A Triptych of Designed Objects, which explore the relationship between Text and Artefact, Theory and Practice

Thesis
July 2012

Michael R. Dickinson

School of Design, Communication and IT
Faculty of Science and IT
The University of Newcastle Australia
Supervisors
Dr Trevor Weekes
Roger Dunstan
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father

Lyell Rivers Dickinson

27th November 1932 to 30th July 1978
Abstract

\[ \text{DE}^Q \]

A triptych of designed objects, which explore the relationship between theory and practice

\[ \text{DE}^Q \] can be thought of as a logo\(^1\) for the research. It is not meant to be directly interpreted as an equation, rather as a thought provoking visual statement “Design = Energy to the power of ‘Q’ the question asked”. This visual statement refers to the theorising of Dilnot (1999) and Jonas (2000) who argue that the domain of design is ‘artefact’ centric, positioned in one corner of a triangular model of knowledge creation (Archer, 1979). The other two corners of Archer’s triangle are occupied by the humanities, which use ‘words’ in one corner and the sciences, which uses ‘numbers’ in the other. In their theorising, design occupies the third corner and uses artefacts as its major form of communication.

\[ \text{DE}^Q \] is an artefact. A symbolic representation of the research but how does it communicate? How does any artefact communicate? This research undertakes a process, which aims to reveal the 'silent language' of design through a systemised analysis of the three artefacts designed for this study. Each design will have at least the nominal functionality of a source of lighting but they (both individually and as a set) will be more. Their real purpose is to reveal the \textit{logos}\(^2\) of the logo. They facilitate a discourse on the relationship between theory and practice. They probe the relationship between text and artefact, and they are examples of artefacts designed from, for and of questions.

To achieve this, a review of seminal thinkers in design theory was undertaken which identifies a heart of darkness at the core of the relationship between theory and practice. This is followed by a short review of education literature to uncover if the heart of darkness phenomena has implications in Design domain educational settings.

As a result of the review a research plan was formulated which utilises a mixture of practice led and case study methodologies to further the exploration of the relationship between the

---

\(^1\) **Logo**: An emblem or device used as a badge or symbolic representation of an organisation or company.

\(^2\) **Logos** (Greek) The word by which the inward thought is expressed, the inward thought itself. Used as a term in philosophy, rhetoric and religion it is most often used with the implication of a universal operative principle.
text and artefact through the imposing of an experimental context to the undertaking of three designs, which are nominally lights.

The experimental parameters developed as the study progresses were:

- Artefact before text
- Text before artefact
- Text and artefact in unison

How this could be achieved was not known at the start of the research and its success in many respects is for the reader to judge. But the experiment was undertaken and the results set out in this document.

That the designs were lights was not an arbitrary decision. The intrinsic nature of the function of lighting complements the study and is highly symbolic of the research intent. To illuminate that which cannot be seen, that which was not known. Structurally the light parameter provides the intellectual focus and the constraints required to allow the act of design to take place. The procedure for undertaking the three individual designs is set out below.

The first light can be viewed as a control. It follows a relatively standard approach within design practice. The artefact itself was the focus, generated out of a desire to create, with the analysis of the object being a post analyses. Not so typically this post analysis utilises the literary style of story telling to expose the now silent message embedded in the artefact creation but post analysis of artefacts in its many text centric forms is highly typical within design.

The second case study was a design undertaken after the recording of an experience in the form of a text-based document. This is in contrast to the method of design utilised for the first light design where the design was produced before the recording of a text. The experience to be explored is participation in a jury. The text produced was rich with thoughts and emotions. The text also recorded a discernable unit of experience, which can be argued to be discrete from the typical manifestation of design practice. The text exists before the artefact and the text is used as the starting point for the creation of a light design. The undertaking of this case study also provides the opportunity to contemplate the role of judgement in the design process.
The third design is another exploration into the relationship between artefact and text but this time artefact and text are treated simultaneously and not separately. The experiment will be undertaken to complete the triptych of designs, which explore the theoretical implications of theory and practice, artefact and text in relation to Archer’s model. The third design also provides a triangulation of the results in relation to the original design and second light design created for this research.

The line of enquiry will conclude by returning to DE9. The artefact located at the starting point for this research. The logos of the logo is discussed, as are the results of the three case studies, in relation to what they reveal about the relationship between theory and practice, text and artefact.

The conclusion is not an empirical finding. This thesis demonstrates the creation of a logo, a myth, and an innovative approach to addressing the theory practice relationship through the constructing of a practice led enquiry that experiments with the positioning of text and artefact in the design process. The results of the enquiry reveal that theory and practice in design have a difficult relationship but they are not opposites and that questions have a powerful influence on design. That exploring the logos of the logo of this study can further the design disciplines understanding of the relationship between theory and practice.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENTS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis question</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits of investigation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the study</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. THE BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preamble</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart of darkness</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viollet-le-Duc 1814-1879</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander 1936 -</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbent 1929 -</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones 1927 -</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rittel 1930 - 1990</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Darkness</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viollet-le-Duc</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbent</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rittel</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addendum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlow's Response</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory and Practice in Design education</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of a theoretical understanding of design

Studies in Relation to Design Studio

Cliff: How do academics come to know discipline specific design knowledge?

Davies and Reid: Problematics in Design Education and the Design Entity.

Studies of Non-studio, Theory aspects of Design Education

Conflict from all quarters.

So what was found?

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH PLANNING

Introduction

Restating the question

Observer effect: The researcher as subject

The use of artefacts in research

Types of knowledge generation

The text based forms of presenting research

Viollet-le-Duc: Learning to draw

Alexander: A pattern language

Dunne: Design Noir: The secret life of electronic objects

Loi: Suitcase Thesis

Access

Whiteley: Power Point Thesis

The design of the investigation research instrument

The Mapping of the Procedure

Taking the next step

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Introduction

Format

CASE STUDY 1 ‘UMM’

Artefact before Text

Introduction:
APPENDIX A1 LOGO HAND DRAWING ........................................ 137
APPENDIX A2 LOGO DEVELOPMENT ........................................ 138
APPENDIX B1 UMM IMAGES OF THE ARTEFACT .......................... 139
APPENDIX B2 UMM GLASS BLOWING ...................................... 141
APPENDIX C1 URY IMAGES OF THE ARTEFACT ......................... 144
APPENDIX C2 URY GLASS BLOWING ...................................... 146
APPENDIX D1 UMLAUT IMAGES OF THE ARTEFACT .................... 149
APPENDIX D3 UMLAUT PAPER EXPERIMENT ................................ 151
APPENDIX D4 UMLAUT TEXT AS MATERIAL .............................. 152
APPENDIX E1 HELSINKI EXHIBITION ...................................... 154
APPENDIX F1 GROUP PHOTO ‘THE TRIPTYCH’ ............................ 156
List of Figures

Figure 1 Archer's model ........................................ 12
Figure 2 Dorst's model ........................................ 14
Figure 3 Viollet-le-Duc illustrations ...................... 19
Figure 4 Examples of designs by Viollet-le-Duc .......... 20
Figure 5 Examples of Alexander's lists and drawings .. 21
Figure 6 Broadbent spiral design model ............... 23
Figure 7 The three-head spaces of designers according to Jones 24
Figure 8 Boundary Searching .................................. 25
Figure 9 Matchett's process diagram ..................... 26
Figure 10: Larson cartoon ..................................... 43
Figure 11 Loi's Suitcase Thesis .............................. 58
Figure 12 Detail of Sarah Casey's 'Patina' ................ 59
Figure 13 Sarah Casey's 'Patina' ............................. 60
Figure 14 Whiteley's Power Point Thesis .............. 61
Figure 15 Fallman's Model .................................. 66
Figure 16 Explanatory notes for Case Study 1 'Umm' cover page 73
Figure 17 What the hell is an Umm? ......................... 76
Figure 18 Explanatory notes for Case Study 2 'Ury' cover page 90
Figure 19 Broadbent's Spiral Model ......................... 93
Figure 20 Swann's Iterative Model ......................... 94
Figure 21 Fry's Design Process Model .................... 97
Figure 22 Worked examples of Fry's model ............. 97
Figure 23 Ury is presented despite Sir Text's objections 101
Figure 24. May I present Ury ............................... 102
Figure 25. Explanatory notes for Case Study 3 'Umlaut' cover page 105
Figure 26 Umlaut illuminated and illuminating her text 110
Figure 27 Umlaut as a light ................................... 110
Declaration

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a degree to any other University or Institution.

Michael Dickinson