

## Acknowledgements

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'Design as' analogies in the literature on design; an attempt to reconcile them with 'real' talk in design education.

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## Abstract

Design pedagogy at tertiary institutions presents students with the task of decoding discourse in many different forms. These include written texts, some of which many students find unrelated to the 'real' talk about producing and evaluating designs. Such 'real' talk is found in the design critique, or crit. I attempt to find a way to point to existing connections hitherto not explored between the two forms of discourse. This paper will present three examples of 'design as' analogies, namely design as bricolage (Louridas, 1999); design as moral problem solving (Dorst and Royakkers 2006) and designing as disclosure (Newton, 2004). The authors' explanations of these analogies are held up against the spoken texts of the crits, and I show how their theories are enacted. Some pedagogical implications of the findings are suggested, with activities that could help students bridge the gap between the metadiscourse of the literature and the discourse of the studio.

## Keywords

design critique, discourse, analogy, design as, design education

## Introduction

Design pedagogy at tertiary institutions presents students with the task of decoding discourse in many different forms. These forms range from a selection of theoretical discursive written texts to the oral discourse of their educators spoken during studio

exercises and feedback crits. It is my experience that many students perceive these two discourses as coming from two different planets, the more abstract theoretical texts being in no way related to the 'real' talk about producing designs. However, learning a designerly way of thinking involves among other things making connections between the discourse of the studio/studio assessment and the learned knowledge of textually grounded information. For Ardington (2008) 'learned knowledge' of theory and 'tacit knowledge' of studio provide tensions that need to be addressed in design education.

As part of a larger study on the use of metaphor in the design critique, I examined the relationship between a sample of the discourse of some design educators in the final crit context in Visual communication and Architecture, and a random selection of theoretical approaches to design that attempt to define the process and role of design by way of an extended analogy. The crit was chosen as a discourse genre because it is a place where the functions of language are oriented towards goals that include the speakers displaying their identities as designers and educators (see Melles 2008). In a context of an evaluation the design educators need to show how they structure their reasoning in relation to design outcomes, and draw on their expertise, practice and reflection in so doing. Their understandings are likely to have been shaped to some extent by the existing body of academic debates about design, its evolution and definitions. My goal in this analysis was an exploratory one, and makes no strong claims other than to substantiate some of the intricate links between language, cognition and perception.

### Extended analogies in the literature

An analogy is a type of metaphor that is not creating a new concept through a blending process, but is explicitly expressed through words such as 'like' or 'as', and the comparison needs to be explained or demonstrated. In the attempt to expand the idea of what design is, and how its ideologies are formed, there is a tension, and recourse to analogies is an attempt to unpack that tension.

Within the field of design theory, metaphorical thinking around the question 'what is design?' occupies a particularly interesting space. This is because metaphors allow design theorists to see one thing as another, as a scenario to be envisaged, both privileging and concealing. The relationship of roles relevant to the design situation is described in metaphorical terms by Nelson and Stolterman (2003) who, in *The Design Way*, describe relationships such as the designer-facilitator, or the service design

relationship, which they describe as 'a partnership which is a conspiracy (a breathing together)'. Their claim is that every designer is a leader 'because every design process is about leading the world into a new reality' (p. 298). In their chapter *The Evil of Design*, they discuss the relationships among the attributes of design, which include, for example: 'design is knowing and naïveté; design is flux and permanence; design is collaboration and solitude; design is timeless and temporal' (p. 257). An 'ensouled design' (p. 282) is an important metaphor they discuss, because, 'When we encounter ensouled designs, we are energised' (p. 286).

This paper presents a discussion of three examples of 'design as' analogies, namely design as bricolage (Louridas, 1999); design as moral problem solving (Dorst and Royakkers 2006) and designing as disclosure (Newton 2004). The authors' explanations of these analogies are held up against the spoken texts of the crits, and I show how they are enacted in the discourse of the educators.

### Design as bricolage

For Louridas, 'Bricolage creates structures, in the form of its artefacts, by means of contingent events. To arrive at a definition, bricolage is the creation of structure out of events' (p. 520). Louridas describes the bricoleur as wanting to 'create a structure out of his means and the results of his actions. He tinkers with the materials, takes stock of the results of his tinkering, and then tinkers again.

'One element's possibilities interacts [sic] with all other elements' possibilities, with the overall organisation of the artefact he makes ... so that each choice will involve a complete reorganisation of the structure ... and the result is often at a remove from his initial intentions.' (Louridas, p. 520)

This attitude, with its acceptance of ambiguity and openness to combining the materials at hand, defines the bricoleur as much as the creator of metaphor. Two major concepts associated with the bricoleur are, firstly, he 'redefines the means that he already has' (p. 3) and, secondly, the designer as bricoleur is unselfconscious.

There are many instances in my recorded data where a design educator's words support the concept of redefining or reorganizing using materials at hand. Instances of this occur mostly in a summing-up of what has gone before in the crit or as advice/coaching. What follows is an example. The educator's words are in italics:

– The thing about design is that it is about refinement and, as you're doing here you're doing it very well, it's establishing a system and then moving elements around within that system to get the optimum sort of combination. And that's what it's really all about; it's not like arriving there in one go.

Self-conscious design is design conceived as, and practised as, a distinct activity. It is professionalised and institutionalised design (p. 522). In self-conscious design, tradition no longer

'filters occasion, execution, and purpose contingencies....The designer is free to resolve them and use them in appropriate ways. In fact, he is not only free to resolve them, he is also responsible to resolve them and use them in appropriate ways. Some innocence is lost.'(p. 526)

'Selfconscious design is, then, a kind of metaphorical bricolage' (Louridas p. 530). A manifestation of self-consciousness is praised by one design educator:

– Now that opening spread ... is great. What I'm really pleased about with it is the fact that you've actually got the whole thing in dual language. Because that's actually something really quite complex and you've managed to sort out the fact that it's very easy to find the language by putting them in two colours and always going left to right. It's incredibly easy to follow that through.

Similarly, words of advice/coaching can identify how bricolage can be enacted, for example:

– once you've established the masthead as a sort of symbol, then you can destroy it or take it apart a bit. Because this is the first issue, you've got to set this in people's mindset that they understand what they're looking at.

In the crits, advice given to students sometimes implies a kind of tinkering, as several examples indicate:

– but if you're going to, graffiti is a hard one to deal with because you

need very good examples of it. You'd almost need somebody who is graffiti or a tag artist to go and actually do this for you. / The other thing you can think about with your masthead is that you can apply other finishes to it. So you've designed it typographically and then you've applied this finish to it ... it doesn't mean you have to stick with this finish.

### **Design as moral problem solving**

The analogy of moral problems with design problems was introduced by Whitbeck (1998a). Dorst and Royakkers (2006) set out a concise list of the features shared by designing and ethical problems. Three items in this list are explored for entailments: there is an inexhaustible number of different solutions; the process involves finding as well as solving problems; and design solutions are often holistic responses.

The first of the features – that there is an inexhaustible number of different solutions – is one that is commonly expressed in the advice/coaching phases of the crits. It is characterised by the use of modals, and is close to the design as play metaphor:

– If that happens, try tracing it off in pen, then throw it into levels, push your contrast up in your levels and you'll find that it will probably work. / And it's here ... these pullouts, that's the kind of stuff that would have worked really well on the Contents page. / If anything, I might have taken this strong black and white image and used that and then opened up the white space across here and played with that. Or even have taken it that way. It would just follow on a lot better than that.

The second feature – the process involves finding as well as solving problems – is less explicitly entailed here, but rather suggested by the design educators:

– Now your masthead is actually a really interesting little masthead. I suspect it's a masthead that's quite driven by fashion and potentially might date a little quicker than some other mastheads. / But it's a good idea to test these things out a lot on lots of different people and see if they can understand it and then go back and change it as you want to do.

The third feature – that design solutions are often holistic responses – is tied up with the larger purposes and overall reaction to the magazine design:

– What were you trying to achieve in terms of the positioning of this magazine? / I thought you could have played around with these a little bit more, made them a lot bigger, made them more of a feature – the images more of a feature ... to help the reader understand what the article's about. I think that that is what this is missing ... is that we get a taste of what the article is about but we can't really read what the article is about from the images and from the placement of images. / On the last page, if you were to compare these two pages and you half close your eyes and you look at them, they look very different, don't they? So what's the difference between them? So which one is more appealing for you? So in future, in your design work, think about it that way ... like half close your eyes and look at it and think 'How do my eyes feel more comfortable?' and then, if you half close your eyes, you stop looking at the words and the text and you actually start to look at the shapes and the space on the page a lot more easily. OK?

Finally, there is an example of text where the analogy with moral ethics is encapsulated:

– Again, design is very much about exclusive to rather than inclusive to about knowing why it is you're choosing not to do these things. I think this would have been quite a successful design but it would have given you quite a different aesthetic in different fields – and you know that. So that's important that you demonstrate that in your process as well. So it's not at all wasted in any way. It's quite a crucial part of the whole process and it's something that we expect to see.

These comments show how the analogy with ethics is evidenced in the discourse, particularly the close link between ethics and values, since designers draw on value systems when they make design decisions.

### **Designing as disclosure**

Newton (2003) claims that the conception of designing as disclosure draws

directly from Derrida and hence to the work of Baudrillard, Barthes, McLuhan and deconstruction more generally. 'In hermeneutic philosophy, disclosure tends to be posited in counter-point to discovery' (p. 103). The mode of articulation we choose to ascribe to designing as disclosure begins with an act of signification.

'An act of signification is ... an active process of projection undertaken by a person or group of people (the user), who affords some distinguishing (to that person/group) relationship between a referent (the thing being considered) and a description (the sign).'

(Newton, 2003, p. 96)

For Newton, as for Eco (1984), metaphor is one linguistic form of signification, and any act of signification is implicated in our understanding and experience, or disclosure, of the world. The text, whether it be a visual representation or written, has to be considered as a choice between all relationships that might be made, how they are considered, and from what perspective. From a postmodernist perspective, visual representation has to be 'read', and 'considered with impulsion, through a process of signification, as a metaphor structure through particular connections' (p. 100). Following Schön, who describes design as a conversation, design representation then becomes the manifest expression of a single episode within the larger, ongoing design conversation. Each design episode is seen to be metaphorical in nature, at the same time, 'both highlighting and hiding particular entailments'. The entailments are 'realised as a set of connections (relationships and concerns)' (p.105). Newton postulates that, '[t]his puts an entirely different spin on design pedagogy: a move away (though certainly not entirely away) from data, methods and systems, towards experience.

According to the proposition of design as disclosure, there is no single reading of a text, but visual representation is read and inscribed with possibility. The design process (reflective conversation) proceeds as an iterative process of articulation and re-articulation of signification and experimentation. As with language, there is a meaning potential in the text of designing. Newton, who sees each episode of designing as being metaphorical in nature, expresses designing as 'read [ing] a situation/problematic, and to read effectively demands an active challenging of how things are being understood, an active openness to new possibilities, and an active revision of understanding' (Newton, 2004 p.104). Disclosure involves hypothesis, and exploration, and in the crit text hypothetical statements are used in under the umbrella of advice/coaching:

– And if you think ‘Well, if Murcott was faced with my site, what would he do?’ not ‘What did he do on that site?’/ You would have been better served if you had actually continued to hand-draw and leave it feeling a bit more unfinished and unresolved.

The discourse of the critique can be described from Newton’s perspective as articulating a process of signification and experimentation. It provides an active openness, and communicates future possibilities, together with the DE’s own impulsions:

– So therefore I think you’d be better off thinking more loosely than so completely. A little bit of ambiguity at this point is good.

In the following section of text from an architecture crit, several elements of Newton’s explanation are shown to be enacted in the discourse of the educator:

Crit text:	Relation to disclosure theory:
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I’d still like to see more play with these guys,  
disclosure; of relationships

maybe one flips up or ...  
disclosure; hypothesis, exploration  
because when you say that they step down the site,  
disclosure; signification  
I don’t believe you when the back one’s lower

disclosure; the act of  
signification is broadly speaking an act of reading the world.  
so if it were an idea about that, that one needs to be up.  
disclosure; hypothesis, exploration of implications

Textual entailments of the design as disclosure analogy reference the constantly shifting nature of design, and the need for an understanding that a design concept does not exist already as an entity to be captured from ‘outside’.

### Conclusion: some pedagogical implications

The connection that I make between the design as analogies in the literature and the language used in the crits signifies that a configuration of ideas from different quarters of the same discipline can be substantiated. In other words, that such analogical approaches are part of the knowledge that the speakers draw upon, albeit unconsciously. This finding could be developed pedagogically into a tool that can bridge the gap perceived by some students between ‘coal face’ of the crit and the more abstract discourse of the literature.

In other words, a follow-up to this study would be to develop explicit language activities that can connect the more exploratory experimental discourse of the studio to some of the conceptual frames and images found commonly in design studies literature. Such activities would demonstrate how attitudes may appear linguistically at the micro level throughout the crit and build up at the macro level to constitute evidence of principles or higher order concepts. A similar educational purpose has been articulated by the Writing PAD project (n.d.) which explores the discourse community of art, and aims to fuse the tenuous connection that students perceive between theoretical enquiry, written assessments and the creative processes of the studio.

As an example, students would be given a written or spoken record of crit comments, and then be asked to describe how such comments could reflect the speakers’ way of seeing the process of design; what identify which particular words show this. As an example what follows is a section of a crit text:

– The interesting thing about this one is you’re trying to use the “c” as a substitution. I think you’re really trying to do too many things here and gone a little bit ... trying to do everything all at once. Fair enough! That’s probably where you’re at. I don’t mean you, every ... not necessarily knowing which it is the really best idea and really the only way of doing that is to sort of test one and find out which one gets the top ten. Because sometimes you can’t make a decision, it’s going to be difficult to make a decision when it could all work in some way or other. But a nice use of figuring in terms of this chopping off the top, probably trying to make the sea and the princess all the same maybe just might be a little too much. But it does work, so good on you!

In asking students to respond to the language of this piece of text, I would develop a bank of questions that could include the following two exercises:

Select a sentence or two from this text; what does it say about finding design solutions? Are they part of other design problems? So what is the educator saying about the student's freedom to design?

From your answers to these questions, write a statement about how the educator views the designing process.

Can you connect the educator's view to any of the following statements:

design is like evolution  
design is like play  
design is like management  
design is like experimental practice  
design is like solving problems

A second example of discourse is taken from an Architecture crit:

– And equally it seems a little bit like the way you've treated the facades is a little bit applied; you've taken a few qualities of the rock formations and then put them on different sides. Whereas the real poetry in this guy is in its sculptural quality; it's a beautiful three-dimensional rock-like house. So then the language of it shouldn't be stuck on to the outside. It should be part of the same logic that makes you generate this weird three-fingered rock think in Hunter's Hill. Do you know what I mean? But your experiment and how you deal with it are totally leading in the right direction. So if you were to continue this, then I'm sure it would all come together as convincingly as this part has.

Select a sentence or two from this text; what does it say about finding design solutions? Are they part of other design problems? So what is the educator saying about the student's freedom to design?

From your answers to these questions, write a statement about how the educator views the designing process.

Can you connect the educator's view to any of the following statements:

design is like a conversation  
design is like understanding possibilities  
design is experimenting  
design is like a ritual

Such conceptual language exercises as these would open discussions and reveal to students the implications of the language choices that their educators make, and situate them in the wider context of design and architecture.

## Contributor Details

As a language and literacy lecturer at the University of Technology Sydney, Barbara Lasserre has had a longstanding interest in the fusion of discourse analysis and design education. Her research has centered on cognitive metaphor, particularly in the spoken and written discourse of design.

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