

Written response to the 'Methods of investigating' brief

In his book *Species of Space and other Pieces*, French novelist Georges Perec (1936-1982) talks about the idea of the 'infra-ordinary': "How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?" (Perec 1997: 206). Georges Perec also discusses this idea in his own work using a variety of approaches and literary techniques rich in lightness, humour and accessibility, and he can observe and record for days on end what is happening in the same place. His focus is on everyday life and spatial observation, with particular attention to the most ordinary, trivial, easily overlooked, residual and meaningless things of ordinary life. "What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, our rhythms. To question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us." (Perec 1997: 206).

Perec's approach to this type of research was very encouraging and inspiring to me, and I immediately understood the significance of my research brief. When I was investigating in the Chinese medicine clinic of my choice, I initially put too much emphasis on my own feelings and only collected basic things that were not within my familiarity, such as the types of herbs, the people who visited the clinic and the price list, ignoring the 'known' and 'visual' things such as medicine packaging, product displays and other 'infra-ordinary' things. Having gained an understanding, on several subsequent investigations, I began to look closely at the most visual and mundane things in the clinic. And I was surprised to discover that the graphics, text, colours, typography, physical environment and cultural values of pharmaceutical packaging that were initially off my radar were interesting, complex and worthy of deeper investigation when I zoomed in and out on the details.

In addition, I spent a long time reading *Exercises in Style*, written by Raymond Queneau (1903-1976). I was pleasantly surprised by his work. Queneau tells the same story in ninety-nine different narrative styles, such as note-taking, epistolary and rhetorical, as a way to tap into the potential of language in a way that is utterly intriguing. This new and unique form of writing and carefully crafted research process cannot help but make me realise that there is no upper limit to creativity. For my research project, I should experiment further and focus on the reinventing of the packaging, going through a lot of sketches to find out the existing pattern of images use on a whole set of packaging.

Reference list:

- Perec, G. (1974). *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. London: Penguin.
Queneau, R. (1947). *Exercises in Style*. London: John Calder.