Benjamin Willers

Project Log Book & Dissemination

6 June - 9 September, 2011
Monday 6 June

Major project feedback, very relieved by the mark I have received. I am also very pleased that both John and Neil feel that the idea I have had for my dissertation is workable and exciting. I have proposed to investigate how effective data visualisations are that use circles and area to represent information. I have already found an interesting survey from 1926 which examines the effectiveness of pie charts which seems quite relevant. I propose to conduct a similar survey for area charts to measure the success of these. I am asked to write a formal written proposal and submit it for them to read.

Tuesday 7 June

Due to the library to write the written proposal, I also find some very useful information related to Stevens’ power law which reveals that people actually use an exponent (power of function)
The Relative Merits of Using Circles and Area to Communicate Quantitative Information

The 2005 redesign of The Guardian is widely acknowledged as being one of the most important newspaper design projects of the last 20 years. The paper has embraced information design and in so doing has provided its readers with alternatives ways to understand current events. According to Mark Robinson, graphics director at the paper, his team produce about fifteen to twenty data visualizations each day. The type styles, formats, maps and templates are all preprepared and allow the team to turn a complex story into an uncomplicated visual very quickly. It is easy to see how the popularity of circle charts among designers in this field has grown in recent years, they are quick to produce and allow for large amounts of flexibility regarding their layout on the page. They also appeal to a wide audience, sales of David McCandless’s 2010 book Information is Beautiful is proof of this.

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Our Irresistible Fascination with All Things Circular

About his frustration with the overuse of the circle and area methods, including an article in 2010, ‘Our Irresistible Fascination with All Things Circular’, written proposal

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Monday 13 June

We are told for the first time which rooms are available to us in the Greestone building. I am surprised at how much room we have on the plan. When we walk around the Greestone I begin to worry about filling the space. There had been rumours that we would be squeezed into a corner as the fine art members had occupied all of the premium spaces, but this is not the case. Later when I get home I have a play about with the floor plan and create an alternative isometric version that I feel is clearer in regards to what level certain rooms are and how these can be accessed by the numerous staircases in the building.

Friday 10 June

Have spent every day of this week in the library doing general reading around my subject.
Tuesday 14 June

Group meeting to discuss the exhibition over lunch. I have a version on my isometric map to show the group which they seem enthusiastic for, despite the temporary use of black and green I have used. I also suggest that the business cards could be used to encourage visitors to see all of our work. Using the same idea as children’s trading cards each visitor is able to collect a card from each exhibit and they are encouraged to complete the set by visiting everyone else’s. This could be done by simply numbering the cards, or it may involve the back of each card containing part of an image that makes a large picture when they are all put together. During the meeting we then begin to speculate how we could integrate this concept with the poster so that blank spaces could be covered with each business card to create a larger complete image, or reveal a hidden message. Upload cream map to Facebook group for all to view.

Wednesday 15 June

Design the surveys I will distribute to measure the effectiveness of area and bars to represent data. These have been designed to be easy to duplicate on a black and white photocopier so I have limited myself to 1 A4 sheet for circles and another sheet for bars. There are fifteen pairs of diagrams for each, one has been assigned a value and the observer is required to provide their best estimate for the value of the other. The size of these diagrams would ideally be larger but I have felt that having a larger sample to take results from would be preferable. The questions actually are identical, so the participant should notice the same answers for both the circle and bar, however because they are asked to only fill in one sheet at a time they will likely be unaware of this. This has been done in the interests of fairness and a great amount of thought and time was spent to ensure I include a wide range of ratio differences between the diagrams.
Saturday 18 June

Get some friends from Tesco to test by survey. I approach board looking people while they are on their breaks between many are not willing to help. I do get some people to help, although many do not wish to finish all of the questions. When I look at the answers given I get the distinct impression that the figures are larger than expected. Circles that are smaller than the standard have been given larger figures. I thought that my instructions were clear, however I will need to make more effort to explain the survey better in future.

Sunday 19 June

Get some more surveys completed, this time I take more time and explain it more thoroughly and get some better results. In the evening I begin to compile these results into a spreadsheet document and start to create formulas that automatically calculate averages. From just a few early samples I can see that judgments using bars are much more accurate than that of circles.

Monday 20 June

Meeting with Neil, since submitting my proposal I have become concerned that my research question may have become too focussed and unsuitable for a 10,000 word investigation. However I was pleased to hear that Neil thinks that this is not the case. I am advised to seek Fredric Dickinson's help to try and find any follow up articles in response to the 1926 report which discusses the relative merits of bar and pie charts. It may be the case that the findings were disputed by another author in which case this would make for an interesting study in itself. I should try to find answers to the following questions, who are we aesthetically drawn to circles? Is it a Gestalt thing? How do we judge the size of circles if not instructed? (area, diameter, circumference etc.) If we are going to use circles, how can we work around their problems? If it can be shown that users experience circles differently from how the designer intends, should we adjust the sizes so that they are mathematically incorrect but appear consistent? A possible exercise I could do would be to recreate the Guardian diagram on government spending using different methods and discuss the merits of such. An important question to ask is “Where does recent interest in information graphics come from?” Could it be the graphics displays that tell us about our computer disc drives memory? Aim for four chapters, 2000 words in each. Introduction and conclusion 1000 words each.
Tuesday 21 June

Go to see the new X-Men at the cinema. We arrange to meet an hour before so that we can discuss concepts for the show. I had spent all morning trying to come up with some new ideas to expand on the business and idea we had previously with little luck. I felt a bit under some new concepts though based on the visible light spectrum. White light is made up of many other different colours, the idea behind the spectrum concept is that each member of the group and their work is diverse, however our efforts can be combined to make something new and wonderful. It is unfortunate there are a perceived seven colours in the spectrum and only six full time members, but this is just a small detail. Everyone would pick their colour and this would be used throughout the exhibition and the promotional material to help visitors find our work and encourage them to visit the other MA exhibitors. I also had the idea of referencing the iconic Pink Floyd album cover 'The Dark Side of the Moon'. The ‘A’ in MA Design would be used as the prism from the image and a beam of White light would enter on one side followed by our own colours on the other. Although this is a sound concept I was unhappy with my attempts when it came to visualising it. The album cover has been imitated many times before and I felt it just felt a bit naff. The fact that the image has been imitated often enough for me to cut down to one more member is one of the groups four concepts that we are required to submit. A more interesting idea that was discussed is to use the theme of sketches, this is something we all have in common and yet something we all do in a unique way that demonstrates our diversity. We could use a photograph of the Greestone building and divide it into six, each member would then draw part of the building and these would be combined to form an image that would form our exhibition piece. When it discusses was also made regarding how we are going to do the business cards, we had previously discussed how these could be combined to create a hidden picture or message for those visitors who collect all six, however we made no progress actually deciding on what this message should be.

Wednesday 22 June

I work on the spreadsheet document that I am using to calculate the survey results. Whereas before I was using several versions to interoperate the results in various ways I have found a way to show many different trends within the same document which will make my life a lot easier. I am using both mean and median averaging functions at this stage, the advantage of using the median is that data from some individuals that is way off is not taken into account for overall average figure.
Thursday 23 June

Neil had previously suggested that I try to find articles written in response to the 1926 example I found from the Journal of American Statistical Association. I was told that Fredric Dickinson would probably be able to help me with this, however I found that I was able to uncover all of the information I needed on my own. There were a further three written in the few years following the original and some more in the 1980s. The discussion in each make for a very interesting read and will allow me to write a whole chapter on the subject of pie charts alone.

Friday 24 June

infosthetics.com is a collection of information graphics projects. A contact email asks for recommendations for projects to feature, so I sent a message and hope for the best; From: ben.willers@yahoo.co.uk
Subject: suggestion
To: andrew@infosthetics.com
Date: Friday, 24 June, 2011, 23:00

Hi,
My name is Ben Willers, I am currently researching data visualisation for a postgraduate university degree in the UK for my latest project I collected my own data on everyday activities such as sleep patterns, spending habits and television viewing. In an attempt to transform the data into a series of visualisations that are both visually engaging and exciting while also being successful information presentation pieces I would appreciate to hear the options of others. Thanks for your help.
http://lifevisualised.freetzi.com/index.html

From: Ben Willers
Hi Andrew,

That sounds fantastic, thank you very much! Hearing the thoughts of others with some experience in this area is going to be of great help. I’m going to be available over the next couple of months so I look forward to hearing from you again.

Regards,
Ben Willers

Hi Ben,

Just that you know I am pitching your project to some good data visualisation practitioners, to use your work as a basis for a critique.

Not a critique like Stephen Few likes to do but one that is constructive in nature and demostates a high level of design sensability. If it goes well, you should get the the reviews through me, and then you have the chance to provide your own reaction to them. Then everything will be posted on infosthetics.com. I hope you find this a good opportunity. If so could you let me know whether you’ll be away in the next weeks? It would also be great not to pitch your work to other blogs...

Hope to hear from you soon!

Greetings - Andrew,
Saturday 25 June

In preparation for the group meeting on Monday for the exhibition I mock up some visuals for the spectrum concept I had earlier in the week. I had previously dismissed this idea however it is a much more appealing concept when I had visuals. The map works especially well as each person’s room is allocated to their colour and reduces the number of labels that accompany the diagram. Still at a loss about business cards.
Sunday 26 June

I have been falling behind with my journal over the last few days so I take my iPad to Tesco to catch up on this during my breaks. Did not get as much as I would have liked done as everyone that saw it wanted to play with it. I also get several more people to fill out my questionnaire. In the evening I very, very quickly create Photoshop visuals of the room I will be exhibiting in with a selection of my work on the walls. Not to scale and no real point but a fun exercise non the less.
Monday 27 June

Before our meeting I visit Kall Kwik to get some prices for large scale printing. Ten A1 colour prints on 190gsm will cost £15 each, ten A0 prints would be £25. It only occurred to me later that this likely to include VAT. Although considerably more expensive than the university printers I may need to order paper separately and I am assured that the colours will be of the higher quality than I can get using our facilities. Staples also offer A1 printing at £20.99 which does include VAT, but not any larger sizes. While at Staples I took this opportunity to print off my portfolio sheets for John. The person in front of me was having a document bound and seemed very interested in my work as it came off the printer. He asked what I was studying, what software I was using and what my plans for the future were. He then explained that he is involved in the marketing of medical devices and data visualisation to show information about patients. He gave me a business card and asked that I get in touch with him should any work come up in the future which I did later in the day with a link to my website.

We all meet in the studio and walk up to Greystone to take a look at our exhibition spaces. Measurements are taken, plans are drawn and decisions are made about where we will exhibit. I will get John to do the long space in the end and David can use as much of the other as he transfers for his table. Later we all talk concepts and my spectrum idea appears quite popular with some members of the group. However there is some concern that the pastel tones will not be represented as well using this method.

Further reply from man I met in Staples yesterday about my work, asking about what software I am using and how easy it would be to work with larger data sets.

Tuesday 28 June

Spend the day in the printmaking studio conducting test prints on the large scale digital printer in preparation for my exhibition. I have prepared one of my images with a large amount of bleed and ready to produce my first image, however I am advised to spend today printing small sample from a range of my images to test how well the colours reproduce on fabric and how well the text reads. After a number of prints we find a printer setting that gives the best results, and I begin to alter some of the colours in my files so that they don't appear as dark. Some problems rolling the fabric before steaming mean that some smudges have appeared, although this should not be an issue with the final product.

After washing however I am disappointed that some of the colours have run and the result is far worse than it was before. I consider my options for another method of printing, however I will ask whether I can get away with not performing a washing stage as the fabric will only be used for display stretched over a frame.

Further reply from man I met in Staples yesterday about my work, asking about what software I am using and how easy it would be to work with large data sets.
Wednesday 29 June

The fabric print from yesterday has dried and looks much better than it did last night, I think it may be worth skipping the washing stage since it has lost some of the fine detail and some of the white text on a coloured background is now a little blurry. Using the measurements I took of the exhibition space yesterday I begin to precisely plan where all of my work should be displayed. Although I would like to include every piece this will mean there would be little spacing, so I decide to slightly increase the print sizes and display only ten, leaving two out. I intend to recreate a 3D scale model so I prepare a PDF to print at a later date.

A test print for the exhibition banners is sent to Emma at printmaking so that we have something to show the group next week.

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From:
ben.willers@yahoo.co.uk

Subject:
MA Design Student

To:
david@vivoinnovation.com

Date:
Monday, 27 June, 2011, 16:35

Hi David,

We met earlier in the Lincoln Staples print area, thank you again for your compliments on my work and your business card. Here is a link to my website for the project I have been working on for my MA in graphic design.

http://lifevisualised.freetzi.com/

Please let me know if I can be of any help to you in the future.

Thanks again.

Ben Willers

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From:
David A. Wright

To:
ben.willers@yahoo.co.uk

Date:
Monday, 27 June, 2011, 16:35

Hi Ben,

Thanks for touching base.

We do have a requirement from time to time for more detailed graphic work so thanks for your contact info.

With regards to the visuals and your website etc. I have found it hard to map out any 10 or 20 individuals I assume it’s a collection of data points that you are trying to visualise, are you using analytical software to generate the data points and could readily convert that – i.e. I have found it hard to do if it was done for a large number of individuals do you need to input the data manually for each individual.

Hope that makes sense – please let me know your thoughts.

Thanks,

David

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Hi David,

I have used a spread sheet program to calculate, group and organise my data. Each chart is designed and developed on paper before being created in Illustrator. No analytical software has been used so although larger data sets are always possible it would also be more challenging using my process.

As I say let me know if I can be of help at any time.

Thanks.

Ben

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Wednesday 29 June

The fabric print from yesterday has dried and looks much better than it did last night. I think it may be worth skipping the washing stage since it has lost some of the fine detail and some of the white text on a coloured background is now a little blurry. Using the measurements I took of the exhibition space yesterday I begin to precisely plan where all of my work should be displayed. Although I would like to include every piece this will mean there would be little spacing, so I decide to slightly increase the print sizes and display only ten, leaving two out. I intend to recreate a 3D scale model so I prepare a PDF to print at a later date.

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Thursday 30 June

Spend the day in the library with the intention of getting more of my dissertation done. I begin from my previous research that this will make a interesting section and one that is very relevant to my research question. Despite conflicting reports I have discovered that she did indeed use are in the correct way, although her decision to present her data in this way is clearly because she believes that it was important to grab the readers attention with a beautiful diagram. I find lots of relevant information in the preview section of Amazon’s book site, so I may not need to buy or borrow any more books because it looks like everything has been covered here.

In the afternoon I walk up to Thomas Parker and conduct some more tests using the plotter. I am pleased that there is much higher quality paper in the printer this time that illuminated the wrinkling I experienced before. I am still disappointed by the colour balance, however the resolution is much higher than I can achieve with the textile printer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plotter</td>
<td>high resolution, cost effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colour, print colour, limited to A0.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile printer</td>
<td>unique printing style, bright colours, large scale printing, up to 1500mm wide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colours sometimes appear over saturated, colours may run when washed, expensive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Friday 1 July

At the moment I am feeling that the textile printer will be the best way to go. Hopefully I can resolve the other issues where gradients are involved. The large scale that the textile printer allows is very tempting and although I will need to conduct more tests I am fairly convinced that it will reproduce all of my images clearly enough so that they will communicate clearly. Originally I wanted to have all thirteen of my images displayed, however after much consideration I decide that although this is possible it will mean I am not adhering to the space I would like to separate them. Rather than squashing them all in I decide to create three. These include the first sheet chart, my weighing fluctuation chart and my image of my time chart. These are also the standout charts so I think this is a good idea. To plan how my exhibition will appear I create a diagram in illustrator. When this is printed I decide to assemble this as a three-dimensional model using card. When this is done I will further detail each of the plots that will display my two log books. Overall the model is a little rough around the edges, however it gives a great idea of how my exhibition space will appear.
Saturday 2 July

There isn’t much I would like to improve on my website, however I would like visitors to be able to leave their comments. At the same time though I appreciate the clean look it currently has, I decide to integrate links to my flickr pages. First I need to update my flickr profile since the last time I did so was to show my development work of this project. Links are then placed into my website which directly links to my flickr photoset and visitors from there direct back to my site for a higher resolution image. I still need to write a project summary to inform the reader about my work and my intentions with it.

Finally complete printing and assembling the second version of my log book for John.

Sunday 3 July

After work I began the drawing exercise Jo has set us. We have been provided with a photograph of the Greystone building and we have been asked to make a sketch of it in our own style. Each of our images will be combined somehow to create an image which shows our diversity while at the same time emphasising something that we all have in common. Drawings are to be made in pen and must have a ‘sketchy’ quality.
"I love what you’ve created from your data collection - it’s so cool to turn the seemingly mundane details of life into such beautiful pieces of art. :)"

mallysun

"great graph!"

tomalynn

"‘Great!’"

nieva german

"Love the simplicity and the beauty of this infographic"

shopzilla

"‘It’s great!’"

novichkov.net

" Looks pretty!"

juhansonin

"nice work"

wirtaw

"Awesome!"

Electrocute_

" ‘Nice!’"

madeinuk

" ‘nice work’"

veritas

" ‘It love all of your visualizations my friend, right now Im compiling info for similar analysis of my behaviors. Hopefully the visualizations will be so great as yours.’"

Yourmang

" ‘Nice!’"

jbrooks2010

" ‘Looks pretty!’"

johnsonin
Monday 4 July

Group meeting to discuss exhibition at Angel cafe. Before we met I collected the test banner prints from Emma in printmaking. Both have turned out really well. I personally like the thinner transparent fabric and think it would work well if we did decide to go with the spectrum concept. The thicker linen would work well if we went with the novel or sketch ideas as it more closely resembles paper. The linen is very popular with the group. We also shared our sketches of the Greestone building and discussed how we could arrange these to make our poster. I suggest we take vertical slices of everyone’s images and compose it in the way which is popular amongst the group. I also got to show my scaled model of my room and explain how I intend to display my work.

Later I prepare some initial concepts of how to integrate the spectrum concept to present to John later in the week.
Tuesday 5 July

Work on the spectrum concept ready to present on Thursday. In the concept I showed before there were only six colours to represent each of the full time members. On the map I had used a grey colour to represent the part-timers, in this new version I have included seven colours with all part-time members being represented under one colour. Now more happy with the business card design, I had wanted to make it clear to the visitor that each was part of a set. This could have been done by numbering the cards but I wanted to avoid this. Simply using one colour would not be enough as they would not represent a set, my solution was to repeat the MA Design logo and substitute all of the colour with a light grey apart from your featured colour. It is obvious to the visitor that they should collect one of each card by visiting each exhibit. This paper envelops help reinforce this. I then developed the banners and the booklet using a similar aesthetic to tie the concept together.

Just before midnight I receive a notification from flickr that David McCandless has added me to his contact list. This is hugely exciting, especially since I am only the 82nd person he has added. Now if only I could get Nicholas Felton to add me as well...
Wednesday 6 July
Work on dissertation. Begin by trying to finalise my structure however I end up attempting to complete the first draft of my final section. I had previously struggled with the style of writing that I was used to. I had essentially just listed all the quotes and referenced material that I wanted to include. Returning to it now I find it surprisingly easy to transition into some something middling or a style of writing that I will consider using in the future. By late evening I have very nearly completed the first draft of this chapter. Although I was aiming to get it emailed to Neil before our meeting on Thursday I was relieved to hear that Neil thinks that I am on track and together we discuss the concerns I have about the structure. The first section should explain the issues that I will be investigating, why I am doing this and how I will set about this. I had originally intended this type of information to be included in the introduction, however I am advised to include it within a section of the main body to allow for a deeper explanation. I should also mention my practical work in the introduction to explain why I am researching this area and what importance it has for myself and others. I also got an opportunity to ask how to correctly reference source material that has been quoted in another book and when to use quotes and paraphrasing.

Thursday 7 July
Meeting with John to present concepts for exhibition. It was our intention to decide on a concept during the meeting however we are asked to spend one more week developing these further so that we can make a definitive decision next time. For the spectrum concept we are advised to rethink the logo, it is too similar to the Pink Floyd album cover and John does not want to see type stacked vertically. I know this was a potential issue previously but was hopeful that it wouldn't be an issue when only two letters were involved. For the novel concept there is a slight concern that it may be sending the wrong message about our work. Visitors will be unaware of our involvement with the book club and the concept may not immediately communicate design. The sketching concept is an interesting idea, but needs to be developed further in order to make a decision. For next time we are asked to explore the visual language that will be used for each concept, whether this means going for a more neutral, classically understated approach or an all out affair. Think about logos, how this can be applied and how to theme our spaces. Think about what else we can do with the spaces and the time we have and how our choices will work with this. Make sure that what is added does the concept provide. Have some boards to present each concept for next time. Chat with John afterwards to discuss the options available to me for printing my work. If I am to print on canvas I should give some consideration to why I have chosen this material and what message this will send. It could be an option to make a feature of the frayed edges and place...
Two cultures exist in data visualization: the pragmatic approach for very technical, analysis-oriented work, and artistic pieces with a focus on aesthetics. The first demands that a visualization communicates effectively and efficiently, allowing the user to effortlessly understand the data. On the other hand, artistic visualizations are designed to evoke feelings of awe and wonder. These more sublime pieces may be considered both aesthetic and captivating at the same time. It was the intention of this investigation to find ways to combine these two approaches and create work that possess both qualities.

Ben Witters
Saturday 9 July
More work on the pie chart section of my dissertation, found some more sources of interest including a study from 1991.
Meet with Jo and James in the evening and have an opportunity to discuss exhibition concepts.

Sunday 10 July
Any variation on the identity for the spectrum concept seems inferior to my previous attempt. I try small changes to begin with, then more drastic approaches. The colour wheel is one alternative, and I consider a pie chart as well, although there are problems with how to represent the part-time staff this way. Another approach is to use a Pantone colour book design, each member retains their own colour like before, but the exhibition booklet would fan out to reveal project overview and contact information.
Monday 11 July

Thinking about my choice of canvas for the exhibition I realise that it would in fact make more sense to do it this way because the work I have produced has artistic qualities. Although I do not consider myself as an artist, or regard the work I have produced as art, the data representations I have made will be viewed as such by many people, and displaying on canvas in an art exhibition situation could suit well.

Tuesday 12 July

Have a library day to do more on my dissertation. Also find a book by Cleveland I have been interested in reading for a while but never realised we had copies here.
Wednesday 13 July
Go to printmaking to have my first design printed. This will be left overnight and
returned the following day ready to show John on Friday.

Thursday 14 July
Dissertation day, work on Florence Nightingale Rose chapter.

Friday 15 July
Group meeting with John to finalise the concept for the show. We had all conducted
further work since last time to develop our ideas but I was most impressed by Jo’s sketch
concept. As a group we agreed to go with this idea, which also incorporates aspects
from the other two. We have previously discussed names like “Designers, Not Artists”
and “Designers That Draw” to emphasise that we are separate to the fine artists that
we will be exhibiting with. However it currently seems to go a little out of fashion, that
staid work designers don’t draw, so we all agreed that the name: “Designers Do Draw,
Barrie”. We also decided that rolling up a long sheet of paper and encouraging us
participating by drawing onto it will be an interesting side event that could help draw
people in (pun intended). We could also aim to have the local Echo feature this to
encourage people to visit.

Saturday 16 July
Take notes from a book which I picked up from the library last week. Graphing Data:
Techniques for Display and Analysis by Gary Henry just caught my eye and I was looking
for another book to read, although covering pie chart perception, however I find
these sections within it are quite useful (rather than just nice). Haydn Ward’s book also
provided an interesting list of sources that talk about the importance of clarity in the
visual communication aspects of charts, however not a lot about the importance of aesthetics.
This book, however does this on many occasions and that will help give balance to my argument.
Monday 18 Jul

My literature review is a mess and my notes that I have been taking over the last few weeks are all over the place. I decide to transfer all of my notes into one Pages document so that I can search within my text for words or phrases. Whenever I make new notes I will transfer them into this document. Having a list of books I am using will also greatly help when I come to write my bibliography.

Tuesday 19 July

Continue to update my extended literature review. In the evening I return some of the books that I have finished using to the library. While I am there I pick up more books despite the fact that I really need to do more writing using the sources I have collected so far.

Wednesday 20 July

Group meeting to discuss exhibition banners. Have prepared a couple of layouts using different typefaces but nothing special. James had some prepared with new ideas and we decided on a particular layout as theme. Afternoon began the first chapter of the dissertation and I find I have roughly written 1000 words surprisingly quickly. I also try to find a particular article from 1977. Most of the articles I have downloaded to date are from Jester.com through the University of Lincoln e-library. The article I am after is on this website, however it is unavailable using the subscription package I have. To date I have used up all of the 25 loans I have for this year. The good news though is that the quotas renew on the 1st of August, so I won’t have long to wait. In the meantime.

In the evening I write my 130 words describing my project and send it to John.

LIFE IN DATA

BEN WILLERS

GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION

Two cultures exist in data visualisation; very technical analysis-oriented work and artistic pieces with a focus on aesthetics. One is concerned with efficient communication to enhance our knowledge and understanding, the other operates on an emotional level that may be considered both evocative and captivating. It was the intention of this investigation to explore methods of creating quantitative information to develop new styles of visual language that balance form and function. Visualising my own collection of data has allowed me to create documents of my activities, providing others with an opportunity to gain insight into my habits and routines. Only through the power of data visualisation have I become aware of the patterns and rhythms in my own existence.
Thursday 21 July

Spend the morning in the printmaking studio and workshop to complete my first show image. I was considering having a thinner frame, but eventually decided upon a 2 inch thickness to give them a really chunky feel. The first frame is assembled without any issues. When I came to stretch the fabric though I found that the frame was still visible through the material. After contemplating the best course of action we decided that we should add a layer of paper underneath. Other options involved adding a layer of hardboard to the frame, however this would have added extra weight and cost. Stretching the fabric in such a way that it did not distort the images was also a challenge and it took quite a lot if tweaking to get it just right. When it was done though I was extremely pleased with the result and am now 100% convinced that this is the best way to go. Receive a nice message from a flickr user about my work.

From: Charlotte Vogel
Subject: Hi, love your stuff!

Hi Ben,
Just wanted to say hi and that I love your data visualisations. Is everything you posted your own? I love making graphs but struggle to think of different formats so it's great to look through your stuff.
Did you have a website or online portfolio where I can look at your work in higher detail?

Best wishes,
Charlotte

From: Ben Willers

Hi Charlotte,
Your kind words really mean a lot to me, I love getting any feedback on my work so thank you for taking the time to comment. I am currently looking for an MA Design in graphic communication at the University of Lincoln (UK) the work I've done so far has been instead between February and July. I'm not really finding new formats that work well is really difficult. I found that using a well established format along with a slight twist gave good results. A lot of my stuff is just really variations on bar charts I currently have a website dedicated to this project which includes higher resolution images just click on the main image on each page I changed the web host yesterday so I think there were some problems viewing it better but it should be fixed by now.
lifeindata.site50.net
Best of luck with your own work, I'll be sure to check it out in a moment.

Thanks again,
Ben

From: Charlotte Vogel

Hi Ben,

Wow! What a fascinating project! If I love the website – it’s great to be able toview it all in detail (I’m sure it will go down very well as part of your MA). Your graphs would be lovely printed enormous and displayed in an exhibition.
I hope you stumbled upon the Data Flow books during your research. Great stuff. I could look at graphs all day. Do you know any good websites about interesting data representation? I love putting graphs together but am feeling a bit stuck. I also find designing the axes – how you start looking through these graphs and found your stuff.
All the best for a highly successful MA!
Charlotte

From: Ben Willers

Yes, I have noticed a lot of these computer-generated graphs – they are disgusting! I will pursue your suggested trail.
I’ll keep watching your photostream with anticipation. I hope all goes well.
Saturday 23 July
Continue work on the first chapter, write up results from my experiment. I have used a percentage error method in the past, however much of the research I show to compare this to use uses exponents. I am aware of how to calculate exponents however I was unsure how to find an exponent of a number. After some time I was able to find how this is done and I was able to apply a formula in a spreadsheet to calculate exponents for the data I have collected and find mean and median averages. The results I have reveal an exponent higher than most other research would suggest, however it is in line with Cleveland’s research. The figure I have is 0.95 which is so close to one it suggests that there is hardly any perceptual problems at all. It is interesting that both Cleveland’s and my own research was conducted more recently than much of the other work which have suggested exponents of 0.7. This may be because people are now more experienced in making these types of comparisons, and interesting further study would be to investigate judgements of circles is a skill that can be improved through practice.

Friday 22 July
Wiring up the first chapter, also find an extract from a book by a guy called Pinker which may have some interesting info. I check Stephen Few’s blog and find more about David McCandless. I am shocked and a little disappointed that he copied my idea and I am now going to use McCandless’s famous billion-dollar-o-gram and recreate it using different methods. I will still need another example of this to recreate.

From: Ben Willers
To: Johann Chan (Digital Arts Magazine)
Hi, Johann
I read your data visualisation feature with great interest in your August issue. I am currently on the MA Design course at the University of Lincoln on the Graphic Communication pathway. I have noticed that many visualisations are very technical and efficient communication devices while others are purely artistic. For my major project I have explored methods of visualising data that balance form and function. The data I have used is all my own and tracks my activities to allow others to gain insight into my habits and interests. http://lifeindata.site50.net

Please consider featuring my work in your Graduate Showcase section in a future issue. I think it is very relevant and timely given your recent data visualisation articles. Attached are some PDFs, if you require any further information or images please get in contact.

Many thanks,
Ben Willers
University of Lincoln
MA Design, Graphic Communication

Monday 25 July
Google my name and I find loads of sites featuring my work! Most of these are blog posts, including Nicholas Felton’s, however a few have written a short piece about my work. One has even written an article about data visualisation and mentions my name in the same sentence as Felton’s with my television viewing data at the top of the page. In the evening I adjust the project description and resubmit it to John.
Ben Willers visualizes minute details of his day to day life. He has created information graphics of everything from his nutritional intake to his bank account activity. The chart above is a record of Willers’ television watching over a four week period using a visual style based on an oscilloscope and includes the programs he watched as well as his attention level while watching them. Willers uses his imagination to produce visually pleasing documents of his activities.

"Infographic your life - Ben did! And it looks very good too :)"
@twitsper

"I hate data, but I absolutely LOVE this Ben Willers’ Life In Data"

"Ben Willers has charted his life for 2010: Food, weight, money, sleeping, everything. Not as sexy as the Feltron Report but still pretty nice and damn ambitious."
The graphic designer Ben Willers has turned into an infographic every detail of his life for the year 2010. He has displayed every detail, even the most insignificant: every calorie, every meter traveled, hours of sleep, the money spent... anything.

The result is “Ben Willers Visualized”, a site that is both a rich collection of beautiful infographics and an indiscreet insight into the life of a man. Very interesting.

Google Translate:
“The graphic designer Ben Willers infographic has turned into every detail of his life for the year 2010. He has displayed every detail, even the most insignificant: every calorie, every meter traveled, hours of sleep, the money spent... anything.

The result is “Ben Willers Visualized”, a site that is both a rich collection of beautiful infographics and an indiscreet insight into the life of a man. Very interesting.”
Hi, just wanted to say thank you for mentioning my name and featuring my work in one of your recent articles, ‘Are brands missing a data opportunity?’ I feel really honored to be featured on a professional site such as this. This has helped me get some great feedback from people regarding my work which is of great help since I will be exhibiting a selection of my work later in the year. It was a very interesting article by the way, I will continue to read your site with great interest. Thanks once again.

Ben Willers

Are brands missing a data opportunity?

Nicholas Feltron, Ben Willers (shown above) and others are examples of ‘artists’ who are collecting and using their own personal data to find ways to showing patterns and rhythms in their own existence.

It takes time and an obsessive mind to get to this level of painstaking detail and to what end? However, it’s likely in the very near future each one of us will have a large data repository of our behaviors—some will be ‘ours’ and some will belong to ‘corporations’. How we intend to use it and get the most out of it will depend on just how selling brands are to share and how many consumer-centric ‘middlemen’ emerge to help it happen.

Brands have for years been collecting masses of data on their customers which they’ve intended to use ‘against’ them. I am being ‘flip’, but the current state and world of data mining is really a pure B2B play with giant corporations helping brands, play with, append and manipulate their data with the prime objective being more fruitful marketing efforts.

It’s based on the old ‘command and control’ model— with the brand controlling the data and using it to maintain their power over the subservient consumer. Could there be another way of thinking about this?

What if brands were to give up their data and share it with their customers? I am not talking about doing this as an act of transparency—although that would be advisable and smart, I am really suggesting there will be forms and analysis of data that could be used to make customers more engaged with the brands product or service.

Here are some examples;

Insurance companies are using devices to collect data on how you drive—although it benefits the insurer in the form of lower premiums, there’s also ‘data-flow’ between insurer and insured. This could be used to help the driver drive safer or more efficiently.

Car companies hold exactly the same data which could be used in a similar way.

Grocery stores use data purely to reward and switch their customers from one brand to another but isn’t there more they could be doing. Providing menu and dietary advice and suggestions for example. You can think about data on a personal level, but also there’s huge power in comparing the personal to the universe.

Utilities could be doing a better job here—this isn’t about installing the ‘Smart Grid’ they already know who consumes what, so why not create averages and norms?

Netflix captures a lot of information about movie preferences and uses it to make recommendations but could this be more sophisticated? Could you see what’s trending? Could you compare your tastes to those of others? Could you dig deeper into this data?

Data as a marketing tool is already a huge industry but its being used in a very old-fashioned way. It won’t be long before some brands realize there’s an opportunity to get closer to their customers by finding clever and creative ways to share data. In addition, we are going to see new entities emerge that act as ‘curators’ and ‘agents’ for consumers—collecting and analyzing data on their behalf to help make intelligent recommendations and suggestions.

Data has the ability to change the way we interact with and experience brands and used correctly and in a much more open way it will create much deeper and more personalized relationships than currently exist.
Collecting data doesn’t have to be limited to areas of important scientific study and research. Take Ben Willer for instance. He visualizes minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour details of his life. From his nutritional intake to the amount of TV he watches to his bank account activity, Willer creatively builds entertaining infographics about his life. Forget introspective journals and personal blogs—infographics are the new path to self-discovery.
“Man documents his daily activities in clever infographic-form”

“Here is a site with interesting graphical displays of quantitative information, most of them true to the data, with a high signal-to-noise ratio. (I’m not sure you will find the data themselves interesting, but that is another story. ;-) My thanks to Koen Van den Eeckhout for pointing out this site to me.”

Jean-luc Doumont (Facebook)

Gregor Pfyffer and Manuel Roberto Garcia-Huidobro Moreno like this

“Tres cool! Ben Willers’ life visualized”

hazeliz

“Ben Willers postanowił sprawdzić jak jego życie wygląda przy użyciu danych. obserwował swoją wagę, pożywienie, sen, spacery, finanse i czas oglądania TV. Najważniejsze jest jednak to, że te suwe dane przekształcił w coś co jest ładne i informatywne zarazem.”

Google Translate;

Ben Willers decided to see how his life looks through the data watching your weight, diet, sleep, walking, finance and time watching TV. The most important thing is that these raw data transformed into something that is nice and informative at the same time.”
“Ben visualises his life from watching TV to what he eats. Amazing dedication and depth of data.”

http://shareblog.hugoking.com/post/8354427951/ben-willers-visualised

“this is okay, but nicholas feltron’s personal annual reports are far better in execution.”

mcmillions

Next up a feltron-esque bout of self-recording and lovely design from Ben Willers. Monitoring all your activities and creating huge data sets about your actions is a surprising thing to be catching on, but very interesting. I’m not sure I’d have the discipline and patience to record meticulously enough, though. This is very nice though.
Acai Pure Ultra for men is a supplement that helps men in weight loss. They have therefore encouraged their members to purchase the Acai supplements and to use them for weight loss. The other places that have stocked the Acai Supplements are the health and fitness centers.

You are guaranteed over four times faster calorie burn and weight loss in comparison to regular workout sessions and a nutritious diet. Acai Power Blast has no stimulants whatsoever. None of those ingredients have proven to carry the risk for any serious side effects when taken as directed. Many people who are aware that the supplements on this fruit assist in burning of fats and that they do not have side effects buy them and advise their friends who are on the quest of weight loss. It was noticed that the natives of this area did not have heart problems, cholesterol issues and their body fat levels were normal along with the fact that their bodies are always fit and trim. Introducing Acai Force Max, the next-generation supplement in weight loss for men. Are you looking to build muscle, lose body fat, and have a whistle-clean workout routines for weight loss colon? It is made from the Acai berry that is known to be very effective in weight reduction. It is 100% natural and there have been no reports either in clinical trials or from people currently using the product as a weight loss supplement. The only side effect is suppressed appetite, which is Acai berry's main purpose but other than that, you are guaranteed an after-effect free use of this wonder supplement and also does not give you constipation or cause dehydration. While extracts serves its purpose as a bronchodilating ingredient for respiratory ailments, it was never originally intended to serve as a stimulant in weight loss products. The supplements are usually sold in many medical stores and pharmacies across the world. It was noted for its ability to increase energy so that side effect was put to use in weight loss formulations. A case in point is at those last pills that contained ephedra. It is a small dark-purple berry and 80% of its make-up is the seed. It works within weeks and you could stand to lose up to 2 pounds a day. This is even better since you can purchase the Acai supplements from your office desk and get them delivered to your doorstep by evening. Acai berry is the biggest and most active ingredient in Acai Force Max supplements. Berries are usually found in places around the Amazon forest in Brazil. This is because many men have turned to these supplements for their weight loss programs.

Hospitals that specialize with heart and weight problems are also an ideal place to purchase this product. Their plant extracts have now found their way around the world and is helping scores of people with their weight loss quest. Acai supplements are also sold on the internet. Does Acai Force Max have any side effects? This is mainly in the websites that deal with merchandising of all products or those that deal with medical merchandise. Acai Force Max is only found in up market health stores and shops in very few Western countries and for the rest, you can purchase or order for a supply of it online. All these online sellers ensure that the manufacturer's delivery is delivered to your doorstep. The Acai supplements are found in almost every convenient store in America and Europe. These centers have realized that in addition to their client's workouts, using these kind of supplements will give better and faster results. Acai Force Max is a supplement that will not only assist in weight loss but also known to improve the skin, lower cholesterol levels, help keep diabetes at bay, improve digestion and density the body and also improves your performance in bed. The Acai berry is found in the South-American corner of the continent. However, due to the fame that the Acai berry has gained over the years.
Tuesday 26 July
Wake up at 2:00 in the morning and in a productive mood, so I work on the second dissertation chapter where I discuss pie charts. I create a pie chart in Apple Numbers and apply lighting effects and a wood texture. I also tilt it so to make the nearest sector more prominent and give it depth. I then use the same data to create a bar chart, this is clearly superior for representing the data accurately and illustrates the points that I am making well.

Wednesday 27 July
Attempt to rewrite the third chapter of the dissertation including the analysis of the Nightingale. Before this section was far too long and discussed issues not relevant to my investigation. I now get it down to about 1000 words however I feel that this could be stripped back even further. This does mean that I will need to find something else to accompany this new section. It would be good if the third chapter could be a discussion of other people’s work and chapter four would be all about my own, however this will mean having chapters of different lengths that we have been previously asked to avoid.

Thursday 28 July
Group meeting with John to talk about our progress, I have been fearing that I was falling behind with my dissertation however after hearing from the others I seem on track. Earlier that morning I collected my exhibition print to show, thankfully John is pleased with it and I am given the go ahead to use this method. I also learn that the project description I have submitted is approved. The scale model I have made of my room really helps show how I intend to use my space, so much so that John wants everyone else to create their own. Later in the evening I recreate my room using scraps of mount board left over from another project. I have also included the other halls so David can place his work in here as well. I have decided to print my work separately, stick it to mount board and apply to the model with double sided tape so different arrangements can be tried.
Friday 29 July
Meeting with Neil to discuss dissertation, he seems happy with the chapters I have produced so far. I am told that I should make it very clear if these investigations have been a continuing concern over the last century or if it has only been discussed in depth in the 1920’s and again more recently. I am also asked to look at whether there was anything that happened in the early part of the 20th century that sparked the initial concern.

Saturday 30 July
Eventually find the data in table form to recreate the Nightingale rose diagram. My version looks almost identical to hers, however it is interesting that there are some slight differences between the two, most notably she got the colours muddled up on one pair of red and black sectors. In no case though has she over emphasised the most important blue sectors. I also recreate the diagram where the wedges do not overlap as I have felt in the past that this would be more effective for her cause, however the diagram doesn’t look too much different. I also recreate the diagram in the style of David McCandless which I find quite amusing. The next version I create is a simple bar chart, first a stacked version and then again with the sections sitting on the base line. With the first it is possible to view how many people were dying overall, with the second we can see how many are dying from each cause and identify patterns in the wounds and accidents data. This is a far more useful chart than the rose, however it does not grab the attention of the viewer with the same degree of success.

I also feel that it illustrates Nightingale’s case more effectively as we tend to underemphasise sectors scaled by area. In evening I work on the banners for the show, James and I have agreed to split this task between us. I have trouble setting the background images and will require help with these when we meet on Monday, however I have tried a new style that I am quite pleased with and will suggest to others, instead of making the images really big in the background I have used just one sketch scan centred and below the text.

Diagram of the Causes of Mortality
In The Army In The East

Deaths from infections and disease
Deaths from wounds and injuries
Deaths from all other causes

Diagram of the Causes of Mortality
In The Army In The East

Deaths from infections and disease
Deaths from wounds and injuries
Deaths from all other causes

More effectively as we tend to underestimate sectors scaled by area.
Monday 1 August

Lunchtime meeting to discuss banners, we are all really impressed with James' designs and we use this opportunity to proofread everyone's text for the first time. The rest of the day is spent in the printmaking studio printing my work for the exhibition. I get most of my charts printed, however it is challenging to get the gradients to reproduce well. I need to do some colour tweaking on the walking and meal time charts because the colours have come out poorly.

In the evening I wash some of the sample prints along with a colour catcher sheet and I am pleasantly surprised by the results. When I tried this before I got some very blurry results, however these are much better.

Sunday 31 July

Continuing from the work I did yesterday recreating the Nightingale rose. I now create a component bar diagram. This has the benefit of showing the exact amount of people dying, not just as a measurement of deaths per thousand. It is clear why Nightingale did not use this method though, as it makes the deaths seem insignificant compared to the enormous army at the time.
Wednesday 3 August

Morning spent in the library rewriting my Florence Nightingale section. Afternoons in the printmaking studio steaming my prints. Last night I created a new version of my walking chart and the print is much better today; the gradients are now clearly visible. Overall I am very happy with most of the finished prints, however the text is a little difficult to read on my spending chart which is disappointing. I may try washing this one to see if there is an improvement, but all of the others seem fine.
Thursday 4 August

*Begin the next part of my dissertation to discuss the work produced in The Guardian and by David McCandless.*

Friday 5 August

_Dissertation, David McCandless section. Steven Few has critiqued his work extensively and has provided some fantastic quotes for me to use. In fact there are too many to use and I will have to be selective. As McCandless has added me as a contact on flickr I decide to contact him to see if he can provide a quote for me to use. No reply came from this._

From: Ben Willers
To: David McCandless
Subject: Dissertation help

_Hi David,_

_I am currently on the MA Design course at the University of Lincoln investigating data visualisation. I have been exploring how to combine analytical information design with information art and have created a series of images that document my life. I can currently be at the dissertation stage and I am investigating the merits of using art to communicate quantitative information. I am hoping to present a balanced argument and would be extremely grateful if you could include some of your thoughts._

_In 2009 you created the Billion Pound-O-Gram to compare large sums of money by visualizing them. Steven Few argues that judgments of area is a perceptual task that cannot be done well and a bar chart would communicate the data more effectively. The article can be found here; www.perceptualedge.com/blog/?p=1030._

_My question to you is simply, “Do you think the encoding of information using area helps you communicate your message?” If you have any further reading that you feel would be beneficial to my research I would also be extremely grateful._

_Many thanks for your time, I will continue to follow your work with great interest._

_Regards,_

Ben Willers

ben.willers@yahoo.co.uk

My site: lifeindata.site50.net

Monday 8 August

_Chapter one tided up._

Saturday 6 August

_Final first draft of the McCandless section and completely rewrite Florence Nightingale again. I have dramatically reduced the amount of background information when I have talked about the rose diagram to fully focus on my question. I have also removed all references to the bats wing diagram which in a way is a shame because it was really interesting, however it was not necessary to include it. I cannot make direct comparisons between Nightingale’s rose and my bar chart to demonstrate how ineffective her version is for accurate communication._

Monday 8 August

_Chapter one tidied up._

_Received a message from a flickr user who wants to feature my work in a magazine_...
Dear Ben,

Hello, it's really good hearing back from you. As mentioned our coming IdN Extra is going to build around the theme of Infographics, we found your infographic works under Life in Data fit our theme perfectly. It would be great if we could feature you.

In detail, below please kindly find set of materials we would need from you.

1) all images from your Life in Data + any others you found them fit our theme Infographics perfectly.
   
   * please kindly make sure all images are in at least 300 dpi and could enlarge to size 235 mm x 297 mm

2) captions of all your submission in the following format

   Title:
   Client / collaborator:
   Year:
   Work Type / Media:
   Brief work description:

   Titling for TV channel Showtimes xxx program

3) images of your own identity:

   a) Business card, stationery, and any self-promoting projects / materials

   Way of submission, please kindly submit all the materials by uploading them in our server:

   FTP: ftp://
   Login/Password: *Please open a folder inside the public folder
   *Please email to confirm when upload is complete

   Thanks again for willing to participation and should you have any further queries please feel free to contact me.

   Warm regards,

   Alva Wong
   Features Editor
   4th Floor, Jonsim Place
   228 Queen's Road East, Wanchai, Hong Kong

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Hi Alva,

I have uploaded the files you requested into the public folder in the folder 'Ben Willers'. Let me know if you require anything else.

Thanks again

Ben

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Hi Alva,

I have received the file you are looking for. It looks like you have uploaded the correct images.

Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Warm regards,

Ben Willers

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From: alvadelica
Subject: Interview request from IdN magazine (IdN Extra – Infographic)

Dear Ben,

Hello, how are you?

We are IdN (international designers network), an international designer network based in Hong Kong. We are working on our IdN Extra, as a continuation of its mission to amplify and unify the global design community. IdN Extra is a special edition of IdN Extra that explores in-depth a particular theme of projects to the coming IdN Extra. We are going to build around the theme of Infographics. We had come across your works and found them extremely inspiring and perfect for our IdN Extra. Thus, it would be wonderful if we could feature you.

If this interest you would please kindly give me a reply at alva@idnworld.com. Thanks for your kind attention and looking forward hear back from you soon.

Here is some information about what we do, you could also visit our official website www.idnworld.com if you would like to know more about us.

IdN (international designers network) is published monthly and targets digital designers, photographers, art directors, printers and creative professionals. Throughout the world, IdN regularly organizes design awards and events with a view to fostering a greater sense of community within the creative industry. The magazine is currently available in two languages, English and Chinese, and in five editions: International, Asia-Pacific, Australia/New Zealand, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and Spanish.

Hi Alva,

Thank you for getting in contact and taking an interest in my work. Of course I would be delighted and honored for you to feature my work. If you require further information or PDF files please do not hesitate to ask.

Many thanks,

Ben Willers
Tuesday 9 August
Most Bob to the morning in order to work on the frames, unfortunately it will be a few more weeks before I can get them made since the workshop is currently being rewired.
Meet with Jo and James to read each others dissertations in the afternoon. A great opportunity to see the style others have used and get some feedback.

Wednesday 10 August
Rewrote section four, distinguishing between the different types of data visualisation, just about finished by evening and looking good! By the evening I had rewritten my log book. I had originally thought about going landscape but I think the landscape format from before will work better, (and much easier to do).
Monday 15 August
Dissertation day, evening spent starting the catalogue. The format is very similar to the one used for the spectrum concept and features one spread for part-time members and two spreads for full-timers. Everyone has the text from their banner and an image on the first spread, full-timers also get a large image on the second. Also included is each person’s website, contact email and phone number along with their QR code. A6 seems quite small, but it is surprising how much can be fitted into the space. The images still contain a lot of detail and it is much better than newsprint for displaying work.

Saturday 13 August
Small crisis, after reviewing the methods I have used to calculate exponents from my questionnaires I have found that I have done this incorrectly. It takes several hours to find how to rectify this. Before I thought the exponent from my research was 0.95, it is now 0.84. This is much more inline with the other research that has been conducted. I decide to include a table of results in the main body of my essay to show the range of exponents between questions and participants. By late evening I have my four chapters and half an introduction paid out, I publish as an ePub file and send to my iPad to review in my lunch break at work tomorrow.

Wednesday 17 August
Work in the library on the background images for the catalogue and print off some copies to see how well they reproduce. QR codes are scanning fine on my iPad and 3DS. Finally start to receive images from people so I can drop them into Indesign.
Life. In Data.

Ben Willers has meticulously recorded every aspect of his life – including money spent, steps walked, nutrition absorbed, hours slept – and visualised them with complex and beautiful infographics. Every detail is laid bare and displayed with graphic precision – apart from exactly who or where Ben is. Surely a person is allowed some privacy?

MDK™

Find out (almost) everything about Ben at lifeindata.site50.net

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From: Ben Willers
Hi Mark,

Many thanks for the email and for featuring my work on your site. It always makes my day when I hear positive things said about my stuff. To quench your curiosity I am studying for an MA in graphic communication at the University of Lincoln (UK). I am currently writing my dissertation and preparing for the end of year exhibition. Having my work featured on sites such as yours is fantastically helpful as I tend to get feedback on what pieces people enjoy most so I can select the best ones for my show.

Thanks again,
Ben Willers

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From: MDK™
Subject: Life in Data.

Ben,

I wanted to let you know that I have included your wonderful Life in Data infographics on my design website at http://www.MDKtm.com.

I think they are wonderful.

Good regards,
Mark


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From: MDK™

Thanks for getting back Ben. It looks like it’s working up to be quite a show judging by the amount of work you’ve put in.

Keep me posted on how you get on and I really wish you well.

Best regards,
Mark


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Life in Data.

Ben Willers has meticulously recorded every aspect of his life – including money spent, steps walked, nutrition absorbed, hours slept – and visualised them with complex and beautiful infographics. Every detail is laid bare and displayed with graphic precision – apart from exactly who or where Ben is. Surely a person is allowed some privacy?

MDK™

Find out (almost) everything about Ben at LifeinData.site50.net
Friday 19 August

Try to arrange a mini iFlipbook, however after a long pause on the phone I am told that there is a backlog to speak to in sales and I should call again next week. I have a feeling that the unrelated dispute they are having with the BA graphics students is a factor here. Two week extension given to allow us more time to produce the dissertation and dissemination report. This has come as a huge relief because the preparation for the show is eating into my time and preventing me from doing other things.

Meeting with Neil, essay seems OK, well researched and referenced. For television references I only need to include the year in the text. If there is no author for the net magazine reference I would list this under ‘N’ in the bibliography. I am advised to increase the point size by one and to centre justify the text, however after some persuasion we agree that justified left is also acceptable. The abstract should be about 200 words and should sum up the whole piece, including the findings of the report. For the introduction I also need to add a section which briefly explains the chapter. I am also advised to move section four into the introduction section. Sections five is a conclusion so one extra page and I am advised to move this into the conclusion and add a bit more that sums up the rest of the report at the end. This will come to about 10,000 words at average size (not over 9000).

Return home to find two parcels, the 10 mm binding bolts for the log book and the business cards I ordered on Tuesday night. In Staples 100 single sided cards would cost £14.99 and Kall Kwik charge similar. The cards I have ordered have cost £3.90 and that includes delivery. I am very surprised by the high quality printing and the quality of the stock. I will definitely be reordering more cards from this supplier.

Andrea has sent her teapot images however these are too low resolution to print from as they need to be increased by about 300 percent.
Sunday 21 August

James has been asking us to send him quotes that we can use in the exhibition so that he can format them for the vinyl cutter. I have been putting this off because I do not really want to feature them. It is at about 8am as I am filling yogurts at work. I have an idea, the quotes could be from Internet users who have commented on my site. These are all relatively short and hopefully I will be able to feature three or four. The perfect place for them would be on the stand I am putting the iMac on and I will get people to write them so that they feature different handwriting styles.

Saturday 20 August

Design front cover for the catalogue using one sketch from everyone. Trying to make each piece appear balanced is challenging. I am particularly concerned that James’ paint splash is not prominent enough so I have emailed a version to him to review and suggested he send me a painting that will be more visible. An email from the university is requested on the front page so if we can more clues to the inside cover, ideally we can mini this off altogether. Also select small details on the main pages and add in Andrea’s images that she has sent today at the correct resolution. I am now only missing stuff from Paul and the mini essays, and a back cover that I have no plans for yet. Later on I copy the email messages I have been sending to people over the last couple of weeks and their replies. I also begin to add images that I have been taking on my phone, like the models I made and the printing I have been doing.
Monday 22 August

Me and Jo visit printers to get quotes for catalogue. First drop in to sleek to Elpeeko, however they do not want to take on any more work from the University until a dispute about pay is resolved with the BA graphics students. Next stop, Ruddocks, we have previously had a quote for 300 perfect bound copies for £695 however we visit as we have some further questions. We are informed that to have our order ready for 2 September we will need to supply the artwork by the end of the day if we are prepared to wait until the Wednesday before the show we have until tomorrow evening. They provide us with some further quotes including 200 and 300 copies saddle stitched. The lady we spoke to was very pleasant, however it was clear that she did not know much about printing as she was constantly moving between rooms to ask the opinions of others. The third place we visited was Prontaprint on the high street, both me and Jo were very impressed with the guy who spoke with us as he was able to answer all of our questions and gave us some good advice. We are told that he can produce some samples for the next day and he will do his best to give us the best price possible.

Afternoon meeting with John to discuss posters for screen printing. We had previously thought about using two or three colours; however we have decided to keep things simple and only one. We have straightened out an attractive poster that contains all of our sketches, so John suggests making a series of six, and make a limited run of each. Six copies of each will be produced and each will be numbered and signed by the group before being placed around Lincoln.

Tuesday 23 August

Today is our day to use the printmaking studio to print our banners. Early tests fail to show any background detail in the images and James has to perform many test prints to get them close to how we would like them. The brown/gold colour we are after proves particularly challenging to reproduce as it appears very dark in fluorescent lights. Walk around the rooms at Greestone to sort out minor details like where to hang the banners. John suggests that in my space I place the skulls on a stand in the middle of the room. This would allow the user to stand in the middle of all my pieces and read about each one in turn from the screen. Later me and Jo went to collect the dummy catalogues from Prontaprint, they have turned out really nicely, however they are asking quite a bit more expensive than Ruddocks. This is despite the guy promising that he had got us the best price, however when we show him the offer from Ruddocks he says that he will see what he can do to lower the price. I later receive an email with a revised quote attached which is over £100 less than before.

Meeting with John in the afternoon to show him the catalogues, it is suggested to drop the sketches from the page boarders when an image is being shown as it is interfering with our work. Somehow the conversation turns to plinths and I happen to mention that it may be interesting to use cardboard boxes from Tesco. This is despite the guy promising that he had got us the best price, however when we show him the offer from Ruddocks he says that he will see what he can do to lower the price. We receive an email with a revised quote attached which is over £100 less than before.
From: Christine Lemke
Subject: tools you use

Hi Ben, saw your quantified self visualizations on your website: http://lifeindata.site50.net/index.html

Your website is great!

I’d love to know, if you’d be willing to share, what tools you are using to track all this data?

Thanks and best,
Christine Lemke
Entrepreneur based in NYC and San Francisco

Wow, that’s a lot of work, but super interesting stuff! Thanks for sharing, Ben. I’m toying with ways to make an analysis like this interesting for people who know nothing about “quantified self”, and you’ve sparked an interesting idea to get historical data into the mix. It would be super easy to automate the parsing of old bank statements.

Recording your tv habits must have been painstaking. Wish there was an easy way to do that.

Thanks again,
-Christine

I found that once I got going it became easier to record the data so the processes became second nature. Television viewing was actually quite simple. All I had to do was use a red pen to circle any programs I had watched in a TV Guide and rate between 1 and 8 depending on how interested I was at watching at the time. Once I had 4 weeks worth I sat down and entered them into a spreadsheet and began designing from there.

Best of luck with your work, I would be interested to see when you have stuff to show.

Cheers,
Ben Willers

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From: Ben Willers

Hi Christine,

Firstly thank you very much for taking the time to view my work and your kind feedback. Most of the data collected for this project was through extensive handwritten diaries of data I thought would make for interesting visualisations. Walking distance was recorded using a pedometer, money information was taken from old bank statements, working hours from old pay slips and body weight from a Wii Fit. The data was then placed into a spreadsheet (Apple’s Numbers) where I could group and organise it in various ways to identify patterns. I then use a spreadsheet and designed the charts by hand before creating in Adobe Illustrator. Of course things don’t always come out as I had hoped and other times I accidentally stumbled across something quite interesting.

I guess it’s a fairly old fashioned way of doing things but I hope that answers your question. Many thanks again for getting in contact.

Regards,
Ben Willers

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Wednesday 24 August

John and I seem to love the box idea. Originally we were thinking of using the green boxes as these lock together and are more stable, but the brown banana boxes are more attractive. Making them stable is going to be an interesting challenge for David. James also joined us and although he is sceptical when I describe the idea on the phone he also seems to like the concept.

Design for screen print posters is adjusted and finalised, we will also include details of the preview night despite this being apparently invitation only. We will print these tomorrow at Greestone.

Catalogue, Jo has written the thank you section for the final page and the style is perfect. I had attempted this last night but came out rubbish. With the book now complete we read through it to catch any final mistakes. There are quite a few minor adjustments including one on James’s piece, unfortunately when we call him he has already printed his banner which includes the same mistake. With the final adjustments made we are ready to go to print. We are informed that we have been given permission to go ahead with the printing from Prontaprint when the necessary paperwork has been sent to John. Later I email both Prontaprint and Ruddocks to inform them of the situation.
Thursday 25 August

Jo is to talk to the printer, at times this goes really well, but we run into a number of problems. Joans screen has got some glue on it which really interferes with the text, and at one point I remember that we have to redo the screen completely, however we decide to cut the text from another section and line up the image to create these posters. This turns out pretty well, although some of the text is a little muddled with the image. By the end of our printmaking session I feel that we have just begun to get good at this process, and we are working much quicker than we did at the start.

Friday 26 August

Dissertation, work on the introduction and rearrange sections as discussed in Neil’s meeting last week. In the evening at Tesco I collect as many banana boxes I can find. Unfortunately most are slightly squashed or have markings on them, however I collect them anywhere I can see on them. By folding the back seats down over I can fit at least 18 in the back. The dark green boxes would be a lot easier to get hold of, more sturdy and easier to assemble into plinths, however the dark look quite unattractive.

Saturday 27 August

Morning shift at Tesco, collect more boxes. Unfortunately most of our bananas coming in at the moment are coming in a different type of boxes that we require, only the organic varieties and kids bananas are coming in the sturdy design, the others are coming in boxes that look similar but are made of thinner cardboard. These should be fine for my log book stands, so I collect these also.

Sunday 28 August

As usual, Sunday means a 7am to 6pm shift at Tesco. Spend most of my breaks rummaging through cardboard cages trying to find banana boxes. By late afternoon I have nearly cut 60.
Monday 29 August
Bank holiday, work on conclusions for dissertation.

Tuesday 30 August
Morning meeting with John and the group, this is the first time many of the others have seen the box idea and most like it. Kelly will be creating hers in white paper to match her work. All full timers are present to sign the posters and we begin to distribute. I have one put up in Ruddocks and another at Angel cafe, have less luck with high street chains like Paperchase. Finally get the paperwork through from the university to confirm the order for the catalogues, visit Printprint to drop off the file. Evening on dissertation, Chris has had a look through and has some good advice and has found some spelling and grammatical errors.
Wednesday 31 August

Two car trips to get 38 boxes home from home to Greestone. Begin to arrange the piles into plinths ready for David to begin constructing them. Print-off copy of my dissertation and leave for Neil. Lunch with Jo and James to discuss stuff. On the way home stop to get more boxes from Tesco, get another car full.
Thursday 1 September

Rob helps make the stretcher frames for one week. I cut the lengths and use the band saw to prepare the ends and Rob screws these together. Afterwards I sand them down and take them down to the printmaking workshop ready to stretch my images. It had been about six weeks since I did the practice version before and I can clearly remember what to do. Two layers of paper are glued onto the frames and then painted on top of the upside-down image. It takes me six hours to complete seven images. I leave the final, biggest image for tomorrow.

Friday 2 September

Arrive at Greestone for 8:30 so that I can finish my final image before meeting up with others to paint rooms. The chart I have left is quite easy, I try to get it done right because it is bigger than the others. Not many others show up to paint, fortunately David is here so we can discuss our room. To solve David’s mould problem on his wall we have decided to create a wall of boxes two or three high to cover it. We can then place some of his models and development pieces on it that will sit directly below his wall mounted boards. First we need to sort out the floor which has splatters of white paint on it. We try just painting the relevant spots, but we are told we should paint the entire room. We begin but soon realize that there may not be enough paint as some tins contain a different colour. We abandon painting for the day.

Pick up the catalogues from Prontaprint which have turned out really nice. We will have a drawing session next week.

Saturday 3 September

Work on log book.

117116
Monday 5 September

Paint the floor and the walls where it is needed in one room. Both are in pretty good shape apart from a few patches. This can then dry overnight so I am ready to hang in the morning. Richard Black brings up the iMac and screen to my room and makes kiosk mode available. Later I use my retina and make the necessary adjustments to make it display effectively on this screen.

Sort out the boxes, they are all slightly different colours and need grouping. They are also difficult to stack because they are not always square; some that are not are moved to one side.

Go to Wilkinson to buy the curtain rod holders for our banners, unfortunately they do not have enough in white so we buy natural wood colours and arrange to have the ones available in the Nottingham store put to one side for David to pick up later. I also buy a packet of mirror plates to see how effective these are for hanging my work. I will need 10 pairs but they have plenty in stock so I just get one for now.
Tuesday 6 September

Being in a 30m orange extension lead from home to power my iMac from the plug at the other end of the room. The last part will visible so I will need to source a white cable for this part. Begin to put up my images. Using the mirror plates I bought from Wilkinson I complete this with relative ease and it slots in first time. Unfortunately when I return to Wilkinson they have sold out, but lucky I ask at a hardware shop close to TPH and find them even cheaper.

Afternoon drawing session to draw on the catalogue covers, I find being spontaneous was difficult and struggle to think of things to draw, so I decide to copy parts of my graphs. For the last few I draw famous data visualisations from memory. Some of the worse ones are ones I spend just a few seconds on.

Before going home I return to Greestone to put up two more pictures.
Wednesday 7 September
Carry the remaining images upstairs from the printmaking room to my exhibition space. Yesterday I had centred my images 150cm from the floor, despite reading that this should be done at 145cm. I now feel that 150 is slightly too high and decide to lower these later. The remaining images are now put up centred at 145cm. Me and David put up the two banners in our rooms and the one in James’ room. We are very concerned that the boxes will not be able to support an iMac and brainstorm a solution. If the MDF top is held in place with wall brackets these would take most of the load, if we can get the height just right the boxes will look seamless underneath creating the illusion that they are taking the load.

Before finishing for the day I remove the three pictures I put up yesterday and repaint the wall as it is looking a little patchy. I only just get finished before the building closes and have to rush, I am very concerned that I have made things worse because the wall now looks much more yellow than the surrounding walls.

Thursday 8 September
Another early start, this is the only part of the day when I can get on and do my own work without being interrupted. Relief as I walk into my room and find the paint on the far wall has dried white. Move onto making my plinths, using the brackets I found last night I assemble the iMac stand which is relatively easy. The most difficult part was getting it tight enough to the top of the boxes so that they can support the iMac. For the remaining stands I have used the weaker boxes and for these I add cocktail sticks in between layers so that they join seamlessly. Before going home I stop at Dunelm to buy bin bags to cover the sink in the room as we use it regularly. Before going home I stop at Dunelm to buy bin bags to cover the sink in the room.
Friday 9 September

Just a few more jobs to complete in my room, the cable for the iMac needs tacking to the wall and the excess had hiding in the boxes, a white sheet needs stapling to hide the doorway to the sink area, straighten the banner with blue tack, clean the iMac and mouse, de-fluff my work and sweep the floor. Other rooms also needed banners putting up and little jobs which I help with. My room is ready for the 1 o’clock walk through but I stop to help with other peoples rooms. I also add in the final details to the map I put together last night by matching the names to the relevant rooms.

By 6 o’clock everything is sort of ready. More people than I expected have come to look around. Receive some very positive comments about my work and lots of people use the comments book. The biggest complement comes from Chris Tigg who offers to buy two of my exhibition prints.
Looks fab! This is how such detailed work should be displayed. Well done. Hope it went down well.

Charlotte Vogel

I loved the idea of autobiographical data being used as graphs. Brilliant idea.

Absolutely mind blowing! So interesting. Well done Ben.

Gail

Fascinating and well thought through.

Excellent use of secondary data!

E & C.
The lost my husband in your dads book. You asked for 200 dollars. It was a very nice present. I'll give you twenty dollars. I have a lot of trouble with my health. My husband is not well. I miss him a lot.


Beautiful mix of colour and black and white. Picture is very effective. Interpretation is straightforward. Logical. It's a different way of seeing things. Striking.

Very graphic - homage. Well done Ben, stunning visuals, enjoyed seeing them in the flesh. 

⑴ D. Slater
Well done x

This is all so brilliant - so much thought and detail. Absolutely Fabulous.

Graham + Barbara Beaumont.
Never realised you were so clever Ben.
Always thought you was an thick ass me!
Or worked at Tesco. Get out now.

Kate
x Boobie xx

Ben,
You are talented, however you watch too much.
Channel 4. give up your head.
Focus on your education and become financially secure
in September 2012,

-John
(this is (excellent) were)