

# An Autoethnographic Exploration of Creative Design Practice: Towards Pedagogic Implications

Chris de Beer

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Supervisor: Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

Co-supervisor: Professor Claudia Mitchell

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As the candidate's supervisors we agree/do not agree to the submission of this dissertation/ thesis.

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Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

Professor Claudia Mitchell

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# ABSTRACT

I have lectured Jewellery Design at a University of Technology in South Africa for nearly 30 years now. My teaching practice has gradually adjusted over the years to suit the changing needs of the industry, the university and the students. I have become aware of the need to make deliberate adjustments, because the changes happening around me are more complex than I realized, and I feel out of touch with my students. To gain a better understanding of my own creative practice and the intersection with my pedagogic practice, I have undertaken an autoethnographic exploration of my identity as creative artist and designer, and as university educator. I produce numerous objects during the creative design process and my office/studio is filled with these artefacts. It occurred to me that there might be meanings contained within these objects that could influence my creative and pedagogic practice. So I set out to analyse the things that line my office walls.

The research questions that guided my research were: a) *Which are my significant creative outputs/artefacts, and why do I consider them to be important?* b) *How does my self manifest in these significant creative outputs/artefacts?* and c) *What are the pedagogic implications of an enhanced awareness of self in creative practice?*

As an artist and creative designer, I often stage and participate in exhibitions. So I decided to analyse the objects that I produced for these exhibitions to see what I could find. I developed an autoethnographic self-interview method using denotative prompts and connotative responses, which enabled me to reveal an underlying network of connections that culminated and intersected within the objects. On analysing the significances, I was able to recognise aspects of my creative process and arrive at an understanding of creativity that allowed me to engage fruitfully with factors that could influence the development of creative ability. The elements I identified within my own creative practice, using the self-interview, related to the meandering nature of creativity, the role serendipity plays, and the extent to which I draw on personal experience as a source of inspiration. The primary original contribution of this thesis lies in the development, refinement and use of the autoethnographic self-interview.

When I considered these insights in terms of my pedagogic practice I realised that I could pay more attention to the diversity of my students, to the heterogeneity that manifested in the classroom. I recognised that this approach could help me acknowledge the emergent nature of



creativity, particularly if I wanted to encourage my students to use their own personal experiences as a foundation for creative design. By inviting this personalised approach I would, of necessity, have to make them aware of the nature of serendipity, of the ‘happy accidents’ in daily life (and creative design), and the usefulness of this phenomenon when aiming for innovation, or in a better word, creativity.

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## The composition of my thesis

I have chosen to present my doctoral study in the following format as specified by the University of KwaZulu-Natal College of Humanities Handbook:

“A thesis may comprise one or more original papers of which the student is the prime author, published or in press in peer-reviewed journals approved by the college academic affairs board, accompanied by introductory and concluding integrative material”

This format of a collection of papers suits the way my work was initiated and has unfolded. It started with a chapter published in an edited book, followed by a series of four articles written for various academic journals. The chapter and the articles show the gradual development of a method for deliberate consideration of the significance of an object. Each chapter or article deals with an exhibition that either I staged, or in which I participated. In this thesis, I present the chapters/articles as discreet entities, but with a thread that runs through, much like different artworks at an exhibition. This thread is visible in the interlude, a one-page artist statement with an image, that precedes each paper.

In the introductory and concluding chapters of the thesis, I will refer to the five papers by their shortened titles. The first paper is a chapter that was published in *Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education*, a peer reviewed book edited by Pillay, Naicker, and Pithouse-Morgan (2016). The full title of the chapter is “*Creative Self-Awareness: Conversations, Reflections and Realisations*” (de Beer 2016a) and it will be shortened to “*Creative Self-Awareness*”. Similarly the second paper, an article that was published in the journal *Educational Research for Social Change*, and titled “*Examining Aspects of Self in the Creative Design Process: Towards Pedagogic Implications*” (de Beer, 2016b) will become “*Examining Aspects of Self*”. The third paper, “*Rethinking visual journaling in the creative process: Exploring pedagogic implications*” (de Beer, 2018), which was published in the South African Journal of Higher Education becomes “*Rethinking Visual Journaling*”, while the fourth paper, “*Through the Jeweller’s Loupe: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Relationship between my Creative and my Pedagogic Practice*” will be referred to as “*Through the Jeweller’s Loupe*”. This paper has been submitted to *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* and is currently under review. The final paper, “*Faceting the crystal: An autoethnographic exploration of creative practice from a jeweller’s workbench*”, which is currently under review at the *Qualitative Report*, will be called “*Faceting the Crystal*”.

Each paper is preceded by an ‘interlude’, a type of artist statement that provides more context for what is to be considered. The interlude is more than an introduction to the chapter or article that follows. It has a number of characteristics that enable it to act as a type of connective tissue that holds the thesis together. It uses questioning prompts, that echo the denotative prompts used in my self-interviews, as headings, and images of my creative work and environments, for visual flavour. The images I use on each interlude is juxtaposed with the text, similar to the haiga used by the poet, Mari Pete, when she responded to the very first exhibition of my research journey (*Creative Self-Awareness*). A haiga combines image and text in a way that does not privilege either (Addiss & Yamamoto,

1995), but rather adds another dimension with both modalities contributing to 'knowing differently' (Kouhia, 2015). It is not about the text being illustrated by the picture, but the feeling, or embodied knowledge, which is generated by the juxtaposition. It combines the evocative qualities of the image with the discursive qualities of the writing, to echo what has just occurred, and to provide a receptive frame of mind for what follows.

The thesis page numbers are in Italics at the bottom of each page, halfway between the center and the right hand corner. This is to accommodate the numbering formats of the various journals.

## Prelude: Going?

“I learn from going, where I have to go”

- Theodore Roethke, "The Waking"

The notion of learning where to go by going, of finding out where the path is by walking, and thereby making the path, appeals to me. I find myself discovering what to make by making, as can be seen in figure 1 below. It shows a workspace in my studio with the raw materials and creative artefacts in varying stages of production.

There are a number of tentative explorations and experiments, with embossed images of cameo profiles, and leaf outlines, which could end up being final pieces, once they are combined with something else; they might also lie in wait for a number of weeks before they are interacted with again.

I will find out when I start making ... again.



*Figure 1 - Various experiments and explorations with plastic from recycled plastic containers.*



## A journey of discovery: Looking for a way in

As a lecturer and practising jewellery designer/artist at a university of technology in Durban, South Africa, I found myself producing and collecting numerous artefacts and objects that engaged with the various aspects that constitute the creative design process. I had reached a stage in my own creative development, where I wanted to examine these objects so I could understand what I had done and how I had done it, so I could facilitate the creative development of my students.

When I look back now, I realise my life was a blur, a creative blur that sometimes focused on my students and sometimes on myself, my creative practice. I became aware of a schism between my students and I, and wished to bridge the gap, to heal the rift, so to speak.

This schism is due to the fact that my current students come from culturally diverse groups, being of Indian, African and European descent. The designs that they produce do not reflect their cultural heritages. Instead the Western idiom seems to dominate. I want to find out how to encourage them to use resources that are local, indigenous, and personally significant, rather than the current hegemonic colonial and Eurocentric visual references that surround them. To complicate matters, the majority of my students did not do Visual Art as a subject at school. Furthermore, a large number of them come from poverty-stricken backgrounds and are expected to finish their qualification so they can start earning money. Coming from these types of backgrounds, they are not used to seeing creativity as something that is valued. To teach them to explore creativity in course work is therefore a difficult task as we do not share cultural backgrounds, languages or personal histories.

What I did have in common with my students was objects. I produced creative objects and wanted my students to create such objects as well. I gauged their creativity by the objects they produced, in a similar way I recognised my creativity as manifesting through my objects. I thought I could dissect these objects and find the seeds of creativity inside.

The focus of my doctoral research was my creative practice. I wanted to examine it to gain a deeper understanding of what happens when I am creative. I wanted to identify the factors that play a role in and impact my creative practice, and to use this understanding to explore implications for my pedagogy, with the intention of improving my teaching practice.

Mitchell (2011) confirms the relevance of researching my own creative artefacts to find out about the creative process, when she says “the analysis of material objects offers the possibility of theorizing abstract concepts in a grounded manner” (p. 35).

### Things I remember making

To provide some insight into my development as creative designer, I would like to share two pieces of memory writing: a few paragraphs I wrote recently in response to a prompt from my supervisor, and a pre-proposal reflection regarding an incident in my first year as jewellery design student.

These two vignettes revolve around significant objects in my life, which highlight aspects of the creative process that have influenced my journey as lecturer, artist and designer. They reveal the influence of serendipity (a cheap box of lightbulbs, and an incidental encounter with exposed metal),

uncover my inclination to creative problem solving (a little platform on the side of an ashtray) and point to where my yearning for aesthetic thrill originated.

### *Making, as a child*

The prompt I responded to in this vignette was from Schulten's (2012) blog, in which she asked:

#### **"What Things Did You Create When You Were a Child?"**

Tell us what you remember best about the things you created when you were a child. How old were you? What materials did you use? Did you create secret spaces like pillow forts where you could retreat, or construct inventions or child-sized versions of real things out of cardboard? Did you write stories, put on plays, invent potions or your own recipes? Tell us some favorite childhood memories of creating — and ask yourself why those creations were so satisfying and memorable." (Schulten, 2010, para. 10)

*"My most significant making, as a child, happened when we moved into a house, when I was standard 8 (grade 10) - we lived in apartments until then. A little stream ran through town where I dug up some clay and made my mom an ashtray. I remember it being a hollow gourd shape with a small mouth. This meant that she could not stub the cigarette out, so I made a platform on the side of the pot, specifically for putting out the cigarettes. It was air-dried and I painted it blue and white with enamel paint. I think white on the inside and blue on the outside.*

*The next important creation was an ambitious lamp made from bent nails and torch light bulbs, soldered together with soft solder. All because I managed to buy 24 for the price of one, as the box was incorrectly priced. It was a mission replacing the bulbs that blew, but it did introduce me to soft solder (a low temperature soldering technique used for electronics, where one uses a soldering iron and lead solder, which melts at about 190° C) and I made some pendants and funny bits and pieces with the molten metal.*

*I still have the wooden tray I made in woodwork class in my first year of high school; in fact, I repaired it last month.*

*What makes these creations so memorable is that if my parents and I had paid attention to my creative endeavours, I would have studied product design rather than architecture, which I failed twice and therefore, had to go to the army for National Service. I only went into Jewellery Design because my buddy from the army did, and I had an aunt that lived in Durban, close to the Jewellery Department, where I could board."*

### *Making, as a jewellery design student*

To explore whether I had sufficient 'substance' for a doctoral study, my supervisor-to-be asked me to produce about 10 pieces of writing to see what memories I had to draw on for my research. The recollection below is of one of my most notable experiences as a jewellery design student. During my first year of study as jewellery design student, I had an epiphany, which resulted in me chasing the thrill of aesthetic experience. This chase continued until quite recently, in fact, I still feel the afterglow of that first aesthetic thrill.

*"During my first year at university, more or less in the middle of the year when I had sort-of become used to how things worked, I forgot my homework at home!*

*We were supposed to design a brooch, which we would then manufacture. I can't remember what the brief was, but the lecturer, Mr Alex (not his real name), was coming around to see what we had designed. He started on the opposite side to where I was sitting which gave me time to quickly scribble some designs that I could claim was done at home. The designs were of squarish brooches that could be manufactured quite simply. I would take two squares of metal, one brass and one nickel silver, put them on top of each other and cut them in half diagonally and swap the top and the bottom and solder the pieces together. The cutting line would be drawn free hand so that I would not have to file a precise line. It did mean that I had more latitude in the making; I would not have to stick to a drawn up plan, but could improvise as I went along. Below are the sketches as I remember... with a rendering of the final brooch.*

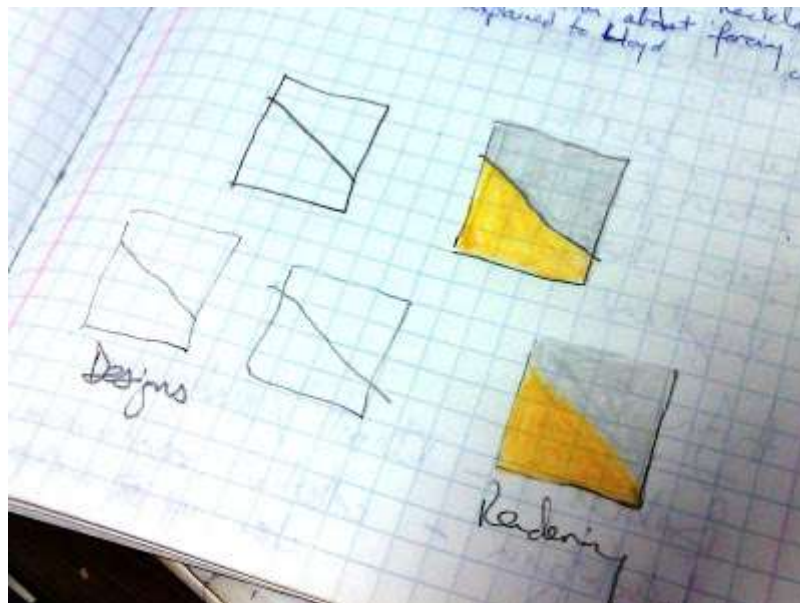


Figure 2 - Reconstructing the design sketches

*I managed to persuade the lecturer that it really was what I wanted to do, in spite of his scepticism about it.*

*I soldered the two pieces together and then had to clean the resulting oxides off. I decided to use a sanding disc rather than the pickling acid and started removing the oxides gradually. The brass and nickel silver was exposed gradually and the soft sheen of the subtly contrasting metals overwhelmed me... I remember staring at the square of metal and feeling how the void inside me was being filled without me feeling saturated! I drank and drank through my eyes and could feel a healing peacefulness settle inside me. A strange peaceful feeling that made me expand and grow ... and my eyes sucked at the delicately coloured and gently shaped square in front of me... I was enraptured and having a Damascus road-type of experience! I think I awoke aesthetically on that day.*

*My original intention regarding my jewellery design studies was to eventually open my own shop and make lots of money. However, this aesthetic experience changed the course of my life and still*

*has me hunting and searching for this welling up and quenching feeling inside.... Every now and then I am still caught by surprise and have a whiff of the balm..."*

## My research questions

The first question that guided my study was:

- *Which are my significant creative outputs/artefacts, and why do I consider them to be important?*

I asked this question because I produce and collect significant amounts of objects, of creative artefacts, and many are displayed on my office walls. My office at the university also doubles as my studio (see figure 3). Sometimes these objects are the result of the creative design process when I produce jewellery and related artefacts for exhibitions, sometimes they are produced as the result of an innate desire to just make, or what some people might refer to as 'fiddling'. As part of my teaching, I often refer to these objects when I have consultations and briefing sessions with my students in my office. I became aware of the abundance of objects that surround me and that I was holding onto them, sometimes pinning them up in layers over each other, unable to discard them as if there was a special significance within them.

- *How does my self manifest in these significant creative outputs/artefacts?*

This question came about because I could sense that my creatively designed objects encapsulated aspects of myself, but I could not pinpoint what these aspects were. I had a feeling that these objects somehow represented the experiences I was busy having, and I was looking for the correlation between the way the objects looked, and my life.

- *What are the pedagogic implications of an enhanced awareness of self in creative practice?*

The motivation for asking this question was the suspicion that getting to know myself better would have an impact on the way I teach my students. It seemed to me my design process was undergoing changes as I became more aware of my own creative processes, and I wondered whether this heightened awareness would influence the way I teach.

## Working with objects

At the start of my doctoral research process, I knew that the "contents of [my] consciousness" (Eisner, 2002, p. 6) was being expressed, that I was conveying aspects of myself during the creative process, but I was not able to identify the nature of this content. I also had a feeling I might be able to use reflections on my own creative practice to gain a better understanding of my students' creative endeavours.

I was not sure whether meaning was created or invented (Glenn & Hayes, 2007), but thought it was dependent, in some way, on the inter-relationship between objects. I was under the impression I would be able to identify particular objects that represented "nodal moments" (Graham, 1989, p. 98), which Graham defines as a point in time, just beyond a crisis of sorts, where one becomes aware of the "connecting lines that were previously hidden" (p. 98) and notices the patterns

inherent in one's experiences. I thought I could then examine the connotative and denotative meanings (Riggins, 1994), were I to write detailed analyses for each object. Riggins (1994) refers to these two types of meaning as "mapping" and "referencing". According to him, the denotative, or "referencing", information refers to the superficial information that is readily apparent, such as its "history, aesthetics or customary uses" (p. 109), as opposed to the connotative or "mapping" information, which is primarily about the self and its relationships, revealed through the stories elicited by contemplation of the object.

I am part of a research support group that acknowledges the value of critical friends as trusted colleagues that support and validate each other's research (Samaras, 2011), and I imagined I would need to organise discussions with such a group of carefully selected critical friends, in order to identify the most significant artefacts to analyse. I did not think I could do it by myself.

My office had become a repository of artefacts from my world (figure 3). This collection of objects had become too dense for the type of sense I was trying to make, for the type of direction I thought I should be taking. Looking back to the beginning of my doctoral journey, I can now see I wanted to find out specific answers regarding my creative design process, so I could arrive at a conclusion and get my students to be more creative. I wanted to arrive at "undebatable conclusions" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), so I could draw up a clear plan that could be implemented to take the discomfort out of the teaching process; I wanted it to be easy.



*Figure 3 - A repository of artefacts.*

One of my idiosyncrasies, mentioned above, is that I collect and produce interesting bits and pieces and then pin them onto my display noticeboards in my office, as if for inspiration. I often do not use these references (the bits and pieces) deliberately, but they influence what I do and what I think, in an indeterminable way. Every now and then, an object on my wall would catch my eye, and trigger a thought, or response, which would then manifest at a later stage in a creative artefact. I wanted to come to grips with this phenomenon of indeterminable, sporadic inspiration, which would include

serendipity (Bleakley, 2004) and possibly employ it more deliberately within my creative process. I thought autoethnography would help me make sense of this.

### Working with autoethnography

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) compiled a comprehensive, if not definitive, overview of autoethnography. I will not try to improve on it, but will use their definition as a springboard for providing an outline of my own approach to and understanding of autoethnography, and how it relates to their description.

Ellis et al. (2011) define autoethnography as:

“... an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.” (Para. 1)

*An approach to research* – When authors tell the story of their lives by recounting selectively remembered events, they are writing an autobiography (Schwalm, 2014). When researchers investigate a culture, with the aim of providing a better understanding of that culture to outsiders, they do ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011). According to Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnography combines the insider approach of autobiography, with the outsider perspective of ethnography. It seeks a personalised understanding of a cultural phenomenon. It is also an approach that acknowledges the absence of “undebatable truths” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), as it recognises the existence of multiple perspectives regarding the same phenomenon (Denshire, 2013), extending to the way one can feel different about the same thing, at another time. Autoethnography recognises the interaction between these “past and present selves” as a method for making sense (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 69). It does not seek conclusions but wants to stimulate conversations and provoke questions when examining a phenomenon, with the aim of developing self-understanding (Bartleet, 2013).

Autoethnography also recognises the emergent nature of this research process, acknowledging serendipity, the unplanned and unexpected (Bartleet, 2013), when it arises, and using it to convey the complexities of the creative process (Bresler, 2008). When examining my own creative design process, I became aware of several instances where ‘happy accidents’ played a role in the way the process unfolded.

*An approach to writing* – Autoethnography recognises the generative power of writing when it is used for more than documentation. Richardson (2000) advocates the use of writing as a method of inquiry, and Ellis, in the Handbook of Autoethnography (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013), explained that one of the reasons she was drawn to autoethnography was because of the way writing could be used for inquiry, as well as evocation. Using writing for evocation can allow one to find out what lies beneath the surface, to find out what one thinks or feels about a situation (Gullion, 2016). Through my exploration of autoethnography as an approach to writing, I have found that the emergent quality of free writing enables me to excavate impressions and emotions, to discover the significances that are contingent on my inner states.

*To describe* – In autoethnographic writing, descriptions of events attempt to increase the “representational richness” (Humphreys, 2005) of an experience from a personal point of view, in a way that allows the audience to empathise and relate in a manner that is meaningful to them. To enhance the meaning one can use evocative descriptions, such as vignettes (Humphreys, 2005), (Mizzi, 2010), poetry (Pelias, 2013; Ricci, 2003), and layered accounts (Ronai, 1995) to facilitate such empathy, and increase reflexivity.

Description does not necessarily amount to an accurate account of perceptions, particularly if one subscribes to the notion of 'knowing differently' (Kouhia, 2015), meaning one does not favour propositional (descriptive) knowledge over presentational ('symbolised') knowledge or practical ('how to') knowledge (Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008).

To generate a description that would resonate with others, it could be helpful to acknowledge a range of responses, or impressions (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015), to evocative encounters within daily life, which would add to the richness of the explanation. Life is messy (Adams et al. 2015) and thick (Geertz, 1973) and one would probably need multiple sources and modalities, through which to attempt a portrayal that reflects the cluttered and chaotic nature of our lives. Description, in the case of autoethnography, is a representation of experiences from a personal perspective, but done in a way that allows others to access the account and interpret it from their own point of view (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). When producing such an interpretable description in my own writing, I become aware of my own biases by looking at the words I use to describe. I employ the Synonyms tool in my word-processing programme to find better ways of expressing myself, and it is quite enlightening to see how I recognise a 'better' word for what I want to say, when I skim the list of alternatives. I am often amazed at how 'narrow' my range of terms is for describing what I want to say.

*Systematically analyse* – Chang (2008) offers an insightful explanation of what happens when one considers data from an autoethnographic perspective. She points out that the analysis and interpretation are often intertwined, needing a “balancing act” (p. 126), which results in a process of zooming-in and zooming-out. Zooming-in is used for analysis, or “fracturing” (p. 128) of the data, and zooming-out to group the fractured data into categories that suit the terms of the inquiry, i.e. the cultural context. Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras (2015) use the word “clustering” (p. 157) to describe the process of re-organising data into groupings that make sense. In my own process of analysis, I sometimes ‘fracture’ my images into words and sentences, and then ‘cluster’ these words into groupings or categories that suggest themes I can engage with. Sometimes, when I analyse or interpret my data, the interpretations become new data, that can then be the subject of a new analysis. This points to the intertwined and emergent nature of my data and the analysis or interpretation thereof. There does not seem to be a fixed set of data or a ‘standard’ approach to the analysis.

In my study the generation of the data, and the examination thereof, was done by developing a type of autoethnographic self-interview, which I see as an internal dialogue between two different selves, one self being more denotative and the other more connotative; this was an evolving process that took shape as I progressed through the writing of the five papers. The self-interview became apparent during the writing of the second paper and was developed through the writing of the last three papers. The data and the analysis emerge from this process of looking inward, often, and trying to make sense each time. Each new look presents me with a new perspective; I become a different self each time I have a realisation about the connection between my culture and myself.

Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) explain the “methodological openness” (p. 64) of autoethnography, by drawing attention to autoethnographers as “eclectic bricoleurs” (p. 64). Bricoleurs, as explained by Rogers (2012), and to lightly paraphrase (Lévi-Strauss, 1972), are problem-solvers that do what they can, with what they have, where they are. Because the aim of autoethnography is not to solve a problem, but to develop understanding (Ellis et al., 2011), autoethnographers use diverse approaches to interpret and generate the data required to achieve this end (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). They can still use more conventional types of qualitative

research data gathering tools, such as field notes, personal documents and artefacts, and interviews, but the autoethnographic approach has caused a shift towards greater recognition of the "aesthetic, cognitive, emotional, and relational values" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, p. 79) uncovered by the research.

To understand the intertwined nature of data collection (or production, in my case) and analysis, I have found it useful to consider Ellis's description of layered accounts, as an autoethnographic research technique that combines "vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection" (Ellis 1991, as cited in Ellis et al. 2011) to demonstrate to readers that evocative texts (which would include images) can be as useful as abstract analyses (Ronai, 1995).

Although field notes can be seen as a conventional data collection tool, an autoethnographic approach to field notes emphasises the emergent nature of data generation and analysis, particularly when one focuses on the nature of writing, as espoused by Richardson (1994), when she states that "writing is also a way of 'knowing' - a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it" (p. 516). This was evidenced in the *Faceting the Crystal* paper when I used found poetry to analyse one of my self-interviews, and became aware of my ambivalence towards gold.

I wish to establish the trustworthiness of my research by making my work visible (Mishler, 1999), showing the link between my research and creative processes, and the products that resulted. To this end, I have inserted several images that depict the artefacts I made and that I discuss. I also show images that capture the writing that was done. These images are not meant to show the content of the writing; they show the forms the writing take, in some cases revealing the divergent and convergent nature of the inquiry (figure 4.1), and in another showing the scattered occurrence of 'interesting' phrases (figure 5.7). Approaching the same piece of writing from different angles like this, alternating between the content and the form the writing takes, is evidence of crystallisation (Richardson 2000), rather than triangulation. It shows my multifaceted self on the one hand and of a range of approaches to the same experiences on the other hand.

*Personal experience* – I have found it useful to consider Richardson's (2000) notion of the self as a crystal, established and contained by the various aspects/facets of self. The crystal facets could be regarded as the planes that define where the self and the cultural meet, and to use proper crystallographic terminology, it could define the space where cultural experiences are refracted into personal spaces, resulting in slightly altered trajectories, determined by the nature of the self; the substance one is made of. This could explain why everybody perceives the same cultural phenomenon slightly differently, and why I see things in my idiosyncratic way. For example, why I see uncharted lands beyond a hazy horizon, even though the haze might be from pollution (the *Creative Self-Awareness* paper) and why I think that a chocolate foil wrapper can be a substitute for gold (the *Examining Aspects of Self* paper).

Often the type of personal experiences highlighted, or focused on, in autoethnographic writing can be seen as "epiphanies – remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 6) or "nodal moments" (Graham 1989, p. 98). These two concepts can be seen to represent the underlying network of connections that culminate or intersect within that experience.

Most of the autoethnographies I have read deal with issues of social justice, often concerned with marginalised and repressed minorities (Boylorn, 2008; Berry, 2007), and providing a space where the voices of these cultural groups can be heard. In a video clip, Ellis and Bochner (2014) comment on the apparent prominence of such 'serious' research, stating that there are also 'happy'



Autoethnographies. In the video clip, Ellis suggests these are not done as often as more 'painful' autoethnographies because the happy people would rather continue with the pleasurable activity than stop to write about it. I think I find myself in the same position regarding my creative work. I would rather make things than write about making them. I usually end up writing about my creative practice because I see it as a way to get back to the state of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004), or to alleviate the discomfort that I experience at the juncture where my personal and professional lives overlap (Burnier, 2006). This would be when my state of mind is not conducive to being creative, due to the stresses of my professional life.

Other autoethnographies, not as preoccupied with social injustice, can be found within the creative arts. Numerous autoethnographies exist where artists seek a deeper engagement with their creative activity, in order to broaden their understanding of their discipline. These range from visual art (Gosine, 2017), craft (Kouhia, 2015), photography (Goldstein, 2012), and film (Oh, 2016), as well as theatre (Bird, 2017), and dance (Spry, 2001). Kouhai's (2015) short film made me aware of how effective it is to use multimedia to increase the richness of the story one wants to tell, and that written texts by themselves cannot convey the richness of the story that a visual autoethnographer, such as myself, needs to tell.

*To understand cultural experience* – Because the aim of autoethnography is to understand the relationship between cultural experience and the personal, the self, and to address the separation between self and others (Reed-Danahay, 1997), Richardson's (2000) previously mentioned idea that the self can be seen as a crystal, is useful. It could be used to explain the way everybody has a slightly different interpretation of a cultural experience, based on their slightly different 'compositions' or characteristics.

I have also found it helpful to start with a very broad definition of 'culture', such as the one in the Merriam-Webster dictionary that sees it as "the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time" (Definition of Culture, n.d.), combined with Chang's (2008) explanation that it is a "... group-oriented concept by which self is always connected with others" (p. 13). In other words, the group that I belong to at that moment, depending on the context. Holliday (1999) differentiates between two ways of seeing 'culture'. He refers to 'large' culture when dealing with 'ethnic', 'national' or 'international' ideas, and uses 'small' culture when talking about cohesive behaviour or activities in small social groupings. I approach my study from a 'small' culture point of view within a situation that was shaped by 'large' cultural forces such as colonialism and Eurocentrism.

Looking through the papers I have written during my doctoral research process, I recognise the various 'small' cultural groups I belong to, or have belonged to over the years. I remember being a wide-eyed undergraduate student exploring the visual word, trying to understand what I was seeing and then encountering gold leaf as done by my lecturer, for an exhibition, and wanting to do it myself. I remember my first day as lecturer, where I was a Master's student before I walked in the door, and a lecturer (in the eyes of my students) a moment later. I remember being a disgruntled jeweller, not understanding what people saw in gold, and using gold-coloured foil from chocolate wrappers to make jewellery and objects. I remember, as an artist, organising a collaborative art exhibition with my partner, convinced that I was going to discover the meaning inherent in my jewellery in the process. I remember, as a concerned lecturer, that I was going to make my students blog because it was going to teach them to make sense of their creative practice, without really understanding what that meant. I remember being anti-misogyny and making a range of 'Medals for women', probably placing myself firmly in the misogynist's camp. I remember not having much and abhorring waste, and realise that this has contributed to my fascination with bricolage – making do

with what I have. I often feel as if I have made money when I manage to fix a broken item. I now make jewellery from recycled plastic milk bottles, and don't insist that my students do the same.

Each of these groups could be seen as a culture that I momentarily/continuously belong to. The multiple links between these cultural experiences makes for a messy experience, but the realisation that I am at the centre of all these experiences provides me with an anchor, a sea anchor, or *drogue* (what a nice word). I become a type of anchor for myself. I keep myself steady in stormy weather, because part of my self is in the thick of things, engaging reflexively, or as Carolyn Ellis says to Douglas and Carless (2018), "being tuned in to the voices in [my] head" (4:08) and "figur[ing] out the world" (3:09).

## The original papers that form the body of this thesis

A brief overview of each paper follows, with the titles of the chapter and articles serving as headings. I use an image that represents each paper and add a denotative or referencing description to provide a synopsis. In the chapter that concludes the thesis as a whole, I provide another synopsis of each article, but from a connotative perspective.



*Figure 4 - An example of a 'Conversation' from the collaborative exhibition. Three enamelled Kiepersol pendants juxtaposed with a blue titanium dragonfly brooch.*

The first paper I wrote was published as a chapter in a peer-reviewed edited book (de Beer, 2016a). It was based on a collaborative exhibition with my partner, who is a colleague and also a jewellery designer, in which we presented the artworks as two bodies of work in conversation with each other. Figure 4 shows such a conversation. I wanted to identify the meaning inherent in these 'conversations'. I felt there was a lot of intrinsic meaning in the artworks and asked a poet to write some haiku-type poems that, I thought, would elicit the meaning that resided within these objects. Haiku is a type of Japanese poetry, using short verses, usually three lines of five or seven syllables, to convey a feeling evoked by an impression.

## Examining Aspects of Self in the Creative Design Process: Towards Pedagogic Implications



Figure 5 - A Cameo brooch made from a recycled plastic milk bottle.

The writing I did for the *Creative Self-awareness* chapter (de Beer, 2016a) led to a paper published in the South African journal of *Educational Research for Social Change*. This article focuses on the social significance of creative work, and the role personal experiences can play in the creative design process (de Beer, 2016b). I reflected on an exhibition in which I had participated, and which dealt with self-reflexive research. I discussed artworks I had chosen to display (figure 5) and examined the relationship between the objects and my personal life. The examination was done by developing a type of autoethnographic self-interview, which I see as a kind of internal dialogue between two different selves, one self being more denotative and the other more connotative; an evolving process that took shape as I progressed. The three papers that followed illustrate the emergent nature of this inquiry.

## Rethinking Visual Journaling in the Creative Process: Exploring Pedagogic Implications



Figure 6 - A page from my own journal that was discussed in the article for SAJHE.

The initial submission of my next paper was rejected quite quickly, with no explanation, by the first journal I sent it to. In the version of the rejected article, I had incorporated a number of 'scientific' looking tables to show the result of my reflections, and I was then advised by my co-supervisor to present these findings in a narrative format. The revised article received an encouraging review and after minor revisions was accepted for publication in the *South African Journal of Higher Education* (de Beer, 2018).

Though the Jeweller's Loupe: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Relationship between my Creative and my Pedagogic Practice.



Figure 7 - The 'intuitively selected object' used for poetic inspiration, as mentioned below.

The subsequent article I wrote has been submitted to *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, a journal that addresses, amongst other themes, the purposes different types of reflective practices serve and their link to the quality of what happens in the workplace. This article is currently under review. I wrote this paper with an international audience in mind, incorporating the effect of Apartheid on my experience as a jewellery design lecturer. I used an autoethnographic self-interview to analyse a poem that accompanied the print shown above (figure 7).



## Faceting the Crystal: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Creative Practice from a Jeweller's Workbench



Figure 8 - A wall in my office/studio

My final paper was submitted to *The Qualitative Report*, and it is still under review. This journal acknowledges how rich and diverse qualitative research can be and encourages submissions that contain forms of representation that are not necessarily textual. I find this reassuring, as I use a number of pictures to convey the richness of what I encounter during the making of objects. The focus of my article is on exploring and refining the autoethnographic self-interview method I had developed to make sense of the objects in my life, and on my office walls (figure 8). This corresponds with one of the aims of *The Qualitative Report*, which is to provide a platform where researchers can share the methodological aspects of their projects.

## First interlude: Conversations?

When writing my papers I often planned to do deliberate writing, but often did not have anything to say. But then ... it was probably because I thought I should say BIG meaningful things. I did not realise the small everyday things were significant. I did not write enough stories... I still feel a bit as if the 'stories' are just anecdotes and not real stories.

I think I was immobilised for two reasons... a lack of motivation and a misconception of what 'knowledge' is. I think the two are somehow linked. I feel as if I am searching for a BIG thing and then become demotivated when I cannot find it. I do not realise, or, am not yet convinced, that it would be useful to engage with numerous little things. These could then coagulate and form the BIG thing; almost like the idea of eating an elephant. The thought of eating the whole animal is too daunting, but doing it bit by bit is much less frightening. Maybe the thought of sorting out my life, of understanding everything, is too intimidating. I should probably engage with the little stories, the conversations (see below), the seemingly insignificant, and start weaving my cloth from those threads.



*Figure 9 - This is a 'conversation' as discussed in the Creative Self-awareness chapter. It was done while planning a collaborative exhibition. It shows Marlene's 'Kiepersol' pendants with my titanium dragonfly in conversation. Note the serendipitous heart shapes in the strings, the threads as mentioned above.*



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## 4. CREATIVE SELF-AWARENESS

### *Conversations, Reflections and Realisations*

#### INTRODUCTION

Socrates's idea that the unexamined life is not worth living, holds particular meaning when choosing the lens of autoethnographic research. The narrative presented in this chapter deals with my growing self-awareness as creative designer, lecturer, and artist that manifested during two collaborations. During the first collaboration at a local art gallery, I juxtaposed my creative work with that of Marlene de Beer, my partner and colleague in the jewellery design programme at a university of technology. Attempting to understand my creative self, I had several reflective conversations with her regarding the exhibition. The subsequent collaboration was with Marí Peté, a poet. I wanted her to use poetry to uncover, what I thought were, the hidden meanings embedded in the works on display.

When these collaborations took place initially, the intention was to stage a meaningful collaborative exhibition and, secondly, to see if poetry could elicit perceived subtleties that were embedded in the exhibits. Subsequently, this self-exploration has taken a more deliberate route with specific conversations and reflections to uncover inherent meanings. The purpose of uncovering these meanings would be to harness this self-awareness in becoming a better lecturer and artist, to integrate it with the other aspects of self.

In this chapter I will show how my self-awareness has developed and grown. I will begin by outlining the collaborative exhibition with Marlene. Next, I will reflect on the various stages of the collaboration, discuss some of the works that were produced, and highlight a further collaboration with Marí. Then follow further reflections on the initial reflections and a focus on the realisations that occurred. The reflections will be interspersed with these realisations. To conclude I will identify the various assumptions and realisations I had during this autoethnographic journey.

#### CONTEXT

As a lecturer in the jewellery design programme, I lecture design and am responsible for the creative development of my students. Not big-C creativity, but small-C creativity, or second order creativity, as discussed by McWilliam and Dawson

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(2008). I do not expect my students to create ranges of avant-garde jewellery, but I am trying to get them to design ranges of, what they would consider, reasonably original and innovative jewellery. The students I teach are culturally diverse, coming from Indian, African, European, and a mix of these backgrounds, but the jewellery they design does not often reflect their cultural heritages. In fact, the Western idiom seems to dominate. I feel that one way to address this hegemony is to enable the students to draw on their own experiences and points of view, their selves, as reference. It is difficult though to become aware of this self amid the bombardment of what constitutes life in the 21st century. I feel that I need to gain this self-knowledge first in order to facilitate the development of such self-awareness in my students.

I have become aware of the many aspects that intersect and constitute what is considered one's identity, and now I am exploring the many junctions in my life to determine which might be suitably harnessed in the quest for developing and sustaining creativity. Because the topic is small-C creativity, I am situating my exploration in the everyday experiences and realisations that I have within this crystallising intersect—in my professional life as lecturer, gemmologist, and goldsmith, as well as in my private, everyday life as father, husband, lower league squash player, amateur birdwatcher, Sunday gardener, and part-time bread baker.

## METHODOLOGY

It was when I tried to identify aspects of my creative self that manifested during the collaborative exhibition and was attempting to understand the feelings subsequently aroused within me, that I decided to employ autoethnography. I was going to examine aspects of myself with the assistance of specific others, exploring my creative design side by having conversations with another designer (Marlene) and collaborating with a poet (Mari) to explore the more subtle emotionally inexpressible and layered side. It wasn't a specific problem with an answer that had to be uncovered, but a problem that needed to be explored—typical of qualitative research (Cresswell, 2006, p. 47).

### *Data Sources*

I was not clear on what would constitute the data; initially I thought the objects on display would be the data, and discovered that “artefacts become data through the questions posed about them and the meanings assigned to them by the researcher” (Norum, 2008, p. 23). I therefore obtained my data from reflective discussions with Marlene, conversations with Mari, reflections in my journal,<sup>1</sup> blog posts<sup>2</sup> about the exhibition, and personal recollections. All these reflective interactions produce data by making explicit the meanings and significances ascribed to the objects and the circumstances that led to their creation.

### *Nature of the Collaborations*

This was a partial collaboration with two people and at different stages of the exploration. It took the form of conversations and impromptu interactions based on creative impulses. This causes the report to be more evocative than analytic because most of the collaboration was done in order to arrive at new ground rather than examine what had been done before. My collaboration with Marlene can be referred to as a concurrent collaboration (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013) because we did most of the collaboration at the same time and in the same space.

My interaction with Marí was twofold. Firstly, it was an artistic collaboration that resulted in a number of short poems, one of which provoked an emotional response from me—an uneasiness, a sense of foreboding, of expectancy. There has not been a discussion regarding these poems yet. This type of collaboration is sequential (Chang et al., 2013) because I handed images of the art works to Marí so that she could respond to them in her own time. I only saw the poems when she posted them onto the blog. Secondly, Marí was a critical friend who prompted several discussions after an initial draft of this chapter had been compiled. These critical conversations brought about several insights regarding the significance of this research. Some of these insights are discussed in the Realisations section at the end of the chapter.

### *Relational Ethics*

Regarding the relational ethics (Ellis, 2007), both Marlene and Marí had opportunity to read this chapter to decide whether they were comfortable with what was written. Marlene is busy with postgraduate studies that examine notions of feminine subjectivity, and approached our collaboration as an opportunity for her to give voice to her own growing awareness regarding such issues. Originally, this chapter was part of an article Marí and I had cowritten for submission to a journal, so she is comfortable with what has been said.

### *Trustworthiness and Validity*

Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be established by using crystallisation rather than triangulation to validate findings (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I have applied this notion by seeing the various aspects of self that are identified, as facets of the same crystal. As a gemmologist, it is easy for me to see the external facets as manifestations of an internal structure that determines the configuration of these crystal faces. In crystallography, it is the regular molecular structure of the crystal that determines how light is interfered with, how it is refracted and reflected to result in the splendour one associates with gemstones.

The conclusions and positions I arrived at are valid because it was through input from others that I was able to make the leap from being self-absorbed to being

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exposed. Marlene pointed out that I had made choices without consultation, and Mari made me aware of my inner turmoil.

## ENGAGEMENT

### *A Conversation Begins*

During the course of setting up the *Phenomenal Engagement* exhibition of our combined work at the KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts Gallery in Durban, my conversation with Marlene changed to a dialogue amongst facets within me. I hope to portray this shift by compiling a narrative that outlines what happened, and then interspersing this narrative with reflections. When I considered the reflections, further insights occurred to me. For ease of reading, and to emphasise the fact that the reflections happened at a later stage and the insights at an even later stage, the reflections and insights are presented in text boxes, and in italics in text boxes within the text boxes, respectively. The nested text boxes illustrate the way that insights happen “on top of” reflections.

Setting up the exhibition became a way of making sense, conversing within, except instead of words, I was using objects to ponder and explain. While setting up the exhibition, I realised that underlying concepts were emerging, concepts that, for me, had very definite male–female connotations. These concepts were represented by objects that had multiple meanings, which became more lucid the moment they were placed in the vicinity of other objects, for example, when a bird shape faces an object it might be pecking it; if it faces away, it might be fleeing.

The conversation that Marlene and I were having, I now realise, is known as a relationship. So many things are unsaid and surmised within a relationship and things that are said are often ambiguous. I thought that objects would have uncontested meanings and have now discovered the ambiguity of meaning and that it is a matter of interpretation. (Looking for easy answers and certainty.)

*—and that I need to have more deliberate conversations about my creative work.*

### *Blogging*

Later I began to transfer the physical exhibition onto a blog—because I have been trying to convince my students to blog. In the jewellery design programme the emphasis is on the creative process, as opposed to the product. It is therefore imperative to keep a journal of sorts through which to show the way the process unfolds. In my view, my students do not keep adequate design diaries and I feel

## CREATIVE SELF-AWARENESS

blogging is an effective alternative way to reflect on the creative process. It is relatively easy to incorporate images and has a built in mechanism for indexing the writing that one does, that is, using tags for each post. I realised I could use the process of my blogging as a way of showing my students how to use a blog to make sense of their own creative activities.

My own creative work and my employment become blurred quite often. I am fortunate to have such a close connection between the two. It enables me to model creative design activities to my students, but it also introduces an edge to my teaching. I often traverse learning spaces where I think I should know more, better. (Doubting myself?)

I use blogging in various ways: as an archive or filing cabinet, as a journal, as a portfolio exhibition, and as a teaching tool. I realise that reflection is necessary for development as a designer and this is why I encourage my students to keep a blog. One of the issues here is that they need guidance in how to use the blog for reflection. The main feature that I have found useful for reflection is the label or tag feature. It allows one to add tags to a post. A tag is a user-defined keyword that is attached to the post, which helps with the classification of all the posts and the information contained therein. A blog can be configured to show a list of the tags that have been allocated, and also the number of times a certain tag has been assigned (a tag cloud is similar, but it shows the frequency of a tag by the size of the word). This would then indicate an area of possible interest when a student is not sure what their focus is.

I used my own blog to demonstrate the use of tags and tag clouds to facilitate reflection. I was able to track the development and application of a motif by using labels in Blogger (see the Kiepersol post at <http://phenomenalengagement.blogspot.com/2011/08/kiepersol.html>).

This post, and the tag cloud, can now be used as an exemplar for my students.

*At this stage I was looking for practical ways of making use of reflections. I was not concerned with the actual content, I was in standard lecturing mode, not aware, yet, of the importance of nuances and unspoken or unwritten meanings that are embedded here. I only became aware of these after my recent conversation with Marlene.*

I thought it would be quite simple to translate the exhibition into a number of photo posts on the blog, and started doing just that. Soon I realised there was more to an exhibit than could be portrayed in a photo. Because there were a number of subtleties



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(such as the textures of the paper, and the white vinyl letters on a white wall) that were deliberately used, I felt I had to find a way to convey them. I started looking for ways to convey the spaciousness, the layout, the detail, the reflections, and the juxtapositions.

I did find some mechanisms for conveying such subtleties, but it would need a more deliberate effort to create a virtual exhibition that succeeds in getting all these nuances across. Two of the mechanisms are:

- Animated gifs, for showing multiple views of objects.  
(<http://phenomenalengagement.blogspot.com/2011/09/sonder-winsbejag.html>)
- Photosynths™ to show panoramic and close-up views.  
(<http://phenomenalengagement.blogspot.com/2011/09/panorama.html>)

It feels as if being aware of such mechanisms has now planted a seed for a future virtual exhibition that might even include sound.

*It actually feels as if I need to spend more time with fewer objects. I feel like it would be more beneficial for me to find out what other participants and viewers experience when encountering our objects.*

### *Why the Exhibition?*

Marlene and I have separate studios at home and continuously produce creative work. She produces ranges of jewellery that have a very deliberate focus, whereas I experiment with a range of techniques and materials without necessarily having an end product in mind. One of Marlene's foci, the notion of female subjectivity, leads her to work with established and recognisable imagery that has deliberate feminine connotations, such as female profiles (cameos), cutlery (spoons and forks), and sewing equipment such as tape measures and safety pins. I work with titanium, aluminium anodising, bookbinding, and whitewall tyres. The imagery I work with often has a feminine or female shape or form such as curvaceous leaves or budding-bulging forms.

I wonder if this lack of focus is not possibly a symptom of the times, where men and women are searching for a fairer distribution of roles, but women are rooted more solidly than men because they bear the children and men look on (my words), unaware that women fear men's wrath (Marlene's words).

*I am very aware of me trying to find my role, my function, and thinking that other people have more clarity than I do regarding one's place and role in life—so much generalisation! (Doubting myself as having less clarity.)*

## CREATIVE SELF-AWARENESS

Living in the same space, and being in a relationship, has made me very aware of the tensions, the dialogue, and the complexities of interpretations of the same phenomenon by two different people. I have also become aware of the influence that two creative people in the same space have on each other. Imagine two musicians living in the same house each playing different instruments. I am quite sure that their music would be influenced by the other's. (To what extent ... maybe they would also avoid each other?) They could not play different music at the same time, ignoring each other. In this way, it is inevitable that our jewellery would start "talking" to each other, and our practice rub off on the other. I sometimes explore techniques using Marlene's imagery. We are in constant dialogue in this way. (Are we, or is it just me?) I wandered into Marlene's studio and saw an arrangement of prototypes and pieces of jewellery she was making and realised that all my bits and pieces put next to her bits and pieces would create a rich tapestry, a dense conversation.

We reached a stage where we wanted to have a conversation with the world outside and this led to the decision to stage an exhibition where we would show our individual complete works, but also combine our bits and pieces to show the conversation we were having. It was an opportunity to extend the conversation.

*—or rather I thought it was—when I spoke to Marlene at a later stage she told me that her participation was reluctant, she did not feel she wanted to do this, but only did it because she wanted to please me. So ... it became evident that it was me who wanted to have this conversation with the world. ... The bits and pieces would show the world what I was thinking and would be an opportunity for Marlene to show me what she was thinking, except I was not aware of this silent conversation. It only became apparent at a later stage when I had a conversation with her to confirm what the meanings of the art works were, or so I thought.*

### *Preparing for the Exhibition*

Preparing to exhibit was a whole new conversation with its own dynamics. It consisted of seeing what we had, putting it all on a big table, and starting to sort and negotiate (see Figure 4.1). We also had to decide how to display, what I've come to call the "conversations" (see Figure 4.2)—how to place the objects so that the grouping would be perceived as an entity where the various components elicit a tension and invite closer scrutiny. Based on our experience of displaying at previous exhibitions, we decided to place each group of objects on its own piece of paper. I have lots of bits of paper in my studio and I realised that some of these sheets of



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paper have male–female connotations, such as tissue paper being more feminine and cardboard being more male. This notion of juxtaposing male and female was implemented later.

The act of arranging and sorting is part of the creative process. In the jewellery department my students often feel that they have completed a project when they've made a piece of jewellery. I wonder if I should not change our project briefs so that they have two components, where the second part includes an aspect of sorting and negotiating.

*Relating my creative work back to my teaching.*



*Figure 4.1. Compiling the conversations on a table tennis table at home*

Figure 4.2 shows a group of objects arranged as a conversation. Each of these objects has a string of memories that resonated with me when I handled them. It consists of an opened safety pin above a folded paper medal made from handmade



## CREATIVE SELF-AWARENESS



*Figure 4.2. A typical conversation*

cotton paper with embossed gold-coloured aluminium foil from a champagne bottle. The embossed image is that of a classical cameo profile. Just below the medal is a little sterling silver pendant in the shape of a bud with a strand of red cotton attached to it. Below the pendant is an unset ceramic cameo that has been glazed with red earthenware glaze. These objects all lie on top of a piece of paper from an old book (hence the off-white colour); it is the fly leaf, which is the first page of a book—used to adhere the block of pages to the cover. These all lie on top of an upside down dressmaking pattern (note the dotted lines).

- The safety pin reminds me of Grey Street,<sup>3</sup> and the shop where I buy beads for the bead work that I teach my students. It also makes me question the biases I have regarding what it looks like compared to how well it works.

Similar to glossing over a pretty face, an example of superficial engagement—see later on.

- The handmade paper was made by a colleague, and it has evoked a desire to make my own. It exposes the hegemony of the bought over the handmade.

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- I peeled the gold foil from a bottle of champagne.
- The cameo impression was made using a found piece of metal. It was meant for something else when I appropriated it.
- The red cotton string has all sorts of spiritual and bloody connotations. I started paying attention to it after one my students gave me a Lakshmi string.<sup>4</sup>
- The unset cameo pendant was made by Marlene. To me it signifies the stereotypical beauty of women. The type of beauty that causes me to gloss over a pretty face and project, thoughtlessly, all sorts of values that might not be present.

Another case of superficial engagement.

### *The Exhibition*



*Figure 4.3. The exhibition at the gallery*

Both of us had complete pieces and several prototypes and test pieces. The exhibition consisted of my work (the silvery framed prints hung against the wall) opposite Marlene's work (on small shelves against the wall), and the meeting ground in the middle was tables where the two bodies of work met in the form of conversations (see Figures 4.2 and 4.5). These conversations consisted of selected test pieces that complement each other or have the sort of tension that exists between the genders. That is the underlying theme of the exhibition: a conversation that is the result of tensions that are present, but not always evident. We were using our work to make some of the underlying tensions evident.

I'm not sure that there is much tension evident. It all seems too gentle and pleasing to the eye. I wonder if we were not using the exhibition to relieve tensions instead.

*It now transpires that I DID balance the tensions rather evenly. I made things look nice and acceptable, giving everything a label and a place to be. (A superficial sorting out of a problem, typically male?)*



## CREATIVE SELF-AWARENESS

### *Advantages and Limitations of the Physical Exhibition*

Being able to spread out our work in a large gallery space was a wonderful opportunity. It enabled us to see the discrete parts of our bodies of work. Each aspect could be isolated and studied more carefully. In our studios, the pieces tend to be on top of each other or out of sight in drawers. It also made it possible to see the deliberate similarities in our work. This enabled us to start the conversation on the walls of the art gallery in terms of how we juxtaposed the finished works. Having a central space for the conversations was ideal. It made it seem like an area where the thoughts were worked out (Is that not what happens in a conversation? You try to find out how you feel by saying different things and negotiating with the other person what sounds right—unless they are trying to fathom what it is that you want them to say—while crystallising what you think) before they manifested on the walls, which is kind-of how it happened.

The obvious limitation of a physical exhibition is that it has to be dismantled after a limited period. This is where the blog as archive and as continued exhibition comes in. However, the juxtaposition of the work on the blog is not as subtle as in a physical gallery space.

### *The Glossary*

The interpretations of the motifs used in the artworks were not necessarily self-evident so we compiled a glossary to explain how we interpreted these motifs. Some of the terms that were included are: couple—relating to the union of opposites; decoration—an award; sanguine—bloody or optimistic; sine—Latin for curve, hollow or fold; tangent—touching but not intersecting; sinister—left-facing or ominous. These themes only became evident when we were preparing for the exhibition.

It was not as if these concepts came out of nowhere. I had explored heraldry as part of printing the medals and was amazed at the depth of meaning, which was not obvious, particularly in a non-feudal culture. We are both Afrikaans-speaking in an English-speaking city, known as the Last British Outpost, and have rediscovered the beauty of our mother tongue. This fascination with words has sparked an interest in the etymological roots of words.

*It seems that the fascination was mostly mine and that Marlene's participation was more superficial. She was busy engaging with the notion that writing is a male thing, a tool that the patriarchy uses to maintain the status quo.*

We felt the glossary was very important but that it would probably not be read by everyone who attended the exhibition, even though it was placed at the entrance

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to the show. We therefore had the words cut out of vinyl so we could stick them on the wall next to or near works that addressed the glossary terms. The words were cut from white vinyl to be stuck on a white wall. This was done deliberately so the words would not be very noticeable but that one would notice them when moving closer to the works, which were placed on narrow shelves on the wall (see Figure 4.4). The intention was to create a subtle texture as a background to the exhibition, similar to the subtle, textured backgrounds of the different papers used for the conversations.

I think we were trying to insert “background noise” into the conversation and I felt that we were the only ones who noticed it. Maybe the whole exhibition was itself background noise to the lives of the spectators? (A questioning of self value? Doubting the value of what we (I) were doing?)

*It seems now that the exhibition was background noise to our relationship. What I mean is that there were other undercurrents happening all this time and I thought the exhibition was a focus we shared, but it was MY focus, not OURS. (Being very unaware of wider impacts, of the whole picture within which the exhibition or creative work is happening—superficial engagement?)*

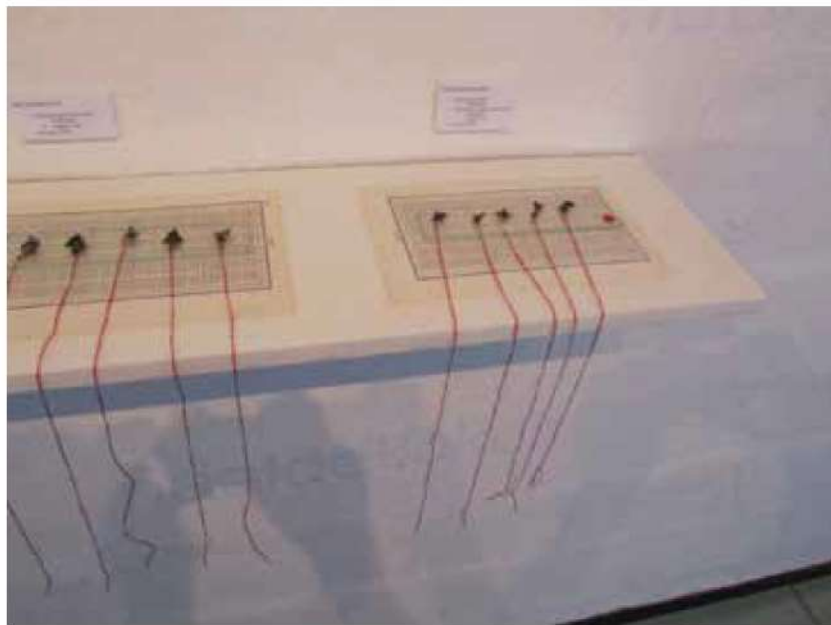


Figure 4.4. Shelf with birds, lettering *naaldekker* [dragonfly] on the wall underneath



## CREATIVE SELF-AWARENESS

### *The Work*

Marlene's work revolves around how women need to establish a feminine symbolic order or genre in response to the Western dominant masculine–patriarchal order, where women have historically served as a sacrificial substratum and mirror for masculine projections. She feels the need to contribute to the creation of a symbolic feminine order, which should be based on the recognition of ontological difference, while at the same time recognising coexistence. This does not signal the replacement of patriarchy with matriarchy. A mimetic strategy, as put forth by Luce Irigaray (1993), through subversion and parody, would be a method with which to disrupt the culturally dominant patriarchal symbolic. As Marlene said: “My choice of subject matter, techniques, and materials deliberately works to subvert and mimic the stereotypical normative construct of women as objects” (de Beer, 2013).

This artist statement sounds so academic because Marlene has just had her proposal for her doctoral studies accepted, and the ideas here are from that document.

My work is more of a playful investigation into materials and techniques. I use everyday motifs that catch my eye, such as a leaf from the cabbage tree or the cross on the Portuguese soccer shirt, and then combine these with found materials, such as printed circuit (PC) board and chocolate wrappers, to create what I consider to be interesting objects. This allows my preoccupations to float to the top for closer inspection and introspection.

I, on the other hand, am struggling to compile a pre-proposal literature review, which is why my writing seems so unacademic.

*Looking at it now, I recognise several terms that show a superficial engagement with my environment (including my family): playful ... everyday motifs that catch my eye ... interesting objects ... preoccupations ... float to the top.*

### *The Conversations*

I will use Conversation #14 (Figure 4.5) as example. It shows a titanium dragonfly on its back above a square piece of PC board that has a cross-shaped hole in it. In the hole is a dark bird shape made from blackened sterling silver. Below the PC board is a greenish cameo of a classical woman's face that looks to the left (sinister). This arrangement of objects, the conversation, lies on top of a sheath of old bookkeeping

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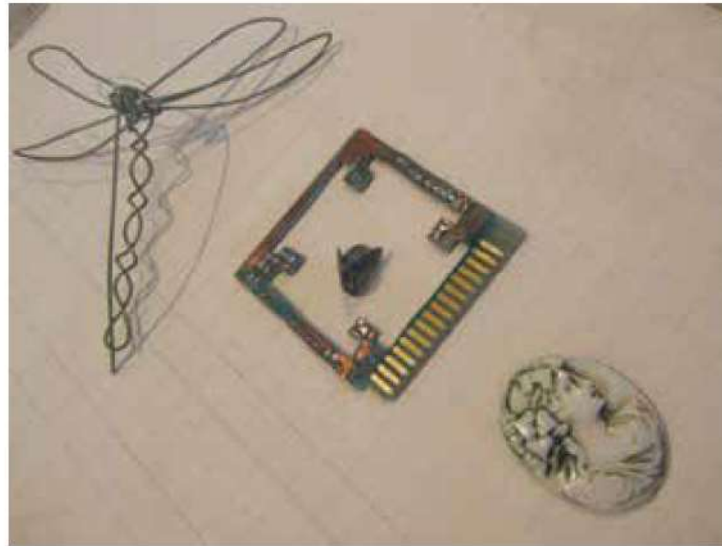


Figure 4.5. Conversation #14

paper, which in turn is on top of an old dressmaking pattern. Besides the obvious male–female connotations of the various objects, there are a few other concepts I would like to identify: presence–absence, chaos–control, contained–drifting, hard–soft, and connection–disconnection, displacement– ...

Presence–absence is shown by the cross-shaped hole with the bird inside; the presence of the bird emphasises the absence of the cross. The cross is a Crusader cross, which was awarded by the Pope to the Crusaders for their (futile) campaign against (perceived) injustice. The cross that was cut from this piece of PC board can be found in another conversation—where it was “awarded.” What is left here is an intention, an allusion to an award.

Seeing how dense this description is, I feel that there were too many conversations for the viewers to engage with meaningfully. We should have been more selective and shown fewer conversations if we wanted to say something specifically. Maybe that was the point though: there are so many conversations in a relationship. Which ones are the important ones, and who decides?

*I'd decided, without consultation, which conversation to use as an example of our interactions. The problem with making this unilateral decision was brought home when I had a conversation with Marlene about the meanings inherent in, what I blithely called our conversations. She pointed out that it was actually a conversation that I was having with myself because she would have chosen a different example to focus on.*



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When I wanted to know which example she would have used, she browsed the archive of images and selected Conversation #20 (Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6. Conversation #20

This conversation, to describe it using Marlene's words, consists of two groupings: at the top is a female figure, which is linked to a red umbilical-like cord that connects to something that is off the page, and at the bottom are two motifs that look sharp, like weapons or stings.

I would have described it differently, focusing on the materials used and the actual motifs.

*I think I have uncovered a method for future autoethnographic explorations with Marlene: we can describe what we see separately and then compare notes.*

### *Why Haiga?*

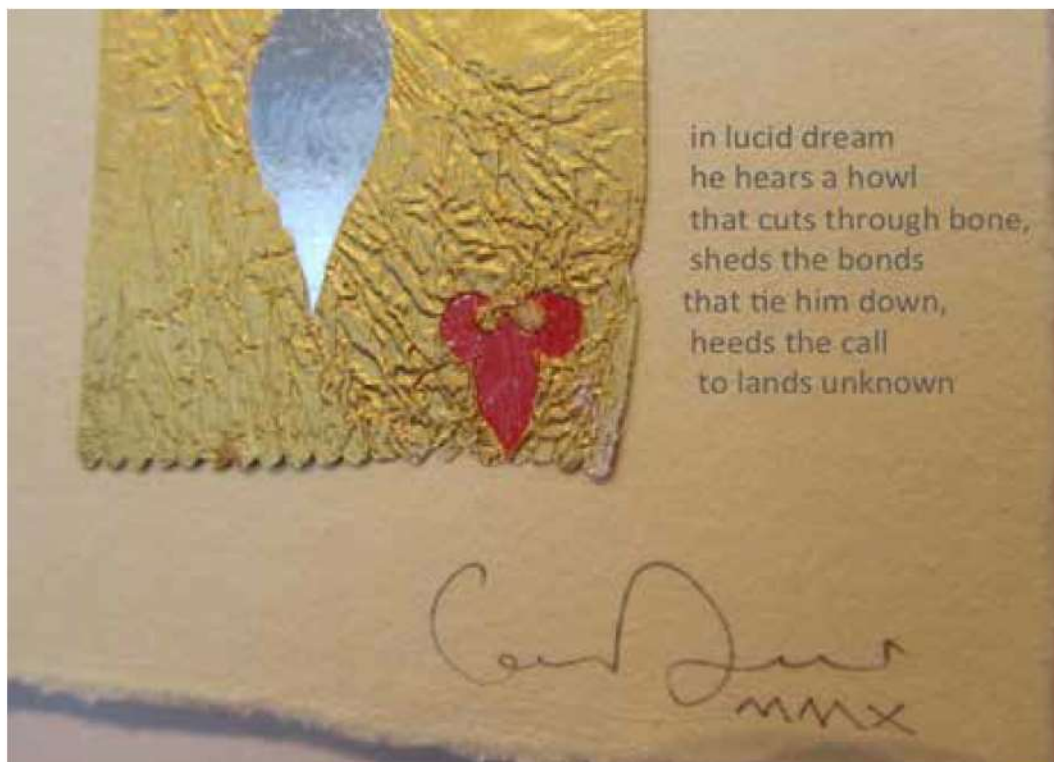
In compiling the conversations, I recognised that there were quite elaborate and potentially dense concepts that were being summed up with careful placement of

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three or four little objects. Having read and heard Marí's poem, "Umgeni Road" (a poem where she captured street and shop signs while driving down Umgeni Road, Durban; Peté, 2008) and bumping into her at the exhibition, I realised that a poet like her could probably capture the essence of the various conversations.

I was still under the impression that there is a single essence or meaning resident in phenomena.

At the outset, our collaboration took an unexpected direction. Marí contributed independent artistic responses to the blog, rather than teasing out meanings in the way I imagined. Her approach to the collaboration was rooted in the principles of haiga—an ancient Japanese tradition of combining an artwork and a poem, each work carrying its own meaning while leaving space for combined meanings between the art and poetry to be brought to the haiga by the viewer–reader who then becomes an active participant in the creative process. Such creative power led to a key moment in our collaboration, when one poem (see Figure 4.7) struck a deep chord with me:



*Figure 4.7. This haiga tapped into a subconscious conversation within me*



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in lucid dream  
he hears a howl  
that cuts through bone ...  
sheds the bonds that tie him down,  
heeds the call to lands unknown

This poem spoke to me directly—almost unnerved me—it seemed as if the poem was, unbeknown to Mari or me, tapping into a deeper, subconscious conversation within me. Was I busy talking to aspects of myself through the work I was making—aspects like my anima or other archetypes?

I'm still coming to terms with this realisation.

*I'm still coming to terms with this realisation.*

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Reed-Danahay (1997, p. 2) felt that autoethnography can be seen in two ways: as an “ethnography of one’s own group” or, what I feel applies to what I’m doing, as “autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest.” This autobiographical writing was done in a postmodern sense because it questioned the idea of a coherent, individual self. I straddle a few ethnographic groups: lecturer, designer, artist, mentor, jeweller, curriculum coordinator, husband, father, and son, and I found that the demands and expectations of each of these roles made me feel very incoherent and un-individual.

### *Assumptions*

According to Muncey (2010, p. xi) “the unexamined assumptions that govern everyday life, behaviour and decision making are as strong as any overt beliefs.” If these unexamined assumptions are going to exert that much influence on my life, I feel I ought to start examining them to determine the extent of their influence. Originally, I assumed there was a simple question to which I was seeking an answer: “What are the meanings embedded in my creative activities, and how does I make these explicit in an understandable way?” It has now transpired that the issue is far more complex, and I find myself complying with Cresswell’s point of view regarding qualitative research. He suggested that qualitative researchers are trying to identify “the complex interaction of factors” rather than “tight cause-and-effect relationships” (Cresswell, 2006, p. 47).



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There is not one question that I am trying to answer here. Instead, I am on a search for an approach that I can take when dealing with my students as creative designers. I want to find out how to expose the underlying motivations, the relationship between everyday activities and creative practice. I assumed it would be a simple matter of identifying specific solutions that could be implemented. However, this autoethnographic exploration and analysis has made me aware of the complex nature of the issue at hand. Creswell (2006, p. 47) suggested that qualitative research involves the reporting of many perspectives, identifying the many factors involved, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges. This correlates with my understanding of what Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) meant when they referred to crystallisation as an outcome of autoethnography.

I think that the role of a good lecturer in the creative field is to encourage playfulness and to recognise when it becomes relevant in terms of the creative process.

### *Realisations*

When Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011, para. 3) proclaim: “autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist,” I realise that although I’m not trying to hide, I need to seek ways of drawing on my subjectivity and emotionality more overtly to determine my own influence on my research and how to use it in my pedagogical and creative practices. Collaborative autoethnography, in this instance, facilitated a greater awareness of myself, and prevented me from arriving at glib and ready-made answers.

My conversations with Marlene helped me to see how self-absorbed and prescriptive I was regarding intentions and interpretations of the art works, specifically the conversations. It became a matter of negotiating the interpretations rather than writing up the meanings that I assumed were there and using a conversation solely to confirm what I was thinking. I realised that conversations are an opportunity to be made aware of other points of view regarding the same object. Marlene helped me realise that there are multiple interpretations that can be elicited if one wants to develop the whole complex picture (Cresswell, 2006). I might even have stumbled on a methodology that consists of eliciting many points of view about the same phenomenon before arranging them into a configuration around a central concern. Like the facets that embrace the crystal, I now have an opportunity to discover what my creative self looks like.

I realised there is no meaning resident in objects. These artefacts turned out to be prompts for conversations that provided the data that I could then interpret. Looking at my reflections, I realised I was trying to develop a simple picture, which probably contributed to the sense of uncertainty that also emerged in my reflections.



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Mari's one poem in particular and my response to it was invaluable; it opened another avenue to explore, or, to use the crystal analogy (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), it showed another facet of myself, one where unknowns lurk. Mari's poetic responses made me aware of other aspects of self that could be ascribed to the artefacts that had been created and displayed. I could not have arrived at such self-awareness without her contributions because I'd assumed that all the conversations had taken place and just needed to be organised and written up. She showed that there are unknowns beneath the surface and that creative collaborations might be useful to elicit these—so one can inspect them and see which facets of the crystal they are.

### *Jolt*

I agreed with what Marlene and Mari said about my inadvertent one-sided approach to the exhibition collaboration and the unknowns lurking within because it struck a chord within me. Other things were said and other haigas written that did not evoke or provoke a response from me. It is as if I have an inner compass that gets stuck and needs to be jolted from time to time so I can reorientate myself.

### *Implications*

The realisations I've had are applicable to two areas: my pedagogical practice, and my own creative practice. I could enhance my teaching by stage managing collaborations with or between my students, similar to what I did with Marlene. We, the students and I, would have to bring our own creative artefacts to the collaboration. Until now, I have asked my students to reflect on what they have made. I will now ask them to arrange or display their work in conjunction with one another, and then to comment on the tensions or harmonies that are made evident. It would be as if they were having a conversation via their objects, and the conversation would have to be decoded for the viewers. This decoding would be their reflections and would, hopefully, lead to realisations about their creative work and their selves.

I have many more objects that I could use to stage a collaboration with someone else. The exhibition with Marlene focused on our relationship and issues of gender. If I were to choose someone who I have a different type of relationship with, like a colleague who is more technically orientated, to juxtapose my creative work with hers or his, it would probably reveal a different kind of aesthetic concern and show another facet of the crystal.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter consultant: Sizakele Makhanya.

Marlene, for sharing so selflessly, but still being critical, and Mari for spontaneously taking off by herself.



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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I use an online journal that I can access from my work computer, my home computer, and my tablet. It is OneNote, one of the applications in Microsoft. It takes the form of a notebook, with sections and pages that can be added as I need them. Whatever changes I make are synchronised to the other computers so I have all my reflections in one place. Using my tablet allows me to insert photos into the journal, where required. I often take a photo of whatever creative work I have produced, upload it to my journal, and only write about it at a later stage.
- <sup>2</sup> *Blog* is an abbreviation of *Web log*. A blog is an online journal that can be public or private, much like a diary that allows one to post text and images. Each entry is dated and can be indexed with labels (also known as *tags*) that allows one to access specific entries or groups of entries at a later stage. One can also post to one's blog using a cell phone (mobile blogging). I often post photos from my cell phone camera directly to my blog so that I can add descriptions and reflections to these photos at a later stage.
- <sup>3</sup> Grey Street is a nearby Indian business district, which is also a tourist attraction because it is a colourful and vibrant trading area. I often take my students there to purchase beads for a Zulu beadwork project.
- <sup>4</sup> A Lakshmi string is the red cotton string Hindu people wear around the wrist of their right hand to signify their devotion to the goddess Lakshmi who is the goddess of spiritual and material wealth and prosperity.

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*Chris de Beer*  
*Department of Fine Art and Jewellery Design*  
*Durban University of Technology, South Africa*

## Second interlude: Stereotypes?

I was experiencing and learning a lot in terms of my own creative practice, on the one hand, and on the other hand I was gaining many insights into my students' creative practice. What concerned me was there did not seem to be lessons being learned, which could be repeated the following year, with a new group of students. I now realise I was not looking deep enough; I was examining the situation too superficially. I was looking at the direct personal encounters and outcomes, rather than paying attention to the environment (see the brooch below), the expectations, the students' backgrounds... I was under the impression that one either was creative or not.... But this is not really true; I did not really know what, or where, creativity was. I was under the impression that anyone could be creative, with practice. I just wasn't too sure what to practice. I felt, if I could become more creative then so could other people.

There is a contradiction here that I need to unravel...



*Figure 2.0 - A brooch made from a recycled milk bottle; using the sell-by-date to comment on the stereotypical male perception of stereotypical women.*

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### Examining Aspects of Self in the Creative Design Process: Towards Pedagogic Implications

*Chris de Beer*

*Durban University of Technology, South Africa*

[chrisdb@dut.ac.za](mailto:chrisdb@dut.ac.za)

#### Abstract

I am a practising jewellery designer and artist who lectures at a university of technology in South Africa. The aim of this study was to deepen my understanding of my own creative design process so that I can better facilitate my students' creative development. I used the little-c (everyday creativity) definition of creativity as a framework for analysing work that I exhibited in a self-study research exhibition. By analysing the space in which I worked and the objects I produced, I looked to see how aspects of self manifested within the process of producing creative artefacts. This was a qualitative study in a transformative paradigm, using autoethnography as methodology. The analysis was done by conducting an autoethnographic interview with myself, and then analysing the responses. To ensure trustworthiness, I show several images of my creative work in situ. I also use a convention of nested text boxes to show the relationship between my reflections and meta-reflections. The study produced several key realisations that could leverage pedagogical implications: the creative process is not linear, serendipity can be harnessed, play should be encouraged, and personal experience can be incorporated in the creative design process. Autoethnographic research into my own creative design process made visible the richness of personal histories and local contexts as resources for learning and teaching about creativity and, more broadly, as resources for social change.

**Keywords:** Self-study, creative design process, autoethnography, exhibition, self-interview

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## Background

I am a practising jewellery designer and artist who lectures at a university of technology in Durban, South Africa. One of my lecturing duties is to teach my students how to design and manufacture jewellery—not only conventional jewellery that can be sold in commercial jewellery shops, but contemporary jewellery that engages with a “diverse range of contemporary social, environmental, technical or artistic trends” (Quickenden, 2000, p. 1). Developing unique contemporary South African jewellery could play a part in the long-term growth of the jewellery industry and contribute to social change by creating an awareness of, and cultivating an appreciation of, local and indigenous resources. I feel that this can be achieved if we, as designers, were to draw on our personal and private lives and then incorporate these influences in our creative design process. I want to encourage this personalised approach to the creative process by formulating briefs that include a private or personal aspect with my students in the jewellery design studio.

The objective of my research, therefore, is to gain an understanding of my own creative design process in relation to the development of contemporary South African jewellery, and to explore the pedagogical implications inherent in this understanding. I use autoethnography to examine my creative process because it affords me the use of “personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience” (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013, p. 7), particularly as designing jewellery necessitates an awareness of the various roles that it can play within one’s culture: those of portable wealth, indicator of status, and spiritual mediation (Metcalf, 1989).

Initially, I attempted to catalogue all the creative design objects in my office, but it became a quagmire that immobilised me because there were too many leads to follow and the underlying network became too dense. So, I decided to focus on one of the objects highlighted in an exhibition: the cameo prints.

## Creativity and Why It Is Important

Creativity is the ability to produce outcomes that are original and appropriate (Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004, p. 91) and can be assessed in terms of the 4P model as proposed by Rhodes (1961), where he suggests that one can evaluate creativity by examining the nature of the product, the personality of the person, the nature of the processes employed, and the relationship to the environment (press).

Of interest to me, are the role of play and the impact of serendipity on the creative process. The importance of play, regarding creativity, was emphasised by Winnicott (1989) when he stressed that “it is in play, and only in play, that the person is able to be creative and to find herself” (as cited in Creme, 2003, p. 273). For the purpose of this article, I define play as a series of connected events that provide pleasure (Eberle, 2014) and revolve around “non-serious” (Huizenga, 1970, p. 5) exploration which is “goal-directed and rule-bound” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, p. 71)

Serendipity is the act of finding interesting or valuable things by chance. It is a type of creativity that results from “synchronicities, fortuitous accidents . . . and fruitful detours” (Bleakley, 2004, p. 472). Johnson (2010) referred to this phenomenon as a “happy accident” and what makes it happy is the fact that the discovery is personally meaningful (p. 109). To recognise the significance of the new discovery appears to require a tolerance of ambiguity (Bleakley, 2004).

I am approaching creativity from a little-c (everyday) point of view, as opposed to a big-C (legendary) point of view (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010). This means that I explore seemingly insignificant, but personal, everyday experiences that can be used as a resource in the creative design process. This is in reaction against how I was taught to design creatively, where there seemed to be an inordinate

emphasis on Eurocentric visual references that I did not relate to, accompanied by a rigidly imposed design process with apparently no room for serendipity or play.

Skiba, Tan, Sternberg, and Grigorenko, (2010) recommended a little-c approach when addressing creativity in the classroom. Several researchers support the development of general (little-c) creativity, seeing it as our “birth right [and] survival capacity” (Richards, 2010, p. 228), “the province of every human being . . . to enhance the process of their lives” (Piiro, 2010, p. 166), and seeing it as “vital for individuals’ well-being and for the well-being of our world” (Fairweather, & Cramond, 2010, p. 115). Furthermore, Torrance emphasised that teachers can contribute to the development of creative behaviour and must “build the blocks of creativity” (as cited in Baldwin, 2010, p. 86).

## **Exhibition of My Creative Design Process**

The Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) project,<sup>1</sup> of which I am a member, organised an exhibition that encouraged participants to display the results of their self-study and autoethnographic research by using artefacts as opposed to written texts. The exhibition was titled “The Inward I,” with the aim of sharing the research with each other and with the larger academic community in Durban.

To uncover the aspects of self that are significant within the creative design process, I participated in the exhibition and focused on how lecturers could make self-reflexive research into their own educational practices more visible. For the exhibition, I produced a poster (see Image 1) that showed images of my workspace, and of the objects I was producing at that stage. I then analysed the poster and an object on the poster.

Exhibitions of this nature can be seen as a method that is used by “arts-inspired scholars” to try “seducing onlookers into encounters with their work” (Barone 2008, p. 489). In this case, the seduction was done by using shwe-shwe<sup>2</sup> covered display boards, uniformly designed posters, and a variety of creative artefacts displayed in conjunction with the poster.

Having an exhibition can be an intensely reflexive exercise, as is made apparent by Reinikainen and Dahlkvist (2016) when they detailed the process of curating their exhibition. During curation, one has to select the appropriate artefacts and decide how to display them—all contingent on the aim, which is not always clear from the start. I have found the curation of an exhibition to be the same as the process of writing in that, similar to Hampl (1996) who writes to find out what she knows, I find out what I want to show in the process of exhibiting. I find that I become more aware of my context as creative designer when I see what I have available for showing.

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<sup>1</sup> TES is a collaborative project that involves about 40 participants from a range of diverse academic and professional contexts. The group meets twice a year for inter-institutional workshops. Smaller groups meet weekly or monthly at various participating universities. The main research question that guides the self-study activities revolves around transforming one’s educational practice. The project supports and investigates the collaborative self-reflexive activities of the project members (Harrison, Pithouse-Morgan, Conolly, & Meyiwa, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Shwe-shwe (see the background of the display board in Image 1) is a printed cotton fabric that is available from textile shops in Durban. It was traditionally used by Sotho and Xhosa women, but is now widely used by all cultural groups.



**Image 1: My Poster “The Pedagogical Implications of an Awareness of Self in Creative Practice: A Self-Study” (photo courtesy L. Scott, 2013)**



Mitchell (2015b) makes it clear that exhibitions can be a useful tool for facilitating social change. Although this exhibition had social change as one of its aims, I participated because I was trying to make sense of my own creative practice and initially saw it as an opportunity for reflection. I wanted to see what I was doing. I decided to examine the artefacts that are displayed on my office walls because my office is also my design studio and workshop. I therefore produced a poster (Image 2) that showed some of the objects I had produced within the environment they were created.

**Image 2: Photos of My Office as Part of the Exhibition (photo courtesy L. Scott, 2013)**



This section of my poster shows the formal arrangement of the photos that depict my office as a creative space. It also shows a pair of cameo print earrings at the bottom. The following sets of images (Images 3 and 4) are the photos that were used in the poster.

**Image 3: My Office (author's photos, 2013)**



**Image 4: Close-Up Photos of Creative Artefacts on My Office Walls (author's photos, 2013)**



The photos I decided to display were taken in my office. These showed jumbled masses of objects pinned to a notice board on one side, stacks of books and papers on my desk with some ceramic work in progress, to the side, and a range of prints, postcards, and drawings on the wall behind my computer. I decided to highlight the latest projects that I was busy with: the ceramics on my desk and the foil prints on the wall behind my computer.

The top three photos (Image 3) are oriented in a landscape format and show a type of panoramic view of my office. The lower photo shows the desk where most of my creative work happens. From this desk, the objects would migrate to the office walls. The two portrait-format photos (Image 4) show close-up views of art works. The two earring prints at the bottom of Image 2 can also be seen in the photo on the left. I paid careful attention to the layout of the photos and earrings, making sure that it was a visually pleasing arrangement.

I wanted to show the messiness of my creative space, but also show that there is some underlying structure—an order that might not be visible, but of which I was aware. When Lapum, Ruttonsha, Church, Yau, & David (2012) had an exhibition to show the intricacies of the journey a patient follows before and after surgery, they decided to use a labyrinth-like formation, because it “is symbolic of [the] patients’ transition” (p. 108). To show the underlying organised structure of my seemingly messy creative space, I decided to use a formal, symmetrical, layout with a space created in the centre at the bottom for displaying a pair of earring prints. The content of the photos was chaotic—not the arrangement; and the focus, the product of the messiness, was presented as the focal point. The layout of my poster signified the underlying order of my creative process as the labyrinth, above, signified the notion of transition.



## Methodology

This is a qualitative study in a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2009), using an autoethnographic methodology to explore the aspects of self that play a role in my creative practice.

Ellis (2004) and Holman Jones (2005) provided a very clear definition of what autoethnography is: “Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze . . . personal experience . . . in order to understand cultural experience” (as cited in Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The diverse nature of our educational settings leads to unexpected outcomes, and Mitchell (2015a) recommended an autoethnographic approach for university educators who seek to “locate and make sense of our experiences” (p. 10), with the aim of contributing to social change.

### Autoethnographic self-interview and multivocality

When I tried to explore the creative artefact, I did not know how to proceed. To overcome the writer’s block, I attempted to start writing by focusing on initial observations and rememberings. After I had jotted these down, I started responding to these prompts.

Reflecting on my responses, I realised I had adopted two distinctly different voices: that of an autoethnographic interviewer, and that of an autoethnographic informant. I had, in fact, conducted a semi-structured interview with myself. This relates to Anderson and Glass-Coffin’s (2013) definition of an autoethnographic self-interview as “involv[ing] dialogue between one’s past and present selves” (p. 69), and is similar to Mizzi’s (2010) notion of multivocality, which states that there are “plural and sometimes contradictory *narrative voices* located within the researcher” that would “expand the ways we can perceive and inquire into an encounter” (p. M3).

My self-interview was different from the types of self-interviews that Keightly, Pickering, and Allet (2012), Singh (2012), and Meskin, Singh, and van der Walt (2014) conducted. Keightly et al. (2012) had a group of research participants who were given questions and audio recording devices so that the participants could interview themselves. The benefit was that the interviews could be paused and resumed as required or determined by conditions.

Singh (2012) examined her own life story as educator and used a set of prepared questions to keep her focused on what Webster and Mertova (2007) called “critical events” (as cited in Singh, 2012, p. 86). She deliberately selected “people, events and places” she felt contributed to the development of her “educational persona” (p. 86), and then responded to these questions in writing.

Meskin et al. (2014) wished to examine their own professional practice. To do this they drew up a list of predetermined questions, which were reviewed by a critical friend, to have asked of themselves by this critical friend. They therefore named their method a reciprocal self-interview (RSI).

Riggins (1994) classified the content of responses that an interviewer obtains from an informant in two ways: referencing (denotative) or mapping (connotative). Referencing responses are the kind where the information provided concerns “the history, aesthetic or customary uses of an object” (p. 109), whereas mapping responses indicate the extent to which objects are representations of the social world, the ideology, of the informant. My responses started as denotative and then became more personal and connotative. Not all the responses became connotative but where they did, I became aware of nuances and influences that were not apparent on the first inspection or reflection. This is similar to the first–second draft writing that Hampl (1996) does, where the first draft is a remembering

and the second draft is a re-remembering of the same memory (Strong-Wilson, Mitchell, Allnutt, & Pithouse-Morgan, 2013), except that my drafts are combined—with impressions and feelings added to the second draft as they arise.

## Analysis

I analysed my self-interview by treating it as a narrative (Riessman, 2008). On examining the narrative for patterns that make sense (Bernard, 2011), I realised that the information I had provided could be divided into the two categories that Riggins (1994) used when analysing material artefacts, that is, referencing (denotative) and mapping (connotative). The prompts used by me as autoethnographic interviewer self were denotative and the responses by me as the autoethnographic informant self were connotative. On coding the responses, I noticed areas where the connotative information revealed aspects of the self and other areas that caused insights and realisations—sometimes with pedagogical implications. I also became aware of more voices that could be called on to comment. These are voices that show my playful self, my consumerist self, my stereotypical male self, and my lecturer self, to name some of them.

The autoethnographic interviewer self's denotative prompts that I developed, and that are responded to in the next section, are as follows:

- Where I initially encountered gold foil or leaf
- Embossing
- The champagne and chocolate wrapper foil
- The red string
- The handmade paper
- The message, and its origin.

The aspects of self that were revealed are discussed under Discoveries at the end of the article, and the insights are noted within text boxes below the responses that evoked them. This is a method of noting that I have used before (de Beer, 2016), and which helped to show the meta-narrative as it unfolded.

## Trustworthiness

In autoethnography, issues of reliability and validity are linked (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, reliability is contingent on credibility; I have, therefore, outlined the process I followed exactly as I experienced it. By making my processes of writing and interrogation of the writing visible in the way that I do, I believe that I adhere to Mishler's (1990) point of view regarding the validity of inquiry-guided research. He insisted that the "visibility of the work" (p. 429) increases the trustworthiness. I've done this by including images of the objects I examined, and images of the examples I referred to, where available. Some of these images, being artworks, have their dates of origin inscribed on them. To promote trustworthiness further, I have stated the relationship between my creative design work and my occupation.

### The Cameo Print Earrings: Responding to the Prompts

Image 5 shows one of a pair of earrings that is displayed as a print. It is a small sheet of handmade cotton paper that has been folded in half, with a rectangle of gold-coloured foil folded over it. It has an image of a classical cameo profile stamped onto it in silver metallic foil, with an embossed fleur-de-lis medal top, above it. To be worn as an earring, it can be suspended from the red thread tied through a grommet that has been inserted near the top in the middle.

**Image 5: Cameo Print as an Earring (author's photo, 2016)**



I present my autoethnographic informant-self's connotative responses to each of the prompts:

#### Where I initially encountered gold foil or leaf

The first time I saw gold leaf work in real life, I was amazed. It was a print that was done by my lecturer at that time, Dieter Dill, and I happened across it at an exhibition in George. I couldn't understand how it was done, and I think that was part of the magic of the experience.

Is that not the type of magic that we try to put into our creative works? I sometimes deliberately do not share the magic with my students because I want them to be amazed. I like it when one can do something really simple, but it looks amazing, and other people then want it.

Do I detect a trace of capitalism here?  
(Consumer self?)

When I researched how gold leaf was done, it turned out to be a laborious technique that needed a lot of preparation and careful work. I did try it over the years but never really succeeded. I then saw

the technique a few years later and it reignited the flame . . . I tried gold paint and various other techniques to imitate it but still did not manage.

When I recently went to Haesloop, a supplier of fashion accessories, I saw, incidentally (serendipitously), that they sold rolls of metallic foils for hot stamping. This is the contemporary technique used to stamp gold lettering on the spine of leather-bound books. When I enquired, they said it was applied using heat, about 100 degrees centigrade. I was given some samples to try out and I experimented that evening, using an electric clothes iron. I remember it was a metallic blue foil I tried first, and I was stunned by the beauty of the foil print (I think it was a bit like the magic I mentioned earlier). I just made some crosses and dragonfly shapes (Image 6), and it worked well enough for me to realise that I had encountered a new vein of creative work to mine.

“Just” implies that I do lots of test pieces to try new ideas. Sometimes they work and sometimes they don’t, but at least I know whether the idea should be pursued. It also implies that I was in a playful mindset, freewheeling and brainstorming.

(Playful self?)

**Image 6: Blue Metallic Foil Test Piece (author’s photo, 2016)**



### Embossing

I first embossed a print when I was an undergraduate student at Stellenbosch in 1984. One of the modules I did was printmaking and I was taught traditional printmaking, such as hard and soft ground etching. A project I had to do then was called *boksvolberge* [box full of mountains]. I initially tried to depict mountains by drawing them, but gave up because the paper was too small to depict a mountain, or so I thought.

The mountains in the Western Cape are often seen as silhouettes in the distance, and it was this aspect I was fascinated by—the way that mountains are seen as layers of ever diminishing, overlapping, and pale blue-grey shapes. I tried to capture this by cutting out the shape of a mountain and then embossing the background into the paper, which raised the profile of the mountain in relief (see Image 7—and note the date in the signature: '84).

**Image 7: Boksvolberge (author's photo, 2016)**



Because an embossing is done without colour, one has to see the print in the type of light that will show the relief; it therefore becomes quite subtle and like the faint silhouettes that one sees on the horizon. When embossing is done on handmade paper, it is even more effective because the difference between the rough, natural texture of the paper is contrasted with the smooth, pressed surface of the embossed area.

I find myself drawn to faint silhouettes on the horizon, as if there are unknown lands that need to be explored and this staring at them is the first step of the exploration. I also have a fascination with the silhouettes that I see when I drive home at the end of the day when the light is fading and the horizon flattens out into a delicate intricate outline, waiting to be embossed.

The notion of unknown lands first surfaced in my chapter in *Academic Autoethnographies* (de Beer, 2016). This notion of exploration is tied up with fantasy, adventure, and play. (Playful self?)

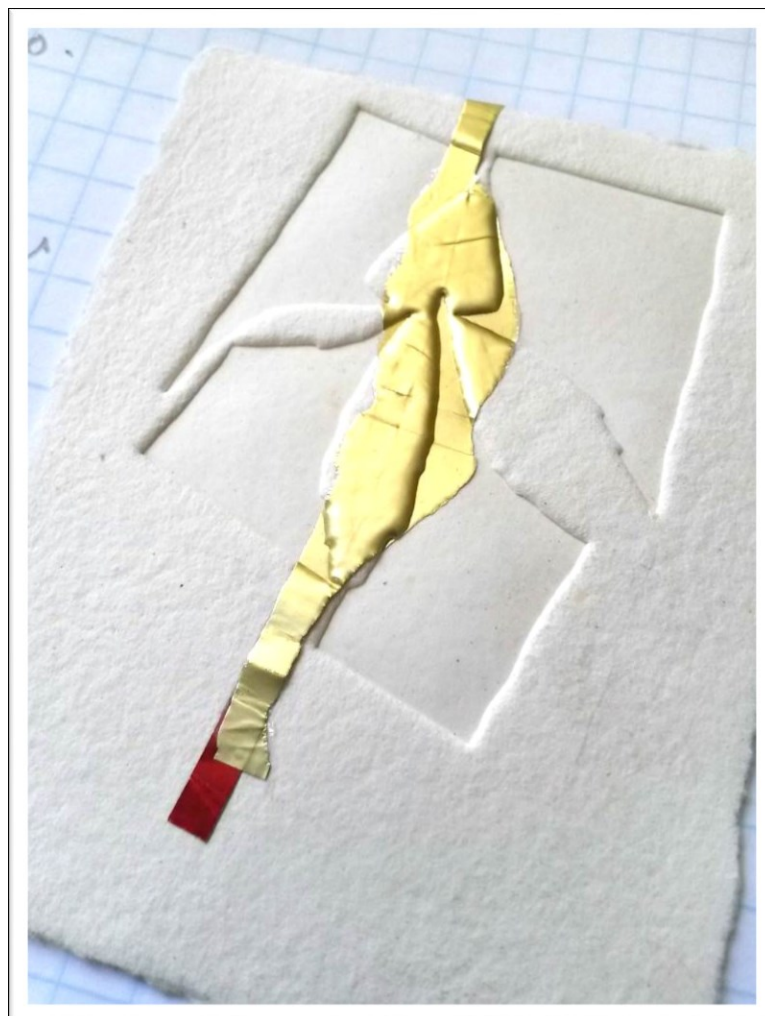


### Champagne and chocolate wrapper foil

At a staff exhibition in 2009, I saw two artworks by a colleague that made quite an impression on me. The works were rather large (700 mm x 700 mm) and used curly burglar bar designs as the main motif. What intrigued me were the backgrounds—one was metallic silver and the other metallic gold. The silver turned out to be the silver foil from cigarette boxes and the other was gold foil from champagne bottles.

As soon as I recognised the origin of the foil, I realised that I had a source of such gold foil at home because we regularly opened a bottle of champagne and simply threw the foil away; this was an opportunity to turn a routine into a ritual. Every time I opened a bottle of champagne, I was generating raw materials for creative practice. I started keeping the foils religiously (ritually?) and also kept the bit of foil that had the little red tab one uses to tear the foil open, because I realised that the red tab had its own aesthetic possibilities. The piece of foil that is torn off sometimes, serendipitously, resembles a human figure, and the red tip at the bottom could be seen to allude to blood and the notion of opening, of tearing open. Image 8 shows one such torn-off tab used in an embossing.

**Image 8: Champagne Foil Used in an Embossing (author's photo, 2016)**



I did make some prints where I combined the metallic foils with the champagne foil, but the champagne foil started looking a bit insipid to me. It was as if it was 9-carat gold compared to 18-carat. It did not have the lusciousness of pure gold; it looked watered down.

Was I becoming blasé?

At more or less the same time as the champagne routine, there was a chocolate routine. It was customary to have a small piece of chocolate for dessert in front of the television, after a small whiskey and before bedtime. I was given a box of Ferrero Rocher chocolates one Christmas at about that time, and noticed the beautiful gold-coloured foil. It looked like 18-carat gold compared to the champagne foils (luscious!). I applied the hot stamping metallic foil on top of this chocolate wrapper and it was beautiful! The chocolate wrappers were now removed and stored very carefully to keep them intact and, for a while, the chocolate opening routine had a ritualistic feel to it.

I realised that I was drawn to a particular shade of gold, and also to particular shades of blue-green and red. I teach painting and colour theory and have not seen it as an opportunity to allow the students to express their individuality. Maybe I could get the students to identify the colours they are drawn to, the ones that they think are special, and then try to mix the pigments to depict their chosen colour.

Are there other things I can get the students to identify? What are the things that I am busy identifying for myself? Forms? Motifs? (Lecturer self?)

### Red string

The red string I use is embroidery cotton and initially, to me, this particular shade of red only had the connotation of blood. It acquired another connotation when an ex-student of mine, who is Hindu, sent me my first Lakshmi string in 2001. A Lakshmi string is the red string that Hindus tie around their wrists as a sign of devotion to Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, fortune, and prosperity. I receive one of these strings every year and am assured that it has been blessed by the local Hindu priest. When I use red string now, it has a psychological richness that I do not try to explain, I just feel that it is significant.

If called on I would try to explain, but it just gives me a full feeling when I think of it. Like a lump in my chest.

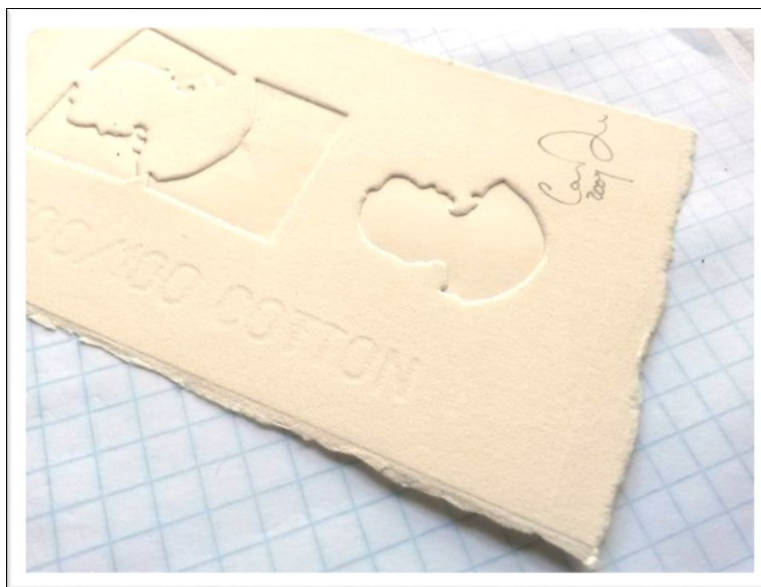
### Handmade paper

I like the idea of making one's own paper. It is a material that we take for granted and discard very easily. I am sure that, were we to make our own paper, we would be more careful with it. One can buy handmade paper, and it is usually a bit thicker than mass-produced commercial paper and the colour is also creamier because it has not been bleached. The kind of handmade paper I use is made for watercolour painting or printmaking, and it is made from cotton, often recycled cotton cloth. It is available with a smooth or a rough texture, and I prefer the rough texture.

I discovered that there is a paper making unit in my department and have been given some sheets of handmade paper. I have also made a few sheets of my own, which I used for the cameo print earring that is explored here. Handmade paper is recognised by the edge, which is kind of ragged and known

as a deckle edge. The deckle is the frame that traps the paper fibres on top of the sieve. It looks almost like a torn edge, and has convinced me to tear my paper to size rather than cut it. See Image 9 for a comparison of the deckle edge with the torn edge. The deckle edge is on the left and the torn edge on the right.

**Image 9: A Deckle Edge (left) Compared With (right) a Torn Edge (author's photo, 2016)**



I now arrive at the size of my prints by tearing the large sheets of handmade paper in half, and in half again, until they are about A6 in size. A6 is an A4 sheet of paper divided into quarters, or folded in half twice. I think it is because as a jeweller, I make relatively small things—things that fit inside my cupped hands—that I feel comfortable with such small prints. Even when inspecting a large object or print, I always inspect it closely and notice all the surface textures and details, looking for traces of how it was made.

A friend recently gave me a stack of handmade paper that had belonged to his late father, a well-known artist. I've realised that the significance of the materials I use can extend beyond how they are produced to where they come from or are found, and could add to the story of the work that I produce.

And I want to tell stories (adult play?). But I do not always have the patience . . . a living contradiction?

And what must the stories be about?!

### **The message, and its origin**

The cameo print earrings I show here are part of a series of prints called "Medals for Women." Being in a relationship with a woman, I have become acutely aware of the trials and tribulations women have to go through, often without any acknowledgement. I wanted to demonstrate my awareness of, and involvement in, this issue without laying claim to the right to bestow these awards.

"Medals for Women" are not actually medals, they are a manifestation and acknowledgement of my awareness. I use many traditional heraldic devices and motifs to make these prints look like medals,

particularly the ribbons from which the medals hang, the bar at the top, and the connection between the medal and the ribbon. I found that the fleur-de-lis motif could be interpreted in various subversive ways: it could be a lily but also a spear.

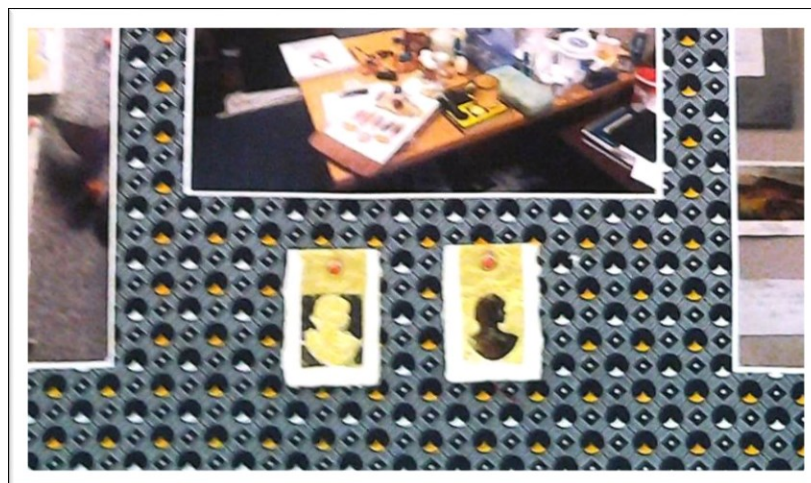
The fact that I use a classical cameo profile probably refers to the stereotypical roles of women. I did make a personalised profile of my partner, but felt that it was too personal, as if I was bestowing a medal on her. It could too easily be interpreted as me being patronising, so I kept the profile anonymous.

The cameo profile, and its surrounding pieces (Image 11), that I do use for the embossing was obtained from a colleague's scrap box. She had cut it out but was not going to use it, so I rescued it before it was disposed of. Another happy accident.

I wonder whether using the traditional cameo profile refers to (denotes?) a, or my, stereotypical perception of women. (Stereotypical male self?)

These two prints were done in the format of earrings. They allude to being wearable in terms of their size and the fact that there is a connection and a loop at the top. A further suggestion of them being earrings is the fact that they are a pair, not identical, but there is a definite relationship between them: they are opposites, in a way. One does have to examine the prints a bit closer to notice this, but they are inverted: in one print, the face is silver and in the other print the space surrounding the face is silver (see Image 10, cropped from the original display image, which explains the lack of crispness). It does refer to the act of perception. Are we aware of a thing or of the space around the thing? Are people defined by what we see when we look at them, or by what surrounds them?

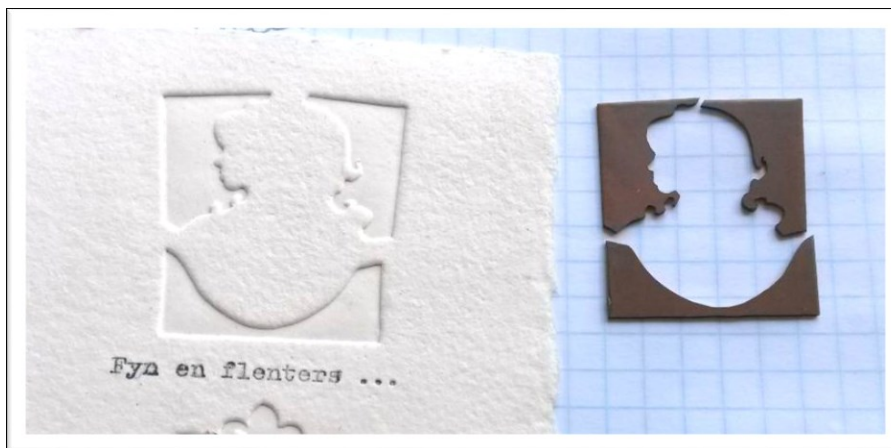
**Image 10: The Inverted Earrings (photo courtesy L. Scott, 2013)**



I recognised this dilemma of whether one perceives the object or what surrounds it when I was doing the embossings of the cameo. I had the offcuts from when the profile was cut out, all the bits of metal from around the profile. When I positioned them to emboss the profile, they were out of alignment and I then noticed that one could still discern the face, even though slightly distorted (Image 11). It made me realise that it was the surroundings that defined the inside. Doing several prints where I was deliberately careless when arranging the sections

(Playful self?), I realised that one has a lot of latitude when trying to show an image. It is as if the mind's eye does not need a lot of information to come to a conclusion that is quite close to the "truth."

**Image 11: "One Can Still Discern the Face" (author's photo, 2016)**



## Discoveries

Having identified various aspects of self that play a role in my creative design process, and considering these in relation to how I perceive my creative design process to unfold, I realised that the process is not linear, serendipity can be harnessed, play is important, and personal experiences can be useful as references for the creative design process.

### The creative process is not linear

Sawyer (2010, p. 182) confirmed that "creativity takes place over time" and is not limited to the moment of inspiration. When I trace some of the developments in the creative design process of the cameo print, I notice that, in some cases, a number of years have gone by since the first encounter with a phenomenon, such as a new material or process, and when it was actually implemented. The most significant example here would be the long association I have with gold leaf. I first noticed it as a student at an exhibition in which my lecturer was participating in about 1985, and have had intermittent encounters with it and its stimulants since then. The most recent incident occurred when I serendipitously discovered it at a supplier of fashion accessories and started using it in my "Medals for Women" range of prints.

Another element that shows the iterative cyclical nature of the creative design process is my use of the red string. Over the years, it has become more significant to me due to the nature of my interpersonal relationship with an ex-student, and the way I used it in other works of art.

### Serendipity allows the creative process to flow

Mitchell (2016) discussed autoethnography as a wide-angle lens with which we, as university educators, can examine the world through ourselves. She touched on how serendipity affords us an opportunity to examine just what it is we value and what our preconceptions are. My own preconceived ideas about how the world ought to be, how the design process should work, and what it actually means to be creative have been exposed in several instances where serendipitous discoveries and encounters allowed my creative process to flow and then result in unexpected but



desirable outcomes. The gold foil and chocolate wrappers are examples of how my creative process progressed after these fortuitous discoveries provided new connections, or solutions, for design problems that I had been incubating subconsciously.

I realise now that the same quagmire (my seemingly chaotic office) that hampered my analysis can be seen as an environment that is conducive to serendipitous discoveries taking place.

### **Elements of play are requirements of the creative process**

There are several instances where I recognise aspects of play entering my creative process. The aspects that I particularly notice are curiosity, discovery, delight in exploring, development of seemingly unrelated skills, and feelings of contentment after a bout of such playful activity. This playfulness is most apparent when I produce a number of prototypes by just trying new techniques or when I stare at the horizon, daydreaming and wondering what adventures might be there. Richards (2010) emphasised the importance of play and describes it as the “one way that we truly—and delightfully—learn” (p. 220). I also recognise elements of play when I think divergently and tolerate ambiguity, which are both requirements of the creative process (Torrance, as cited in Sternberg, 2006, p. 87).

### **Personal experience provides resources and impetus for the creative process**

Lowes showed the importance and relevance of personal experience within the creative process in his model of “well” and “will.” The well is described as a “dedicated form of gathering and coagulation of life experience,” and the will as “the re-ordering of this often chaotic material” (as cited in Bleakley, 2004, p. 470).

The personal experiences that are prominent in this autoethnography, and that fill my own well are my interpersonal relationships, the materials I encounter, and my physical environment. The will or reordering processes I employ have been developed over the last 30 years and it is unfair to expect my students to be as fluent in their reordering (or design processes) when they have barely left school.

## **Pedagogical Implications**

The discoveries I made regarding my own creative design process all have implications for the adjustment of my pedagogical practice.

### **The creative process is not linear**

I have become more mindful that I should not assess my students’ creative outputs based on work that is produced over a relatively short period of time. They will probably only produce their notable work a few years after they have left the department. Several researchers claim that it takes at least 10 years, or 10,000 hours, of practice before one can be truly creative (Baer & Garrett, 2010). If I could get my students to document and reflect on their creative work over an extended period of time, it might make the development of their creativity more evident and encourage their willingness to explore and venture into new and uncertain areas.

### **Serendipity plays an important role in the creative process**

It is possible to create environments that are conducive for serendipity to take place. This would entail providing numerous influences, both visual and conceptual, for new connections to be made. The visual influences could take the form of images and objects, and the conceptual influences could be provided by encouraging dialogue in the form of reflections and conversations.

I often notice serendipitous occurrences in the work my students do. These usually take the form of accidents or mistakes where the outcome is not what they had in mind or, more often, not what they think I had in mind. It could be useful to have conversations regarding their mistakes as part of the assessments that are done.

### **Elements of play are requirements of the creative process**

In a jewellery design programme, the emphasis is on the establishment of a product, a piece of jewellery. By moving the emphasis of the creative design process away from the product, a space might open for play to be encouraged. This could be done by focusing on the design process that precedes the making of the final object—the stage where a number of potentially useful ideas are generated, based on personally meaningful resources, and the prototypes are produced.

The format in which ideas and prototypes are developed could range from loose pencil drawings, to water colour sketches, to paper cut outs, to 3-dimensional wire “drawings,” to ceramic models, and rough “jewels” made from copper and brass. These are all approaches that would decrease the anxiety that accompanies working in expensive precious metals.

Playful engagement in this phase would result in numerous connections that could lead to serendipitous discoveries at a later stage. It would also lead to diverse solutions to the same problem, particularly if it is done collaboratively.

### **Personal experience provides resources and impetus for the creative process**

I have realised that I could encourage my students to “gather and coagulate” (Lowes, as cited in Bleakley, 2004, p. 470) more deliberately. The gathering would be a matter of using journals, in various forms, to document the various influences that surround them. Examples of such influences could be images of artefacts that are in their personal spaces, and visual or written documentation of experiences such as celebrations and excursions. Coagulation would constitute the use and manipulation of such gathered material in the execution of a specified project brief.

## **Conclusion**

This exploration was aimed at gaining an understanding of my creative design process so that I can facilitate the development of my students’ creativity in the jewellery design class. The methodology I employed facilitated such an investigation, where I used my various autoethnographic voices to gain access to the deeper layers of significance that manifest via my creative artefacts. I realise that autoethnography is a most suitable methodology to use when trying to uncover the various aspects and influences that contribute to my creative design process, particularly when I employ self-interviews and “multivocality” (Mizzi, 2010) to identify and isolate the various selves at work.

The pedagogical implications that I have identified, while apparently simple, like “keep a journal,” are much more complex than they seem, as I have already started discovering. I think I have slowly realised that I am able to create my own meaning by engaging with the world around me with a sense of curiosity. There are interesting and useful things all round us, if we can just acknowledge them. Once they are acknowledged they become part of our mental library and we can draw on them as required. That is what I sense when I look at my office walls—all the seemingly mundane things that become interesting when used in a different context.

As Mitchell (2015a, p.11) highlighted, autoethnographic research by university educators can contribute to social change by making visible “the richness of the diversity of our classrooms” as an



vital resource for “identifying the moments of learning (about ourselves and our students).” I think that my students often underestimate the value of their personal histories and stories as far as using these as references to draw on when working on projects in design class, or when solving problems creatively. What I mean is, I think everybody has within them interesting ways of doing and seeing things that would facilitate their being creative in a useful way. It is just that we can be so overwhelmed by the world, and its hegemonies, that we can feel inadequate. I want to encourage my students to use their innate curiosity and to engage creatively with the world around them using their own personal experiences as a foundation and reference for creative work. This could involve using local and indigenous resources that are personally significant, rather than colonial or Eurocentric references.

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### Third interlude: Creative?

My educational outlook has expanded, as I now take more cognisance of, what I considered to be, peripheral outcomes. Instead of focusing on the content of an email, I now realise the achievement in being able to send the email. Instead of necessarily judging the shape of a forged teaspoon, I treasure the ability to move metal with a hammer, a lesson I was taught by Terry Hargreaves, a seasoned goldsmith with many years of experience.

I also recognise the way creativity can only really be assessed by the person being creative. This person is the only one who knows whether the conclusion they have arrived at is 'new' or not, and the extent to which this idea is useful. (The journal page below illustrates this point)

I feel as if I now have to concentrate on facilitating the having of experiences and to create space for the occurrence of reflection. I also need to find out how to encourage (useful) reflection; not just a chronological recall of events. I realise it would be useful to use a set of questions to guide the reflections, similar to what I have experienced from my research supervisor. This reminds me of the discussion I had with my B.Tech students regarding their journals and reflection. We arrived at the question "How does this relate to my improvement as designer?" which will be used to guide the reflections they are expected to do. It does imply that I/we need to cultivate an understanding of what 'design' is, or can be.



*Figure 3.0 - This is a page from my own journal that might seem quite creative to a viewer. However, I know that it was done simply as a demonstration of what I would like my students' visual journals should look like. I was just practising my drawing and painting skills.*



# RETHINKING VISUAL JOURNALING IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS: EXPLORING PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATIONS

**C. de Beer**

Department of Fine Art and Jewellery Design  
Durban University of Technology  
Durban, South Africa  
e-mail: chrisdb@dut.ac.za

Doctoral Student: School of Education  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

## ABSTRACT

I lecture jewellery design at a university of technology in South Africa. Through this study, I wish to arrive at a deeper understanding of my own creative process, so that I can facilitate the creative development of my students. The focus of this article is the visual journal, or reflective sketchbook, which I require my students to keep. To establish the relationship between my creative practice and visual journaling, I analysed a creative poetic performance I delivered at the South African Educational Research Association's (SAERA) 2016 conference. Using the little-c definition of creativity, I analyse the threads that constituted and contributed to my performance, to see how aspects of self manifested within this creative process. I did the analysis by conducting an autoethnographic self-interview, and then examining the responses. To my surprise, I discovered that the inspiration for my own creative work does not necessarily originate in my visual journal and that the visual journal could play a more useful role, if used as a prompt for reflective conversations.

**Keywords:** visual journal, creative design process, autoethnography, poetic performance, self-interview

## BACKGROUND

As a practising artist, lecturing jewellery design at a university of technology requires me to teach my students how to design and make conventional jewellery, as well as producing more creative contemporary jewellery that connects with a 'diverse range of contemporary social, environmental, technical or artistic trends' (Quickenden 2000).

In my experience, this requires more creativity than would be required should the jewellery have been designed according to well-established norms and standards. I have learned that this type of innovation requires deliberate incorporation and inter-weaving of personal beliefs, approaches, attitudes, practices and subject matter. It is a proficiency developed over a

number of years and, until now, I have been under the impression that keeping a visual journal can facilitate such creative development. By ‘visual journal’, I mean something such as an artist or designer’s sketchbook (Holtham, Owens and Bogdanova 2008), which is a combination of text and images, and more; as shall be explained in the next section of this article.

The objective of my research, therefore, was to gain an understanding of the complexities surrounding the contents and use of a visual journal, and to explore the pedagogical implications inherent in this understanding. I examine my creative process using an autoethnographic approach as it enables me to use ‘personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience’ (Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis 2016, 7).

## **CREATIVE DESIGN JOURNALING AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT**

In dealing with the creative processes of my students, I see creativity as a little-c (everyday) activity, and not as a big-C (legendary) endeavour (Beghetto and Kaufman 2010). The result is that I value the personal, commonplace experiences that my students and I encounter in our creative practice. These experiences are ubiquitous and readily accessible, when one is able to shift one’s focus from the ‘other side of the fence’.

Fine artists and professionals involved in creative design work tend to make extensive use of sketchbooks to record their creative process (Holtham et al. 2008). Messenger (2016) uses the term ‘visual journal’ to refer to these notebooks, which are a combination of images and text, and are used to document research processes. The visual journals are sometimes used for archival purposes and at other times, they can play a role in the improvement of creative practice, by providing material for inspiration and reflection (New 2005).

A creative designer’s visual journal is more than documentation of what has transpired. It is a way of record keeping that allows the designers to examine their thinking, which then can lead to them becoming aware of the bigger picture (Grauer and Nath, quoted in Scott Shields 2016). Scott Shields (2016) feels that the primary goal of a visual journal is to explore experience; one’s own experience. Because experiences take multiple sensory forms, it is necessary, as a creative designer, to be aware of Olver’s (2001) reminder that a visual journal need not necessarily take the form of a book, which would exclude three dimensional forms that include movement (such as dangly earrings), or emphasise texture, or the play of light on a surface. Incorporating a wider range of material in a visual journal would allow the development of a personal design philosophy that takes cognisance of more than just visual senses, thereby establishing a foundation for future work. It would facilitate the development of a personal design language that draws on emotions and intellect as well. From this point of

view, visual journaling can be seen as creative self-study, ‘using the visual journal to turn inward and engage in a creative practice focused on ... the development of a [design] identity’ (Scott Shields 2016, 5).

The requirements for the visual journals that my students need to produce are equivocal. They have the freedom to choose their own themes or areas that interest them. They then have to collect the necessary visual imagery or artefacts that inspire them, develop ideas for manufacture by producing drawings and/or prototypes, and then manufacture the final pieces after consultation with the lecturer.

My intention, in requiring my students to keep such a journal, was to provide the students with a space in which to document the work they do, record the process of developing their creative designs and collate the material they draw on when developing their designs. My intention was also that it would enable personal reflection; or, what Schön (2008, 79) calls, a ‘conversation with the situation’ and facilitate conversations between my students, and with me.

## **USING AN ART EXHIBITION TO TEACH/LEARN VISUAL JOURNALING**

I thought that I would be able to improve my students’ ability to keep a visual journal if we staged a collaborative art exhibition of our jewellery and then shared our experiences of the process, by examining and discussing our journals. I intended using this work, with my students’ permission, as the foundation for a conference presentation or journal article.

I had worked out how to keep an online visual journal, a blog, and how to use the online capabilities to categorise the various posts by creating a tag cloud.<sup>1</sup> This categorisation would then facilitate the compilation of a research report and it seemed a clear-cut mechanism for reflecting on the creative design process and producing a written account thereof at the same time.

The exhibition was staged, and some journaling took place, but not enough to do a presentation. My journaling consisted of two blogposts: one showing the work ready for exhibiting and the other of the gallery in disarray, as we were busy setting up. I did have numerous photos, tracking the development of my creative work, on my phone. My students had preparatory sketches in their journals, and photos of the exhibition on their phones. In discussing the journaling process with my students after the exhibition, it transpired that there seemed to be no clear goal that directed this supposedly reflective process. I perceived their journaling as a mechanical chronologous documentation of occurrences, with no focus for reflection. During our conversation about the journaling, and perusing their visual journals, I

realised that the aim of the journal, as I saw it, was to provide material that would act as an aid for reflection on our development as designers. I had a feeling that my students did not share my enthusiasm, and just saw this as more work to do.

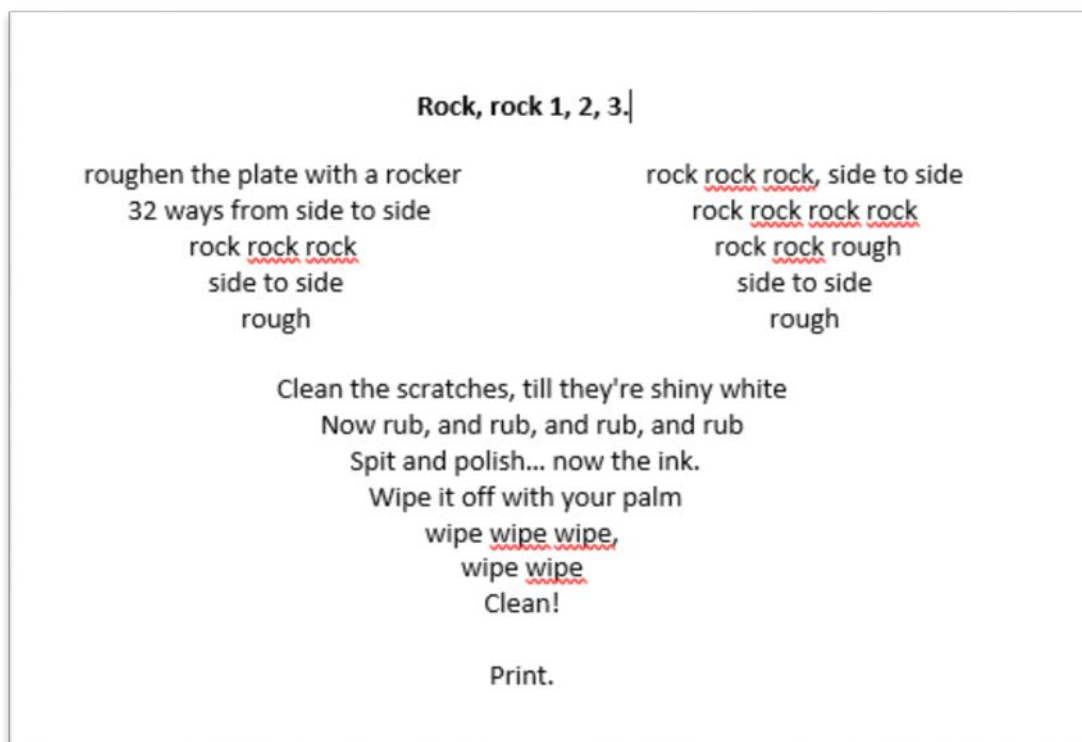
## MY PRESENTATIONS

I made two presentations at the recent SAERA conference. The key presentation, or so I thought at the time, dealt with insights I arrived at regarding the journaling activities of my students. The other presentation was incidental (or so I thought), and was a poetic performance I staged at the Special Interest Group for Self-Reflexive Methodologies, titled 'Reimagining Education through Poetic Inquiry'.

### 'Reimagining education through poetic inquiry ...'

When I reflected on the presentations, I realised that the poetic performance contained information that could assist with my research regarding the relationship between the creative process and visual journaling. It has therefore become the focus of this article.

My performance can be seen online at <https://youtu.be/nqYvhfJmm9E> and the poem is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Rock, rock 1, 2, 3

The explanation that I provided for the Special Interest Group programme stated:

This poem illustrates the mezzotint printing process, and reveals similarities to the teaching and learning process that I have come to notice. The title of the poem refers to the steps one does in the jive, which is the dance my wife and I are currently learning in our ballroom dancing classes. I have become aware that several aspects of my life seem to be converging and becoming integrated with each other.

The poem I performed was based on a mezzotint<sup>2</sup> print I had done previously (Figure 7), and the process whereby the print was produced. The stanzas of the poem were arranged into three triangles with a triangular space between them, similar to the patterns I use for the mezzotint prints. According to Higgins (quoted in Wyatt 2016) pattern poems, which are composed in particular visual patterns, ‘combine the visual and literary impulses, to tie together the experience of these two areas into an aesthetic whole’. My poetic performance mirrored the pattern of the process used for the production of a mezzotint print. I went through the rocking motions of producing the print and then, for effect, showed a print that I had supposedly made as part of the performance; almost like magic.

The process for producing a mezzotint is very labour intensive and requires specialised tools and materials. One needs copper plate and a rocker for roughing the plate. I made some of the tools, and the copper plate used for printing, by hand. (I could have bought these, but wanted to instil some significance into the print). I made the rocker from an old file that was re-purposed.

The pattern in which I arranged the words of the poem was similar to the geometric patterns used by Zulu craftsmen for the straps they utilise when making their sandals. These straps are carved from whitewall car tires that are recycled. The tires have white inlays on their sides. The white substrate is exposed in geometric patterns by carving the black top layer away. I encountered this process as part of a research project I undertook, which was aimed at producing jewellery made by incorporating indigenous techniques and materials, and uses traditional Zulu sandals as inspiration.

As I was busy writing a description of my poem for this article, I became more and more entangled in the difficulties of using words to describe a visual image. I realised there were nuances that were not being conveyed and that I was unable to show the richness of the poem and how various aspects of my life unwittingly culminated in this poem.

It became clear to me that the creative product I was trying to describe was the result of a complex creative process that defied easy documentation and classification. The pattern poem was the result of various modalities that were interwoven and would require a different approach if I wished to capture it in a journal. It made me realise that I should pay closer



attention to what I expect from my students; I became conscious that journaling was not as easy as I had thought.

## METHODOLOGY

To examine my creative practice, I used an autoethnographic methodology aimed at exploring the various aspects of self that manifested during this process of creating and performing a poem. I wished to understand the larger context, my creative practice and my pedagogy, by examining my own experiences within it. I examined the various cultures inherent in my ‘multiple, shifting identities’ (Reed-Danahay 1997, 4) by writing personal narratives that were prompted by the contemplation of objects. I examined the denotative meanings of these objects and related things and then allowed the connotative meanings to surface, going from, what Riggins (1994) calls referencing, to mapping. An inward and outward shift of focus, with the intention ‘to deepen an understanding of [my selves] and [my] work ... in a broader cultural context of making [and designing, and teaching]’ (Mitchell 2016, 180). This aligns with the definition provided by Ellis and Holman Jones, which states: ‘Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze ... personal experience ... in order to understand cultural experience’ (quoted in Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011, 1).

I used objects to provide me with access to memories so I could tell stories about myself to myself, to access the network of connections between these and the links to my creative practice, and other. I wanted to examine the ‘webs of significance [I have] spun’ (Geertz 2003, 145), and I did this by conducting a semi-structured autoethnographic self-interview.

To explore my pedagogic practice, I wrote ‘a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context’ (Reed-Danahay 1997, 9). A part of my social context is the programme where I lecture jewellery design, and my students collaborate in this investigation. According to Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2016) this is a partial collaboration, which Coia and Taylor (2010) refer to as a ‘co/autoethnography’, as my students shared autobiographical narratives, in the form of blogposts, that guided our discussions regarding the purpose of journaling.

## TRUSTWORTHINESS

Reliability and validity are interconnected when doing autoethnography. The more credible the account, the more reliable it is deemed to be (Ellis et al. 2011). To make my account more credible I have, therefore, detailed the process as it transpired, with personal insights as they occurred. I have also included images of relevant objects and places to enhance trustworthiness. This is in keeping with Mishler’s (1990) view that ‘visibility of the work’ (429) strengthens

trustworthiness. A specific example is the screen clipping (Figure 2), which shows how I conducted my self-interview. It shows comments on the right and insertions in capital letters. I also make the link between my occupation and my own creative practice explicit, with the aim of enhancing the trustworthiness of this study.

### **Autoethnographic self-interview and multivocality**

When I tried to unravel what my pattern poem entailed, I became entangled in the various threads of thought my mind was taking. I was feeling quite overwhelmed, took a deep breath, and started to write a note to myself:

It is so difficult to untangle all these threads that go into the making of this text ... even just finding the beginning of the thread is difficult. I might just end up with one long thread as opposed to a woven cloth .... Look for lots of short threads to weave together.

I then made a list of all the threads I recognised as contributing to and manifesting in the poem and the performance. The list of threads, which is detailed further in the Analysis section of this article, were used as prompts to elicit connotative responses. It was similar to a brainstorming session, where I produced a list of prompts without necessarily evaluating their relevance; this happened afterwards.

Reflecting on the note to self, I realised I had adopted two distinctly different voices: that of a *Guiding self* and that of a *Seeking self*.<sup>3</sup> I was having a conversation with myself. This conforms to Anderson and Glass-Coffin's (2013, 69) notion of an autoethnographic self-interview which 'involv[es] dialogue between one's past and present selves', and is similar to Mizzi's (2010) notion of multivocality. Mizzi states there are 'plural and sometimes contradictory *narrative voices* located within the researcher' that would 'expand the ways we can perceive and inquire into an encounter' (M3).

The type of self-interview I conducted differed from those of Singh (2012), and Meskin, Singh, and van der Walt (2014). Singh (2012) examined 'critical events' (Webster and Mertova 2007, quoted in Singh 2012, 86) in her journey as educator and used a set of prepared questions to maintain her focus. She responded to her questions in writing as she examined the impact that specific 'people, events and places' had on her 'educational persona'. When Meskin et al. (2014) scrutinised their professional practice, a critical friend reviewed and asked them a set of questions they had determined in advance. They labelled it a 'reciprocal self-interview' (RSI).

My questions arose when I searched for similarities between my two presentations at the conference. I wanted to see what the underlying issues were that connected my creative practice (the poetic performance) and the journaling process I expected from my students.

## ANALYSIS

According to Riggins (1994), the responses that an informant (one of my selves) provides to an interviewer (my other self) could be either referencing (denotative) or mapping (connotative). When the information that is provided deals with ‘the history, aesthetic or customary uses of an object’ (1994, 109), it is considered a referencing response, and where it reveals the ideology, or social world, of the informant it is considered a mapping response.

The threads I had identified started as denotative (referencing) and then became more personal and connotative (mapping). When I realised they were becoming connotative, I stopped listing them, instead focusing on the denotative threads, which I used as prompts to elicit the connotations that came to mind. These I examined in terms of their relevance to my social world, which included my creative and pedagogical practice.

I then reflected on these connotations to reveal further significances, to see how I felt about each thread. I was extracting information with the aim of recognising underlying patterns that would possibly explain what was going on here.

The two questions I asked myself were: ‘What comes to mind when you think about this thread?’, and secondly, ‘What type of material did this thread provide for my creative practice? Where is the material located?’ I captured my answers as comments in a word processed document and inserted text in CAPITAL LETTERS (see Figure 2).

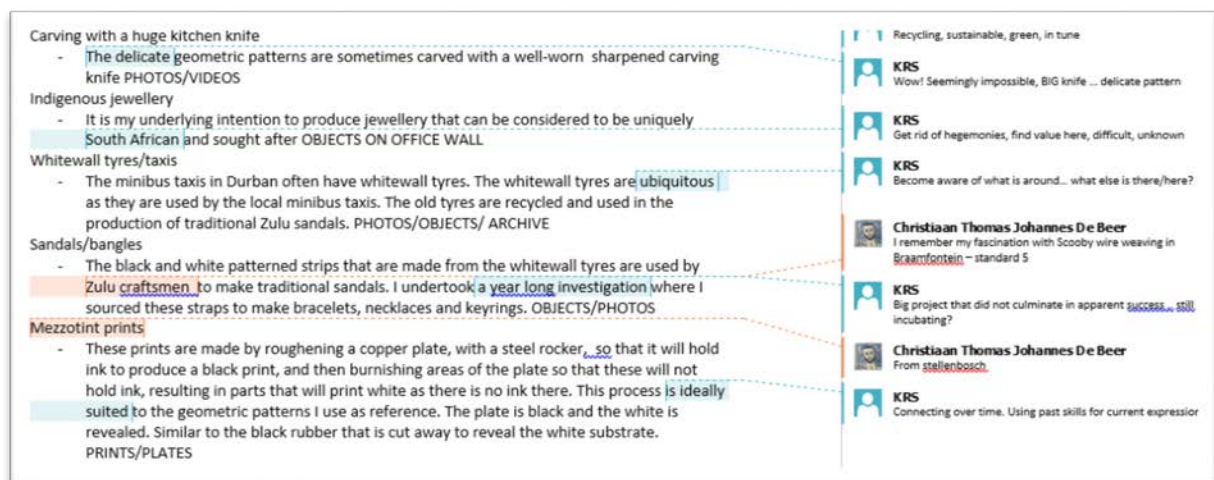


Figure 2: Screengrab of self-interview

I regarded my self-interview as a narrative, so I could analyse it by looking for patterns that made some sort of sense to me (Bernard 2011). I saw that the information could be separated into categories that Riggins (1994) calls referencing (denotative) and mapping (connotative).

The prompts I used as *Guiding self* were denotative and my responses as *Seeking self* were connotative. On coding the responses, I noticed areas where the connotative information revealed aspects of the self and other areas that caused insights and realisations – sometimes with pedagogical implications.

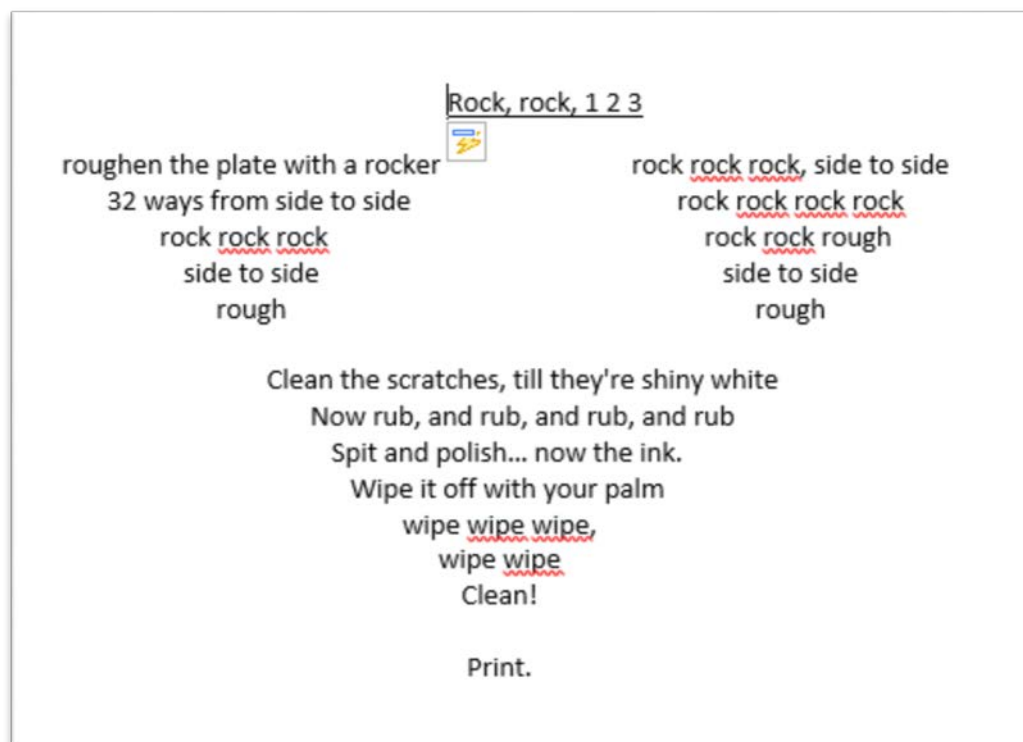
The *Guiding self's* denotative prompts that I developed, and respond to in the next section, were as follows:

- Rubber from old car tyres
  - Carving with a huge kitchen knife
  - Indigenous jewellery
  - Whitewall tyres/taxis
  - Sandals/bangles
  - Mezzotint prints
  - Silwerstroomstrandskulp
  - Maspala / samples
  - Kitchen knife/Dlamini/Dominic/Thembenkosi
- 
- Rock rock 123 123 / or 12 rock rock rock back side close
  - Nadene smiling/Hein
  - Jive/tango
  - Ballroom
  - Relationship
  - Weekly routine
  - Doing things together
- 
- Mezzotint
  - Rocker/rocking
  - Old file
  - Punches with students
  - Scraper/burnish
  - Plate with natural edges / what it looks like is what it looks like

I examined all the threads, however, in this article I only discuss the ones that are most relevant in terms of creative journaling, and that have significant pedagogical implications. I discuss my most important discoveries regarding the relationship between my creative practice and visual journaling, and the pedagogical implications thereof, in the Discoveries section at the end.

### Rock, rock, 1, 2, 3 – Unravelling the threads

The poem I performed was based on a mezzotint print I had done earlier, and the process whereby the print was produced. The stanzas of the poem were arranged into three triangles, with a triangular space between them, similar to the patterns I use for the mezzotint prints. The poem I performed was based on a mezzotint print I had done earlier, and the process whereby the print was produced. The stanzas of the poem were arranged into three triangles, with a triangular space between them, similar to the patterns I use for the mezzotint prints. The title of the poem refers to the steps one does in the jive, which is the dance my wife and I are currently learning in our ballroom dancing lessons.



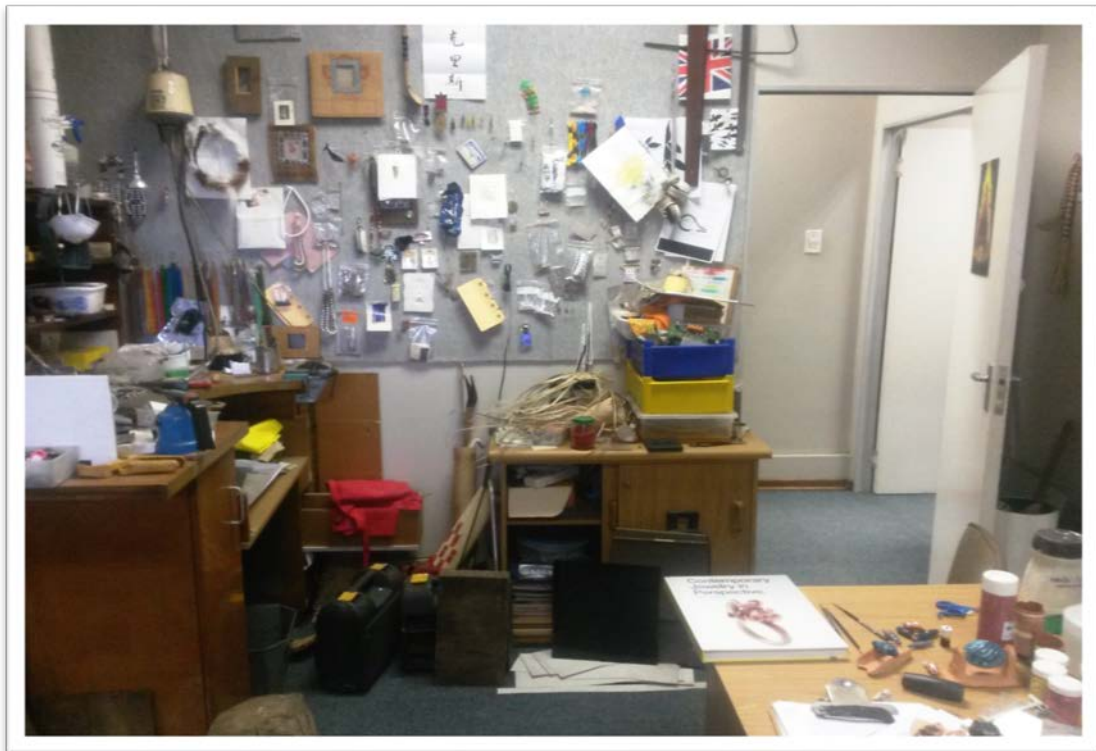
**Figure 3:** The poem

What follows are my responses to the prompts. The responses consist of referencing (denotative) observations, followed by mapping (connotative) reflections. I inserted images as well, to show the visual aspects of my research.



### ***Indigenous jewellery***

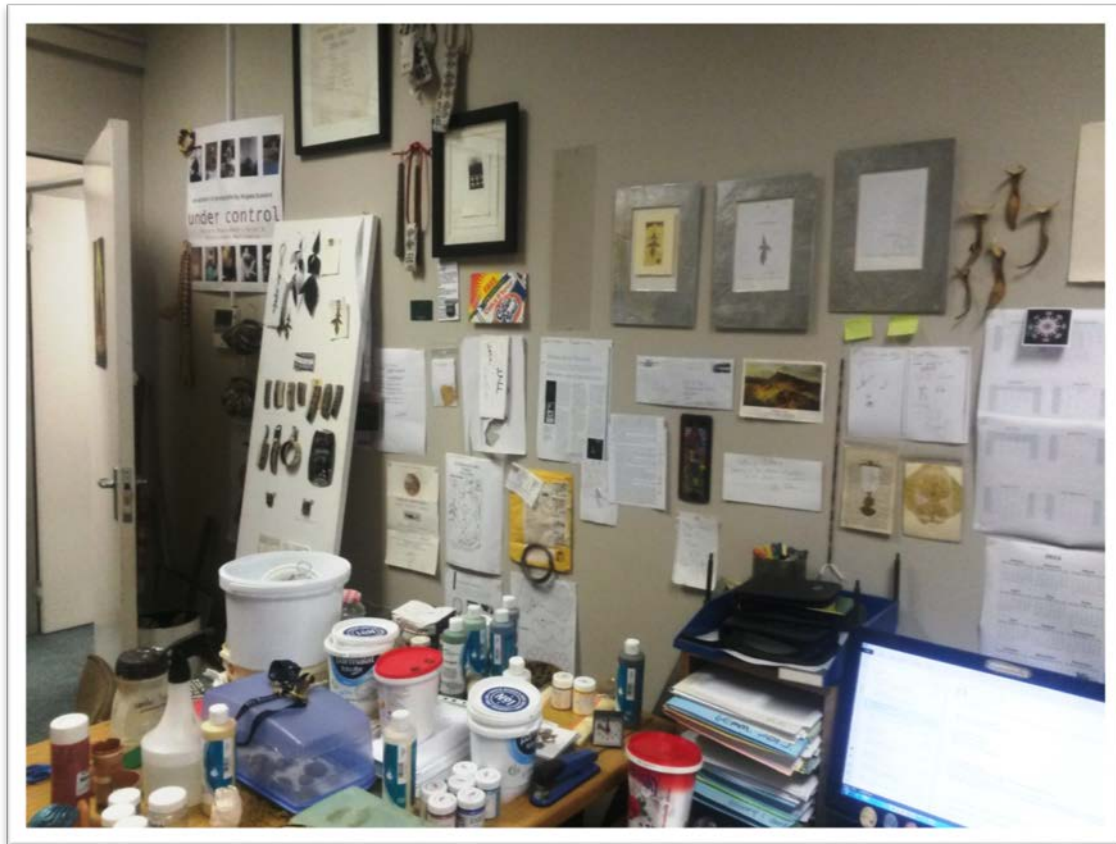
I started studying jewellery design under the impression I would become rich from making precious jewellery from gold and gems. I was not exposed to that type of jewellery as a child, and found it difficult to engage wholeheartedly with this kind of design. Sometime during my first year of study, I inadvertently made a brooch that contrasted brass and nickel silver, both base metals, and I became totally consumed by this subtle colour juxtaposition. It was in complete contrast to the shiny precious metals we were taught to work with. In fact, I had a ‘Damascus Road’ type of aesthetic experience which has, since then, influenced my development as a designer. I think it was then I realised there were other types of beauty lying in wait for me. I started finding pleasing aesthetic arrangements, textures, colours and formations in the world around me. I collected shells, twigs, leaves, stones and seeds, and surrounded myself with these inspirational materials (see Figure 4 and 5). I also discovered the world of ‘found’ objects. Objects that are found serendipitously and that have an aesthetic impact on the senses of the beholder. I became aware of the richness of the world that lay just on the other side of what I was used to, or taught to expect.



**Figure 4:** A collection of design reference materials on my office wall

Being in Durban, I am surrounded by traditional Zulu craft, such as beadwork, grass weaving, ceramics, woodcarving and tyre sandals. At the University of Technology where I lecture, the

aim is to develop jewellery designers that can produce uniquely South African jewellery. I try to achieve this by drawing on this craft heritage and encouraging a personal aesthetic sensibility within my students; one that is aware of the hegemony of Eurocentric values.



**Figure 5:** Another wall, showing artworks and reference materials

### ***Mezzotint***

Figure 7 shows one of my mezzotint prints which depicts a black and white pattern derived from one of the sandal strap patterns. The embossed chequerboard pattern underneath is based on the 'Maspala' pattern, which is discussed next. These prints are made by roughening a copper plate, with a steel rocker, so that it will hold ink to produce a black print, and then burnishing areas of the plate so that these will not hold ink, resulting in parts that will print white, as there is no ink there. This process is ideally suited to the geometric patterns I use as reference for my creative work. The printing plate is made to print black and the white is then 'revealed'; similar to the black rubber that is cut away in the sandal-making to reveal the white substrate.

I encountered the mezzotint process when I was a student and did not think that I would implement it one day. It was when I started looking for a way to use the black and white patterns, and focused on the way the white is 'revealed' that I remembered about mezzotints. It provided me with a way of utilising my metalworking and toolmaking skills in a non-jewellery

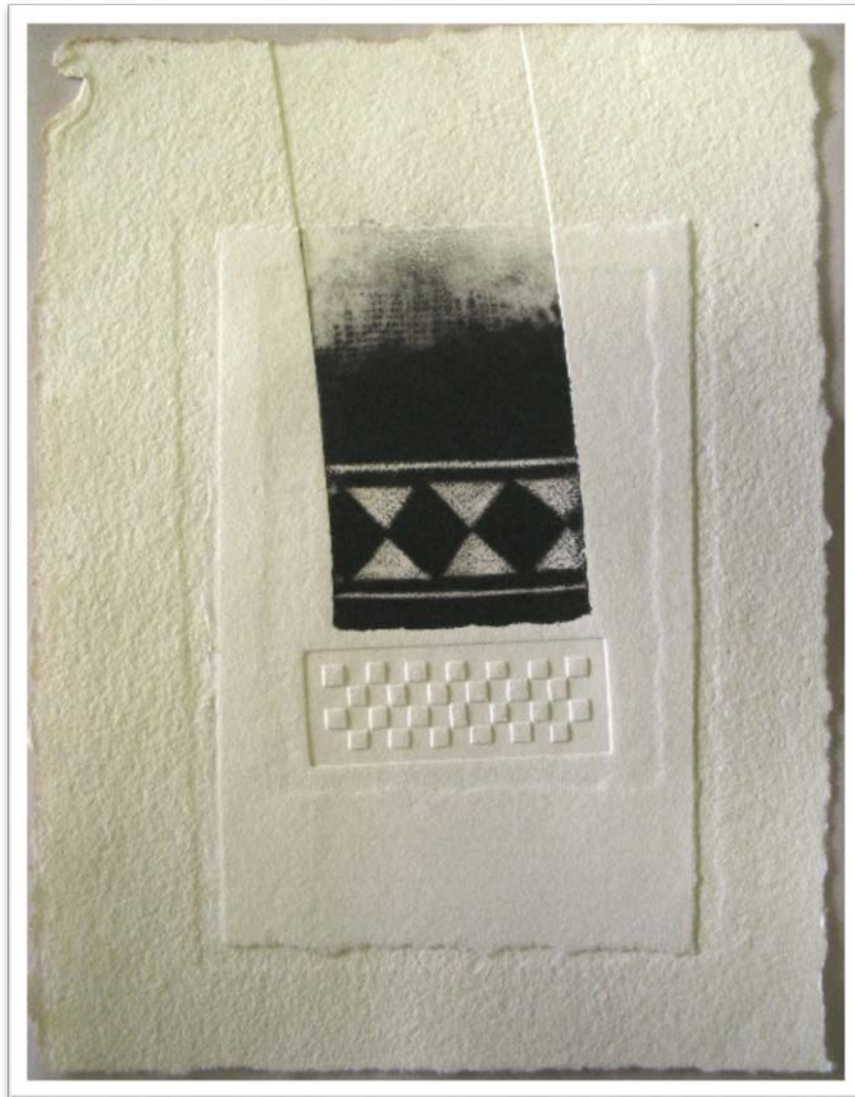
way. I sometimes get stuck creatively, because I cannot think of a piece of jewellery to make, even though I would like to. Pursuing the printmaking process provides me with another creative outlet.



**Figure 6:** The mezzotint print in situ on my office wall

I intend using the printing plates, after I have printed a numbered edition of about 10, to make brooches or pendants. To this end I have a number of plates that are in the process of being prepared for patterning and printing. But I have not made any jewellery from these plates yet.

The print is one of numerous objects on display on my office walls, and that I refer to during my creative work, see Figures 4 and 5.



**Figure 7:** The mezzotint close up

### ***Maspala / samples***

Maspala is a Zulu term for ‘Municipal’, referring to the chequerboard pattern on the caps of Municipal police. It is one of the patterns that Zulu craftsmen carve into the whitewall tyre straps that they use for making sandals (Figure 8) from recycled tyres.

I encountered the Zulu sandals during my explorations of the area around the University. A few blocks down the road is a complex where cattle hides are tanned and traditional Zulu craftsmen, all involved with the design and manufacture of traditional Zulu dress, have stalls from which they trade. With one of my Zulu students to act as interpreter I would go from stall to stall to see what the craftsmen are making and how they do it. One morning, when I collected



a tanned hide I had commissioned, I saw two young Zulu men carving patterns on long rubber strips. I recognised what they were doing; they were making the rubber straps from which the sandal straps are made. I ordered two straps from them, which I collected the following weekend. I realised these long patterned straps could be made into bangles quite easily and would be a step along the way towards making indigenous jewellery.



**Figure 8:** A traditional Zulu sandal made from recycled car tyres

I made a number of bangles, which I sold at a local craft market. A few weeks later an overseas buyer approached me, wanting to know how big an order of bangles I could guarantee. I went back to the complex where I had ordered the two straps, but the young men had gone ‘back to the farm’. I started searching for white wall tyre to recycle and other Zulu sandal makers. After a few weeks of searching I had to let the buyer know that, in fact, I could not guarantee any bangles.

A few months later, I became involved in a craft research project, and my newly appointed research assistant, on hearing about my interest in the sandals, introduced me to Mr Dlamini, a sandal maker that lived a few hundred yards away from him. I could not revive the bangle order, but was introduced to the world of the ‘izimbadada’, which is what the sandals are called, after the sound that that they make when walking.



I collected numerous off-cuts of the various patterns whenever I visited Mr Dlamini, the traditional sandal maker, which I then displayed in my office as inspiration for future work (figure 9). This is amongst all the other design reference material on display.



**Figure 9:** Off cuts from the patterned rubber strips, amongst other reference material

### ***Rock rock, 123, 123. / or 1 ... 2, rock rock rock, back side close***

These rhymes arose in my mind when I contemplated the mezzotint rocker, and the need to perform the poem. I am starting to realise that the various aspects of my life; my interests and activities, are all intertwined, as I suppose, they should be.

These are the rhythms of the Jive and the Tango as called out by my ballroom teacher during our dancing lessons. The Jive has become our favourite dance; it was too fast for us, but now, having mastered the basic steps, we find it a dance that allows us to get carried away by the music. The Tango intrigues us; we saw the Argentinian tango being danced and it feels like the dance I wish to master. *It is my ballroom goal.*

We started dancing as an activity to enrich our relationship and it is not always easy, but helps with revealing dynamics within our relationship. It is as if I have become aware of the dance-of-life that we are negotiating. Part of the negotiation is to make sure that our weekly routines are coordinated, and I realise that, now that I am older, I have a need for certain anchors in my week, around which I organise the rest of my life. I feel the need to have certainties around which I live. *Maybe I'm just feeling old.*

### ***Rocker/rocking***

The rocker was made from an old file (see Figure 10). I cut the bottom section with the tang (the bit that goes into the handle) off, forged it flat and sharp, filed the little teeth in, and then hardened and tempered it so it would be a tool that lasts several years. It is an intriguing object to hold, with a comfortable weight and an interesting twist on the handle, which serves no purpose. Then again, the whole object's purpose is obscure to someone that is not familiar with the mezzotint process.



**Figure 10:** A mezzotint rocker, made from an old file

I collect old tools made from carbon steel, so that I can use the steel to make punches, chisels and, in this case, a rocker. Having said that, I collect all sorts of materials that might come in handy in the creative production of jewellery and other artefacts. I collect foil chocolate wrappers, interesting and useful bits of wood, glass beads, empty flour packets, empty

aluminium cans, and lately, empty plastic milk bottles, as they are made from high-density polyethylene (HDPE), which seems relatively easy to recycle and has interesting tactile qualities, *and might be useful for making jewellery?*

The rocking motion used to raise the burr is quite tiring and meditative. According to the lecturer that taught me, the plate has to be rocked in 32 directions to produce a solid deep black print. The number 32 has stuck with me, and sounds quite professional, which I suppose, is what an aspiring art student wants to sound like. When rocking the plate, 32 directions become a muddle, and about 20 directions cause the right amount of burr anyway.

I seem to appreciate this amount of work, and the effect it achieves, *now that I am older*. I wonder whether I should bother with imparting this appreciation to my students. I sometimes get the feeling they are bemused by my willingness to do all that extra work for an effect that is not quite so noticeable.

### ***Scraper/burnish***

The burrs that were raised by the rocker are removed with a triangular scraper, and the scraped areas are then polished smooth with a burnisher. I make my own scrapers and burnishers from broken drill bits (all the old, broken tools I collect, remember?) If I could encourage the students to make and use burnishers, we might be able to address the hegemony of a polished and clean surface. It seems to be one of the aims of current commercial jewellery; to be as shiny as possible. This shininess obscures the fact that the design is very similar to most of the other pieces of jewellery in the same showcase.

Such a shiny and polished surface on a jewel is not natural: it starts showing wear as soon as it is worn and then acquires the patina of use. *But maybe that is what a piece of jewellery offers – a new beginning.*

Jewellery that is handmade is often characterised by slight imperfections; it shows another person was involved in the making of the piece. There are so many other types of surface finishes that can be imparted to a piece of jewellery, *once the hegemony of the polished surface is tackled.*

### ***Plate with natural edges / what it looks like is what it looks like***

I made the copper plate used for the mezzotints. This required me to melt copper scraps into an ingot that I then rolled flat to produce the sheet. The edges of this sheet are not perfectly straight (Figure 11), but it suits me. At the beginning of a jewellery manufacture programme the emphasis is on becoming skilled at using the various jewellery tools and techniques. The

technical exercises are aimed at developing goldsmithing skills, and usually culminate in objects that are straight or square or 'perfect' in a technical way.

When I was an undergraduate jewellery design student I continually clashed with my lecturers regarding their insistence on 'perfection'. I became aware of the hegemony of this quest for apparent flawlessness. I found it impeded playfulness and exploration and I therefore started gravitating towards a more natural and organic aesthetic. I began searching for ways to encourage apparent imperfection in my creative work. After a number of years, I feel I have acquired the mind-set and level of skills that allows me to work spontaneously and to acknowledge serendipity in its many guises.

My performance of the poem at SAERA followed this approach. I gave it some thought and established a general outline of what I would do, but then I performed it off the cuff and made things up as I progressed; I improvised, knowing that what was going to happen would turn out to be fine.



**Figure 11:** Copper plates, on either side of a silver plate, all with 'natural' edges

## DISCOVERIES AND CONCLUSION

It has become apparent to me that I have misjudged what constitutes a 'useful' visual journal. I

was under the impression that the visual journal (or reflective sketchbook) plays a crucial role in the creative design process. However, on examining the circumstances that surrounded the generation of my creative poetic performance, I realised that the idea for the poem was generated while I was seated in my office, surrounded by the various artefacts on my office walls, not from my visual journal. These artefacts included the mezzotints and patterned strips of rubber that the form of the poem and the nature of the performance was based on.

The types of material that played a role in the development of my creative practice were of an explicit, and of a tacit nature. The explicit materials included objects I had made and found, and digital images on my phone and computer. The tacit materials were memories, attitudes I had developed over a number of years, and proficiencies I had acquired through practice.

I have become aware that I do not reflect in my visual journal; I use it to capture ideas I have and plans I make. If there are reflections, they deal with pedagogical implications, not my creative work. I do, however, use my journal to facilitate discussions with colleagues and students.

When I examined my own creative process, I noticed I had relied on a visual journal only when I planned the shape of the poem for my poetic performance. The inspiration for the poem and its performance came from the collection of artefacts in my office/studio, and tacit knowledge that related to my technical skills, social life and aesthetic philosophy. I now realise it is not possible to capture all these sources of inspiration in a visual journal.

The visual journal I expect from my students does have a role to play, albeit a pedagogical role, not a creative role as such. In future, I would still require students to document their process and record sources of interest that might inspire and develop ideas, but the journal would primarily function as a prompt for conversations that reflect on their development as creative designers.

I made sense of my creative journaling practice in two ways; by doing it with my students in a manufactured situation and doing it by myself for myself. It was only after the second incident that the true nature of my creative journaling made itself manifest. During the initial journaling activity; the art exhibition and the associated expected journaling, I was focused on what the students were doing. After the second creative activity; the poetic performance, I examined my own creative process, and where the impetus came from, and realised the extent to which I did not rely on a visual journal. I examined my own propensity for visual journaling only when I wrote this article.

It was my interest in the border between my creative practice and the inherent pedagogic



implications in what I would unearth, that led to this back and forth gaze, or the shift between the ‘ethnographic *wide-angle lens*’ (Ellis and Bochner 2003, quoted in Mitchell 2016) and the inward look.

The influence of positionality manifested when my roles changed from director to performer (Mitchell 2016). My perception of what influences creative practice shifted when I changed from a co-producer/director for the art exhibition to a performer of a pattern poem at SAERA. In addition, this exploration raised issues regarding the journaling process when being creative, as well as the impact I have on the creative development of my students.

I therefore find myself responding to Mitchell’s (2016, 186) call to arms in ‘recognising the place of looking-inward stories in influencing the wide-angle lens’. I recognise the value of examining the nature of my own creative practice, and how it could influence the creative development of my students.

## NOTE

1. When blogging, one can add a tag/label to the post to categorise it. All the tags show as a cloud of words in the side bar of the blog, and the more often a specific tag is used, the larger the word representing that tag grows, showing the frequency of usage.
2. A mezzotint is a type of print that is produced by roughening a metal plate mechanically, then scraping and polishing the surface to reproduce areas of light and shade. It is then inked up and printed on to paper (see Figure 6).
3. I have coined these two terms to show the difference between the two selves that are manifesting. The *Guiding self* shows a denotative self and the *Seeking self* a connotative self. These terms are based on Riggins’ (1994) categories of ‘mapping’ and ‘referencing’ information.

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## Fourth interlude: Patterns?

My methodological development started with becoming aware of my inner voices. I knew I was sort of judging what I was seeing, but did not know how to 'formalise' this idea, how to give it more credence than just saying 'I analysed it'. This was brought home by the input from a journal editor in relation to the *Examining Aspects of Self* paper. Her comment made me think about what actually happening inside my head. It was only after I separated the selves and realised I was lumping similar bits of information together that I embraced the notion of coding... codifying, or as I said in one of my articles, 'clustering'.

For me this idea of clustering, or looking for patterns originated in discussions with a former colleague, Joan Connolly, who was an early influence in my autoethnographic journey. Joan said one does things and then looks for patterns. At that stage, I did not know what it meant. I did not know how to produce enough data to evoke/elicit patterns. I did not know what would constitute my data, and I also was not sure what a pattern would look like. I now realise there are, as in design, several types of patterns. Sometimes it is based on similarity between all the elements (as shown below), and at other times it is illustrated in how different bits fit into to each other, to the next one, as in a bracelet, where it is only one aspect of a link that fits into the next one, but it produces a chain, a flow. Similar to the poems I generated in the *Faceting the Crystal* paper; using alliteration to cause the flow...and establish the rapport.



Figure 4.0 - A photo taken in my studio of a number of rectangular pages and frames that serendipitously illustrates the emergence of a pattern due to their geometric similarity

## **Through the Jeweller's Loupe: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Relationship between my Creative and my Pedagogic Practice.**

I am a South African jewellery design lecturer and artist on an autoethnographic research journey with the intention of gaining an understanding of my creative design process from a cultural point of view. I want to harness this understanding to enable the creative development of my jewellery design students. I am not looking for definitive answers, but rather for questions and discoveries that could guide my continuing exploration. In this article, I provide an overview of changes in South African Higher Education since I started lecturing in 1988, and the impact it has had on my own pedagogical practice. I then summarise the autoethnographic research I have undertaken thus far in relation to my creative practice. I explain my view of creativity, as well as the way the objects that surround me are imbued with meaning. To examine the overlap between my creative and pedagogical practice, I analyse one of my objects and an accompanying poem by using an autoethnographic self-interview, thereby identifying a number of issues with which to engage.

Keywords: autoethnography, object inquiry, poetic inquiry, self-interview, creativity, design education.

### **Introduction and Background**

Under the Apartheid system, the white National Party (which ruled from 1948 to 1994 - I was born in 1958), divided South Africans into four racial groups: White, Coloured, Indian and African. This classification system discriminated between the different racial groups, and privileged the Whites. The education system reflected this bias, with spending per pupil in white schools being at least two and a half times that being spent on African pupils (Fiske & Ladd, 2005). This resulted in poor quality education for Africans (Fiske & Ladd, 2005). The

different racial groups each had their own universities, with access to the better-resourced universities being controlled by law and restricted to white students.

I have been lecturing at a university of technology since 1988. Initially, the student body was predominantly white, similar to me, and we shared a common educational background. When South Africa became a democracy in 1994 (and I had been teaching for six years), the restrictions on access to education were lifted and gradually more black students (this includes Indian, Coloured and African students) entered the institution where I was teaching. Over time, the composition of the student body has changed to the current enrolment of 90 percent black students, and I now appear to have much less in common with my students than before, in terms of our cultural backgrounds, languages and personal histories. It would therefore be prudent to become aware of and to ‘unveil hidden assumptions that may be framing [my pedagogic] practice’ (De F. Afonso & Taylor, 2009)

The students currently enrolled in Art and Design disciplines are mostly underprepared for tertiary education, in terms of the numeracy and literacy levels required for completing their studies successfully (Spaull, 2013). This is borne out by their National Benchmark Test scores, which shows that more than half of them are not adequately equipped to undertake university studies. Furthermore, very few of those enrolled have experienced any art or design education at secondary level. Research done by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, and the Department of Education, shows that most of the schools in South Africa were not in a position to offer Visual Arts as a subject choice, due to a lack of trained teachers and no infrastructure and resources to facilitate the offering of this subject. This led to a particularly small number of learners enrolling for Visual Arts, with only 1,7 percent of Grade 12 learners taking it as a subject in 2009 (Gaylard, 2010).

The problem does not lie just with the students though. The university, and tertiary education in general, is not equipped to cope with the diverse nature of the student body, as it



tends, due to a range of issues that lie beyond the scope of this article, to use a traditional, unitary approach to education. This prevents it from dealing effectively with the diversity of the student body (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007).

### ***Changes in the South African higher education landscape and the jewellery design programme***

Due to the pervasive lack of exposure to Visual Arts, the Jewellery Design programme devised its own set of entrance tests and questionnaires in determining the aptitudes of enrolling students. Information gleaned from these questionnaires shows that most of my students enrol in this programme under the impression they will make a lot of money from working with gold and diamonds. This is not very surprising to me, as this is also the impression I was under when I chose to study Jewellery Design nearly 40 years ago.

The emphasis within the Jewellery Design programme is shifting towards preparing the students for jobs, rather than future lives that might, or might not, include jewellery. Many of our current students come from poverty-stricken backgrounds and, quite predictably, their focus tends to be on becoming employed. On completion of their studies, virtually all enrol in a two-year internship with a jeweller, rather than taking up post-diploma studies where they could pursue their own interests and develop their identities as designers and artists.

Knowing that the students will be working in the industry has brought about, in the lecturers, a renewed focus on developing manufacturing skills. Initially, the perception within the programme was that the first three years of the diploma would be used to prepare the students for the joy of a creative fourth year. Now though, with most of the students leaving after three years, there is a re-examination of where and when creativity should be infused into the jewellery design programme. I have also begun to reconsider my own teaching and

its relationship to my creative practice as artist and jewellery designer. I sometimes feel overwhelmed by my teaching responsibilities and out of touch with my students.

### ***My previous research***

I have been examining aspects of my own creative practice with the intention of becoming a better design lecturer. Initially I was under the impression that meaning resided within objects and embarked on a journey to uncover the meaning inherent in my creatively produced jewellery and related artefacts. This started with a collaborative exhibition at a local art gallery. In an attempt to elicit the elusive meanings, I asked a colleague, and poet, to write some Haiku-type poetry I could use in conjunction with images of my work and publish as blogposts. However, instead of finding the essence I was looking for, I realised that, in my case, meaning is constructed and dependent on the context within which I interact with an object (De Beer, 2016a).

Having become aware of the need to engage more deliberately with my creative artefacts, I analysed an artwork I had exhibited at another exhibition, which aimed at promoting self-study. I analysed the work of art by conducting an autoethnographic self-interview (De Beer, 2016b); presenting myself with denotative prompts to which I provided connotative responses. ‘Autoethnographic self-interview’ is a term I have developed, which describes the internal dialogue when I explore my creative artefacts. The aim of this inner conversation is to uncover my memories and the various associations I have with these recollections when contemplating artefacts that I have produced or collected. I rely on Riggins's (1994) explanations to define the types of prompts and responses I give myself. When I regard one of my own objects, I find it difficult to control and separate the thoughts that surface in my mind, so I use denotative prompts, ones that Riggins refers to as ‘referencing’, to start the dialogue. These prompts focus on the ‘history, aesthetics or

customary uses of an object' (p. 109) and are quite superficial. However, they do act as points of entry that enable me to elicit significant memories and connotations, thereby revealing more personal relationships and connections. Riggins (1994, p. 109) refers to these connotative responses as 'mapping', as they show how the self is projected '...onto the world's map, its spatial spread so to speak'.

In this way, I was able to uncover deep-seated connections that allowed me to further examine my creative design process and recognise inherent pedagogical implications. I became aware of the way the creative process can deviate, how important it is to play within this process, that chance can make a significant contribution, and that it is possible to incorporate aspects of one's own experiences within the creative design process (De Beer, 2016b).

Subsequently, I staged an exhibition of jewellery with my students at a local art gallery, with the intention of examining the role that our visual and reflective journals play within the creative design process. I understood visual journals as sketchbooks in which one collects and creates inspirational material to use as references for the creative design process, and reflective journals as books (or blogs) where one documents and examines what happened during the process of producing creative work. I was quite convinced that regular journaling, in the form of blogposts, would contribute significantly to the creative process. During a recent conference of the South African Educational Research Association, I was involved in a Special Interest Group symposium on 'Reimagining Education through Poetic Inquiry'. Participants had to write and perform a poem that somehow reflected aspects of their pedagogic practice. I wrote a pattern poem that revealed aspects of the mezzotint process. To unravel the various autoethnographic threads that manifested in this performance, I conducted another self-interview. Amongst other things, I discovered that I draw on explicit

and tacit resources in my creative practice. The explicit resources include tangible materials and digital images; the tacit resources include memories, attitudes and proficiencies.

In the ensuing discussions with my students, and on examining the role that journaling played in my own creative practice, it became apparent that the journals had more value from a pedagogic point of view rather than necessarily encouraging creativity (De Beer, 2018). I became conscious that in my own creative practice, I relied more on the objects that surrounded me in my office/studio, than the journals I kept.

I then decided to examine the tacit resources mentioned above. I did this by selecting an object, one of my own artworks from my office/studio walls, which, I felt, embodied these tacit resources. It was an intuitive choice that needed further inquiry to explore what it represented. I responded to the feelings and memories that were revealed and wrote a poem consisting of four rhyming couplets; each couplet encapsulating an idea. On trying to analyse the ideas represented by each couplet, I found myself unable to progress. I realised that the issues represented by each stanza were too dense to express in words, so I decided to choose objects, from my studio, that best represented the complex connections expressed by each couplet. I then analysed each object by disentangling the various connections in a self-interview.

### ***My approach to creativity***

The notion of creativity that I want to focus on is the type of everyday creativity that enriches our lives, the type that allows us to engage fruitfully with life as we encounter it, without the pre-requisite of having to grasp it fully before taking further action, i.e. the ability to improvise (Coleman, 2015). This correlates with Robinson's idea that creativity is 'the process of having original ideas that are of value' (RSA Animate 2010, 07:45). It can be compared to Kaufman and Beghetto's definition of mini-c creativity, which they describe as

‘the novel and *personally meaningful* interpretation of experiences, actions and events’ (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009, p. 3, my emphasis) and stress the developmental aspect of this approach. It is an idea that I have considered before, when I searched for a way to ‘explore seemingly insignificant, but personal, everyday experiences that can be used as a resource in the creative design process’ (De Beer 2016b, 97). In addition, it is what enables us to discern aesthetic qualities within our daily lives. This is similar to Eisner’s (2004) and Read’s (1961) emphases on artistic ways of being, and how to educate for its development.

I find it extremely difficult to get my students to ‘relax’ into being creative and I wanted to explore the factors that contribute to this obstruction. I have noticed how students tend to approach their creative work in the same frame of mind as when they approach tasks that require no creativity; with a lack of playfulness and very little curiosity. I would like them to have a more receptive frame of mind, one that is open to recognising possibilities and alternatives, including serendipity. This does require a deliberate, temporary suspension of judgement and an ability to switch to convergent thinking when it is required, such as when one has to select from many generated ideas, for implementation.

## **Methodology**

### ***Object poetic inquiry***

I have come to recognise the objects that surround me as nodes through which I can access an underlying network of connections. According to Graham (1989, p. 98), nodal moments are situated ‘somewhere beyond a moment of crisis or a set of experiences which approximates the same function as a crisis’, and it is the juncture at which one becomes aware that the course of one’s life has ‘connecting lines that were previously hidden’. Each of the objects I engaged with embodies multiple engagements with ideas and experiences and is a text that consists of multiple, interwoven stories. Mitchell (2017) and Turkle (2007) confirm that an



object can have different, and differing, meanings depending on the perspective from which it is perceived or approached and one can think through things; use them to make sense of your world.

### ***Autoethnographic self-interview and multivocality***

I see autoethnography as a way to understand one's situation through an examination of personal responses within a specific, cultural context. I develop a greater understanding of the various connections that intersect in the objects that surround me, by having a type of conversation with myself when I inspect the objects. These 'conversations' take the form of a semi-structured self-interview, which is a method I have used before to examine the links between my creative and my pedagogic practice through one of my artworks (De Beer, 2016b) and 'involves dialogue between [my] past and present selves' (Anderson and Glass-Coffin 2013, p. 69). Mizzi (2010) refers to this inner dialogue between different selves as 'multivocality'. He compiled a narrative, which shows a conversation between his various selves, so he could gain a better understanding of the tensions that exist within himself.

I consider selected objects and generate a set of denotative prompts (guides) that enable my more subjective and past self to respond connotatively. In this way, I can bring underlying connections to the surface that would allow me to search for patterns and recurring themes.

### ***Analysis***

As Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) state, the aim of autoethnography is not to seek finality and closure; it is to gain understanding and insight within a context so that I can 'better understand who [I am], why [I] act in the way [I] do, and how [I] might act differently in the future' (Lake, 2015). I arrive at the insights through looking at the stories I can tell from my current perspective; by exploring my objects to reveal the connections that then elicit connotations, which result in the stories. When I then examine my stories, I can discern

recurring themes that hint at areas to explore. In the explorations, I then discover and make more meaning.

The nature of my autoethnographic inquiry reveals, and produces - through reflexivity, the multiple layers and facets of myself. It is not possible to use a traditional positivist approach and criteria to judge the validity of these experiences, and of this composite text. What could work is the notion of 'crystallisation', as advocated by Richardson (2000) , which, instead of establishing a fixed point of truth, allows for a combination of 'symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach', which provide us with 'a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic' (p. 13). This reflects the open-endedness of my autoethnographic approach and the accompanying sense of agency.

To enhance the trustworthiness of my research, I make the various steps I took visible and link the insights to my creative and pedagogical practice, as suggested by Adams (2017). I show the choices I made and the range of interpretations and conclusions I came to, emphasising that these are subjective selections from a range of choices. I show an overview of the process (Fig 1); starting with the initial print on the left and the conclusions on the right. It shows the divergent and convergent nature of the exploration.














INITIAL IMAGE AND POETIC RESPONSE	OBJECT RESPONSE	ANALYSIS OF OBJECT	CLUSTERING OF THEMES	CONCLUSIONS/ REALISATIONS
 <p>I don't know what you see but I capture that you're thinking I can't feel what you feel but I sense there's some linking inside it - inside, outwardly, what between me and you and because it's there doesn't mean it's that</p>	<p>Coin</p> 			<p>Get to know my students</p> <p>Get to know myself/relax/I am tired</p> <p>Find out how to deal with diverse students (heterogeneity?)</p>
	<p>Pictorial</p> 			<p>Encourage divergent thinking</p> <p>Encourage the development of interests</p> <p>Engage with the students to find out how they see the world</p>
	<p>Journal</p> 			<p>Interact more with my colleagues regarding the syllabus</p> <p>Relax (give credit to the students and myself) and reflect</p>
	<p>Rubber</p> 			<p>I should become more tolerant (seek first to understand)</p> <p>I should 'make' and 'play' more</p> <p>Engage with colleagues (re assessment?)</p> <p>Create space for divergent thinking to develop</p>

Figure 1- A snapshot of the analysis

## **Objects on my office/studio walls / the poetic portrait response**

My creative and pedagogic lives are intertwined, which results in my office also being my studio. This entanglement (Fig 2) is visible in the objects and artworks pinned on the walls; ranging from finished artworks, to prototypes, to raw materials, to visual references and found objects.



Figure 2 - My office/studio

To examine the tacit aspects of my creative design process, I decided to analyse one of my own artworks, hoping to access the deeper connections and significances embodied in this object. I selected an artwork, on my office/studio wall, which I had produced for a curated exhibition. It was an intuitive choice, where I selected an object that caught my eye, as it felt as if it was at the intersection of several significant ideas, memories and emotions. I decided to respond poetically to the prompts that arose when I contemplated the print and it resulted in this poem (Fig 3).



I don't know what you see  
But I can hear that you're thinking

I can't feel what you feel  
But I sense there's some sinking

much is unsaid, unheard, unfelt  
between me and you

Just because it rhymes  
doesn't mean its true

Figure 3 - The print with the poem

This object poetic response was discussed in a self-reflexive research support group, where I explained my intentions and the group, as critical friends, allowed me to gain further insight into what I was trying to say and offered their own perspectives and insights. As Samaras (2011) explains, critical friends are trusted colleagues and peers that comment on and support each other's research.

When I studied the transcript of our conversation, I realised I was not able to convey verbally the subtleties expressed in the poem. I decided to choose an object that would represent each couplet and to examine the connections and significances within each object, by having an autoethnographic self-interview, as I had done before with other objects (De Beer, 2016b).

For the first couplet, I selected 'The Cameo print' (Fig 4), for the second 'Plectanthra' (Fig 5), the third couplet, I felt, was represented by 'Jasmyn' (Fig 6), and the fourth by 'Rubber' (Fig 7).



For the first three objects, I (as observer/interviewer-self) wrote down the denotative prompts derived from the first things that came to mind; usually what I saw or knew quite readily. I then spent some time, as reflective/responding-self, elaborating on the prompts and uncovering the various connections that became apparent. With the fourth object, the piece of carved rubber, I wrote a type of refrain using the sentence 'Just because it's (a) doesn't mean it's (b)', inserting the first word, (a), as a denotative prompt, which then allowed (b), the connotative response, to manifest.

I reflected on the connotative responses and made a note of the most significant insight I had for each prompt. I then clustered these insights according to themes I identified, culminating in a number of discoveries/realisations.

Below is an image of each object, with the denotative prompts and selected connotative responses. Due to space constraints, I will only discuss three of the object responses.

## *The Cameo Print*



Figure 4 - The Cameo print

*'I don't know what you see*

*But I can hear that you're thinking'*

The print is part of a range titled 'Medals for women'. It is an embossing, on handmade cotton paper, which uses a profile of a traditional cameo, cut out from a squarish piece of copper plate, as well as the piece of plate from which the decorative top of the medal pin was cut from. It has a saying at the bottom, which I added afterwards, using a manual typewriter. To start analysing/ excavating the object for deeper significances (to reveal underlying connections), I noted a number of denotative prompts, based on the appearance and the immediate recollections I had regarding the object.

These were:

- The deckle edge
- A 'crown' on top
- Pieces making a picture
- Perfect profile underneath
- Saying underneath (discussed below)
- Gecko poo (discussed below)
- Curled edges

Using these prompts as guidelines, I documented the connotations that surfaced. At a later stage, I examined these connotative responses to ascertain underlying themes that might emerge. Below, I show two examples of the prompts and responses, and list the themes that emerged for this object.

### *Saying underneath*

Translated, it means 'broken into smithereens'. In Afrikaans (my mother tongue), it could also mean 'delicate and in tatters'. I typed this with a manual typewriter (*to infuse with authenticity?*)

It does capture what I was trying to convey originally, and now, looking at it again, I find myself wanting to be scathing and critical. I wanted to point out that I am imposing meaning and that I do not have to, but then I realise that I feel compelled to be critical (as if that is my role as educator), meaning I have to break it down.

I recognise that I am automatically critical of what my students do, instead of being receptive, supportive, and open. I also recognise that I have this inclination to label and summarise what is going on, which does not encourage divergent thinking.

### *Gecko poo*

This print is kept in a vase underneath a place where geckos live, so it is inevitable some poo will fall on it.

Once again, I was going to be denigrating about how it is being neglected and ignored and 'stuffed' in a vase. Actually, the print is on hand and kept with another that deals with the same subject matter, so the poo is part of the story, if I want to look at it that way. I can choose to look at it more positively.

I suppose it is inevitable that the environment should make an imprint on what happens in the classroom... and that is ok; it indicates interaction between the real world and the classroom, and invites serendipity.

The main themes, from these exposed connotations, indicate I should become more aware of what exactly my role as educator should be, and of the diversity within my students, and find out how to deal with it. *Is that not my role as educator? 'How to deal with it' probably refers to how I (get them to) integrate the outside world within theirs, and allow them to do it at their pace (or just slightly beyond? - which means I need to know what their pace is, i.e. get to know them better).*

## *Plectanthra*

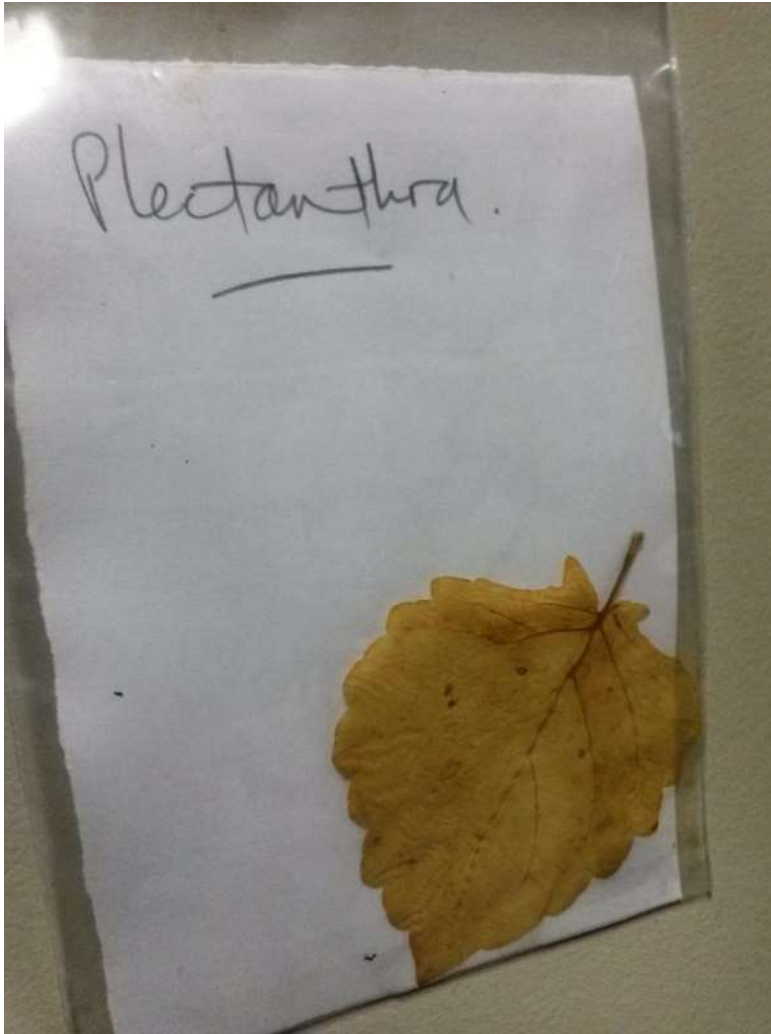


Figure 5 - The plectanthrus leaf

*'I can't feel what you feel*

*But I sense there's some sinking...'*

It could be because of the obvious sagging in the corner that I chose this object to represent the couplet above. It is the leaf of a plectanthrus in a plastic packet with the word 'Plectanthra' written on the paper behind it. It has been on my studio wall for about three years now.

The initial prompts I noted are:



- Unused/waiting
- Superhero name? (discussed below)
- Past expectation
- Trying not to forget
- It is indigenous (discussed below)
- a momentary engagement made into a big thing?
- Related to kiepersol - voluptuous vessel

### *Superhero name?*

Plectanthra sounded like Electra, or a type of dinosaur. My sons had a great time memorising the names of dinosaurs, as did I. I still remember brontosaurus and triceratops. I associated the name with a Greek sort of name that could be used for a female superhero. It had feminine connotations to me, at that stage, a voluptuous vessel with a sort of sharp end at the bottom and lips at the top, that swallowed or allowed things to enter, and filling up. Similar to the kiepersol (Cussonia) leaf I had a fascination with at that time.

This response highlighted a significant degree of divergent thinking, founded on a wide variety of personal experiences. It shows that visual and tacit aspects could be drawn on to practice creative thinking, should one consider divergent thinking as playing a substantial role in the creative process.

### *It is indigenous*

There is something special about the leaf, but then, if I cared to dig deeper into any other leaf I would also find special things there. I think the thing is to dig just a little bit deeper, to engage and not gloss over. But then... why choose one and not the other? I suppose everybody will have their own reasons for choosing something. By increasing exposure to more things, the choice increases and the selection, possibly, is more informed.

An important realisation in this case is that I should probably allow my students to choose subject matter, or an approach to it, that they are interested in, to work with.

The main themes I extracted, when contemplating all my responses to the Plectanthra prompts, are: the importance of divergent thinking, the desirability of a wide range of interests, and that I should get to know my students better.

## *Jasmyn*



Figure 6 - The 'Jasmyn' embossed steel plate

*'Much is unsaid, unheard, unfelt,*

*Between me and you'*

This is an embossing depicting the leaves of the Jasmine plant on a piece of recycled cool drink can. This Jasmine grows next to our bathroom, outside the house. I found a can with my name on it and then wanted to see how I could use it. I annealed the steel (softened with heat, hence the burnt look), cut the leaf shape from some brass plate, embossed it onto the piece of burnt steel and wrote the date, in roman numerals, in the corner.

I will not discuss it here, due to space constraints.

## *Rubber*



Figure 7 - Carved Whitewall rubber tyre strip

*'Just because it rhymes*

*Doesn't mean it's true'*

This is a piece of carved rubber tyre. It is a leftover from the sandal-making process employed by local, traditional, Zulu sandal-makers. They cut straps from the sides of whitewall tyres, onto which they then carve black and white patterns. It is quite difficult to obtain these straps, as they are made from recycled tyres and there is a big demand for this material in Durban. I feel it is a material that could be used to advance the development of a unique South African jewellery idiom. I have collaborated with traditional sandal-makers in the production of such jewellery, but my students do not seem to engage with the possibilities of the medium.

I wrote a type of refrain using the sentence 'Just because it's (a) doesn't mean it's (b)', inserting the first word (a) as a denotative prompt, which then allowed (b) the connotative response, to manifest. It was as if I had a one-sentence interview each time. Below are a number of refrains to illustrate the first stage. These are only some of them, arranged to form an interesting pattern; from short to long and back again.

Just because a Zulu made it doesn't mean it is good  
Just because it is rubber doesn't mean it will last forever  
Just because it is mine doesn't mean I should hang on to it  
Just because it is black and white doesn't mean it is colourless  
Just because it is pliable doesn't mean it should be used for a bracelet  
Just because it seems obvious doesn't mean I shouldn't dig deeper  
Just because it is a reference doesn't mean I have to use it  
Just because it is indigenous doesn't mean it is amazing  
Just because it looks interesting doesn't mean it is  
Just because I found it doesn't mean it is mine

Three significant refrains, with their connotations, are below.

*Just because it seems obvious doesn't mean I shouldn't dig deeper*

I assume that other people are like me and have the same connotations (connections). They [might] have the same propensity for connections, but not the same connections.

What are my students' connections?

*Just because it looks interesting doesn't mean it is*

I tend to go on a bit when my interest is piqued. Rather find out what others think about it,

and let others bring things they think are interesting, for discussion.

Allow the students more space to participate and initiate discussions.

*Just because I found it doesn't mean it is mine*

I tend to collect influences (in the form of objects) and then hoard them, as if just having the thing is good enough, or a guarantee of some sort of success...

I need to make more creative things using what I've collected.

Some important themes that emerged from this exercise emphasise the need for me to become more open-minded, thereby allowing space for the students to develop and share their interests (heterogeneity) and that I should continue with my own creative practice and not let it lapse.

## **Discoveries and Implications**

Thus far, I have used a few significant prompts to illustrate the process and reveal some of the discoveries.

The three most important issues I have uncovered are:

- I need to increase my awareness of what constitutes the diversity of my students, so that I can encourage/allow divergent thinking to manifest.
- To make this space available within the curriculum will necessitate discussions and negotiations with my colleagues.
- I need to maintain my own creative practice, so that there is common ground with my students, and to energise me.

This exploration has made me aware of two areas I could usefully interrogate (i.e. two questions to guide me), to begin with.



### ***Divergent thinking***

To be creative requires both convergent and divergent thinking (Lawson, 2006). In my experience, the current education system seems to focus on convergent thinking, at the expense of divergent thinking abilities. Divergent thinking encompasses a range of thinking skills, including intuitive and generative abilities (Bailin, 2015). However, being creative does not solely depend on thinking skills, it is also affected by the kind of person one is (Bailin, 2015) and as educator and care-giver, I can play a substantial role in fostering the personal qualities required for the development of creativity. Two of the ways I can do this, is to allow more time for making mistakes (Adams, 2014) and to address the metacognitive skills of my students (Hargrove & Rice, 2015).

### ***Heterogeneity***

This is the encouragement of difference. It is where one would allow the unique personalities of the students to manifest in the work they do. It will permit them to learn from what they encounter in the classroom and make it their own. It is not possible to teach all the students in one class the same thing. Each one will take from the class/lesson/workshop what they require or are ready for. It does mean that the lesson then has to be presented in a way that allows for such idiosyncratic absorption. It would also require a space/time for such absorption or reflection to take place. Should heterogeneity be combined with divergent thinking, it could encourage 'productive idiosyncrasy' (Eisner, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

This exercise has opened my eyes to the significances that can be drawn from objects and the way that meaning is linked to the context within which an object is perceived or interacted with; the way an object is a text, consisting of many interwoven stories that can be

unravelling, provided one finds a way in. To gain entry I propose the denotative/connotative approach, particularly for educators that make things. This could offer a useful way to access the significances of their world; thinking through and with objects/things.

I realise that my process exemplifies the type of thinking I would like my students to have. I systematically alternated between divergent and convergent thinking, and through reflexivity, found myself making unexpected but useful discoveries.

I now recognise the need to be conscious of the thinking skills that contribute to the ability to diverge, and the environmental factors that could have an impact on this receptive frame of mind within the studio. I have become mindful of the need to familiarise myself with the diversity of my students, and explore how to leverage this heterogeneity for the development of their creative potential.

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## Fifth interlude: Curiosity?

I have become more accepting of, what seems to be, my 'procrastination'.

I realise that this delay in action often occurs because I do not have enough information, or have too much and I do not know what to focus on. I now allow more time for matters to resolve, or would like to think that I am doing this (I still struggle with this). I feel as if I am in the middle of changing, reverting back to what I was as an undergraduate student, when I would be busy with lots of things at the same time, curiously playing within my environment (see below). For some reason I started seeing this as frivolous, thinking I should be busy with something more 'meaningful'.



*Figure 5.0 - My office/studio walls could be seen as me 'curiously playing within my environment'. It shows, amongst many other things, tree bark that looks like paper, a twirly section of tool steel, tags for labelling, glass beads used for Zulu bead work, samples of Ilala palm basketry, colourful embroidery cotton, heat-shrink plastic used to package Castle milk stout, and a Zulu headdress made from Impala skin.*



# **Faceting the crystal: An autoethnographic exploration of creative practice from a jeweller's workbench**

**Christiaan Thomas Johannes de Beer**

**Durban University of Technology and University of KwaZulu-Natal**

## **Abstract**

This autoethnography explores the overlap between my creative and my pedagogic practices as a jewellery design lecturer at a University of Technology in South Africa. I wanted to gain a better understanding of my own creative processes, so I could facilitate the creative development of my students. Using a small-c definition of creativity, and regarding objects as three-dimensional nodal moments, I employed an autoethnographic self-interview to analyse artworks I had submitted to an exhibition. As a result, I realised I have underestimated the role life experience plays within the creative process, and that I could place a bigger emphasis on informal learning. In addition, the autoethnographic self-interview, serendipitously, took me on an inward journey that revealed other facets of myself, concealed by rational, discursive conventions.

Keywords autoethnography, self-interview, creative practice, design education, jewellery design, informal learning

## **Introduction**

I have lectured Jewellery Design at a University of Technology in South Africa for nearly 30 years now. Looking back, I can see how, over the years, I have gradually adjusted my teaching practice to suit the changing needs of the industry, the university and the students. I have become aware of the need to make more deliberate adjustments, as the changes happening around me are more complex than I realised and I feel out of touch with my students. To gain a better understanding of my own creative practice and the intersection with my pedagogic practice, I have undertaken an autoethnographic exploration of my identity as creative artist and designer, and as university educator. I wish to gain a better understanding of my creative design process from a cultural perspective, to see how it flows from and into my daily life experiences. I aim to use the insights I gain, to facilitate the development of my students' creativities. The methodological goal of this autoethnographic

quest is to expose areas I can usefully explore, and to demonstrate and reflect on the method I have developed to assist with this exploration.

In this article, I begin by providing an overview of the changes that have taken place within my programme and the impact these have had on the prescribed and experienced curriculum. Next, I discuss my previous autoethnographic research, showing the various aspects of the creative design process I have investigated, and the realisations I have had along the way. I explain how I have come to see creativity and how I approach objects as nodes of meaning. Thereafter, I show how I conducted an autoethnographic self-interview regarding the latest exhibition I participated in; highlighting some of the realisations I have come to, regarding my creative design process and related implications for my pedagogic practice. I also offer my methodological realisations.

## **Developments within the Jewellery Design programme**

The composition of the student body has changed dramatically since I started lecturing in 1988. This was just before South Africa became a democracy, and virtually all my students were, like me, classified as White under the apartheid system of racial classification and segregation. Due to the control the National Party government exerted over the education system, access to the better-resourced universities was restricted, by law, to White students (Fiske & Ladd, 2005). When the African National Congress (ANC) came into power in 1994 these restrictions were lifted and gradually more non-white students enrolled. Currently, 90 percent of my students are non-white, the majority being Black African students. The commonalities we share are not as evident as before, and part of my ongoing autoethnographic inquiry aims to uncover the less obvious points of connection, which could influence my pedagogic practice. For instance, being of Afrikaans descent, English, which is the medium of instruction at my university, is my second language. Likewise, for many of my

students, their mother tongue is not English. This could have bearing on the vocabularies we employ, and could emphasise the value of a more multilingual approach to teaching and learning.

A further complication, regarding my students' preparedness for tertiary Art and Design education, is that the majority did not do Visual Art or Design as a subject at school. I empathise with this shortcoming, as my own exposure to Art at school was rather lacking. I only did Art as a subject up to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and then did not continue; due the limited subject combinations we were allowed. Visual Art is not offered at most South African schools, due to a lack of suitably qualified teachers and a shortage of the necessary resources (Gaylard, 2010). In addition, the university is, mostly, grappling with how to deal with the diversity of the student body, as it approaches education, for a number of reasons that cannot be dealt with here, from a traditional, unitary point of view (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007).

The Jewellery Design programme utilises questionnaires and a set of entrance tests to provide more information regarding the aptitude of the students selected for the course. From these questionnaires, it became clear that the majority of students that apply do so because of the imagined financial rewards of working with gold and diamonds. I was under a similar impression when I came to study Jewellery design, nearly 40 years ago. I changed my focus once I completed my course, but I now find most of my students go into the commercial jewellery industry on completion of their three-year diploma. A number of my students come from poverty-stricken backgrounds and are not interested in completing a fourth year as a graduate student (Bachelor of Technology [B. Tech]), as they are under pressure from their families to start earning money and contribute to the running of the households as soon as possible. The emphasis within the programme used to be on the B. Tech. It was what the students were prepared for during the preceding three years. They were taught practical skills so that they could explore and be creative and find an area that they wished to pursue during

the fourth year. This has now changed and I have to reconsider the lack of emphasis on the creative aspects of the three-year diploma. I feel I need to prepare my students for life beyond the jewellery industry and to lead fulfilled lives whether they choose to continue making jewellery or not. This realisation has prompted me to re-examine my pedagogic practice and the relationship to my own creative practice. I wish to re-connect with my students and to alleviate my feelings of being engulfed by change.

## **My previous research**

I have spent the last few years examining various characteristics of my creative practice. The aspects I have examined so far concern: where meaning resides (de Beer, 2016a), factors that impact on and facilitate the creative process (de Beer, 2016b), and the role of visual and reflective journals within the creative process (de Beer, 2018). My autoethnographic research is done by inquiring into the work I do for exhibitions I stage or participate in. These exhibitions are usually group exhibitions in art galleries, for which I make jewellery and related art works, such as prints or objet d'art, which are subsequently offered for sale. The works I produce are not similar to the jewellery offered in commercial jewellery stores; they are more like vehicles for artistic self-expression and exploration. My autoethnographic inquiries are therefore a series of consecutive explorations; each one with a slight shift in focus, as my understanding of my creative process and the pedagogical implications that are uncovered, widens and deepens. A particular method of exploration I am developing to assist with this inquiry is, what Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) call, an autoethnographic self-interview. My approach to the autoethnographic self-interview is discussed in more detail under Methodology.

## The search for meaning

The first exhibition I explored in my research was titled ‘Phenomenal Engagement’. It was done in collaboration with my partner, Marlene de Beer, who is also a Jewellery Design lecturer. A significant part of this exhibition consisted of arrangements of objects we had made, called ‘Conversations’. These consisted of test pieces and prototypes juxtaposed to trigger associations between them, as shown in Figure 1. It shows Marlene’s ceramic cameo lying beneath a section of cut-out motherboard containing a silver dove, below a titanium wire dragonfly brooch, all on top of ruled accounting paper.

At the time, although I was struck by how rich and significant the work was, I did not realise that it was significant *to me*. I was convinced that the meaning, the essence, was locked inside the objects we had made and could be pried loose and exposed by other means. In an attempt to identify this perceived essence, I asked Marí Peté, a poet who is also a colleague, to write some haiku-type poetry that would capture this essence. However, I was quite taken aback when most of the poems did not resonate with me. They were quite striking, just not what I thought they would be, as if Marí was seeing things differently to me. The poems can be seen on the blog we created for this exercise, at <https://phenomenalengagement.blogspot.co.za/search/label/haiga>.

Marí and I wrote a collaborative paper about the poetic encounter for a conference and, with her consent, I adapted the paper to serve as a book chapter (de Beer, 2016a). The chapter consisted of a discussion of the exhibition, the process of preparing for the exhibition, the relationship between the exhibition and my pedagogy, and a description and discussion regarding the work. I reflected on what I had written and inserted the reflections in text boxes at the appropriate place in the text. In some cases, I had meta-reflections, which I inserted in boxes inside the appropriate text boxes (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 - A Conversation and nested text boxes

Subsequently, I examined all the reflections and meta-reflections and arrived at a new understanding of myself, and of my creative practice. Through my autoethnographic inquiry, I came to realise that, instead of finding the essence I was looking for, in my case, meaning is constructed and dependent on the context within which I interact with an object (de Beer, 2016a). This became clearer to me when I discussed what I thought were the most significant *Conversations* with Marlene, and she did not regard the ones I had chosen as particularly significant. This made me realise that context plays a role in the generation of meaning. I saw



that there were many unknowns within me and that I was busy with a superficial search for answers to the dilemma of being creative and wishing to encourage creativity in my students. It became apparent that I needed to do more exploration into my creative practice and of the factors that play a role in the creative process, and I saw that objects could play a more important role in conversations with and between my students.

### **The autoethnographic self-interview**

After writing the book chapter, I realised I could examine the objects in my office, a space that also acts as a studio and workshop (see Figure 2), for a better understanding of my creative practice.



*Figure 2 - My office/studio/workshop*

I thought a careful cataloguing of the various items on my walls would reveal patterns that would enlighten me regarding their reasons for being there; of their significances. However, I became immobilised in the quagmire of objects and realised I had to simplify my search. I decided to focus on two objects I had exhibited as part of a group exhibition called 'The Inward I', and started exploring them.

I jotted down some initial, superficial key points regarding each object, then noted my recollections; the connotations that surfaced when I followed each prompt into my memory, revealing the connections that existed there. There was no judging, just a free flow of memories. When I had completed these reminiscences, and reflected on my frames of mind during this exercise, I realised I had adopted two different personae; one that engaged superficially and provided prompts for the other to respond to, and the other, more engaging, storytelling self. I realised I had conducted, what Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) call, an autoethnographic self-interview.

On analysing what surfaced through this autoethnographic self-interview, I realised I should be aware of the non-linear path the creative process follows, the value of play when facilitating creative behaviour, the importance of serendipity within the creative design process, and that it is possible, even desirable, to integrate personal experiences into this process (de Beer, 2016b).

### **The creative design journal**

I subsequently decided to examine the role and need for a journal within the creative design process. I participated with my students in an exhibition, with the understanding we would all keep a journal and discuss the role it played in the production of the ranges of jewellery we exhibited. The journal was loosely defined as a book (or blog) for collecting visual references, which could act as inspiration for the creative design process, and a place to document reflections. I was planning to use this exercise as the focus for a conference presentation, but, as it transpired, the students did not journal much and I realised we did not have a common understanding of the type of journaling required, nor its exact purpose. I presented this learning at a recent South African Educational Research Association conference.

At the same conference, I participated in a Special Interest Group symposium that focused on “Reimagining Education through Poetic Inquiry”. I presented a pattern poem that focused on the mezzotint printmaking process and revealed comparisons that could be drawn with my pedagogic practice. I decided to investigate this poetic performance to deepen my understanding of the relationship between my creative practice and my pedagogy. When I tried to identify the various connections that manifested in this performance, I found myself in a tangle. I decided to ‘unravel the threads’ and realised I could employ the autoethnographic self-interview process to untangle the threads. As a result of this self-interview, I arrived at significant realisations regarding the tacit and explicit resources I utilise in my creative practice. The most important understanding that emerged was that my visual journal consisted of the objects that surrounded me in my office/studio. I realised that I need to define the notion of journaling more carefully, and re-examine how I expect my students to use journals (de Beer, forthcoming).

### **The poetic object**

The monthly research support group I attend completes writing tasks that assist with our investigations. A recent task was to bring an object and a short piece of writing to show where we are on our research journey. We had to limit our presentations to three minutes each. I remembered about the task the day before it was due and this meant I made an intuitive choice from the objects on the wall in front of me and limited the writing to a short poem, consisting of four rhyming couplets (see Figure 3). I presented my object and the poem to the group and, based on the ensuing discussion, realised I was not conveying my situation adequately. I decided to analyse the poem in more depth to obtain a better understanding of the state of affairs.

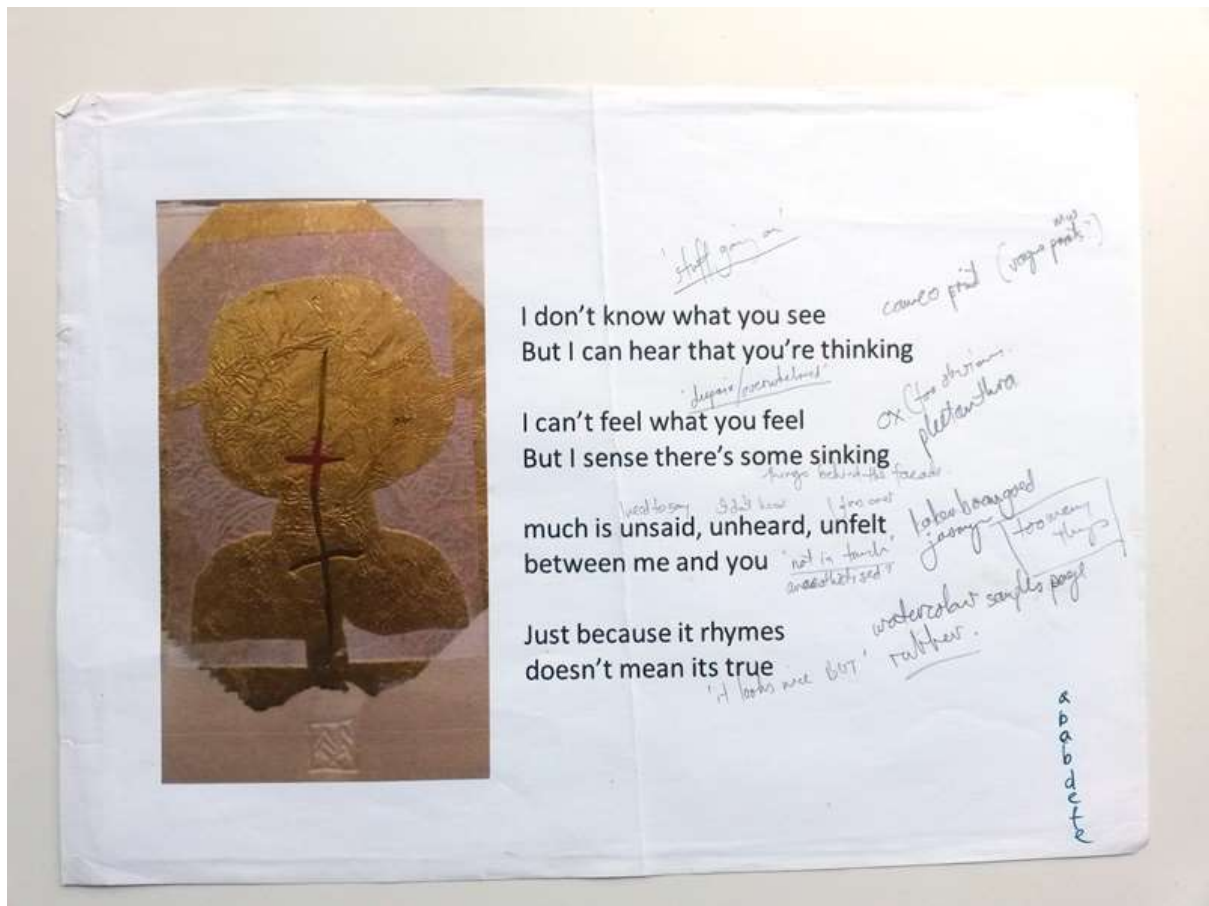


Figure 3 - The Autoethnographic poem with handwritten notes

After several attempts that did not lead anywhere significant, I decided to choose an object from my office wall to represent each couplet, and proceeded to analyse the objects for significances. I employed a similar autoethnographic self-interview process as before and in the process, deepened my understanding of the relationship between my pedagogy and my creative practice. This resulted in three key realisations. First, it became apparent I should maintain my own creative practice, as it would invigorate me and assist with establishing a shared understanding of the creative process. Second, I realised the need to increase my understanding of what constitutes the diversity of my students, as I would consequently, be in a better position to encourage divergent thinking: a key cognitive skill that supports creativity. Third, I became aware that such a change of emphasis within the Jewellery Design programme would necessitate discussions with my colleagues regarding the syllabus.

## Understanding Creativity

Because of my autoethnographic journey thus far, I have adjusted my expectations of what constitutes creative behaviour from my students. I now focus on everyday creativity, also known as little-c creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009), rather than the big-C type of creativity associated with significant cultural achievements, such as Picasso's development of a new artistic paradigm, or Beethoven's musical contributions. I now aim to encourage creative behaviour significant to the students in their personal capacity. Ken Robinson has a plain definition of creativity, which I find useful. He says it is the ability to 'produce original ideas that are of value' (RSA\_Animate, 2010) and I emphasise the need for the idea to be original from the students' point of view, and that it be useful to the students within their personal context. This type of creativity could allow the students to lead lives that are more fruitful and enable them to improvise when they encounter the conundrums of design and of daily life (Coleman, 2015).

This does imply that I am, at that point, not in a position to judge the degree of creative behaviour and I can probably only ascertain the extent to which a student is creative, by encouraging reflection from the student and engaging in conversations regarding this idea. To determine their engagement with the creative act, I could look for the twinkle in their eyes, the 'shiny eyes' as Benjamin Zander (2008) said, when explaining how he knew he had reached the audience, or for the detached engagement that Csikszentmihalyi (2004) asserts, could indicate them as being in a state of 'flow'.

This type of creativity is influenced by an environment that does not condemn mistakes (Adams, 2014) and encourages the making of novel and significant connections in the quest for leading a personally meaningful life (Coleman, 2015). In previous research regarding my own creativity (de Beer, 2016b), I discovered that I often rely on serendipity, also called

accidental discovery (Race & Makri, 2016), and divergent thinking to generate these novel and significant connections.

## **Methodology**

### **The (art)object as knowledge**

Based on Polanyi's idea (as cited in Eisner, 2008, p. 5) that "we know more than we can tell", Eisner (2008) emphasises that knowledge takes many forms and is created in a variety of ways. He acknowledges that art is a form of knowledge that expresses and conveys, as Langer (as cited in Eisner, 2008) puts it "feelings which the artist knows" (p. 7). Eisner then urges us, as artists, to "try telling what we know with anything that will carry the message forward" (p. 9), as it is not possible to do so with rational, discursive language.

Knowles and Cole (2008) expand the definition of knowledge to be more than propositional, stating that knowledge is made "through kitchen table conversations" (p. 59) and, amongst other examples, when one encounters an evocative object, such as a photo. I realise that the art objects I encounter, that I examine, are such evocative objects.

I see my objects as visible and tangible representations of, what Graham (1989, p. 98) refers to as, "nodal moments", as these objects are the culmination of, and entangle, a number of experiences. The autoethnographic self-interview allows me access to the connections between the various interconnected experiences, enabling me to discern, in retrospect, patterns that allow me to make sense of my situation. In a way, it enables me to untangle the connections.

The objects I create sometimes convey an explicit message, such as the "past the sell-by date" brooches in Figure 6. However, more often than not, my artworks are done as playful explorations into materials and techniques, with an underlying intention that cannot be



expressed in ordinary discourse, and is not always clear to me. I have discovered how I can, through the autoethnographic self-interview, become aware of the various feelings and emotions connected to the object. The knowledge “contained” in the object becomes available for reflection.

### **The autoethnographic self-interview refined**

My autoethnographic self-interview technique has undergone a number of changes and enhancements. The interview process is based on the idea of multivocality, the concept of having several different selves in conversation with each other, as expounded by Mizzi (2010) and based on Anderson and Glass-Coffin’s (2013) notion of the present and past selves being in conversation with each other during an autoethnographic exploration. I use denotative prompts to elicit connotative replies, which correlates with Riggins’ (1994) notions of “referencing” and “mapping”. “Referencing”, i.e. the denotative prompts, would refer to information that concerns the appearance and cursory history of an object, whereas “mapping”, i.e. the connotative responses, points to the way these references allow stories about the objects to materialise, thereby “projecting its history onto the world’s map” (p. 109). On the one hand, I am the interviewer and on the other an informant, having what Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) call an autoethnographic self-interview.

My awareness of the different selves started as reflections and meta-reflections in nested text boxes (see Figure 1) I examined for significant insights (de Beer, 2016a). I next progressed to jotting down things that came to mind while examining an object (de Beer, 2016b). These “things” were memories and immediately apparent denotative observations. I would, as a consequence, write stories/narratives prompted by the connotations I had uncovered and explore the stories for realisations about myself that could have significant implications for my creative and pedagogic practice.

The denotative/connotative nature of my autoethnographic self-interview became much more deliberate when I realised I was “unravelling the threads”, following the poetic performance at the Special Interest Group. I became aware of the interconnectedness of the various experiences that underpin an object, and that these can deliberately be untangled.

Afterwards, I shifted towards non-discursive responses to the objects I used as an entry point to my inner world. It included poetry and other objects, as responses to the feelings I experienced when contemplating my artworks. To make my feelings accessible to others, and myself, I would at that point, revert to the deliberate, autoethnographic self-interview, using denotative prompts and connotative responses when exploring the chosen objects.

I have also discovered I can transmute my connotative responses into poetry by highlighting significant words, which I use to write Haiku-type poems (see Figure 7). For example, “Pyrite”, one of the poems I produced (below Figure 7), provided me with a deeper understanding of my ambivalence regarding the preciousness of gold. The other poem, “Can of Thorns”, cannot be explained beyond saying that it resonates with me. It seems to me the beginnings of a lyric inquiry (Neilsen, 2008) where “knowing ... is an experience of immersion and expression rather than one of gathering data only to advance an argument.” (p. 96).

I realise I still seem to believe that “more is better”, as I was under the impression I needed a large number of denotative prompts (more than 10) in order to elicit significant realisations. However, when doing the autoethnographic exploration for this article, I saw that I could start with a smaller number of prompts and still have significant insights, due to the interconnectedness of my connotations. I was quite pleasantly surprised when the denotative prompts regarding the “lots of white” of the catalogue pages, led to connotations quite removed from whiteness. It means this self-interview process can be done in a shorter time and still be effective in revealing significances that are not apparent to begin with.

## Analysis

### **Crystallisation - Questions rather than answers - trustworthiness**

Anderson and Glass-Coffin point out that the aim of autoethnography is to reach a deeper understanding of one's situation within a specific cultural context, and not to reach finality or closure. The nature of my autoethnographic inquiry reveals, and produces, through reflexivity, multiple layers and facets of myself. It is not possible to use a traditional positivist approach and criteria to judge the validity of these experiences, and of this multimodal/composite text. What could work is the notion of "crystallisation", as opposed to triangulation, offered by Richardson (2000, p. 13). Instead of establishing a fixed point of truth, it allows for a combination of "symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach" which provide us with "a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic" (p. 13). This reflects the open-endedness of this approach and the sense of agency that accompanies it.

Being a gemmologist, the notion of the self in/and its context being seen as a crystal, appeals to me. Several aspects of crystallography can serve as analogies to illustrate this autoethnographic inquiry. The crystal consists of a substance (molecules) with a structure that allows it to be a building block. The molecules cohere in a way that determines the physical and optical properties of the crystal. Some physical properties, such as density and hardness, play a role in the way light reflects, refracts and disperses. The way the molecules fit together determines the form of the crystal, also known as its habit, the way it usually manifests. It is therefore, a number of factors put together that determines what the crystal will look like and how it will behave. Sometimes the colour of a gemstone is an integral part of the structure,

and other times the colour is due to an oxide or impurity. Ruby and sapphire are the same gemstone; corundum, just tinted (tainted?) by different oxides/impurities. Could we, as humans, not be seen as different varieties of the same “stone” that are simply t(a)inted by different impurities? I seek the autoethnographic self by defining the various layers and facets that compose the abovementioned crystal. Should I be able to determine commonalities/connections between various diverse aspects of myself, I will be taking a step towards identifying my “habit”<sup>1</sup> and my crystal system<sup>2</sup>. I might become aware of what my constants<sup>3</sup> are, and how these influence my habit. Put differently, this exploration could allow me to understand how the composition/nature of my situation influences the way it manifests. I am not trying to establish an objective truth; I am examining various factors and aspects that influence my experiences, to arrive at a better understanding of the relationships and tensions that exist.

I wish to enhance the trustworthiness of my research by showing the steps of the process I have taken, as in Figure 7 and the layout of the denotative prompts and connotative responses.

## **“Durban Bench Narratives”**

### **The exhibition**

“Durban Bench Narratives” as the exhibition was titled, was arranged several months before writing this article, as a showcase for the Jewellery Design lecturers and past students from my university who are practising jewellery designers. The intention was to show the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Habit’ is the form in which one usually encounters a crystal in nature. One of the habits of a diamond is an octahedron

<sup>2</sup> Gemstones are divided into systems according to their inherent symmetries

<sup>3</sup> In gemmology the constants refer to physical and optical properties that determine how the gemstone reacts to and influences light that reflects from it or refracts into it. These are determined by the chemical composition.

audience in the province of Gauteng, where there are two other jewellery design programmes, the type of work we produce in my home city of Durban. It was to show the issues we concern ourselves with and show the work of graduates we produce.

Everybody had to produce a body of work and it could be for sale. However, the aim was not to make money, rather to show the artistic and creative content of our work. For me, it was an opportunity to produce a coherent body of work I could engage with to make sense of my creative and pedagogic practice.

I used some of my previous work, but subsequently produced a range of new work based on my recent creative explorations into the use of recycled plastic, particularly Hdpe (high density polyethylene), which is used to make milk bottles.

Unlike the name of the gallery, Tinsel, suggests, the pieces are not showy bits of glitter. They are pieces of jewellery and artworks, made as an expression of my personal concerns and perceptions.

### **The autoethnographic self-interviews**

In my understanding, the nature of an artwork/object is that it consists of many layers, open to multiple interpretations, depending on the viewer and the context. I analyse these objects to uncover the knowledge and significances embedded within, through the experience of producing them. I used two autoethnographic self-interviews to elicit connotations that reside within me, in relation to these objects. I subsequently examined the links between these connotations and identified issues that pertain to my context as creative designer and design lecturer. The first self-interview produced too much information, but still resulted in useful insights. For the second self-interview, I reduced the number of prompts, and arrived at valuable realisations.

As explained in the Previous Research section of this article, I have analysed my creative works before and thought I would use the same method again, as I found it an effective way to reach into my memories; to get around my innate reluctance to open up and see the connections between my life and the objects I produce. When I reviewed the body of work I exhibited at the Tinsel gallery, I noticed it could be divided into three groups: the prints (Figure 4), the pendants (Figure 5) and the brooches (Figure 6).

I generated the denotative prompts as before and noted the connotations that arose. There were approximately 14 works and I generated two to four prompts per item. The connotations that emerged resulted in about 6 000 words. In what follows, I show examples of selected, denotative prompts and some of the connotative responses below each object. I chose these particular objects and prompts after considering all the responses, and selected the ones I felt raised significant issues, in terms of the overlap between my creative practice and my pedagogical practice.





Figure 4 - 'Jasmyn' print

Denotative prompts

Torn paper

Jasmyn<sup>4</sup> impression

on HDPE rectangle

with red blob inside

Connotation

A rectangle of handmade  
paper; to add  
authenticity/realness?

...

...

...

Implication

I happen to like authenticity.

What do my students

like/value?

...

...

...

---

<sup>4</sup> "Jasmyn" is Afrikaans for "Jasmine"



*Figure 5 - Silver and HDPE pendants*

Denotative prompts

Matt dark silver

Connotations

I did not want to produce a traditional shiny silver pendant, so I tried to retain the patina of the casting, to a certain extent.

The beads were cleaned in lime juice, which is also used by traditional silversmiths on Ibo island, where I went for a consultative trip; to provide input regarding 'better' ways of manufacturing and cleaning

Implications

Aware of the hegemony of 'shiny'. What is it about shiny? Where is shiny not ok?

Can we use the matt/shiny circle from tumble-polishing? But then we need the time to play, and make mistakes!

silver jewellery. So, I used  
lime juice to clean the oxides  
and sand (from my garden),  
instead of sand paper, as an  
abrasive.

Hanging sideways	...	...
Big centre hole	...	...
Different sizes	...	...



Figure 6 - 'Past the sell-by date' HDPE brooches

<u>Denotative prompts</u>	<u>Connotations</u>	<u>Implications</u>
Top one without a date, but with crown	This is a continuation of a previous batch of brooches.  Often when I start, I don't know where to begin so I continue where I stopped previously. I want to comment on the cameo so I used the crown as a 'reward'. When the dates 'came along', I was 'offered' another type of comment, so I went with that.	Serendipity  How can I make other 'comments' come along? Spend time doing that, using a journal i.e. do it deliberately, serendipity cannot be relied on, only encouraged
Set of 5	...	...
Small to big	...	...
2 facing left 2 facing right	...	...

When I started looking for themes, I felt a bit overwhelmed, but I also noticed some interesting phrases. I made a list of these phrases as a type of coding or making sense and saw that, when combined, these lists were quite poetic. They alluded to feelings and emotions that resonated within me.

Below are the original text and the highlighted and extracted words.

<h2>Pendants</h2> <p>Wednesday, 20 September 2017 2:20 PM</p>	
<h3><u>Beads/Pendants</u></h3> <p>The names - I saw an opportunity to give names with a <b>bit of a twist</b>, as is sometimes done in the jewellery business. A synthetic ruby would be called a 'created' ruby, a brown quartz a 'smoky topaz'. I did not want to mislead anybody. I just realised it was <b>an opportunity to play</b> with words and perceptions.</p> <p>the materials - I used mostly recycled hdpe (code 2) (milk bottles and their lids, although the lids are usually another type of plastic (code 7 - other). I did use some silver, but I used the plastic to do lost wax casting with i.e. I used it as a model which was burnt out and replaced with silver, sterling silver. The idea for working with plastic came from a <b>sambok</b> that I had bought on the streets from a Zulu vendor. He told me that he had made it from plastic shopping bags, <b>and looking closer</b> I could see sand grains. He told me that the plastic was melted and then poured into a shallow groove scratched into the ground. As the ingot cooled down it would then be rolled like a sausage until it was thinner and round. The dirt discoloured it and it looked like a proper <b>sambok</b>, made from hippo skin. This was <b>and looking closer</b>. It was about 10 years ago</p> <p>the configurations - On the one hand I used the malleability of the plastic to reshape it completely (in the case of the beads and the string), on the other <b>I used the found forms to dictate</b> the ultimate shape. i.e. I folded a cut-out in half to arrive at a semi-triangle with the top of the milk bottle showing at the bottom.</p> <p><b>Pyright</b> - a play on pyrite, or fool's gold. Quite a beautiful gemstone with <b>unfortunate associations</b>. Real gold ore doesn't look like gold at all. I was given a piece of black rock and told that it was gold ore. I was at Stellenbosch university at the time. Didn't know how to extract the gold so I just blasted the piece of rock with a very hot flame. It burnt away <b>and left a puddle of gold</b>. The rock was about as big as a pecan nut and gave about half a teaspoon of gold. It cracked when I rolled it, meaning it was full of impurities like arsenic, so I cast it into a ring... and you know... <b>I can't remember what happened to it...</b></p>	<p>with a bit of a twist</p> <p>an opportunity to play</p> <p>and looking closer</p> <p>and looking closer</p> <p>I used the found forms to dictate</p> <p>with unfortunate associations.</p> <p>and left a puddle of gold</p> <p>I can't remember what happened to it</p>

Figure 7 - The process of developing the poem

I was quite excited about this turn and thought I would present the poems as the patterns that have emerged. This highlighted the idea of multiple ways of knowing and enriched my perception of my own work, and of myself. I was rather intrigued at my ambivalent response to gold; how I managed to extract it, and leave it behind. This exercise could also illustrate what McNiff (2008) means when he suggested that art-based researchers “start the work with questions and ... design methods in response to ... particular situation[s]” (p. 33). Sawyer (2013) points out this dilemma, of not being quite sure where one is heading but making sense retroactively, when he says “Before you can arrive at the

right questions, you often need to go ahead and make something, and then reinterpret it as something very different based on what happened when you made it” (p. 32).

Two of the poems are below.

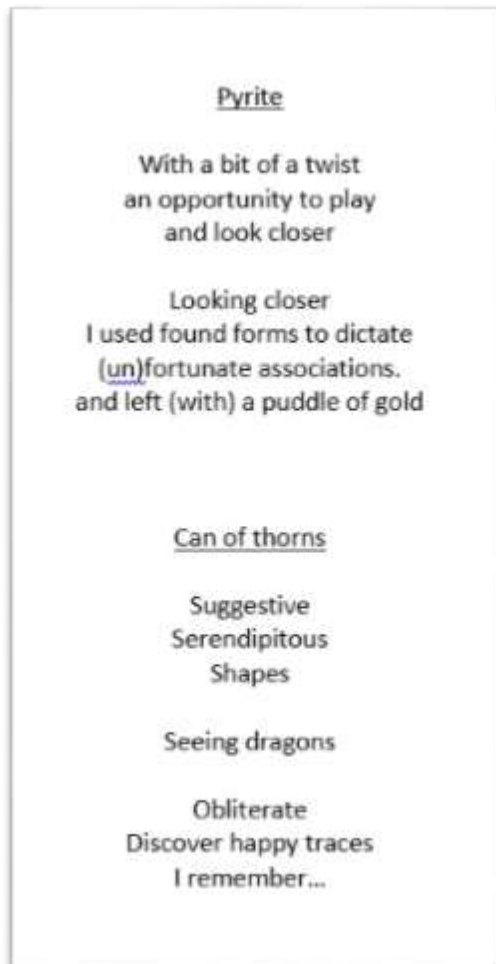


Figure 8 - The poems

However..... I realised I had gone full circle. I started out with the intention to show that objects are like poems; they contain a number of metaphoric and symbolic strands that, when juxtaposed, result in “productive ambiguity” (Eisner, 1997). Which means I have illustrated how the object can be read like a poem. It was not what I set out to do and so I did not really see much value in the exercise, at that stage. I decided to reconsider the number of



prompts and connotations to use. I was doing too much and getting too complex, which is what McNiff (2008) warns against, when he advises art-based researchers to establish a method of inquiry that is straightforward, easy to describe and can be implemented systematically.

To limit the number of prompts, I used the catalogue we had compiled for the exhibition and viewed it as a number of thumbnails (see Figure 9). This was my “object”.

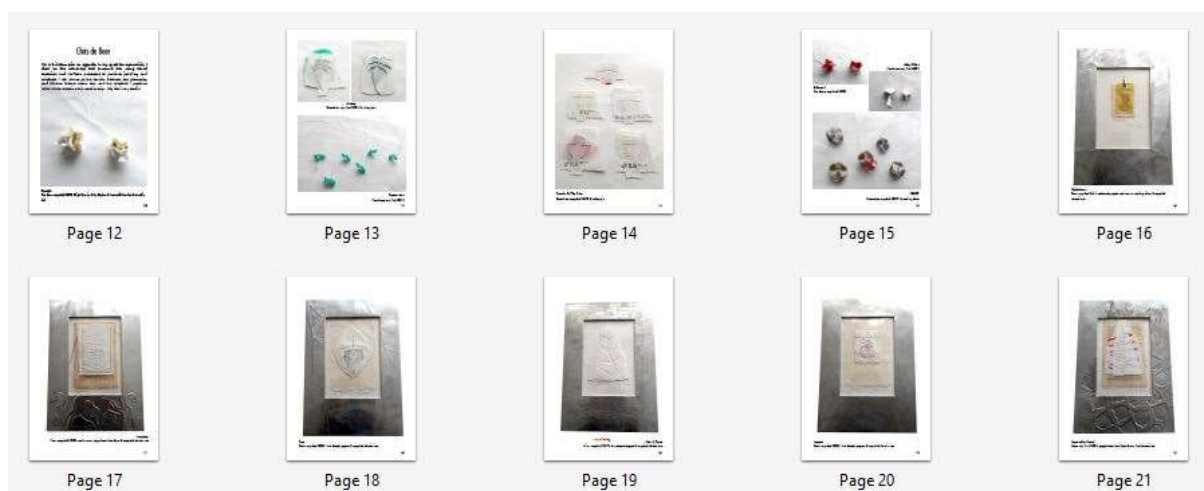


Figure 9 - Viewing the catalogue as thumbnails

Looking at the catalogue in this condensed way, it struck me that there was “*Lots of white*”, the work was made from “*mostly plastic*”, and there were a number of “*identical frames*”. I used these three phrases as my denotative prompts and generated about five to nine connotations per prompt (see Figure 10).



Figure 10 - A screen shot of the prompts and responses

After I had reflected on the first set of connotations, regarding the amount of visible white, I realised I had gained enough insight for the moment and did not need to examine the other two sets of connotations as closely. The table below shows how I arrived at key notions via my connotations with the denotative prompts.

#### Connotative response

I like the fact that there are many shades of white possible. One does tend to think white is white,

#### Insight/Realisation

I used to think that 'white is white'... The power of stereotyping/labelling, having

#### Theme

but there are many shades and different reasons why the shades change.

preconceived ideas. These can get in the way of adjusting/improving/innovating - for students AND lecturers

HEGEMONIES

The white here is from synthetic 'perfect' white, to dark brown 'white' paper, which is just old paper.

It is as if white becomes browner the older it gets. (it obtains a patina... does time add value?) Sometimes value is added by the passage of time. We are in too much of a hurry to make sense immediately. We need to make, and take, time to reflect. I say that often, and we don't really do this.

REFLECTION

Cream white is the colour of handmade cotton paper.

I know this because I read about the paper making process, and made my own paper. I am curious. How do we get the students to be(come) curious?

CURIOSITY

I appreciate it when the handmade quality shows; the hammer marks and scratches. As students, we tried our best not to have scratches on the jewellery we made. We were taught that highly polished surfaces are desirable. It is so difficult to acquire the tolerance for scratches, to see the incidental

HEGEMONIES – DEVELOP  
OWN TASTE

marks as having value. It is  
possibly the same as ironing one's  
clothes. Are we not just  
conforming to norms?

As students, we used black velvet  
as a background for jewellery  
photos. We sought the contrast  
with the shiny metal, but a white  
background has now become  
preferable, as it shows more  
nuances. Have we, as lecturers,  
become more sensitive?

We used to buy into the industry  
norms, and have become more  
sensitive to the nuances of what we  
are trying to convey. This came  
about because we are exposed to a  
wide range of inputs.

EXPERIENCES

We participate in exhibitions that  
have differing requirements, and  
have to deal with all the students.  
We learn from them. Is it possible  
to get them to learn from each  
other?

COLLABORATION

Having mostly white allows little  
bits of other colours to become  
focal points. We teach colour  
theory and colour schemes, but do  
not, at that point, do exercises  
where their colour preferences are  
allowed to manifest. The students  
have to stick to the available  
colours.

And then they face the conundrum  
of which colour to choose when  
they go to the bead shop for the  
bracelet project. We show them the  
available colours first... maybe  
they should discover this problem  
for themselves? We are solving  
their problems for them.  
Could/should we not let them mix

their own colour? Analyse the	DEVELOPMENT OF TASTE
colour they prefer and find out	BASED ON OWN
how to mix it. Much like 5+5=? As	<b>EXPERIENCE</b>
opposed to ?+?=10 (something I	
saw on a TED talk). Find ways to	
incorporate and address the	
students' interests and concerns.	

## Pedagogic Realisations

Because of this exploration, I realised there might be several hegemonies that come into play in creative practice, and these might affect my students' willingness to be curious. I became aware of the value of reflection, particularly in relation to the life experiences one has as part of the informal and incidental learning processes. I feel I could place a greater emphasis on informal and incidental learning, and not rely on formal, structured learning to the extent I do. I am also starting to pay attention to the possibility of incorporating collaboration as a strategy for enhancing learning. Lastly, I feel I should pay more attention to how my students' personal tastes develop. It might be feasible to facilitate this, by exposing them to experiences that allow informal learning to take place.

There seem to be some overlaps here. The deliberate development of one's taste, one's aesthetic sensibility via having life experiences that draw one into the space between the self and the environment; engaging with the environment in a personally significant manner, such as finding the colour one prefers; for a bedroom wall, a t-shirt, a milk shake..... I think this could encourage curiosity, which might have a bearing on the willingness to be creative.

The key realisation, for me, is the role that life experience has played in my own learning and creative development, and that it could possibly play in my students' learning. I realise I am depriving the students, for various reasons, from having life experiences that

could be the foundation on which their learning takes place, and I should explore this as a method for teaching. Dewey's (1938) idea that learning derives from reflecting on experience supports this avenue of exploration. Daudelin (1996) explains the link between reflection, experience and learning rather well, when she says:

Reflection is the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences; learning is the creation of meaning from past or current events that serves as a guide for future behavior. (p. 39)

In our design programme we have several areas of teaching that could be explored for the implementation of "learning from experience". These vary from finding interesting materials, trying new techniques, making useful objects, and dealing with real customers, as well as presenting the final work.

## **Methodological Realisations**

I have realised I can do research with the same intent as my creative process. It does not have to be a purposeful search for information or knowledge, it can simply be a response to a feeling I have. Sometimes, the process of discovery starts when I'm feeling uneasy about something, when I have a nagging feeling. Or it can also flow from curiosity; when something piques my interest. The learning that takes place does not necessarily have to be written down to count as knowledge. A found poem can provide insight and stir the insides, making me wonder.

I have many conversations in my head, with myself, and have come to realise I can deliberately choose a self, through which to talk. I have become aware of the difference between the different selves, particularly the detached denotative self, and the immersed storytelling-self. When I do the self-interview, I start with a clear distinction between the two



different voices. After a while, the boundaries blur and it becomes more like a noise, with no clearly discernible voice. I have come to recognise this stage and consequently, ‘terminate’ the interview. This usually happens when I carry on for too long and ask too many questions.

I notice that I do this in my lectures as well; I tend to belabour a point instead of stopping and waiting for questions, should there be any. Again, this is a matter of assuming that much talking equates to learning taking place. In short, I go on a bit; I should have shorter, more defined activities, whether it is for research, creative practice or teaching. I tend to rely on making a plan, taking it as it comes, winging it, making do, ... and this often allows serendipity to make an entrance.

An aspect of the research process that did not go as planned, was the “coding”. I thought obvious themes would emerge, however, it became apparent that there are many aspects and factors that intersect and interact. I thought I would arrive at solutions to problems, or have well-defined problems. This process has merely made me see that creativity can, as with education, be a simple process, but there are too many other demands that also need to be met. It becomes the finding of balance amongst all the roles, intentions, wishes and desires, and then serendipity steps in, opening another door, offering an encounter that takes me to new places.

There seem to be many facets to an experience and/or an object, each one correlating with a different perspective. The same experience/object can provide multiple insights, as it is contingent on the context within which one considers an experience/object. The nature of art objects makes them more suitable for this type of reflection, as they do not have a utilitarian function as such, which might encourage a free flow of associations; unlike a useful object that might direct one’s thoughts to the function of the item.

The most difficult aspect of the research process to deal with, was the feeling that I should be busy all the time. I often felt as if I was procrastinating, but later realised I did not

know what to do or say (write) and needed more time to read, or think. I usually had more clarity after a tea-break, or the following day. I have come to realise that insights cannot be forced; one has to prepare for them to happen, if they are going to happen at all. There is a making of sense that does not always deal with finding the correct answer; sometimes I needed to change the question to fit the findings, as in the case of arriving at poetry instead of clear realisations.

I thought I had arrived at a clear-cut method for providing insights regarding my situation as creative practitioner and lecturer. To an extent, it is quite straightforward and can provide questions to ask and directions to pursue. However, it is also a method that can be adapted for going deeper and finding out what else there is within; a way of opening up and getting used to seeing more. I now feel as if my inward eyes have to adjust to the dark, or the daylight, depending on the context. Getting used to the daylight would allow me to start noticing colours; getting used to the dark would increase my awareness of other subtleties.

I have learnt that this kind of research takes time. That insights cannot be forced. This realisation implies that I need to keep on paying attention, and continue with my exploration. I should not regard myself as having arrived at a destination. I need to allow for growth to occur, the decay of old ideas, and the development of new areas. I need to embrace reflexivity and the process of becoming.

I also realised that I only needed a few prompts to guide my exploration. It could be that this realisation came with practice. The number of prompts became less, the more often I had self-interviews, and I now feel as if I could use only one prompt to start the digging within. Using a number of prompts facilitates looking at the situation from multiple angles, which correlates with the notion of crystallization; it shows the multi-dimensional nature of my reality, of myself.

If I were doing this kind of research again, I would do it as a normal creative activity, not as a separate “Research” process. I would let go a bit more and allow more space for serendipity to step in and take me in a new direction, not be so intent on finding something, but create space for encounters with aspects of the self, cultivating embodied knowledge. Like going for a walk to somewhere, but having time to take a detour, or stop and look at ants going about their business.

Should other researchers be interested in using a similar research practice, I would suggest they pay more attention to the everyday creativity found in life experiences. This might encourage serendipity, which often takes one in new directions, providing new realisations and insights.

## **Conclusion**

Since embarking on this autoethnographic journey, I have realised that my life and my work are inextricably entangled, and my life experiences in both spheres affect the other side in unforeseen and productive ways. The autoethnographic self-interview has enabled me to expose this richness, or thickness, as Geertz (1973) would have it. This richness can become overwhelming and the self-interview is one way of revealing some of the sense that resides in this overload. I discovered that it takes a bit of practice, using many prompts, to reach the stage where only a few different prompts are necessary to reveal the dense network that underpins and connects the objects that surround me. When I initially tried to make sense of my situation, I was under the impression the process had to be difficult and complex to be of any use, along the lines of “no pain, no gain”. In fact, it was when I let go, indulged serendipity, and followed my intuition that I experienced this journey as a playful exploration. I discovered there are other types of knowledge and, when words were used

lyrically (Neilsen, 2008), they could illuminate other aspects of my crystal-like reality (Richardson, 2000).

On the one hand, I found the autoethnographic self-interview useful to untangle the intricate connections that constitute my creative and pedagogic practices, providing me with new points of view from which to regard the relationship between those two areas. On the other hand, I became aware of the way this intricateness can be harnessed to provide a richer perception of my own inner life, contributing to a greater acceptance of the tensions that exist in my daily life. I now see these tensions as the, sometimes opposing, forces that keep me upright between them. I would recommend this type of autoethnographic exploration for researchers who wish to appreciate the relationship between themselves and their world, bearing in mind that their findings will not always conform to rationalist, discursive conventions.

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## Coda: Stirring?

I'm looking for a direction and just stirring my subconscious to see what is down there... It seems that I will prime myself for the self-interview and then follow the previous route, where I select an object (artwork from the exhibition) that I feel is quite significant, and then respond to it, maybe poetically, I'm not sure yet. I don't know whether I should resort to the autoethnographic self-interview as a matter of course, and just fine tune it... like realising that I have to 'prime' myself beforehand, then selecting an object, noting emotional, intuitive responses and then use the denotative/connotative procedure before I analyse the feedback to see what came out.

It could be that relying on the emotional, intuitive responses circumvents the need for a written response, which could get in the way of examining or analysing. This might also be a way to get my students to participate in conversations and critiques, where their personal responses are noted, and then elaborated on. Almost like using smiley faces for assessment, but now selecting other images or artefacts that represent value judgments, or just represent values. The selecting of the artefacts could be a class exercise discussion during which there is a conversation about the values that are sought after in craft, art and design...



*Figure 1 - Amahlandla enyoka (the spine of a snake)*

## Realisations: Now that I'm inside – What did I find and what have I learned?

### A look around

In keeping with the Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) reminder that autoethnography is a search for understanding, rather than for definitive answers, I want to share some writing I recently did to demonstrate how my viewpoint has changed, from looking for those “undebatable conclusions” that Ellis and Bochner (2000) mention, to one that embraces and acknowledges the contributions of the “multiple and shifting identities” that Reed-Danahay (1997, p. 3) refers to.

What follows is a section of a piece of free writing, done in response to a prompt supplied by my research supervisor. The research support group I participate in was asked to read an online newspaper article on “learning to deal with the impostor syndrome” (Richards, 2015) and we were then to start by responding to the ending of the article: “...the impostor syndrome has not gone away, but I've learned to think of it as a friend. So now when I start to hear that voice in my head, I take a deep breath, pause for a minute, put a smile on my face and say, ‘Welcome back old friend. I'm glad you're here. Now, let's get to work.’” (Richards, 2015, para. 16).

This was my response:

*Welcome back old friend... would you care for some tea? We can use the beautiful cups or the comfortable mugs. The ones that John gave to me as a present, because he did not like them. Maybe you can tell me how you feel about them and whether we should use them or not. I might hear something useful in our chat. You seem to know so much and been to so many places.*

*You can be so eloquent; you weave the most dramatic and intriguing stories. Could you explain again, why I should not do as much reading or writing as I think I ought to? How do you manage to be so certain? No doubts, no worries... I envy your steadfast resolve to just be.*

*Could you explain, again, why being depressed and lethargic isn't really a problem? Could you confirm, again, that it is a cycle and it will go up in a while? You seem to be a rudder sometimes, more like a sheet anchor that keeps me facing the right way when the storm comes. It is all a big sea, isn't it? And being on a ship is the place to be. Just because we make landfall does not mean I should get off and build a city. If anything, being on land enables me to do repairs so I can sail away again; to replenish my supplies so I can reach other places.*

*Let's sit on the veranda, I'll pour. Keep an eye out for the eagles. They've been about recently, eyeing the chickens. When the sunbirds come for their daily sip of aloe nectar just sit quietly. You'll see their nest that has been demolished by the monkeys, there on the right. Just next to the orchids that are in full bloom. You know, I used an orchid profile for a piece of jewellery I recently made for Marlene. I thought it would be nice to use her hobby as a motif for a brooch. There are more orchids in the kitchen. I'll show you when we finish our tea. I have to bake more rusks; maybe you can help with rolling the dough into balls?*

*Look! A new bird... Never seen it before. Did it have yellow or red feet? Maybe we can find it in the Newman's, which is there next to you. Hear that 'poo-poo-poo' which is answered with an 'I'm here!'. I used it in a group discussion recently and it was very amusing to see the interaction in the*

*group when Lee answered my 'where-are-you?' call with an enthusiastic 'I'm here!' They thought she was pulling leg and didn't know that we had rehearsed the exchange. It did help to show how poetry can be found in the environment and that it can also emerge and take a life of its own.*

*This tree, here on the left, is a cabbage tree, a 'kiepersol' in Afrikaans. I used to love the leaves, because they're shaped like a person. Marlene made pendants and I made prints using that motif, but I think we've moved on somehow. It is still nice, but... I find my attention is now on getting the garden ready for the baby chameleons that will be born in January. I have to make sure there are sufficient long grasses for them to climb up at night, so the snakes won't eat them. The perestrophe that I planted has taken over and killed a lot of the grass, so I am looking for tufts of grass to transplant. Any idea where I might find some?*

*You've been very quiet...?*

*Oh, sorry. Did I put you to sleep? Feel free to lie down in the guest room...*

*Are you sure you have to go? I was just starting to enjoy myself.*

My response shows how I value the qualities of the different selves, particularly in the sailing analogy: where the one self is the rudder and the other self the explorer. I used to think I should only be a rudder and I was exploring too much; heeding “the call to lands unknown”, as shown in the haiga poem in the *Creative Self-Awareness* chapter. The realisation that I can combine both roles has been quite liberating and empowering.

This awareness, of the different and contrasting aspects of myself, increased with each paper I wrote for my doctoral study. The book chapter and each article, in succession, enabled me to go deeper into the significances of my personal experiences and to identify more facets of what constitutes my many fluid selves.

A connotative re-examination of the five papers I wrote

What follows is a reconsideration of the book chapter and articles I wrote. These re-examinations are written from a connotative angle, showing some of the significances I have become aware of.

*Creative Self-awareness: Conversations, Reflections and realisations*

I make many objects, usually in an experimental and playful way, and collect even more, usually just out of curiosity. These objects fill my office walls and feel like a veil through which I can almost see the meaning of/in my life.

When I saw my partner also had mounds of objects I thought that, if juxtaposed in an art exhibition, these carefully curated collections would surely reveal the meaning encapsulated within them. But, I found that instead of defining the objects, I had produced a rhizomatic network that multiplied the meaningful connections, extending into my teaching practice.

In an attempt to capture the essence, I resorted to poetry, however, it added more nodes, and extended the rhizome, adding more layers. Describing the objects and materials revealed additional significances that concerned my pedagogy as well, and serendipitously exposed aspects of myself, hinting at the journey to come.

### *Examining Aspects of Self in the Creative Design Process: Towards Pedagogic Implications*

I often participate in exhibitions, usually showing the work I am incidentally busy with. Most of the works I now produce are playful and explorative fusions of personal experience, often using found materials and skills developed over the years.

On reflection, I realise my approach to creativity was from a perspective that excluded the usefulness of everyday creativity. Once I adopted a more general approach, I was able to recognise the value and potential of using personal experience as a source of inspiration for the creative design process.

Two significantly different inner voices surfaced when I contemplated my creative objects. One was a dispassionate observer/interviewer whilst the other was an engaged and seeking informant. The interchange enabled me to elicit and expose the previously hidden connections between my professional and personal lives, confirming the entanglement of these two selves. This awareness is useful when exploring strategies for addressing my pedagogic practice and its capacity for instigating social change.

### *Rethinking Visual Journaling in the Creative Process: Exploring Pedagogic Implications*

I examined the role a visual journal plays within the creative design process by alternating between an inward and an outward gaze. The outward gaze engaged with my students' understanding and use of a visual journal when preparing for and participating in an exhibition. The inward gaze used an autoethnographic self-interview focused on the connections revealed when I analysed the influences that manifested in the writing and performance of a poem.

My students and I organised an exhibition of our jewellery so we could keep journals of the process and examine these afterwards, to see what transpired regarding the creative design process. The journaling did not go as expected. I subsequently analysed the journaling aspects of my own creative work, a poem I performed at an educational research conference, to see the nature of the visual journal I actually used.

It transpired that a creative design journal can take many different forms and one of the most important uses for this journal, in my programme, is to facilitate reflections and conversations between my students and with me.

### *Through the Jeweller's Loupe: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Relationship between my Creative and my Pedagogic Practice.*

I wanted to examine the overlap between my creative and my pedagogic practice, in order to identify issues that might be usefully explored to improve my teaching practice. To facilitate this exploration, I recognised the ubiquitous nature of creativity and accepted objects as three-dimensional nodal moments; solidified entangled connections, so to speak.

To become aware of these issues I contemplated an intuitively selected object, wrote a poem, and then attempted an analysis of the poem. The stanzas did not offer their significances very readily, which compelled me to select other objects that I felt represented the feelings being conveyed.

I conducted an autoethnographic self-interview regarding each object, and one of the interviews manifested as yet another poem, combining denotative prompts and connotative responses, eliciting connotations that did reveal underlying themes concerning pedagogic issues which arose from my creative practice.

### *Faceting the Crystal: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Creative Practice from a Jeweller's Workbench*

I wanted to understand my autoethnographic interview process better, so I analysed my contribution to a group exhibition at a gallery named Tinsel.

I started doing what I considered to be a very methodical autoethnographic self-interview with numerous prompts for a large number of objects. I generated a considerable amount of information, and, when I started analysing what I had written, I noticed several interesting phrases I then combined into found poems (fragments of free writing combined in a serendipitous way to express and evoke hidden feelings). These poems revealed tacit knowledge I was previously not able to express. It showed me aspects of myself that confirmed the idea of seeing the self as a crystal; as consisting of many facets. It did not, however, provide information with obvious implications for my pedagogic practice, at that stage.

Doing a follow-up autoethnographic self-interview with less objects, and even fewer prompts, enabled me to identify a fair number of areas to explore in terms of my teaching practice. I realised this process, even with only a few prompts, can facilitate the finding of questions, as opposed to providing solutions.

### *Connecting through the papers*

All the articles and the book chapter I wrote were based on exhibitions I staged or participated in. The aim in each piece of writing was to analyse the objects I had produced, and to expose and then examine the connections that culminated or intersected in these objects. In exploring the connections, I revealed and relived personal stories that allowed me to see the relevance to the world within which I operated. The objects acted as starting points to reveal the underlying network that connects the various parts of my life.

### How I approached this exploration of the link between my creative and my pedagogic practice

As explained in the introductory chapter of this thesis, I used an autoethnographic approach as it allowed me to use my own experiences to make sense of my situation, to use myself as a lens through which to explore my world. To gain a deeper understanding of autoethnography, I explored significant characteristics relevant to my research. Two aspects, in particular, appeal to me. Firstly, the way autoethnography starts with the self, the personal, and then uses this self-understanding to connect with and possibly influence the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). For example, it is what enabled me to make the connection between the role divergent thinking plays in my creative design process (*Examining Aspects of Self*) and the need to embrace the diversity of my students so I can encourage the development of divergent thinking in the studio (*Through the Jeweller's Loupe*).

The other aspect of autoethnography I find appealing is that it is not a search for answers, but an exploratory journey that aims to develop an understanding (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). This is why the notion of finding out what to do by doing, or, as Bartleet (2013) put it, using Theodore Roethke's words, "one learns by going, where to go" (p. 57) seemed so useful. To express this slightly differently, the act of going provides you with input, which helps you decide in which way you should proceed, a type of trial and error process, guided by the situation in which you find yourself. This is what I did when I tried to make sense of my self in context through my objects; an emergent process depending on reflexivity for progress.

As my research flowed from my initial research questions, which did not change much in the five years of research, I want to discuss the learning that took place and the discoveries I made using these questions as my headings. I will highlight my methodological developments as part of this discussion, where relevant. In keeping with the self-interview process I have developed, which uses superficial denotative prompts to elicit deeper connotations, I provide myself with short questions and prompts that come to mind, and then answer these in more depth. I have come to the realisation that I need this type of 'pre-writing' (Cloutier, 2016), to elicit insights that provide me with a greater understanding of the context within which I am conducting the investigation.

*Which are my significant creative outputs/artefacts, and why do I consider them to be important?*

This research question led to several sub problems, raised by my 'referencing' self; the self that presents readily apparent denotative observations as prompts, which my 'mapping' self will address further down (Riggins, 1994). I had to re-examine my understanding of creativity and of the nature of (my) objects. I also had to develop a process for examining the objects, so I could determine their significance. This process had two aspects to it; how I investigated the objects and how I communicated the findings. Finally, I had to arrive at a conclusion regarding the 'significant' objects.

#### *My understanding of Creativity*

I now pay more attention to everyday creativity (small-c) and do not seek Big-C (or legendary) creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) within my students, as discussed in the Examining Aspects of Self article. In writing that article I came to the realisation it could be useful to foster the inherent curiosity of my students, and to encourage them to use their individual personal experience as a foundation and reference for creative work. This might steer them away from colonial and Eurocentric references and emphasise the usefulness of appropriate indigenous and local resources. I have come to regard everyday creativity to be seated within my students and to see how it can be strengthened by focusing on their diversity, their heterogeneity (*Faceting the Crystal*), and encouraging the manifestation of what Eisner (2004, p. 16 ) calls "productive idiosyncrasy". To me, this implies drawing on one's unique characteristics, such as likes and dislikes, to generate a personalised solution to a problem one has to overcome.

#### *The nature of (my) objects*

It is useful for my research to see objects as three-dimensional "nodal moments" (Graham, 1989), where the "connecting lines that were previously hidden" (p. 98) can be investigated. The thickness of culture (Geertz, 1973) means the various aspects of experiences are not immediately apparent, and one needs to untangle the connections very deliberately, often exposing significances that are unexpected, thereby inviting serendipity to manifest. This does imply the significance (meaning) of an object is contingent on the context within which one engages with it.

#### *How I investigated the objects*

I developed a type of autoethnographic self-interview to examine the objects, applying Riggins' (1994) concepts of 'mapping' (connotative meaning) and 'referencing' (denotative meaning). It is a

type of inner dialogue between two different selves, with one self using denotative prompts to elicit connotative responses from the other self.

The process of developing my research method, the self-interview I began using in the *Examining Aspects of Self* article, started with becoming aware of my inner voices. I knew I was evaluating the objects I contemplated, but did not know how to 'formalise' this idea, how to give it more credibility than just saying 'I analysed it'. This was brought home by feedback from the reviewers for the journal, *Educational Research for Social Change*, who wanted more clarity regarding my method of analysis. Until that stage, I did analysis by contemplating something and then trying to name the feelings that arose within. It was only after I separated the selves that were doing the contemplating and the feelings that arose, that I was able to progress towards making sense of objects. These separated selves were named the autoethnographic interviewer, providing denotative prompts, and the autoethnographic informant, responding connotatively, for the self-interview I did for the *Examining Aspects of Self* article, and the Guiding self and Seeking self for the *Rethinking Visual Journaling* article.

When I considered the type of sense I was making from my introspective reflections, I realised I was lumping similar bits together, and that enabled me to embrace the notion of coding. When my supervisor suggested the word 'clustering', as a synonym for coding, I started feeling even more at ease with the idea of making deliberate sense of data that has been produced and gathered (*Through the Jeweller's Loupe*).

I encountered the idea of clustering in another guise, when I was introduced to autoethnography by Joan Connolly, a former colleague and early mentor. She said one looks for patterns. At that stage, I did not know what it meant. I did not know how to produce enough data to evoke or elicit patterns. Also, I was not sure what a pattern was. I applied my experience as a visual art and design lecturer to the written texts and realised there are, as in art and design, several types of patterns, or types of clustering one can apply to data. Sometimes a pattern is based on similarity between all the elements (the data), and at other times, it is defined by how different bits (data) fit into each other, flow into the next one, like a bracelet. It is only one aspect of the element that links to the next one, but it results in a chain, a flow. Similar to the poems I generated in the *Faceting the Crystal* article, using alliteration to cause the flow...and the rapport with the self.

When I started with the autoethnographic self-interview, I did not realise the extent of the underlying network of connections that would be exposed, and I thought I would need many prompts and responses, to enable me to come to useful conclusions. I used a large number of denotative prompts for the Mezzotint self-interview in the *Rethinking Visual Journaling* article and at the beginning of the *Faceting the Crystal* article. It was during the latter half of the research I did for the *Faceting the Crystal* article that I reduced the prompts to only three. I realised the prompts only served as starting points that would lead me into the underlying network of connections linking the objects to the self. The connotative prompts set me off on an inner journey, so I could 'learn where to go by going', by following the network of connections.

I also concluded I do not need the large number of objects that surround me, in order to make sense of my creative practice. After I encountered the 'quagmire' I mention in the *Examining Aspects of Self* article, I realised I probably just need to spend some time with the objects I have created, by documenting and reflecting, and then 'let them go'. The objects displayed in my office can, however, be useful as inspiration for the production of creative work, a type of three-dimensional visual journal, as seen in the discussion of the Mezzotint poem I performed at a conference (*Rethinking Visual Journaling*).



### *How I communicated the exploration*

I was under the impression the act of writing would be a 'mere' documentation of what had transpired, but this has now changed. I have come to realise it is through writing that I clarify my thoughts (Cloutier, 2016) and discover more aspects (Richardson, 1994) of my exploration. It was through freewriting exercises, such as writing discussion-type emails to my supervisor, reminiscing about what I made when I was little and doing a 3-minute presentation of my doctoral learning journey (Queensland, 2008) that I developed an understanding of what I knew, as if I was then able to enter a space below the surface. I also used found poetry to evoke other types of knowledge. Found poetry consists of fragments of free writing, such as words or sections of sentences that become significant within the context one is exploring, which are then combined in a serendipitous way to express and evoke hidden feelings. An example of such found poetry can be seen in the *Faceting the Crystal* article, when I uncover my ambivalence regarding gold by compiling a poem from significant phrases generated during my self-interview.

I am slowly realising that, what seems to be an unwillingness to write is, sometimes, an inability to make sense. It is because I do not yet know what I need to understand. I do not have an opinion because I don't understand enough. Then, after a day or two, when I've read some more or thought some more, things fall into place; a relationship becomes apparent and I have more understanding, which allows me to engage a bit more.

### *A conclusion regarding the 'significant' objects*

I have realised all the objects I examined are important, not within themselves, but because each one is a node that connects multiple strands of experience and memory. Each object can provide the connotative significances that will reveal implications for my pedagogy, and I do not have to engage with all of them. I feel I have found a way, through my denotative/connotative self-interviews, to access an underlying network of significances through a single object. The selection of the appropriate object is contingent on the context within which I am exploring. It is as if I enter a frame of mind, or look through a specific lens, which allows me to identify the appropriate objects for my self-interview.

### *How does my self manifest in these significant creative outputs/artefacts?*

My next research question uncovered numerous ways in which the self manifests, and showed me that it depends on the context within which I produce, use, or view the object. Two approaches underpin this question: understanding the self as a crystal and recognising the existence of multiple selves, or multivocality (Mizzi, 2010).

#### *The self as a crystal*

Richardson (2000) proposes the use of crystallisation, that is to say, the defining of boundaries, as opposed to triangulation, which pinpoints a position, when establishing validity and, by extension, when understanding the self or the 'truth'. She sees a crystal as combining "symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach" (p. 13). My autoethnographic research enabled me to identify various aspects that comprise myself, even when they seemed to contradict each other; such as the need to tell stories, but not having the patience to listen to stories, as pointed out in the *Examining Aspects of Self* article. It is useful to see these apparent contradictions as facets of the same crystal, providing a "deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic [of the self]" (Richardson, 2000, p. 13).

### *Multivocality*

To acknowledge the existence and interaction of multiple selves facilitated the development of my autoethnographic self-interview method. Mizzi (2010) defines multivocality as the “plural and sometimes contradictory narrative voices located within the researcher” (p. 2), which “exposes the fluid nature of identity as it moves through particular contexts” (p. 1). This notion allowed me to focus on the various selves that manifested, as I considered the objects in the *Creative Self-Awareness* chapter. This idea of different selves interacting then progressed to a stage where my “past and present selves” (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, p. 69) interacted during a self-interview; my present self providing the previously mentioned denotative prompts, which elicited connotative responses from my past self – the one with all the memories.

### *Ways in which the self manifests*

The realisation that my objects can be seen as three-dimensional nodes, situated where several underlying connections intersect, enabled me to discover various aspects of myself at play within the creative process. These range from the subconscious incubation during creative practice – whether making or writing, the deliberate casting about for influences derived from personal experiences, the playful exploration of my environment and the willingness to accommodate serendipity when it presents itself.

### *What are the pedagogic implications of an enhanced awareness of self in creative practice?*

To address this research question it was useful to consider my findings in the light of Rhodes’ (1961) 4-P model of creativity. He defined creativity by considering the qualities of the Product that is produced, the Process that results in the product, the Person that implements the process and the Press. By press he meant the pressure from the environment, the external factors that play a role. The factors I focus on are primarily concerned with the Person, their qualities, or personality traits, and the Press, the external factors that could influence the creative process.

I wish to prepare my students to be more than jewellery designers, and to lead fulfilling lives. This feeling of responsibility, coupled with my own sense of being engulfed by the changes in the world around me, as mentioned in the *Faceting the Crystal* article, has contributed to my motivation for undertaking this study. When I explored the creative objects that surround me, I discovered several connections that revealed implications for my pedagogic practice. I have documented and commented on several of these discoveries in the concluding sections of the various articles I wrote.

This approach dovetails nicely with the way Sefton-Green, Thomson, Bresler and Jones (2011) explain creative learning. Sefton-Green et al. regard the term “creative learning” as an amalgamation of “teaching for creativity” and “teaching creatively” (p. 2). This is a useful umbrella under which to cluster these discoveries, as it compels one to consider both sides of the creative teaching and learning ‘coin’: the role of the students in this endeavour and the impact of the lecturer (as an external influence), and the way the lecturer views teaching, on them.

From this vantage point, I realise I could value the diversity found in my students more than I had been doing, and that this diversity could provide a base from which to encourage creative learning to take place. A useful term to describe this diversity is ‘heterogeneity’, as opposed to homogeneity, which would imply the pursuit of a normative teaching approach. Heterogeneity, on the other hand,

would require differentiated learning experiences (Martinsen, 2003) to accommodate the diverse needs of the students. Two of the apparent differences between students, that could play a role, are varying learning styles they might have (Butler, 1988; Fleming & Mills, 1992; Kolb, 2015) and the notion of multiple intelligences, as put forward by Gardner (1983). The notion of learning styles refers to, amongst others, students' preference for a particular modality, such as auditory or visual, when encountering new information. Multiple intelligences is a related idea, suggesting that intelligence consists of various abilities that would influence the students' capacity to engage within a certain modality. These modalities include, amongst others, musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic and bodily-kinesthetic.

A more specific example I often encounter relates to exposure to Visual Art at school. Some of my students did Visual Art as a subject at school, whereas a number of them did not. This means I need to be mindful that some students are likely to be more practised in expressing themselves visually, whereas others are still learning how to. I will need to take into account these differences when encouraging my students to engage with the briefs we generate. It would therefore be unfair to assess the designs they produce strictly from a visual composition point of view. I realise I have to find a way to present the projects we require them to do in a manner that intrigues the students who come with more experience in a visual-spatial modality and does not discourage those with less experience.

The pedagogic implications that have come to the fore in my explorations are: recognition of the different ways the creative process potentially unfolds for each student, the productive role serendipity can play within the creative process, the contribution play can make in the fostering of creativity, and how the integration of personal experiences can provide impetus for the development of creative potential. I have realised these various pedagogic implications I have uncovered are all linked to the way I have come to understand the notion of heterogeneity.

### *Heterogeneity*

Heterogeneity, meaning the encouragement and acceptance of difference in my students (Eisner, 2003), is an important concept that underlies a number of pedagogic implications. Its presence can be seen in the way I emphasise the incorporation of the personal experiences of my students in the classroom (*Examining Aspects of Self*). It can also be seen in how I feel it would be useful for students to draw on their own, unique, everyday experiences as sources of inspiration for the creative process. I feel I should pay more attention to how my students' personal tastes develop. It might be feasible to facilitate this, by exposing them to experiences that allow informal learning to take place.

I gradually became aware of this idea of heterogeneity and the importance of encouraging the manifestation of such "productive idiosyncrasy" (Eisner, 2004, p. 16). Firstly, this could involve recognising the non-linear route the creative process takes; the way it meanders (*Examining Aspects of Self*). Secondly, it could encompass recognising the importance of serendipity (*Through the Jeweller's Loupe*). Thirdly, I see the value of encouraging playfulness when promoting creativity (*Rethinking Visual Journaling*), and finally, I have come to recognise the important role the integration of commonplace personal experiences could play within the creative design process (*Faceting the Crystal*). These concepts are discussed in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

### *Creativity meanders, is emergent*

Initially I saw the creative process simply as a meandering. Before I started examining the nature of my creative process, I saw it as a type of journey that took me down side roads to intriguing visual and conceptual encounters, which often resulted in novel outcomes. I felt as if I was stumbling

across interesting ideas I did not necessarily seek out. In doing my self-interviews, I started seeing links between current work I am doing and earlier, seemingly random, encounters with similar ideas. For example, my fascination with gold leaf (*Examining Aspects of Self*), which started with a chance encounter at an exhibition of my lecturer's work. A number of years later I found myself working with metallic foils, and I now realise the other areas I was exploring at the same time contributed to an apparently serendipitous encounter with the heat-stamping foils at a fashion accessories supplier. I now see the creative process as emergent (Bleakley, 2004), in that it unfolds over time, building on what went before, and what it produces is novel and unpredictable (Sawyer, 2015).

When writing the *Creative Self-Awareness* article, I realised I should pay more attention to the way the creative process unfolds within, and is expressed by, my students. Yoo (2017) points out that knowledge does not necessarily manifest as writing; there are other modes of expression that could be used to gauge the development of creativity within my students. I have been expecting direct results from my input during my students' creative design processes, which has led to frustration on both sides. This was particularly evident in discussions about the role that I thought the visual and reflective journals could play within the creative process (*Rethinking Visual Journaling*).

When Yoo (2017) highlights: "The way in which we present our research indicates the kinds of knowledge we value" (p. 445), I realise I value embodied and practical knowledge above propositional knowledge, yet I expect my students to express the creative making, the research they do, through propositional writing. I see that my expectations, regarding the way I feel my students ought to communicate, could be what leads to this communal frustration.

Now that I have recognised the emergent nature of creativity within my own process (*Examining Aspects of Self*), I should allow more latitude and space for my students' creative processes to unfold in unique ways, particularly if I expect them to incorporate personally significant resources and influences (*Faceting the Crystal*). It might be helpful if this process of unfolding became the focus of my teaching, rather than the establishment of a creative product, as I have come to expect.

### *Serendipity*

In the *Examining Aspects of Self* article, I recognised the importance of serendipity and the productive role it can play within the creative process (*Examining Aspects of Self*). This idea is reinforced by Cherry (2013) when he discusses the intricacies of the jewellery design process. He notes serendipity can manifest when "a combination of elements suddenly seems to offer unexpected qualities or opportunities" (p. 14). Similarly, when Roberta Bernabei interviewed Bernhard Schobinger, a European jeweller, he pointed out that he welcomed unexpected accidents as he thought them to be "a big opportunity because new forms are often made by accident" (Bernabei, 2011, p. 237)

Bleakly (2004) refers to the manifestation of serendipity as "fortuitous accidents", noting these "fruitful detours" (p. 472) often happen when ambiguity is tolerated. The role of the teacher in a setting that encourages such ambiguity could be to accept the unexpected (Sawyer, 2015) and to welcome the surprises accompanying such accidental by-products (Bleakly, 2004).

It might be useful for me to identify projects that allow and incorporate serendipity as it manifests during the projects my students undertake, or are given, and to encourage my students to wander down the interesting detours they encounter while addressing creative design problems. To indulge such personal detours would have an impact on the way we assess projects in the jewellery design programme, and it would require us to focus more on the process of creative problem solving, and the personal aspects of the students that contribute to it, rather than the product.

### *Play*

There is strong evidence that play facilitates creativity by fostering “the development of cognitive and affective processes that are important in the creative act” and has a significant impact on divergent thinking, which is “one major cognitive process important in creativity” (Russ, 2003, p. 292). I understand divergent thinking as the ability to generate a number of different ideas and links to a problem (Guilford, 1968). A personality trait closely linked to play is that of curiosity, also considered important in the development of creativity (Custodero, 2015).

I have come to recognise the importance of play, and playfulness, in my own work. I find it fulfils a productive role within my creative design process; manifesting as “curiosity, discovery, delight in exploring, development of seemingly unrelated skills, and feelings of contentment after a bout of such playful activity” (*Examining Aspects of Self*).

Martinsen (2003) comes to the conclusion that “play may be an important activity that could be used in educators’ work to stimulate creativity” (p. 230). This is an avenue I would like to explore further, devising activities that incorporate elements of play within the projects my students undertake. I feel it might reduce their anxiety regarding the outcome of these projects when the process is less serious, but still focused on a goal (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

### *Integration of personal experiences*

It has become apparent I can pay more attention to the integration of personal experiences as inspiration for the creative design process, particularly if I wish to promote the idea of heterogeneity. In the *Examining Aspects of Self* article I was contemplating what my colleagues and I could do deliberately, to cause my students to have ‘useful’ experiences they could then draw on for creative inspiration. It was as if we thought they have not had any ‘useful’ experiences yet. I was seeing my students as ‘empty vessels’ that needed my input, or else they would not have anything to draw on. By the time I was writing the *Through the Jeweller’s Loupe* article I had, through the various self-interviews I had conducted, come to the realisation that I need to increase my awareness of what constitutes the diversity of my students, as if I was suspecting there might already be something inside for them to draw on.

Henriksen and Mishra (2015) confirm the value of drawing on such individual experiences, when they emphasise the value of learning that takes place in the ‘real’ world, meaning real in the students’ lives. Sawyer (2015) reiterates this, stressing the importance of building on the prior knowledge of learners, pointing out they are not empty vessels that need to be filled.

Several jewellery designers interviewed by Bernabei (2011) and Cherry (2013) mentioned they used their own lives as reference sources when producing creative jewellery, particularly as a means of self-expression. I feel if my students were to draw on indigenous and local resources that meant a lot to them, it might increase their sense of agency and could result in the development of uniquely South African jewellery (*Examining Aspects of Self*). Due to the diverse nature of their personal experiences, it would make sense to allow for idiosyncratic visual journals (*Rethinking Visual Journaling*), to assist in their creative design processes. Cherry (2013) examined the creative process of 17 practising contemporary jewellers and emphasised the varying forms their visual journals take. Until now, I have expected uniform visual journals from my students, as if they have similar visual references to draw on, which would translate into similar looking journals. With the realisation that they have a diverse range of personal experiences, in various modalities, which they could use as inspiration, I see I should aim for visual journals that express the individuality of the students.

A further consideration that arises when encouraging such idiosyncrasy would be the possibility of adapting assessment criteria to embrace such divergent journals, and by extension, all manifestations of the creative process. Ellis and Barrs (2008), however, point out it is not a matter of simply adapting criteria when assessing for creative learning, and that “assessment of creative work will always involve interpretation and negotiation” (p. 74). This draws my attention to how I could encourage the conversations my students have, and negotiate the briefs and criteria with them, even on an individual basis.

### A consolidation of my learning

I started this journey looking for answers; instead, I have found a way in to elicit questions appropriate to my context. These questions provide a lens through which I can then approach my creative and my pedagogic practice.

Others that can benefit from this autoethnography, I feel, are self-reflexive researchers that wish to examine their own selves and practice, and educators that teach creative design practice. For the self-reflexive researchers, I suggest a way to become aware of and unravel their inner voices when exploring the self. Because I make, and am surrounded by objects, I use these artefacts as an entry point to the self, and for the exploration of experiences. However, I do not think objects are the only way to access the inner connections. I feel any type of thing can be used as such a portal to inner selves, provided it is a significant part of an underlying network of personal connections, and produces an inner ‘echo’ when contemplated. I cannot tell others how to conduct their own self-interviews, but I have made my own process visible, so it could suggest possible steps other researchers might take in their own quest for enhanced reflection.

Creative design educators might benefit from some of the realisations I have had regarding the diversity of my students, and how this feature could be used as a resource to augment development of the creative process. I have come to recognise the emergent nature of creativity, and realise it is a personalised exploratory journey for each student, incorporating his or her own experiences. Such exploration would probably be more fruitful were it done in a playful way, and I need to find ways of playing usefully, bearing in mind that a narrow definition of ‘useful’ might be counterproductive. Should the students be included in establishing criteria for what is to count as useful, it might provide them with a sense of agency and foster engagement in the creative process.

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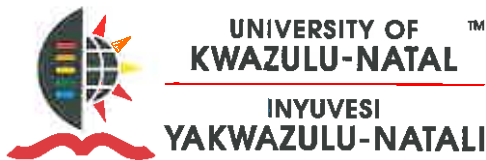
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26 June 2013

**Mr Chris de Beer 213571026**  
**School of Education**  
**Edgewood Campus**

**Protocol reference number: HSS/0243/013D**

**Project title: Pedagogical implications of an awareness of self in creative practice: A self-study**

Dear Mr de Beer

**Expedited approval**

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
**Dr Shenuka Singh (Deputy Chair)**  
**Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

/px

cc Supervisor Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan  
 cc Dr Claudia Mitchell  
 cc Academic leader - Research Dr MN Davids  
 cc School Administrator Ms B Bhengu

**Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**  
**Professor Urmilla Bob (Chair) and Dr Shenuka Singh (Deputy Chair)**  
**Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building**

**Postal Address:** Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

**Telephone:** +27 (0)31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Facsimile:** +27 (0)31 260 4609 **Email:** ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

**Website:** www.ukzn.ac.za

**Founding Campuses:** ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville





1 November 2017

Mr Chris de Beer 213571026  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs De Beer

Protocol reference number: HSS/0243/013D

New Project Title: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Creative Design Practice: Towards Pedagogic Implications

**Approval notification – Amendment Application**

This letter serves to notify you that your application for an amendment dated 1 September 2017 has now been granted **Full Approval**.

- Change in Title

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc .Supervisor: Professor Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan & Prof Claudia Mitchell  
cc. Academic Leader: Dr SB Khoza  
cc. School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymam@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymam@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



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The structure of my thesis I have chosen to present my doctoral study in the following format as specified by the University of KwaZulu-Natal College of Humanities Handbook: "A thesis may comprise one or more original papers of which the student is the prime author, published or in press in peer-reviewed journals approved by the college academic affairs board, accompanied by introductory and concluding integrative material" This format of a collection of papers suits the way my work was initiated and has unfolded. It started with a chapter published in an edited book, followed by a series of four articles written for various academic journals. The chapter and the articles show the gradual development of a method for deliberate consideration of the significance of an object. Each chapter or article deals with an exhibition that either I staged, or in which I participated. In this thesis, I present the chapters/articles as discreet entities, but with a thread that runs through, much like different artworks at an exhibition. This thread is visible in the interludes, a one-page artist statement with an image, which precede each paper. In the introductory and concluding chapters of the thesis, I will refer to the five papers by their shortened titles. The first paper is a chapter that was published in *Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education*, a peer reviewed book edited by Pillay, Naicker and Pithouse-Morgan (2016). The full title of the chapter is "Creative Self-Awareness: Conversations, Reflections and Realisations," (de Beer 2016a) and it will be shortened to "Creative Self-Awareness". Similarly the second paper, an article that was published in the journal *Educational Research for Social Change*, and titled "Examining Aspects of Self in the Creative Design Process: Towards Pedagogic Implications" (de Beer, 2016b) will become "Examining Aspects of Self". The third paper, "Rethinking visual journaling in the creative process: Exploring pedagogic implications" (de Beer, 2018), which was published in the *South African Journal of Higher Education* becomes "Rethinking Visual Journaling", while the fourth paper, "Through the Jeweller's Loupe: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Relationship between my Creative and my Pedagogic Practice" will be referred to as "Through the Jeweller's Loupe". This paper has been submitted to *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* and is currently under review. The final paper, "Faceting the crystal: An autoethnographic exploration of creative practice from a jeweller's workbench", which is currently under review at the *Qualitative Report*, will be called "Faceting the Crystal". Each paper has its own list of references, and all the references I used throughout are combined into a consolidated list of references at the end. The thesis page numbers in Italics at the bottom of each page, halfway between the centre and the right hand corner. This is to accommodate the numbering formats of the various journals. Going? "I learn from going, where I have to go" This quite an abrupt start. Should I maybe insert a title sort-of-page somewhere here? See comment on next page, re page numbers, as well. -Theodore Roethke, "The Waking" The notion of learning where to go by going, of finding out where the path is by walking, and thereby making the path, appeals to me. I find myself discovering what to make by making, as can be seen in figure 1 below. It shows a workspace in my studio with the raw materials and creative artefacts in varying stages of production. There are a number of tentative explorations and experiments, with embossed images of cameo profiles, and leaf outlines, which