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**Finding my woof by tweaking the warp:
a personal account of an attempt to better understand
learning in a Communication Design course.**

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requirements for the award of the
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Declaration:

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Date: 30 August 2006

Signed by candidate

Abstract

In this dissertation I set out to research my Design teaching practice from the perspective of *enactivism*, a term coined by two Chilean theoretical biologists, Humberto Maturana and the late Francisco Varela. Enactivism as a discourse, has its origins in philosophical hermeneutics and means that through our *living* in the world we are in fact *creating* our world, where inner and outer *specify* one another through *embodied action* (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1993:172).

Central to my research is the hermeneutic method of enquiry, which involves the phenomenon of interpretation understood to be the “*enactment or bringing forth of meaning from a background of understanding*” (Varela *et al* 1993:149). In researching from these points of view I am situating *myself* within my *research* so that a mutually supportive relationship may emerge as I venture into my writing (Haskell, Linds & Ippolito 2002). In so doing I am able to “bring my own life into my academic process” (Kull 2005:101) and the resulting writing is primarily concerned with capturing this process as it unfolds.

The journey that I take meanders during my sense-making process as I reflect on the data that has emerged through an approach that involves a conscious gathering, as well as an intuitive *welcoming in*. In this way, similar to *grounded theory*, there is a “continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Strauss & Corbin 1994:273). This leads, for me, to a new awareness of how I can improve my teaching as well as fresh insight into an ethical aspect of Communication Design. Lastly, a new research path opens up for me as I conclude my reflections on a research process that has truly been a case of “laying down a path in walking” (Varela *et al* 1993:237), a process that I can only fully appreciate in its wholeness as it draws to a close.

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Part One

What is the lay of the land?

An overview.

“If it is so that the world arises in the interplay of our living together, then which way do we live together so that the world that arises is the one that we want to live in?”

(Maturana cited in Hocking, Haskell & Linds 2001:47)

The topic of this dissertation has emerged from personal experience in my practice, issues in design education and theoretical interests that I have become aware of through completing the coursework for an M. Phil. at the University of Cape Town (UCT). So that readers may orientate themselves I have, in the section that follows, touched on all of the above influences in a way that draws these threads together into a kind of *fabric* that may give some definition to my current teaching approaches. The following sections will, through a series of reflections and interpretations induced by the research data, pull at new threads in the fabric of my teaching so as to allow for a more attentive fit with the world I and my students find ourselves in and are complicit in creating.

In the title I am playfully referring to how this dissertation is a bid to get in touch with an underlying structure in my teaching, to find my voice in a manner that is meaningful and useful. The figurative use of this

old term, *the warp and woof* (Colins English Dictionary 1991:1766) of fabric is intended to provide a metaphor for how, when viewing life in a holistic way, the effect of any reflection (a tweaking of a thread) alters the total state of things.

While teaching a Communication Design¹ over the last ten years I have grown increasingly conscious of the need for teaching and learning attitudes that are more cognizant of the living subjects involved, and that are more questioning of habitual practices that are lead by dichotomies such as the mind versus body split and subject versus object separateness.

This may sound mildly paradoxical in the light of my work being in a creative field, where it is often assumed to be all about encouraging students to make creative imagery that is self expressive. But the stresses and strains that manifest daily exist in very real terms among students and staff alike, underscoring “such dyads as teacher-versus-learner and empowered-versus-disenfranchised” (Davis 2004:10) and the ever present baggage in the form of learning attitudes based on assumptions of acquisition and transference.

By and large our course is well run and we manage to see graduates through into the workplace where they follow careers in many different areas of the creative communications industry. But even though I know my colleagues and I have evolved the course in so many progressive ways over the years, I recognise the need for me to develop ways of being more attentive to what is happening in my teaching practice. I intend to do this in this writing by listening and carefully interpreting the nuances of what my students are saying through

¹ I teach the subject of Communication Design to second and third year students in a Graphic Design programme at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town, SA. Students who qualify after completing either the Diploma (three years) or the Degree (four years) course find employment in the communication industry as Designers or Art Directors working on brand development (corporate identity), packaging design, publishing, web/interactive design, and advertising (to name the main and fairly distinct areas within the communication industry).

My choice of title for this writing also plays on the shared root word, *texere*, for text and textile. I have tried to capture an element of the warp and woof of textile fabric by incorporating a criss-crossing motion in the way that this text is read. These text boxes on the right-hand side carry illustrations and parallel thoughts to (or merely quotes to support) what is being discussed in the main body of the text. In this way I hope to momentarily suspend the linear structure (downward warp) of the text so as to allow for the reader to glance sideways (across at the woof) and in so doing maybe reflect, and engage with their own experiences. Regarding format, my use of contrasting fonts also serve to accentuate different voices throughout the text.

a reflective and interpretive process that recognises my role as the observer. I am interested in the issue of design education in terms of the world we find ourselves in today and how compatible this is with notions of sustainability.

What do I mean by sustainability? This word is in danger of becoming another buzz-word that triggers many different responses in people. In the sense of teaching Communication Design, I am talking about attitudes amongst all involved in teaching and learning that are considerate of a very simple principle – that through our actions we both *initiate* and are *shaped* by our *environment*². This seemingly obvious concept has had a profound effect on my thinking and this writing is part of an ongoing search for further understanding in my teaching using this idea as a guiding light.

As it is impossible and meaningless to speak for anyone but myself in this dissertation, I will be researching my own teaching practice and will not be trying to make any claims that can be generalized. The exploratory manner I'll be following is the only way that I feel I can genuinely make my own discoveries and find the questions that need asking. If what I write resonates for anyone else in a similar situation then I will be doubly happy and closer to my hope that, in some small way, this dissertation will add to a growing body of work that seeks to remind us all of richer, more imaginative spaces where we can cohabit as learners and teachers, giving and receiving in ways that are “moving” and about “movement” (Jardine, Clifford & Friesen 2003:220). When I speak of movement in my practice I am touching on what feels to be so vital in the process, that fluid moving from student to teacher and back, from the personal to the general, the micro to the macro shifting that happens when there is a mutually created space that allows for a flexible, non-coercive approach to learning opportunity as it arises. To paraphrase Robert Bly, if we are to live between the

² This principle is fundamental to the concept of *enactivism* which I will be elaborating on in my methodology section (page 14).

opposites, we need to not only recognise them but rejoice in them, and we need to push them far apart so that we can live in the resonating space between them (1992:174/5).

What follows is a brief look back to some of the events that have led me to want to do this research work.

Finding my bearings.

My teaching career began somewhat differently from most. I had been active in the world of advertising and design for about ten years when I was approached to do some teaching in the department of Graphic Design at the tertiary institution where I'd previously qualified. My first years of work experience had shown up the failings of the course and I felt that this could be an opportunity to use my work experience in SA and overseas in ways that could better prepare students for a rapidly growing industry. After an initial period of disillusionment and wanting to return to professional practice I decided to leap fully into education because it seemed to offer an interesting opportunity to more fully understand design and its processes, and to have some fun in an environment where commercial pressures are more peripheral.

The more I have taught the more I have come to love this crazy, complex process of teaching and learning that is so elemental in all our lives. I remember the time, about seven years ago, when I started to develop a sense that teaching was a lot more complex than I had initially imagined. It was a realisation that both daunted and energized me. Since then I have been learning to cope with the heady highs and draining lows of trying to become more experienced at this extraordinary game. There was a time when I felt the immense pressure that comes with the pointless quest to be the knower of all knowledge pertaining to the design course I teach. I even became seduced by the prevalent institutional attitude of providing training that followed a transactional model of students as clients with their outputs (the pieces in their design portfolio) being of the utmost

Mark Nelson noted the difference between research in the academic world where we have the time to sort things out, asking fundamental questions, and the world of professional practice where we simply push forward. (Friedman 2006)

"We teach what we like to learn and the reason many people go into teaching is vicariously to re-experience the primary joy experienced the first time they learned something they loved."
(Brookefield 2004)

importance to their success as young job applicants. In this rush for many final end-pieces the process of developing more thinking attitudes became secondary. This approach exhausted me as it started to feel that my job was never done, and the lack of any significant, broader discussion within my faculty added to my resentment.

Certain key events have eased the way for me to find a more livable space in my teaching. The birth of my two children, I think, gave me the insight I needed into dealing with chaos and the development of a more empathic approach. The chaos that young children bring to orderly adult lives was the reminder I needed of our human condition and how this seeming *non-structure* is where one can find the ways to move forward by letting go to a certain extent, and sensing the opportunities for guidance/teaching as they arise. The wonderful questions that my children ask also demand careful reflection and answering as they mostly refer to those aspects of our lives and world that have become habitual and taken for granted. These questions provide a magical link between our distant past and our future, as they are not unlike the ponderings of our ancestors.

As a parent/teacher, this has had a profound effect on how I behave. After the birth of my first child I suddenly found that I was able to relate to my students as someone else's children. I think I was able to empathise far more deeply with their *being in the world*, with their hopes and their fears, because of my perception of them as loved children. Through this empathic approach I have been able to perhaps "do something analogous to what parents do that enables their children to discover their existence as humans" (Bunel & Forsyth 2001:166).

Another key event has been my completion of the taught Masters in Teaching at the UCT. Over the last three years this has led me to the writings of some inspirational people that have opened up spaces for a new

The teachers who get "burned out" are not the ones who are constantly learning, which can be exhilarating, but those who feel they must stay in control and ahead of the students at all times. (Smith 1998:95)

understanding of teaching and learning. Of the four modules completed prior to the writing of this dissertation I found the Researching Teaching module to be one of the most extraordinary learning experiences in my adult life. This module was facilitated in such a way as to allow each of us, as individuals, to reconnect with our experiential history that in turn enabled us to be more present in our current practice. This experience proved to be hugely energizing as it expanded my views on so many fronts. I found myself able to adopt a more questioning approach to what I do with students, as well as find affirmation for the teaching-by-the-seat-of-my-pants that I had been practicing (having not studied to be a teacher). My past experiences as a learner in seven different schools were fore-grounded again in a way that made me appreciate the first principle of *enactivism* – that “the possibilities for new perception are conditioned by the actions that are enabled by established perceptions” (Davis 2004:213). My personal history came back in sharp focus, especially my memories of a country school run by my parents where, as pupils, we were given the freedom to learn experientially, explore our environment and follow our obsessions in ways that breathed fresh air into what I had experienced in mainstream schooling.

As a result of this module I viewed myself, in a sense, as whole again having remembered where I’d come from and where my past experiences (and current actions) could be directing me.

The term enactivism came about through the work of two Chilean theoretical biologists, Humberto Maturana and the late Francisco Varela, who claim that our “sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition” (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1993:173). The idea proposes that through our *living* in the world we are in fact *creating* our world, where inner and outer *specify* one another through *embodied action* (*ibid*:172). Put differently, they view perception as not being about “a passive mapping of external features [the world around us] but a creative form of enacting significance on the

“That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you’ve understood all your life, but in a new way”.

(Doris Lessing 2003)

basis of the... [subject's] embodied history" (Varela *et al* 1993:175). This way of viewing our cognitive structures can be thought of as the "space of the possible" for a person (Davis 2004:213). This thinking rang so true for me that when I first fully grasped the concept, it felt like one of those moments when one realises that although the radio has been on, one hasn't really been listening to it.

The philosophical origins for this attitude can be found largely in the Continental philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, especially the school of philosophical hermeneutics and the work of Martin Heidegger and his student Hans Gadamer (Varela *et al* 1993:149). By becoming more aware of the *interpretive turn* these philosophers are said to have prompted, new ways of understanding my teaching (and the world we live in) have become apparent to me. Most importantly, this shift in my thinking has given me renewed energy to see, in a studio full of students, the possibilities that lie in the diversity of their experiences and to act in such a way as to bring about the occasions where this potential, rich in tacit knowledge, can be welcomed into the community of learning. This glimpse of a world where the generation of knowledge is understood in terms of "participatory epistemologies" (Davis 2004:100) has not only validated my earlier sense of the complex nature of teaching and learning, but has also (for me) thrown a new light on this pervasive human activity called *design*.

If I view design from the perspective of complicity and participation that Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, Varela, Maturana, Davis and Jardine all argue for, there is the beginning of an attitude that I believe can show those of us in design education, a way of talking and interacting with our students that encourages a larger sense of responsibility with regard to the kind of world we are co-creating through the design (and students) that we send out into it. By using the word *responsibility*, I don't for a minute, want this to sound like I am

espousing strict guidelines that cause design to become stifled and boring. On the contrary, I find that much of the design that we see in the world displays very little evidence of any larger project or vision and that the resulting work has become at best trite, and at worst, risky in the light of what current consumerism is doing to our fragile planet. This may sound like I am departing from my main area of interest, but my concerns for the sustainability of design are causally intertwined with the ways in which we teach it. It is therefore my interest that, by relating to students in a manner that recognises these dynamic principles of life, the deep potential that exists in a more holistic approach may be released and that the resultant design work may stand a better chance of being engaging, emotive, challenging, imaginative, inspiring, transformative and ultimately more meaningful.

The inherent difficulties in teaching being done in this way, such as the additional time required for students to engage in deeper more critical processes, are all part of the challenge and can, in fact, become the eye-openers that encourage us to review past assumptions. The above concern about time, for example, has resulted in discussions in my department that have ultimately shaped a new timetable that now allows for deeper and longer engagement for students working on a design brief. The timetable had previously been a victim of the *quantity is better than quality* school of thought and had been structured around numbers of projects and subject turn-around.

More recently, due to student numbers increasing unmanageably, staff/student contact time has come under pressure. Our response has been to create study groups, which will allow lecturers to meet with groups rather than with individuals and also encourage students to draw on each other's resources. By working in ways that are more flexible to situations as they arise, we are able to create in our studio work a "microcosm of a society" (Smith 1998:99) that thrives on integration, conversation, and initiative.

Central to the Researching Teaching module was a more wide-awake approach to the issue of objectivity in academic research and writing. Varela *et al* (1993:27) argue that, “by not including ourselves in the reflection, we pursue only a partial reflection, and our question becomes disembodied. . .”. They go on to point out the irony inherent in the scientific practice of attempting “to have a disembodied view from nowhere that leads to having a view from a very specific, theoretically confined, preconceptually entrapped somewhere” (*ibid*:27). Davis talks about teaching and learning being “about divergence . . . [rather than] convergence onto a pre-existent truth, . . . – about broadening what is knowable, doable, and beable” (2004:184). This kind of thinking intrigued me greatly as I could recognise its significance within the Communication Design course I was teaching in terms of loosening up the adherence to beliefs that the world is fixed and separate from ourselves.

The disembodied approach resonates again when I think of how, for so long, Graphic Designers have been straight jacketed into believing that they must necessarily remove themselves from their work in order to serve their clients interests. The “*Swiss method*”³ (McCoy 2001:7) that swept the world in the 1960’s attempted to reduce design to a formula that could be trotted out every time anything needed to be graphically communicated. This may have been an important part of the ‘growing up’ phase of Graphic Design and the establishment of the discipline in global commercial terms, but the dominance of the approach has had far reaching consequences and still enjoys nostalgic returns.

Seasoned designer, Paula Scher describes how she “had rebelled against the Swiss international style because the act of organizing the Helvetica typeface on a grid reminded me of cleaning up my room. Also I viewed Helvetica, the visual language of corporations, as the establishment typeface and therefore somehow responsible for the Vietnam War” (Scher 2002:25).

³ The *Swiss method* is described by Heller *et al* (2001:7) as the graphic style “based on an assumption of modernist rational method” that attempted to achieve the “ideal . . . [of] the objective presentation of information, rather than the subjective expression of an attitude . . .”

Notions of design needing to be more responsive to the diversity and eclecticism of human experience have slowly grown but are still regarded as falling outside of the more businesslike (the way things are) formulaic approach. When we encourage our students to 'think-out-of-the-box' we are referring to the restrictions of any paradigm that tells us what is normal and how we *should behave*.

Graphic Design⁴ education has been shaped by its history as a guild-based, master-apprentice tradition and this has led to a vocational model being used in many Design Schools. I believe that in order to move beyond what may have become entrenched, more innovative and enquiry driven approaches need to be integrated. I am therefore interested as a design educator in becoming more aware of these invisible (traditional) attitudes (both within design education and the broader context of teaching and learning) so that I may be able to question them firstly, and secondly, consider ways to act differently in order to grow the course that I teach.

⁴ It may appear as though I am using the terms *Graphic Design* and *Communication Design* interchangeably without reason. Communication Design is a more contemporary and inclusive description for the discipline known broadly as Graphic Design. It is also the name given to the core subject that I teach. I am therefore using the two terms where they best suit the context within my writing. Heller *et al* (2001:3) point out that Graphic Design is a recent phenomena of the last hundred years, arising out of the growing communication needs of consumer societies during the industrial revolution.

How do I re-discover this land?

A mode of exploration.

I have attempted, so far, to orientate the reader by providing some insight into how I have arrived at this point in my teaching career. In summary, I find myself teaching a creative design course in ways that feel right but cannot put my finger on what constitutes this feeling. The lack of a language or an approach to understanding this tacit knowledge, which by its very personal nature cannot be objectively researched, is what interests me, and in this writing I attempt to find ways of entering into my conception of teaching and learning so as to improve my practice (Breen 2002).

In the orientation section of this dissertation I have incorporated brief references to the sort of methodology that I will be following in this writing. It is important for me to contextualise and place my story so that it is apparent that my method of approach to this research is genuine in how it does not start with concepts definitively defined before beginning, and that I am wholeheartedly committed to learning as I go along, allowing what emerges to surge forth as the process develops (Depraz, Varela, & Vermersch 2003:17). What follows is a more focused description of my methodology.

In the completed course-work of the M. Phil. at UCT I have been introduced to the concepts of enactivism and hermeneutics and have chosen, for this masters dissertation, to research my teaching practice using these approaches in what counts for a methodology.

Enactive research.

I have given some background to the term enactivism already (pages 10-11) but feel that the essence (or what I understand to be central to this concept) of the enactive view is "that cognition has no ultimate foundation or ground beyond its history of embodiment" (Varela et al 1993:xx). Embedded in this is the idea

that “identities and knowledge are not ideal forms, but *enactments* – that is, *embodied* in the nested interactivities of dynamic forms” (Davis 2004:154 my italics). Davis (*ibid*) and Varela *et al* (1993:9) further elaborate that life and learning (cognition) are therefore understood in terms of a *constantly evolving landscape of possibility* (no representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind), where a subject explores (enactively) and selects actions that are adequate to emerging situations. As can be seen, this alternative orientation of the enactive acts as a bridge between cognitive science and what this means for everyday experience and it is this emphasis on practice and *doing* that leads my approach/methodology in this writing. I find a resonance within Bob Kull’s (2005:101) approach in the way that I have also moved into the circular, self-reflexivity of my research using my writing as an example of what I am writing about, and that in doing so I am able to *bring my own life into my academic process* in a manner that is authentic for me. In this way my research is an expression of who I am and who I am becoming, and my partiality is not something to be guarded against but rather an asset and an opportunity to make the research more meaningful (Haskell, Linds & Ippolito 2002).

“Everything said is said by someone”
(Maturana & Varela 1987:27)

My feeling for this research is well articulated in the following quote:

“When our partiality, that is, what makes our relation to our research unique, is understood as an integral aspect of our methodology and data, the research and the researcher begin to share a mutually supportive relationship” (*ibid*).

Hermeneutic enquiry.

Having said this, hermeneutics becomes an interesting companion to enactivism in that its task is “not to methodically achieve a relationship to some matter and to secure understanding in such a method . . . but to rather recollect the contours and textures of the life we are already living” (Jardine 2000:116). My writing

therefore flows using a hermeneutic approach to enquiry that relies on the “planned as well as the unplanned, the expected as well as the fortuitous” (Davis 1996:29). In this method of delving into possibilities and playing with the emergent form, this writing, or bricolage (*ibid:xxvii*) is my attempt to find a better *understanding* of what might be happening in my teaching practice through *interpretation* where interpretation is “the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding” (Heidegger 1962:189). Originally the term *hermeneutics* meant the interpretation of ancient texts but it has been extended to include the whole phenomenon of interpretation which is understood to be the “*enactment or bringing forth of meaning from a background of understanding*” (Varela *et al* 1993:149).

Autoethnography and Grounded Theory.

My approach may be compared to autoethnography in that it involves my own personal narrative, notably in Parts Three and Four where I am telling the *story* of my research as it unfolds in real time. In this way my intention is to, not only capture my learning experience meaningfully, but to “evoke a resonance in the reader through first person narrative rather than . . . provide objective description and analysis” (Kull 2005:109). As I interpret and analyse my data I am not only trying to get at what has been said by my students but am always seeing myself in *relationship* to what is unfolding. And so my research reflects my constantly shifting notion of self.

Similarly, grounded theory as a methodology can also be detected in my approach in the way that my writing is a “continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Strauss & Corbin 1994:273), where the data is continually incoming through a process that involves a conscious gathering as well as intuitive emergence. This process has involved (for me) a modification of the state of understanding at all times as new material/data arises in the form of insights and further reading, demanding to be incorporated into (and

compared with) the fabric of the writing. Each time something is added in this circular mode of enquiry, a new layer of understanding is gained.

These approaches are oriented by complexivist and ecological discourses, that are themselves situated within the discursive branch of interobjectivity where “knowing is equated with being and thought is understood in terms of ongoing adaptations of dynamic circumstances . . . [,where] humanity is understood not just in terms of linguistic and cultural productions, but as biological-and-cultural forms that are nested in biological systems” (Davis 2004:110).

I realise that my method of exploration is vulnerable to the criticism that it is subjective and self-absorbed, yet personal transformation is my intention (Kull 2005:110) and it is from my inextricable situatedness within the complex collective that I am able to “appreciate the role of individual thought and action—the *in-here-ness of knowing* – in the *emergence of the shared body of knowledge*” (Davis 1996:80 my italics).

The four main data points that I have used to allow material to surface are elaborated below.

(i) Student journals.

I asked ten students from the third year of the Graphic Design programme that I teach to engage in a journal writing exercise during a social-awareness project. My request for participation in this journal exercise was more of an *invitation* to engage, in whatever way they felt was most appropriate, in a running commentary on their learning experience during and after the above-mentioned project.

The design project, Ideas that Matter⁵ (ITM), is one that entails students working in groups to produce a social-awareness campaign that supports a non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO) of their choice. The project provides a rich experience in that students engage in primary research around social issues that are mostly quite foreign to them. In addition, students have to deal with the printing industry to accurately assess the budget required for the production of their campaigns. The campaigns are submitted as part of a competition sponsored by SA's largest paper producer. The winners are granted the money required for the implementation of their campaigns and the students eventually see the tangible results of their work affecting people's lives.

I like to view the project as something thrown into the moving stream of learning in the course that I teach – the ripples caused by this *perturbation*⁶ (Maturana & Varela 1987:96) are found in my student journals, conversations and own reflections. These ripples are themselves perturbations for me, and it is around these events that the main currents or themes for this dissertation will become apparent.

(ii) Student interviews and conversations.

Secondly, I have audio recorded and transcribed from interviews and conversations with the above students during and after the Ideas that Matter project. The reason for this is to take up on some of the themes raised in the journal writing and to start the process of interpretation that is central to this writing.

⁵ The formal requirements of this project can be found in Appendix 1.

⁶ I use the word *perturbation* as Maturana *et al* (1987:96) do to denote a disturbance or something that ruffles the surface of one's consciousness. Any interaction with the environment *triggers* an effect in the living being but it is the *structure of the disturbed system* that determines what changes will come about for it (*ibid*). Davis (2005) mentions that the word *teach* comes from the Old English *tacn*, which meant something like *sign*. Any object or event could potentially serve as a teacher, and so, to teach was to *perturb*. The act of teaching was originally understood strictly in terms of its *effect* on the learner, not at all in terms of any deliberate effort to affect learning.

(iii) Personal reflections, memos and memories.

Thirdly, I have also drawn on my own reflective journal entries written during the course of this design project, and during the process of writing this dissertation. In using these short reflections I am trying to capture a sense of personal understanding of what is occurring during the research process.

I believe that this ‘mindful, open ended reflection’ is what Varela *et al* are leading up to when they describe embodied reflection as not being “just *on* experience, but that [reflection] *is* a form of experience in itself – and that ... it can cut the chain of habitual thought patterns ... such that it can be ... open to possibilities other than those contained in one’s current representations of the life space” (1993:27).

(iv) Literature, already read and being read.

And lastly, I have found my entry into this writing through the work of several main authors who write from the perspective of enactivism and philosophical hermeneutics. These include Varela, Maturana, Davis, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Jardine. As I progress through this research process I am continuously reading new material and re-reading what I have read already. In this recursive process I am moving through the literature in a way that allows for emergent understandings to surface, so that a space may be found where the different sources are in *conversation* with one another. I have found it helpful to come at the concept of enactivism from the perspective of several different authors; all coming from different backgrounds and using slightly differing terminology. I have aimed in my writing to capture the excitement that I have felt as these connections become apparent and the subsequent insights emerge, for this is what I believe is the essence of the enactive approach, to *learn* is to *do* and to *become* more experienced through a process that is circular in its reciprocal interplay.

The intention is that the material derived from the above data points will provide me with enough perturbations, or triggers, for interpretation and reflection. I will use these ripple-like disturbances as entry points into my teaching and then explore the interpretations and reflections in a theme-based manner. The interpretive enquiry approach has long been established as a means to look at one's own teaching work in a way that allows one to become more experienced "at hearing the nuance and difference that each situation brings" (Jardine *et al*, 2003:7). Hans-Jorg Gadamer, recognised as the most important contributor to the field of philosophical hermeneutics, puts it this way – "understanding in the interpretive sense begins in the face of something happening to us such that things no longer go without saying, things are no longer simply obvious" (Gadamer 1975:299).

My research approach is probably best summed up in the words of Patti Lather:

"Data might be better conceived as the material for telling a story where the challenge becomes to generate a polyvalent data base that is used to *vivify* [original italics] interpretation as opposed to 'support' or 'prove'. Turning the text into a display and interaction among perspectives and presenting material rich enough to bear re-analysis in different ways bringing the reader into the analysis via a dispersive impulse which fragments univocal authority" (Lather 1991, cited in Jipson & Paley 1997:9)

Davis describes interpretation as the human tendency to "construe coherences amid the spray of experiences that constitute existence" and points out that its Indo-European roots lie in the Latin *inter* for between, and the Sanskrit *prath*, meaning to spread about (Davis 2004:99).

A way in.

This section is about how one student's reflections have prompted me to reflect on my understanding of the teaching and learning process. The interpretive nature of this work does not begin with a topic in hand, it is more a case of something becoming a "topic only when its interpretive potency strikes or addresses the one doing the interpretation" (Jardine *et al* 2003:59).

In the following journal extract Vusi Ngxande allows us a glimpse of who he is, and in so doing provides the topic that speaks to me in this research.

"What's in a name?

According to black/African culture, your name will ultimately determine your destiny.

My name is Vusimusi Lincoln Ngxande.

Everyone calls me Vusi.

I call myself Vus.

My first name I don't know where it comes from. It is also part of African culture to name a child after past family members.

My name is actually spelt Vusumuzi. But ignorance about black people's names was rife even when I was born.

My name means 'to wake the house or nation'.

I have never really paid much attention to my name.

But the past two-and-a-half years have been regressive rather than progressive.

Somehow being born in the dust and pollution of *ekasie* doesn't seem to be a deep enough foundation to set the story of who I am and where I come from. My identity can't have materialized from the chimney smoke and tar of urban disadvantage.

There has to be more than that.

I feel reluctant to carry on with this journey into the future without a rearview mirror.
The dilemma is also feeding into my perception of design learning.
Why is tradition not taught at schools? Why are kids not taught the significance of their names?"

Insight one

Finding the thread.

When I first read these words it felt like a door had opened and a chill draft swept onto my comfortable notions of how black students cope on a course like ours. We lecturers (99% of us are white) have struggled for years to try to integrate and encourage the few black students⁷ that enroll in our course. We have had some success, but a distance always seems to remain between them and students from other racial groupings and staff. I began to realise that this distance has become a sort of buffer zone that has blinded me to the personal stories that individuals bring to a course. This distance has become part of what seems to be normal about this course. The black students always group together. A common reaction might be to say, 'so what?' If they feel more comfortable that way then let it go. Why try and orchestrate a dynamic that could ultimately backfire?

The triggers for me in this journal extract are: "I feel reluctant to carry on with this journey into the future without a rearview mirror" and, "the dilemma is also feeding into my perception of design learning".

⁷ In my eleven years of teaching (1995 to 2006) we have had an increase from one to fourteen black students registering to start the first year of the course.

When I read Vusi's entry about his ignorance surrounding his name and the desire to build onto something more positive than the hard reality of *ekasie*⁸, I began to sense a sadness in his frustration with his background and yet an acknowledgement emerging too. For me, he is not merely saying that he rejects the urban squalor; he is factoring it into who he is and therefore wants to see it in his rearview mirror as he progresses with his life. He is also alluding to how this is affecting his learning on the course.

Vusi is in his third year of the course and is only now starting to work this out for himself. It is not as though we, as staff, haven't spoken on these issues before, and yet there is still this slowness to grasp something so crucial.

Is this because there is no time frame for these kinds of realisations and students can only arrive at them when they are ready? Do we need to be more explicit about issues of personal history being integral to how students engage with the design process?

I am reminded of the bland assumptions made around students as *commodities* and how we take them onto a course without so much as a glance at their backgrounds – quotas must be reached, student profiles must be representative. But where exactly do the black students who enroll on our course come from? What are our hidden prejudices that only they can see in a course like ours? What prejudices do they bring with them? How do we run a course in a way that allows for a healthy discussion about personal histories?

I find that answers to these kinds of questions emerge slowly as students move through the course and they warm to certain staff, work on personally expressive design projects or engage in reflective journal writing. Often much of this remains untapped, as was the case with another student, Ndumiso, who had already finished the course before we became fully aware of his stand-up comedy career. I can't help

"The range of what we think and do
Is limited by what we fail to notice.
And because we fail to notice
That we fail to notice,
There is little we can do
to change:
until we notice
how failing to notice
shapes our thoughts and deeds"
R.D. Laing in Goleman (1985)

⁸ *ekasie* – a colloquial word for an Apartheid era 'location' or separately developed settlement.

wondering what opportunities we might have missed in not knowing this fascinating aspect of Ndumiso's life? How could we have encouraged him to include more of his humour in his work. Could we have used this somehow to empower other black students on the course? How can we as teachers recognise talents in our students that lie outside of what we usually expect? How can we train ourselves to genuinely listen to what our students are saying to us?

These questions may seem somewhat obvious, but I have found that it is often the obvious questions that need asking as they deal with what has become habitual. It is interesting that so many questions have arisen out of contemplating Vusi's journal entry and it would seem that this is a point of perturbation (for me) where things can "no longer go without saying" (Gadamer 1975:299) and further investigation is necessary. Jardine speaks of how, what seemed "obvious starts to become suggestive, ...[showing] itself as rich, complex and difficult, full of hidden relations, stories to tell, whispers and hints, obligations, and implications"(Jardine *et al* 2003:141).

In the section that follows I start to look for the implications of Vusi's words in the hope of *understanding*, in the hermeneutic sense, where they fit within a "longstanding whole" to which it may belong and "from which it gains its sense and significance" (Jardine *et al* 2003:12).

Insight two

Assertions-turned-assumptions.

I am intrigued and energised by Vusi's choice of words because, for me, they break with traditional or commonsensical language concerning learning. I was initially surprised that he was writing about ignorance of his culture and the important role it plays in his learning, rather than about aspects relating more specifically to the course. He is reflecting instead on something that is altogether more fundamental to his

learning, and it draws my attention more towards notions of the nature of being (ontology) rather than practical everyday matters (epistemology).

His comments remind me to take note again of what feels like an insidious malaise that exists quietly in the background where certain attitudes remain largely unspoken about and unchallenged. In this “computational model of mind” (Varela *et al* 1993:xix), knowledge is largely understood in terms of commodity and transfer. This can mean that, even though we speak the language of progressive education, there is still an almost unconscious belief that the course with all its *packets of information* still has priority. There is a linear, transactional theme to the following common student attitude: a fee has been paid by the student, who now feels he is owed knowledge transfer and a piece of paper to prove it, which will have entailed lecturing staff providing the “subject’s objects” in the hope that the student may be able to “catch onto” them (Davis 1996:99). This problematic approach results in a preoccupation with lists of things to be learnt rather than with ways in which knowledge is understood, connected and applied in our constantly changing world.

We (particularly in the West) have, over time (especially since the 1600’s) become used to a mode of thinking about learning that has been driven by scientific method and more recently by business models. I refer to this empiricist mindset as an insidious malaise because of the hold that these “formalist perspectives on knowledge” have over “virtually every niche of human endeavor” (Davis 1996:81).

A veneer of coherence conceals a fractal like web of suppositions and conjecture that has been born out of the antagonistic relationship (in modern times) between what the ancient Greeks called *gnosis* (matters of existence and questions of meaning) and *episteme* (practical every day matters) (Davis 2004:26-27).

Davis (1996:178) points out how this hegemony has been fuelled by metaphor in our language and how it continues to play a “powerful defining role in our perceptions of what it means to think, to know, and to act intelligently”.

The English language is filled with tropes that entrench the mindset that knowledge is some *thing* that is outside ourselves and to be acquired. We speak of grasping a concept, exchanging ideas, food for thought and constructing understandings (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler 2000:54-55). It’s interesting to note that the word educate has its roots in the Indo-European word *deuk*, meaning to *lead, draw and tug* - along with many others like induce, induct, introduce, deduce, reduce, abduct, and seduce (Davis 2004:182). In Davis’s view, images of control and coaxing emerge in this etymology that are supportive of “modernist assertions-turned-assumptions that humans are rational and radically individuated” (Davis 2004:182). As these assumptions have now been “embodied in four centuries of prescriptive and technique-driven models of teaching” (*ibid*:182) they need to be recognised for the damage they have caused, and are causing, so that alternatives may be sought. Davis mentions that Walter Ong’s work suggests the roots of modernism reach back as far as the advent of literacy in the way it prompted a separation of earlier modes of thinking from modern ones (1996:60).

Consider another word: complicit, with its root *plek-* ‘to weave, plait, entwine’ and a different scenario unfolds where possibilities are emergent rather than prelimited. When viewing teaching and learning from the perspective of complicity there seems to be an equal recognition of what is being taught and who is engaged in the learning. If viewed as equal parts in the process then a true entwining can result – a weaving together of student, teacher and subject matter. There is also the hope that this recognition of complicity may heal the damage done by a history of gnosis being pitted against episteme, so that the former (pre-enlightenment)

complimentary relationship may again flourish. It is in this spirit that I move on to further explore what this student's reflections may hold.

Insight three

Looking further. Horizons – past and present.

My search for further interpretation of Vusi's comment about not wanting to go on without some kind of rearview mirror prompts me to read Gadamer's chapter in *Truth and Method* about horizons with new eyes. The following sentence stands out for me:

“To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it, but to see it better within a larger whole and in truer proportion” (Gadamer 1975:272).

This resonates with Vusi's hunger to understand who he is in terms that go beyond *what is close at hand*, i.e. his present state of ignorance about his name and the immediate poverty of *ekasie*. Gadamer goes on to suggest that someone who has no sense of their horizon is a person who does not see far enough and therefore overvalues what is nearest to him (*ibid*:269). The questions posed earlier, *why is tradition not taught at schools?* and *why are kids not taught the significance of their names?* take on new meaning here. This would seem to me to be the way in which many people tend to live nowadays, with an over-infatuation with the present and the way things are. Herein lies a challenge for design education, to continually rattle the boundaries (thereby drawing attention to them) of our students horizons so that they may expand their frame of reference.

'A human being is a part of a whole, called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.' Albert Einstein (1954).

Vusi's metaphor works well in connection with Gadamer's idea that our horizons are ever in motion, our peripheral vision (glimpses of our past in our rearview mirrors) ever present and the whole process contingent on its recursivity.

Being a designer I always find it more comfortable to think with a pencil in my hand and at this point I have been doodling some sketches to gain further insight into this rearview-mirror metaphor. As I doodled I noticed how revealing they were of my own habitual practices.

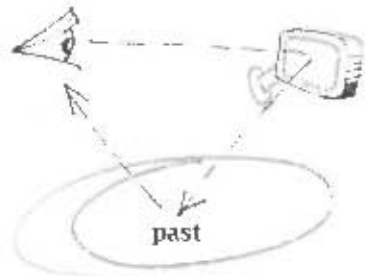


fig. 2.1

My first sketch is indicative of a non-thinking approach where I have indicated sight lines (like some sort of x-ray vision) from the perceiver via the rearview mirror onto the past. The eye of the perceiver is also separate from the present but magically connected to the past by an arrow.

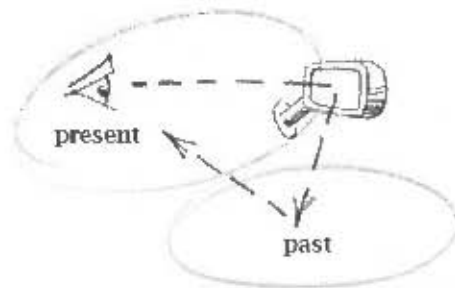


fig. 2.2

The word metaphor comes from the Greek, *metapherein* meaning to transfer. The idea of effective history is given added meaning by transferring onto it the concept of what a rearview mirror achieves. de Certeau (1984:115) interestingly observes that the transportation vehicles used in modern Athens are called *metaphorai*. He talks in comparative terms of how stories are the spatial trajectories that link, traverse and organize places in such subtle complexity. This rings true for me in how my use of stories, memories, and reflections are the *metaphorai* that serve to transport me through this research journey.

After looking at what I had done and seeing the obvious problem I re-drew (fig. 2.2) to show how the perceiver is within the present moment while seeing the past almost *peripherally* through the rearview mirror.

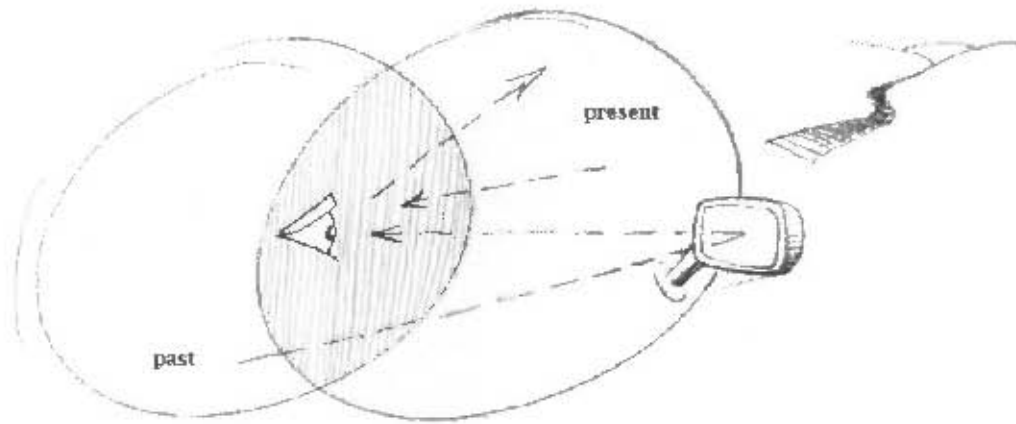


fig. 2.3

It took a third attempt to finally realise that the sketch was still revealing hidden assumptions and I overlapped the past with the present and then reversed the direction of my x-ray vision (an echo of a rationalist view of an individual separate from and merely observing the world) to show the past reflecting onto the perceiver. There is also an indication (the two to-and-fro arrows) that we co-evolve within our present worlds. The union of these two spaces could be seen as the understanding that is attained once this recursive process has been recognised. And finally, this simple sketch is moving with the rearview mirror appropriately reminding me of the passage through time as we live our lives.

When drawing the rearview mirror (I always drew it more realistically than the other more symbolic elements) I became very aware of its status as *something that we do*, a *hidden aspect of perception*.

What seems to be arising through this interpretive process is the need for an *approach* that accommodates and works from an understanding of the complex nature of perception. Once this *awareness* has been established I (and hopefully my students) may be better placed to find more satisfying and productive spaces for design teaching and learning. It is towards this elusive *tool*, this mode of being more aware, that I now turn.

I have been careful not to use the word *method* here to describe this circular action as the word does not incorporate the participatory nature and inherent effect of the subject on knowledge creation, nor does it satisfy my desire to open up possibilities without being beholden to a process that would be aiming at “pinning down” and “render[ing something] objectively presentable” (Jardine 2000:116).

Insight four

The hermeneutic question.

I am encouraged by what Vusi’s comment is indicating here as I read on about how “all self-knowledge proceeds from what is historically pre-given”, and that this is an individual’s “substance” which is the “basis of all subjective meaning” (Gadamer 1975:269). In Gadamer’s view, the horizon of the present is continually being formed by the past and through this fusion, understanding is possible.

Merleau-Ponty (1979:240) also talks about a body taking “possession of time” in that “it brings into existence a past and a future for a present”. In this ontological way of thinking Merleau-Ponty sees his body as the instrument of his comprehension in relation to the perceived world (*ibid*:235) and it is this situated-ness that underlies the whole hermeneutic question. Davis talks from the enactivist perspective of knowledge being “neither *out there* nor *in here*, but exist[ing] and consist[ing] in our *acting*” (Davis 1996:79 my italics).

Inherent in this is the standpoint of the cognising subject. The very word horizon implicitly points to a person being in a place or a world where their view-point or perspective is dependant on who and where they are.

I have a habit, when faced with something that is troubling me, of climbing to a high point on Table Mountain so that I literally have a wide horizon before me while I consider ways of dealing with future events. While up there I am aware of how the mountain, being so close to me, becomes a part of my immediate surroundings and how the immense three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view pushes itself to the fore. When looking at paintings of Table Mountain done by early European settlers (fig 2.4), the first thing that strikes me is the distorted vertical proportions of the mountain. I would imagine that after months at sea with nothing but a gentle rolling horizon (sometimes violent) that the first sight of Table Mountain looming on the horizon must have seemed extraordinary in its height, resulting in a similarly distorted artistic depiction. Two different standpoints, and two different perspectives concerning a particular place, point to our unique differences brought about by our personal histories and differing contexts, socially and historically.



fig 2.4 Table Mountain (n.d.)

Insight five

The hermeneutic circle.

Vusi's metaphor has helped to make me more aware of something that is so hidden in my life experience. Somehow this process of accessing the theory that I have read *through* the reflective comments of one of my students holds a far richer meaning for me. It seems like there is an emergent transparency to the material that I have read before, an opaque veneer gradually rubbed off. When writing the last sentence the recursive nature of what I'd described reminded me of something that I had read in *Truth and Method* (1975), and skimmed over because of its denseness. Gadamer (1975:317) describes the process of becoming more

experienced as a turning back on oneself, whereby something unexpected occurs to provide someone who has experience, with a new one. A new horizon has been acquired within which something can become an experience. I realise that this to-and-fro process of meaning-making is, of course, the hermeneutic circle at work.

Here I am reminded of Huygen's principle, which proposed that each point on a wave front may be regarded as a new source of disturbance (fig 2.5). Within each wave or horizon, there lies the potential for many new waves/experiences and it is these that make up the continual newness of my future horizon. The logic of Huygen's principle⁹ was questioned because of its inability to factor in the bounce-back nature of the multitudes of new wavelets, back onto the source. I like to think of this, in metaphorical terms, as the return effect of our current experiences on past experiences and how this in turn widens our horizons through on-going re-interpretation. The hermeneutic circle is alive here in the way that I am moving from the particular (rearview mirror and ripple metaphors) to the general (thoughts on the nature of experience and, broader implications for teaching and learning situations).



fig 2.5

⁹ I find it interesting that the modern critique of Huygen's principle is that, as a theory it arrived at the right answers about the behaviour of waves for the wrong reasons. Although there is a "wide range of opinion as to its scientific merit . . . many people regard it as a truly inspired insight, and a fore-runner of modern quantum electro-dynamics, whereas others dismiss it as nothing more than a naïve guess that sometimes happens to work" (Mathpages n.d.)

Insight six

How do I become more aware?

The following question comes to mind. Can I better understand *how* this rearview mirror works so that I may learn, firstly how to adjust it, and secondly, what this means for my teaching?

First of all, let me return to something that happened while sketching fig 2.3. When I finally sketched the overlap and fused the perceivers past and present, a more complete picture of Gadamer's comment about understanding became apparent. If we are to understand ourselves (and others), we need to accommodate our past in our present and welcome the fact that it (along with the unfolding situation we find ourselves in) is a crucial part of how we perceive our current experiences. Our present horizon of understanding overtakes the projected historical horizon, and as the latter is projected, it is simultaneously removed in an on-going cycle of fusion (Gadamer 1975:273).

This conscious act of fusion is what Gadamer (1975:274) calls "the task of the effective-historical consciousness".

As mentioned in insight four, this ontological approach recognises the experiential subject and the reality of view-points in our every day interaction with the world we live in. The very expression *the world(s) we live in* makes me think of how uniquely different each of our worlds must be, if the word, *world*, is understood in terms of a subjects fused horizon with all their inherent view-points and history.

So a new kind of question arises: how can I be a more conscious participant in these moments of horizon fusing, my own as well as those of others? How do I create a space where I may start to notice my position, in any social interaction, for its bias and its fluidity?

When thinking about these acts of fusion within a larger social context, ie; when two people share their differing interpretive experiences after reading the same book, or when a teacher teaches as a so called

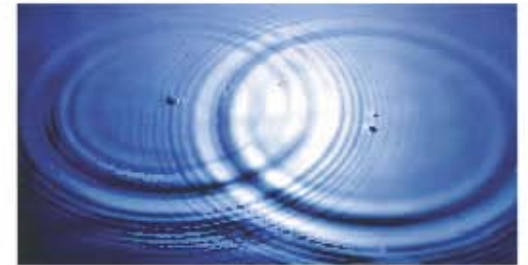


fig 2.6

knowledge expert, or when an audience experiences some form of design, I sense the immense potential as well as the hidden tripwires. I am curious about how I may be able to develop, within my teaching, ways of attending to this fusing process.

Gadamer reminds us that, central to hermeneutics is a recognition of the inner unity of *intelligere* and *explicare*, that interpretation is the explicit form of understanding. Further to this he draws attention to the nature of hermeneutics being all about application, where any understanding must be brought into the current situation of the interpreter. Inherent in this is the acknowledgement that if anything is to be understood according to the claim it makes "...it must be understood at every moment, in every particular situation, in a new and different way... [u]nderstanding here is always application" (Gadamer 1975:275).

This is my approach in this writing and as I proceed there will always be a tendency to find how these understandings may be applied to my present context as a design educator, through an exploration of resonances in the form of memories, reflections and observations.

I remember attending a workshop once that involved an interesting exercise in intuitive understanding (the workshop leader used the term *grokking*¹⁰). We were all paired off (with strangers) and then told to allow our knees to touch while we looked intensely at each other for about five minutes to form impressions before sharing them with our partners. I remember how difficult it was to enter into the other person's space (even

¹⁰ "Robert Heinlein introduced the word *grok* [in actuality revived it from mid-German] in his science fiction classic of 1961, *Stranger in a Strange Land*. It's a translation into English of the technical term *verstehen*, which was introduced by Wilhelm Dilthey into the literature of hermeneutics. *Verstehen* (from the German verb *zu verstehen*, meaning to understand) refers, not unlike the word hermeneutics (which comes from a Greek root meaning "to interpret"), to a special form of sympathetic, experiential and intuitive understanding" (Clark 2000).

with their permission) and really stare at them (and be stared at) for the full five minutes. Once I'd become used to the novel feeling of transgressing major social no-no's (both staring at a stranger as well as physically touching them) I started to read all sorts of details that I would normally have missed due to normal social behaviour. Clothing, hands, stance, muscle tone, complexion and gestures all started to build a perception as to what this person may be like. When sharing our perceptions afterwards I was amazed at how accurately we described one another after a mere five minutes of close observation without the benefit of talking and listening. Thinking of this now, I realise that there was a fusing of our horizons in that time that we genuinely *sensed* one another.

I remember doing something similar during Chris Breen's course, *Re-searching Teaching*. Again, in pairs, we were asked to mimic each other's movements and to maybe sense the moment where the division between who was leading and who was following, became blurred. After a while it felt as though my partner and I were creating something together and there seemed to be an intuitive connection, not unlike the back and forth movement of conversation.

These two memories surfaced for me when thinking about the fusing of horizons and I see now that this is a good place to consider two vital activities that may be supportive of the *effective historical consciousness* act. It's curious that my memory of grokking was all about forming a perception without the benefit of listening to what we might have had to say about ourselves. In effect the smokescreen of words that we often surround ourselves with, was absent, including much of the bias that is ever present in habitual social interactions. In the follow-my-lead exercise with Chris, we simply acted and sensed in a continuous feedback loop. It seems that words, and the medium of language, would have hindered rather than helped the communication process. These simple exercises signal two thoughts, firstly that we could benefit from *engaging more bodily* in this activity of horizon fusing by tapping into our *intuition*, and secondly that if we

start to *give ourselves* over to the creation of something in a more generous way we could possibly find ourselves in the *space of the possible* (educationally and socially) that Davis speaks about.

I am fascinated by how this interpretive process began with a seemingly obvious reading of Vusi's words and how it has now expanded to incorporate issues of subjectivity and the nature of awareness.

The initial ripple has now grown bigger and can now be seen to be the source of others as I "move back and forth between the simple and the profound" (Jardine *et al* 2003:121).

From a particularly personal student reflection comes a wider understanding (horizon) and again I am sensing the loop back of self-similarity in the way I am using Vusi's reflection (and my reflecting on it) as my *own* rearview mirror.

I am using the term self-similarity to describe the process of noticing how phenomena nest within one another in complex ways. What can be learnt from a student comment can be the source for self-similar realisations within my teaching practice, course structure and beyond. There are many examples in nature of the scale independent nature of self-similarity, edges of coastlines, mountain horizons, water ripples and river systems (Davis *et al* 2000:72). Capra (1996:137) talks about how Mandelbrot, the French mathematician (who coined the term *fractal*), used a cauliflower to show how its whole shape is similar to itself at all levels of scale.



fig. 2.7 A river system that looks similar to plant growth.

Laying down a path in walking (while looking sideways).

In this section I change the pace of this research to accommodate a flow of understanding that was prompted by what I was writing about in Part Two. As mentioned in my methodology section I have been engaged in a process of feeling my way around the emergent form arising from my data and have tried to find some kind of fit with the orienting theories in the literature that I have read. What follows is a more accurate reflection of the *experience* of my learning as it unfolds.

I am reminded to re-read an interview with Francisco Varela where he talks about the “three gestures of becoming aware” (Scharmer 2000) and a fascinating journey within a journey has begun. I had read this interview during the Re-searching Teaching course but only, I realise now, managed to scrape the surface of it. In re-reading it I have come to realise that the way in which I am doing this writing is a kind of echo of what Varela was talking about. When I recognised (in his three gestures) what I have been going through, suddenly all sorts of patterns became apparent: reasons why I had chosen certain metaphors; past reflections and moments took on new significance; and connections between writings of the various authors I have read. For this to make sense I need to elaborate on what these gestures are.

Varela describes his later work with Depraz and Vermersch as being about the issue of experience (in his view, a blind spot in cognition science) and their use of three methods of approaching it: psychological introspection (Vermersch), phenomenology (Depraz), and the Buddhist contemplative tradition (Varela). The three gestures are a distillation of these methods, where you proceed in a kind of recursive crossing of three thresholds, *suspension, redirection* and *letting-go* (Depraz *et al* 2003:25). I will now look at these

liminal thresholds as they are first described by Depraz *et al* in *On Becoming Aware* (2003), and from the perspective of how I have come to understand my research process.



Fig. 3.1 Depraz *et al* "follow ... the greek-phenomenological meaning of *epoche* as suspension and break... with it by enlarging it in a holistic way, [calling] *epoche* the organic whole of the three phases" (*ibid*:26, redrawn sketch).

Suspension.

Bearing in mind that this process is cyclical, I will look at the suspension phase first as it does act as a crucial, initial space in which a fertile ground is prepared for what follows.

It is during this stage of experiential research that Varela says one has to suspend judgement and move beyond the habitual (Scharmer 2000). I feel that I have tried to do this in the way I have allowed for the interpretive route to follow its course, accommodating surprising twists along the way. My starting point in this research was to ask some students to reflect on their learning during a particular phase of their third year. I then read through their reflective journals and chose three comments (made by three different students) for

the manner in which they perturbed. It was my original intention to use these three comments as the three main chapters of this dissertation, but have found instead that the very first extract (from Vusi's journal) has provided me with the entry point into a suspensive state where I have been able to attend closely to his words in relation to various theoretical viewpoints. But I have also felt that somehow nothing new has arisen, that I was walking too similar a path to one I'd walked before. The key, Varela says, is "staying with it" because the whole "point is that after suspension you have to tolerate that nothing is happening" (Scharmer 2000). This has been hard for me and the temptation to divert into action has been strong. I've asked myself whether I should be using more of my student data, or maybe creating a new teaching event where I can test what I've been thinking.

I have instead, so to speak, climbed into Vusi's words and it is as though they have taken me on a journey spiraling between the work of Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, Varela, Davis and Jardine (and others). It has been this act of *climbing into* the perturbation, a "slowing down of the film" (Petitmengin-Peugeot¹¹ 1999:47) that has been instrumental in attaining this state of suspension. In staying with the original perturbation and through this attending I have started to participate in the phenomena allowing it to develop and amplify (Scharmer 2003). Bortoft (1996:12) describes the ordering of the parts with respect to the emergent whole as being *nested* rather than linear, and that the whole is to be encountered by stepping right into the parts. I have started to enter into the nesting of the whole through an interpretive inquiry into Vusi's comment.

¹¹ Claire Petitmengin-Peugeot's (1999:45) research comes out of a surprise at the silence surrounding the intuitive experience despite its seemingly central location within human experience. In her work, which she describes as being an adventure into the psycho-phenomenology of intuition, she emphasizes that she wanted to explore to what degree intuition is an experience which mobilizes our whole being. The results of this research showed that out of all the intuitive experiences that they studied, there emerged an "established succession of very precise interior gestures with a surprising regularity. . ." (ibid).

Redirection and letting go.

These two phases are contingent on one another and indicate if one has been successful in the first phase of suspension. The difficulty lies in reversing what feels to be the natural direction of cognition which is from the inside out, and to redirect one's attention to the interior, away from the "spectacle of the world" (Depraz *et al* 2003:31). In terms of how my writing has unfolded in a similar way, I think that the redirection started to happen for me in two stages. The first was the moment when I reflected on an experience that I had had, that of climbing Table Mountain to gain perspective, and the second was my memories of *grokking* and the *follow-my-lead* exercise. To paraphrase Zajonc, a certain interior landscape started to take shape where I was sensing patterns and groupings of previous thoughts and insights (Scharmer 2003). I like Varela's use of the term "hither and thither" (Scharmer 2000) to describe the more spatial aspect of this inward looking as it seems to be a truer sense of what happens, as well as being a reminder that it is this movement between the specific and the broad (the hermeneutic circle) that deepens one's understanding of both and affects all other understandings (Davis 1996:21).

If the redirection phase is about the "dueling poles of the exterior and the interior" (Depraz *et al* 2003:31), the second part, letting-go, is more to do with a move from actively seeking to an "*acceptance, a letting-arrive*" (Depraz *et al* 2003:37). There is a change in the quality of my attention, a turn towards a *listening* to what is happening *within* rather than a reaching out, a revealing of something that "is still unconscious at the start" (Depraz *et al* 2003:31). This is tricky because it runs counter to what my grasping mind is trying to do all the time. Concerns (about the completion of this writing, whether it is going in the right direction and my

absence from the department¹²) push forward constantly and it is only once I have managed to quiet my mind that I am able to enjoy the suspension of letting go and am able to listen to what is emerging.

In reading further around Varela's work I have come across some very interesting and useful parallel threads. Arthur Zajonc, in an interview with Claus Otto Scharmer (Scharmer 2003), speaks of the resonance between the work of Varela, Goethe and Steiner. These parallels have really helped to open up this research experience for me and make it resoundingly relevant. For example, regarding the suspension phase of epoche, there is a strong connection with an observation made by Zajonc about Goethe's suggestion to become more graceful and more delicate in our observing (Scharmer 2003). This strikes a chord for me not only with regard to this writing, but in how it points towards a way of being with students such that judgements and prejudice, along with habitual reactions may be suspended. This amounts to attending to the phenomena in such a way that one becomes a part of it, or as Zajonc says, that through the process of attention there is also a process of transformation in the observer (*ibid*). Regarding my writing (similar to the Goethean investigation), this immersion in the phenomenon (Vusi's comment) and the context that gives rise to it (this research and my teaching practice) leads to a sudden leap (rather than an inductive process) towards insight, resulting in a coherence through which the living field of the phenomena becomes present (*ibid*).

I think of how the enacting of this research process has become, for me, a wonderful foray into knowledge creation, and the following reflection from my personal history becomes pertinent as an example of this:

¹² After attempting to complete the writing of this dissertation while teaching full-time, I was finally granted a sabbatical by my institution. My absence from the department has weighed on my mind as it has put my colleagues under strain. I am deeply appreciative of the gracious manner in which they have accepted the added work-load.

The process of this writing is a bit like standing on the coastline and looking out across the sea to an island (do you see the small rock pool on one of the islands rocky outcrops? I can't either) and only knowing that somewhere over there lies a possible area of enquiry. The only way to find this out is to start swimming in the direction of the island. Along the way the sea currents will push and pull, large ships will threaten and unseen underwater terrors will weaken the resolve. A comfortable boat even offers to ferry me there, safely and efficiently.

Finally, once the sand of the beach is felt underfoot, I can move more concertedly onwards (after all the island has its limits) and things of interest start to become evident. The island also has a feeling of familiarity to it and I'm noticing things that are reminiscent of past experiences. Presently I come upon a rocky outcrop and find a tiny pool that seems to be more enticing than it's neighbours. Within this pool I can see many beautiful creatures and plants, I feel that this is where I can immerse myself in the wonder of this place and in this small space start to look more closely into what is here and how these living creatures came to be here.

As I stare into the pool I slowly become aware that things are changing around me, a sudden splash of water reminds me that the tide has turned. The sun is now directly overhead and its rays are shining directly into the pool without any reflection. My shadow is sharp and stands dark against the colourful detail. I now see that the pool is even deeper than I had initially thought and that many of the creatures have now made themselves small to avoid the heat of the sun. I notice that this pool is connected to the next one by a narrow fissure and as the larger pool rises and falls with the incoming tide



fig 3.2

so does the water level in mine. New fish appear and there seems to be a change in the look of the anemones as they sense the fresh nutrient-rich water entering their small world. I remember, as a child, learning with my father about inter-tidal zones. Sunburnt necks and rock impressions in bent knees from long periods of pool gazing. I stand up to stretch my legs and see that the tide has almost reclaimed my small pool, its original outline now lost and part of the larger broiling activity of the sea.

The detail is the entry point but soon one is forced to pull back from the *particular* and the *general* pushes its way in. Sense of past and the connectivity of things permeate. No one moment is the same and yet there is always an overarching self-similarity to them. Sometimes there is a cloud across the sun and the reflection in the water prevents much of what lies beneath the surface from being seen.

I had no idea that I would end up looking into this particular rock pool. I know in a few hours time that the tidal process will repeat itself.

This short passage could, I suppose, also be an example of *suspension*, *redirection* and *letting go*. I suspended expectation and what would seem prudent (catching a ride to the island by doing more conventional research) by swimming the distance myself. I threw myself bodily into the experience. Through engaging in the process of suspension I was in a better position to find a pool worth looking into and also to notice in an *open* way. This state is what allows the redirection to happen, away from the pool as an object to a noticing of resonances within my life (and teaching) experience. The *letting go* is in the realisation that the process will, and must repeat itself always and that I must move on. The benefit for me in working with analogies and metaphors is the way that they thread *lived experience* together with theory in a recursively generative manner.

A second cycle. Intuition as gesture and as process.

This writing is increasingly taking on a living quality as the unfolding insights and ah-ha moments start to flow. Depraz *et al* (2003:43-50) talk about a second movement of the basic cycle, which they call “intuitive evidence” where intuition follows closely on the epoche (basic cycle of the three gestures) providing surprising insight and fulfillment in a *process of coming forth*.

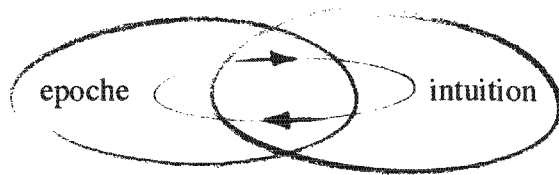


fig. 3.3 Intuition is in full and constant circulation with epoche (*ibid:53*, redrawn sketch).

I feel the need to mention the temporal aspect of the way in which this is happening as it may give me a better idea of what is going on and to see how I may re-present all this in a meaningful way. The authors describe the fragility of the process of intuitive fulfillment as a movement from emptiness to givenness and suggest that this implicit temporality (which is the intuitive act’s most salient trait) be shown in the following three aspects (*ibid:49*):

1. on the most elementary scale, on the order of seconds or even minutes, it is a matter of fulfillment (or completion) or even of holding onto the void;
2. on the scale of the organization of an activity (a work session of several hours, a week or more of successive work sessions), it is both a matter of renewing the suspension in emptiness, of a non-

completed yet nonetheless renovated fulfillment, and a matter of multiple tries at variations of all sorts which proceed and follow each moment of empty, partial or complete fulfillment;

3. on a still larger temporal scale, it's a matter of continuing the research project. (*ibid:49*)

My use of the rock-pool analogy falls into the first and second aspects: where my intuitive writing of the piece happened very quickly (1); only for it to then languish for a month (2) before again; in a quick flash (1), the of where it should fit into the writing as a whole. I think this is what Depraz *et al* are talking about when they refer to how Husserl thematised the process of intuition as being about the “filling-in [or] completion of such an intended meaning by direct perception” (*ibid:49*). This coinciding of my intended meaning (why I wrote the reflection) with the fragile occurrence of the completion (lived experience of the intuitive fulfillment) is what Depraz *et al* call *intuitive evidence* (2003:43). This is an almost involuntary and passive process, and cannot be brought about through a mental grasping. There needs to be rather, more of the suspension process suggested by the basic epoche cycle so that a space may be opened up where intuition may happen freely without hindrance, where the reflecting act is about “*letting* the reflection on lived experience *work*” (*ibid:37*). The fragility of this process can result in frustration as, more often than not, I have had to live with the uncertainty of this approach and the seemingly unproductive nature of it. But I do feel as though I am reaping the rewards and that maybe the “flying a kite” in a “thunderstorm” has been worth it for the “lighting bolts” of intuition that are emerging (*ibid:53*).

A secondary spontaneity.

This act of writing up what has come to pass during the *completion phase* is a delicate mix of being true to what has emerged (and is emerging) and finding adequate words to describe it without disfiguring the experience. “Expression appears constitutive of the very process of experience”, a “secondary spontaneity”

which, while the reporting of the internal evidence unfolds, starts to resemble a “boomerang effect between the act of becoming aware and its exemplary variations” (Depraz *et al* 2003:68 &24). In this way my writing is following a tempo which is governed by and engendered from the examples (my reflections and memories) that are the very supports for this dissertation, and the process is thus understood in a *dynamic* sense (*ibid*:24).

As for expression, the following personal journal reflection captures a moment of personal doubt as I contemplate how to go on.

These last few days have been agony because it has felt like all the magic of the intuitive moment has drained away to be replaced with doubt. This is where I must again suspend my concerns about validity and correctness of doing this writing.

I can hear Chris saying to me “all your life you have tried to be a good person...”. So true, and it has often been debilitating to the point where I have risked not being true to myself in order to be *correct* in the eyes of others. I am trying to write this dissertation in the most honest way, or more importantly in a way that *feels* right. This runs counter to what I understood to be legitimate research as advocated by the Research Methods course that I had to attend as part of the M.Phil. course at UCT.

What I do recognise today is that getting too hung up on any particular methodology could ultimately warp what is unfolding. In the last few days I have been reading *On Becoming Aware* very closely to try and understand all the ins and outs of this method that the authors are proposing. I realise now that even though this has been hugely inspiring and revealing for me I must move on and let go, and not doubt the momentum that has

been created in my writing. The inspirational Bob Kull¹³ (2000) reminds me of what feelsright for me when he describes his *voice* in his writing as meandering between “confessional and impressionist and realist” while “carrying a metaphorical and allegorical load”.

The tension that is evident in the above reflection reveals a paradoxical moment because, although I admit that part of my intent in this writing is to understand more clearly what constitutes learning experience, there is something inside me that feels awkward about this process of “relentless self-annunciation”, and I can sympathise with Jardine’s desire to “...*walk around unwritten*... [allowing] the rich integrities of our experience to come forward free of the discursive swirling of human intent” (Jardine *et al* 2003:83 my italics). The idea of walking around unwritten appeals in the way that it evokes how an attitude of unarticulated experience might allow a more natural (intentionless) emergence of intuitive evidence. For now, all I can do is carry on putting one foot in front of the other in a mode of letting go, and trust that what presents is in fact what constitutes becoming more experienced. This writing is therefore not an attempt to have the last word or to try and get closest to some truth, it is a crafting of a piece of writing that, through the process of writing there lies an experience that is not only useful to me but may be evocative for others too.

This section (Part three) has been a sideways look at something that was there all along: a process, a lived cycle, that has given me strength to move on and to “lay. . . down a path in walking” (Varela *et al* 1993:237).

¹³ I have identified with and been inspired by Kull’s work ever since reading his chapter in *Unfolding Bodymind* (2001). In this chapter called “A Scuba Class Holistic Teaching/Learning through Lived Experience...or how I dove into the sea and surfaced in academia” (*ibid*:35) he grounds the writing in his personal lived experience rather than working from an adopted theory.

Thinking can prepare the soil and also examine the insight to see if it makes sense within my existing worldview, but deep understanding eludes me without the experiential flash (Kull 2005:107).

I have written this in *real time* as the experience has unfolded to try and capture the sense of jumping, feet first, into what I believe is enactivist research. Engaging in this “aporetic circularity” (Depraz *et al* 2003:22) is an invigorating experience for even though I have professed from the outset to be using an enactivist approach there is still no substitute for the actual lived experience, which is the only true medium for any sense of felt understanding. I can relate to the reference by Depraz *et al* to the “Husserlian slogan of the eternal beginner” (*ibid.*: 23) when I think of the nakedness I have felt in this research writing, how going into it without preconceived (*a priori*) conditions set in place, there is no-thing in front of me as I walk this path. I have not set out to prove something based on a current state of things. I get the feeling of walking with a wide peripheral vision that responds to several phenomena: what lies *behind* and around me; a prospect or the portent of a *future*, and at the point where these ‘states’ (or tenses) intersect is my body which is the *present* moment as it continually unfolds, a *space of the possible*.

The recursive process of the reflecting act, revealed by the constant circulation of intuitive moments with *epoché*, has become what is real for me in this writing/research journey and it is the generator of the following section (Part Four) in this dissertation. This next stage of the journey will show examples of more intuitive insights (some freshly written and others harvested from earlier stages of my research) in an attempt to bring forth the meaning so that what has transpired may become evidence for me within the parameters of this work and beyond (on a larger temporal scale) in my on-going research and practice. My challenge in working this way is to encounter the whole as it “*comes to presence*” in the parts (Bortoft 1996:11).

To come at what has happened for me while writing Part Three from the work of Bortoft (who writes on Goethe’s way of science), I have experienced a change in the way of seeing, or more accurately, a fine-tuning of what I merely knew through reading before. This fine tuning has been a focusing of the *organizing idea*,



Fig 3.4 An extraordinary photographic moment caught by Henri Cartier-Bresson (1932).

“Traveller, the path is your tracks
And nothing more.
Traveller, there is no path
The path is made by walking.
By walking you make a path
And turning, you look back
At a way you will never tread again
Traveller, there is no road
Only wakes in the sea.”
Antonio Machado (1929)

which in cognitive perception is of such an active kind that once this idea clarifies, what is seen is changed *from within the seeing itself* (Bortoft 1996: 142).

In this regard, the coming to presence of intuitive evidence in this section (Part Three) is the expression of how my sharpened organizational idea is transforming my understanding of what I do. I now have a glimpse of something intuitive in my choice of title¹⁴ for this dissertation, I may indeed be starting to *find my woof* through this tweaking of some of the threads that make up the fabric of my teaching!

A brilliant example of this is how it was only after Galileo revised the Aristotelian theory of motion and proposed that the trajectory of a projectile is parabolic that people began to see and draw this phenomenon differently.

The pre-Galilean theory of motion caused people to see and draw a trajectory so ..



And after Galileo's shift of the organizing idea, a projectile was understood to travel so ..



fig 3.5 (Bortoft 1996: 142, my sketch)

¹⁴I have used this as a playful working title for over a year, long before I knew that the writing would materialize in the way that it has.

Part Four

Coming to presence.

So, what have I come to realise?

- Vusi's remark has taken me on a journey into reflecting on and considering *how experience* may come about.
- I feel as though I have a beginning insight into how I can attempt to *hold* or *catch* my cognitive process at work (Depraz *et al* 2003:165).
- I feel that this attempt to become more aware of "non-conscious cognitive processes" (Davis 2004:203) is important if I am to teach *in the moment*, in a fully participatory way with students.
- This process of understanding more accurately, what goes unnoticed can, when coupled with the wonder of learning in its *all-at-once* nature, become something even more whole and complete.
- That this is all about *learning to look* rather than merely *seeing*, learning to *listen* rather than simply *hearing* (Davis 1996:46). For me, these ideas and approaches have profound ramifications for Communication Design.

"Thus the whole emerges simultaneously with the accumulation of the parts, not because it is the sum of the parts, but because it is immanent within them"
(Bortoft 1996:12).

Insight seven

An inside-out moment.

I am including this reflection, a childhood memory that I wrote about a year ago when starting my research, as it fits with the style of a constitutive ontology, ie how I have arrived at my current understandings of my world through my embodied experience of living it. It is also an example of what has surfaced during the *coming to presence* phase for it illustrates the reversal of my attention away from “ready-to-use-knowledge” (Petitmengin-Peugeot 1999:47) to a welcoming in of “pre-noetic” (Depraz, *et al* 2002:23) trace elements of my research writing from earlier stages.

We were out camping in a remote spot, sitting around the campfire at night and marvelling at the vastness of space and the countless stars that pricked the blackness. We were family and close friends who did this sort of thing whenever the opportunity arose (being teacher families we always did stuff that did not demand huge cost).

The enduring questions came to me then as I was contemplating this sensual array of infinity: Why are we here? How did we get here? What is the point of existence?

My world of immediate needs and pursuits suddenly became rather insignificant in relation to the immensity of these questions and their possibilities. I remember feeling a mild sense of panic as my universe became dislocated. I was no longer at the center, I dissolved into myriads of stars and souls all searching for some meaning in life. I do think that this moment was one of the more significant moments where I came to a point of being aware of my own consciousness and what its relationship might be to the world around me.

Suspension

Redirection

What better place, than under the vast night sky, to come to such a realisation. Being there in the dark where my own body would have been hard to see added to the experience and the sense of groundlessness that swept over me. The immediate presence of my family and the sharing of the experience made it all a little less scary and we spoke together for a time about possible meanings and ways that we could make sense of this world. To use a cliché, it was *humbling*, in that an instant sense of scale became apparent to me and I sensed how precariously I was situated in this mysterious world.



fig. 4.1 A de-centering moment.

This was a moment when I moved on from thinking, as a child does, that the world revolved around me, to becoming aware of larger horizons and my relation to it all (fig. 4.1). The redirection happened at the point when I was no longer simply looking at the night sky (the object) but rather sensing it as a far grander phenomena. In the sense of the strategy developed by Depraz *et al* the completion held the intuitive insight that the world I'd perceived initially as solid (with me, a child at its center) was less fixed and certain. It was an acknowledging of the "presence and absence of [my] own body" (Jipson & Paley 1997:155). In reflecting on this now, I recognise in what I wrote, a certain Goethean reversal in the way that I started to perceive the world around me. I think that I was starting to *see* differently, to perceive the world in terms of "multiplicity in unity" (Bortoft 1996:248) where my sense of self shifted seismically to become a part of the multiplicity of

Letting go

Intuitive completion

Second cycle:
expression of
internal
evidence

the human race, at the same time as a burgeoning feeling of oneness and unity which arose from the experience as a whole.

Vusi's plea for a rearview mirror returns to me now and I am struck by the possible irony of his statement if he is saying that he needs a rearview mirror to stabilize himself by checking on his past. If anything, the insight received will reflect a world in constant flux where the act of looking 'backwards' will give him a sense of the recursively elaborate state of "a world which a subject itself projects" (Merleau-Ponty 1979:430) in a mutually co-evolving process.

The most common theme to emerge in this writing is one of de-centering, divergence, and expansion. My next reflection comes out of a teaching moment with a student during their ITM social-awareness project.

Last week I had to break up a group of four students due to irreconcilable differences between them and today one of them (Ebrahim) brought a new design solution forwards. In the light of what they have been through with tensions running high I felt the increased pressure (and I'm sure Ebrahim did too!) on this critical review – *please may there be some worth in his design I thought, I can't bear having to say that it won't work again.*

As he started to talk and take me through his thinking my heart sunk as it seemed clichéd and forced. His work allowed no entry for the viewer/participant. My mind raced as I tried to find the positive points in his design.

And then I looked at Ebrahim and remembered who he was and the design work we'd been through together. I remembered a project we'd done at the start of the year where each student had created a piece of work which expressed something personal about themselves and how powerfully they had all owned the work and the learning that flowed from it. I reminded Ebrahim of this and we started to talk about ways of allowing for the

Background

Suspension

viewer/participant to engage with a story, ways in which his design could release the memory and personal experience of the participant. In seconds we had moved from the quicksand of that no-man's land into a *space of possibilities* where we were talking animatedly about new solutions. A third entity had entered the conversation, the person who was to be the participant (consumer) in this potential design experience had arrived in our midst and was demanding a rightful share of the attention. We had moved from the abstract (Ebrahim's strategic concept) to bringing the new idea into the lived world of people with emotions, expectations and histories.

This inward – outward movement intrigues me. So often it seems that for any work to move forward there needs to be this inward and then outward shift of attention. If the students stay with the outward/extrinsic they remain frozen in a one-dimensional zone where they are performing in expected ways.

It feels like the hardest work as a design teacher is to constantly facilitate this inward-outward motion so that students work with the stuff that matters, the material that is part of their (and therefore shared by others) lived worlds.

Redirection

Letting go

Intuitive completion

The significance of this reflection lies in how it characterizes movement: inward-outward; student-teacher-consumer; abstract-experienced, and how non-linear and recursive this movement is. In re-reading this reflection I am reminded of that strange anticipation as a student is explaining a design solution to me, knowing there will be the expectant pause afterwards when awaiting my input. This signifies the edge between the student's space and the teacher space, that in-between place where there is all the potential for anything that we will ever do together. This crossover zone is entered into many times daily and sometimes I am conscious of it and other times not. It is a point where I sometimes feel fear and trepidation for what is

Second cycle after effects

about to follow – I have to consciously let go and free-fall into being with the student in the most relaxed state possible where we can suspend the dreadful expectations of what teacher (now listen to me...) and student (please show me how...) ought to be doing.

Following the trace that is evolving here, a lead is given in the last reflection when I mention how this inward-outward movement can be facilitated by projects that *take* students both inward and outward. This movement is part of what I have sensed is important in doing social awareness work with design students, where the work demands a de-centering and horizon-widening attitude.

Insight eight

Compassion as a grounding emotion.

Ideas That Matter: a social awareness project.

I think that too often we are caught up, as design lecturers, in setting briefs that merely reflect the commercial world and the resulting work simply shows how centered on ourselves we consuming humans have become. Social work, in the form of an awareness campaign, stretches students and presents a challenge to create communication design that suspends a target audience from the helter skelter of daily events. In this mode of suspension, an effective awareness campaign endeavours to redirect a jaded audience away from perceiving certain social situations as seemingly hopeless and move them towards a positive state where there is the realisation that they can make a difference simply through the “manner of [their] living” (Bunel *et al* 2001:152). The aims of such campaigns are to raise the target audience’s awareness about the issue or to elicit some form of action (or both).

On a student learning level, this kind of work is the hardest to do as it forces them to come face to face with issues that seem insurmountable; societies wounded pushed to the side and ignored, the people and

creatures that fall outside the ambit of what is seen as 'normal' and accepted. This coming to terms with the *other* seems to be a significant time for students.

"It's not about marks any more. We are now emotionally involved with these people and really want to help. Even my family are involved, they want to help too..."
(Sylva's journal).

"You can't fix stuff from the sidelines
you have to be elbow deep in it to make a difference" (Gareth's journal).

Issues such as drugs, child abuse and child prostitution, animal rights and black consciousness are not frequently seen in our media. If they are seen it's often an orchestration to gain public kudos for a corporate brand, or a political agenda. I would argue that if you can design communication that raises social awareness then any other design challenge is a walk in the park. Not only are students dealing with tough issues, but their initiation into the project invariably starts with a recognition that they have to move beyond what has been done already in previous campaigns. Innovative solutions require suspension from the *tried* and *tired*. Every time I work with students on such projects I am struck by the generosity of their engagement with a task that takes them far away from their comfort zones. There is an energy that flows during this sort of work, an *emotive* energy that may be what elevates the learning during this project above others. A balance needs to be struck between emotion and reason for only a continuous interplay (with neither pole dominating) between these two aspects of cognition will result in understanding and sustainable solutions emerging.

I think that part of the task for the lecturer is to help this interplay, or *plasticity*, so that there is appropriate flow and a participation in changing relations as the project unfolds (Bunnel *et al* 2001:161). The aforementioned authors go on to suggest that this ability to be flexible and adaptable to changing relations and circumstances is what constitutes the basic phenomenon of intelligence. The work of Bunnel *et al* has

developed in collaboration with Maturana's work on the biology of cognition, which, among other things, looks at how "all the emotions that we distinguish in our living refer to particular relational dynamics" (*ibid*:157).

The student work done during a social awareness project not only engages the students emotionally (ie they actively access feelings such as compassion, empathy, anger, and joy), but through this they develop a strong sense of relational dynamics between: *themselves and their chosen Non-Government Organisation's message and audience; the members of each student group; and their preconceived notions of an issue and the experience of coming to know it better* (to name a few).

"Big revelation of Ideas That Matter, [it] had ...[nothing] to do with design. It was about people. The best thing was the worst thing. Seeing the real people. You see things in people that were always there but that you never saw before. You see things in your friends that you loathe and things in the people that you dislike that you find endearing" (Sylva's journal).

These dynamics run the gamut with students battling to synergize their group efforts, struggling with the whims of desperate NGO's, getting frustrated by the process of finding a simple way of telling a complex story, requesting (for the first time) quotes from printing companies, but also feeling the flow as a good idea presents itself after an inquisitive research process, or the satisfaction of having given something passionately when their campaign wins its sponsorship.

I believe that this often messy and tumultuous experience brings students (and staff) through a "self-enhancing expansion of awareness" (Bunel *et al* 2001:166) into a space where they start to sense the nature of their existence. Similar to my childhood memory of de-centering, this experience takes students out of themselves and illustrates in so many ways how we live in relationship to everyone and everything, and that

Maturana and Varela, in *The Tree of Knowledge* (1987:167-168), talk about the plastic splendor of the nervous system in that it is a system in *continuous structural change*, participating in the ontogenic structural drift of the organism. This structural change happens not in the connections that unite groups of neurons but in the *synapses*. These points of interaction are *zones of delicate dynamic balance* where due to the interactions of the organism in its environment, any number of possibilities may arise as the neurons are washed by the blood flow containing great numbers of elements produced by neuronal interaction. The authors go on to say that, we humans in particular, are changed by *every experience*, and that when we speak of learning appearing to correspond to our circumstances there is actually only an ongoing structural drift consisting of how the organisms unique structure operates reciprocally with the environment on a moment by moment basis.

it is in the relations or spaces between that we can start to find ourselves by becoming conscious of what is *other* from us.

"It became that child – I went into a kid's mind – I spent so much time with little kids -
read children's books trying to understand how the child does stuff"
(interview with Fatima after ITM).

In a way this connects with Vusi's rearview mirror action, which is itself a decentering, or a move away from understanding himself as static, to a welcoming of the resonating space opened up between how he sees himself now, where he has come from, and where he is going to.

The act of giving, sharing, and of going beyond their perceived limits (not just with regard to their prior experience of the social issue at hand but also set notions of how learning happens) is what students always remember of this project.

In work of this nature there is a disturbance of the status quo in ways that break down the, sometimes awkward, separation of teacher (usually cast in the role of representing society) from students (representing their own self interests) (Davis *et al* 2000:176). Once this shift has been accommodated (and in some groups it never happens completely), there is the possibility for a new kind of dynamic that generates a "broadened sense of the individual-as-part-of-the collective..." (*ibid*:176) and then, according to Fatima's journal, "...the magic began... everyone was chipping in, voices were beginning to rise, things were getting out of control". Another student remarks:

"No-one realised that this type of campaign could be done. This is the real driving force for me, the people, the children, the priest in Kayelitsha, the police officers, the

One student commented in his acceptance speech at a prize giving after producing a winning campaign, that he had in fact learnt very little from his lecturers and that the ITM project is where he learnt the most! I told him afterwards, when he tried to apologise, that I took it as a compliment in that it meant we had, first of all recognized the true value of such a project and, secondly his comment had pointed to the validity of actively relinquishing control to allow for students to 'run the show'.

dedicated workers at RAPCAN, the lecturers support and passionate approach to facilitating, and lastly my fellow designers" (Quasim's journal).

This same student commented on how this project further developed his *breyani theory*, which applauds and recognises the wonderful interaction and fusion of many ingredients, and how the resulting mix can be something so tasty¹⁵.

What is so encouraging from a teaching point of view is to see how students manage their group work, and how, once they have established the necessary constraints around their activities, they find their thinking to become truly liberated (Davis *et al* 2000:89). The notion of *liberating constraints* put forward by Davis *et al*, represents a more complex understanding of learning seen in terms of the biological sense of the word *structure*, and its original meaning which was more to do with *ever-evolving forms* rather than today's more static, and predetermined iteration (*ibid*:49 & 88).

In this sense, then, learning is liberated by constraints that once understood, provide a "space for an extraordinary range of creative possibility" (*ibid* :88). Another instantiation of this would be a design brief that has just the right amount of constraint to allow students to creatively interpret within certain parameters. Too *tight* a brief can of course stifle creativity if there is not enough room for the imagination to have free play, and too loose a brief will leave a student floundering around without knowing where to start. So it is important to say here again that a balance needs to be struck.

I think that the truly liberating aspect of this project is that the students realise early on that they are the only ones who can sense any unfolding structure (in the organic sense) because of the unique experiential nature of social awareness work. The lecturer, normally cast as the expert who structures projects (in a modernist, pre-defined sense) according to the way things are done in the real world (seen as separate from

Davis *et al* point out that the word *structure* originates from *strew* and *construe* and was first used to describe how things spread out or piled up in unforeseen, and yet not entirely random ways. This makes sense when applied to how buildings, long ago, were understood not as fixed entities but rather as ongoing, evolving, forms that changed depending on need, opportunity and whimsy (2000:49).

¹⁵ A recipe for breyani can be found in Appendix 2.

the world of education) is no longer a primary aspect of the scenario and a new sense of agency emerges.

Insight nine

Fluid shifts instead of fixed realities.

The paradoxical notion of existing in the spaces between things has become increasingly apparent to me through this research. I have used this phrase frequently in this writing to evoke what may start to happen if one is to become aware of the “space of imaginative possibility . . . a space in between . . . the familiar and the strange; in between self and other” (Jardine 2003:183). When viewing cognition from the enactivist viewpoint I begin to understand myself as always being in a state of *becoming*, where I am neither here nor there but constantly selecting between the actions which constitute my being in the world.

The following observation (from my personal journal) came from the experience of riding my mountain bike and provides an interesting analogy for this kind of *being*:

I find myself using a kind of broader visual awareness as I drop down a particularly steep and rocky path. I keep my focus at a small distance ahead (about two meters) and this enables me not to be distracted by the ruts and rocks that are looming immediately in front of my front wheel. I’ve noticed (painfully!) that if I allow myself to look at an obstacle I will hit it.

While riding with my eight-year-old son we have developed a language that recognises this and we talk of *seeing the river that flows between the obstacles*. An interesting thing then happens, his body relaxes and there are no abrupt movements due to frantic messages to the brain. His body starts to flow in its movements

“You can only learn balance by losing it”
(Fletcher 2007: 221)



Fig. 4.2 *Seeing the river.*

as he finds the path in a seemingly effortless acknowledgement of the entirety of the surroundings. This riding using a peripheral awareness was again illustrated for me when speaking to a mountain-bike rider who, riding at night using only torch-light to illuminate the track ahead, is able to ride much faster than in daylight. It would seem that a state of *letting go* from an active seeking-of-objects to moving with more plasticity may be what allows for this way finding.

Carrying the analogy into my teaching, I understand the importance of being responsive to situations as they arise, using a *soft eye* or peripheral vision to gather a broad spectrum of information as the moments unfold. This ties in with the cycle of epoche and intuition where, if the natural desire to pinpoint and delineate is suspended, a redirection to what is essential (or of the essence) may be experienced. And, similarly at a microscopic level, there is a clue to this kind of behaviour in the way that the spaces between our neurons is *where the action is*. This action, or constant flux that occurs through our reciprocal interactions with the world is the space of endless possibilities, where, our en-active selves flow recursively from knowing, to doing, to being, and so on (Davis 2004:213).

The aphorism, "all doing is knowing, and all knowing is doing" (Maturana & Varela 1987:26) is very revealing of how the process of cognition is actually reversed from what is commonly perceived. Bortoft's (1996:123) point that "the "self-entity" itself emerges *from* the process of cognition and is not there *as such* beforehand" makes me think of the two way flow facilitated by Vusi's rearview mirror, and again my sketches serve as aids to understand this better.

"Letting yourself go in this way is like speaking a new language: you have to let it all hang out to be any good at it."
(Depraz *et al* 2003:37)

"...we must beware of ... inert ideas – that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or thrown into fresh combinations"
(Whitehead 1950:1-2)

"The way we think is not the way we think we think. Everyday thought seems straightforward, but even our simplest thinking is astonishingly complex"
(Fauconnier & Turner 2002:v)

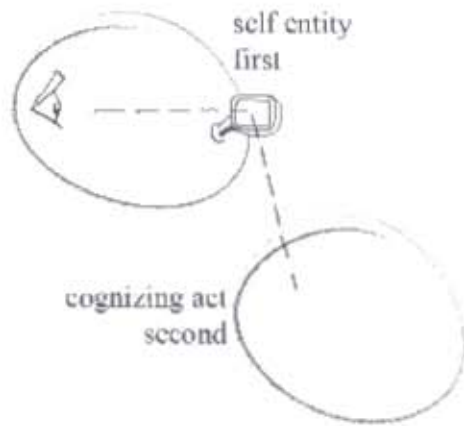


fig 4.3 chicken position/recovery

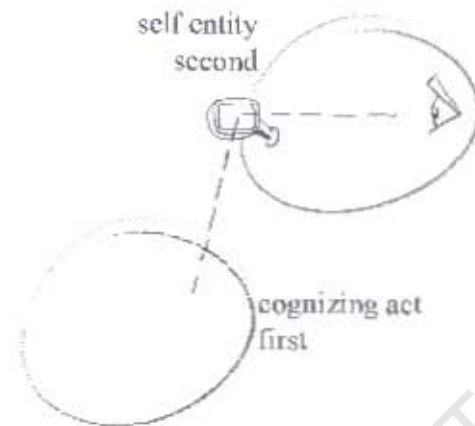


fig 4.4 egg position/projection

Fig 4.3 shows what our everyday consciousness tells us, that we are entities prior to cognition and fig. 4.4 reveals more accurately the baffling process of cognition happening prior to our ability to *see* anything in a meaningful manner.

In grappling with the idea that "...our ordinary thinking is "too late": [and that] we are already the past of ourselves" (Bortoft 1996:124), I am aware of how this ties in with the redirection phase of *epoche*, where the act of redirection is less about being caught up in what pushes forward as the objects of our thought (sense of self entity) but, rather a sensing of what presents from the liminal regions which is where our cognising happens.

But this process is recursive and fig. 4.5 a revision of these linear sketches shows this "cognitive circularity" (Maturana *et al* 1987:244) as a more dynamic process where, similar to the thinking of Depraz *et al*, there is an active, ongoing, cyclical movement between cognition and sense of self.

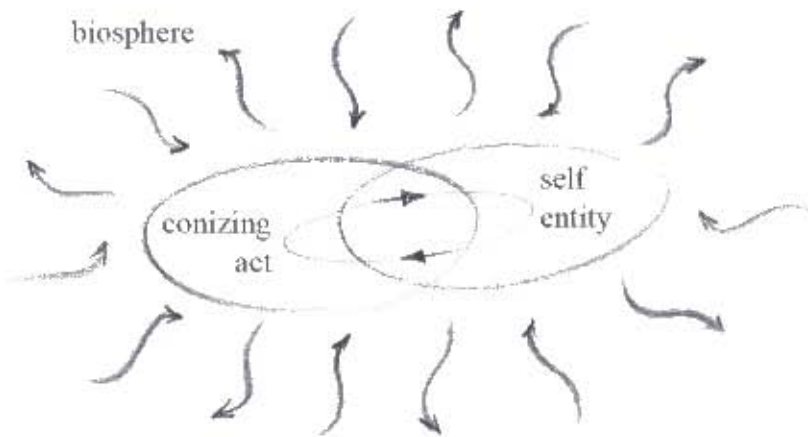


fig. 4.5

Cognition (knowing) is in a co-creating relationship (through the multiple ways in which we en-act (doing) our knowing) with our sense of self (being), and this in turn is in a participatory relationship with our immediate environment and beyond. In this enactivist way of thinking the key words are, *participation* and *action* which is summed up in the phrase *embodied action* (Varela *et al* 1993:172). The thinking act is understood to be wholly bound up in what constitutes a world for us, so that “a change in thinking is a change in the world” (Davis *et al* 2000:71). The ecological postmodern mindset expands the postmodern discourse and puts forward the idea of identities emerging within complex systems, where there is an intertwining of systems that include human, sub-human and more-than-human realms (*ibid*:181).

In this writing I have been moving recursively from the infinitesimal to the cosmic as I make my way through the process of thinking about thinking which is so inextricably interwoven in the unfolding events around us (*ibid*:71). In doing this, similar to how fractal forms show how complexity emerges quickly from simple beginnings, I am able to facilitate the reflective nature of this research, and draw off inferences for my teaching.



fig. 4.6

Insight ten

The hermeneutic question revisited.

The approach that I am talking about, which is a kind of way-finding or a “middle way” as Varela *et al* (1993:21) puts it illustrates, again, the idea of a *space of the possible*. Gadamer (1975:328) writes that “knowledge always means... considering opposites... [and that] it’s superiority over preconceived opinion consists in the fact that it is able to *conceive of possibilities as possibilities*”. My returning to Gadamer here feels right in the sense that my way-finding is similar to what he is saying about knowledge being *dialectical*, where only a genuinely questioning attitude can generate knowledge, and more importantly, that “questions include the antithesis of yes and no, of being like this and being like that” (*ibid*:328). This seems similar to what the phases of the *epoche* are about. In teaching and learning situations there can be an erroneous tendency, I believe, for all concerned to be too eager to grasp at objects (lists of outcomes, artefacts – the subject’s objects), and so allowing preconceived opinion to mask the real questions.

“We’ve been spending hours upon hours brainstorming, throwing all kinds of ideas around! We have so many ideas we get quite lost. The reason for this is that a lot of our ideas are fragmented, little pieces here, little pieces there.
It needs a central core” (Ryan’s journal).

Knowledge creation understood more as a space where agendas need to be *suspended and redirected*, and in a Socratic fashion, where the truly open questions are indeterminate and in “an equilibrium between pro and contra” (Gadamer 1975:326), can start to be far more exciting and productive. So the lesson learnt for me in the mountain bike riding analogy is that riding fast down a rocky path is not unlike teaching in the way that: there is resonance around conceptions of openness and responsiveness to essences; one has to be

Careful of the solidity of opinions; and that by questioning, the object and all its possibilities can be made fluid (*ibid*:330).

This reminds me of a moment during the ITM project when I had invited a guest to participate in a series of reviews that formed part of the evaluation for the project. We had just sat through a re-presentation by a group of students who had really battled with their first attempt at showing their work to date. The following paragraph (from my personal journal) is written as a “brief-but-vivid account” (Mason¹⁶ 2002:20) of what happened after this re-presentation.

As the student’s presentation came to an end, Troy (our visiting lecturer) stood up and walked toward the group, and without a word stretched out his arms to give all four of them a hug. Tears and smiles were visible on all their faces.

The reason why I wrote this down as a moment where something perturbed was that, at the time, I was mildly bemused by the emotion that I had seen. I was more concerned with the fact that the student work that had just been presented was still unresolved and that Troy’s reaction might be misconstrued as affirmation for work well done. Immediately after noting this as a perturbation and more so after writing about it, I recognise that Troy was reacting to the immense effort and pride that the students had put into re-presenting their very

¹⁶ John Mason (with Joy Davis) developed a research methodology that is a form of researching from the inside. The Discipline of Noticing entails the selecting of moments from one’s practice and the writing of brief-but-vivid *accounts* of the incidents (rather than *accounting for* in value-laden terms) so that others may enter into the moment as though they had seen it captured on video – in this way more layered interpretations become possible by drawing on both personal experience as well as theoretical concepts (Breen 2000).

heartfelt work for their NGO. He recognised the learning event for the students (who had done the best that they could) and was not hung up on the exact value of the design work that they had done.

At a time like this I feel that I have lost the generosity and largeness of spirit needed in teaching, and I am reminded to be more open to what presents rather than to be merely driven by miserly comparison of how one group compares to another.

Teaching seen in this dialectical sense, becomes what Gadamer called the *art of strengthening* which is all about bringing out the strength in what people say and not allowing any dominant opinions to inhibit questioning (*ibid*:330). In the following extract from the work of Bunnell *et al* I believe that this *art of strengthening* is evoked well in this simple dialogue.

A mentor holds up his closed hand and asks a student (speaking in first person):

“What do I have in my hand?”

“Nothing. Air.”

“Imagine something. Anything.”

“A cow!”

“Ohhh! You saw the tail sticking out!”

Somehow he made it seem as if there really had been a miniature cow in his hand! He held up his hand again.

“What do I have in my hand?”

“Ummm... a train!”

“Ohhh, you heard the clickety clack!”

And there I was, hearing the train, and I couldn't help but laugh.

“How do you do that?” How does it become so real?”

“Try it.”

So I held up my fist, loosely curled around nothing, and asked...

“What do I have in my hand?”

“A mouse!”

Immediately I imagined a mouse, wiggling around inside my hand, squeaking as if it wanted out.

“Ohhh, you could hear it squeeking!”
(2001:164).

The two go on to discuss what is happening and the mentor points out that the idea is to invent a clue that makes the other right. In making what the other is saying valid, there is a consensual finding of the domain, a common space where both people start to see how the other makes sense of their world. The mentor then suggests that unless one can do this, one is not truly listening to the other but merely listening to oneself (Bunel *et al* 2001:165). This has (for me) a profound impact on teaching and learning in the way that, as a mode of *behaviour*, or more significantly, as a way of *being in the moment*, there is a move away from “social atomism” (de Certeau 1984:xi) towards a community of relations where attention is given to *speaking into people's listening*.

I believe that the above example illustrates beautifully an attitude of *hermeneutic listening*, described by Davis (1996:53) as “an imaginative participation...[between] agent and setting, thought and action, knowledge and knower, self and other, individual and collective”. He contrasts this kind of listening with evaluative and interpretive listening, which are both based on thinking of human identity in terms of subjectivity, autonomy, and disconnectedness (*ibid*). A student made the following observation during her social awareness project:

"...its not *what you say* but rather *who you say it to or how you say it!* Design has taught me to choose words...carefully, strategically" (Fatima's journal).

The suspension of opinion (and ego) seems critical here if there is to be any true listening. "Opinion" Gadamer says "has a curious tendency to propagate itself... it would always like to be the general opinion" (1975:329).

I find this sometimes evident in planning meetings when everyone wants to have their opinions taken into consideration and no-one is really interested in listening to what is happening in-between the ideas as they suddenly emerge like so much *popcorn*. Obviously there are times when fast ideas and opinions work well but there are also times when there is a need to find the themes or essential threads before the popcorn goes off (Scharmer 2003:51).

Here I find a resonance between, what Zajonc is saying about opening up a space where the essential questions can be asked, and Gadamer's views on the art of questioning being all about dialogue and how the communication of meaning is "...the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point..." (1975:331) "...without necessarily agreeing with it, or seeing [oneself] in it" (*ibid*:270). This conversational process takes time if it is to be allowed to breathe and generate really useful insights, but I do believe that once there is consensus amongst participants (teacher-student, student-student, teacher-teacher) to be *inclined* toward a suspension, there emerges a flow to the conversation that, in its openness to possibility, senses a way forward. This sensing feels, to me, like something shared and communal that those who are present bring into being by "speak[ing] to the experiences of others" (Mason 2002:204). It is most certainly something that is alive and continually reshaping itself as the conversation

The Greek word for opinion, 'doxa', meaning the decision taken by the majority, comes from the Indo-European root, 'dek' which means to accept. Other words that share this root are *doctrine* and *dogma*. (*The American Heritage[®] Dictionary of the English Language* 2000).

unfolds through a reciprocal sharing of experience and intuitively supportive linking from one contribution to the next. Here is a space where the “precious play of the world is open to all” (Jardine 2000:122), where our imaginations can take us play-fully away from any ideas of fixed realities. This move toward the liminal spaces that hover around the fringes of the more formal processes of education, is what intrigues me.

The following *account of* (from my personal journal) and subsequent reflection on the entry came after a conversation with someone who was intent on forgetting something by putting it into a ‘box’.

I could see from my friend's body language that she was holding back her emotions, arms stiff and jaw clenched. She then said that she supposed that all she could do with the incident being discussed was to put it into a box and forget about it.

What follows is the reflection that I wrote afterwards, where a more layered interpretation emerges as a result of the *accounting of*:

It would seem to me that we are hugely preoccupied with boundaries and edges, always trying to determine the size and shape of things (human and thing things). We are forever attempting to compartmentalise and measure, define and delineate, contain and quantify while the world we live in continually and vividly reminds us that every thing and being is really in a state of constant flux. There is a messiness to our existence that defies crisp edges.

Rather than things sitting obediently in the boxes that we try to put them into, there is leakage and seepage between things because, as it turns out, the containers are actually nothing more than porous cardboard. Daily we find, in the metaphorical grocery bag of our

lives, that our chow-mein has seeped and fused with our fresh donuts or the scent of lemons has mysteriously infiltrated the box of tea.

I suppose the tendency to delineate is a direct response to the messiness, an attempt to order the world and our experiences so as to constantly feel as though we are in control of what appears to be never ending chaos. Obviously without our very successful attempts at categorizing the world we would probably still be in the constant state of bewilderment and wonderment that the pre-moderns lived in.

But by boxing so effectively I feel that we may have ultimately *foxed* ourselves, almost to the point where we now believe completely in the cleverly demarcated *truths* that we've created.

It then comes as such a surprise to us when the obvious connectivity of all things leaps into our consciousness time and again. We talk about feelings of *deja vu*, serendipitous moments and increasingly in the West, the notion of *karma* in our behaviour toward one another.

When we so often engage in informal conversation, which (I believe) could be viewed as a temporary suspension of reality, we enter into a space where ego can take a rest and a more empathic listening can lead to the potential for far-reaching connections and the occurrence of fresh insights. I am always surprised at how energized I feel afterwards and yet this mode of interaction seems to be considered a frivolous pastime by many.

The word conversation has appeared in this insight and it seems, in its necessary letting go of fixed outcomes and ability to transcend boundaries, to be fundamental to the hermeneutic process. Hermeneutics is premised on "a form of attention that extends beyond one's self, out into the living ways of things" and takes

its name from Hermes, the “flitting and flirting boy... god of arrival, of youth, of fecundity and fertility and agency” (Jardine *et al* 2003:148).

The thing that struck me during the conversation that inspired this reflection was how insincerely my friend said “oh, I’ll just put it away in a box and forget about it”. In saying this there was the reference to the brain-as-computer mindset where everything is filed somewhere on our hard-drive until needed, and awkward items are simply dumped in the trash.

The tragic inference in the idea of boxing our experiences is that we are constantly constructing representations of a pre-given world in that boxes are usually receptacles for items, things brought in from outside of our inner boxes. This view that we are merely receivers of outside *realities* has been further shaken by recent cognition work that has shown that there is ten percent more neural traffic *from* our brain *to* the senses than the other way around. Our brain actively goes fishing for info and so it becomes understandable that we are in the habit of constructing our realities, to a large extent we hear and see what we are predisposed to hear and see (Varela *et al* 1993:148).

Of course no one really says this kind of thing with any conviction (that we can box our experiences), but the point is that in people still using these damaging expressions, a veritable smoke screen descends and obscures the space where possible ways of acting may be presenting. The same goes for the way courses are divided up into subjects. The more we separate and box, the less chances our students have of finding the connectivity, of sensing the multiple threads that emerge through conversations ability to foster questioning environments. The separation between so-called *practical* subjects and *theory* became evident when a student (in her fourth-year Degree year), in responding to my query about how her dissertation was relating to her practical work, showed surprise that there could be much linkage. It seemed that her perception was that she

had to complete the written part simply because the course demanded it, not because it could be something wholly integrated and generative in her Degree-year work.

In the course I teach there is still a separation of a subject called Techniques from the main subject of Communication Design. Often different lecturers teach these separate subjects in separate blocks of time. It isn't therefore surprising how few students actively integrate their Techniques (such as three dimensional modelling, illustration or print-making) into their design work. Much of this harks back to how design education echoed the school system with its teaching of separate subjects with little chance for conversation between subjects, both in the sense of what is taught and students-as-subjects.

Historically Graphic Design education has operated along vocational lines in its habit of simply echoing what is happening in the marketplace. For example, students will learn how to design a media object like a brochure or perhaps a logo. In the case of a logo, the design brief will often, quite unambiguously, state that the primary aim is to design a logo to be applied to a business card, complimentary slip and a letterhead (because these are the traditional media used to carry logo design). And then, secondary to the primary aim, there is a bit of creative work done in the designing of something visually appropriate for the proposed client. Entrenched in this approach is the assumption that whenever a client needs to promote their identity, these are the optimal media available, and the mindset is one of reproducing and improving selected objects (Friedman 1997). I am perhaps over simplifying here but there is a pattern in the tendency of design education to become infatuated with fixed outcomes that echo the status quo rather than properly delving into the unique situation of a client to get at a design suggestion that is creatively responsive to this uniqueness.

In our headlong rush to teach students about how to *design objects* we are losing the real thrust of design education which should be about learning to ask the open questions so that we can sense a way forward that

Design programmes should be knowledge intensive, and here I agree with Friedman (1997: 67) that they should "integrate specific knowledge with a larger understanding of the human beings for whom design is made, the social circumstances in which the act of design takes place and the human context in which designed artefacts are used".

will engender designing that finds an adequate fit¹⁷ with the context into which our designs will appear. Media traditionally used to communicate a design identity could be challenged as possibly being inappropriate for a client, and new as-yet-non-existent media elements need to be imagined and created.

As I have mentioned, there is still an attitude in design education that simply positions design as a problem-solving exercise, a reactive response to the way the world is.

I agree with Bortoft when he says that, if we are to really think in the “mode of coming-into-being, instead of the finished product... we have to think verbally instead of thinking in terms of the noun” (1996:128).

In the context of design education we need to think of *designing* rather than to for-close on the final result of *design*. So often in my teaching I have encountered this attitude of quick closure when students, in their desire for an end result, misunderstand the design brief and then miss the opportunity of engaging in the *conceiving act of designing*. This subtle shift toward understanding the term *design* primarily in its verb sense is hugely important, I believe, and it is this move that can suspend habitual approaches in design education. Students come on to a design course wanting to produce great looking designs, and it then comes as a shock for them to find out that only *generative* ideas can drive *form* if there is to be any meaningful design.

¹⁷ At this point I need to be more specific about the term *adequate fit* and the way that Varela *et al* propose a replacement of the classical adaptationist view of evolution with *natural drift*, which can be understood as the biological counterpart of *cognition as embodied action* (1993:188). Notions that adaptations to different regularities (sensorimotor and environmental) in the world are always optimal, need to be revised in favour of natural drift, which suggests that relationships between organism and environment are co-determined and about an ongoing process of *satisficing* that triggers change in the form of *viable* trajectories (*ibid*:196-197). In this alternative way of thinking the evolutionary process is reviewed to entail the taking of a suboptimal path that is satisfactory (satisficing) or *adequate*, where a path is laid down in walking, instead of a path followed to some pre-given goal (*ibid*:205). The viable trajectories mentioned are determined by the organisms active history of structural coupling which is the sensorimotor patterns (linkages between sensory and motor surfaces performed by the nervous system) that enable action to be perceptually guided (*ibid*:173/204/205).

Fauconnier *et al* (2002:4-5) highlight the relationship between form and substance when they imaginatively use the example of Patroclus donning the spectacular armour of Achilles to battle the Trojans. Initially they were terrified but soon discovered that it was not Achilles inside the armour and they had no pity. This has relevance in the way that we tend to look at form in the way the Trojans looked at the armour – but the miracles made possible by the armour are entirely dependant on the invisible warrior within.

This follows what I was writing about in insight nine, where self-entity is assumed to pre-exist the cognitive act. Much of what we do (and need to do better, I think) in the design course that I teach, is a reawakening to the notion of the *idea being an active process* rather than a fixed entity.

How often have I heard, “I haven’t got any ideas!” or “Where am I going to get an idea from?” This sort of cry is the result of a mindset that situates knowledge as entity outside of the subject. There is a sad passivity to this approach to learning where the student is constantly in search of some sort of optimal solution that is floating around out there. When some-thing is then found that the student believes is a solution it is then very quickly dollied up using the computers seamless wizardry and handed in as final work. What amounts to a gathering exercise often seems devoid of life and static compared to work that has come about through active engagement with a knowledge creation process. I believe that, in simple terms, I could be doing more to help students to develop a way of seeing and being that is a *designing way of seeing and being*, so that when they work as designers they are engaged in *ideating* rather than merely trying to *get an idea*. In so doing, the dynamic relationship between substance and form may start to come into play. The personal process through which we construct meaning (which is largely invisible to our conscious minds) *through* the elaborate forms we have as human beings (language, mathematics, music, art), then becomes an intriguing guide for the designing process (Fauconnier *et al* 2002:5).

Thinking of design education in these terms seems to have strong parallels with what is generally accepted to be one of the ways in which we learn language; that we constantly interrogate inadequacies in vocabulary (words, terms and phrases) in pursuit of possible meanings through a process of experimentation, *before* anything becomes a part of our natural lexicon (Davis 1996:206). I am interested in how I may broaden my understanding of design teaching and learning in ways that embrace those most natural or tacit

Similarly, the word technology, with its current meaning of manufacturing, comes from the ancient Greek *techne* meaning to *bring forth*. Over time we have lost the meaning of technologies of self making (language and alphabetic writing are languages of self making) as process and fixed on the tools and machines that have resulted through this process (like the printing press and electronic information devices) (Davis *et al* 2000:170).

“We do not see the “space” of the world; we live our field of vision. We do not see the “colors” of the world; we live our chromatic space” “But when we examine more closely how we get to know this world, we invariably find that we cannot separate our history of actions—biological and social—from how this world appears to us. It is so obvious and close that it is very hard to see” (Maturana *et al* 1987:23).

“Because we are men, and live among men, we end by being quite unable to see the phenomenon of man in its correct magnitude” (de Chardin 1966:72)

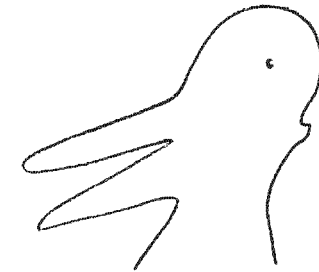
of learning processes, like learning a language or how to ride a bicycle. These are skills that we learn by internalizing as well as knowing the particulars of the explicit programme, but if we spend too much time attending to the mechanics of riding a bicycle (like my mountain biking experience) or the grammar of speech, there is a strong chance of us losing our balance or talking gibberish (Argyris & Schon 1974:11-13). Learning skills like these is the same as learning to behave according to a new *theory of action* (or theories-in-use) and fundamental to both is practice, experimentation, engagement with tacit knowledge and a learning environment that allows a reinforcing cycle (*ibid*:14).

Theories-in-use as put forward by Argyris *et al* (1974:7) “include knowledge about the behaviour of physical objects, the making and use of artefacts, the marketplace, organizations, and every other domain of human activity”. There is, for me, a clear connection with what Bortoft (1996:123) describes as the *organizing idea*, which is prior to what the subject sees visually, or what Jardine *et al* (2003:183) term the “natural angle of regard”. Seeing a chair as we do (being chair users) means that we see it cognitively as well as merely visually (*ibid*:130). We do not simply respond (like onlookers) to the world around us, we actively engage with it to construct meaning and the meaning we construct is as a result of our organizing idea or theories-in-use.

What this points to, for me, is the importance of suspending the rush for completion and assumptions of optimal solutions so that we can redirect attention back onto the essence of what organises in an attempt to see more *designerly*.

The enactivist view reminds me of the dangers of talking in terms of *either-or, process or product*, and to rather see such notions as *inseparable*. Product and outcome are mutually specifiable with process. If the co-evolution of the two can be re-energised so that the latter is reclaimed and re-invigorated, there may be a chance that the cry for more sustainable design could start to fall on more receptive ears.

“You think that what you do not do yourself does not happen” (Herrigel 1989:31).



The ambiguity revealed in my sketch (based on J. Jastrow's well known illustration) shows how we see in a more than sensory way, that even though the lines are unchanged visually, we see either the rabbit or the duck depending on what our organizing idea is. Two people, each seeing *either* a rabbit or a duck, will *both* be receiving the same visual stimuli. The organizing idea is what shifts perception between seeing the drawing *rabbity* or *duckly* (Bortoft 1996:130). This could mean that, children shown this image on Easter Sunday may be inclined to see a rabbit, whereas on any other Sunday a duck may be seen first (Kihlstrom 2004).

This suspense of the rush for end point is an activity that doesn't come easily. Even for a great mind like Descartes, there was a quick closure on the "conclusion that I am a thinking *thing*" (Varela *et al* 1993:62 my italics) in his famous "I think, I am", and a missed opportunity to rather get to what the *thinking* may be about. The product or self-entity has been placed before the process and a balance has been lost. This relates to the act of designing (and teaching design) in a profound way, in how difficult it is, when surrounded by the many manifestations of design (as noun) in the world, to suspend the rush to create yet another piece.

In this mode of habituation we tend to dwell on generalities and not particularities, commonalities and not difference, and it is during this phase of suspension that we need to try and stretch and hold the process for as long as possible so that we may truly create design and design education (as verb) that embraces reflection. In this way, I believe, we may be able to start to evolve an ability to become more aware of the living nature of our organizing ideas as they evolve with the world, not in a passive sense, but in the active sense of how participatory the whole process is. Only in this way can we hope to learn how to listen care-fully and ecologically to the world we live in and realise that it is in the way that we live in the world (our viable history of structural coupling) that we are co-creators of (we enact and bring forth) the very same world that seems to be so grounded and outside of our inner struggles (Varela *et al* 1993:205).

Again I am indebted to Vusi's heartfelt question for the way it has spun me off into a domain where the more open questions can be posed, away from "methodological self-security", and towards a desire to ponder "a return to the essential generativity of human life" (Jardine 2000:116 -120).

Jardine's use of the word generativity follows the enactivist turn in its proposal that, in the *living* of our lives we *generate* the *possibilities* for our existence. We have the choice, through our *actions*, to be *co-creators* of the world(s) we live in. Something as seemingly passive as listening, when recast as an active

"Who are you going to believe, me or your eyes?" Groucho Marx

"Although we say, 'I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it,' it would be more accurate to say, 'I wouldn't have seen it if I hadn't believed it.'" (Fletcher 2001:222)

process, becomes a far more powerful aspect of our generative lives, in the way that we are able to actively reach out and listen.

In the earlier dialogue between student and mentor (page 67), this is evident in the way that the person concealing the imaginary thing validates the others suggestion by saying “Oh you heard it...” The recognition by the one of the other’s active hearing of the mouse or the train acknowledges the other’s view point or system of theories-in-use, and the consensual process that ensues is a welcoming in of the infinite possibilities that can occur due to the complex make-up of those involved coupled with the context that they find themselves in.

Application to Communication Design.

In this penultimate section I aim to review my teaching practice in the light of what has emerged in this writing so far. Through this reflective process certain approaches in my teaching have become fore-grounded and in this next section I will explore how these newly tweaked threads are able to show me a way forward. In examining these approaches, which came about through an intuitive sense of what worked, I am looking not for validity, but for new resonances that might enrich my work as a design teacher.

How do I see *designerly*?

When introducing first year design students to typography I have, in the past, set an exercise-based project that is an attempt to generate a sensitivity to typographic form. In the light of what I have been writing about I now see a new dimension of value in this exercise. The exercise starts with the simple task of cropping a single letterform to a tipping point where the letter can only just be discerned, and the remaining shapes are on the verge of simply becoming arbitrary marks.



fig. 5.1

Through the process of playing with letterforms, students learn to look with new eyes at the letter shape, to see the potential for ambiguity in figure-ground reversal, and to assess the critical parts of a letter that give it its particular qualities thus setting it apart from another of a very similar form. These qualities are all but invisible to us and go unnoticed as we read quickly the many written and designed texts that we come into contact with on a daily basis. I recognise in this exercise, more fully now, how this slowing down of the rush for closure, this suspension (in time) of the reading process to a point where comprehension (and cognition) emerges, is another example of the hermeneutic circle. This simple exercise has in its essence a wider implication for designing as a whole, in the way that it embodies the holistic notion of relationships between parts and wholes. It is really about composition as a design fundamental, and it allows for complex interpretations to emerge from simple beginnings. In exploring the essence of the letterform we are experiencing an essential (micro) part of a design, and in so doing the cognizing act starts to show itself. We see what it is that happens prior to our fixing on the total letterform, within the total word, within the sentence and ultimately the design as a whole. In appreciating these simple, early forms it becomes possible to understand how we are always in the act of *seeing as something*, that we are always looking for something because our conceptual scheme or organizing idea is *out there ahead of us* (Crusius 1991:28).

As one looks at these cropped letterforms one becomes aware of one's way of seeing shifting (from *looking* for an *a* to maybe a *d* and so forth) as it seeks for a viable fit and this becomes an interesting mind exercise as it slowly becomes evident that there is a recursive and concurrent relationship between our conceptual scheme and our sensations¹⁸ (Crusius 1991:28). This sensitisation to how we see type is vital for

"We have to go to the stage prior to our usual awareness...so that we can recognize that we usually begin from what is, in fact, the end" (Bortoft 1996:128-129).

Vincent van Gogh wrote, "I am always doing what I cannot do yet, in order to learn how to do it" (n.d.).

Psychologist-philosopher John Dewey stated over a hundred years ago that ". . . the real beginning is with the act of seeing; it is *looking*, and not a sensation of light" (Gibbs 2006:43 my italics)

¹⁸ Incidentally, the three letterforms in fig. 5.1 are all letter *a*'s, taken from three different typeface designs.

young designers whose tendency it is to use letterforms (as an end) in their design simply as a means to convey the meaning of words. A more designerly approach is to see the potential for meaning in every single part of a design, especially the typographical elements which need not only be carriers of word meanings (which is what the Swiss method advocated) but potential conveyors of the entire range of symbolisms that any culture may hold as meaningful. In this way typography as “visual/verbal conceptual expression. . .” (McCoy 2001:10) becomes a powerful design element. One of the downsides of the computer as a tool in the design process is that students have increasingly become used to simply choosing an existing typeface from a drop down list and treating this limited choice as typography instead of trying to imbue form with content. For those willing to experiment and question, the computer becomes an extraordinary design tool that allows infinite manipulation of type forms.

The cropping exercise attempts to re-introduce type as image within the design whole, so that students can appreciate how every element in a design (colour, shape, texture, typography, imagery) works together to present the final composition as a whole, not in a linear fashion but in a holistically reciprocal way as they are placed in relation to one another (contrasting, supporting, balancing, unsettling). In the experience of accessing this shifting within our cognizing moments, I believe that there is a lesson for students that it is naïve to expect a design to communicate its authors meaning unambiguously. There is always an interpretive process based on how people see. It can never simply be a case of people seeing the elements in a design merely as bits and pieces on a piece of paper, there is a *non-sensory* aspect in the form of the *idea* which is organizing the way of seeing.

Several aspects emerge from this simple exercise. Firstly, the cognizing act is opened up to reveal a process that is more than pure sensory downloading of what appears to be outside of us. We are always



fig. 5.2 Herb Lubalin's mother and child logo (McAlhone & Stuart 1998:86).

In this beautiful example the whole comes to presence in the parts quite beautifully as we see the 'baby' ampersand growing inside the 'womb' of the pregnant O. One has only to glance at the rest of the design to confirm what is imminent within the O part.

actively looking and sensing within our personal framework of inclinations. Secondly, contained in this first realisation is the tangible evidence that when designing one has to play an interesting game of placing oneself in the shoes of the target audience so as to empathically create work that will speak into its (the audiences) listening. In this way the extremes of cognitive solitude (only ones interior life exists) and a fixed representational world, are exposed for discussion and reflection.

Thirdly, inherent in the exercise there is a glimpse of fractal complexity in the relational dynamics between parts and wholes. The exercise focuses on type but everything that is understood in terms of type becomes liberating for all the elements of a design (and their relation to one another) so that “the essential value of each *difference* is enhanced and enriched, by being brought into a particular, compositional *relationship* that *adequately* facilitates the desired outcome of an *emergent* design” (Nelson 2003:127). Emergent in these simple cropped letterforms is the elemental process of designing which is about composing wholes. What this entails is seeing compositionally in a different mode from the usual one of thinking of a design composition simply being made up of separate elements that all *add up* to a finished fixed solution. There is resonance here with the way in which this writing has unfolded. The composition of its organic structure has emerged from an intuitive process that is in a constant circulation between parts and whole, where the *parts are seen in the light of the whole*.

Design wholes.

In Bortoft’s exploration of Goethe’s extraordinary work in colour theory and plant studies, he suggests that if we are to see in a Goethean way, we need to turn our customary way of seeing inside out in order to truly understand *unity* (Bortoft 1996:247). This is not seeing unity as unification which is the result of the grasping, analytical intellect, but rather the reverse; which is unity without unification, which is the unity of

the *intuitive mind* (*ibid*:60). This is the shift in consciousness that has been the organizing idea that has shaped my research writing. The interpretive nature of the hermeneutic circle exemplifies an instance of wholeness in the sense that “the meaning of a text must have something to do with the whole text” but “this whole is not the same as the totality of the text” (*ibid*:7). In the following excerpt there emerge strong parallels between the meaning structure of my writing and the design process, and to highlight this I have used the word *designing* in place of *saying* and *writing*:

“The art of ... [designing] is in finding the *right parts*. The success or failure of... [designing], turns on the ability to recognise what is a part and what is not. But a part is only a part inasmuch as it serves to let the whole come forth, which is to let meaning emerge. A part is only a part according to the emergence of a whole, which it serves; otherwise it is mere noise. At the same time, the whole does not dominate, for the whole cannot emerge without the parts. The hazard of emergence is such that the whole depends on the parts to be able to come forth, and the parts depend on the coming forth of the whole to be significant instead of superficial. The recognition of a part is possible through the *coming to presence* of the whole” (Bortoft 1996:11).

Within this approach there is no hierarchy or linearity, only the recursive and contingent nature of *viable fit* in our emergent being in the world.

Further to this, there is an interesting hint of how we can behave in the process of bringing a design into the world that evokes the hermeneutic process. There is the active recognition of the parts that constitute a whole, and this recognition is possible through the coming to presence of the whole. Nelson *et al* (2003:228) describe this hither and thither process in terms of the design material speaking to us and what a critical part of the design process this is, as this dialogue facilitates the move away from the polarity between the objective and subjective into a holistic relationship. “When a design is brought into the world, there is no longer a distinction between *that-which-is* and the *not-yet-existing*” (*ibid*).

This temporality takes me back to what Quasiem wrote in his journal when he compares design with time, "...it [design] waits for no one but sometimes you can be right on time". Reading this reminded me of Merleau-Ponty's view on time when he states, "time has meaning for us only because *we are it*" (1979:430). Quasiem initially refers to time/design as being extrinsic to himself, some *thing* that has motility and a kind of agenda of its own. You can be left behind by it and, in fact, there seems to be some sort of uncaring character indicated by the idea that there is no waiting around for anyone who may be struggling along trying to get on board. He is probably also thinking of the dreadful emphasis on *deadlines* that is so inherent in the communications industry, and a constantly malefic factor in their student lives. Words such as *deadline* do so much damage in entrenching attitudes of separateness, not to mention the negative connotations that the prefix *dead* brings with it. The so-called deadline becomes this border where the student submits their work in such finality that it is tacitly understood as 'dead' to them, and now belongs to the higher authority of the teacher. This may seem exaggerated but I believe that words such as these that creep in from the marketplace unchallenged can be counterproductive in a learning environment. If presented in ways that recognise more complex relationships between subject and world, inner and outer, there may be a chance of a different approach towards the issue of deadlines.

Returning to the second part of the student comment that "*sometimes you can be right on time*" I sense a shift in the way he understands the concept of time/design. There is a convergence happening that has lessened the gap between the notion of time being a 'thing' and the subject who is in need of catching it. Merleau-Ponty's comment that *we are time* jumps into focus now in the light of this convergence. And I get a sense that Quasiem is tentatively presenting an idea that designing is an activity that is constantly in flux because it feels like it is (sometimes when all is going well) *exactly* at that living juncture where past, present and future meet.

There is a circularity to this insight in the way that it resonates with the temporal aspect of Vusi's comment (his reluctance to go on without looking back), and in how it animates the idea of "cognition as embodied action ... always [being] about or directed toward something that is missing... [and that] there is always a next step for the *system* in its perceptually guided action ... [in that] the actions of the system are always directed toward *situations* that have yet to become actual" (Varela *et al* 1993:205). The move toward the *not-yet-existing* is integral to complex, living systems and so the question emerges as to whether a design is a closed system due to intentionality, or is it "only as complex and comprehensive as it needs to be in order for it to fulfill its intended purpose" (Nelson *et al* 2003:123). Intent becomes central here and I would agree with Varela *et al* (1993:206) when they say that "the intentionality of cognition as embodied action consists primarily in the directedness of action[,] ... what the system takes its possibilities for action to be and how the resulting situations fulfill or fail to fulfill these possibilities".

The possibility for a design approach that has sustainability as part of its intent, emerges at this point. If our directedness for action, which (I believe) comes about through being more aware of what constitutes our organizing idea, can include a sensitivity to how design impacts on society and the natural environment, we may reawaken more mindful practices that evoke older wisdom from before modernist times. In this way, questions of "*should we*" replace the "*can we*" (Davis 2004:201) of a world seduced by a constant quest for new products that, when designed, are not seen as serving anything beyond immediate short term needs.

Thinking Design.

The following example of design thinking shows how, in a small way, a consideration for what happens *after* a product has reached the end of its immediate use can be factored in to its design. This biodegradable

"We all have a habit of thinking that everything around us is already existing without my input, without my choice. You have to banish that kind of thinking. Instead you really have to recognise that even the material world around us, the chairs, the rooms [etc]. . . all of these are nothing but *possible* movements of *consciousness*. And I'm choosing moment by moment out of these movements to bring my actual experience into manifestation. This is the only radical thinking that you need do. . . but it is so radical. . . because our tendency is to think of the world as independent of our experience. . . so instead of thinking of things you have to think of possibilities, . . . possibilities of *consciousness*" Goswami (2004)

cell phone has a plant seed encapsulated in its case so that after the phone becomes technologically obsolete it may be planted and enjoyed as it produces flowers.

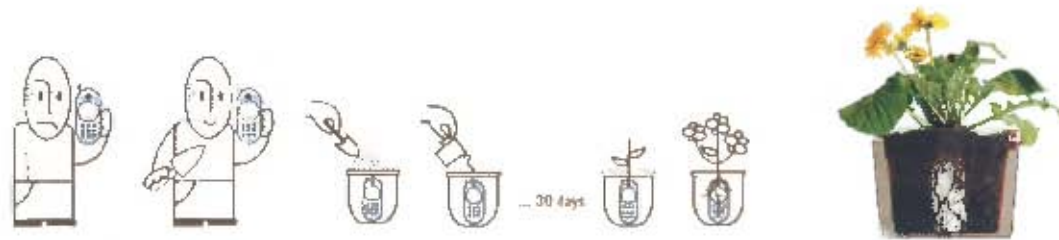


fig. 5.3 (Negrillo 2004)

How fresh, how simple and considerate is this kind of thinking? I believe that we can recover some of the ground lost to decades of unsustainable designing by reintroducing the simple attitude of empathy and consideration into our *intent* in a bid to awaken ourselves from “ecological somnambulance” and learn how to “carry ourselves in such a way that the ways of [a] place might show themselves” (Jardine 2000:227). Terry Irwin (2004) writes about how designers can learn more from nature’s cycles and *growth* in particular which is the primary dynamic underlying all life, but that we should not forget the last steps of ageing, death and decay.

“Designers produce all manner of solutions for messages, artefacts, activities and complex environments and yet it still has not become an essential part of the design brief to plan for their timely demise” (2004:63)

Tony Fry emphasizes that if there is to be an “age of sustainment”, the imperative is the “elimination, *by design*, of the unsustainable” (2003 my italics). Here is a shift away from understanding sustainable design in terms of *more* green products; towards thinking of ways in which design can become re-energised through seeking the sustainable from what already is, and moving from materialization to dematerialisation, where

designing is less about products and more about services (Fry 2003). In this mode of designing we can be more conscious of how to provide a client with communication materials that “perform their function with modesty rather than excess. . . [and] products that retain their utility and symbolic value over the lives of their users”, and by “bringing design to sustainment. . . [this recovery can be] understood as both a retrieval and a coming back to health” (*ibid*).

Of course this runs counter to the typical support that design provides for our system of consumerism and this means an immense effort is required to slowly bring about the necessary change in direction of the momentum driven *super tanker of capitalism* that we are all travelling in.

I believe that if this kind of discourse were to be more central within education there may be hope for a reconnection with our earths needs, a remembering of where we come from and how we are inextricably bound into relationship with this place.

But these practices can only come about through knowing oneself in a deeper way than what presents in our daily routine, and here Vusi’s reference to his need of a rearview mirror helps to remind me to take note of what so easily slips past my attention. Thus students need to have opportunities to get in touch with themselves, and one such opportunity is a project (which I call *Me, Myself, I*) that challenges students to create a piece of graphic design that communicates *something about themselves* to an audience of their peers. What emerges is how Graphic Design reflects cultural information, personal biases and social values on an immensely wide scale.

In the years that I have run this project (inspired by San Francisco designer, Lucille Tanazas) I have always been surprised by the level of engagement shown by students¹⁹. An energy is generated as individuals engage with the process of designing themselves into their work in a way that is similar to my methodology in this writing, where writing is “validated as a method of knowing” (Richardson 1994:518). As I have mentioned before²⁰, this process of designing becomes like languaging where sense of self is constructed through an exploration of the competing ways that meaning and structure may be given to the world (*ibid*).

One student wrote in her journal the following reflection about her *Me, Myself, I* project:

“It was as though I climbed out of my skin and saw myself from above. I focused on who I was, who I am now and who I would like to try and be. With this project I just realised again that we are all *people* – all made from the same stuff – doesn’t matter who you are – everyone has baggage and I looked around me in the class and saw how each person struggled to represent themselves”
(Anine’s journal, 2005).

I found it interesting that, for her final design, this same student translated her entire work (which was quite text intensive, almost diary like) into English from her mother tongue, Afrikaans. A year later in her journal (being one of the students I’d asked to participate in my data gathering exercise) she wrote, “*ek wens eintlik ek het die guts om in Afrikaans te design*” (I wish I’d actually had the guts to design in Afrikaans). She did eventually redo the work *in Afrikaans* and a potency returned to the work that took her on a journey of self discovery, energising her attitude and work content in her degree year. She became reconciled with the

¹⁹ This is the same project that helped me to re-connect with Ebrahiem in my reflection on page 54 and has often been useful as a reference point for me when talking to students who are struggling with an opaque aspect of the design process. The brief for this project can be found in Appendix 3.

²⁰ See page 75.

idea that it's OK to design expressively and not to work in a language (both visual and verbal) that she believes she *ought to use*.

In the following example (fig. 5.4) another student created a striking piece of visual language that makes a social comment within the context of South Africa that he felt strongly about.



fig. 5.4 Waahid's design for the *Me Myself I* project

I now have a better understanding of what may be going on and also see the project as a fitting companion to the social awareness project (which follows one semester later) in that "if you are aware of who you are, then you can ultimately take on the identities and problems others may pose, yet not lose your own" (Tanazas 2002:3). These words are reminiscent of Gadamer's views on the art of strengthening with regard to conversation. A dialogue is "...the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point..." (Gadamer 1975:331) "...without necessarily agreeing with it, or seeing [oneself] in it" (*ibid*:270).

If a student is able to recognise the inevitable play of their "for-having" (Heidegger 1962:191) and pre-judgements in their perceptions of the world, then they may find that their capacity to question prejudice may allow a more hermeneutic attitude in their listening and a "deeper connectedness" (Kull 2005:110) to the many sources that they will interact with during their social awareness work. More so, there is a holistic

aspect to the dialectic nature of conversation where there is the opportunity to see “multiplicity in unity” (Bortoft 1996:248) when Gadamer (1975:331) speaks of “the art of seeing things in the unity of an aspect”. In fact I have come to realise how the ITM project, from its smallest scale to its widest implications, has within it a nested and holistic nature. From the individual who works within the group collective to create the design elements that brings forth the whole of the campaign, to the way that social-awareness campaigns are a part of a greater body of design work aimed at uplifting society and proposing ways that we may live together better.

I have chosen to use the following example of designing to illustrate firstly, a practical application for the insights that have emerged from my writing, and secondly to point to what I believe is a valuable shift in thinking in the field of Communication Design. The call to “brand the beloved country” was sent out by one of South Africa’s design visionaries, Ravi Naidoo (2006). It fell upon three design studios to produce proposals for the branding of South Africa that would respond to the premise of *real freedom*. I was present at the International Design Conference where these proposals were first shown and I remember feeling disappointed as the first solutions appeared on the screen.



figs. 5.5 – 5.7

It seemed that each, although well crafted, remained a static entity never moving beyond being a thing with inherent limitations in terms of its support base. The ribbon idea had, to my mind, the most potential as it started to communicate the *feeling* of freedom.

As soon as the following design was shown I felt a sense of relief wash over me as, at last, here was evidence of thinking that actually came to terms with the notion of diversity being a strength.



fig.5.8

At first glance there is not much to see, but as soon as the viewfinder is placed within the magical element of a context, multiple possibilities open up revealing multiplicity in unity and the fundamental element of freedom, which is *freedom to choose*.



fig. 5.9 Free: smiles.



fig. 5.10 Free to return.

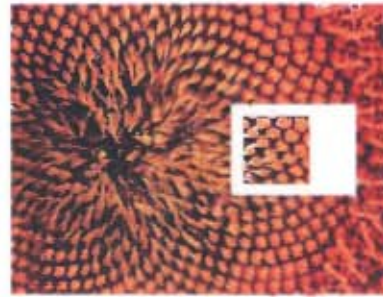


fig. 5.11 Free to interpret.

The hand written *South Africa* comes from a letter written by Nelson Mandela to his daughters during his incarceration on Robben Island. In this letter he describes his hopes for a truly free South Africa. This element becomes the logotype and evokes a uniquely South African symbol of freedom.

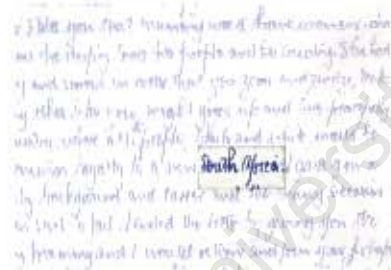


Fig. 5.12 Excerpt from Mandela's letter to his daughters.

The thing that struck me first was how well the designers had evaded the old problem of showing a static, finished product, forever frozen in its given (by the designer) state. The viewfinder, on the other hand, doesn't

go into the territory of trying to find elements (like birds and ribbons) that could symbolize freedom for this country. Instead they give us a viewfinder and encourage us, the people of South Africa, to effectively find our own interpretations of freedom. Nothing laboured, pre-given or dressed up. An environmental application includes a freestanding pillar with a built in viewfinder that allows people to interact with ever changing views as they move around it. Products such as cameras, and bags help bring the idea to life.



fig. 5.13 Freestanding device.



fig. 5.14 Branded camera.



fig. 5.15 Branded bags.



fig. 5.16 Highlighting social issues such as shack fires through the distribution of fireproof blankets with safety messages printed on them.

And so this approach to designing holds great promise for me, as it encourages a way of being, where “being is the imminent, the always emerging meanings concealed when tradition is reified, made into what it is not, monolithic and static” (Crusius 1991:20).

Designing that doesn’t acknowledge “being as . . . the truths of process and discovery” (*ibid*) runs the risk of being affected by thinking that sees communication in terms of a “conduit (or tube)” (Maturana *et al* 1987:196). A preoccupation with communication understood as a message to be transmitted and received by

someone without a careful consideration for the “structural determination” (*ibid*) of the person receiving it (or those responsible for sending it), will always be limiting. Tibor Kalman’s (cited in Bierut, Drenttel, & Heller 1997:184) statement that “Graphic Design is a language, not a message” illuminates the notion of Communication Design sharing the open-endedness of language or “*linguaging*” (Davis 2004:154). Davis uses the gerund *linguaging* to refer to the recursivity of language, like “*knowing-knowledge, doing-action, being-existence*”, *designing-design* and *ideating-idea* infer something “*arising and adapting*” (*ibid*) rather than a self contained message. In this way of thinking *self* is seen as fluid, shifting, and always emergent based on our embodied interactions with the physical and cultural world (Gibbs 2006:21).

Part Six

Outro

Concluding thoughts.

And so, as this particular piece of writing draws to an end, I am grateful for the opportunity it has afforded me to explore and come a little closer to a personal understanding of what enactivism and hermeneutics can be and most importantly, how these approaches can influence my conception of designing and how to teach it in a more interesting way. It is significant that it is in the words of Merleau-Ponty that I find the essence of what has happened in this research writing:

“As my living present opens upon a past which I nevertheless am no longer living through, and on a future which I do not yet live, and perhaps never shall, it can also open on to temporalities outside my living experience and acquire a social horizon, with the result that my world is expanded to the dimensions of that collective history which my private existence takes up and carries forward. The solution of all problems of transcendence is to be sought in the thickness of the pre-objective present, in which we find our bodily being, our social being, and the pre-existence of the world, that is, the starting point of ‘explanations’, in so far as they are legitimate – and at the same time the basis of our freedom”

(Merleau-Ponty 1962:433 my italics).

Only now can this have any real meaning for me. Only after this process of reflection which has flowed through a series of experiential and generative insights am I able to get at a meaningful understanding of what happens as I perceive. I have a beginning sense of the *thickness of the pre-objective present* and how this can be the space (a *starting point*) where, if I am able to remain open to it, I can find a rich ground for my future teaching of design. Here, of course, lies the paradox that in talking about a ground for future mindfulness, I am also accepting the total *groundlessness* of my existence in the recognition of the idea that we are co-creators of our worlds. In this thinking lies only immense hope and wonderment that each one of us

“It moves. It moves not.
It is far, and it is near,
It is within all this.
And It is outside of a ‘this’”
(sa-Upanishad cited in
Caora 1991:154)

holds the clues to why we are here and where we may be going. The possibilities are endless but not arbitrary, we have choices and it is up to us to boldly lay down a path by walking it with open and curious minds.

Regarding teaching, I recognise that a delicate touch is required, a sensitivity to the pace of learning, and an open and generous heart. Difficult to do in these times of outcomes based education, our so-called information age, fast through-puts, increased syllabus load, and redressing of past social injustices. But I suppose that these and other pressures will always be the kind of challenges that we as teachers will have to face. I find solace in the idea that as a teacher I can only really try to create a space where my students may be able to “voyage onward” through themselves (Herrigel²¹ 1989:44). This must surely be possible, and maybe as a relationship between us emerges a “growing receptivity” will let me “bring to view something of which . . . [they have] often heard but whose reality . . . only now begin[s] to become tangible on the *basis of [their] own experiences* . . . [and] an *inward movement* is thereby initiated” (*ibid*:44 my italics). The teacher must pursue this movement without influencing its course, helping the student in the most secret and intimate way he/she knows; by (what is called in Buddhist circles) *direct transference of the spirit*, and in this way the student remembers that more important than all outward works, however attractive, is the inward work which they must accomplish (*ibid*:44). There is truth in these words for me as they touch on the core of what binds me to this teaching work that I do. Although a spiritual dimension to teaching may not sit well with some for its religious overtones, I refer to what is spiritual for me not as something “apart from ordinary life” or out there, but as *who* I am and *how* I participate “in the physical here and now” (Kull 2005:102).

²¹ *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1989) was written by Eugen Herrigel (a German Philosophy Professor) in 1953 about his training by Kenzo Awa in the art of archery. I realise that Herrigel's work was limited by inaccuracies in the translation of what his teacher said to him (Shoji 2001) and cannot be used as a true reflection of the Zen way – but I find a resonance in his interpretation of his experience all the same.

I find this quote by Einstein to be a rather poignant analogy for the state of groundlessness: “Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavor to understand reality we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the face and the moving hands, even hears it ticking, but he has no way of opening the case. If he is ingenious he may form some picture of the mechanism which could be responsible for all the things he observes, but he may never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his picture with the real mechanism and he cannot even imagine the possibility of the meaning of such a comparison.” (Friedman 2006)

I agree with Jardine (2000:115) that education is about a bringing forth of new life and in this way it is a generative discipline, concerned with this emergence in the light of the possibility that things can become other than what they are already. Education therefore has a spiritual dimension for me in the way that it embodies an “experiential shift from feeling alienated from an essentially static and lifeless existence to a sense of belonging in a world that is vibrantly *Alive*” (Kull 2005:102).

I realise that the largely sight-based metaphors that I have used throughout my writing might appear to dominate what should be, in the hermeneutic approach, a more *listening* mode of inquiry (Davis 1996:17). I am, however, a designer and what I do and what I teach manifests ultimately as visual artefacts. I do recognise that, due to the tendency to *see* what is visual as being more fixed than fluid, that one of our challenges as designers is to try and take our visual work into realms where experience is explored in more generative, and enactivist terms. This is one of the tasks of design as I see it, to transcend traditional boundaries and to enact new possibilities that probe what knowledge can be found in the interface between what often seems to be separate. Varela *et al's* suggestion that cultural knowledge, when viewed as something that *comes to presence through “the interface between mind, society and culture rather than in one or even in all of them”* illustrates this notion that “knowledge . . . is enacted in particular situations . . . [and] does not preexist in any one place or form” (1993:179 my italics). Similarly, design finds itself in a liminal, boundary space where its processes and artefacts can become the messengers of the dynamism that is life. The viewfinder example shown earlier does this, I think.

That sort of approach reveals in its participatory interpretation of *freedom*, that there can be no fixed ideas of freedom and that as a concept of any worth, it can only exist in multiple interpretations of what it might be.

This is attuned to the principles of enactivism which place “objectivity in parenthesis” (Maturana 1985) and is therefore more accommodating, and welcoming of diverse interpretations.

A way forward.

Because designing is able to occupy a space between disciplines, the activity has in recent times, moved away from fixed *states* to a more fluid *being*. The term multimedia design is used when discussing anything that crosses traditional media boundaries, and it is this growing beyond borders that I find interesting in terms of a future research path. Here is fertile ground for discovering ways to communicate *designerly*, where designing becomes an activity that explores its relations to time as a “structure of nowness[,] ... a three part structure of the present with its constitutive threads into past and future horizons” (Husserl 1996, McInerney, Gallagher 1998 cited in Depraz *et al* 2003:123).

The interactive nature of multimedia design, with its reach into the worlds of image, words, movement and sound becomes an interesting alternative to the linear format of texts such as this one.

I believe that there is a need for “radical innovations in grammar and style of expression” (Bortoft 1996:124) for the presentation of research work that has, as it’s driving force, an organic flow that is shaped by an experiential mode of inquiry.

Interactive design and its rhizomatic²² nature, could provide a more meaningful presentation medium for research that needs more flexible pathways for its expression. Much like the research process in this writing has been for me chiefly experiential in the way that I have made new meaning for myself within an organic

²² Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe their concept of rhizome in terms of multiplicity having “neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows)”.

structure of personal memories, reflections, and existing theory, I would find it a very interesting challenge to try and create an interactive text that attempts to facilitate a more exploratory experience for a participant (the word reader seems too passive here) in the way that someone would be able to *enter and move through the work in multiple ways depending on their needs* within a current context. In this I am reminded of Varela's notion of adequate fit in the way that a participant would interact with a text based on the history of their sensorimotor structure (1993:173), and generate a viable learning experience that flows enactively as they become co-creators of a uniquely personal text. As a result, the hope would be that the experience might be more meaningful than if it were a linear text with all its hints of closure, finiteness, logical sequence and the inherent difficulty of language.

The process of this research writing has involved an attempt at making explicit what is tacit in my teaching practice, a bringing forward into the light of what had previously been an informal "gut feeling" (Breen 2002). I am interested in designing a research experience, that follows a similar methodology, that could facilitate the formulation of theories-in-use by providing interaction between the participant and the text in such a way as to allow for the inferring (for the participant) of explicit theory from the tacit knowledge and behaviour of the participant (Argyris *et al* 1974:11). In this way the choices and preferences of the participant would drive the process in a knowledge building experience that could not only have the above effect, but also draw attention to how compatible or incompatible their *theories-in-use* are with their *espoused theory* (*ibid*:7). Argyris *et al* describe espoused theory as the "theory of action to which [someone] gives allegiance, and which . . . they communicate to others" (1974:7). For example, someone may say that they support the notion of sustainable designing but actually live their designing lives in ways that still perpetuate the consumerist status quo. This incompatibility may be largely invisible and so the interactive process of the

medium of multimedia could reveal, open up, and bring forward knowledge in “newly articulated configurations” (Friedman 2005).

This could be a future research area for me where I would be challenging my designing skills to the extreme, and personally venturing into uncharted waters where *practice* (I do) can become a welcome and enriching activity that resonates with *theory* (I see). I recognise that by indicating such a future research activity I am posing more questions and *could be* scenarios, but I feel that this is compatible with the nature of hermeneutic enquiry. To reiterate in Jardine’s words, hermeneutic research writing of this kind is “a return to the essential generativity of human life, a sense of life in which there is always something left to say, with all the difficulty, risk, and ambiguity that such generativity entails (2000:120).

This process has been truly transformative and I am deeply touched by, and thankful to Vusi Ngxande for his words that originally perturbed and then generated this journey of discovery.

*Kayeleboga Vusi*²³.

²³ Three days before the completion of this dissertation (27.09.06) I spoke with Vusi Ngxande on his return from Johannesburg where he had been a member of the cast of a reality TV show, *The Cut*. In this TV show the cast (all young creatives from all over SA) are given creative design tasks to carry out within very tight deadlines. I was interested to hear that, when working on these tasks, he’d drawn on some of the material he’d written about in his reflective journal, including his interest in the meaning of his name. I would like to think that his journal writing helped to trigger something within, as it has done for me.

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Appendix 2

Mutton Breyani Recipe

1kg mutton or lamb, cubed
15ml grated fresh root ginger
10ml crushed garlic
5ml salt
250ml brown lentils
625ml basmati rice
250ml cooking oil
300ml hot water
6 potatoes, peeled and quartered
3 large onions, thinly sliced
6 hard-boiled eggs, halved, for garnishing.

Marinade

3 sticks cinnamon
5 cardamom pods
2 green chillies
2.5ml turmeric
5ml roasted masala
30 ml garam masala
5 whole cloves
5 whole allspice
a few strands saffron
1 large tomato, skinned and grated
250ml buttermilk

Wash and drain the meat in a colander. Rub ginger, garlic and salt into meat. Combine marinade ingredients and marinate meat for about 3 hours. Boil lentils until tender, about 20 minutes. Rinse and drain. Wash rice until water runs clear and drain. Heat 50ml oil in a large saucepan over medium heat and add rice. Toss to coat well. Add 100ml hot water and cook, covered for 5 minutes on medium heat. Remove from the stove. Heat remaining oil in a large saucepan and fry potatoes on all sides until browned, about 4 minutes. Remove and set aside. Add onions and braise until brown and crisp for 7-8 minutes. Remove about a quarter of the onions from the pan and reserve. Add meat and spices to remaining onions and cook, covered for 30 minutes. Remove meat from saucepan and keep warm. Layer potatoes in same saucepan then layer other ingredients as follows: sprinkle half the rice over potatoes, arrange meat mixture over rice, sprinkle lentils over, then remaining rice, top with reserved onions, dot with butter and sprinkle with remaining hot water. Close saucepan, sealing lid tightly. Cook on high for 5 minutes then simmer for 1 hour on low heat, not opening saucepan. Top with halved hard-boiled eggs and serve with atchars. Enjoy!

Appendix 3

Brief

Graphic Design / Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Subject	Lecturers	Semester	Project intro	Nr of days	Deadline
GD 2 User Design	A Sean Beniman B Bruce Snyedon C Bruce Snyedon	2	17.10.09	10	Apr 31 10.05
Project: Me, Myself, I.					

For this last project we will produce a class book that gives each of you an opportunity to create a visual spread that is ABOUT YOU.

This book is about personal history and aims to give you a chance to explore yourselves a bit - Who are you, What are you? How can you, within the medium of a book, show something of yourself. This follows well after the brochure - you will each have a single opening page, a dps and a final single page.



As a starting point, choose a **SINGLE WORD** that will serve as an entry point into your visual and typographic exploration. Choose a word that is less literal and more open to interpretation, expressing double meanings and therefore creating a richer tapestry for interpretation. This word can be incorporated in the work. Use personal images from personal archives, family portraits, previous homes, artifacts from childhood, etc. diary entries, and other sources of autobiographical text are all welcome.

Move on from the purely superficial and be brave enough to allow people a glimpse of what really makes you tick. Explore graphic styles, typography, photography, illustration etc. Find a visual way to make an interesting statement about YOU. Place it, shape it and craft it beautifully so that your pages tell a story quietly, persistently, loudly or shockingly!

The **project aim** is for you to grow in confidence through this personal expression while still communicating something to an audience.

As Lucille Tenázas (an influential San Francisco designer who inspired this project) says:

“The whole idea of authorship is important.

I try to instill in students that you have to make your voice heard.

If you are aware of who you are, then you can ultimately take on the identities and problems others may pose, yet not lose your own.”

We will arrange for the book to be printed and bound with a plain cover (cost will be no more than your usual print expenditure).

Your work will be assessed by your peers and given a mark based on an agreed rubric.

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Fig. 4.4 My sketch.

Fig. 4.5 My sketch.

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My colleagues, for shouldering the extra workload during my sabbatical and for putting up with my closed door. It is now open...