AN INVESTIGATION INTO HOW CREATIVITY IS MAINTAINED BY GRAPHIC DESIGNERS IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO DESIGN PRACTICE

BY

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SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER'S IN GRAPHIC DESIGN IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND DESIGN, DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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MARCH 2015

Abstract

The primary objective of this study was to find out how practising graphic designers maintain creativity in a digital environment. The study also investigated three factors that may positively influence their creativity. First, whether practising creative experimentation outside commercial constraints positively impacts a designer's ability to produce creative design. Second, how drawing assists original design. Third, whether enriching sensory stimulation helps graphic designers maintain creativity.

An action research method was used. The project reviewed current literature and gathered empirical data through qualitative interviews and a workshop. In addition, a practical component was developed that consisted of drawings made from observation, drawings as concept experiments and examples of a commercial design and illustration.

Results proved that creativity is a multifaceted phenomenon, and it plays a pivotal role in contemporary graphic design. The three factors, practising creative experimentation, drawing, and sensory enrichment, proved to be beneficial to the creative abilities of graphic designers. The study concluded by acknowledging the challenges of the digital era within the field, and the importance for practising graphic designers to maintain creativity.

Declaration

I, Nic Human declare that AN INVESTIGATION INTO HOW CREATIVITY IS MAINTAINED BY GRAPHIC DESIGNERS IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO DESIGN PRACTICE is my original work. It has never been presented anywhere else for any purpose. This thesis in an outcome of my professional knowledge and experience within the graphic design field. Additional sources and all other influences are fully acknowledged in the references.

Signed . . . . . .

Date . . . . . 11 March 2015 . . . . .

Signed . . . . . .

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Date . . . . . March, 2015 . . . . . .

Prof. Kate Wells M.Des PhD (Co-Supervisor)

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my two supervisors, Rick and Kate. Rick, through your guidance I was able to carefully articulate and clarify these ideas. Kate, your uncanny optimism is truly inspiring, and your knowledge in academic writing proved to be invaluable to this study. You both made me believe this study was worth pursuing and quite possible.

Secondly, I would like to thank all the designers who personally contributed to this study: Nigel Holmes, Milton Glaser, Amanda Kavanagh, Sebastian Kaupert, Nick Young-Thompson, Richard Hart, Mitchell Harty, Odelle Hadnum, Kailash Maharaj and Nicole de Villiers. I am truly grateful for your contributions.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife, Estelle, and both my parents, Theo and Marietjie.

Thank you so much for all your support, encouragement and patience.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The motivating force behind my decision to pursue this research study was my reflections as a working graphic designer on the challenges that graphic designers face in maintaining creativity throughout their careers. These reflections led me to review relevant literature and conduct pilot interviews with other working graphic designers. It became evident that the designers I approached agreed that a study on this topic could be both relevant and necessary. Also, the possibility emerged that the impact of digital technology on the field may influence how graphic designers search for creative solutions. So, the initial research and reflections compelled me to conduct this study, especially to identify possible methods that may assist graphic designers in enhancing their creative skills.

Shaughnessy (2005) explains that, today, graphic design is a dynamic field and a practitioner must consider many aspects in order to function successfully within this field, such as interpreting briefs, delivering on deadlines, estimating cost and maintaining a creative approach. We observe that O'Reilly and Linkson (2009) state that it is a great challenge for people working in visual communication fields, such as graphic design and illustration, to maintain a motivation for creativity in their work. Meggs (1998) also informs us that the graphic design field has greatly been influenced by the digital revolution. He further states that commercialism is the reason why a mass of average quality graphic design work has become rampant (Meggs 2008).

After initial research was conducted in the form of scanning relevant literature, pilot interviews were conducted through Email correspondence with five Durban-based graphic designers, and then the primary research question was articulated:

How do practicing graphic designers that work in a digital environment maintain their creativity?

In an attempt to unpack this question, we briefly look at the text of a few seminal authors and designers. They are discussed in greater detail from page 32 in the Literature Review Chapter.

Stefan Sagmeister is an award-winning New York-based graphic designer who revealed, in an interview with Steven Heller, that various forms of design and art experimentation, outside his day-to-day work, allows him to remain creatively engaged in his profession (Heller 2009).

We see that digital design tools have largely replaced traditional methods such as hand drawing. However, the experienced graphic designers, Nigel Holmes (2008) and Milton Glaser (2000) believe that drawing can still play a vital role in creative design.

Julia Cameron (1995), author of the international bestseller, *The Artist's Way*, believes that how we stimulate our senses directly impacts the creative capacity of an individual.

Primarily, from these statements, the following sub-questions were formulated:

1. How can creative experimentation through practising design or art, outside the constraints of commercial design, contribute towards a graphic designer's creativity?
2. What role can drawing play in the creative process of generating original design solutions?
3. What impact, if any, can enriching sensory stimulation have on the creativity of a graphic designer who works in a digital environment?

This research project aims to define creativity, and the role this plays in graphic design. A methodology for the investigation was developed and data were gathered through both reviewing relevant current literature, and gathering empirical qualitative data. For the qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four Durban-based graphic designers namely, Nick Young-Thompson, Richard Hart, Mitchell Harty and Odelle Hadnum. Thereafter, a workshop was held where four graphic designers participated in creative projects. They are, Nick Young-Thompson, Mitchell Harty, Kailash Maharaj and Nicole de Villiers. The choice of participants depended on their area of focus, which is largely print design and illustration. Their availability played an important role. Furthermore, in the process of reviewing relevant and current literature, it became evident that the most prominent international influences came from New York City. Thus, four New York-based graphic design specialists were interviewed namely, Milton Glaser, Nigel Holmes, Amanda Kavanagh, Sebastian Kaupert.

The methodology of this study fits within the action research framework. The action research methodology was chosen because it encourages a person to critically reflect on the nature of a certain phenomenon, with the hope of improving shortcomings, especially shortcomings produced by dominant theories that serve as the context of an individual or group of people. This methodology then calls on both researcher and participant to explore possible solutions through actions. This concept is further discussed in Chapter 3 (Henning 2004).

Ultimately, through this research, the study may propose answers and possible methods as to how graphic designers can maintain creativity in a digital environment, within a dynamic and demanding field. If this phenomenon is thoroughly understood and discussed, the graphic design field may benefit by seeing more creative, inventive and imaginative work produced by its practitioners.

In an attempt to delimit the scope of this study, empirical research was conducted with graphic designers with a particular focus on print design and illustration. The study largely excludes web design and video, areas of specialisation encompass by the graphic design field. The study focuses on the graphic designer as an individual, and although group dynamics were explored in the workshop, the impact on the individual is what was addressed. Delimitation is necessary, because the current graphic design field has a number of areas of specialisation, as evident in the text of Sagmeister (2005). So, research findings that arise will be especially relevant for designers with a similar emphasis, namely print design and illustration.

This study uses specialist terms, and it will assist the reader if these are explained:

1. ‘Creative experimentation’ is used for the exploration of new ideas, and design or art techniques. This exploration is for personal development and may result in financial reward. For example, a designer may set aside time to explore methods to incorporate a sudden visual inspiration into a design project.
2. ‘Sensory enriching stimulation’ refers to experiences, as captured through an individual’s senses, where the individual’s state of mind can benefit from. For instance, the smell of a freshly baked croissant may trigger a vivid visualisation or memory of being at a street café in Paris.

3. ‘Commercial design’ refers to design solutions that are produced for financial rewards, and when a designer begins the design process while being aware of financial implications.
4. The term ‘influential designers’, as used in this study, refer to graphic designers that are discussed in graphic design literature. They are at times mentioned as seminal practitioners and authors, such as Nigel Holmes (Heller 2006) and Milton Glaser (2008).

Further terms, such as drawing and creativity, are addressed in the Literature Review Chapter.

The current graphic design field serves as the context of this study. So, this chapter continues to explore what we mean by the term ‘graphic design’. The chapter then explores the context of both major theoretical paradigms and the impact of the digital revolution, and explains how this possibly influences a contemporary graphic designer.

1.1 Graphic Design as a Discipline

‘Graphic’ in the term graphic design originated from the old Greek word ‘graphein’, which literally means ‘mark-making’. This word encompasses any marks made from writing to drawing. The English word ‘design’ is based on the French word ‘dessiner’, and it has been used since the Renaissance period. This French word was used for actions such as sketching, drawing, composing and planning. So, in-fact these two words have similar meanings (Barnard 2005).

In 1922 the distinguished book designer, William Addison Dwiggins, was the first to use the term ‘graphic design’. He claimed he needed to create a new term to name a new surfacing discipline. He described his work as adding aesthetic and creating structural order to printed pieces of visual communication (Meggs 1998).

As cited in Barnard the notable design practitioner, Richard Hollis, often used the term ‘visual communication’, and he states that graphic design is “the business of making or choosing marks and arranging them on a surface to convey an idea”. To separate this rather broad definition from fine art, Hollis later added that, “unlike the artist, the designer plans for mechanical reproduction” (Barnard 2005:11).

Today, graphic design is still regarded as a young discipline, especially if one considers the history that distinguishes it from other forms of art and design. Richard Grefé (2008), the Executive Director of the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), states that it is important for practising graphic designers to consistently reflect and be responsive in a professional businesslike manner towards the needs of clients. This will enable graphic design to establish a firm foundation as a profession and a discipline.

We observe that Dwiggins (Meggs 1998) and Grefé (2008) refer to graphic design as a discipline. But how do we define a discipline?

According to the graphic design theorists, Ellen Lupton and Abbott Miller:

> *A discipline is the range of objects, practices, and information that define a field of knowledge. A discipline such as law, medicine, art, or philosophy embraces modes of learning and obeying, knowing and conforming. The boundaries of a discipline mark not only what falls within its breadth but also what the field excludes, what it bars* (Lupton and Miller 1999:66).

Milton Glaser (2008), regarded as the doyen of American graphic design, encourages practitioners to consider the rich and illustrious history of graphic design, to gain a clearer understanding of the field. He believes that graphic designers who work in marketing and fashionable trends might argue the importance of knowing more of graphic design history, because these areas of design are often purely concerned with what is novel and new.

If we consider graphic design to be visual communication (Barnard 2005), one may argue that making marks to visually communicate ideas, has been present since cave-dwelling prehistoric times. Homo sapiens, or modern humans, painted and carved marks on rock surfaces to communicate either to themselves or to future generations. Mark making was their way of recording knowledge, and, ever since, it has played an integral role in the development of our species (Meggs 1998).

Steven Heller, a leading author on graphic design, states it is only since the last few decades that the field's history has been recorded and chronicled. Therefore, so far, it has been a difficult task for current historians and scholars to determine the exact sequence of events in graphic design history. He believes certain factors cause the

discipline to become characterised and propelled forward. Such factors are “war, economic depression, technological progression, etc” (Heller 2000: XI).

The roots of the term graphic design, lie in the modern art movement, and the discipline established itself as a trade in the last five decades. Graphic design’s theoretical origin can be found in the Gestalt psychology movement as well as in abstract painting (Lupton and Miller 1999).

‘Gestalt’ is a German word for form and shape. This psychology movement was a major theoretical underpinning in modern art, especially under the Minimalist sculptors and painters, such as Ronald Bladen and Robert Morris. This movement continually challenged the boundaries of human perception (Arnason 2003).

Lupton and Miller (1999) state that the avant-garde art and design movements, such as Bauhaus and de Stijl, during the second decade of the twentieth century, emerged from this thinking. As one can see in the following text extract:

> *Pervading these works is a focus on perception at the expense of interpretation. ‘Perception’ refers to the subjective experience of the individual as framed by the body and brain. Aesthetic theories based on perception favour sensation over intellect, seeing over reading, universality over cultural difference, physical immediacy over social meditation* (Lupton and Miller 1999).

In graphic design history, this theoretical underpinning was probably most evident in poster design. Image and text were simplified to communicate clearly and persuasively to the public, often creating a sense of desire. These persuasive posters told the public to either buy a product or attend an event. Yet, unlike the, often ambiguous nature of modern art, poster design had to retain pictorial reference, to clearly communicate a message to the general public. These works were usually distinguishable by their dramatic flat colours and bold shapes (Meggs 1998).

It was the struggling poet, Lucian Bernhard, whose poster for the Priester matches competition, that was thought to be groundbreaking for its simplicity. It conveyed the message through the brand name as a single word with two flat colour matches. This poster is reproduced in Figure 5.1 of Appendix 2. But it is only during the First World War that the art of poster design was refined and used as a powerful medium

of mass communication. The power of war posters is evident in works such as Julius Gipkens' German symbolic eagle poster and James Montgomery Flagg's American poster for military recruitment. Reproductions of these two posters can be viewed in Figure 5.2 and 5.3 of Appendix 2 (Meggs 1998).

About the purpose of graphic design, the practitioner and author Katherine McCoy states:

> *Unlike its venerable cousin, architecture, graphic design is a very new design expression, a phenomena of the last hundred years. A spontaneous response to the communication needs of the industrial revolution, graphic design was invented to sell the fruits of mass production to growing consumer societies in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rapidly expanding reproduction technologies provided the means for graphic design's participation in the vast economic, political, technological, and social changes of that era* (McCoy 2001: 3).

During the twentieth century graphic design has evolved into a distinct form of commercial art, and has branched into many genres. It has developed beyond mere typography and layout into a discipline consisting of several kinds of 'visual and textual' forms of communication. During this century the term began to encompass many areas of design such as magazine layout, packaging design and reproduction, poster design, print advertisements and copy writing, logo design, corporate identity development and branding, as well as the initial phases of the digital online and interactive design that we know today (Heller & Pettit 2000).

According to Jorge Frascara (2001: 14), the increase in the knowledge of people's social experiences and how users experience products had a fundamental impact on graphic design during the twentieth century. Frascara believes the "experimental psychology, cultural anthropology, and even sociology" during the time of the Second World War greatly impacted graphic design. He describes three stages of development in the following text extract:

> *...while an advertisement from around 1900 would be centered on describing and praising the product, one from the 1950s would describe the product in connection with the pleasures that it would*

> *bring. And one from the 1990s would be focused on desirable experiences and try to connect them to the product* (Frascara 2001: 14).

Since magazines gained popularity in western society, their design challenges have drawn many graphic designers. Magazines often reveal shifts in the trends of pop culture and fashion. Steven Heller believes that magazines such as *Avant Garde*, *Esquire*, *Fact*, *Fortune* and *Émigré* played a pivotal role in establishing trends and styles within this discipline. It was, and still is, a medium where many aspects of Western society are displayed and designed as visual communication. Such aspects include economics, engineering, fashion, leisure and art. Through their ephemeral nature, magazines gave designers the opportunity to design for advertisements, explore new styles in layout and typography, as well as editorial illustrations, photography and copywriting (Heller and Ballance 2001).

In the following text extract McCoy explains the thinking behind this form of communication:

> *These men understood design as a balanced process involving the powerful multiple modes of seeing and reading, and sensed the possibility of theory and method as guiding the creative process – the first rudimentary seeds of professionalism* (McCoy 2001: 5).

Today, the design author and practitioner, Adrian Shaughnessy (2003: 73) believes that the graphic design field has developed into a "global business and cultural phenomenon". It has grown immensely from a "craft-based skill" often undertaken by anonymous practitioners. Even though graphic design has not yet experienced the publicity of other more established design disciplines, such as fashion and architecture, he states that graphic design can be seen all over the world.

Grefé, from AIGA, states that now there is an increasing demand for graphic designers in the post-industrial economy, through the information age (Grefé 2008).

In order to understand the movements in the discipline of graphic design, Heller (2001) expresses in his text, *Introduction: The Beginning of History*, the necessity of viewing design work alongside the economic and cultural context. It is important to consider the time and place, as well as when and where designs are displayed or are in circulation.

1.2 The Influences of Major Theoretical Paradigms on Graphic Design

Philip B. Meggs is regarded as the first prominent graphic design historian, and he believed that an understanding of the history of the field is important if designers want to "continue a cultural legacy of beautiful form and effective communication".

Meggs' text states:

> *If we ignore this legacy, we run the risk of becoming buried in the mindless morass of a commercialism whose molelike vision ignores human values and needs as it burrows forward into darkness* (Meggs 2008: 9).

According to Heller, graphic design was heavily influenced by modernism, with leading designers, such as Paul Rand, adopting a modernist approach in their work. Heller further regards Rand as one of the most influential graphic designers of the twentieth century (Heller 1999).

In his *Paul Rand Lecture Series* at the School of Visual Arts (SVA), in New York City, Heller (2011) explains the modern influence on prominent designers such as W.A. Dwiggins, Rand and particularly the work that E. McKnight Kauffer did for *Portfolio* magazine. Heller also views Alex Steinweiss as a pioneer of the modern era as he is known as the first designer of original art for record albums.

In his seminal text, *No More Rules*, the design writer, Rick Poynor (2003), states how many graphic designers also embraced the postmodern theoretical paradigm and how they have applied it to their design work. He tells us that following the rejection of modernism, mainly during the 1960s and 1970s, deconstruction as an analytical process became a popular approach, leading many designers to reject the conventional modernist use of design elements, especially in typography and in photography. The design work of particularly David Carson became synonymous with this approach. According to Poynor, the work of current prominent graphic designers, such as Paula Scher, Peter Saville and Neville Brody, has significantly been influenced by postmodernism.

We note the influences of two dominant theories on graphic design, modernism and postmodernism, and for this study, it is important to briefly consider the essence of these two theories and their influences on graphic design.

> *Among all modern philosophers there is perhaps no one who exerts a greater fascination upon large masses of people than Friedrich Nietzsche* (Carus 1907: 230).

Paul Carus (1907: 230-231) states Nietzsche's popularity was mainly due to two factors. First, his philosophical style was direct and unambiguous. Second, because he did not appeal "to the intellect, but to sentiment, to passions, to our ambition, and to our vanity". Carus continues that these are attributes that directly appeal to human nature, and, according to Carus, Nietzsche's ideals stimulated sovereign pride, 'irresponsibility', and 'absolute independence'. He believed all authority and order should be questioned, including a belief in God, truth, law, and even logical thinking. For Nietzsche, perfection did not lie in wisdom and nobility, but rather in strength, vigor, and "an unbending desire" for a power that knows no limits. To a large extent, this ideology became the foundation of modernism.

The author David Harvey (1989) states in his seminal text, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, that modernism, was mainly preoccupied with continual innovation, dramatic change, the ephemeral and fragmentation. Modernism challenged various disciplines to develop in isolation by separating themselves from their historical continuity. Harvey continues that the modern mindset did not have reverence for its own history.

The theorist and linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, was a prominent figure in developing structuralism, a modern method that was concerned with analysis and interpretation of human perception. In Saussure's writings it is evident that modernism and structuralism shared the same theoretical underpinnings (Harris 1983).

An insight from Saussure that significantly influenced typographic design and visual communication is the critical relationship between the signifier, and the signified, in written and spoken language. Saussure believed the reliability of this relationship can only be fathomed through a specific cultural context, for example, the connection between the concept of a dog, and the graphic marks, 'dog', can only

be made by people who are familiar with the English language (Lupton and Miller 1999).

The Industrial Revolution gave birth to modern design. Artists and artisans from this reformation adopted a critical approach to creating visual messages, through both form and function (Lupton and Miller 1999).

The influence of modernism is especially evident in the collaborative design work of the Austrian social scientist, Otto Neurath, and the graphic artist, Gerd Arntz. Their work has enabled theorists to directly link visual modernism to social modernism, as well as the psychology movements of the time. They designed highly simplified graphic icons to inform and aid modern life. Neurath called the system he developed, Isotype, short for, the *International System of Typographic Picture Education.* The aim of his system was to simply depict concepts without necessarily having to read the text to understand it. They developed signs for public spaces and transport, and were especially interested in creating statistics and information charts in educational posters, textbooks, and museums. This approach was deeply embedded in Gestalt psychology (Henning 2010).

The German artist, designer and architect, Peter Behrens, has influenced many modern graphic designers. The well-known modern architects, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe were only two of his apprentices. Meggs believes that Behrens's design has influenced much design of the twentieth century. Behrens had a particular interest in typography, and in designing new fonts such as *Behrensschrift*. To him, reading text was like "watching a bird's flight or the gallop of a horse. Both seem graceful and pleasing, but the viewer does not observe details of their form or movement. Only the rhythm of the lines is seen by the viewer, and the same is true of a typeface" (Heller 2001).

McCoy (2001) expresses that even though typography has a long-standing history, the quest to embed meaning in designed type has only emerged since the early stages of the twentieth century. The first modern graphic designers realised that text can both be read and seen, as evident in Futurist typographic experiments. The original revolutionary modern artists of the Dada, Futurist, De Stijl, and Constructivist movements often concentrated on visual communication. They repudiated the conventional divisions between fine art and applied art, 'high' and 'low' art. Visual communication gave them an opportunity to explore both

functionality and the self-expression often associated with 'high' art. In their discourse, function did not oppose art.

The Bauhaus movement's aim was to tie together design, craft, and art, through a shared philosophy and a "sense of identity". McCoy states:

> *Several early Modernists went on to execute some of the first serious 'professional' graphic design, applying their early experiments to the pragmatic communications needs of manufacturing clients* (McCoy 2001: 4).

Simultaneously, the Russian Constructivists began to design for public mass communication during the Russian Revolution, and many chose to maintain their artistic identities (McCoy 2001).

According to Heller, early graphic design was propelled forward by radical modern designers, such as the American designer, Alvin Lustic, who refused to create through conventional commercial art styles. Known for his book covers, he was mainly influenced by European design of the 1920s and 1930s. His influences had a profound impact on the American book cover designs of the 1940s. Lustic freely borrowed from his favourite modern painters, like Joan Miró and Paul Klee. From an early age, he decided to be a 'modern' designer rather than a 'traditional' designer, striving to maintain a fresh 'eye' to appreciate both modern design and art. Lustic also had ideals that design could change the world, for the better (Heller 2001).

But, since the two great wars, the Western world has undergone major changes. Political, social, religious and cultural views were dramatically influenced by theoretical shifts. In short, due to the devastation of the Second World War and the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Western world, to a large extent, 'lost its faith' in the grand theories such as modernism, structuralism and Marxism (Eagleton 2003).

Modernism aimed to unite people as it gave rise to industry and scientism, but modernism did not distinguish between nationality, ethnic and religious backgrounds. David Harvey describes it as a 'paradoxical unity' that caused an "overwhelming sense of fragmentation" (Harvey 1989: 11).

Harvey communicates in the following text that:

> *The twentieth century – with its death camps and death squads, its militarism and two world wars, its threat of nuclear annihilation and its experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – has certainly shattered this optimism (of modernism). Worse still, the suspicion lurks that the Enlightenment project was doomed to turn against itself and transform the quest for human emancipation into a system of universal oppression in the name of human liberation* (Harvey 1989: 13).

Since the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of the hippie movement, a belief in linear progress has been replaced by scrutinising questions, such as whether humans are even progressing. 'Absolute' truth as the foundation of dogma and doctrine were substituted by heterogeneous beliefs and pluralism. Thus, emerged the postmodern and post-structural thinking (Eagleton 2003).

It is largely the theories of philosophers such as Michael Foucault and Jacques Derrida that contributed to the change towards postmodernism and deconstruction as a form of social analysis. Derrida's originally French book, *Of Grammatology,* in 1967, rejected modern criticism.

> *Derrida described deconstruction as a mode of questioning through and about technologies, formal devices, social institutions, and central metaphors of representation* (Lupton and Miller 1999: 3).

Lupton and Miller articulates the physical manifestation of deconstruction as following:

> *(T)his suggestive word has served to label practices in architecture, graphic design, products, fashion that favor chopped-up, layered, and fragmented forms, often imbued with ambiguous futuristic overtones* (Lupton and Miller 1999: 3).

Poynor (2003) believes that postmodern design is often identified for its stylistic approaches. Yet, he claims that even though these styles have seemingly lost popularity since the late 1980s, the theories on which they were based might even have intensified.

Poynor further states:

> *If modernism sought to create a better world, postmodernism – to the horror of many observers – appears to accept the world as it is* (Poynor 2003: 11).

The Swiss designer, Wolfgang Weingart, is seen to be a seminal graphic designer in understanding the postmodern influence on this field. He rejected the "reductive conventions of Swiss modernist typography". Weingart (1972 cited in Poynor 2003: 20) wrote:

> *It seemed as if everything that made me curious was forbidden: to question established typographic practice, change the rules, and reevaluate its potential… I was motivated to provoke this stodgy profession and to stretch the typeshop's capabilities to the breaking point, and finally, to prove once again that typography is an art*.

Following Weingart, one may consider Dan Friedman as a prominent postmodern designer, yet he felt uneasy about this term. He preferred to call himself a 'radical modernist'. Friedman's work is difficult to place as he often worked in three dimensions, and often moved between creating gallery art and functional graphic design. Friedman embraced complexity in his work, because he felt there "are often more ideas than space", an approach one may call postmodern. Friedman was influenced by the idea that design can serve humanity and be culturally inspirational (Holt 2001: 200-201).

In an essay Chuck Byrne and Martha Witte describe the influence of the deconstruction theory on design and typography. They state:

> *Within the last few years, typography and design in general have been influenced, either directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, by the concept of 'deconstruction'… We live in a deconstructed world, a world agitated by more and more complexity, where the attention span diminishes hourly (turning us into a society of information grazers), and values appear to change weekly. It is inevitable that heretofore clear and supposedly resolved notions about what design does and the way it does it will begin to blur and ultimately reshape themselves* (Byrne and Witte 2001: 246).

Byrne and Witte (2001) further express that many graphic designers may have thought of deconstruction as an unrelated theory to their practice. Though they feel arrangement and characteristics lie at the core of typographic design, and this influences the meaning and appearance. Byrne and Witte believe this approach is indeed influenced by the visual discourse of deconstruction. They point out that digital effects, such as layering, caused photography, similar to typography, to also gain emphasis in deconstructive design.

The renowned graphic designer, Paula Scher, who has been influenced by this discourse and known for experimental typography, states that the designer should decide about the legibility in typography according to the purpose of the text (Byrne and Witte 2001).

Even though many designers concern themselves with postmodern design and complexity, Poynor (2003: 171) believes the conspicuous purpose of graphic design remains "to help a business to sell things". He suggests the likelihood that the 'postmodern condition' may foreseeably remain the dominant theory that influences both society and graphic design, even "imposing operational constraints or 'rules' of its own". Following this statement he asks two questions:

> *To what sustained uses, other than its familiar and largely unquestioned commercial uses, might graphic design be applied?*
>
> and
>
> *How, and even more to the point, where should designers who wish to engage in a rule-breaking postmodernism of resistance position themselves* (Poynor 2003: 171)*?*

Today, Shaughnessy (2003: 74), states that postmodernism has led the field to be split into two directions. First, is, what he calls, "mainstream graphic design". This branch is what most people see through advertising and branding. The second branch is "graphic design that concerns itself with issues like self-expression, complexity and ambiguity".

1.3 The Impact of the Digital Revolution on Graphic Design

> *During the last quarter of the twentieth century, electronic and computer technology advanced at a staggering pace, transforming many areas of human activity. Graphic design was irrevocably changed by digital-computer hardware and software* (Meggs 1998: 455).

Meggs (1998) states, since the 1990s, the desktop computer has enabled a single designer to execute many areas of design and reproduction processes for print. Due to the Industrial Revolution, these areas, such as doing typesetting and creating photographic negatives, used to be handled by various specialists. Meggs further states the rapid improvement in digital software during this time has caused many, even initially resistant designers, to explore the creative possibilities of this new medium. This medium enabled them to manipulate type, photographs and illustrations in groundbreaking ways. During this period, the Internet revolutionised the way people gained information. Designers were able to draw from both modernist and post-modernist influences to create their design, causing a vast range of styles and approaches.

Meggs believes another technological development that had a profound impact on graphic design, was the invention of the 'mouse' as a scrolling tool. This allowed people to work intuitively rather than using 'mathematical coding'. This directly impacted the digital creative work of graphic designers (Meggs 1998: 455).

The pioneer postmodern designer April Greiman instantly recognised that the computer had changed "the design process in fundamental ways". For Greiman, the invention of the 'undo function' enabled designers to delete mistakes in ways they were unable to do with traditional tools, such as ink or even pencil drawings. This function caused digital design to remain 'unfinished', because work could always be altered. Greiman observed that this caused an uncertainty evident in many designers' work (Poynor 2003: 96).

During the mid-90s, a 'techno' futuristic style began to emerge in digital art and entertainment. Graphic designers adopted this stylistic approach. This is particularly evident in the work the studio, Me Company, has produced for Nike ads and Björk's album art. To achieve these effects graphic designers also began to use the 3D

animation software often used only by animators and electronic game developers (Poynor 2003).

Today, to a large extent, these digital tools and functions are still being expanded on. Gavin Ambrose and Paul Harris believe that creative design is in a type of 'golden age'. They state:

> *Never before have the opportunities and outlets been so broad as society continues to become visually richer and more adventurous and technological developments continue to advance the frontiers of the visual world* (Ambrose and Harris 2003: 6).

In accordance with Ambrose and Harris (2003) this study is in favour of the creative possibilities that digital computer tools present to designers.

Nowadays, software development, online stock images and font libraries rapidly speed up the design process. The Internet has an extensive range of resources for graphic designers, yet traditional design skills, such as drawing, have largely been replaced by digital tools.

The digital age has also brought about a revival in illustration with the birth of vector graphics. Current affordable software such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign and Dreamweaver give image-makers a range of new possibilities with which to create their illustrations and designs. But, Angus Hyland and Roanne Bell (2003: 7) argue that "the innovations that facilitate creativity can also stifle or restrict it". They continue, that outsourcing to professional practitioners can be removed from a client's budget "by the point-and-click simplicity of ever-evolving graphics packages".

In this chapter we have observed how graphic design was established as a discipline; how the modernist and postmodernist theoretical movements have impacted it; and how the field has been influenced by major technological advancements, such as the digital revolution.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A range of current literature has been scanned in order to understand more about the primary research question: How do practicing graphic designers that work in a digital environment maintain their creativity?

Creativity is the central theme in this question and therefore the Literature Review Chapter unpacks the multiple facets of creativity to understand more about this phenomenon. Further, this review investigates the role that creativity plays in graphic design, and the review discusses the three research sub-questions, as proposed in the Introduction Chapter. This is undertaken in order to find out whether the practice of these disciplines impacts on the creativity of a graphic designer. Furthermore, this chapter reflects on the text of seminal authors on creativity, drawing, graphic design and the science of the senses.

Today, creativity is a frequently used word in our society - from *creative* business solutions to *creative* hairstyles. In an interview conducted with Milton Glaser, at his studio in New York City, he stated:

> *…it's a mischievous term, and a hierarchical term. It is also a social term. People want to be creative because it is supposed to be an elevated state of being. But no one knows exactly what that means* (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

Nigel Holmes, predominantly known for his information design work for *TIME* magazine, also explained in an interview conducted at his home in Westport, in the USA, that he maintains a creative approach in his work by treating every project as new and fresh. But, he admits he doesn't like the word creative, because, today, he feels it is over used. Holmes stated:

> *…in America, it (creativity) is often even used as a noun. They say: "Oh, you're a 'creative'", especially in the advertising industry. Or they say: "We have to hand it over to the 'creatives'." As if writers aren't*

> *creative. Actually, everybody is creative. Madoff was creative in the way he created his Ponzi Scheme.*
>
> *I feel uneasy by the idea that 'creative' equals 'art' or 'new'* (2011, pers. comm. 27 September).

Mark Oldach (1995), the author of, *Creativity for Graphic Designers*, believes creativity plays an integral part of successful graphic design practice. Due to the availability of digital imagery and increasing time constraints, graphic designers seldom have the time to approach a brief in a fresh and creative way. Yet, he argues that it is real creativity that lies behind successful and clear communication design. A creative approach enables a design to stand out from the clutter of visual imagery we experience today. He continues that a designer should look for creative opportunities in various aspects of graphic design, and that "a truly innovative designer treats all projects as opportunities for creativity" (Oldach 1995: 62).

So what is creativity?

2.1 Defining the Multiple Facets of Creativity

Before we look at the role that creativity plays, or the role it is expected to play in the graphic design field, it is important to first try to define the word 'creativity' in a broader sense, because it seems to be widely used in various fields, disciplines and industries.

The cognitive scientist, Margaret A. Boden, writes:

> *Creativity is a puzzle, a paradox, some say a mystery. Inventors, scientists and artists rarely know how their original ideas arise. They mention intuition but cannot say how it works* (Boden 1998: 22).

Boden further states that a scientific approach to the concept of creativity is often void of artistic explanation. On this point, Boden attempts to define creativity as the "novel combinations of old ideas… due to the improbability of the combination", and that often, psychometric tests are designed to calculate creativity based on this principle. But, she claims that in order for us to call an idea creative it must not only be new, but also interesting, and these interesting ideas are indeed formed by

previously unrelated concepts. She also believes that combination theorists tend to exclude value in their attempts to define creativity (Boden 1998: 22).

Sir Ken Robinson, a renowned author on creativity and education, also includes 'value' in his definition of creativity by unambiguously stating "creativity is a process of having original ideas that have value" (Azzam 2009: 22).

If we briefly look at how the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1995: 273) defines the word 'creative', it simply states that it is the act of making something through using one's imagination. Though it is a frequently used term in Western society, it was only in 1933 that the *Oxford English Dictionary* decided to include the word 'creativity', and it only became popular during the 40s and 50s (Oakley 2009).

The seminal author Edward De Bono (1970), known for his pragmatic approach to creativity, challenges the popular assumption that the domain of creativity only belongs to a few gifted people. He states that lateral thinking is a skill that can be learned, similar to mathematics. He maintains that lateral thinking is important to challenge the rigidity of logical thinking. De Bono states that these two modes can dramatically complement each other in idea generation.

Further, he invites us to rather focus on the term lateral thinking instead of creativity, because, to him, the term creativity tends to describe a result, and lateral thinking a process. De Bono believes this process plays a pivotal role in generating creative ideas. He describes a problem-solving approach to creativity, rather than an approach that "may be justified in the art world where creativity involves aesthetic sensibility, emotional resonance and a gift for expression". De Bono uses lateral thinking as an attempt to generate *new* ideas, by deliberately "breaking out of the concept prisons of old ideas". This thinking, he states, is what causes advancement and change in every field, from science, the arts to business (De Bono 1970: 11).

Barrie Hawkins, the author of *How to Generate Great Ideas,* also embraces a problem-solving pragmatic approach. He believes that there are various perceptions and mindsets that can influence and assist in utilising the skill of generating creative ideas, beginning with self-assessment. Not neglecting the important role that other people can play in assessing one's ideas, he encourages the reader to avoid a negative frame of mind when searching for ideas. He believes that one should initially suspend judgment, to encourage the generation of many ideas, even those that might initially seem frivolous or unfit for a problem. He continues that criticism

and evaluation is an important part of selecting feasible ideas, or in De Bono's terms, creative ideas (Hawkins 1999).

According to Alison Antes and Michael Mumford (2009), from The University of Oklahoma, time constraints seem to play an integral role in creativity aimed at solving a problem. In their text, *Effects of Time Frame on Creative Thought: Process Versus Problem-Solving Effects*, they explain that people's perceptions of time often influence their creative thought processes, as well as their motivation for doing creative work. In their text, mainly based on quantitative research evaluation, they state that it is evident that "time has a profound, and pervasive, influence on creative work and creative achievement" (Antes and Mumford 2009: 166).

Traditionally, it is understood that time constraints have a negative impact on people's ability to generate creative ideas when solving a problem. They give three reasons for this perception. First, creative thought processes need time. Second, people use simpler and less effective methods in solving a problem when confronted by limited time. Third, the cognition processes required are used to manage time, rather than concentrating on creative thought (Antes & Mumford, 2009).

However, Antes and Mumford believe that induced time constraints may lead to focused search strategies in idea generation, and it is possible that these constraints may even contribute towards some creative thinking processes (Antes and Mumford 2009).

Similar to Hawkin's approach, they also recognise two important aspects in creative thought processes, namely idea generation and analysis. They continue by describing, no less than, eight 'core processing activities':

1. Problem Identification
2. Information Gathering
3. Concept Selection
4. Conceptual Combination
5. Idea Generation
6. Idea Evaluation
7. Implementation Planning
8. Monitoring

In this list one begins to observe the complexity of what they call a 'multifaceted phenomenon' (Antes and Mumford 2009: 167).

In her research paper, *Unpacking Creativity*, Kerrie Unsworth (2001: 3) also recognises creativity as a multifaceted phenomenon. She explains that "creativity is usually defined as the production of novel ideas that are useful and appropriate to the situation". In order for us to understand the process, she argues that we must look at the multifaceted characteristics of creativity to fully understand this phenomenon. She believes a 'unitary construct' prevents a more complete understanding of this phenomenon. Encouraging the reader to rather consider the heterogeneous nature of creativity, she developed a matrix based on four types of creativity: expected, responsive, contributory and proactive.

Importantly, this matrix recognises two factors that she finds pivotal in establishing what influences the different types of creativity. She asks the following two questions: First, *why* is the person engaging in a creative process? Second, *what* causes the person to engage in creative thinking, i.e., what is the 'trigger'? (Unsworth 2001: 5)

In the first question, Unsworth implies that we must recognise whether the reason for engaging in a creative process is initiated "through self-determined choice or because of external demands". The second question points to "the degree with which the problem has been formulated before the creator begins the process". Unsworth explains two possibilities: A closed problem, for example, an algebra formula, or an open problem, which includes most artistic explorations. She continues that the four types of creativity are based on the four combinations of these two factors (Unsworth 2001: 5).

Even though Unsworth (2001) and Antes and Mumford (2009) suggest that creativity is a term with many aspects, one begins to note a distinction between a problem solving scientific approach, and the creativity often associated with the arts (Boden 1998; De Bono 1970).

Similar to Unsworth's first question, Kate Oakley (2009: 405), from the City University, in London, also recognises the approach to creative idea generation through intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. She cites Anna Craft by stating there are "two waves of conceptualising creativity": First, creativity as personal expression, an approach often based on a romantic perception. Second, creativity driven by social

factors, often viewed as a ‘democratic’ phenomenon that anyone can learn. The latter, ties in well with De Bono (1970) and Hawkins (1999). Oakley states that the second approach is the one most people are familiar with. This ‘wave’ is what mainly influences industry, business innovation, and society. Oakley believes that it is this form of creativity that “brings us lots of new products in the marketplace”.

Oakley (2009: 405) cites Rob Pope in stating that the social emphasis on this term is arguably a modern response to dynamic social change and technological advancement. These are due to “specifically modern dilemmas, including space travel, global communications and population explosion”.

Oakley warns of an unbalanced approach to creativity by also looking at creativity based on personal expression, or rather practised through an intrinsic motivation. She states:

> *Most obviously there is a danger that by ‘mainstreaming’ creativity in this way, and stressing its pro-social elements, we risk excluding creative expression that is marginal, radical, counter-cultural or in some way deemed to be anti-social* (Oakley 2009: 405).

This dimension of creativity is often associated with a romantic, even mystical, approach, and we see that a purely problem-solving approach might fall short of fully defining this term (De Bono 1970).

So, if creativity is in fact a term that has only gained popularity in the first half of the twentieth century, it might lead one to ask:

What inspired Ludwig von Beethoven to compose the choral where the choir bursts into the chorus in his 9th Symphony? Why did Vincent van Gogh feel compelled to paint Starry Starry Night with such a sense of movement and energy? And, more recently, why did JK Rowling write an enigmatic story about a magical school in England? These are all works of art well-known for their imaginative quality and value.

As Nigel Holmes implied, nowadays, creativity is often associated with the arts, and so, one might benefit from looking at this relationship.

Julia Cameron (1995), a renowned author on creativity, has taught creative workshops for artists from various disciplines for many years. In her seminal text,

The Artist's Way, Cameron states that the creative path of an artist is a spiritual path, and she encourages artists to acknowledge their own spiritual needs. Further, Cameron also urges artists to kindle a belief in a 'Great Creator', or a Deity, that endorses their artistic endeavours.

Cameron (1995) recognises that this may be difficult, as many people do not believe in a God or religion, but she maintains that this is important in developing an open-mindedness needed for artistic and creative exploration. She states that often it is the fear of failure and judgment that keeps people from artistic exploration and expression. She lists quotes from celebrated artists, composers and writers who seemingly acknowledge a belief in a deity, such as Johannes Brahms, Piet Mondrian, Leo Tolstoy, CG Jung, René Magritte and William Blake.

Cameron makes little attempt to distinguish 'artistic' and 'creative' skills. One may possibly assume she views these two terms as synonymous, which may be problematic if one attempts a scientific approach.

However, in *The Artist's Way*, Cameron (1995) introduces two fundamental disciplines that play a pivotal role in developing or recovering one's artistic and creative abilities:

Firstly, the discipline of, in her terms, the 'Morning Pages'. The Morning Pages is the practice of writing three pages of free writing each morning. This enables an artist to move past the, often negative, thoughts that block the creative process (Cameron 1995).

In her text, *The Sound of Paper*, Cameron states that the "Morning Pages are a potent form of meditation for hyperactive Westerners", and the "Morning Pages awakens our intuition" (Cameron 2004: 2).

Secondly, Cameron mentions the necessity for artists to deliberately and regularly expose themselves to enriching sensory stimulation. She calls these practices 'Artist Dates', and believes it is important for artists to draw from these experiences when engaging in the creative process. She also stresses the importance of doing these excursions alone (Cameron 1995). She states:

> *On an Artist Date, we become intimate with ourselves, our hopes, dreams, and aspirations… (T)he Artist Date is a serious tool for self-discovery* (Cameron 2004: 3).

In her text, *Rethinking Creativity*, Kerry Freedman introduces yet another dimension to the concept of creativity. Similar to art, she states that it "must be defined as applied in a cultural context". She states that Einstein most probably would not have envisaged his theory of relativity if he weren't surrounded by the scientific interest in space travel. Similarly, Picasso may not have painted *Guernica* if he wasn't acutely aware of the political climate and artistic discourse of his time (Freedman 2010: 10).

Freedman also believes that critical reflection plays an important part in the creative process, and that critique, as the starting point, has not yet sufficiently been researched. She continues that a creative approach, in some way, chooses a new direction, departing from a previous 'path' or perception.

In Sarah P. Richards' unpublished master's degree dissertation, *Artist's Block: The Creation of a Workshop to Reengage Visual Artists with Their Creative Process by Using the Natural Environment as Facilitator*, at Durban University of Technology (DUT), she attempts to define creativity. Richards quotes McNiff by stating that the creative process is an energy that follows a certain direction. She believes that this process "suggests a series of actions, changes, and fluctuations", and that, related to Boden's (1998) statement, a creative idea is the consequence of "previously unrelated areas" (Richards 2008: 25).

Similar to Antes and Mumford (2009), Richards (2008) looks at frameworks that consist of various steps by pointing out the creative process present when creating. These steps are closely related to the actual process of creating an artwork, such as the technical skills needed to complete the task. These frameworks consist of various steps, such as identifying the assignment, and the invention of the new direction. But, in two frameworks she suggests an unexplainable moment in a particular step where the idea arises, and only thereafter follows the execution of the artwork.

'Play' is a concept that Richards (2008) focuses on by stating that it should form an important part in the creative process. Richards states the artist, Wassily Kandinsky, believed that it is important to experiment through 'playing' with ideas, and that this, seemingly childlike, playing, is fundamental in connecting the artist with the process of creating art.

Kandinsky harshly criticised the materialist society by describing the reality of materialism as a "useless game… not yet past; it holds the awakening soul still in its

grip". Richards draws the connection that in order for an artist to experiment, the artist needs to move past the fear of financial failure, a factor very real in the commercial side of the art world (Richards 2008: 27).

We have looked at several different approaches to creativity, such as the approaches required in creating art, and in solving practical problems.

Nevertheless, the reviewed texts reveal fairly consistently that creativity is related to a process of generating ideas, through using one's imagination. This process is influenced by one's own facility to think beyond conventions in choosing an alternative direction of thought, with the intention of applying it to a problem.

In a qualitative interview conducted with Milton Glaser he distilled this multifaceted phenomenon by stating:

> *…you would have to relate creativity to transgression. Most creative efforts, at least in part, are a repudiation of an existing condition, and it shows of an alternative vision* (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

Robinson explains, in an interview with Amy Azzam (2009), that critical reflection forms an integral part of creative thought processing, and that, in fact, it is an essential skill for the 21st century. He believes it is of paramount importance that people approach the pressing problems of this century, such as economic unpredictability and exploding population growth, with a creative mindset.

Robinson agrees that creativity is not only a skill available to the 'elite few', but rather it is a skill that anybody can develop through practising. He thinks this term can be associated with many fields: "math, science, music, dance, cuisine, teaching, running a family, or engineering". He states that "a big part of being creative is looking for new ways of doing things within whatever activity you're involved in" (Azzam 2009: 22).

Following on that trend, Robinson believes that many creative endeavours can really benefit from collaboration; "Nobody lives in a vacuum" (Azzam 2009: 25).

Alternatively, he also acknowledges that some individuals express real creative quality:

> *when they connect with a particular medium or set of materials or processes that excites them… If you combine a personal aptitude with*

> *a passion for that same thing, then you go into a different place creatively* (Azzam, 2009: 26).

Robinson further states that it is very important to encourage people, especially children, to experiment and explore their creative possibilities through chosen tools or skills, because he feels that the 'regime of standardised testing' has led people to think that if something is not instantly quantifiable, it does not matter (Azzam, 2009).

2.2 The Role of Creativity in Graphic Design

We have seen that creativity is a term that is frequently used, and is often approached from various angles and fields. Oldach (1995) states that creativity plays a significant role in graphic design. This may lead us to ask: What role *does* creativity play in the field of graphic design, and what role *can* it play?

In the research paper by Australian academics, Vasilije Kokotovich and Terry Purcell, they claim that the practice of designing is a highly systematic process of mental synthesis; that designing is a balance between creative idea generation and a logical selection process to realise those ideas. They quote Lawson by stating that:

> *Design involves a highly organized mental process capable of manipulating many kinds of information, blending them all into a coherent set of ideas and finally generating some realisations of those ideas* (Kokotovich and Purcell 2000: 437).

In this research paper they refer to design in a broader term, including both two-dimensional and three-dimensional design practice.

In graphic design, Oldach (1995) believes that creativity does not only influence the technique or visual feel of a design, but that it lies at the core of solving a communication problem, allowing a designer to meet the demands of a brief and client. Further, Oldach encourages graphic designers to search for original ideas, rather than 'leaning' on the ideas of other, more successful designers. He states that through researching a design problem, and establishing the objectives, a designer will find more stimulus in generating original ideas, than through looking at the work of other designers. Oldach continues that:

> *Creativity is so interwoven into the design process that I found myself describing concepts, approaches, phases and methods rather than creativity itself* (Oldach 1995: 1).

Richard Hart, a co-owner of Disturbance Design, in Durban, believes that creativity has an important role to play in graphic design. Hart explained in an interview that:

> *Creativity should play a big role in anyone's design work. If you're not being creative, you're being boring and uninventive. Design is about being the opposite of those things. So really, creativity is at the heart of what we do as designers. If you're not creative, you shouldn't be a designer* (2011, pers. comm. 4 April).

Stefan Sagmeister, a celebrated New York-based graphic designer believes that the field has dramatically grown in recent years, through the exploration of skills and writing as critical reflection. Sagmeister states that the skill-set of designers is broadening:

> *It (graphic design) now embraces what used to be a dozen different professions: my students compose music, shoot and edit film, animate and sculpt. They build hardware, write software, print silkscreen and offset, take photographs and illustrate. It's easy to forget that routine jobs like typesetting and colour separation used to be separate careers* (Sagmeister 2005: 7).

On current critical writing in graphic design, Sagmeister adds:

> *There is also a new emphasis on how design is being reviewed and critiqued, driven by Steven Heller's 'Looking Closer' series, 'Émigré' magazine's reconfigured essay-heavy format, Rick Poyner's 'No More Rules' and 'Obey the Giant', and maybe most significantly, by the emergence of design blogs like underconsideration.com and designobserver.com. I don't think there has ever been a time when design was reviewed so critically and enthusiastically by so many people in so many cultures* (Sagmeister 2005: 7).

Sagmeister implies that, with the dramatic advancement and broadening of the skill-set, it has become necessary for graphic designers to constantly approach their work in a creative manner (Shaughnessy 2005).

Adrian Shaughnessy (2005: 135), author of, *How to be a Graphic Designer Without Losing Your Soul*, asks in his text: “Where does the creative process begin?” He argues that it begins through everything a designer observes, intentionally and unintentionally. A designer has the privilege of being able to observe design through everyday life. Shaughnessy suggests that this skill of observation is what fuels creative design.

Shaughnessy (2005: 135) believes that continual questioning is what keeps a graphic designer from becoming “compliant and submissive”, attributes that, according to him, leads to unimaginative and mediocre work.

In using the analogy of a rugby team, Shaughnessy believes that the field of graphic design also consists of practitioners with various personality attributes and approaches to their work. He implies that designers should develop their own approach to the creative process in graphic design. Of crucial importance to producing thought provoking work, Shaughnessy (2005: 135) states that designers “need to acquire a ‘voice’”, and that this is not necessarily the same as developing a particular style. He admits that the question of: ‘how to acquire a voice in graphic design’ is a concept not easily explained. He argues that developing a design voice, or ‘tone’ depends on three factors (Shaughnessy 2005: 136):

First, is ‘creative conviction’. A designer needs to have a clear vision of what is important and has worth, and what doesn’t. Shaughnessy (2005: 136) explains that this is similar to a philosophical creed. He shares that it can be about believing that design “is about improving social conditions”, or it can involve aesthetics, such as only using limited elements in your design work.

Second, it depends on an inner certainty and “trust (in) your creative instincts”, though he states that there is no problem in questioning, or even doubting oneself from time to time (Shaughnessy 2005: 136).

Third, a graphic designer should continually develop and maintain “an awareness of fashion, cultural trends and history”. Shaughnessy (2005: 136) argues that the human condition has a constant appetite for what is new and novel, and designers should try to keep abreast of the flux in trends and the current zeitgeist. Keeping this frame of mind within the current context is an important skill a designer should nurture. He maintains that a good designer has the ability to select the fashionable elements that can contribute to their own designs.

On originality in design, Shaughnessy (2005: 136) believes that this is an obsession for many designers. He simply states that breaching copyright laws forms part of bad practice. Though, a creative designer "freely borrows and adapts from sources in precisely the way artists have done for centuries", and that such a designer will readily explain their influences and sources of reference.

In some way this may contradict Oldach's (1995) view on developing original ideas.

To clarify this concept it might help to state a quote by the celebrated graphic design icon, Paul Rand:

> *Mies van der Rohe once said that being good is more important than being original. Originality is a product, not an intention* (Heller and Ballance and Garland 1998: 10).

Similar to Glaser, the authors of, *How to Be a Graphic Designer*, Ana Labudovic and Nenad Vukusic (2009: 131) also believe that creativity in design can be 'mischievous'. They state that all creative professionals have experienced times when, no matter how hard they try, their ideas won't spring forth. Encouragingly, they continue that "creativity does not go away forever; it likes to play hide-and-seek." Labudovic and Vukusic further explain that the work environment for many creative professionals can be very stressful, and that, often, these professionals use a range of techniques to achieve their creative results.

Hart also acknowledges an inexplicable aspect to creative work, but he believes that creative thought can be practised:

> *After a while, as a designer, your brain begins to work in a certain way, which allows you to be creative pretty much on demand. I don't know exactly how this happens or what these habits are* (2011, pers. comm. 4 April).

Labudovic and Vukusic state that there are many names for the various stages of the creative process, as we have seen in the text of Antes and Mumford (2009). Labudovic and Vukusic believe that with graphic design, "it comes down to research, concept, design and implementation" (Labudovic and Vukusic, 2009: 134).

To add to this thinking, Emily Cohen (2008: 189) states that the brief is where the creative process begins. She further explains in a reproduced essay in, *AIGA:*

Professional Practices in Graphic Design, that the 'creative brief', if well developed, can play a pivotal role in the design process. For Cohen, the brief is the bridge between the 'business objectives' and 'creative strategies'. Further, she explains that the brief should be adjusted to fit each unique design problem, rather than finding a fixed formula.

Although Oldach (1995) states that creativity in graphic design is related to solving a business or communication problem, Labudovic and Vukusic (2009: 132) hesitate to outline this phenomenon. They believe that creativity is the 'force' behind many imaginative design works, as well as the reason designers will work for hours to attain a certain result in their work. Nonetheless, they also believe that creativity relates to lateral thinking and is about "making new connections".

As we have seen earlier, the creative industry can be very demanding. Labudovic and Vukusic suggest that creative professionals stand the danger of burning out if they do not learn to 'take care of themselves', and it is important for graphic designers to find new ways to remain enthusiastic about their work (Labudovic & Vukusic 2009: 131).

Similarly, Odelle Hadnum, a sole proprietor of the studio, Chilli Source Design in Kloof, KwaZulu-Natal, explained in an interview about the dramatic impact that burnout has had on her design career, and how this has influenced her decisions in all aspects of her work. She believes 'burnout' is a frequently seen phenomenon in the graphic design profession (2011, pers. comm. 21 April).

It is clear that graphic designers often function in a dynamic and pressured work environment. The text of Labudovic and Vukusic (2009), as well as the qualitative interviews with Hart and Hadnum suggest the importance for designers to develop their capacity for creative output, as well as maintaining their mental well-being amidst strenuous demands. This may lead one to ask: How do graphic designers maintain their creativity within the demands of industry?

Glaser (2000) believes that drawing has a central role to play in creating design. He also claims that many designers today do not see a need to draw, but Glaser emphasises that drawing is a tool that can contribute towards gaining two important skills, namely clear observation and attentiveness. This may tie in with Shaughnessy's (2005) third factor of how a graphic designer develops a 'voice'. Glaser states that drawing can bring out ambiguous ideas from our unconscious,

and it can allow us to develop them to a point of clarity. According to Glaser drawing is important in generating and realising original visual concepts.

Glaser (2000: 10-11) states that "the computer and devaluation of drawing skills have undoubtedly changed things. We are living in a 'collage' world. The extraordinary reservoir of available historical and contemporary imagery means designers can find and assemble anything on screen… Certain skills have become irreparably lost".

In *Drawing is Thinking,* Glaser (2008) goes further by stating that drawing is similar to meditation.

Sagmeister believes that there is one important factor that impacts his ability to create original work. That is experimentation. In an interview with Heller (2009), Sagmeister explains his habit of taking a one-year sabbatical every seven years. In this year he experiments with many small design concepts that he otherwise does not find the time for in his high-pressure career. This allows him to renew himself as a designer and artist. In 2009 his destination for his second sabbatical was Bali, an island known for its natural beauty and cultural richness.

It is apparent that experimenting with concepts and techniques outside of commercial pressure can possibly have a positive impact on expanding and sustaining a designer's creativity.

Julia Cameron states in *The Artist's Way* (1995: 21) that 'creative block' can also hinder people from freely engaging in creativity. She continues that often people have good ideas but are unable to actualise them. Cameron believes that creativity can be both developed and maintained, and that regular exposure to enriching sensory stimulation plays an important role. Cameron may speak about creativity and art in a broader term than graphic design, but we have observed the importance of creativity in this field.

2.3 Creative Experimentation in Graphic Design

In their text, *Recharge Your Design Batteries,* John O'Reilly and Tony Linkson (2009) state that creativity has often been compared to energy. To prove their point they refer to the theory of the 'divine spark', Dr Frankenstein's creation brought to life

through an electric charge, and “Freud for whom ‘Eros’ was the energy that bound impulses together into something productive” (O’Reilly and Linkson 2009: 6).

O’Reilly and Linkson (2009: 6) express that, similar to energy and batteries, creativity can also run out or burn out, because creativity is neither a tool nor a skill. They continue that creativity is “a part of who we are”, and that we can use it for our work. According to O’Reilly and Linkson, it is a difficult challenge for people working in the creative industries to know how much of their creative energy they should use, and for how long. They compare this export of energy to running and dancing, and continue that one must feed yourself before you can utilise the energy needed for such activities. They further state:

> *The worlds of design, moving images, illustration, photography, and all the other visual communications disciplines live on the border between two essentially different territories – art and commerce. Just keeping the paycheck going can be really hard work and the belief that our jobs are an opportunity to explore some aspect of the creative spark can be submerged in the detail of earning a living* (O’Reilly and Linkson 2009: 7)

In this text they encourage professionals in the various fields of visual communication, especially graphic designers, to tell their stories of how they maintain their creativity. Many of them maintain it by exploring different processes of creativity in their day-to-day professional lives. These experiments are often undertaken outside the restraints of commercial work (O’Reilly and Linkson 2009).

On creative experimentation, Paul Rand states:

> *Without play, there would be no Picasso. Without play, there is no experimentation. Experimentation is the quest for answers* (Heller and Ballance and Garland 1998: 8).

David Sherwin (2010), an experienced graphic designer, explains in his text, *Creative Workshop,* that developing one’s creativity takes practice. He also states the importance of viewing failure as part of graphic design practice. One may gather that his intention is for designers to take risks in their work. This theory possibly ties in with Richards’ (2008) idea that an artist needs to move past the fear of failure, especially financial failure, in order to experiment. In his text Sherwin has compiled

eighty exercises aimed at helping graphic designers play with small design projects; projects that often vary between half-an-hour and two hours to complete.

Similar to Sagmeister (2005), Sherwin (2010) acknowledges that the graphic design field is expanding with many subdivisions, and that, today, graphic designers should strive to broaden their skills. Consequently, these exercises deal with the fundamental skills of current graphic design practice, such as photography, illustration, typography, copywriting, research, making a physical prototype, and design history. To incorporate these skills the exercises are based on a range of projects, such as designing book covers, music packaging, film posters, interactive storyboarding, hand animation, and online ads, encouraging the designers to use a wide range of tools to execute these projects.

Sherwin (2010) has applied tight time restraints to the projects, because he believes that a designer can benefit from thinking about smart solutions in limited time restraints. These projects are set up, in some way, to imitate real briefs. Nonetheless, they are based on areas of design practice that designers might find more interesting than day-to-day work.

When Richard Hart was asked how he viewed Sagmeister's habit of doing small design projects while he was on his sabbatical, he replied:

> *Yes, for exactly the same reason as Sagmeister. I need to stay engaged, enthusiastic, passionate and creative. Often the daily work in a design studio drains you of your enthusiasm. By giving yourself projects that you're excited about, it keeps you creatively alive* (2011, pers. comm. 4 April).

Hart believes this relates to the individual's own needs:

> *Doing work that feeds your soul is an entirely personal thing, something you need to make room for in your life according to how badly you need to do it. At Disturbance we have always seen the importance of doing love projects, so we make time for them in amongst our paying work. Usually when the studio is having a slightly quiet moment. I also make time to do my own personal work… I don't think everyone has the same needs for their own creative wellbeing* (2011, pers. comm. 4 April).

Hart's last statement might relate to how Shaughnessy (2005) compares the graphic design field to a rugby team, where Shaughnessy states that there is room for different personalities within the field. Hart's statement may also suggest that for some people it is important to create, but not necessarily for all. His opinion primarily refers to an artistic characteristic. The literature reviewed, so far, has shown the importance of developing and maintaining a creative approach in graphic design through practise and experimentation.

O'Reilly and Linkson (2009: 9) believe it is paramount that a designer focus on building "the relationship between art and commerce". They must be able to reconcile the client and their own perceptions in their design work, as well as merging the ability to create work on request with "the enjoyment of being creative".

2.4 The Role of Drawing in Contemporary Graphic Design

As we have seen in the Introduction chapter, design software packages present designers with a range of digital tools that have largely replaced traditional methods of creating design. Before digital advancement in the graphic design industry, designers would often render a poster or book cover through drawing or painting. But, today, digital tools promise quicker and more economic results, though, I have noted that some designers still prefer to create at least some aspects of a design through drawing and painting. It might be interesting to note that digital tools are often based on traditional methods, such as the pen, pencil and kerning tools in Adobe's Photoshop and Illustrator (Ambrose and Harris 2003).

Many design authors believe that today, digital technology has been integrated into every aspect of graphic design, yet many designers tend to critically question the industry's dependence on computers. Hyland and Bell (2003: 7) state that the graphic design and illustration fields have been "overloaded with under-qualified creatives and mediocre imagery".

Even though hand drawing is commonly viewed as a skill that can be replaced by digital tools, some seasoned designers such as Milton Glaser and Nigel Holmes believe it still has an important role to play in current graphic design practice.

Glaser states that appropriation and copying have become widespread in the industry. His view is that drawing assists original design solutions, as seen in this text extract:

> *I see no difference between drawing and designing… If you cannot draw, you must draw on the images of others* (Glaser 2000: 10).

In *Art is Work*, Glaser (2000) states that drawing, as a tool, can be used to move quickly and fluently through many design ideas before focusing on the detail and execution of a design. This enables a graphic designer to explore many solutions in a relatively short time.

In Leo Duff and Phil Sawdon's (2008: 89) text, *Drawing – The Purpose*, they explain that Nigel Holmes considers drawing to play a central role in his explanatory design work, including the work he did at *Time*. Holmes believes that Otto Neurath, with the help of a graphic artist, Gerd Arntz, pioneered the field of information graphics, an important division of graphic design. According to Holmes, Arntz's drawings were iconic, beautifully simple and successful, because he understood the visual nature of his subject matter - an understanding he gained through constant observation through drawing. Holmes believes drawing contributed to Arntz's ability to successfully capture the essence of the many subjects he depicted. Holmes further explains that "drawing teaches us to see the essence of things, not just the surface appearance".

Donald Young (2004: 18), recognised for his typeface and logo design, states that "if you improve your drawing skills, you become a better designer". He believes that even today, in the digital era, drawing allows a designer:

> *…to dissect a shape or form and its volume as well as the manner in which a curve accelerates or flattens* (Young 2004: 18).

To him, drawing is a skill that is central to becoming a good type designer, because it improves one's analytical and interpretation skills (Young 2004).

According to Timothy O'Donnell in his text, *Sketchbook: Conceptual Drawings from the World's Most Influential Designers*, a sketchbook, similar to a diary, allows a graphic designer to experiment and develop ideas in private. This enables a designer to engage in the creative process without the concern of making mistakes or being judged:

> *Sketchbooks, like diaries, allow the designer a private, personal space to vent, daydream, free associate and explore. Most importantly, they offer a place where mistakes are allowed and experimentation encouraged* (O'Donnell 2009: 6).

O'Donnell (2009: 6) states that for many leading professionals, even amidst digital advancements, sketching "remains an integral part of the creative process". Because globally graphic designers often use the same hardware and software, it allows designers to develop ideas according to their own logic. This ties in with Shaughnessy's (2005) argument that it is important for designers to develop their own 'voice'. O'Donnell's text showcases the sketchbooks of many influential designers, such as Richard Niessen, Mirko Ilic, Nigel Holmes and Jason Munn.

O'Donnell (2009) maintains that the sketchbooks of successful designers give us an opportunity to observe their thinking processes behind solving design problems. He feels these important processes are difficult to observe in final work, especially in the digital age where many of the preliminary works are deleted from the computer.

On the importance of drawing in the design process, O'Donnell quotes the celebrated architect, Le Corbusier:

> *To draw oneself, to trace the lines, handle the volumes, organise the surface… all this means first to look, and then to observe and finally perhaps to discover… and it is then that inspiration may come* (O'Donnell 2009: 4).

Danny Gregory's (2008) text in, *An Illustrated Life: Drawing inspiration from the private sketchbooks of artists, illustrators and designers*, explains how many artists and designers find inspiration through sketchbooks as an important aspect of their creative professions. Amanda Kavanagh, owner of the studio ARK Design, in New York City, states that her journals give her an environment for experimentation through drawing, doodling and making small paintings. They allow her to pay attention to colour, composition and designed text. She believes this deals with both the professional and personal aspects of her life, and that through journals she can play with imagery and concepts without pressure. Kavanagh states that she often uses the Moleskine brand, a brand that creates a range of journals for the various requirements of creative professionals from many fields. She continues that

keeping a visual journal has little to do with drawing skills, and it should rather be a tool to record experiences and ideas.

Similarly, Nick Meglin (2008), a previous editor at *MAD* magazine and drawing lecturer at the School of Visual Arts (SVA), in New York City, states in his text, *Drawing from Within*, that often people are concerned about their ability to draw. As an alternative, he presents the idea that drawing can be enjoyable, when people eliminate the notion of over criticising their own drawings. Meglin believes there is only one way to better drawing skills, and that is simply through the act of drawing.

Betty Edwards (2006) states in, *Drawing From the Right Side of the Brain*, that drawing can be learnt, similar to learning how to read and write. She claims that drawing requires practice, not unlike reading, to develop one's ability to articulate. Edwards states that drawing requires a cognitive shift to the right hemisphere of the brain, the side that is often associated with creative thought processes. In the following text extract she states:

> *The key to learning to draw, therefore, is to set up conditions that cause you to make a mental shift to a different mode of information processing – the slightly altered state of consciousness – that enables you to see well* (Edwards 2006: 5).

Frank R. Wilson is a neurologist and author of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated text, *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture*. Wilson shares his view on the importance of sketching through an interview with O'Donnell in the following text extract:

> *When you get into how the human body and brain works, you quickly become humbled by the complexity of this stuff, and how the nervous and neuromuscular systems and thought and emotion are profoundly interrelated and interdependent. The more interesting question to me is, why is it that working with the hand creates all these emotional dependencies?*
>
> *…So it may be the thing about the hand that is so specific to the creative process is that, although we really do have an extraordinary amount of control over the hand, it takes a lot of time. While that might be seen as a disadvantage in an efficiency-obsessed world, the fact*

> *that it takes so much time means everything else has to be excluded from consciousness. This is why sketching works, because it's a meditative process in which the nervous system is using the body as a way of re-experiencing relationships in the world* (O'Donnell 2009: 176).

Also on the creative thinking process and drawing, Edwards expresses that one can develop "inventive, intuitive (and) imaginative" thinking through drawing. She believes these thinking processes are often neglected by our educational systems, and that learning to draw, as she presents in her text, can help a person to 'unblock' creative thought (Edwards 2006: 6).

2.5 The Impact of Enriching Sensory Stimulation on Creativity

Julia Cameron states that 'creative block' hinders many artists from creating freely. She says that:

> *…the artist's brain is a sensory brain: sight and sound, smell and taste, touch. These are the elements of magic, and magic is the elemental stuff of art* (Cameron 1995: 21).

Cameron (1995: 21) continues by saying that it is important for creative people to regularly expose themselves to enriching sensory stimulation.

Annemarie Lombard (2007: 162), an occupational therapist from South Africa, also uses a beautiful metaphor for describing sensory experiences, namely your 'sensory diet'. She believes that our sensory experiences have a direct impact on how we deal with stress and how they affect our overall psychological well-being.

Lombard (2007) maintains that artists tend to have a low threshold for sensory input, and it is important for people to manage their sensory input in order to function optimally and successfully, in both work and social environments. She states that if one exceeds one's sensory threshold it may cause a person to experience frustration and possibly lead to aggressive behavior. On the contrary, the right

amount, and type, of sensory input can cause an individual to focus well and successfully deal with stress.

My own experience in the graphic design industry is that graphic designers often find themselves working in stressful work environments.

In the journal, *New Scientist*, Hollingham (2004) believes that sensory scientists are proving that how people experience sensory input is highly individual. A pleasant experience for one may be a really bad experience for another. This ties in with Lombard's (2007) text on managing sensory intake. Lombard further states that movement is one of our senses we often neglect. To help manage one's sensory input, the most prominent activities she lists are forms of exercise and creating art.

Sally Augustin (2009) writes, in the field of applied psychology, that human senses evolved during prehistoric years in the savanna. The goal of all our senses is to create a single awareness of our environment. She states that often our preconceived ideas about colours, textures and spaces are drawn from primitive instinct. Augustin continues that sensory input directly impacts our emotions, and emotions control the way we experience our lives.

On the subject of sensory experiences, we may gain from observing Dale Anderson's view in *Business Credit*:

> *In our modern society, with our technological breakthroughs, we have lost so much of our senses. For example, when you go to the grocery store, you don't feel your food anymore. You don't smell the meat. You don't feel the grains. Everything is boxed and wrapped and covered. Such modern conveniences dull our senses which shrink and age our brains* (Anderson 2009: 20).

Interestingly, Mike Westley (2003: 317), programme manager of The Sensory Trust, states that the reason there has been an increase in research being undertaken that relates to sensory experiences is due to "our growing understanding of how the brain handles emotions, logic and creativity". Westley believes that a computer environment causes people to focus too much on the visual sense.

Shannon Brownlee and Traci Watson (1997) recognise in an academic study, similar to Lombard (2007), that people's experiences through sensory input can vary dramatically. They state there is growing scientific proof that either depriving or over

stimulating our senses directly impacts our emotions, health and intellectual capacity. They further imply that the right type, and amount of sensory experiences can, indeed, help the brain to function more effectively.

In the text, *The Inspired Workspace*, Marilyn Zelinsky states that an inspiring workspace affects how well people function, creatively and productively. Zelinsky encourages people to create an environment that stimulates their senses, as well as echoes the notion of play and possibility if they wish to be creative, or create art, in that space. To strengthen her statement, she quotes the renowned psychologist, Carl Jung:

> *Without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable* (Zelinsky 2002: 43).

We have widely looked at the impact of sensory stimulation on creativity, however in the graphic design field there does not seem to be much literature written about how sensory experiences impact the work or creativity of a designer. Yet, we have seen that sensory experiences directly impact emotions and the creativity of an artist. Comparably, O'Reilly and Linkson's (2009) text points out the important link between art and business in graphic design, and the essential part that enjoyment plays in maintaining creative motivation as a graphic designer. If we consider this, we may assume that sensory experiences could possibly impact the creativity of a graphic designer.

From personal experience through working in a design studio, I find most design tools are digital, and graphic designers seldom create design in a 'hands-on' manner. This process often neglects both the tactile sense and the sense of movement, an important experience according to Lombard (2007).

In a study on the impact that the senses have on how the brain performs, the mathematician, Christoph Kayser (2007), states that the brain functions best with tasks that rely on gaining information through engaging most of the senses.

Is it then possible that the digital work environment hinders graphic designers from emotionally connecting with their work?

This review has looked at defining creativity and the role it can play in graphic design. It has also considered literature with regard to the three factors that may

assist a current practising graphic designer, working in a digital environment, in maintaining creativity.

Informed by the content of the reviewed literature, the following chapter addresses the methodology and theoretical framework through which empirical data are gathered, analysed, and presented.

Chapter 3

Theory and Method

The Literature Review Chapter presented the thoughts of authors and designers on the particular research area of this study, as presented in the Introduction Chapter.

The method with which empirical data were gathered, are influenced by the primary research question pertaining to the creative facility of a graphic designer as an individual. In the attempt to delimit the broad graphic design field, in the Introduction Chapter, the study proposed that graphic designers are researched with a focus on print design and illustration.

The research took on a qualitative approach to gain insight into how current graphic designers experience their practice, and proposed three practical factors that may positively influence their creativity. These are mentioned on page 2 and discussed in detail from page 32 of Chapter 2.

For the purpose of drawing possible conclusions and suggesting recommendations, the study aimed to find "patterns, relationships and the dynamic that warrants the inquiry" (Henning 2004: 32).

An educational linguist at the University of Johannesburg, Elizabeth Henning (2004: 33), states that appropriate methods should be applied that "have the potential to address the (primary) research question". Henning explains further:

> *It stands to reason, however, that lived experiences cannot truly be traced through surveyed questionnaires. In the same vein a wide spectrum of survey issues cannot be captured in a phenomenological interview* (Henning 2004: 33).

Hence, Henning (2004: 33) believes that an appropriate 'design logic' has to be applied. The purpose of this master's degree project was to attempt to assist graphic designers discover possible solutions to the challenges of maintaining creativity, that is to say, work with designers to find ways to better their creative endeavours amidst a demanding industry.

Attempting to choose the appropriate 'design logic' for this study, various methods were considered, such as grounded theory, action research, ethnographic research and a phenomenological approach (Mouton 2001).

As a result, this study made use of a phenomenological approach, because this qualitative method aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the perceived realities of participants, as well as articulate a particular phenomenon within the current graphic design industry. Even though a researcher may have some knowledge of the particular topic, it was important that I remained objective throughout the investigation (Welman and Kruger and Mitchell 2005).

Within the phenomenological approach, action research is an applied research methodology that allows the researcher to test hands-on research methods while gaining empirical data. This was applied in the context of developing and conducting a workshop (Welman and Kruger and Mitchell 2005).

In order to gain a further understanding of this particular methodology, lets briefly consider its characteristics.

3.1 Action Research as Methodology

In the second edition of *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research* Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2008: 4) state that:

> *Action research is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.*

Reason and Bradbury (2008: 3) further explain five key interrelated descriptions of action research:

First, an action research methodology aims to creatively develop practices in response to urgent or important issues that people face in both communities and organisations.

Second, action research promotes a collaborative relationship between the researcher and participants. New 'communicative spaces' allow for the flourishing of development and dialogue.

Third, this method draws from various forms of enquiry, mainly because empirical knowledge is obtained through various personalities from various contexts.

Fourth, action research is concerned with values, and in order for humans to flourish, issues are addressed on diverse levels, such as individuals, communities, and the greater ecology within which people function.

Fifth, the modes of enquiry in action research evolve and develop. Two factors responsible for this is that further research deepens understanding and the contexts of people are in constant flux.

Bridget Somekh has worked on action research projects for over twenty-five years and she is a founder editor of the international journal, *Educational Action Research* (EAR). Somekh (2006: 1) states in the following extract that:

> *It (action research) is a means whereby research can become a systematic intervention, going beyond describing, analysing and theorizing social practices to working in partnership with participants to reconstruct and transform those practices.*

Somekh (2006: 1) further states this form of enquiry aims for equality between practitioner-researchers and researchers to strive for "skilful and reflexive methods".

Because of the interrelationship between critical reflection and development of solutions in action research, especially with participants, this particular study can benefit from this methodology.

In this study, key terms that relate to graphic design, and, more specifically, the area of research were critically examined to address the primary research problem, as stated on page 1. As a result, this research method aimed at revealing practical advice on how a graphic designer can maintain creativity as articulated in the primary research question of this study.

Now that the characteristics of this methodology have been addressed, we focus on how this methodology informed the empirical data.

3.2 Method of Inquiry

We observed that action research puts emphasis on the relationship between researcher and participants. Therefore, in-depth qualitative interviews were used to gain insight into how this phenomenon is perceived by specifically chosen participants, four Duban-based and four New York-based graphic designers. The questions for the interviews developed from reviewing current and relevant literature, as discussed in Chapter 2. Thereafter, a workshop was designed and conducted where possible solutions to the research problem were tested and explored. Primarily, through allowing the participants to work on two creative projects. The first project gave each participant an opportunity to verbalise, in a group, how a specifically chosen object triggered visualisations, when exposed to a specific one of their senses. The second project allowed the participants to individually design for a creative brief, through using physical art materials, as opposed to using digital tools. This project was split into two phases namely, ideation and execution. Before the workshop session, the participants were instructed to conduct some research that would assist them during the second project. These methods are directly influenced by the insights gained through the interviews. The workshop allowed the researcher to observe and reflect on the working methods of the participants.

Furthermore, because I have experience in working as a graphic designer within the field, I created a practical component. This component enabled personal development. The reflections on this component are discussed in Chapter 5. The work largely consists of a number of small visual journal projects. These journal projects gave me an opportunity to artistically experiment and practice drawing outside commercial design work, as well as capture sensory experiences from both personal field excursions and personal day-to-day activities. Within this component, examples are given of commercial designs I have created where preliminary drawing played a fundamental role.

Interviews were held with four industry-based graphic designers in Durban. This allowed the study to gain phenomenological data on how local designers perceive the research questions and industry challenges. Thereafter, four influential graphic designers were interviewed in the USA, and these interviews allowed the study to observe international influences. A workshop was then conducted with four graphic designers in Durban that work in the field. The workshop gave an opportunity to create an environment where graphic designers could refresh creative motivation. The names of the interview and workshop participants are mentioned from page 52 in Chapter 4. The empirical data gained from both the interviews and workshop played a crucial role in answering the primary question and sub-questions. This is concluded in Chapter 6.

Seven of the interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis, and often in their studios. This allowed me to, especially in New York City, observe their working environment. Only the interview with Richard Hart was conducted via Email.

Keeping in mind the delimitation of this study, all participants were selected because they have experience in print design, as well as illustration.

The data was then observed, transcribed, analysed, interpreted and scrutinised, in order to gain a deeper understanding as suggested by Henning (2004).

In the following subsections of this chapter, we look at the methods involved in conducting the interviews, the workshop, and in creating the practical component.

3.3 Interviews Based on Qualitative Questioning

Interviews, if well constructed, can give the researcher meaningful data from which to gain insight. According to Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe (2008: 127) the aim of qualitative research is to be “open to different ways of seeing the world”. They state the researcher should “strive to be open to the realities of others and understand different realities”, and to listen before making necessary assumptions.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008: 129) believe, when dealing with the data, that it is pivotal the researcher “shift(s) from being an objective reporter to becoming an informed and insightful commentator”.

As per Bloomberg and Volpe's (2008) claim of aiming to comprehend the context of the subject, the interviews were conducted with designers in a conversational manner. This allowed the interviewees to comfortably express their personal views.

With this approach in mind, a semi-structured interview questionnaire was formulated that served as an interview guide, aimed at addressing the primary research problem and factors. The interview questions are listed in Chapter 4. Although, questions were prepared, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for necessary flexibility according to each participant's focus within the graphic design field (Welman and Kruger and Mitchell 2005).

For instance, in Duff and Sawdon's (2008) text, Nigel Holmes refers to his view on the role of drawing in his design work. Therefore, it seemed fit to emphasise this in the interview, as well as hear his view on how this concept relates to creativity. However, the primary research problem and three factors, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, were still worked into all the interviews.

While conducting the interviews, some questions were raised through the questionnaire, and some were spontaneously raised by the participants. The aim was to conduct natural conversational interviews in which the participants confidently raised their personal views (Welman and Kruger and Mitchell 2005).

Initial research was undertaken on each designer, and this was worked into the questionnaires. This was primarily orchestrated through the internet and available published texts. This allowed the research process to gather detailed insights into the context of each interviewee. The aim was to gain an understanding of his or her own views, as professionals, on the relevant research questions.

Ethical clearance was received through presenting a letter of informed consent to each of the participants. However, the information was not particularly of a sensitive nature, and only resulted in restricting the researcher from freely using their intellectual property.

The eight interviews were transcribed and the raw data sorted. The data were then analysed and interpreted to find similarities and consistency. This enabled me to make informed assumptions that influenced the workshop design, and the data played a vital role in suggesting recommendations (Mouton 2001).

3.4 Designing a Workshop Template

According to J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole, the relationship between qualitative research and the arts is a recognised form of qualitative inquiry, and some researchers critically look at this approach. This is evident in the following text:

> *To welcome the arts into social science research, not as a subject or object of study but as a mode of inquiry, requires deep consideration. Seeing methodology through an artful eye reflects a way of being in the world as a researcher that is paradigmatically different from other ways of thinking about and designing research* (Knowles and Cole 2008: 1).

Knowles and Cole (2008: 4) believe "our sensory response" in "human experience is primary in the arts". Understanding this is fundamental in art-based research. Even so, they state that research must be built upon rational criticism, in order to obtain a desired truth.

The workshop was designed to have an artful approach, to give graphic designers an opportunity to explore their creativity in a friendly and nonjudgmental environment. The intention was to create a space that catered for holistic creative and artistic needs. Themes from the 2nd Chapter are incorporated, such as to suspend judgment in the initial stages of generating original ideas (Hawkins 1999; Cameron 1995), as well as Sagmeister's statement on the importance of creative experimentation in maintaining a fresh approach in graphic design practice (Heller 2009).

The workshop programme was carried out according to the suggestion presented by the interview findings. The key aspects can be viewed on page 73 of Chapter 4. The workshop was held on a Saturday 10h00 to 14h00, at the Methodist church in Moore Road, Durban. Photographs of the room where the workshop was held can be viewed in Figure 5.4 to 5.12 of Appendix 2.

Two projects were designed for the workshop session. The first gave the participants an opportunity to explore, in a group, how enriching sensory input can stimulate the imagination. The second project was a design brief that provided each participant with the opportunity for creative experimentation outside day-to-day

commercial restraints. Individually, the participants developed this project through using traditional art materials, thus encouraging the designers to use drawing as a method of design, rather than a computer. This approach was backed by Glaser's (2008) text, where he states that drawing can be used as an important tool in creating original design.

Through these projects, the workshop aimed to address, and test, the main research problem. Further details on the structure of the workshop, and the methods used in capturing the data, are available in Appendix 4.

3.5 Practical Creative Experimentation

With the aim of sharpening my drawing skills, creating an environment for personal creative exploration, and finding a way to capture sensory experiences, I decided to develop personal projects in a visual journal. In the reviewed literature, this can also be referred to as a sketchbook.

Gregory (2009: 1) states that personal sketchbooks give artists, illustrators and designers the opportunity to develop 'private worlds', 'record impressions', and 'to work without judgment'. Such practice enables an artist "to take risks and to chart new directions". Gregory continues that:

> *It's the closest one can get to being inside an artist's head, to feeling the raw creative flow: a book bulging with drawings and scrawled captions, some pages experimental, some pages carefully observed. The pages are buckled from layers of watercolor. The margins are filled with shopping lists and phone numbers… You see moments being recorded in sequence. You see ideas unfold and deepen* (Gregory 2009: 1).

We also observe O'Donnell's (2009) view in Chapter 2 that sketchbooks allow graphic designers to explore creative ideas to a communication problem, before considering client and budget restraints.

Importantly, O'Donnell believes that sketchbooks give an opportunity to observe the creative process that is often absent in final pieces of design. He also maintains that the initial process of developing original ideas requires privacy, and as this research

project has shown, influential designers choose to record this process using a sketchbook.

The texts of both Gregory (2009) and O'Donnell (2009) revealed that graphic designers as artists use sketchbooks in versatile ways. For this reason, distinctions were made for the various intentions of the drawings in the practical component, such as drawings that emerged from close observation, and those for creative concepts. Further details on this component are discussed in Chapter 5.

Through reviewing literature and gaining empirical data from action research methods of enquiry and exploration, the resultant data lead to, and informed, substantive recommendations for graphic designers.

Chapter 4

Interviews and a Workshop Creativity and Practice

In an attempt to find in-depth answers to the primary research problem as posed by this dissertation, qualitative interviews were carefully formulated and conducted, as indicated in the previous chapter. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and key themes were identified and analysed. Thereafter, a workshop was designed and held in response to the comprehensive interview findings and the reviewed literature. Here follows the basic structure of this chapter:

Firstly, this chapter discusses both the formulation of the semi-structured interview questionnaire, and the interview findings.

Secondly, this chapter reports on relevant details in designing a creative workshop model, as well as the conducted workshop observations.

Throughout this chapter, the full names of the participants to both the interviews and workshop will be used upon introduction, thereafter only their first names. This will simplify the line of argument and seems appropriate as personal communications were undertaken on a first-name basis.

Eight graphic designers were specifically chosen to interview because of their various approaches, and their length of experience in the field. This approach allowed me to gain valuable insights into the current thinking in the field. The primary aim was to recognise themes that emerged within an action research approach. The graphic designers were each in different stages of their careers and lives. The study recognises that such factors may have an impact on how they approach their practice.

The four Durban graphic designers are Nick Young-Thompson, Richard Hart, Mitchell Harty and Odelle Hadnum.

Nick is a senior designer who earned a B-Tech degree at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). Throughout his career he has maintained an interest in illustration.

Richard is an acknowledged designer and is co-founder of the Durban-based design studio, Disturbance. His design career spans more than twenty years. Richard is known for his explorations in fine art and various design disciplines.

Mitchell has experience in both working as a freelance designer and as an employee of the graphic design industry. He is currently working at Reebok in Durban.

Odelle has been the sole proprietor of the design studio, Chilli Source, for the past eleven years. Before that, she worked as an art director on both above-the-line and below-the-line advertising.

The four New York designers were predominantly chosen for their contribution to the graphic design literature. The four designers are Milton Glaser, Nigel Holmes, Amanda Kavanagh and Sebastian Kaupert.

Milton is an acclaimed American graphic designer with his experience in applied arts spanning over half a century. Over the years, Milton has made valuable contributions to graphic design education. He is best known for designing the *I Love New York* logo, and an iconic poster for Bob Dylan. In 2010 the American president, Barack Obama, awarded him a National Medal of the Arts (Glaser 2012).

Nigel is an established designer of explanatory graphics, and he is especially well-known for the work he did at *Time*, under the art director Walter Barnard. He is currently working as a freelance designer. Heller communicates in his text, *Nigel Holmes: On Information Design*, that:

> *Nigel Holmes did not invent pictographs, but he has created a vigorous graphic language that is now part of the public's visual vernacular* (Heller 2006: xi).

Amanda studied at Syracuse University, in the state of New York, where she majored in illustration. She founded the studio ARK Design in Brooklyn, New York City. Her personal journal drawings feature in Gregory's (2008) text.

Sebastian is co-owner of an advertising studio that currently specialises in interactive web design. He also lectures as a Professor at Pratt University in Brooklyn. Sebastian served for two years on the board of the New York chapter of American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA).

From the responses in the interviews, a workshop was held with four Durban-based graphic designers. Two of the designers participated in the interviews. They are: Nick Young-Thompson and Mitchell Harty. In addition, Kailash Maharaj and Nicole de Villiers also attended the workshop.

Kailash works as an art director at TBWA Hunt Lascaris and lectures at Inscape Education Group. He is also a master's student at DUT.

Nicole is a self-employed illustrator and graphic designer. She received a degree in graphic design, and has worked in the industry for more than 6 years. Children illustration is her primary focus.

4.1 Formulating the Interview Questionnaire

Relevant literature to this study points to the dynamic influence New York graphic designers and critical writers have made on the graphic design field. This is evident in the text of Heller (2006; 2009), Heller and Vienne (2009), Meggs (1998), Glaser (2008), and Meglin (2008).

A questionnaire was drawn up to specifically investigate and address four distinct research questions, namely:

1. How does a graphic designer maintain creativity in the digital age?
2. How can creative experimentation through practising design or art, outside the constraints of commercial design, contribute towards a graphic designer's creativity?
3. What role can drawing play in the creative process of generating original design solutions?
4. What impact, if any, can enriching sensory stimulation have on the creativity of a graphic designer who works in a digital environment?

The latter three questions collectively aimed to provide insight needed to answer the first question, which is the primary research problem. An interview questionnaire, consisting of twelve questions, was drawn up from the four points of enquiry.

Through capturing and analysing the data, specific themes were identified and are discussed. The following twelve subsections examine the interview questions.

Upon the introduction for some of the participants, icebreaker questions were asked, such as: “What was the name of your first pet?” and “Where would you like to go as your next holiday destination?” I found this necessary, as Henning (2004) views an interview environment as somewhat artificial, and often formal. To observe their personal and honest views, an informal approach seemed more suitable. Although, with a celebrated personality, such as Milton, these icebreaker questions may have seemed overfamiliar. So, they were not presented to Milton, Sebastian and Richard.

4.1.1 FIRST INVOLVEMENT WITH ART OR DESIGN

All the graphic designers were asked to recollect their first involvement with art or design. Through this, I gained insight into their original artistic dreams and reasons for pursuing a career in graphic design. This allowed an insight into their personal experiences, as well as gain a valuable understanding of their context (Henning 2004).

4.1.2 DEFINING CREATIVITY

Thereafter, they were asked to offer their view on the term, ‘creativity’. We observe in Chapter 2, on page 19, that it is a frequently used and multi-faceted term, yet often difficult to define.

4.1.3 THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY IN THEIR GRAPHIC DESIGN PRACTICE

Oldach (1995) believes that creativity should play an important role in graphic design practice, and a practitioner should creatively approach client briefs to find appropriately original design solutions. Therefore, the designers were asked what role creativity played in their graphic design work.

4.1.4 POSSIBLE HABITS FOR MAINTAINING CREATIVITY

In maintaining their creativity, they were asked if they had any habits that supported this. O'Reilly and Linkson's (2009) statement that in order to explore creativity throughout a career, one must learn to maintain and refresh creative motivation is important. In addition, they compare this concept to recharging batteries.

4.1.5 EXPERIMENTING WITH DESIGN CONCEPTS OUTSIDE COMMERCIAL CONSTRAINTS

The focus of the questionnaire shifted to investigate the possible benefits of practicing creative experimentation, pointing out the common difficulties of high-pressure industry work. As an example, Sagmeister's method of doing small design experiments was introduced. In accordance with Heller's (2009) approach, the designers were then asked whether they experiment with design concepts outside commercial constraints, and why.

4.1.6 THE BENEFITS OF EXPERIMENTATION IN DESIGN

The questionnaire also interrogated what relevance and importance is placed on a well-defined brief in corporate graphic design. They were also asked if they believe a designer can benefit from playing with design experiments outside commercial restraints.

4.1.7 EXPERIMENTATION THROUGH OTHER FORMS OF ART OR DESIGN

Pilot interviews with Durban industry-based graphic designers, which were undertaken in 2010, revealed that most of them practise other forms of art and design. Their responses varied from doing mosaic art to digital illustration to writing short stories. This, they reported, helps them to create freely without the judgment of a client or art director. In *Art is Work*, Glaser (2000) claims that the ability to work in various areas of design and art has been valuable to his practice. In the current interview questionnaire, both the designers from Durban and New York City were

asked to elaborate on whether they practice any such activities (2010, pers. comm. 8 April to 7 May).

4.1.8 THE ROLE OF DRAWING IN CONTEMPORARY GRAPHIC DESIGN

The questionnaire then changed emphasis to the role of drawing in graphic design. It was stated that, due to the advent of digital technology in the field, the role of drawing has altered in application. Digital tools have largely substituted traditional drawing mediums as a method of creating design. Their views on the role of drawing in contemporary graphic design were then considered.

4.1.9 THE BENEFITS OF PRACTISE DRAWING FOR A GRAPHIC DESIGNER

It was observed in the Literature Review chapter that there are various modes of drawing. Namely, drawing from observation, as interpretation, drawing from imagination, and even as a form of meditation. They were asked if they believe a graphic designer can still benefit, or be enriched, by practicing of drawing, and why.

4.1.10 DRAWING AS ENJOYMENT

They were also asked if they ever draw for sheer enjoyment.

4.1.11 HOW ENRICHING SENSORY STIMULATION RELATES TO GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Cameron (1995) believes in the importance for artists to regularly expose themselves to enriching sensory experiences. She states that they can draw creative ideas from lived experiences. The occupational therapist Lombard (2007) argues that the right type, and amount, of sensory experiences can cause a person to focus well, and deal with stress. However, she also states that these requirements are highly individual.

In my research I have not been able to find appropriate literature that links enriching sensory stimulation to graphic design, although, this study references literature that

links sensory enrichment to both creativity and stress management: two phenomena often present in current graphic design practice.

The creative workshop methods of the German design studio, Hort, were brought to the attention of the participants. At these workshops, designers are encouraged to create three-dimensional objects through actively using their hands within the facility space, rather than through the use of software. After describing the possible benefits of enriching sensory stimulation on the creativity of a designer, I asked whether they believe this has any relevance to the practice of a contemporary graphic designer.

4.1.12 KEY ASPECTS FOR A WORKSHOP

Lastly, with the aim of conducting a workshop, all the designers were asked what key aspects they would like to see at a workshop that focuses on helping graphic designers maintain their creativity.

The answers of the graphic designers to both the icebreaker question, and their first involvement in art and design, will not be discussed in the following sections, as their purpose was simply to set an informal tone throughout the interview.

4.2 Interview Findings

The empirical data from the interviews and workshop was recorded with a dictaphone, personal notes and photographs. The photographs are presented in Appendix 2, and the transcriptions for the interviews with Milton and Nigel are presented in Appendix 3. The data was gathered over a period from March to October 2011.

The interview answers are discussed in the same sequence as they appeared in the questionnaire.

4.2.1 DEFINING CREATIVITY

When all the participants attempted to define creativity, it became clear from the start that they viewed it as a complex term. Each approached from a different angle, yet none of the participants directly contradicted what was discussed in the Literature Review chapter. The most prominent view was that creativity relates to transgression through challenging the boundaries of existing perceptions. In defining creativity, Milton stated:

> *Most creative efforts, at least in part, are a repudiation of an existing condition, and it shows of an alternative vision* (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

Within the concept of creativity, three further themes frequently emerged. Firstly, they all claimed that the trait of creative people is to have a curious mindset and to see things differently. Yet, they could not determine how much of such a mindset is due to aptitude, and how much can be learnt. Secondly, creativity does not necessarily only relate to the arts. In other words, a businessperson has as much opportunity for inventiveness as a musician. Thirdly, the purpose of engaging in creative thought is to solve a problem, whether it is a visual communication or a business problem.

Nigel and Milton believe there exists a general misconception, in society, about creativity. Milton states that society views it as a 'hierarchical term', because society generally views creative people as having an 'elevated state of being'. Nigel believes the term is 'overused', especially in the advertising industry, where the term creative is often used as an informal job description (2011, pers. comm. 21 and 27 September).

Creativity, under restrained and unrestrained conditions, were separated and discussed by Odelle, Milton and Amanda. Odelle illustrated the concept, of how much time is often spent in a studio on these two approaches, through the use of percentages. She believes 70% of her creative efforts are under restrained conditions, and 30% unrestrained. Milton described a critical distinction between the creativity in the arts and in the applied design arena. He believes that any work created for an audience has to consider existing perceptions, in order to communicate successfully. In Milton's opinion, this is the most important constraint a designer must consider.

Both Sebastian and Amanda believe there is a mysterious aspect in creativity that is difficult to quantify. Sebastian stated that there are recognised methods one can follow in order to develop ideas, yet one cannot predict exactly when a valuable idea will emerge from the subconscious. Amanda took an intuitive approach, by stating: "I see designers who have got that special touch, that really magic thing". For Amanda, art and creativity are deeply interrelated, as both pertain to her design work and her painting practice (2011, pers. comm. 20 September).

About the mystery of the creative process, Sebastian added:

> *We know there is a beginning when we understand the problem, and we know there is the point when we have an idea. Something happens in between, in a similar way as traditional medicine looks upon eastern healing arts* (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

Richard did not attempt to define creativity, but had strong views on the role it should play in a graphic designer's work.

4.2.2 THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY IN THEIR GRAPHIC DESIGN PRACTICE

All the designers acknowledged that creativity plays a crucial role in graphic design. However, Mitchell said that his current job does not leave a lot of room for creativity. He stated his "real creativity comes out through personal projects" (2011, pers. comm. 10 August).

As the previous question, the answers flowed from different angles. The most common view was held by Richard, Nigel and Milton, in that, a creative approach to graphic design avoids being unoriginal. Richard believes that creativity should play an important role in any graphic designer's career. For him, design is about creating inventive and exciting work.

Similarly, Milton aims "to add an element of an imaginative, non-repetitive, fresh idea to the problem", when it is appropriate. Though, he believes that people with rigid marketing ideas and objectives make it extremely challenging for designers to add an imaginative quality to their work. Similar to his previous response, he has experienced that the transgressive imagination of a designer is "immediately limited by the understanding" and perceptions of both the client and audience.

Accommodating the ‘distinction’ between these perceptions lies at the root of successful visual communication. Milton believes a designer’s creative efforts should be spent on communicating effectively, through delivering the message. But for him, “beauty is a very special attribute” that can be added after the critical communication problem has been considered (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

Nigel agrees that creativity plays an important role in design, as do linear thought processes. He admitted to being more excited about the creative aspect in his work. However, he also finds pleasure in the mechanical process of “drawing the elements”. Working on different jobs, in various stages, helps him choose creative design directions (2011, pers. comm. 27 September).

Nick’s answer was similar to the previous respondent. His design work gives him an opportunity to stretch the perceptions of people who do not naturally look for creative solutions. He also acknowledged the difficulty in maintaining such a mindset.

Milton described the conflict of objectives that tend to dishearten designers, as evident in the following extract:

> *I think the easiest thing to do, and you see it in professional life, is to give up… You become a professional. They ask, “We sold a hundred thousand boxes of Protex last year, what are you arguing about?” If that is your objective, that’s fine, but a lot of people have other objectives. The field itself is discouraging* (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

Linking creativity to a kind of ‘playfulness’ is important to Sebastian. He also mentions the impact of ‘repeatability’ and experience on the creative process. This resembles Richard’s answer where he states that it is unexplainable, but the more creative work a designer does, the more efficient the process becomes (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

Again, Amanda had an intuitive approach, by stating, in her designing, a creative result is reached through a feeling that it works well, when the colours and scale are balanced.

4.2.3 POSSIBLE HABITS FOR MAINTAINING CREATIVITY

When asked whether they have specific habits to help maintain creativity, the answers were addressed in two ways. Firstly, they mentioned practical activities that help them to maintain originality, and secondly, perspectives were raised that allow them to continually produce creative work.

Sebastian stated that, during one's career, methods evolve and every designer has to find their own way of activating creative thought. He claims:

> *For some people, they have to remove themselves from the normal environment, like sit in a café, go for a walk, or sit on the subway. You figure out how you can literally create the situation where you will have the greatest chance of having interesting ideas emerge* (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

Both Nigel and Sebastian felt their habit of starting work early in the morning gives them an opportunity for creative thought before distractions begin, such as phone calls and Emails. They both felt that distraction avoidance plays a crucial part. For Nigel, it is important to keep working, and not wait for inspiration or for the 'Muse' to arrive (2011, pers. comm. 27 September).

Sebastian uses Transcendental Meditation to help him quiet his mind, and he records his dreams. He believes personal experiences can play a valuable part in inventing new design avenues, such as visiting galleries and going to a cinema. This, he says, can directly link a designer to the context of their audience, which enables a possibility for creating a true connection when communicating through design.

Milton simply stated that, for him, two activities that play a fundamental role are reading and drawing.

Two methods Odelle emphasised are doing research when given a brief, and using brainstorming techniques. She believes research should be the starting point of any new brief. Odelle stated, "(i)t is like an injection…, because it challenges your preconceived idea, style or direction" (2011, pers. comm. 21 April).

A habit for Mitchell is to keep his camera at hand, "to photograph any scene that presents itself" (2011, pers. comm. 8 July).

Richard hesitated to mention any habits, other than, repeatedly undertaking creative work.

Amanda, Mitchell and Odelle do art and design projects that excite them, outside of their work environments. Mitchell often does poster design for local rock bands, and Odelle enjoys creating art where she can actively use her hands, especially painting. Amanda views journal drawing as a way of recording personal events in her life. She feels this heightens the experience. Similarly, her journals also create an environment where she can, on a small scale, contemplate many possibilities for a design. Because of the concise format, she is able to design while she travels, for instance, on the subway.

On having particular mindsets that favour a capacity for creative thought, Milton said he has a curious mind, and focuses on maintaining an open mind. He explained that rigid certainty closes one's mind.

Enjoyment is an important aspect for Sebastian. He maintained:

> *At this point, it is absolutely enjoyable what I do. I am really glad I can do what I do, as a profession. I wouldn't have it any other way. I think it is an essential part to experience that kind of joy, and to have the energy and confidence to control the creative process* (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

Notably, both Milton and Nigel discussed role models as their sources of inspiration. Milton has great admiration for the work of both Pablo Picasso and Giorgio Morandi. Nigel fundamentally respects the way that Otto Neurath and Gerd Arntz have invented information graphics for public spaces. Their work directly inspired his methods.

4.2.4 EXPERIMENTING WITH DESIGN CONCEPTS OUTSIDE COMMERCIAL CONSTRAINTS

All of the designers acknowledged the importance of experimentation in creating original design, but some felt there does not have to be a distinction between commercial and self-initiated design projects. Although, four of the designers,

Mitchell, Nick, Richard and Sebastian, said they practise design experimentation outside their commercial work, as well.

About design experimentation, Richard answered that, similar to Sagmeister, personal projects allow him to remain enthusiastic and passionate about his design work, and that day-to-day commercial work can drain one of such enthusiasm. But, he felt that "doing work that feeds your soul" is personal, yet not all designers have this need (2011, pers. comm. 4 April).

According to Nick, maintaining enthusiasm in one's daily work can be challenging, and he stated that the importance of experimental design lies in creating according to your own vision and ideas. This is not always possible when designing in a corporate environment. Experimenting, he felt, helps a designer to gain confidence in chosen design methods.

Nigel and Odelle said they do not feel a need for doing experimental graphic design outside their paying work, as they design everyday. Rather, both expressed an enjoyment for creating through other art forms, as discussed in the following section.

Working as a freelance designer, according to Nigel, gives him more creative freedom than when he is working for an employer.

Amanda discussed the difficulty of shifting between client-initiated design, and doing free artistic work. She called it the "issue (of) balancing the two different worlds", describing it as two modes of thinking (2011, pers. comm. 20 September).

About separating commercial from personal work, Milton stated:

> *I make no separation between what I do daily and what I do on my way home, or when I am sketching. I don't see my life as dichotomies. It is one experience.*
>
> *I am having a show here, prints of illustrations for jobs. Five or six years ago I started doing patterns on the computer, and three years later somebody asked me if I had any rugs. Now there is going to be a show of rugs made in Tibet, in Santa Monica coming here in a couple of months. All because I thought I would make some patterns. There was no reason to do that… I just did it. Then the reason materialised.*

> *That is what happens in life, you start to do something and a reason materialises* (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

Milton's view points to the important possibility that self-initiated work can become commercial, and design does not have to respond to client briefs.

Sebastian practices creative experimentation through many 'outlets', including music. For him, personal projects "blur the line between art and design objects". He continued: "(T)he *idea* comes out of reflecting on stuff that goes on around me", allowing him to reflect on life in general. Sebastian stated that elements from these projects are inevitably used in his commercial work (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

Similar to Milton, Sebastian articulates his outlook on the commercial aspect of design:

> *The notion to design commercially, to me, is almost a misunderstanding... (Y)es, there is a commercial qualification that happens at some point, but we all know that some of the most successful commercial designs were completely inspired, and absolutely pushed the boundaries between design and art* (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

Further, Sebastian used Sagmeister's work as an example where provocative design goes beyond the 'commercial framework' or 'brand rationale'. He believes this form of design truly captures the attention of an audience (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

4.2.5 THE BENEFITS OF EXPERIMENTATION IN DESIGN

Amanda, Mitchell, Nick and Richard stated that design experimentation is beneficial.

Amanda said her best ideas are born from 'accidents', when she tries new techniques, and described such activities as "spend(ing) time alone with your brain". She believes this principle does not only apply to visual arts, but all forms of art. Furthermore, Amanda implied that this helps her to remain passionate about her art or craft, and it even impacts psychological well-being (2011, pers. comm. 20 September).

Mitchell contributed:

> *If a designer does not practice any creative work, other than work for a job, in that corporate environment, he or she will lose touch with their creative abilities, and modes of working. A designer's work will become repetitive and stale... It is quite a key aspect, but I think most designers naturally enjoy doing free creative work* (2011, pers. comm. 8 July).

Mitchell has observed that some progressive agencies allow for experimentation within a corporate environment. However, he felt that if a designer's job does not allow this, he or she should create their own environment for such work.

On the same trend, Sebastian believes that a creative person will naturally search for creative solutions, whether it is for a "design solution" or an "agreement with a contractor". He reiterated that designing is a way of "being in the world" (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

4.2.6 EXPERIMENTING WITH OTHER FORMS OF ART OR DESIGN

Even though all of these graphic designers work in dynamic corporate environments, they all expressed that they engage in a wide range of art and design practices, finding it both inspiring and energising.

Mitchell described his love for pottery, and enjoyment for working with his hands. He stated: "(I)f I can sit down right now, and do pottery, I will be in my element" (2011, pers. comm. 8 July).

Nick finds artistic outlets through figure drawing and gardening, experiencing both as enjoyable and relaxing. He has discovered that figure drawing developed his confidence when drawing for design. Plants and flowers allow him to design through nature, and he compared this to arranging colours on a canvas. These practices allow him to create in a non-judgmental environment.

As answered in a previous question, Odelle paints and draws as a way of spending quality time with her children. This imbued a passion to one day make illustrations for a children's book.

Painting and experimental photography give Amanda an opportunity to create expressive art.

Nigel shared his landscape drawings, which can be viewed on page 115 of Appendix 2. He particularly enjoys sketching musicians at jazz clubs.

Both Odelle and Nick introduced the concept of inspiration to this question. Nick raised the point that design is a universal *language*, and, as a graphic designer, he finds inspiration in other forms of design, such as fashion. Similarly, Odelle is especially inspired by good photography and good interior design.

Milton views the various creative activities an artist or designer may practise as "continuity", and "not (as) a series of discreet and separate acts" (2011, pers. comm. 21 September). Milton explained:

> *I believe everything is related to everything else. There are no unique occurrences in the universe. Everything is connected… The benefit of doing many things is that you have something to bring to the next project. Your experiences change how you work* (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

This concept, Milton felt, ties in with the theme of a book he was finishing off during the week I interviewed him, called, *In Search for the Miraculous or One Thing Leads to Another*. It is based on an exhibition he held in 2010, where he showcased how an idea from one project inspires another, even if they were created many years apart. The exhibition displayed a wide range of Milton's art and design projects (Glaser 2012).

Richard's outlook, on design and art, resembles that of Milton. He responded:

> *Yes, I feel very much as Glaser does, design is design. If you love and understand design it's a joy to move seamlessly between one discipline and another.*
>
> *I have dabbled in product design, interior design, fashion design, photography, painting, sculpture, writing and music. All outside the world of graphic design, but all doable within the guiding principles of design* (2011, pers. comm. 4 April).

4.2.7 THE ROLE OF DRAWING IN CONTEMPORARY GRAPHIC DESIGN

In finding out how drawing may assist contemporary graphic designers in creating original design, the respondents were asked how they view the current role of drawing in the field. Sebastian replied that this question needs to be answered from two angles. Firstly, one should consider that there has been a general shift in the craft, from traditional hand drawing to digital tools. Secondly, one may reflect on the role of drawing in an individual's graphic design practice. Interestingly, the other designers all spontaneously approached the question from these two stances.

All the participants acknowledged that digital platforms have become the general way of drawing for current graphic designers.

On developments in the craft, Sebastian stated that pencil drawing was central in graphic design until about fifteen years ago, but due to digital production it is not a fundamental requirement anymore. He added, graphic design was considered a craft or trade, and seldom had the dimension of invention, as it has today. He stated:

> *It (graphic design) was really a craft with a particular task. I mean, the art director was the one that thought of the ideas, but then you hired a graphic artist to then make the artwork, to execute or produce the artwork that was needed. So, the whole concept of being a graphic artist was predicated on the ability to draw, to have full command and sophisticated skill with a pencil… The fundamental skills set has largely changed, to being able to operate equipment that is highly technical* (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

Sebastian felt this gives designers the ability to execute design concepts without being limited by their drawing skills.

Milton agreed that one can be a capable designer without being able to draw well. He believes the popular views on drawing in graphic design have significantly changed during the twentieth century. He explained how drawing was not well regarded at the beginning of the modern era, due to the popularity of abstraction in fine art. But he maintained it has "robbed them of much of their form making ability". During the rise of the modern era, drawing was viewed as 'utilitarian' and not

‘intellectual’. This, he felt, had a significant impact on how graphic design has developed (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

When working at *Time* magazine, with the advent of digital technology in 1985, Nigel observed how good illustrators produced weak work. Many illustrators believed they had to produce work on a computer. According to Nigel, even today, illustrators don’t have to use a computer. As an information graphics designer, he stated that drawing by hand, and drawing through using a computer, are very similar. Although, he claims that digital tools have significant benefits, such as easily creating iteration and erasing mistakes.

Mitchell recognised that drawing is not an essential tool for a designer, and perceived that designers should ‘move with the times’. Similarly, Odelle viewed drawing in design as a ‘luxury on the side’, though she explained the enjoyable qualities (2011, pers. comm. 21 April and 8 July).

Nick, Milton and Amanda expressed how, today, digital software dictates the way many designers work. However, they use drawing to conceive original design ideas, as well as for solving aesthetic problems.

Nick sketches his designs, especially typographical forms, before he works on a computer. This enables him to quickly consider many angles to the visual problem.

Milton raised the question, “if you can’t draw, how can you make form?”. He continued that “if you can’t draw, you can’t represent what you are thinking of”. Milton compared this to a jazz musician unable to play piano. He stated:

> *For me the idea of drawing is a ticket to heaven. You can make anything you imagine. Not everybody can do that. The biggest advantage, I think, I have over other designers is that I can think of something and represent it. I can make it real. If a client goes to an artist or designer who can’t draw, that skill is not available to them* (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

For Amanda, initial small sketches allow her to consider the message before focussing on the detail of aesthetics.

4.2.8 THE BENEFITS OF PRACTISE DRAWING FOR A GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Most of the participants felt that practising drawing has beneficial values to a contemporary graphic designer. Although both Mitchell and Richard stated that a decision to do so depends on the individual. Mitchell felt a designer who predominantly works with photographic material does not have a reason to draw. However, for Richard, continually drawing helps him to creatively "keep in shape" (2011, pers. comm. 4 April).

Sebastian experienced that sketching allows him to rapidly record visual ideas. To him, it is a fast way of note taking. Nick, Amanda and Nigel had similar views about the benefit of sketching ideas before design execution, which is, to quickly consider many options before choosing a direction.

Amanda responded that there are many benefits to drawing, and a designer 'can't go wrong' by regularly practising it (2011, pers. comm. 20 September).

Nigel mentioned two benefits he experiences through drawing, namely, relaxation and, more importantly, the concentration of his focus. When creating symbols for information graphics, Nigel reported that it is essential to be able to observe and represent. He believes this is a skill best learnt through drawing. In addition, he felt that drawing from life allows a person to 'look hard' at a subject; a vital skill when analysing form to create graphic symbols. Nigel used the example of Gerd Arntz who worked out all his artworks and designs through constant drawing (2011, pers. comm. 27 September).

Both Nick and Odelle have experienced drawing as a form of meditation. For Nick, life drawing allows him to develop on drawing skills in a pressure-free environment. This has improved his ability to make rapid sketches when designing to meet deadlines.

Milton explained a fundamental benefit from a philosophical angle:

> *(A)fter years and years of drawing where you learn to represent what is in front of you, you then discover that is not the point… Being able to draw accurately is irrelevant. Then you have to ask: "What is it for, if not for that?" What it's for is to determine what is real. That is why it is a survival mechanism for the human species, and that is why it has persisted for so long. If drawing merely had a decorative or financial*

consequence it would have disappeared a long time ago (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

4.2.9 DRAWING AS ENJOYMENT

Richard, Nigel and Odelle answered that they occasionally draw for enjoyment, but Mitchell said he does not (2011, pers. comm. 4 and 21 April and 27 September).

4.2.10 HOW ENRICHING SENSORY STIMULATION RELATES TO GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

When asked about the possible benefits of enriching sensory stimulation on the creativity of a graphic designer, the participants had two predominant themes. Some participants spoke about specific activities that enrich their senses, and most chose to focus on the enjoyment they receive from creating with their hands.

Earlier in the interview, when briefly explaining her experience as an art director, Odelle mentioned she had experienced burnout. She explained:

> *At the studio all the designers worked very long hours. It is a norm in the industry, but it should not be* (2011, pers. comm. 21 April).

Through insight, which Odelle received from taking a sabbatical, subsequent to her burnout, she continued:

> *You can find out what feeds you, what fills you up and what doesn't. How can one do less of what doesn't fill you up, and do more of what does? It definitely also helps you to set your personal boundaries, and become aware of 'warning signs', to know when you are too close to burning out* (2011, pers. comm. 21 April).

This response allows valuable insight into the context of her next response, where Odelle stated:

> *What has struck a chord is that I really love doing mood boards, and I always have them around… I usually stick beautiful colours on them to see how they work together. It can even be a piece of rope or something from a magazine, any beautiful piece of design. These boards are always full of things that make me happy. I guess it is my*

> *way of looking for exactly that which you are talking about, for something other than just the clinical digital environment* (2011, pers. comm. 21 April).

For Sebastian, calming sounds and music help him to focus and relax, though he made it clear that one's sensory bias is highly individual. Nick displays inspiring posters and a fish tank in his workspace to counter a stark corporate environment. Amanda responded that digital connectivity in the industry, particularly through Emails, hinders important social interaction between graphic designers. She feels this interaction creates an environment for learning. Also, making journal sketches of a scene allows Amanda to record an experience with a heightened sense of awareness.

Nigel enjoys the process of cooking. As a visual artist, this gives him an opportunity to not only create dishes that are flavourful, but are also beautifully presented.

More so, culinary preparations give him an opportunity to work with his hands. On the theme of working with their hands, both Nick and Sebastian described the delight they experience from building mock-ups for design projects. Even though Mitchell felt it does not relate directly to graphic design, he loves pottery, and finds pleasure in shaping clay. However, photography does relate to design, and photography allows him to remain attentive to possible subject matters.

When the various senses were mentioned, as stated by Lombard (2007), Milton immediately focused on the sense of movement. He elaborated:

> *We learn through motion. The brain responds to movement, especially the movement of a hand. It is a fundamental relationship. The hand is a brain, not an appendage. It is not separate from your brain… Creativity is motion. It's movement towards or away, making decisions to open or close. That is what keeps the brain and mind active. Otherwise it looses interest, and the nerve endings stop working* (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

The act of creation is fundamental to Milton's understanding of maintaining inventiveness. Milton stated:

> *There is nothing more basic, certainly to a designer or a painter's life… For me the idea of making something, whether cutting it out or pasting*

> *it down, is what nourishes the brain. It's what keeps it lively and engaged. Disengagement, whether from your business, from your friends, from your work, is basically what ends people's capacity for invention* (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

4.2.11 KEY ASPECTS FOR A WORKSHOP

All the participants endorsed the notion of conducting creative workshops in order to refresh the creativity of graphic design practitioners. Some recurring themes emerged. The most prominent aspect was held by five of the participants, in that the workshop should create an environment for free creative exploration. Nick, Odelle, Richard and Mitchell felt the presence of various art and design disciplines could inspire graphic designers to consider new methods and techniques in their own work. Creating an environment for social interaction and cultural appreciation was seen as a priority for half of the participants. Amanda, Odelle and Mitchell would like to see various art materials, including computers, at such workshops. This should provide an enabling mechanism for designers to experiment, to play and to develop their own working methods.

Both Milton and Mitchell thought a creative workshop environment may give participants the opportunity to reflect upon their own practice, and help gain clarity on a particular direction they would like to pursue. Again, Milton referred to the theme of the book he was working on, which is to view a career in art and design as a continual journey.

The interview answers revealed the range of ways graphic designers maintain creativity, as well as the importance of maintaining creativity if a designer hopes to develop an inventive quality in their work.

4.3 Designing a Workshop

The primary objective and benefit of the workshop was to experiment with methods that may assist a graphic designer in maintaining and developing creativity within a current context. The workshop also created an environment for social interaction between the identified graphic designers, as they are mentioned on page 54. This

aspect was raised by participants in the interviews as crucially lacking within typical professional practice. The Literature Review Chapter suggests that there are aspects of creativity that relates to people working collectively, and as individuals. Therefore, one project was designed for group participation, and the other project was designed so the participants will individually work on it. Because of the defined focus of the study, the participation of the designers as individuals was observed.

This chapter reports on how the participants responded to the proposed projects. Here follows the structure of the workshop:

- The intended key aspects of the workshop;
- Time duration;
- The facility;
- The tools and materials used in conducting the workshop, as well as the instruments with which the data was documented and recorded;
- The brief for the first project;
- Observations of the first project;
- The brief for the second project;
- Observations of the second project; and
- A conclusion.

4.3.1 INTENDED KEY ASPECTS

The workshop presented a wide range of art and design materials with which the participants could explore. However, digital tools were not supplied in order to encourage drawing and writing as methods of conceptualising and designing. The workshop aimed to create a friendly, non-judgmental, environment that encouraged creative play and exploration. The selected participants were purposely chosen to observe and share their different methods of working.

Sufficient time was given for social interaction, where the designers were encouraged to speak about their own work and creative projects. An abundance of

healthy and flavorsome food and drinks were offered throughout the duration of the workshop. Since an important part of the workshop was dedicated to enriching sensory input, this seemed fitting.

4.3.2 TIME DURATION

The total time duration of the workshop was three hours and thirty minutes. Half an hour was dedicated for the facilitator and the participants to introduce themselves. Thereafter, the designers participated in the first project called, *Listen to Our Senses*. This continued for approximately an hour. Another thirty minutes was dedicated to a break for refreshments. Following this, the second project, *Design for Music,* was introduced and executed within an hour and a half. Interestingly, the designers indicated that they would have preferred to carry on with the project past the allocated time. This was not possible as the facility was booked for a further activity time slot. The last thirty minutes were devoted to concluding the session by hearing their immediate responses to the experience. Lunch was provided during the debriefing stage.

4.3.3 THE FACILITY

The workshop was held in a lounge area at a Methodist church in Glenwood, Durban. It provided a suitable relaxed environment with chairs, tables and couches. The room was well lit, and there were few distractions, thereby enabling the designers to focus clearly while participating.

4.3.4 ART MATERIALS, DOCUMENTING AND RECORDING INSTRUMENTS

Various art materials were supplied, including gouache, pallets, pencil crayons, pastels, fineliner pens, pencils, sharpners, glue, scissors, sticky tape, Prestick, bright coloured paper, layout and 200gsm textured paper, a cutting blade and a cutting matt.

Physical reference materials were also supplied, which comprised of an eclectic range of magazines and printed sheets of various type fonts.

Three methods were used in documenting and recording the event. Firstly, with their permission, photographs were taken throughout the session. Secondly, a dictaphone recorded their responses to the projects, as well as snippets of their social interaction. Thirdly, immediate observations were jotted in a notebook as the workshop progressed.

4.3.5 PROJECT 1: BRIEFING

The first project was called, *Listen to Our Senses*. Each participant was given two objects that stimulate one of the four common senses, other than the visual sense.

They were told to close their eyes and verbally describe the imagery that each object triggered. This allowed them to connect the sensory experiences to their creative imagination. An example was supplied: The scent of a specific fruit can remind one of a street market in a small town in Italy. It was stressed that there are no right or wrong visualisations, and they should also try to explore non-obvious imagery. The participants were encouraged to explain the experiences in as much detail as possible.

4.3.6 PROJECT 1: OBSERVATIONS

The various sensory experiences triggered fond and vivid memories, as well as visualisations of tranquil scenes. Some visualisations were experiences they would still like to have, such as eating an authentic croissant in France.

In this project, Mitchell focused on the sense of sound. First, he listened to a song, *Pinta Nina Santa Maria* by Vangelis. For Mitchell, this triggered images of the ocean. He imagined being inside a barrelling wave, and being covered by water. Thereafter he listened to an ambient sound effect. This reminded him of being on a sun bathed secluded beach. As Mitchell regularly surfs, these sounds provoked images that reflected his love for the ocean.

To explore the sense of smell, Nick was given a fresh naartjie to break open. This triggered an unexpected fond memory of a time he had spent with his father on their patio. After this, he was given an incense stick. This reminded him of smoking hubbly-bubbly one evening with a few friends of his, next to a bonfire amid a forest

of pine trees, while listening to jazz. The sensory stimulation of these objects allowed Nick to momentarily recall vivid memories.

Kailash was handed objects that intended to stimulate the tactile sense. He shared that he normally does not think in terms of memories, but rather of stories he might write. However, from feeling the texture of the wool scarf it reminded him of sheep and folk people in the countryside, as well as images he saw on his recent trip to New Zealand. When Kailash was given coarse beach sand to run through his fingers, he pictured colours, such as blues and whites. For him this began to set the scene for a story: “A bright sunny day, cold breeze, gentle seas, laughter, comfort, water lapping toes”. Kailash has a passion for creative writing, and belongs to a writer’s club. It was interesting that in both experiences he referred to storytelling (2011, pers. comm. 6 August).

For the sense of taste, Nicole was given a freshly baked croissant. She particularly enjoyed its smell. This created a visualisation of a memory she wished she had. Although she said it might sound like a cliché, it reminded her of eating a croissant in France. Further, the plain croissant reminded her of marzipan, almonds and wedding cakes. In so, it also reminded her of her mother and her mother’s love for marzipan. Thereafter, Nicole was given a fresh piece of parsley, and instantly it reminded her of mussel chowder, such as what they would prepare when their family had a holiday at the beach.

Interestingly, all the sensory experiences had spontaneously set off particularly personal memories and visualisations. At the workshop, it was evident that they experienced this project as enjoyably refreshing, and none of the designers were reluctant to participate. They readily articulated their experiences.

In retrospect, drawing may be used in future workshops to explain and materialise their sensor experiences. This may also yield interesting results.

4.3.7 PROJECT 2: BRIEFING

Before the workshop session, the participants were asked to bring any reference material that relates to a musician or a band of their choice.

For the second project, *Design for Music*, they were asked to design a poster for the chosen musician or band, advertising a once-off show in Durban. The poster had to portray a theme of victory over drug abuse, as well as clearly communicating the event details. The designers could invent a suitable title for the show, and were encouraged to use any of the supplied art and reference materials.

Ambient music played in the background to create a relaxed environment. Posters of celebrated designers were displayed on a wall. The aim was to inspire and show the many approaches designers have taken when designing music related work.

In answering the brief, three stages were highlighted: Idea generation, idea evaluation and design execution. Time restraints were suggested according to these stages, but the participants approaches were, I subsequently discovered, far more spontaneous.

4.3.8 PROJECT 2: OBSERVATIONS

I immediately noticed that the participants isolated themselves, and began to page through reference material. Even though they socially interacted during the previous project, the atmosphere became quiet. Mitchell sat at the table and Nick was stretched out on a couch. Nicole sat on the floor, laid out the references and began to jot ideas in a supplied notebook. Interestingly, all the participants had their own methods of working.

Three of the four participants began the creative process through writing their visualisations. Thereafter, all the participants began to make small design and layout sketches. Thirty minutes into the project, Mitchell began to use various art materials, while the other three still conceptualised. Nick and Nicole were listening to music on their iPods. Specifically, Nicole told me she listened to music that related to her project theme. The participants were not interfered with during this process, as initial idea generation and conceptualisation forms an important part of the creative process. This approach coincides with the text of De Bono (1970) and Hawkins (1999). Kailash was able to source ideas for aesthetics from a comprehensive physical file of reference materials that he began to collect from his third year as a graphic design student.

In the design execution phase, all the designers began to use A1 and A2 size 200gsm paper. They also used many of the art materials that were supplied.

4.3.9 CONCLUSION

At the end of the workshop, lunch was supplied, and each participant was given a chance to explain their trail of thought, as they presented their work in progress. Although, none of the posters were completed by the end of the session, their work indicated clear directions in design execution, through the use of colours, layout and fonts. It was remarkable to observe the conceptual quality of design work that the participants were capable of producing within this environment.

The designers made it clear that they enjoyed the session, and asked whether there could be a follow-up workshop. This was not possible. However, it did reflect a desire for the designers to participate in such a workshop environment.

It would be somewhat unrealistic to assume that if a designer attended this workshop session that it would notably improve their overall creativity. However, this workshop design presents aspects that, if considered as regular habits within professional practice, should lead to improved creative abilities and design solutions, from which the individual and industry will benefit.

For future consideration, a similar workshop may include inter-discipline interaction, involving practitioners from other design fields, as discussed in the interviews.

Chapter 5

Practical Component Creating a Visual Journey

This chapter reports on self-initiated art and design projects created in journals as indicated in Chapter 3. All these projects were between 2010 and 2013.

Through these projects, I aimed to combine the three identified research factors. They became a personal method of maintaining creativity as a working graphic designer. They allowed me to practise various aspects of drawing, creatively experiment outside commercial constraints and search for experiences that enriched my senses. Reflecting on these projects, I hoped to maintain my own creativity, amidst working as a graphic designer and as a postgraduate student. Also, by mostly using traditional image-making methods within a digital age, this chapter observes the creative results of these projects.

Additionally, two examples are supplied of a design and illustration I have created within a commercial environment where preliminary hand drawing played an important role in the creative design solution.

When I began initial research for my proposal, I discovered the text of both Glaser (2008) and Gregory (2009), and found their views on drawing and sketchbooks inspiring. Almost instantly I decided to keep visual journals while conducting this study. The primary reason for this was to keep drawing and artistically experiment amidst time restraints. I had developed a personal habit of drawing since I began to work as a graphic designer, and realised that industry-based graphic design entails many hours of using design software.

I was attracted to working in this format for two reasons. Firstly, because it enabled me to creatively and artistically experiment in a concise and economic way. Secondly, when I began to work through a number of pages, the journal began to reflect a sense of continuity. I recognised recurring themes, as well as observed the emergence of a natural drawing technique.

Much of the work, as reported on in this chapter, does not directly relate to my typical commercial graphic design work, and I will not attempt to claim that this is

how graphic designers should develop journals. My own techniques are heavily influenced by training I received from a landscape and figure painter, John Smith. Having said that, it is my personal opinion that, because graphic designers often have different influences and interests, a visual journal of one designer can stylistically be substantially different to another designer (Shaughnessy 2005).

Through these personal projects, I was able to practise drawing. As we saw on page 35 of Chapter 2, drawing can be beneficial to graphic design practice. Also, the design and illustration projects allowed me to creatively play and experiment with concepts without having to consider the client judgments that designers often have to take into consideration. I experienced this as having a positive influence on my ability to draw from my imagination.

This chapter analyses drawings done from observation. These are divided into two sections. Namely, sketches from life in New York City, and small journal compositions. The chapter also focuses on creative design and illustration experiments. It also briefly analyses the role that drawing played in two of my commercial designs.

5.1 Sketching from Life

5.1.1 PROCESS AND MEDIUMS

When planning the research trip to New York City, I knew I wanted to capture as much from the experience as possible. A common and often effective way of recording such experiences is through taking photographs. Yet, I wanted a more experiential way of capturing immediate observations and reflections of this dynamic city. The significance of this geographical space is that it was the first time I experienced New York City, and I wanted to express my own interpretation.

Since 2008, I have found the discipline of free writing a valuable tool for working through creative ideas and thoughts. So, together with drawing, I decided that an appropriate way of capturing the experience might be through making visual and verbal sketches in a journal.

On the trip I used a 5 x 8¼" Moleskine journal with thin blank pages, and a black fineliner pen. This simple combination of tools allowed for a direct way of sketching. Reproductions from some of these pages are in Figure 1.1 to 1.7 of Appendix 1.

One evening in New York City I attended Sketch Night at the Society for Illustrators, and had the opportunity to draw from posing models. The evening was divided into twenty-minute sessions. After completing a few warm-up sketches, I decided to refine two drawings, using soft 4B, 9B and watercolour pencils. These drawings were done in a sketchpad and can be viewed in Figure 1.8 and 1.9 of Appendix 1.

5.1.2 REFLECTIONS

In New York City, I had the equivalent of approximately one week for leisure, and had sufficient time to find quiet moments to sketch, such as in Central Park or coffee shops.

In creating these visual and verbal sketches, I was not concerned with making mistakes, as I feel drawings and writings can be edited afterwards. I found this mindset important for fluently creating many sketches.

Looking back, I can say these sketches allowed me to remember the experience in more detail than if I had only taken photographs, such as the evening when I sketched a street scene through the window of a Starbucks shop on the corner of Broadway and Amsterdam, while listening to Louis Armstrong.

5.2 Small Compositions

5.2.1 PROCESS AND MEDIUMS

Figure 2.1 to 2.14 of Appendix 1 display journal drawings from observation where more time was allocated for composition. Most of these are from my third journal, since I began to conduct research for this study early in 2010.

This work depicts a method I have developed to constantly observe and reflect upon my surrounding environment. Working through these journals allows me to remain sensitive towards the visual nature and beauty of line, colour and

composition. All these drawings are made from scenes I have personally experienced, and the subject matters vary, even though I have occasionally returned to themes, such as horse anatomy.

Most of the drawings from this section were done in a 5 x $8^{1}/_{4}$" Moleskine journal for watercolour. Even though drawings from previous journals were done with fineliner pens, the later works are with a traditional dipping fountain pen. I made this change because I feel the expressive line complements my drawing technique. The colour, as seen in some of these drawings, is added with Derwent watercolour pencils.

Many of these drawings were composed from photographs, which allowed me to carefully consider focal points and space on the page. The preliminary composition sketches to many of the journal drawings were created in a layout pad.

5.2.2 REFLECTIONS

A benefit I found from drawing in this compact format is that it makes the process portable, thus, allowing me to draw in many places, even if I only had half-an-hour to spare. The simple ritual of opening the journal and preparing the pens and pencils made it easy to start the drawing process. In some way this felt like preparing for meditation. I found this particularly valuable as Meglin (2008) states that often people find it difficult to make time for the discipline of continual drawing.

The method of drawing from personal experiences allowed me to create drawings that are authentic as they are my own interpretations. More important to this study is that I experienced this habit sharpened my drawing skills, and improved my ability to fluently sketch and refine ideas for both commercial designs and illustrations.

5.3 Concept Experiments

5.3.1 PROCESS AND MEDIUMS

The work discussed in this section differs from previous work discussed in this chapter, in that these were created from concepts, and not from observation. They were personal illustration and design projects where the aim was to develop creative

solutions for self-initiated briefs. Reproductions of the pieces can be viewed in Figure 3.1 – 3.9 of Appendix 1. The only project that was not self-initiated was the church logo displayed in Figure 3.8. I decided to include it because it was created outside commercial restraints, and the logo was accepted without amendments.

In this section, I briefly explain the thinking behind some of the projects. As music plays an integral role in my family's life, a number of them were inspired by music, and it was possible to find appropriate reference material. I made an effort to photograph and sketch as much original reference material as possible for the execution of the illustrations. Most of the pieces were conceived and developed through drawing in journals.

The ink illustration in Figure 3.1 was inspired by the song, *Monday*, by Ludovico Einaudi. The purpose was simply to listen to the song and visualise a scene, according to the music's aesthetic.

In Figure 3.2 the drawing depicts a visualisation of Rachmaninov's third piano concerto. As this concerto was composed in 1909, amidst immense political, industrial and social turmoil in Russia, the drawing intends to portray something of that intensity, as well as sublime elegance. My attempt was to capture an element of this dynamic musical contrast.

The desire to create the work in Figure 3.3 emerged from reading an article in *Time* about the American soldiers in Iraq. This moved me and I decided to make an illustration on the reality of this war. I decided to make a metaphoric illustration based on words by the rock band, Linkin Park.

The pencil drawing in Figure 3.5 was created following some photographs I took of a model ship. Again, while sketching, I listened to piano music. I did many sketches until this image emerged from my imagination. As book illustrators are usually inspired by text while drawing, I wanted to create a visual concept that may possibly inspire someone to write a short story.

For a presentation that explains my research topic, I created a drawing that illustrates the research process. This can be viewed in Figure 3.6. After considering many possible directions, the simple image of both a closed and open hand seemed appropriate.

The projects shown in both Figure 3.7 and 3.9 are creative exercises from Sherwin's (2010) text. The exercises are specifically designed to help graphic designers refresh and develop their creativity and design skills. In Figure 3.7 the brief was simply to design a personal logo, an exercise designers may find difficult, as designers often create logos for clients, and not necessarily for themselves. The design depicted in Figure 3.9 was created from a typographic exercise. The brief was to find quotes from a respected public figure, and then to use the type to create a portrait of that person. For both these projects, the creative process began with small pencil sketches.

The drawing tools and mediums of the work explained in this section are similar to the previous work in this chapter, but I also used the digital software, Photoshop and Illustrator, to execute the designs.

5.3.2 REFLECTIONS

The primary benefit of producing these illustrations and designs was that it gave me an opportunity to practise my creativity through projects with which I experienced a personal connection. I was able to use my visual understanding, gained from close observation, to create works that have an imaginative quality - works I am able to call original.

Personally, I especially enjoyed creating the ink illustrations, as it combined my natural drawing technique with the chance to develop a creative concept. However, the creative exercises in Sherwin's (2010) text may be particularly beneficial to the creativity of a current practicing graphic designer.

5.4 Examples of a Commercial Design and Illustration

This section reports on two examples I created as commercial work. For each of the two pieces, I included their preliminary sketches. This shows how I made use of sketches in order to visualise the final designs. Through these examples, I aim to explain my typical method of working within a commercial environment at the company, Flow68. Time and budget restraints are fundamental when carefully

unpacking and interpreting our clients' briefs. The reproduced images can be viewed in Figure 4.1 to 4.4 of Appendix 1.

5.4.1 PROCESS AND MEDIUMS

As part of planning to reach certain milestones before 2018, the oil refinery company, SAPREF, briefed us to produce a logo, using the name, Vision 2018. They wanted the logo to incorporate the six divisions that form part of this goal, and wanted the logo to appear similar to the logo for the Olympic Games. Also, they briefed us to create logos for each of the divisions that can easily be identified as forming part of Vision 2018. We presented them three design options, but only one is displayed in this study. Interestingly, we noted that when they spoke about *Vision 2018* they used the words, 'vision twenty eighteen'. This detail influenced the final design solution.

The preliminary sketches, as displayed in Figure 4.1, are produced using a 2B pencil in a sketchbook. The sketches are very loose, and sketches from other projects are also visible on the page. This is typical of my sketchbook, as I view this as a spontaneous process. The ideation sketches followed spending a few minutes researching logos that were produced from a similar request, as well as observing current style trends that I felt can be appropriate. These drawings are not refined, and the moment I had a few ideas that I felt can work, I began to execute the logos. Primarily, using the software, Adobe Illustrator.

When the design options began to take shape, discussions between myself, as art director, and the creative director, Paul Gossman, helped refine the designs. We decided to use a specific colour pallet where each colour will enable to easily identify each of the *Vision 2018* divisions. One set of the completed logo options can be viewed in Figure 4.2.

Another client approached our company to create illustrations for a line of clothing. The aim was to create a boy and a girl character with which African children can associate, as opposed to most locally available children clothing brands that aims at appealing to western children. The client also stated that he would like each character to have a small mysterious friend, and that we should develop a logo, by using the names, Dudu and Sipho. After carefully interpreting the brief, I began to

draw preliminary sketches. The sketches were also created through using a 2B pencil in a sketchbook. Some of the preliminary sketches are displayed in Figure 4.3. Before I began the sketches, references were collected to help give an indication of the illustration style that will be used. The initial drawings were small and loose, and, as I began to gain clarity on the direction, the drawings became more refined. A number of poses and outfits for the characters were considered. The final drawings for both characters were crucial in the execution phase, as I used my hand drawings to trace the outlines in Adobe Illustrator, converting them to vector graphics. During the preliminary sketches some decisions were made on what colours to use, and this was refined in the execution phase. Figure 4.4 depicts a representation of the illustrations we presented to the client.

5.4.2 REFLECTIONS

These examples display a method that I have developed when producing work for clients within a business environment. This is where I accommodate my own understanding of aesthetics with that of the client and audience, while taking into account current stylistic trends within the graphic design field. My experience is that this mindset is similar to a statement that Milton Glaser expressed during the interview. He believes that the role of a designer is to consider the existing perceptions of an audience. I believe the habit of regularly drawing contributed towards the aesthetic of the final design and illustration. Working from my own sketches allowed me to produce original work that is specific to the supplied briefs (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

In this chapter, I reported on projects where I personally experienced a particular interest in their creation. I explained personal methods of thinking, when creating such projects. In some way, they are my own way of maintaining a feeling of engagement in creative practice. In the following chapter, I suggest brief recommendations for how a graphic designer can maintain creativity in a digital age. Chapter 6 also concludes the research study.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study observed the nature of the graphic design discipline. It also reported on the current context of a graphic designer, and how theoretical paradigms and digital technology have influenced the field. The study observed that creativity plays a pivotal role in graphic design, and that creativity is a multifaceted phenomenon that can be applied with different intentions.

The study points out that both financial and time restraints are important aspects to the design process, but when applied too severely, may stifle the creative capacity of a designer. This is evident in the text of O'Reilly and Linkson (2009), where they compare creativity, within the visual communication fields, to batteries that should be recharged.

The research study provides evidence that graphic designers should find ways to maintain creativity if they aim to produce imaginative work and remain motivated throughout their careers. The data, as collected and interpreted through the qualitative interviews, reveal that graphic designers view maintaining creativity as both challenging and important.

The research project discussed three sub-questions that, when answered, may possibly assist graphic designers in maintaining their creativity. The questions are stated on page 2.

The first question is whether a graphic designer may benefit from practising creative experimentation outside commercial constraints. The interviews and workshop all appear to support this hypothesis. We observed that Sagmeister uses personal design projects to maintain a feeling of engagement in his work, and that these experiments often serves as ideas for his commercial graphic designs (Heller 2009).

In an interview, Richard Hart also stated that a graphic designer can counter the phenomenon, where demotivation stifles creativity, through making time for creating personal projects (2011, pers. comm. 4 April).

In the text of Antes and Mumford (2009), we see that restraints are important for creating original visual communication solutions, and all the interviewed participants, as stated on page 63, agreed on the importance of experimentation amidst working within commercial restraints. However, in an interview, Milton Glaser highlighted that a designer should not view various modes of working as separate unrelated practices, but rather as one journey. Both Milton Glaser and Sebastian Kaupert believe that self-initiated projects can develop into commercial work, and commercial work can be approached with the same enthusiasm as personal work. This perception seems critical in understanding the relationship between commercial and personal work (2011, pers. comm. 21 and 30 September).

The workshop participants indicated that they appreciated the session, and enjoyed working on projects that challenged their creative and design skills, as evident from page 76 of Chapter 4. The workshop was conducted within a friendly nonjudgmental environment.

The study findings revealed consistently that self-initiated design and art projects allow graphic designers to creatively experiment, and that this is beneficial, because it enables designers to move past perceived boundaries. We also observed that self-initiated projects assist graphic designers in developing new and preferred techniques.

Fundamentally, the various work and office dynamics, within which graphic designers operate, require different approaches to creativity. During an interview, Nick Young-Thompson indicated that if a graphic designer feels that his or her work or job environment does not allow for sufficient creative exploration, self-initiated projects can serve as a valuable solution. In the same vein, when a graphic designer develops such projects, they can search for opportunities to apply such work into a commercial context.

As the second sub-question, the research study investigated the role that drawing plays in contemporary graphic design, as a method of developing original design solutions. In considering the role that drawing can play in contemporary graphic design, Sebastian Kaupert stated that it is important for a graphic designer to acknowledge that digital tools have become the norm in the field, and that most graphic designers are expected to keep abreast of developing technology (2011, pers. comm. 30 September).

Even though drawing has been described as a dated method of creating design, we observe in the relevant literature on page 35, and empirical data on page 68, proof that drawing can still play a vital role in creating original design. In my own design and illustration projects, as discussed in Chapter 5, I experienced that hand drawing is especially beneficial when used for sketching ideas and considering layout, before digitally executing a design or illustration.

It was also raised in the interviews that a practitioner may want to decide what role drawing plays in their own work, as some graphic designers and illustrators prefer traditional art materials to using digital software, and vice versa.

The third sub-question examined whether enriching sensory stimulation can form a part of how a graphic designer maintains creativity. Lombard (2007) states in her text that sensory input and sensory bias plays a crucial part in how people function in stressful environments. All the participants in their interviews recognised that it is a common phenomenon within graphic design to work in a stressful environment, as designers are often expected to be creative within demanding deadlines. It may be interesting to note that digital graphic design tools focus primarily on sight, and tend to neglect the other senses. During the workshop session it was observed how objects that stimulated the different senses of the participants allowed them to verbally describe vivid visualisations. This seemed to directly impact their imagination.

A number of the interviewed graphic designers, and workshop participants, also commented on a heightened sense of engagement when they physically create and shape objects with their hands. They were unable to explain exactly why this occurs, but Wilson suggests that there is a scientific explanation behind this phenomenon (O'Donnell 2009).

A recurring theme throughout the study was that creative practice is inherently similar to the movement of *input* and *output*. If a person draws from intellectual and emotional resources to produce creative work, that *output* should be balanced with adequate sensory *input*. This simple principle was described as a way to avoid burnout, creative block and disengagement from one's work (Cameron 1995).

This research project finally concludes that the explored three factors can play an important role in how a practicing graphic designer that works in a digital environment maintains creativity. The study recognises that if a graphic designer

understands the research problem, and finds ways in maintaining creativity, the individual will benefit by developing imaginative and inventive design work. As a result, this will be beneficial to the field.

Apart from the factors that the study has set out to investigate, two unexpected factors were discovered. Firstly, in the interview with Milton Glaser he stated that we learn through motion, and that the brain responds to the movement of the body, especially the movement of the hand. He believes this directly impacts painters and graphic designers. Secondly, a number of the participants introduced a factor, namely, that the interaction between practitioners from various art and design disciplines may inspire new design methods and techniques. Further research projects on the role of creativity in graphic design may benefit from investigating these unexpected factors (2011, pers. comm. 21 September).

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Appendix 1:

Here follows a list of the reproduced practical work created by the author, as reported in Chapter 5.

1 Observing life in New York City – visual and verbal sketches
Figure 1.1 – 1.9

2 Small compositions – fountain pen and watercolour
Figure 2.1 – 2.14

3 Concept experiments – illustration and design
Figure 3.1 – 3.9

4 Examples of a commercial design and illustration
Figure 4.1 – 4.4

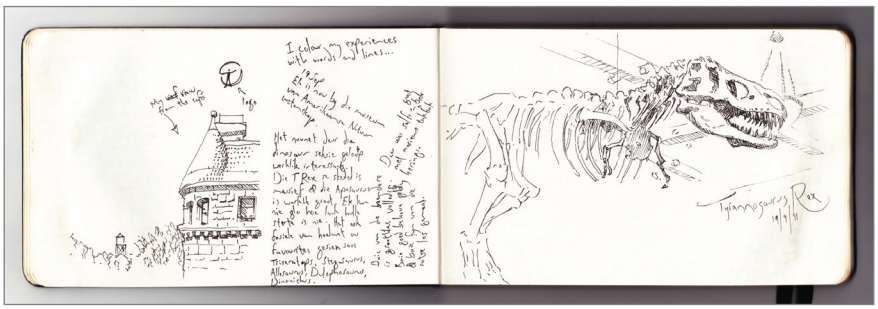


Figure 1.1

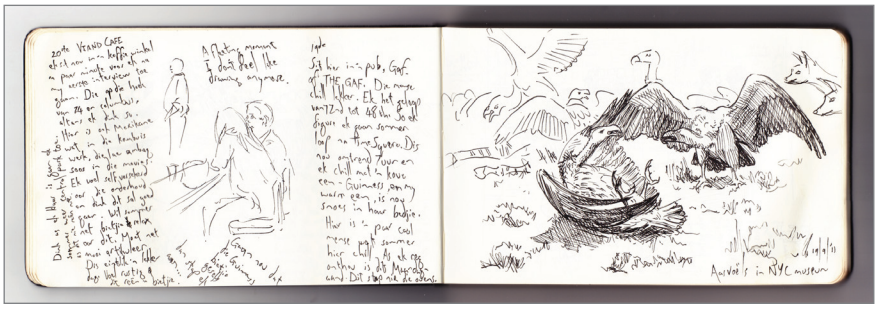


Figure 1.2

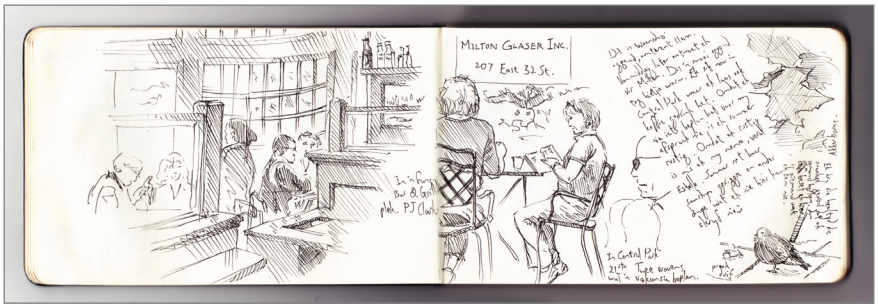
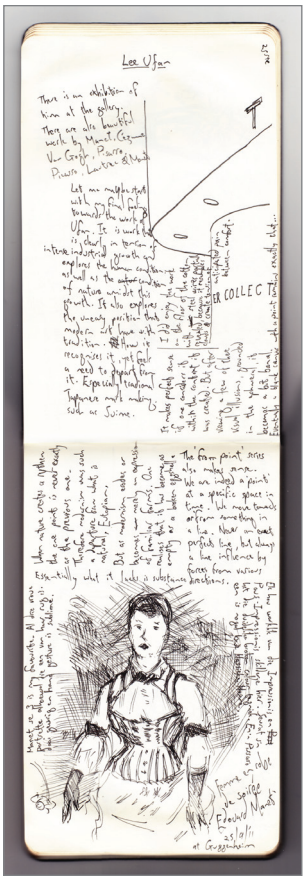


Figure 1.3

Figure 1.4

Appendix 1, figure 1.1 - 1.4:
Observing life in New York City - visual and verbal sketches
Artist: Nic Human

Figure 1.5



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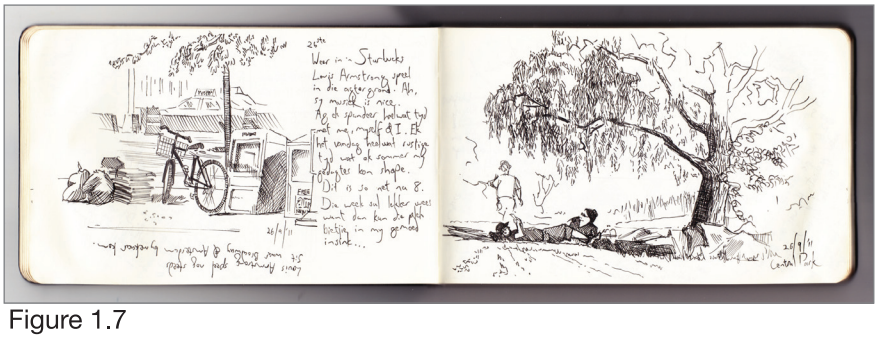

Figure 1.7

Appendix 1, figure 1.5 - 1.7:
Observing life in New York City - visual and verbal sketches
Artist: Nic Human

Figure 1.8

Figure 1.9

Appendix 1, figure 1.8 - 1.9:
Observing life in New York City - visual and verbal sketches
Artist: Nic Human

Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2

Figure 2.3

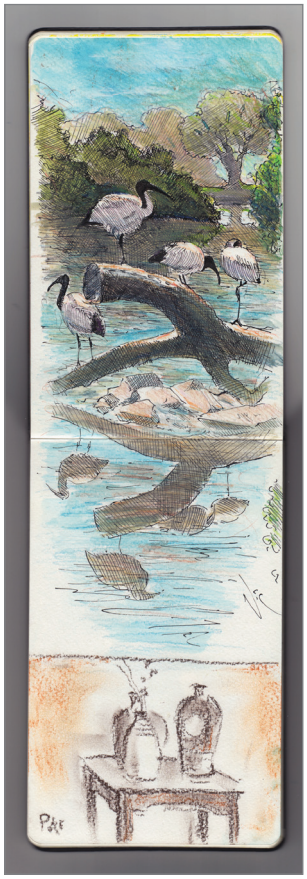

Figure 2.4

Appendix 1, figure 2.1 - 2.4:
Small compositions - fountain pen and watercolour
Artist: Nic Human

Figure 2.5

Figure 2.6

Figure 2.7

Figure 2.8

Appendix 1, figure 2.5 - 2.8:
Small compositions - fountain pen and watercolour
Artist: Nic Human

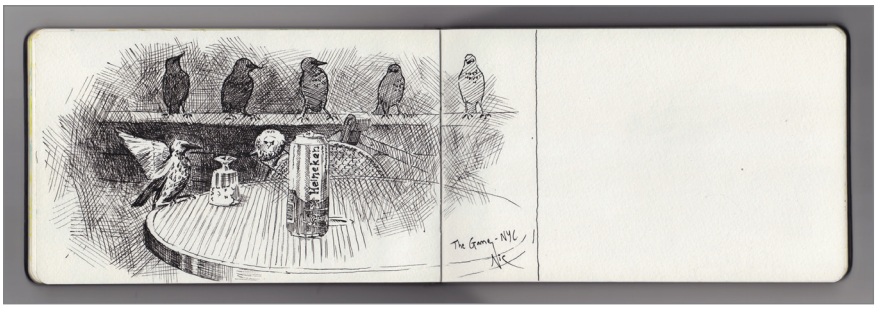

Figure 2.9

Figure 2.10

Figure 2.11

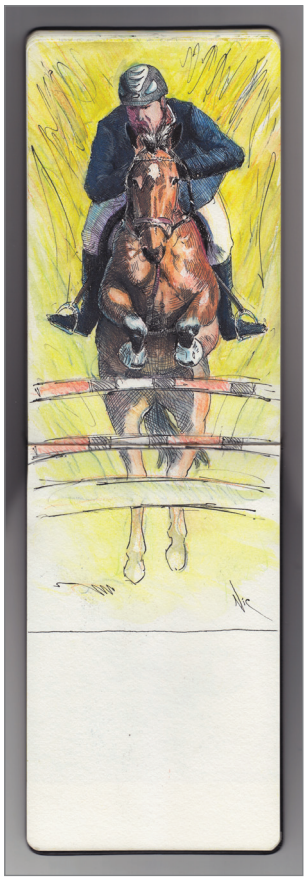

Figure 2.12

Appendix 1, figure 2.9 - 2.12:
Small compositions - fountain pen and watercolour
Artist: Nic Human

Figure 2.13

Figure 2.14

Appendix 1, figure 2.13 - 2.14:
Small compositions - fountain pen and watercolour
Artist: Nic Human

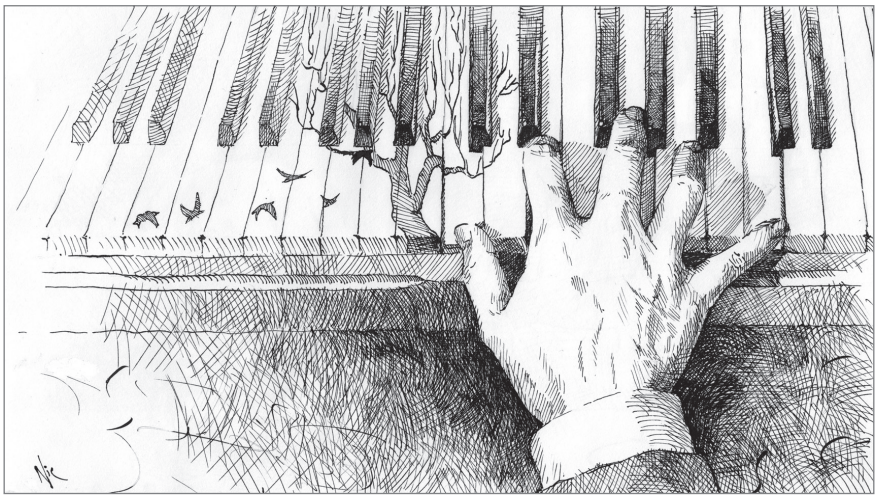

Figure 3.1

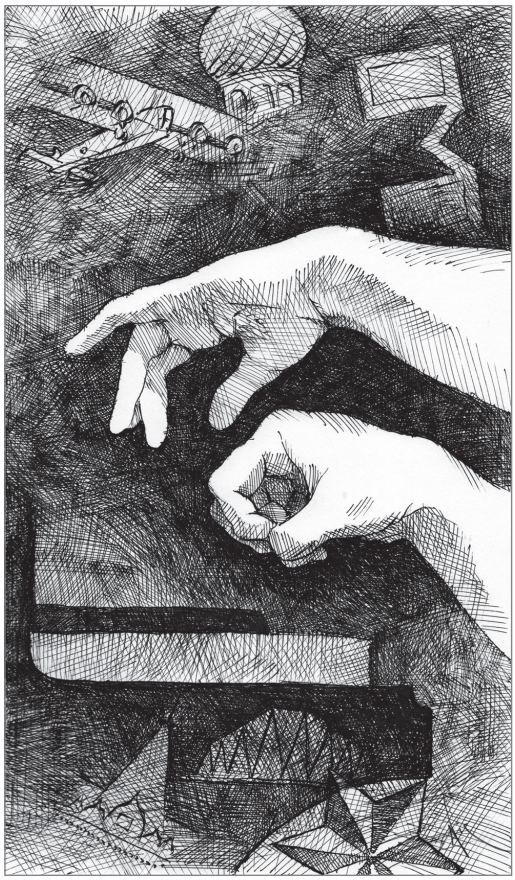

Figure 3.2

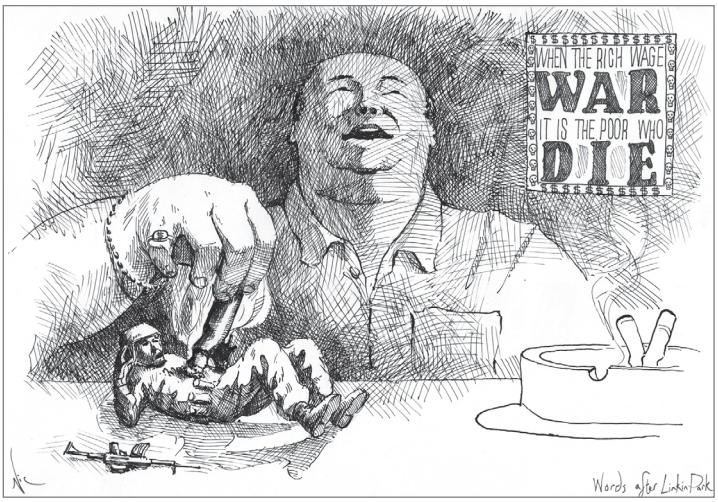

Figure 3.3

Appendix 1, figure 3.1 - 3.2:
Concept experiments - illustration and design
Artist: Nic Human

Figure 3.4

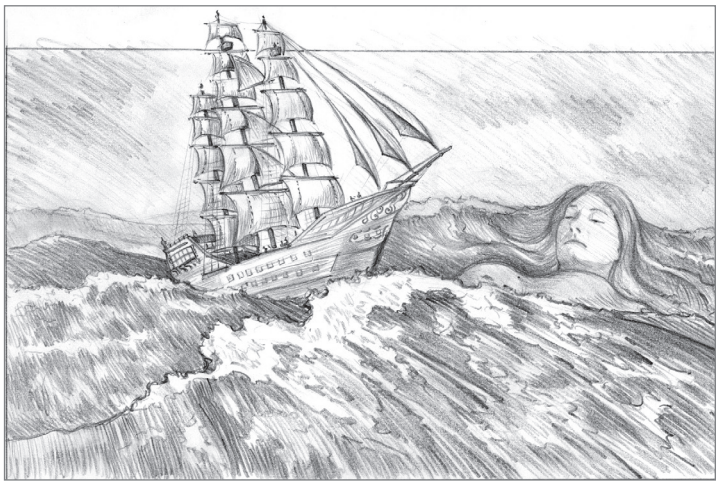

Figure 3.5

Figure 3.6

Appendix 1, figure 3.4 - 3.6:
Concept experiments - illustration and design
Artist: Nic Human

Figure 3.7

Figure 3.8

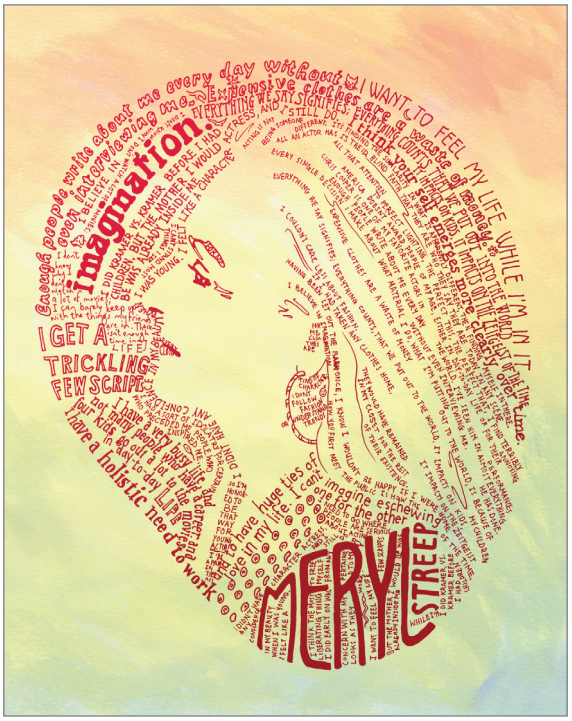

Figure 3.9

Appendix 1, figure 3.7 - 3.9:
Concept experiments - illustration and design
Artist: Nic Human

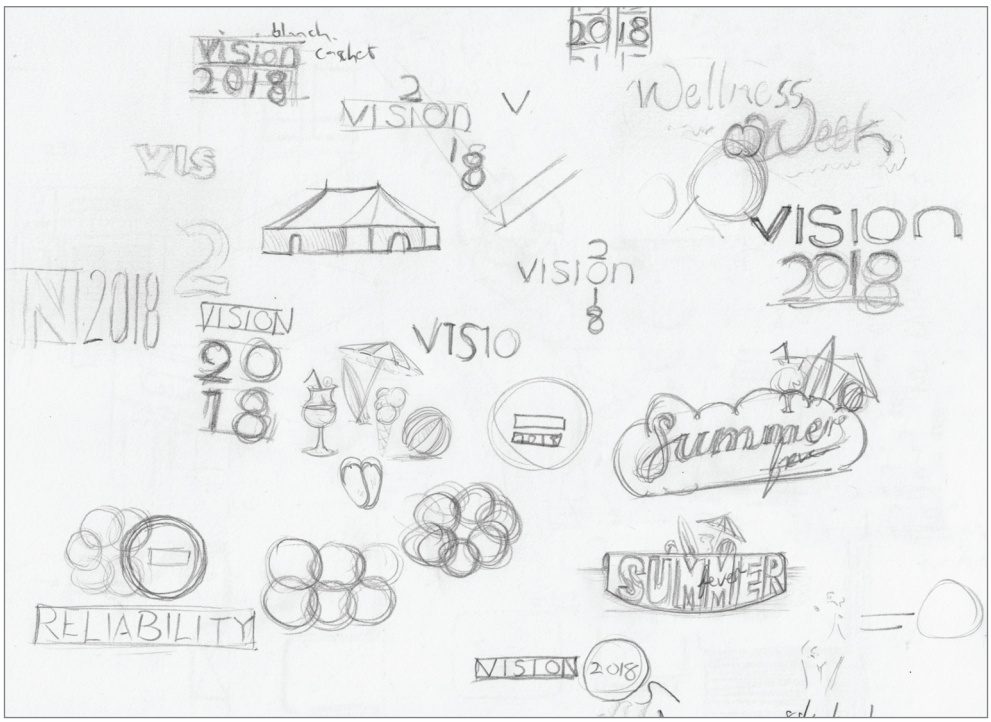

Figure 4.1

Figure 4.2

Appendix 1, figure 4.1 - 4.2:
Examples of a commercial design and illustration
Artist: Nic Human

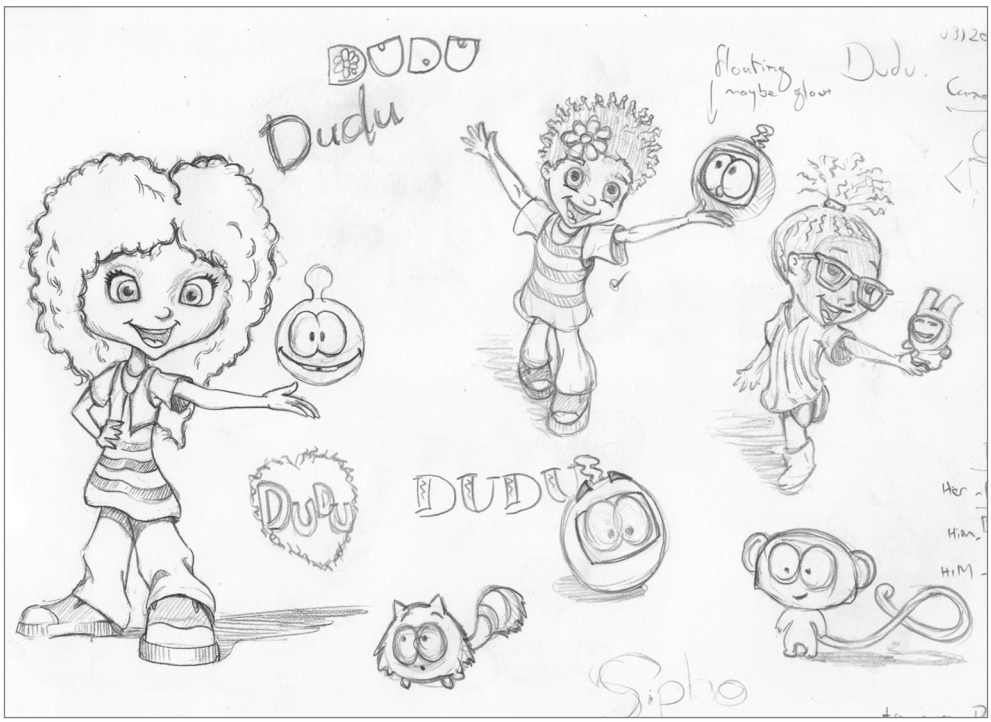

Figure 4.3

Figure 4.4

Appendix 1, figure 4.3 - 4.4:
Examples of a commercial design and illustration
Artist: Nic Human

Appendix 2:

Here follows a list of the reproduced images as referenced throughout the thesis.

1 Lucian Bernhard, poster for Priester matches
Figure 5.1

2 Julius Gipkens, poster for an exhibition of captured aeroplanes
Figure 5.2

3 James Montgomery Flagg, poster for military recruitment
Figure 5.3

4 Photos of creative workshop
Figure 5.4 – 5:12

5 Drawings by Nigel Holmes
Figure 5:13 – 5:15

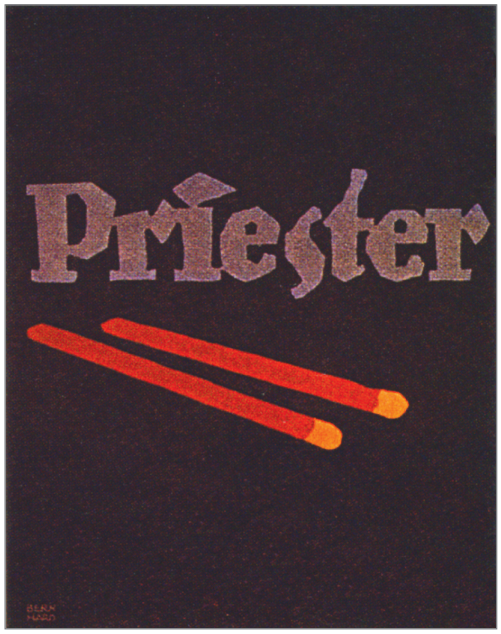

Figure 5.1: Lucian Bernhard, poster for Priester matches

Figure 5.2: Julius Gipkens, poster for an exhibition of captured aeroplanes

Figure 5.3: James Montgomery Flagg, poster for military recruitment

Figure 5.4

Figure 5.5

Figure 5.6

Figure 5.7

Figure 5.8

Figure 5.9

Appendix 2, figure 5.4 - 5.12:
Creative Workshop
Photographs by: Nic Human

Figure 5.10

Figure 5.11

Figure 5.12

Appendix 2, figure 5.4 - 5.12:
Creative Workshop
Photographs by: Nic Human

Figure 5.13

Figure 5.14

Figure 5.15

Appendix 2, figure 5.13 - 5.15:
Drawings by Nigel Holmes
Photographs by: Nic Human

Appendix 3:

Here follows two transcriptions as conducted in qualitative interviews with both Milton Glaser and Nigel Holmes. Only relevant sections of these two interviews are included, as the complete transcriptions of all eight interviews will simply be too lengthy for this dissertation.

Interview with Milton Glaser

Nic: I would like to briefly look at creativity. It seems to be a word that is frequently used, especially in graphic design. Graphic design falls into the category of what we call the creative industry.

May I hear your view on the word 'creativity'?

Milton: Well, it's a mischievous term, and a hierarchical term. It is also a social term. People want to be creative, because it is supposed to be an elevated state of being. But no one knows exactly what that means; 'by being creative'.

I suppose if you were looking for a description, you would have to relate creativity to transgression. Most creative efforts, at least in part, are a repudiation of an existing condition, and it shows of an alternative vision. It is very difficult to do in professional life.

It applies to the arts, because ultimately there is no client. There is no marketing objective. When you have a marketing objective, to some degree, it modifies the notion of creativity. All the work you do as an applied artist always starts with the nature of the audience, and the nature of the client. Which means that all the pre-existing expectations of what form is, what music is, what design is and what drawing is, are already in existence in the minds and perception of the audience and client.

Which means that you are always going to be in a situation where both client and audience resist your perception of what is real. Ultimately we are dealing with perceptions of reality, and those perceptions would vary dramatically with the nature

of the individual's experience. So, you can see, in the world of the applied arts and design, the idea of the imagination and transgression is immediately limited by the understanding of the people you are working for. The real problem in design is to understand the actual limitation of the nature of the audience and client, and how it relates to your own intelligence and talent. You have to understand that art have a different intention than design, and *that* intention is very complex.

Most people don't understand what art is or what its intention is. They think there is some relationship between all things that have a physical manifestation. I am not that innocent. I have always been able to separate the idea of what art is and what design is.

Nic: You have to create from a different stance.

Milton: Basically, you have to reconcile the distinction between what is art and what is design; the distinction between the affect that different marks have on people. Unfortunately, in the world of applied work, it's all lumped together. And people think the creativity of a painter and the creativity of a designer is the same thing.

What you discover as a practitioner, is that everything you do is a reconciliation between your imagination and what the public will accept. So what you do, if you know what you are doing, is you accommodate that distinction, and you walk a middle path. You don't do work that is most transgressive, almost difficult to understand, which should be celebrated for its imaginative quality. You don't design like that for places where you have to be understood. So that is the great distinction.

How you sustain that, has to do with the quality of your own mind. If early in your career you decide you are going to be professional, it means yielding to the imposed of being less creative. Basically it means you suspend your creativity, and you become a marketing man.

The real enemy of the imagination in graphic art, is marketing, and all the people who tell you what the answer is before you hear the question. You have to fight them. If you go into a room and there are four people: you, a creative director, a client, and a marketing expert, the marketing expert will make all the decisions. So you have to structurally understand it. You can't get confused about these *words*, hoping and longing to be an artistic personality and also an effective practitioner. You really have to separate it.

Nic: Yeah, the reason why I find this very interesting and why I understand what you are saying, is because as a designer I also have a background in painting and the arts.

Milton: Most people come into design from an art background. They've started painting, they've drawn all their life, and they think it's an easy segue, because there are some commonalities about form, colour and so on. But they are very different.

Nic: Just another quick question: What role, would you say, does creativity play in *your* graphic design work?

Milton: First, you have to solve the problem. You have to deliver the message clearly to an audience that will understand and respond to that message. That is number one. If you don't do that, you're out. From a personal point of view, I always try to add an element of an imaginative, non-repetitive, fresh idea to the problem, when it can be done.

Nic: Yes, when it can be done.

Milton: I also have an idea about the nature of beauty. Beauty is a very special attribute, but you can't always add it.

Nic: Maybe the trick is to keep a keen eye open for when the opportunity arises.

Milton: I think the easiest thing to do, and you see it in professional life, is to give up.

Nic: As a designer I find it quite difficult to settle.

Milton: You become a professional. They ask: "We sold a hundred thousand boxes of Protex last year, what are you arguing about?" If that is your objective, that's fine, but a lot of people have other objectives. The field itself is discouraging.

Nic: It can be very. I think that is why it is problematic, and why I enjoy talking to you about it. It is the reality of design. May I also ask, do you have a specific way or some habits that help you maintain your creativity?

Milton: All I know is that I am a curious person, and I am well trained. I have learned how to draw properly, read every book I could find, and I tried to have an open mind. Above all, I try not to believe too much about anything. My favourite quote is,

“belief is the closing of the mind”. Whenever I go into a classroom or a meeting with people that are full of belief, whether it is religious or artistic, I already know they have begun the erosion of the capacity for astonishment.

Nic: That is actually a good point (laugh).

As you have mentioned earlier, designers are required by their clients to continually approach briefs in a creative way, and respond to those briefs with convincing design solutions. Working with clients can be very demanding and sometimes this requires so much of a designer’s time and energy that they seldom have energy left for any other efforts.

Although, in the literature I have reviewed so far, I have noticed that some successful designers experiment with design concepts, and techniques outside commercial constraints, as a way of keeping their passion or enjoyment for what they do. Sagmeister said that he often used the ideas from his design experiments, which he did on his sabbatical, in his commercial work. Obviously your approach is very different to Sagmeister’s.

Milton: I don’t know what Stefan’s approach is. All I know is, my life is my work and I spend all my time doing it. I draw all the time; I have thousands of books; and thousands of references. I make no separation between what I do daily and what I do on my way home, or when I am sketching. I don’t see my life as dichotomies. It is one experience.

I am having a show here, prints of illustrations for jobs. Five or six years ago I started doing patterns on the computer, and three years later somebody asked me if I had any rugs. Now there is going to be a show of rugs made in Tibet, in Santa Monica coming here in a couple of months. All because I thought I would make some patterns. There was no reason to do that.

Nic: Yes, there wasn’t a brief.

Milton: No reason, I just did it. Then the reason materialised. That is what happens in life, you start to do something and a reason materialises.

Nic: A very good point.

In *Art is Work* you say, and I’ve seen it in your work, that at *Pushpin* you embraced the idea of practicing various design and art disciplines. “(O)ne could practice a

broad spectrum of activities and learn from those activities so that one informed the other". You also seem to continually experiment with various drawing techniques, where other artists might focus on achieving a single distinct style (Glaser, 2000: 8).

Can you please elaborate a little, and whether this possibly enables you to maintain a fresh approach in your work?

Milton: I have two models. I have Picasso, who was a man who abandoned and threw away everything once he had learnt how to do it, and Morandi, who basically did the same thing all his life. Both are geniuses and great artists. One did everything and one did almost nothing.

Nic: So it really has to do with your own approach.

Milton: I don't know what one's approach has to do with it, except that you can appreciate both.

The only thing about variety and doing many things, such as interiors and dimensional work, is that you move everything from place to place and learn something in the process. I am doing a book on that idea. The book is literally being finished today and tomorrow. It is based on a show I have, *The Search for the Miraculous* and *One Thing Leads to Another.* It is all about how an idea moves around. It is here, then it goes here, and then you can take a little from there, and suddenly you discover there is something you did thirty years ago in your latest work.

This is all continuity and it is not a series of discreet and separate acts. I believe everything is related to everything else. There are no unique occurrences in the universe. Everything is connected.

The benefit of doing many things is that you have something to bring to the next project. Your experiences change how you work. I am always surprised at someone who is willing to do the same thing all the time. It is another way of working.

Nic: That is also why I decided to do this study, because there is only so much of the same stuff that one can do.

Milton: Incidentally, that is what is called good professionalism. You know what you are doing, and you do it over and over. Unfortunately, you then keep doing it until you lose interest.

Nic: Is that possibly the job of a printer?

Milton: Well, I think a printer has the same opportunity to be imaginative as a graphic designer. It is not parochial. It really is a personality attribute.

Nic: Excellent, thank you.

Now I am going to move on to drawing. The role of drawing, in graphic design, has dramatically changed with the digital revolution, and today many graphic designers do not see an immediate reason to draw.

You have recently released your book, *Drawing is Thinking*, where you describe your relationship with drawing, and beautifully invite the reader or viewer to both recognise and perceive your compelling inner logic as an artist. But more importantly, you invite us to use drawing as a tool for visual thinking. You also link the act of making art to our primal existence, comparing the necessity for continual attentiveness of an artist to that of a 'hunter-gatherer'. In your text you speak about various modes of drawing, such as for observation, as interpretation, from your imagination, and even as a form of meditation (all these 'ations').

In this book, as a graphic designer, you have gone far beyond mere industry work and deadlines.

May I ask what role, do you think, drawing can play for a contemporary graphic designer in the digital age?

Milton: It's a long story. It's a story that began with the advent of abstraction, and the departure from drawing. It was perceived as representational right up until the nineteenth century. The idea of replication was the primary function, and it was replaced by the idea of abstraction. The idea was that you could deviate from what is in front of you and represent it obliquely or inferentially. So the 'cool' artists were those who created this revolution in perception.

Nic: The Post-Impressionists?

Milton: Cubists, Kandinsky, everybody who felt that you did not have to do another nineteenth or eighteenth century representational drawing. Photography also probably supplemented that issue. Interestingly what happened then was that drawing was abandoned entirely in favour of what seemed to be cooler, hipper, intellectual, and of a higher importance. So for many years, abstraction was,

intellectually speaking, of a higher level. And drawing became reduced to comics or illustration, which was viewed as utilitarian, and not cerebral. Drawing became less important, and less well regarded.

Then finally the idea of abstraction spread into the world of design, which became largely ideological and about form, but less and less reflecting the art world. Design became less and less about the way things looked, and more about creating a symbolic equivalence for what things looked like.

Nic: Did this start in the modern era?

Milton: It probably started in the 1920's and 30's. By the time I was in school, drawing was despised as being of the past and irrelevant, and even non-intellectual.

So a whole generation of people grew up who had no… The schools stopped teaching drawing, and there were no drawing classes. So people grew up not learning how to draw. What that did was, it robbed them of much of their form making ability. Because, if you can't draw, how can you make form?

Drawing is a neurological issue between the eyes, the brain and the hand. The only thing you get from drawing constantly is control over what you are doing. Otherwise if you don't draw, you can't draw. Nobody draws once...

Nic: … and do it well.

Milton: You can't. There is no way, because the path is not clear. The path from here to here is not clear (pointing at his head and then his other hand). You can't do it.

Nic: It's the same as playing the piano.

Milton: Well, if you can't draw, you can't represent what you are thinking of. There is no mechanism for doing it. It is like trying to learn to play jazz, without knowing how to play the piano. A person could say:

"Play a melody for me!"

To which he replies, *"Well, I can't do that."*

So, the great problem is that designers don't have control over form. I was thinking the other day; that was why typography has become the dominant issue in

designers' work. It's because in typography that is done with a computer, you can create design without having any drawing skill.

For me the idea of drawing is a ticket to heaven. You can make anything you imagine. Not everybody can do that. The biggest advantage, I think, I have over other designers is that I can think of something and represent it. I can make it real. If a client goes to an artist or designer who can't draw, that skill is not available to them. I think it is why to some extent, better or worse, my work is different to many of my contemporaries, because most of my contemporaries can't draw. Massimo Vignelli can't draw. He's a wonderful designer, but he can't draw.

Nic: And that limits them in some way.

Milton: Well, it gives them a different vocabulary. Most of my work in recent years were not drawn, but having the knowledge that if I had to I could, makes a difference. It gives you a different attitude towards form.

Nic: Would you say that what we are currently experiencing in the digital revolution is similar to what people experienced in the 1920s and 30s, with regard to drawing?

Milton: Well, I don't know what the digital revolution really is, except that I know people are dominated by the habits of the computer. The computer is not a slave. It is actually your boss. What people do is they accommodate the computer's will. The computer does certain things very well, and likes it when you ask it to do those things. Before you know it, you spend your time doing just that. You accommodate the computer's capacity and interest.

Because I come from a non-digital background I can really struggle with the computer and make it yield to my wishes, instead of the other way around, not that it doesn't influence you as all tools do. The computer has changed the working habits and stylistic interests of everybody. The results show. It has also levelled out the playing field, because it has so many intrusions on the way you think. Graphic design work has become very similar. Not entirely, but the observation that tools change the meaning of what you do, is true. There has never been a tool this powerful.

Nic: I am going to ask the following question, but you have already answered it to some extent. Can you please explain how drawing facilitates *your* creative process

when given a brief for a design or illustration, from generating the ideas to the final execution?

Milton: There is one very important role for drawing (and it is why it has existed through history) and that is; it helps you understand 'what is real'. The distance between what is drawn and what is seen is the critical distance within which you can determine what reality is. That's what the subject of drawing is and that's incidentally what people don't understand about drawing. When you begin to draw you think the issue is representation. You say, "I'm going to do a drawing that looks just like Joe". After you have learnt to do that, after years and years of drawing where you learn to represent what is in front of you, you then discover that is not the point.

Nic: Like Picasso?

Milton: Like anybody. Being able to draw accurately is irrelevant. Then you have to ask: "What is it for, if not for that?" What it's for is to determine what is real. That is why it is a survival mechanism for the human species, and that is why it has persisted for so long. If drawing merely had a decorative or financial consequence it would have disappeared a long time ago.

Nic: The next section I am going to move on to is sensory experiences.

As people, we absorb and experience the world around us through our senses; sight and sound, smell and taste, touch and movement. A seminal author on creativity, Julia Cameron (1995) states that it is very important for creative people to regularly expose themselves to enriching sensory experiences. She continues that one can draw from those experiences when engaging in a creative process.

In *Drawing is Thinking*, Judith Thurman states the theory that "our senses have evolved as a sublime intelligence-gathering operation minutely attentive to every scent, rustle, and shadow in a landscape" (Glaser, 2008: 8).

It seems to me that a designer's senses can become dull if they only create in a stark digital environment, using minimum hand and body movement to operate the computer.

Previous graphic design studios were filled with the various tools that today are neatly digitally displayed in design software. On a designer's desk, one could have

found a range of colourful paints and brushes, markers and collage snippets. Textured paper and board would lie around, and the smell of inks or photographic chemicals would linger. The studios had a range of ‘real’ tools, but today, although very convenient, they are virtual. Here I am not trying to romanticise about the good ol’ days, but rather to point out the distinctions between real and digital, and how we perceive ‘real’.

Can you please explain how you think a contemporary graphic designer can maintain sharp by avoiding their senses to become dull?

Milton: When you stop to think about it, there is nothing more fundamental in human experience than drawing a line in terms of what it takes to draw a line. The decision to do it, the neurological path, the experience of the feedback you receive from touch, and the sense of motion.

We learn through motion. The brain responds to movement, especially the movement of a hand. It is a fundamental relationship. The hand is a brain, not an appendage. It is not separate from your brain. What your hand does is understood by every part of your body. Drawing changes you. It changes your brain. If your body becomes inert, your mind becomes inert.

Creativity is motion. It’s movement towards or away, making decisions to open or close. That is what keeps the brain and mind active. Otherwise *it* looses interest, and the nerve endings stop working. There is no definitive act where you can actually measure it. Maybe you can observe the brain and see when it sparks and when it stops.

All I know is that the people in my life who have gone flat and have basically lost interest, seemed to have become dumber, and less intelligent. Their brains seemed to have stopped working and became inert. A part of it was a withdrawal from making things. There is nothing more basic, certainly to a designer or a painter’s life. But sometimes people loose energy, they become sick, any number of things can happen. For me the idea of making something, whether cutting it out or pasting it down, is what nourishes the brain. It’s what keeps it lively and engaged. Disengagement, whether from your business, from your friends, from your work, is basically what ends people’s capacity for invention.

Nic: Yes, what I enjoy about your work is that there is always a sense of energy in it. Even in this room I see you display your mock-ups. It also shows of an energetic process. It is actually, as you say; movement.

Milton: Yeah.

Nic: There is an energy that goes into making up work. I feel designing today, to a large extent, involves sitting statically in front of the computer.

Milton: I've been using the computer over the last ten years, working with someone. I love the computer. I love it because I think I understand it better than most people, and because I have alternatives to its use. It's a fantastic instrument, but you have to dominate it. You have to be able to understand what it is capable of doing. How it can respond to your needs, rather than *you* responding to *its* needs.

Nic: Very interesting. One of my main concerns is that drawing seems to get a smaller and smaller space in design education. I find that problematic, and have felt like that for a while. This concern has partially been what has driven me to come and explore in New York City.

Milton: Well, you just have to make a choice about how you want to work. I think the notion about drawing is changing and there are more people interested in drawing. More people are recognising that drawing and painting has a relationship to graphic design, because for a long time it was simply considered to be an old fashioned approach. Though, you can be a first-class designer without ever knowing how to draw a thing.

Nic: That is great, thank you. I have a final question. As part of the research I have conducted a workshop. There have been a good response from the designers, and they seem to have enjoyed being part of the workshop group. I know *HOW* also do workshops, but apparently they are a bit over priced.

Finally, if you would conduct a workshop aimed at helping graphic designers develop, or refresh their creativity, what are the key aspects you would like to see at such a workshop?

Milton: Well, I do a workshop. I do a one-week workshop once a year, in the summer. It has a very discrete objective. It's done over five days. It used to be eight hours a day, now it is seven hours a day. Its intent is to make people aware of what

it is they are *already* doing. Which is to say that most people have no idea of what they're doing, although they think they know what they are doing. So the workshop's intension is to make them raise questions about what they do, to develop awareness that distinguishes between what you think you are doing, and what you are actually doing.

If you start a journey, and I think of this as a journey, towards an objective you have to know where you are, and most people don't.

Nic: Doesn't certain unwanted habits and mannerisms develop when you are not critically looking at what you are doing? Once you pause and reflect you can look at new ways of doing your work.

Milton: The interesting thing is that most people don't know what they are doing. They are engaged in a practice, and they are working every day, but they don't look closely at what they are doing. They just know that at the end of a couple of weeks they have done a couple of jobs. The only time when other people actually look at their work is after they have died. When things are retrospectively put into sequence you can understand what you have done, and how your work has changed over a period of thirty years. Before that, people never take the opportunity to look at what it is they are doing.

Nic: Maybe one's ego gets in the way.

Milton: One's ego gets involved in everything, but if you create the opportunity for people to question what it is they do, at least you give them a vantage point. You give them a position to stand and see. Then you move them to give up their beliefs, and to just accept their experience. That's what I do as a class and it's a good class.

Nic: Are there any lectures or exercises at these workshops?

Milton: On every day of the workshop a practitioner visits, and they ask questions. I move from the past by representing what they've done that brought them here, to the present. They also work collectively, because most people don't understand collective work. Then they create an objectification of what they want to achieve. So, basically it moves from past, to present, to future. That is the structure. It's a powerful class and it's the best thing I've ever done.

Nic: Wow, I'll look into it and read up about it.

Milton: Well, I don't know if I'm going to do it again, this year was tough.

Interview with Nigel Holmes

Nic: Can you please explain a bit about your first encounters with design and illustration? I read on your site that from an early age the comic art of *Eagle* caught your attention. There you also mention a certain drawing of a map by your great-uncle, George Holmes.

Nigel: Yes, that probably was where it began, a kids' atlas. The book is a combination of maps and little drawings. I loved that book, without really thinking that one-day I am going to draw and do this as a job. I have always hung onto that book.

Nic: It is amazing how as a child one can *live* yourself into such illustrated books. For a child it has a magical quality. I remember a book I had about dinosaurs that I subsequently rediscovered many years later. As you get older you look at the drawings from a technical point of view, but as a child you really live into it. I assume it was similar for you.

Nigel: Yes. Now, I can look back at it as a combination between geography and illustration, in a really nice way (showing a reproduced version of George Holmes' map). The George Holmes map was hanging in my dad's living room. My great uncle was an artist. He was the only person in the family that worked in the arts. For Christmas we would get little etchings by him. He also drew plans to make boats. Once, when I worked in London, I was given some of his work as reference for a job that I did. It was quite a thrill. The job was on regional boats that ply waters around England (regional boats such as fishing coracles). All of those pieces inspired me from the beginning.

I especially liked magazines and comics, such as *Eagle*. There was something about the repetitive nature of them that interested me. You got one, and the next week you got another one, that excited me.

The nice thing at Time magazine was that if you made a mistake it was only around for a week, and then people threw it away. Books are different. They live with you forever. So, I have always been interested in doing something in a given amount of time, then the deadline is here and you have to stop. Next week you start all over again. That is why newspapers and magazines have always been very interesting to me.

Of course now on the web you can change work at will. You don't even have to wait a week. But I don't do much work for the web. My son does that. Any job that I receive that has a web component, I'll basically work *with* him. He is a perfectly good designer, but when it comes to working with me, he says: "You are the designer, I'll just make it work." It is nice to work with him.

Nic: I think as a designer it is always good to broaden your skills, but it is also important to recognize when someone else can do certain things better.

Nigel: Earlier, you mentioned the role of the designer in the digital age. As far as I am concerned, and I know it is such a cliché, but the computer is just a tool. That is why, now, I do things in exactly the same way as I did in 1966 when I started; which is, to first do a drawing and then refine the drawing.

Up to about 1985 I would put a piece of acetate over the sketch and draw the image on the acetate with mechanical pens, in almost an eerily similar way as one would do on the computer today. It always came from doing the drawings first. And it still does today, the only difference is that the computer has replaced the acetate and mechanical pens.

Part of the tension in me as an artist is, there is more life in the preliminary drawing than in the finished piece, because I have relentlessly gone over it to create the final product. A funny thing of my own was that I wanted to be represented by something that was kind of unassailable in terms of the technique. So, in some way I just removed myself (my "hand") from it.

In 1985 at *Time* we all got our own Macs. There were computers before, but they were huge room sized machines. I quickly realized *it* was trying to draw in the same way I was. So then my struggle was to make it draw as *I* do, and not be satisfied with the typical lines it produced, and to really make it do what I wanted it to do.

Nic: I think you have mentioned somewhere that back then it would take as long, if not longer, than to produce the work by hand.

Nigel: Ultimately, what it does is it allows you to save your work. I remember being really nervous about doing big things for *Time* magazine, because when I worked on a big piece I could not make a mistake. Now, you can work to a certain stage, save it, and then move on. That's the beauty of the computer. It enables you to make changes, save, and do lots of different iterations. You can go back and correct a mistake.

Nic: Thank you. I am going to move on to the next section about drawing.

The role of drawing in graphic design has dramatically changed with the digital revolution. Previously graphic designers often were known for their swift drawing abilities, but today, due to the impact of the digital revolution, many graphic designers do not see an immediate reason to draw.

How do you view the role of drawing in contemporary graphic design in the digital age?

Nigel: Again, for me, 1985 was a benchmark year: the advent of the Mac into common practice. I keep going back to that. After that point in time I saw good illustrators produce terrible work. I didn't (and don't) regard myself as a good illustrator. I was doing "mechanical" graphics anyway. People didn't really notice any changes in my work, but I noticed it in other people's work, because I was assigning illustrations at *Time* as well as doing my own graphics. People really struggled with the computer. They thought they had to produce digital work, but they didn't.

Even today, they don't have to, and there are plenty of illustrators that don't do their work on the computer, and their work looks very nice and fresh. Back then a lot of people started to produce work that looked kind of stilted, and you could even recognise the programme that they drew it in. It was as if everybody suddenly began to use the same software and tools. You know, how it allowed you to put down shading in a certain direction.

I think in the beginning it had a very deleterious affect on drawing. The best illustrators maybe only used it to scan their drawing and deliver it to us. There were a few artists that did that, and they retained their own 'handwriting'. Nowadays, I

think we have got past that. There are some really good illustrators, especially in the information design field, where the handwriting, or the style of drawing isn't as important as the information. Those people are lucky because nobody really looks at the work and think, "that is a nice drawing". Most people say, "I get the point".

Nic: I think in explanatory graphics it is more important.

Nigel: It is, but I do believe also that people are attracted to aesthetically beautiful things. So, from time to time art directors will not give me an illustration project because they say it will come out looking too clinical, too cold. I can see what they mean, and I try to avoid that, but what they are doing is, they are equating 'cold' to a clean line, as oppose to one that is looser.

Nic: How I understand it, it is the difference between a vector line, which is mechanical, and a crayon drawing.

Nigel: Correct. It is as simple as that. I think they actually do have a point.

Nic: I also think what you are describing is one's emotional connection to a drawing, as well as your cognitive response. It seems the work that people might commission you would often involve the cognitive, although you have mentioned that you enjoy bringing an emotional element into your work, through interesting gestures etc.

Nigel: And humour. For me humour is much easier to do in my style, than actual humour in emotion. I haven't defined emotion yet, but I think you know what I mean, the crayon and vector example. There is something about a crayon line that says a human being drew this, even if you fake it. Sometimes I will do a scribble, scan it, and bring it into the background of a piece. So, I will have something very crisp in the front, but very freehand marks in the back. It's a bit of a cheat, but it works.

Nic: I think the humour aspect *is* very important, and that is possibly why I remember the piece about the shark in the *New York Times*, because it is funny and quirky. It immediately draws your attention. If it were just another statistical piece I would probably have forgotten it long ago.

Nigel: But again, humour is something I get fairly strong criticism about, although it is waning. They say that, "if you are making people laugh they aren't really concentrating on the information". But I think people are much more subtle than that. I think readers know a lot more than you think. I especially think children know

much more than we think they do. I don't think you have to talk down to people. You do not have to eliminate the humour in work simply because you think it won't be taken seriously. If you can make people smile, not in a 'haha' kind of way, but rather in a way that they say, "okay, I get it", you are a long way to the next stage, which is getting the information to them.

Nic: So true. I am going to move on to the next section. I am happy that you have mentioned about a certain 'tension' between your different modes of drawing, how you draw for observation and how you draw for your explanatory graphics.

It is commonly understood that there are distinct 'modes' of drawing, namely drawing from observation, as interpretation, drawing from your imagination, and even as Glaser states, a form of meditation - all these 'ations'.

You have even compared the act of drawing in explanatory graphics to the prehistoric cave markings, as we have discussed earlier.

Would you say a graphic designer could still benefit from practising drawing? Please explain.

Nigel: O yeah. It actually relaxes me. But importantly, it really concentrates you, and I think you have to observe things to be able to make good symbols. We talked about this. You see, Gerd Arntz was an artist first and a designer second. Most of his work was in the form of beautifully executed linocuts, typically restricted to black and white, so that everything was achieved in the simplest way. Even the stuff that he drew as fine art was very crisp. He is the example that I am always trying to get to. Here is a book all about him, starkly simple artworks.

Nic: I am trying to understand, but I think when you represent the visual nature of something, especially in imagery like this where you want to break it down to its *core essence*, if you do not have that visual understanding in the first place you won't know what the *essence* is.

Nigel: Right. But it is funny, because for instance, I like drawing landscapes, but I don't think I have yet successfully drawn a tree. One that I think is good. When I look at it, I tend to get caught up in the detail. I sometimes take off my glasses, because I am short sighted, and then I don't see the detail in the distance. Very often I will even draw without my glasses on, because what I see on the page is perfectly good, but the stuff in the distance is blurred, so I get an overall view. It is

very interesting, because I have seen marks that I have made, that if I had my glasses on, I would not have done.

Nic: That makes sense. I trained for a while under a landscape painter, impressionist style. I was taught to start with the big shapes, the 'out of focus' parts, and then you work towards the detail.

Nigel: Yes, and there are all the stories about Monet having problems with his eyesight. Here are some of the drawings I have done while just looking at landscapes (showing me his drawings). These drawings were done in California, and near the beach.

Nic: These are beautiful.

Nigel: I see no direct connection between this and what I do in my explanatory work, but I know there is.

Nic: I really like how you drew many colours in the green area, as if searching for other colours. I am really happy to see this side of your art, because, along with your work I've seen on the Internet, it shows a more complete artist.

(Looking through his drawings.) (Three of these drawings can be viewed in Figure 5.13 to 5.15 in Appendix 2.)

Nigel: This took about two hours, just looking hard at something. I think that is valuable.

I've also been making toys for my grandchildren from bits and pieces of old furniture. Here I used a walnut that I found on the ground (showing me small toy motorbikes. The one motorbike's petrol tank is the walnut).

Nic: That is beautiful, and it must take some skill to make these.

Nigel: I don't see it as skill. I just look at things. I think I looked at these furniture elements, and I just thought I could use them—furniture casters as wheels. I mean, some of the pieces I make include both found objects and carved wood. I find that kind of thing very relaxing.

Just back to the question whether a designer can still benefit from practicing drawing. In my mind there is really no question about that. When I am invited to teach, which I don't really do much (I just go as a visiting lecturer), I have the

hardest time being faced with graphic design students all of whom have their laptops open. They have grown up completely digital, and it is probably natural for them to go straight to the computer to create their designs.

I however, maybe because I am old, believe there is something, possibly mystical, between the brain and the hand that you don't get from being in front of a computer. I don't know what it is. (Pointing at his head then following his arm to show his hand holding a pencil or pen.)

Nic: Milton also spoke about that.

Nigel: I'm interested in reading what he said, because eventually I just gave up with these students. Saying, "okay, if that is the way you want to do it, far be it from me as a visiting lecturer among your regular teachers."

Nic: To be very honest, as a designer I don't think one can really do the type of work you do without using drawing. Maybe you can elaborate a little on how you use drawing in your own work.

Nigel: (Showing me a piece that he is currently working on called, *Looking Ahead*). These are the first attempts. I asked myself the question: "What is a symbol for looking ahead?" and "how am I going to draw it in a way that will work as a logo?" Here is a picture of a more naturalistic hand. I use it as reference. This thing also seemed key to me. (Pointing to the adjustable middle section of a binocular.) It's not in my initial design ideas. It curves in a specific way. For this design I just worked from a photograph I found, and saw the mistake I've made in my 'cave-painting-I'm-not-looking-at-it' mode of drawing. I was trying to make it up, but eventually you do have to go back and look again at the real thing you are trying to make into a symbol. It is just evidence that when you are making a symbol it has to be based on reality.

But that is maybe not such a good example. All these blue booklets on my shelf are notebooks. I'll even stick designs in them that I like (paging through one of his notebooks). Here is another attempt at a short history of information graphics that I'm trying to write: *From Chauvet to Today*. And here are some emoticons, those smiley faces you can make directly on the keyboard. These ones are upright instead of sideways. In these notebooks are the beginnings of diagrams.

Nic: Okay, so this is where you develop your ideas, as well as stick down images that you like (still paging through one of his blue/cyan notebooks).

Nigel: Yeah. I think Giacometti is also a great example because he also had a good look at things. Some of these sketches were done very quickly. Here you see a drawing of a real pig that will eventually be simplified. I also do a lot of writing. This section is actually about my great uncle, George Holmes.

Nic: It seems important that you have a book that you can develop your ideas and observations.

Nigel: Right. I keep all of those because they serve as a reference to me. I like the jumble in them as well. One thing I have learnt at *Time* was to think of the graphic in relation to the page. In my business the text is as important as the picture.

Nic: Thank you for showing me these notebooks. I am going to move on to the next section. In the following section you have already partially answered some aspects of the question.

In *Drawing – The Purpose*, it states that drawing plays a fundamental role in how you create your work. That it assists you in visually explaining, often complex, abstract concepts.

Can you please explain the role that drawing plays in your explanatory graphics and illustrations? And how has the advent of the digital age influenced your approach to drawing?

Nigel: The digital age didn't influence it at all. My work has always been the same. The end result comes out of this (pointing to the computer). What the computer does is it enables me to have my own library of little elements that I have drawn, all my own original artwork. For example, I have hundreds of animals and I use it a lot. Almost everything I do I add to this library, so I can use them again at a later stage.

I will justify that to myself, and to anybody that happen to ask: "Haven't I seen that before?" I'd say: "I regard this as a language, my visual language." Some people will even say: "So, that is your own clip art." But the difference is I can use almost anything that I have drawn and they will all go together, aesthetically. For me the aspect of archiving is a good thing that has happened digitally. It enables me to very quickly go back and find elements that I can insert into a diagram. It is similar to

going to a dictionary and finding a word or a synonym. I might have two or three different cows, and I still have to work out which one will fit the best. I think that is okay. Some people think you should create from scratch each time, but I think it is like a writer inventing a verbal language each time. Why shouldn't I reuse stuff that I have already drawn? Even if it is for a different client, it is my visual language.

Nic: I think there should always be an aesthetic relationship. You can't have a detailed cow together with a simplified pig, unless you specifically intend it to be like that. In your own visual language you will make sure there remains a relationship between your elements, to avoid it looking like a digital collage.

Nigel: Exactly. Not every element will always work with another, but the ability to source from my library is a huge plus from working on a computer. Before, I would have to have made a Photostat of the elements and stick them down. Sometimes it was easier to rather redraw it.

Nic: Thank you. You have over the years expanded your skills to also making motion graphics. Do you still use drawing in creating those?

Nigel: Yes. They are just the same as anything else. Rowland, my son, works with me. I will give him a brief, similar to what I'll show you now (navigating through his computer). This one is for *National Geographic*. (He shows me a witty movie clip about seven billion people). I will usually give Rowland the frames to animate. He works with Flash. I just give him the key frames. With this clip we went through a few versions to let the walking man look naturalistic. I told him that I don't think this section works as a 'stick figure', let's go back to Muybridge's photographs. I traced the human figure walking, which gave me a much more naturalistic look.

Nic: Yes, you have to look at the natural weight distribution.

Nigel: So, I'm not animating it, and even in the credits at the end, I say, "with a nod to Eadweard Muybridge". I don't care whether people recognize him or not.

Nic: Yes. He obviously created those frames for people to use.

Nigel: Yeah. There is no copyright and I have redrawn them. I am a great admirer of his work, as I am of Arntz's work. I take every opportunity I can to let people know the name. For some people it is just a part in the credits, and other people might say: "Oh, he looked at Muybridge's work."

Nic: In essence your process is the same in creating these motion graphics.

Nigel: It is just the same. I can probably show you my original miniature versions of the frame-by-frame process in my notebook. I sketch and write those ideas so that I have a plan in my head. In the notebook I am thinking and talking it through to myself. Because I am doing the commentary as well, I need to know what I am going to say that isn't on the slide.

Nic: So, writing also plays an important part in developing these graphics.

Nigel: Oh absolutely. Drawing and writing go together. Actually Neurath said that he wasn't trying to make a universal pictorial language. He was using universal symbols, and he said that a good graphic is a marriage of words and pictures. Yes, he was trying to make nice symbols, and make them universal, but he felt that sometimes the words are more important, and sometimes the images.

Nic: If I remember correctly in Lupton and Miller's book in the section about Neurath they use the icons and the words together.

Nigel: Yes, they do. *Design, Writing, Research*, it is a nice book.

Nic: I immediately bought it when I saw it.

Nigel: Here it is (getting the book from his bookshelf). And here is a classic book by Neurath, *Modern Man in the Making*, where he speaks about the relationship between words and these images.

Nic: The next question you have already answered to some extent. May I ask; do you keep a personal sketchbook? And may I also ask why?

Nigel: I make the notebooks myself, because I want them to be of no intrinsic value themselves. I've also got some nicely bound journals but I hardly use them. I listen to a lot of live jazz in New York jazz clubs and take a special sketchbook with me. I take this paricular one because it is smaller and more compact, but it's too small to use for my design work (showing me the little sketchbook). The blue notebooks are very ordinary paper. It has a slightly thicker blue cover. I put ten pages in them, which give me twenty pages to work with. I also date everything religiously and write where elements came from. A lot of it is writing, not so much drawing.

Nic: Maybe writing is your initial process, and maybe one has to first work out what you want to draw before you can work out how you are going to draw it.

So, it seems you have two separate ways of drawing, one that you use to work out your designs, and a personal way of drawing from observation. Do you feel your personal sketches influence your work?

Nigel: It must play a part. It might sound very grandiose, but I think of myself as an artist. By the result that people see in print they probably wouldn't say that, because that is only a part of what I do. It is a slightly romantic idea. When I went to art school, like many students you think you are going to become an artist, and then you realise you won't make any money that way. You won't be able to survive, though some do. I would rather make money by doing this, than work in a restaurant to financially sustain myself. When I am not doing this I paint, do linocuts, or just make things. It is all part of the same thing. So I try to bring some of the aesthetic from my private work into some commercial work, as I've done in this little children's book, a story that I told my son a long time ago (showing me the book that he later gave me). This book has real drawings that I did in India, and the story takes place in India. This book is a mixture of everything, even collage. In fact, the iPad version has just come out, which is nice. It is not on sale yet. The pricing is crazy, because you have to sell them for $3.99.

Nic: This is really great, because there is a specific side to your work that one will see when you '*Google*' your name, but here, I get a chance to observe you as a whole artist.

In the next section I would like to look at *how* you have managed to maintain a creative approach in your work.

Creativity seems to be a word that is frequently used, especially in graphic design. Graphic design falls into the category of what we call the creative industry.

What is your view on the word, 'creativity'?

Nigel: I think I do it by trying to approach each job as though I haven't done anything like it before. Many years ago, Professor Stephen Kosslyn at Harvard, a cognitive scientist, approached me and asked: "Would you like to do a book in which I take examples of your work and I say what I think is good or bad about them; as far as the cognitive acceptance of people. Then you will redesign them

according to the response." It never went anywhere, because ultimately it would just have been a huge amount of work, and neither of us could afford to spending that much time on it.

But in one conversation I said to him: "You know, very often, if I get a job to do, my mind just goes completely blank. It is as though I have no idea what I am going to do." And he replied: "That's good, because it means you have actually wiped it clean from any previous work, and you are starting fresh." But I've also found, as soon as I start to do it, I think: "Oh, this job is like that other one I did a couple of weeks ago, and then my mind begins to draw comparisons." He told me to not worry about it; I was beginning to think that I had some kind of mental blockage or something! It does happen. I'll look at a sheet of numbers and think that I haven't got the first idea what I'm going to do with it. Which is where these sketches come in, because, for instance, I will tell myself: "Okay. This is about recycling. So, what images spring to mind when I think about recycling, regardless of these numbers?" I will then put the ideas aside, look at the numbers, and try to figure out what the numbers actually mean: more recycling or less recycling, what you can or can't recycle.

Then, I see if I can, in some way, put the two together. I don't want to 'force' the numbers onto a picture, or the other way around. If it works it works, if it doesn't it doesn't.

Importantly, I treat every job as new. I think that's how I keep it fresh.

'Creative' is a word I don't like much. I think it is overused, and of course, in America, it is often even used as a noun. They say: "Oh, you're *a* 'creative'", especially in the advertising industry. Or they say: "We have to hand it over to the 'creatives'", as if writers aren't creative. Actually, everybody is creative. Madoff was creative in the way he created his Ponzi scheme.

I feel uneasy about the idea that 'creative' equals *art* or *new*.

But how do I keep things fresh? First of all, I want to work, and I don't want to get bored. So, simply, I want to keep it fresh. Occasionally, I'll get into a job and think that "this is really boring me". Maybe I didn't understand the parameters of the job properly, or I've left the work too close to the deadline. Then I have to just barrel it through and get it done.

But usually, I try to do good work, and people respond to it. I haven't had a corporate job since 1993, when I left *Time*. People still seem to come with new work. I think people can see that I am not just going to trot out something they've seen before.

Nic: In essence that seems very important.

Nigel: Yeah, I think you have to be curious. I read a lot. I read the newspaper every morning. I listen to NPR (National Public Radio), which is intelligent, no ads. Although I have a little CD player in my studio, I cannot listen to music when I work, because I start to listen to the music! I love musicians like Thelonious Monk, and also much more modern music. I find that I stop working, and listen to the music, because I want to pay attention to that.

So, when I work, the stimuli around me have to be to a minimum. I can't multitask. I can't speak on the phone *and* do something else. If my wife tells me to pass on a message over the phone, I'll stop the conversation, and ask: "What darling?" (laughing)

In fact, I see it as an advantage.

Nic: That is maybe how you keep your focus.

Nigel: Which leads me to be slightly sceptical of commentators who say it's okay to multitask, because today's teenagers seem to do it naturally. Personally, I feel they are not getting enough out of anything. If you are on the phone, on *Facebook*, doing your homework, and you are listening to music, everything must be diminished in some way.

Nic: I also feel the same. Though, I don't know it directly relates to my research. (laughing) I find it very difficult to design, if the phone constantly rings next to you.

I would like to move on to another question. Do you feel there is a specific area in your work for being creative, as opposed to other times, when one is required to think more 'linear' or technical?

Nigel: Good question. It is exactly like that, and I am much more excited about the first part, than the second part. Although, once I have planned it all out I can get pleasure purely from drawing the elements. Then, I am not even thinking about what

I have drawn. The process is mechanical, and I assume I've got it right. I definitely also get pleasure from that. It might be strange, but I enjoy it.

There is definitely a time when I am creatively trying to work out what I am going to do. In my studio I have jobs in various stages. Here is a huge one that I am currently doing for Bertelsmann. This is one of seven chapters. It is a very dense document, and the first thing I did was read it while having no idea how I'm going to approach it. The second aspect is to focus on only one part. Thereafter, I normally want to see what it will look like in its final stage, so I do a portion of it on the computer. Then, I'll usually read the rest of the document, and figure out for which sections of the document I want to create diagrams. This document is about big megatrends, like immigration, global warming, globalisation, and how they interact with each other.

Nic: Thank you for explaining the various stages of your process.

Maybe I can move onto the following question. Do you have any specific habits that help you maintain your creativity?

Nigel: In the mornings I get up early (and go to bed early, too! That's mainly because if you get up early, and you work hard, then you tend to get tired at the end of the day.) My wife is like that too. We usually get up at five thirty. It means I can get into my studio before the phone begins to ring. Actually, the phone doesn't ring as much as it used to, because the work comes through emails. But I don't mind that, I hate the phone.

For me, a habit is to get on with it. You can't afford to wait until the 'muse calls'. I find you have to just do it, but I like doing my work. It's not a big deal. I think I can call my routine of getting in early, a habit. I also have a list of things I have to do so I know what I'm going to do that day.

I have always been able to work at home. Not *in* the home, and I wouldn't like to work *in* the home. So I have this separate little office. I think it's good to be able to switch on and switch off. There is practically nothing computerized in our house, except for our iPhones, largely used as alarm clocks (laughing). There is a definite separation between my home and my work. People have often asked me whether I don't get distracted, by looking what is in the fridge, etc. The answer is simply: "No." (Because I don't have a fridge in the office!)

My wife and I also separate the household chores. Mine is to do the cooking, and buy the food. I go shopping for food almost every day, as opposed to buying once a week. The advantages are that the food is fresher, and you get to know everybody in the stores. I'm also able move around a bit, because sitting in front of the computer is bad for your eyes and your back, and also working alone can be lonely. If you had said today: "I can't come to see you in Westport. Can you come to New York?" I would have replied: "Yes." Though in that case, we would not have been able to look at all these books. I go to the city about once a week, even if I have to create the reason, like taking sketches to clients. I also believe you get much more out of a personal, face-to face meeting.

Nic: That is exactly why I didn't just email you the questions.

Nigel: Exactly. It wouldn't have been the same, and I would have seen it as just another thing to do.

Nic: So, you get out and receive the stimulation from going to the city and being in contact with people.

Nigel: Another habit is that I will usually stop at about five thirty, which is still a pretty long day, having started at six. I also go to the gym every day, to try and keep relatively fit. It is really bad for you to sit at a desk all day.

I quickly buy the groceries during the day, and at five thirty I become a cook. I love it. Tonight, we are having haddock in foil pouches with various herbs. By putting them in a pouch, it cooks itself in the oven. I find cooking terrifically relaxing. My wife can't believe that I find it relaxing, because for her it's a chore!

Nic: Actually, this aspect ties in quite nicely with previous interviews I have had with other designers, doing an activity through which one receives a certain sensory input. In cooking, you have a chance to work with your hands, and there is a visual pleasure and smell that goes with it.

Nigel: Oh, completely! Visual, absolutely! I will always attempt to make food that ends up being arranged, and looks good on the plate. We have various machines that chop, but *I* enjoy simply using my hands to chop. You end up eating it, and that's great.

Nic: Earlier, you mentioned exercise. When I exercise, I find, it is a good time to think things through, even art or design concepts.

Nigel: No, that doesn't happen, because I view exercise as a necessity to ward off old age. I don't really like doing it, but I feel I need to do it. If my brain is thinking anything while I exercise, it is: "When is this going to be over?" Every day I do it for an hour, and one day a week I work with a trainer who really puts me through my paces.

I do find though that travelling is a good time for such thoughts, when I'm on a train, or a passenger in a car.

Nic: Excellent, thank you. Design work can be very demanding and sometimes our work requires so much of our time and energy that we seldom have energy left for any other efforts. Although, in the literature I have reviewed so far, I have noticed that many designers experiment with design concepts and techniques outside typical commercial constraints as a way of keeping their passion or enjoyment for what they do. Sagmeister said that he often used the ideas from his design experiments, he did on his sabbatical, in his commercial work.

Do you ever experiment with design or illustration concepts outside typical commercial constraints? May I ask why?

Maybe to add to the question, I realise that you are a freelance designer, and you don't work under a 'boss'. So, I am sure there must be quite a bit more freedom in how you choose to approach your work.

Nigel: Yes, there is a lot more freedom. I will answer obliquely, that I find it uncanny that if I'm working on two jobs at the same time, they will overlap. It is almost inevitable. That might be because I have a shortage of ideas, that I am basically using the same idea for two people, but I don't think it is that. I think, in some way, the one feeds the other.

No, I don't really do experimental work, to answer that part of the question. But I do find that ideas from one job can affect another. It is not the same as I've mentioned before by merely picking up from my own 'clipart,' to use that horrible word. It is rather whole concepts. I might be in the middle of a job, stop and think: "The concept I've done for that job will actually work better in this job."

Usually, I have about six projects that I work on, in various stages of development. Some I do very quickly, some can take much longer, such as a current one where I am only starting negotiations with Chronicle Books, in San Francisco, to do a three hundred and fifty page book of information graphics for children. Huge job. I wish I had a business manager to deal with this, because three hundred and fifty pages of diagrams are going to take an enormous amount of time. But, unfortunately, book publishers don't pay very well. I'm sure they will say: "If the book does well, you'll do well." They will probably offer me a starting fee, and I'll have to say that I can't live on that, and get the work done. Which means I am going to have to do other jobs, and then I need to find out what are their deadlines.

All these things add up to my practice. I'm actually quite bad at pricing my work. I'll often ask what their budget is, and some people surprise me and some disappoint me, but it usually evens out.

I don't think I am undercutting myself too much. I can obviously do jobs for less than somebody who has a staff, but then I won't be able to deliver all the work of somebody who has a staff either. I don't think I'll be able to design a whole book. With Chronicle Books, I'm just doing three hundred and fifty pages of diagrams that will basically make up the whole book.

Nic: If you have a staff, then they will probably end up doing the design and you will end up in a manager position.

Nigel: Right. Which is what was happening at *Time*, when I had been there for sixteen years. A big corporation wants to move you up, and they are usually very curious if you don't want to. Eventually, they said they owe me a sabbatical. So, I said that I am going to take the sabbatical of six months at half pay. They told me when I come back, they will put me in a new position. After about two weeks, I went to one person, high up in the magazine, and I said: "You know, to be honest I'm not sure I want to come back." He said: "Let's not tell anybody, because you are supposed to come back after a sabbatical. You've been here long enough, you can take the sabbatical, and then leave." Which was really nice.

Some people couldn't understand why I didn't want the new job, saying: "Look at how much more money you would have made." At that stage I was about fifty. I thought that I still had some guts in me, and I could do what I really wanted to do,

rather than managing other people, and being disappointed. Honestly, I often looked at the work and thought, I could do it better myself.

Nic: With your freelance work you have an opportunity to still be hands-on, and involved with your work. Thank you so much.

We are nearing the end of the interview. A second last question:

I have also noticed that many graphic designers have interest in other forms of artistic expression. Some creative people can seamlessly move between one creative discipline and another. I am though, very aware that there is fundamentally a difference between using creativity in solving visual problems and creating art from a personal reason. But I would also like to know if you ever practise any creative or artistic expression other than explanatory graphics or illustration?

You actually have already mentioned about your paintings and other art projects that you do.

Nigel: Yes. In fact, within the graphic design profession I put myself into a tiny little niche—explanation graphics—and that has worked well for me. I still get referrals from people whom I've worked with. For instance, Walter Bernard got a request from *Fortune* magazine, in India, who wanted a person that does information graphics, and he recommended me, because he remembers my work for him at *Time*. He knows that's what I do. So, I have pigeon-holed myself, rather deliberately so everybody knows that's what I do. I'm not going to design a whole book for you, but I'll do the diagrams!

Nic: You have become a specialist.

Nigel: I'm not going to design a poster. I wouldn't mind doing that, as a matter of fact, but I get enough to keep me happy from doing things outside my work, to answer your question. The value of being in a rather narrow field is enormous. You become a specialist, and there aren't that many people who will only do this. I've done that right from the start, from my time in England. Which is why I think Walter liked me. Walter was not hiring a graphic designer who could do a layout; do picture research; or covers at the magazine. I presented myself as somebody that wanted to do charts. I think, at that time in nineteen seventy-seven, not many other people had said that to him, if any.

So, I have always advised students who came to see us (they would come to see us in droves) to have focus in their work. Often when you looked at their work you had no idea what they wanted to do, a little bit of typography, a little bit of this and that. Very few of them actually presented a portfolio that enabled you to look at it and say: “I know what I’m going to get if I assign this person.”

Nic: Yes, as a student it is good to learn a wide range of skills, but I agree it is good to get that focus as soon as possible.

I’m going to move on to the last section of the interview. Part of my research, other than the literature and interviews, I’m running a workshop for graphic designers. I give them some open briefs and encourage them to just play with some ideas outside commercial constraints. It seems they’ve actually quite enjoyed it.

Finally, if you would conduct a workshop aimed at helping graphic designers develop or refresh their creativity, what are key aspects that you might want to have at such a workshop?

Nigel: Oh, I would absolutely. I did a workshop for ten years at the Rhode Island School of Design, from eighty-two to ninety-one. It was for professional information designers from magazines and newspapers, and a lot of it was about getting people out of their comfort zones. I would introduce it by saying: “You are not in your office. There are no restraints here. You can get what you want from this, but the idea is to free up your mind.” Though, as artists, I wanted to take them seriously. We did a number of exercises. There were four other teachers who helped me with this project. It lasted for one week and it was very intense. We stayed in the college dorms during the week after the school closed for the year, right at the beginning of June. They kept all the facilities going, so we could use them. It was a terrific setup.

A lot of what we were doing could be characterized as playing. I would get them to explain things. I would set up a situation and pair people off. For instance I would say to them: “Okay, you two people. You are a child and you are a father. Father, your wife has just been to the hospital to have a back operation. Create a conversation about explaining what happened to your child’s mother.” And people did the most amazing things.

One just stuck in my mind. It was only one of twenty of these experiments. The guy got donuts and a long hotdog sausage. He put the donuts over the sausage. One on

top of each other, with a piece of onion between two donuts, and bent it. They represented the vertebrate and the muscle. And he said: “Look what happens if you squeeze it down.” It was wonderful. So, the father explained to the kid that his mother was going to be grumpy, because it hurt.

It opened everybody’s eyes. The difference between a normal workshop and this was that all the pairs were working on a different project. So, you didn’t have to sit through twenty different versions of the same thing. Everybody had a project to do. Some of the ideas were completely crazy, like explaining a mouse to an elephant.

Nic: It seems to be about creating an opportunity to open your mind, further than typical work. An aim in this research is to help designers avoid a creative rut or unwanted design mannerisms, to keep their ideas fresh.

Nigel: Right. At the end the ‘father’ and the ‘kid’ even ate the donuts. Of course they threw the onions away. The good thing was that, by observing the other groups, it freed everybody’s minds up. Some were very nervous and others were natural extroverts. I think, a lot of designers tend to be introverts. It was actually good to get them out of their comfort zones. It also gave them an opportunity to actually speak, because a lot of designers, as I think I have said earlier, are unable to convey an articulated idea. The idea of just freeing up the thought processes was good. I mean, another exercise was to give them a set of statistics and say: “How does this relate to a chair?” Completely unrelated. Some people would really struggle, and others would find some relationship. On another occasion I also used chairs by giving people a piece of newspaper, and said: “Chair.”

So, some people would tear up the newspaper and make a chair, and others would tear things out so they would be left with the negative space of the chair. Other people will actually draw it on the piece. Eventually, we would put them all up on the wall. That whole project would only take about fifteen minutes. Then we moved onto something else.

Nic: That can illustrate that there can be so many approaches to a single problem.

Nigel: Yeah, and quickly. Just do it.

We even used ‘old-fashioned’ drawing, by giving everybody a pad of paper and somebody would sit in the middle, and they drew that person. But, we told them to draw it with their left hand or draw everything that is not the subject. You know,

based on old art school projects that I remember doing. The projects just got the people out of the ruts they were in. They were usually really hard working people that mostly worked at newspapers. It really is a tough job; often producing information graphics every day. That is the kind of workshop that I think often works.

Nic: Thank you so much for your time. It has been incredibly informative. I really appreciate it!

Appendix 4:

A Creative Workshop Programme for 4 Participants

This appendix is divided into the following headings:

- Time Duration
- Introduction
- Project 1 – *Listen to Our Senses*
- Break for Refreshments
- Project 2 – *Design for Music*
- Lunch and Debriefing
- Instruments to Record the Workshop

TIME DURATION

- Introduction: 30 minutes
- Project 1 – *Listen to Our Senses*: 1 hour
- Snacks and Refreshments: 30 minutes
- Project 2 – *Design for Music*: 1 hour 30 minutes
- Lunch and Debriefing: 30 minutes
- Total time: 4 hours

INTRODUCTION

The facilitator takes a moment to introduce him or herself. Thereafter the research project, problem statement and aims are briefly introduced and explained to the group.

The participants are then given a moment to introduce themselves and share a bit about their profession, personal art or design work, and the work of other designers they find inspiring.

PROJECT 1 – *LISTEN TO OUR SENSES*

Sensory Visualisations

This project encourages interaction between the designers. Each participant is given a chance to experience two objects that stimulate one of the four senses, other than the visual sense: textures to feel, scents to smell, food to taste, sounds to listen to.

One by one the participants then close their eyes and describe the imagery that the experience triggers, as well as what it may remind them of. In each case the participant is encouraged to imagine further imagery. For example: an orange may trigger thoughts of ripe fruit, and that may lead one to imagine a street market in a small town of Italy. The facilitator must stress that there are no right or wrong visualisations, and they should also try and explore non-obvious imagery. The facilitator allows the participants to articulate these visualisations in as much detail as possible.

Sensory Objects Used in this Project

The facilitator supplies the following objects for the exercise:

- For smell, a kiwi fruit and an incense stick are supplied.
- For taste, they are given parsley leaves and a freshly baked cinnamon croissant.
- For sound, ambient city sounds and *Pinta Nina Santa Maria* by Vangelis, an atmospheric and meditative piece, are played.
- For texture, coarse sea sand and a wool scarf are supplied.

BREAK FOR REFRESHMENTS

Everybody breaks for 30 minutes and enjoy snacks and beverages.

PROJECT 2 – *DESIGN FOR MUSIC*

The following project is about designing a poster for a chosen musician or band. This poster tells of a once-off concert in Durban.

Art and Reference Materials

A wide range of materials is available with which the participants can create the project. They are specifically encouraged to design with the supplied materials rather than using computer software.

The art materials made available are gouache, brushes, pencil crayons, pastels, fineliner pens, pencils, a sharpener, glue, scissors, sticky tape, bright coloured paper, an A5 hardcover journal, and 200 – 250gsm A1 textured paper.

The reference material comprises of an eclectic range of magazines and printed A3 sheets of various sans serif, serif and casual type fonts. The reference material can either be used to draw from or be used in a collage.

Music Subject of Their Choice

Before the workshop, the participants are requested to bring any reference material that relate to a musician or band of their choice. These references may consist of any piece of graphic design, photograph or illustration.

The Project

Each workshop participant executes this project in isolation. The facilitator explains that each participant's chosen musician or band frontman would like them to design a poster for a once-off show in Durban, as part of a tour. The band or musician released a critically acclaimed and inspiring album after a long road of drug abuse, followed by rehab. The facilitator states that the poster should reflect something of that personal victory. The participant must come up with a title for the particular album or tour and the poster must clearly communicate this title as well as the event details, such as date and venue.

Time Duration

The facilitator states that the project is divided into 3 stages: idea generation, idea evaluation and design execution.

The divisions are as follows:

- For idea generation, 20 minutes are given for sketching and jotting down various ideas.
- For evaluation, 10 minutes are spared for evaluating, choosing and refining an idea.
- For design execution, the participants are expected to spend 1 hour on creating the poster by using the supplied art materials. It is understood that this may not be sufficient time to complete a poster, but it should give the designers enough time to effectively begin the process of creating a poster.

This totals to 1 hour, 30 minutes.

LUNCH AND DEBRIEFING

During lunch, the participants are encouraged to share their concepts and creative processes in the 2nd project. Thereafter, the participants have a moment to reflect and articulate on what they may have gained from the entire workshop experience. Finally, they are given an opportunity to voice what they would like to add or have different in such a workshop.

INSTRUMENTS TO RECORD THE WORKSHOP

Notebook & Pen

The facilitator may use a small notebook and pen to quickly jot down any immediate observations and thoughts that may occur during the session.

Camera

The facilitator may take photographs of the creative environment before the session to document the details of the environment.

Photographs can be taken of the participants while they are working on their individual projects, but this should not be done in such a way that the facilitator disturbs the creative process.

Dictaphone

A dictaphone is a valuable recording tool for later reflection by the researcher. It can be used to record the participants introducing themselves and share their inspirations and work, as well as during the projects and debriefing.