D U R B A N
UNIVERSITY *of*
TECHNOLOGY

Research Proposal

Faculty	Arts and Design
Department	Visual Communication Design – Graphic Design
Degree	M Tech Graphic Design

Title of Dissertation/Thesis	Telling tales: pictograms as a visual voice
Brief Synopsis of the Research	I as a designer-artist reflect on the use of visual communication design graphics for the purpose of creating a voice to express myself, improve my practice and in turn, create an alternate voice for others. My self-study project will reflect on my practice as an artist and visual story teller. I have conceptualised and developed a series of pictographic images on cards; these cards have been used in various situations by people to tell stories. The cards function as creative prompts and their informal quality allows people to feel comfortable whilst telling their stories. I am reflecting on the necessity of a 'visual voice' and its pertinence for me and for people as a playful way to voice thoughts, concerns, anecdotes and day-to-day issues. I do this as a means to provide deeper insight into my practice as a designer-artist and teacher; I find self-study to be an evolving, multilayered and inquiring approach to improving one's practice.

Section B: To be typed in Arial 10-point font in single line spacing (expand sections to fit contents, but keep within the specified maximum lengths)

1. Field of Research and Provisional Title

Telling tales: pictograms as a visual voice

I will be researching in the field of visual communication design graphics for the purpose of creating a voice to express myself, improve my practice and in turn, create an alternate voice for others.

2. Context of the Research

I have always been interested in peoples' stories- their lives, loves, attitudes to family, violence, fear, joy. It is the very day to day-ness of the rhythms of life that interest me. I live in an urban environment that is rich with many cultures, religions and nationalities. It is also filled with a variety of differing types of visual images, from large persuasive billboards, information signage pictorially indicating directions, to warning signs on the roadside showing the silhouette of a man digging. It is an

environment which, in post 1994 South Africa, has opened up to the information highway and has laden our small city with a barrage of images. This city is rich with a multicultural population that largely understands the intended meaning of most information graphics, yet people can imbue these images with their own meaning.

I, as an artist and visual communicator, imbue visual symbols with my own meaning. I voice my perceptions of my social environment in my paintings. Many of the symbols I use are rendered in a pictographic style like those of information signage. I understand a pictogram or pictograph to be a visual sign which can represent complex facts. Abdullah and Hubner, (2006:11) explain a pictogram, for example, as the stylized graphic depiction of a male and female figure indicating public lavatories or as I mentioned, a roadside warning sign of a man digging. I have used this graphic style of illustration because of the simplicity, recognisability and stylized manner in depicting images or objects.

It has been the comments and interpretations of this pictographic depiction of objects and images in my paintings, shown at exhibitions over the last five years that has led me to begin creating a visually articulated picture language. The variety in the interpretation of single or multiple images/symbols has aided my interest in finding ways to collect individual's stories, and prompted my conceptualization and formulation of the idea of creating a 'visual voice'.

In my formulation of this 'visual voice', the concept of playing cards with simplistic images on them is deliberate. To invite people to play, to interact, and to tell their stories to me through the cards is less confrontational, reducing the stress of making a public statement. I believe the cards become a game; a playful game and not an imposing direct questioning interview. I live, as referred to earlier, amidst the bustle of a metropole that is buoyant with a variety of simple graphic images portrayed in

many types of information signage. The information signage system within the city is designed to be understood, be 'readable' by many and so, based on this knowledge, I chose this particular style of graphic depiction.

When I put the cards out at an initial and informal play testing scenario at artSpace gallery in May 2009, I found that the images, or style of graphic depiction used, are intelligible. The stories collected at this event have also shown me that the cards are successful for the prompting and generating of peoples' narratives.

The value of this research is to show the significance of the visual element in story telling in terms of generating story content.

3. Research Problem and Aims

My aims are to:

- Document and analyze the interpretations by various participants of a select few of my paintings.
- Document stories told by participants when using pictographic cards, and create new art works from these narratives as a partial requirement for this self study project.

My critical questions are:

How do I use this graphic style of depiction to elicit stories from others?
How can I improve my practice through the use of these pictographic cards?

Sub questions:

- What are the origins of concepts and recurring themes in my paintings and artefacts?
- What meanings do the personal symbols/icons, generated in my work, pose for myself and for the various participants in terms of origin and intent?
- What is the role of the cards chosen in this self study, and their pertinence in the role of generating or communicating a story /message?
- What is the value of the cards?

The objectives of this study are to:

- Improve my practice as an artist and teacher through this self study/reflection.
- Validate the communication design aspect of the pictographic cards and their pertinence as a visual voice.

4. Literature Review

I will explore in my dissertation factors such as the search for identity, interconnectivity, the desire to communicate and the interpretation of visual symbols/signs - to have a voice - using visual images to create narratives, and the creation of a visual voice for others. My literature will be reviewed throughout the dissertation.

My research will be based on lived and living experiences. It is practice–led and my enquiries are grounded in living values and theories (Whitehead, 2008:1). Whitehead stresses the importance of an autobiography of learning where one's present practice is explained and evaluated by past practices; this is done with the intention of creating a 'better future' which is not yet in existence.(Whitehead, 1998:4). Marie Huxtable (2009:216) writes of the value of enhancing the wellbeing and 'wellbecoming' of all and sees making public valued knowledge as a gift; a gift which may enhance the talents of other human beings. I, in a sense am using my 'talents' (painting and vision) to create a 'gift' (the cards) in order that others can be encouraged to speak and have access to an alternate voice.

I consider myself a narrative painter searching for ways to collect others' narratives, because as Barthes says, "narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society" (1977:79). Narrative is further described by Chase, (2005:656) as "a retrospective meaning- making - a shaping or ordering of past experiences; a way to understand one's own and others' actions and of a way to comprehend events into a meaningful whole".

Barnard (2005:19)points out that there is on the one hand in visual communication design, an underlying assumption that the meaning understood from any form of visual communication should be that of the intended meaning; yet he notes too, that there can be no neutral conveying of a message. He is influenced by Barthes' semiological approach to communication and the connotational meanings an image might have.(Barnard 2005:35) Barthesian semiotic analysis, write van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2003:92) studies the image itself, and treats cultural meanings as a given currency, which is shared by everyone who is acculturated to contemporary popular culture. Barthes stresses that communication is 'the production and exchange of meanings' (Fiske 1990:3, Barnard 2005: 25) and that senders and receivers of a message or sign interpret it according to cultural codes /norms or context.

This is echoed by Noble and Bestley (2004:121) who contend that post modernist design communication is seen as integral to contemporary culture and signs that are read by audiences from particular cultural perspectives. Charles Sanders Pierce (1838-1914) recognized as the founder of the American tradition of semiotics (the transfer of meaning), was interested in the user's mental concept and experience of the sign (Crow, 2005:36).The culture, background and education of the reader will have bearing on how the sign is read: the reading of the sign is seen as an active process, not a one way process with a fixed meaning. (Crow, 2003:36) Similar sentiments are echoed by Mirzoeff (1998) in Gillian Rose's 'Visual Methodologies' where Mirzoeff notes that post modernism reflects an occularcentric culture (2001:8) because knowledge about the world is increasingly articulated visually.

The participants of this study, by using the cards, create their own meaning to communicating their narratives. The cards could be deemed as prompts, or "cultural probes". Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti (1991:21) coined this term to denote a collection of evocative tasks meant to elicit inspirational responses from people. I aim to use these probes as a means to gather social stories in an informal and playful way. The fact that the pictographic cards I have chosen for this study are unaccompanied by verbal text is intentional, because, as Kress and van Leeuwen point out, verbal texts or commentaries impose modes of control over meaning (1996:24) and I am interested in finding alternate ways that allow individuals to make their own meaning from these visual images.

I believe that playful ways to elicit response and to be able to tell one's story are important. Not all beings are verbally articulate, or able to put pen to paper successfully, nor paint a canvas in order to be heard. My early influences in art stemmed from a Social Realist tradition (Heller and Williams, 1982:18) and it is this need to reflect my observations in life, to make social comment, and this basic humanism that has prompted my practice over the years. It is also the basis for the methodology of this study.

The term 'interplay' used by Nithikul Nimkulrat (2007:1) has evoked a personal response in me because it clearly connects for me what I want to achieve in this research; that is, the emphasis on 'play' and the' inter', which is the connectivity between myself and the act of painting and the audience that will firstly interpret a select few of my paintings; and secondly, play with the cards and use them by interpreting them in their own way. The playfulness I envisage when interacting with participants and the narrating of stories with the cards, has already been happening. This, as mentioned, has happened at the artSpace gallery Durban in May2009.

The literature I have referred to above has already been informing my practice. Conceptually, the aspects of 'self study' have prompted me to examine the relevance of my project. In the process of reflecting, which is an important component of self study, I have noted that the 'embellishing, or rejecting (of) embodied knowledge', has encouraged my intention to contribute to my own and others' 'wellbeing'. (Whitehead, Huxtable 2007:6) The relevance of narrative and the human compunction to tell tales as a way to "comprehend events in a meaningful way'', described by Chase (2005:656), further aids my understanding of how images can be interpreted according to ones' own norms. I find the literature on visual communication design further validates the use of the pictograph as my choice as a vehicle for communication and the gathering of narratives.

5. Research Methodology

In my study I aim to use mixed method research methodology, using interpretive and narrative perspectives. This interpretative form of research described by Leedy & Ormrod (2005:108) is a qualitative method that attempts to understand participants' perspectives and views of social realities. Norman Denzin argues that interpretation is an artful political process and that there is no single interpretative truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998:278). It is this very understanding that determines that I document the participants' interpretations of a select few paintings and the stories narrated with the pictographic playing cards.

Issues to be written about/ interpreted would include:-
- Awareness of self (individuation) in relation to personal /auto ethnographic history.
- Themes or trends of perception expressed by myself and the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:142).
- The readings/interpretations of my paintings by posing questions to stimulate guided responses.
- The stories told with the cards.
- The new paintings created as a result of interpreting the narratives told to myself.

Sampling and data collection and analysis:
I will be using students from the DUT Faculty of Arts and Design to interpret selected paintings of mine and to narrate stories to myself with the cards.

Key aspects of the research procedures completed are:
- An exhibition in which the individual participants have reflected on the stories they see in my paintings (October 2006 artSpace Durban and DUT August 2009)
- Filmed documentation of the narratives/interpretations of the paintings and documentation of the stories generated when playing with the cards by the participants (May 2009 artSpace Durban, August DUT 2009)

6. Plan of Research Activities

December 2009	Complete proposal
April – November 2009	Interviews with students and documentations of the narratives they create when viewing the artifacts of this study Practical work- painting and visual journal
February 2010	Draft chapter one Practical work
April 2010	Draft chapter two Practical work
June - August 2010	Draft chapter three, four and five Practical work

September 2010	Submit draft dissertation
October 2010	Dissertation corrections
December 2010	Final exhibition

7. Structure of Dissertation / Thesis Chapters

Title.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Chapter 2.
Methodology

Chapter 3.
Lee's story- reflecting on painting and the relationship to personal socio/historical context

Chapter 4.
Interpretations of my paintings by participants
The context and the making of the cards
How people interact with the playing cards

Chapter 5.
The story of the cards – my reflective interpretations of the meanings of the stories told

Chapter 6.
Theory and practice: reflections on self-study

Chapter 7.
Conclusion

The implications of this study on my artistic and teaching practice and possible further uses for the cards

NB. Literature will be reviewed throughout the dissertation as relevant to the discussion

8. Potential Outputs

1. A public exhibition consisting of:
•Paintings, photographs and filmed documentation.
•Sets of cards that could be used for a multitude of educational purposes and creative ways to generate and gather narratives.
2. A dissertation.
3. A journal submission.
4. The development and patenting of the cards as an educational tool.

9. Key References

Abdulla, R, & Hubner, R. 2006. *Pictograms, Icons and Signs* .London.Thames and Hudson.

Barnard, M. 2006. *Graphic Design as Communication*. 2nd edition. New York. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

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Crow, D. 2003. *Visible Signs.* Switzerland: AVA Academia.

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Gaver, W. W, Dunne, A & Pacenti, E . Cultural probes. *Interactions. Volume 6 (1), 21-29.*

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Huxtable, M. 2009. Developing Talents to Create and offer knowledge of the Self and the World as Educational Gifts. *Educational Journal of Living Theories.* Volume 2(2):215-231

Kress, G., van Leeuwen, T. 1996. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design.* London: Routledge.

Leedy, P. D. & Ormrod, J E. 2005. *Practical Research-Planning and Design.* New Jersey: Pearson, Merrill, Prentice, Hall.

Nimkulrat, N. 2007. The Role of Documentation in Practice-led Research. *Journal of Research Practice.* Volume 3. Issue 1, Article M6

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Graphic Designers. Worthing: AVA Academia.

Rose, G. 2001. *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual methodologies.* London: Sage Publications.

van Leeuwen, T., Jewitt, C. (eds.) 2003.*Hand book of Visual Analysis.* London: Sage Publications.

Whitehead, J. 2008. *How do I Influence the Generation of Living Educational Practices and Social Accountability in Improving Practice? Using a Living Theory Methodology in Improving Educational Practice.* http://www.actionresearch.net *[Accessed 08/07/09]*

Whitehead, J. 1998. *How do I know that I have Influenced your learning for good? A question of representing my educational relationships with my research students. file:///:Volumes/KINGSTON/whitehea.htm [Accessed 08/07/09]*

Whitehead, J., Huxtable, M. *how can Inclusive and Inclusional understanding of Gifts/Talents be Developed educationally?* http://www.actionresearch.net*[Accessed 20/11/09]*

Section C: Ethics
Note: Ethics requirements are faculty specific. Kindly ensure that you are aware of and have complied with the relevant ethics requirements.

Tick as appropriate:

Humans		Organisations		Animals		Environment	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

Indicate Category (X)		
1.	**Exempt from Ethics and Biosafety Research Committee Review (straightforward research without ethical problems)**	
2.	**Expedited review (minimal risk to humans, animals or environment)**	x
3.	**Full Ethics and Biosafety Research Committee review recommended (possible risk to humans, animals, environment, or a sensitive research area)**	

| 4. | **Full Ethics and Biosafety Research Committee review required (risk to humans, animals, environment, or a sensitive research area)** | |

| **Attach Addendums (if any)** |

| **Please initial alongside if the project is to be registered as secret** | |

Guidelines for the Preparation of a Research Proposal

(To be read in conjunction with the Postgraduate Student Guidelines)

Please ensure that you have completed, in every respect, all of the following prior to submission of your Research Proposal. Students are advised to use the electronic version of the FAD PG 4 form which is available from the Research Co-ordinator.

Please complete **ALL SECTIONS**, using Arial 10-point font and single spacing in MS Word.

1. Proof-read your hard copy, ensure correct referencing, edit rigorously and then submit to your Supervisor(s).
2. Number all pages and show correct author source references both in the text proper and in the References at the end using the Harvard referencing method (IEEE for Engineering students).
3. Complete the Ethics Section, the Work Plan and the Budget correctly in every respect and again engage in a thorough spell check prior to submission to your Supervisor/Co-Supervisor(s)/ Promoter/Co-Promoter(s).
4. Please note carefully the closing dates, as outlined in the Academic Calendar, contained in the Rule Book for Students, the registration dates as well the expected duration for the completion of the project.
5. It is imperative that you adhere to your specified guidelines for completion of your research and institutional/faculty deadlines as published on the DUT website.

Declarations

Student Declaration

I, the undersigned, certify that:

- I am familiar with the rules regulating higher qualifications at Durban University of Technology, and understand the seriousness with which DUT will deal with violations of ethical practice in my research.
- where I have used the work of others this has been correctly referenced in the proposal and again referenced in the bibliography. Any research of a similar nature that has been used in the development of my research project is also referenced.
- this project has not been submitted to any other educational institution for the purpose of a qualification.
- all subsidy-earning outputs (artefacts and publications) from postgraduate studies will be in accordance with the Intellectual Property Policy of Durban University of Technology.
- where patents are developed under the supervision of the Durban University of Technology involving institutional expenditure, such patents will be regarded as joint property entitling the Durban University of Technology to its share, subject to the Durban University of Technology's policy on the Management and Commercialisation of Intellectual Property.
- I understand that I am expected to publish an article based on my research results.
- I understand that plagiarism is wrong, and incurs severe penalties.

I HEREBY DECLARE THAT THE ABOVE FACTS ARE CORRECT.

Signed: _____Date: _____
(Student)

Supervisor/Promoter Declaration

(a) I approve the student's provisional title of research project.
(b) I acknowledge that the topic is researchable and the student has the potential to complete the dissertation in the suggested time frame allowed.
(c) I am satisfied with and approve the research proposal;
(d) *I approve of the Co-Supervisor(s)/Co-Promoter(s) proposed by the HoD and student.
(e) I have checked that the student has complied with all the instructions outlined in the Postgraduate Student Guidelines and those appended to the Research Proposal and confirm that the Research Proposal is ready for submission to the FRC.
(f) I accept responsibility to advise and guide the student.
(g) I accept the appointment of Supervisor/Promoter.

*delete and sign alongside if not applicable

Signed: _____Date: _____
(Supervisor/Promoter)

Head of Department Declaration

I, _____ (Full name of Head of Department) have read the research proposal and I hereby submit to FRC for approval.

Signed: _____Date: _____
(HoD)

The abovementioned proposal (including the ethical considerations) has been considered and approved by the Faculty Research Committee.

Signed: _____Date: _____
(Chairperson: Faculty Research Committee)

Date of Approval by FRC	

Routing: Date:	Student		Supervisor/ Promoter		HoD		FRC		HDC	

N.B. The attached checklist (Checklist and Evaluation of Research Proposal) must be completed and signed by the departmental reviewer(s) and HoD before the proposal is approved by the FRC.

Checklist and Evaluation of Research Proposal of Dissertation / Thesis Proposal					
Reviewer / Review Panel Chair				**Title**	
Tel (W)	**Tel (H)**	**Cell**	**Fax**		**e-Mail**
			Yes	**No**	**Unclear**	**Comment**

		Yes	No	Unclear	Comment
1.	**Research Topic**				
1.1	Is the research problem/question clearly stated?				
1.2	Is the problem/question researchable?				
1.3	Is the topic relevant?				
1.4	Is the scope appropriate for the qualification?				
1.5	Is the research appropriately delimited?				
1.6	Are the research aims clear?				
1.7	Are the assumptions stated (if any)?				
1.8	Is the terminology adequately defined?				
2.	**Literature**				
2.1	Is the literature relevant to the problem?				
2.2	Has an adequate conceptual framework been developed?				
2.3	Is the literature current, apart from seminal works?				
2.4	Has the relationship between the research topic and previous research been outlined?				
2.5	Are textual referencing and bibliographic citation correct and consistent?				
3.	**Methodology**				
3.1	Does the research design address the research problems/questions?				
3.2	Are the data collection/production methods appropriate?				
3.3	Are the data analysis methods appropriate?				
3.4	Have ethical considerations been addressed? [1]				
4.	**General**				
4.1	Is the proposal generally free of language/ typographical errors?				
4.2	Is the proposal generally free of plagiarism? [2]				
4.3	Is the research manageable in terms of timeframe?				
4.4	Is the budget allocated realistic?				
5.	**Funding**				
5.1	Is the proposal financially viable?				

[1] Indicate whether ethical clearance through a research ethics committee is required.
[2] In the case of plagiarism, the proposal should be returned to the candidate with a warning. The candidate will need to re-submit (see Policy on Plagiarism).

Recommendations	

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Reviewer)

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(HoD)

	HOD Checklist	
	Please do not submit proposals until all prerequisites have been fulfilled.	
	Prerequisites for proposal submission and approval	**Yes**
1	At least one of the Supervisors/Promoters has a doctorate.	
2	The main Supervisor/Promoter has the necessary disciplinary qualifications, as well as experience, to do the job, and, in the case of inexperience, a Co-supervisor/promoter has been appointed to act as mentor.	
3	The budget follows the DUT stipulations (i.e. does not include cost of laptops, editing or statistical analysis, and, if over R15, 000 for an MTech or R25, 000 for a DTech, the extra cost/s are motivated.)	
4	The FAD Ethics Form has been completed and attached, and satisfactorily addresses all ethical concerns.	
5	The Checklist and Evaluation table has been completed and signed by a Reviewer. (N.B. This should not be the Supervisor/Promoter.)	
6	The approved and signed Minutes of the Review Panel Meeting for Departmental Approval are attached.	
7	The submission of this proposal is accompanied by a brief memorandum from the HOD to the Research Co-ordinator outlining this (and other, if necessary) submission/s.	
8	All of the required signatures and dates (including that of the HOD) are on the FAD PG4a form and attached documents..	
9	The HOD undertakes to ensure that all changes and corrections required by the FRC are carried out satisfactorily by the candidate, and that the corrected forms/pages are re-submitted as soon as possible. (N.B. Proposal/s will not be forwarded until receipt of corrected forms/pages.)	
10	The form PG4b (Notification for Ratification of Research Proposal by the Higher Degrees Committee) has been filled in by the candidate in preparation for submission to the HDC after FRC approval and noting by EXCO/Faculty Board. (*N.B. This should not be signed by the HOD or submitted until after FRC approval and noting at EXCO/Faculty Board*.)	

Signed: _____
(HoD)

Date: _____