This process highlighted the tension between freedom and authorship in participatory design.

Looking ahead, I see several possible directions to extend this project. First, the magnetic poem concept could be expanded into a collective archive, where contributions from multiple participants form a growing database of emotional fragments. This could take shape digitally, with an online interface that mirrors the tactile play of the physical book, or physically, as a travelling installation where new words and memories are continually added.

Second, I plan to further explore material experimentation. While the digital simulation of cut-paper aesthetics worked well, I would like to test alternative printing techniques, such as risograph or letterpress, which may reintroduce a tactile imperfection in a more controlled and legible way. Similarly, experimenting with translucent or textured papers could add depth to the metaphor of memory as layered and fragile.

Finally, this project has pushed me to reflect on my own practice as a designer. I have learned that design does not always need to solve problems in a functional sense; it can instead open reflective spaces, acting as a companion to the personal and emotional complexities of everyday life. Moving forward, I intend to continue pursuing projects that prioritise slowness, tenderness, and speculation, positioning design not just as communication, but as care.

References

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