Establishing design thinking: accident, program frameworks and personal practices.

by

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Abstract

Distribution through electronic media provides an avenue for promotion, recognition and an outlet of display for graphic designers. The emergence of available media technologies have enabled graphic designers to extend these boundaries of their practice. In this context the designer is constantly striving for aesthetic success and is strongly influenced by the fashion and trends of contemporary design work. The designer is always in a state of inquiry, finding pathways of discovery that lead to innovation and originality that are highly valued criteria for self-evaluation. This research is based on an analysis of the designer perspective and the processes used within an active graphic design practice specializing entirely within a digital collage domain. Contemporary design methodologies were critically examined, compared and refined to reflect the self-practice of the researcher. The refined methodology may assist designers in maintaining systematic work practices, as well as promote the importance of exploration and experimentation processes. Research findings indicate some differences in the identified methodologies and the design practice of the researcher in the sense that many contemporary designers are not confined to a client-base but are self-generating design images influenced by contemporary practitioners. As well as confirming some aspects of more conventional design processes, the researcher found that accidental discoveries and the designer’s interaction with technology plays a significant part in the design process.
Keywords

Design practice models, designer self-reflection, digital image creation, compositional design, technology inspired practice.
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A supplied CD containing:

a) Digital collages in .JPEG format.

b) Animation in .SWF and .MOV formats.
Abbreviations

DSLR – Digital Single Lens Reflex

DOF – Depth of Field

Camera RAW – Software program of photographic correction.

IDME stage – Investigative, Divergent, Mapping and Evaluation stages
Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature

Date 1/3/2013
Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background to the study: The passion for design.

My early interests in art practice led me to a qualification in Graphic Design where I subsequently entered the career path of a graphic designer. Through salary and freelancing employment I slowly learned a new method of ‘seeing’ in a visual graphic design context. I literally saw everything through graphic design ‘glasses’, constantly devouring and analysing methods of visual presentation that would hopefully appeal to a mass audience. Such constant implicit attention to graphic design led to continual development of new approaches to composition, layout, typography and illustration techniques, which are the fundamental ingredients of the graphic design language. After many years of designing for industry I moved into education, where I now teach graphic design. My gained knowledge and industry experience is now transmitted to students, however my personal desire was to study design processes and theory to discover and present key factors in a more explicit way.

As a design teacher my motivation for this research is to:

a) Understand the methods and practices of graphic designers, including my own.
b) Increase personal knowledge, skills and techniques.
c) Push the boundaries of innovation within the digital domain.
d) To position my work at a high level of design practice.

For the purposes of this research I systematically analysed my practice and examined my work procedures and strategies from an internal perspective. Observing my inner practice has given me more understanding in discovering why I use and choose certain methods for completing any design work. My preferred practical research has been contextualized within a digital collage genre utilizing Photoshop. Digital collage uses a broad range of content that is easily manipulated and allows for an abundance of expressive possibilities. This research is practice-led, gathering qualitative data as I
proceeded and worked through the body of collage work. The focus of the research is primarily from a designer’s and not a visual art perspective. The collages and the research have been constructed entirely in a designer’s paradigm of working practices and theories, with an emphasis on processes and decision-making steps that a designer undertakes when problem-solving. Marshall & Newton (2000, 1) state that the research task is to develop procedures and protocols that are philosophically relevant to the agendas of design. Existing methodologies have been examined in order to test and confirm their viability as working structure. My objective was to give designers an insight to available research practices and methodologies that may be a guide to other practitioners in the field. Graphic designers, whether they originate from a professional or student perspective, can prosper with a working methodology that promotes a guideline of research, investigative and evaluative practices. The processes are enhanced through a structured layer of steps that should create desirable working solutions.

The research title is:

“Establishing Design Thinking: accident, program frameworks and personal practices”

This exegesis will discuss the following areas:

Chapter 1. Introduces the framework of the research project.
Chapter 2. Discusses methodology from a designer’s point of view.
Chapter 3. Examines examples of technological innovators, digital collage fashion and trends
Chapter 4. Charts the research outcomes of this project, focusing on the experimental processes, software frameworks, learnt practices and personal deviation.
Chapter 2 – Methodology

Digital Art Practice and Design Processes

According to Marshall and Newton (2000, 2) design practice should be considered as worthwhile a practice of acquiring knowledge as other methods of scientific inquiry. This scholarly design practice aims to develop a framework model based on issues of practice and designers’ critical self-reflection. In other words, scholarly design practice requires designers to critically reflect on the creation design processes and to objectively conceptualise the processes into a systematic and concrete model. In practice it is hoped that using a systematic approach results in enhanced creativity. Margolin and Buchanan (1995, 247) argue that design thinking, emerges around the four disciplines of communication, construction, decision making, and systemization, is transforming design from a narrow trade skill and a professional specialization into art of conceiving.

In comparison, (Boyer, cited in Marshall and Newton 2002, 2) proposed that scholarly activities consist of four elements: discovery, application, integration and teaching. These defined notions help define the scholarly design practice. The ‘teaching’ element is excluded in this research because the research focuses on academic activity and is not specific to design practice.

Discovery relates to the conventional notion of pure, original research. It refers to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, freedom of inquiry, following an investigation wherever it may lead.

Application refers to the application of knowledge to consequential problems, and the generation of new knowledge out of the practice.

Integration refers to putting isolated facts into perspective. Integration is about making cross-disciplinary connections and contextualising specialist knowledge for broader audiences.

The design methodologies are not dedicated to a rigid structure of seeking information. Rather design is committed to a path of new discoveries that may hold possible effective design solutions, a process that is focused in the practical
engagement of particular tasks of inquiry. The action creates knowledge that is not only technical but promotes reflection, expressive interpretation and dynamic aesthetics. Broader connections to other methods or disciplines are another factor that contributes to the designers’ repertoire of solutions.

The designer’s investigation in finding a solution is not absolutely linear and static. Throughout the process of design there is a compulsion to evaluate at every stage to affirm that the work is at a professional level of aesthetic quality. It is almost cyclic with a return to other stages – the designer is always questioning the strategies in order to find the best possible solution for a specific problem. Graham Sullivan (2006, 49) argues that different perspectives and practices may emerge as inquiry twists and turns towards various sources in exploration of forms, purposes and actions. Sullivan (2006, 49) describes these aspects of practice:

a) Conceptual practice – where the designer engages in practices that make good use of the capacity to ‘think in the medium’ utilising the distributed modalities associated with visual knowing. The designer creates artefacts that are part of the research process.

b) Dialectical practices – describes forms of inquiry whereby the artist-researcher explores the uniquely human process of making meaning through experiences that are felt, lived, reconstructed and interpreted.

c) Contextual practices – describes critical forms of inquiry whose purpose is bring social change. Contextual art practices make use of cognitive processes that are best described as ‘sitting in a setting’ that is situational and makes use of visual texts, issues, debates and desires that are local in focus but global in reach.

Sullivan (2006) offers a very broad view of a designer’s perspective of working. His form of inquiry seems to be associated with a designer who has considerable freedom to explore and manoeuvre. The social and personal attributes are of significant value and importance to the overall research parameters, where the designer has an opportunity to go beyond the confines of an industry brief and delve in an environment that supports global and personal meaning perspectives. My objective in
this research was to discover a methodology that captures designer thinking more specifically.

Noble and Bestley (2005) have contributed to design methodology by refining more accurately our understanding of processes that a designer undertakes in a visual design environment. One particular model is devised by an actual graphic designer Matt Cooke’s response to a design brief. Cooke states (Bennett 2006, 131) I wanted to formalize our existing practices by building on existing practices by building on design methodologies, testing their effects on the design process and developing a structured approach that could help us to deliver a more effective piece of design. While some methodologies are not appropriate for every designer or situation, I set out to prove in the right circumstances, user centred research can make designing more effective and easier.

Noble & Bestley (2005, 47) state that systematic research methods encourage designers to develop a personal and critical point of view through recording, documenting and evaluating visual and verbal structures, languages and identities in the wider environment, and then apply those findings within their own work. This helps to position and formulate a methodology more applicable to a designer’s wants and needs. Graphic design thinking does not necessarily reflect the same values and outcomes as a visual artist. Designers often indulge in the influence of the mass market rather than their own personal values.

Cooke divides his model into 4 stages:
Stage 1: Definition
Outline of the project – discusses visual communication, identification of the target audience, creates and develops a clear set objectives for the project.
Stage 2: Divergence
Designer/design team broadens the parameters of the design problem giving itself the best chance of finding a solution. Outlines a range of contextual research and divergent thinking.
Stage 3: Transformation
Development and testing of a range of potential solutions. Experimenting with possible successful outcomes.
Stage 4: Convergence
Combining all the results of previous research and experimentation conducted in order to create a final outcome.

Cooke’s methodology closely resembles my practising methods and reflective thinking regarding a working design methodology, so his model served as the starting point for this research. Here are, however, some differences. While Cooke’s methodology is based entirely from a brief driven initiative, my model is focused towards a more self-promotional work practice. Especially in design education the industry client environment is often omitted leaving the designer to focus on self-initiated course of inquiry. The educational and self-promotional environment is broader and less restrictive – essentially creating more freedom to explore, yet is more scholarly critical, and reflective. My methodology is therefore less constraining, enabling a much broader framework of exploration that essentially encourages pathways to multiple divergent thinking. My methodology is quite systematic in its approach, as most designers prefer to position their work in a stepped instructional environment.

However, my methodology is similar to Cooke’s but with five sections. I have referred to the steps as stages in an overall process. The additional section incorporates a stage of evaluation that essentially sees the process as a looped or cyclical rather than a linear one. My methodology provides a process for designers that deliver innovation through investigation practices and critical reflection through evaluation. This is keeping with Noble and Bestley’s (2005) claims call for systematic approach. The constructed methodology does not specifically represent digital collage, as designers must be flexible and extend into other areas of design work. Sections can be molded and evaluation as a continual process within itself may lead to more inquiry and further investigation.
1) Conceptualization Stage

a. Defining what you want to do. Idea searching - research other practitioners in the field focusing on styles & trends.

b. Deciding on the tools and mediums that are possible in the execution of the visual problem.

c. Formulate and reflect possible techniques that may be utilized, including previous experience and discoveries.

d. Engage in divergent thinking.

2) Resources Stage

a. Gathering resources for preproduction.

b. Synthesizing and categorizing images.

c. Identifying & evaluating images partial or complete that maybe applicable for investigative work practices. Identifying further potential images.

d. Undertake image correction or retouching. (Photographic images may be corrected in ‘camera raw’ – altering the values of exposure, white balance, saturation, black fill, etc.)

3) Investigative Stage

a. Investigating possible outcomes through different pathways of exploration. Practice-led research incorporates accidental discoveries that maybe also be intentional. An intentional discovery is a concept of potential steps without any idea of the outcome, which can be accidentally arrived at. Unintentional discovery has no initial concept in place but generates random steps to initiate the element of surprise. The element of surprise is very much part of the discovery process.

b. Advancing the investigation of notable practitioners in my field of work. Critically reflect on the visual devices and techniques demonstrated in the practitioner’s work. This helps in contextualizing my work.

c. Experimenting with non-conformist lines of thinking.

d. Deliberating investigation into finding new and unique techniques, effects & aesthetics through experiential exploration.
e. Creating desired and interesting results through an iterative process of operations. Each operation is slightly modified for different results.

4) Mapping and Divergence Stage
a. Utilizing the learnt and explored outcomes from the previous investigative stage. These outcomes are assessed for usability or refined for repurposing to major work.
   b. Map the knowledge gained from of the previous stages (conceptualizing and investigation) stages to create innovation in technique and aesthetics. Try to break new ground and be inventive.

5) Evaluation Stage.
   a. The evaluation of exploratory experiments is the underpinning influence in my research. The evaluation is a continual process, which helps to drive innovation in my work. The evaluation stage is cyclic in nature – it reverberates in the all the previous stages
   b. Critical reflection of experimental outcomes helps to shift the paradigm of ingrained design formulas. Migrate from formula driven design practices.
Figure 1. My methodology based on Cocke's example:

a) Conceptualization stage - Idea creation with divergent thinking.
b) Resource stage - Identifying and gathering appropriate resources.
c) Investigative stage - Inquiry through experimentation.
d) Mapping and Divergence stage - Mapping learnt techniques to major work with innovation in mind.
e) Evaluation stage - Critical reflection between stages. (Cyclic)
In summary, design methodology gives a working outline and guidance for designers working on a specific project. Methodology defines the processes so that the designer can be better equipped in order to reach the desired goals and find an appropriate solution. Creating a systematic approach that breaks down the process into various sequential steps helps to focus the designer in an appropriate pathway for finding a solution. Nigel Cross (2011, 27) states that an outline a systematic procedure of first analysing the problem as fully as possible, then breaking this into sub-problems, finding suitable sub-solutions, evaluating these and then selecting and combining them into an overall solution. Also Ellen Lupton (2011, 4) suggests that breaking down the process into steps and implementing conscious methods of thinking and doing, designers can open their minds to vibrant solutions that satisfy clients, users, and themselves. My described methodology has been based on methodologies that I have previously researched and the information gained from my theoretical and self-practice research. My methodology is also based on the principle that not all work projects are industry-based. Design can be established in other areas of creative productivity without the restrictions initiated briefs from a capitalist environment. My methodology encapsulates the importance of periodically evaluating work over a period of the creation. Evaluating and questioning the quintessential values of the work is a fundamental requirement in maintaining quality, divergent pathways and positioning the design to a contemporary style.
Chapter 3 - Contextual Review

Overview of Genre & Style

The images that I created during my research are directly derived from investigations into other practitioners’ work from various sources. Art community websites and magazines in particular provide an abundance of updated images. In my experience graphic designers tend not to utilize galleries as an identifiable source of inspiration and motivation. Electronic and print publications are viewed and are valuable resources in receiving visual information that expresses the specific style and trends connected to contemporary compositions. The readily available electronic resources enable me to systematically analyze the structural components that make up modern digital collage. Unique design devices can be interpreted and analysed to formulate the possible steps of creation. The described analytical method helps to give clarity and understanding in establishing the specific style the artist is trying to create. Basically it is an attempt at unlocking the components of the work to find that particular style and then transferring those techniques to your own work. The intention is to accumulate knowledge from a particular design and use this knowledge to enhance new avenues of visual interpretation and expression. Deconstructing work and finding its essential building blocks creates guidance and a map for designers to explore and duplicate that particular style or trend. My practice has followed this procedure on a regular basis.

The overall success of a collage is usually based on the unique placement of elements that give rise to originality, novelty and visual impact. Compositional aspects help to define the fashion or trend that is directly communicated to the audience. However, there is an evolutionary process as designers take certain concepts and techniques from each other. Certain commonalities amongst contemporary designs are eventually located and digested which define the signature features of that style. Commonalities are the devices or techniques that dominate over a range of practitioners work in a particular genre. Discoveries can be made simply by looking deeply into works and
finding established areas of significant quality. My interpretations of a range of numerous digital collages have exposed certain commonalities that are useful to the work that I created. The result is a knowledge bank of devices that guide the work towards a contemporary style that is prevalent in the digital collage field. Some of the devices incorporated into my practice are:

a) Texture layering to create stimulating effects. Layers can be combined using various blending modes – this method often translates into intriguing aspects of images that play with perception.

b) Applying colour consistently to unify all the elements as a whole.

c) Adding possible atmospheric effects to enhance mood. Atmospheric textures such as clouds, gaseous clouds, fog, particles provide a source of inspiration and were regularly used in the background of images to set a ‘stage’ or ‘canvas’ for potential narrative.

d) Lighting effects – painting and using blending modes in Photoshop, which establish mood.

e) Fragmentation of effects and objects. Breaking images into particles helps to increase eye movement and adds detail.

f) Lines of light that promote eye movement.

There is a self-indulgent post-modernist approach that signifies the current trend in commercial digital art. It is hard to compartmentalize the work into specific genres. Compositional placement of elements plays an important role into the uniqueness and impact of the work. Precision placement that interrelates with each element maximizes eye movement to its full potential. The eye needs to be rapidly stimulated to maintain an interest in the viewed artwork. Most dedicated designers exploit this concept to appeal to the mass audience. Unusual and bizarre composition placement gives a sense of uniqueness that strikes a potential interest to an imagined audience.
**Technological Innovators**

My investigation was a constant study of visual work gained from all avenues of contemporary publication. Many were lesser-known artists uploading their work for screen-based viewing but I was seeking certain affinities with my practice. One of the sources of inspiration for my work comes from the aesthetic textural qualities of objects, surface textures whether they are photographed originals or manipulated hold significant importance in my digital collage designs.

Maggie Taylor and Stephen Burns are notable practitioners who utilize textural design in their work. Maggie Taylor is a particular designer that has considerable influence and direction regarding the progress of my inquiry into digital collage design. She inspires me in her visual solutions and her process of compositing her designs. Maggie is most famous for her introduction title designs for the well-known series “Ghost Whisperer” screened on local television. Similar to my own practice, Maggie Taylor photographs or scans found objects that support a dream-like quality. Maggie’s images are figurative by nature and are reminiscent of the early portrait photography style of ‘la belle epoch’ but with an imaginative dreamlike quality. Figures are intertwined with an inquisitive array of objects that suggest a narrative or mysterious story. They denote a surrealist quality within the compositional structure. Taylor describes her sources as:

“A broken bottle. A bird egg. A battered doll. Taylor’s studio in Gainesville, Florida, contains flat-file drawers, walls, and shelves full of quirky 19th-century photographs, taxidermy specimens, mounted insects, vintage toys, sea shells, feathers, and other artifacts she finds at flea markets, online auctions, and in her own backyard. ...If an item is rusty, cracked, chipped, or faded, all the better. “I’m not interested in sparkly things,” says Taylor. “I like objects that have wear and tear, a past, a story to tell.” (Taylor. 2004, 1-2)

Objects are either scanned or photographed and brought into Photoshop for processing digitally. Her method of finding appropriate resource material corresponds
closely to my own practice. Her objects of choice are identifiable as Victorian style which is an eclectic mix of objects and bric-a-brac. In comparison my objects must have a particular intrinsic texture quality that may have significance value in developing visual effects. The inquisitive nature of her figurative subjects against a painted-like background supplies inspiration and direction to the progression of my explorative and project work. Her rendition of Victorian colour values played a significant determining factor in finalizing my own particular colour schemes.

Stephen Burns (Burns, 2006) is an American artist who exploits similar textural qualities in his digital media work. He is a corporate instructor and lecturer in the application of digital art and designs. His work employs a various range of organic and man-made textures. There is an obvious display of digitally constructed textural images that encompasses freshness and vitality, with a composition of focused elements that encourage the audience to look deeper into each textural surface. Burns’ textural compositions are inspirational in creating unique surface quality. There is an immediate curiosity in the digital creation of the textures that resonate throughout his work. The textures are a fascinating digital construction that may not necessarily be from an original source but rather be created entirely in a digital framework of tools and filters. Burns is similar to Taylor in the respect of using a dominant figure but features more abstract expressionism in the textural diversity with all his work. Taylor and Burns influenced my collage practice in terms of style, colour, composition and content. They added a contextual pathway in the realm of digital collage that persuades conceptual and divergent thinking within my own practice. I have researched many other practitioners in the field of collage but they are lesser known and do not have the same standing in the art community. They are usually amateur artists that upload their work to various websites such as deviantART, Designflavr etc. However they have become valuable resource in establishing the contemporary trends of today.

**Social Networking**

Designers do not work in isolation; the premise of completing images is often to share aesthetics, techniques and concepts. Ellen Lupton (Armstrong 2009, 6) argues that design is a social activity. Rarely working alone in private, designers respond to clients, audiences, publishers (print & electronic) institutions and collaborators. While
our work is exposed and highly visible, as individuals we often remain anonymous; our contribution to the texture of daily life existing below the threshold of public recognition. However the digital revolution has brought new ways of socializing and disseminating work. Work can be uploaded to various art community websites and be commented on by other artist (professional and amateur) in the digital art field. It creates a global discourse of connected galleries that has no restrictions on available wall space and artistic prejudice or; anybody can submit online. The benefit of creating networks with other artists adds to the knowledge gained from the practice. Observing and interacting with art community websites helps to establish links not only with artists that have passion, but also with well-known artists who are highly recognized in digital arts. Interacting with professional artists who are well regarded may elevate my own positioning to higher level, as there is a correlation between the artist’s stature and the networks from which they belong. Being a member of several organizations, gallery societies, and various institutions increases social involvement and is a place of knowledge that can be exchanged and debated.

Researching through various community sites is a valuable resource for inspirational concepts, analysing technique and establishing the current design trends. Some feedback of came from regular internet access. The main advantage was that my work could be evaluated at regular intervals through electronic retrieval of associated digital media’s practitioners. My connection with the art community has been through “Deviant Art’ and Flickr. While it is beneficial to have an inexpensive platform for an audience to view your work, the comments are favourably encouraging but not of significant value. The language is not of an academic level but can be encouraging or discouraging depending on the supplied comment. Favourable comments can be gratifying and help in establishing whether your design work has approached audience appeal, but generally speaking, the designer must rely on their own critical reflection.

In conclusion, research is a vital element in design practice. Researching practitioners applicable to your practice can help you achieve a level of work required to deliver the contemporary style that is prevalent in today’s digital collage. Researching work leads to a contextual examination that delivers the visual standard of collage design,
but more importantly enables the researcher to find the inner workings of a collage. The devices, techniques and commonalities that are carefully analysed, provide the essential building blocks or road map for developing your own designs. Social media in terms of art community websites are an alternative platform to view work without relying on conventional galleries and publications. It offers the artist a convenient and efficient opportunity to disseminate work to the public arena. The artist does not have to be well known or have particular artistic standing in the community to be published via the Internet. However the display of the work is limited, to the restrictive dimensions of the computer screen. In comparison, the gallery offers the artist an opportunity to exhibit in a larger format which adds considerable impact and tactile physicality to the viewer.
Chapter 4 - Research Outcomes

*Personal Issues concerning collage practice-led research*

In this section I will detail the interactions between the designer and the computer workspace. Certain issues and concerns have risen as I progressed through my project work. These are my findings in terms of my personal investigation into digital collage.

**Resource Stage**

*Appropriation versus originality*

One of my major objectives for this project was to create works that are original, even while resting within a contemporary design/digital context. Image appropriation is easy and convenient, with the increasing availability of internet resources. Many sites offer professional stock photographs with excellent quality images. One very popular website is stock.xchng ([www.sxc.hu](http://www.sxc.hu)) - which offers free download of professional & amateur photographs. Their collection is quite considerable with all images being absolutely free; no payment of any kind is requested from the site owners. Many artists like myself find this extremely desirable and as it makes resource gathering easy with images downloaded with a few clicks of the mouse. The consequence of downloading images is the loss of originality. The photographer’s creative ideas, thinking, aesthetics and skills are clearly embedded into the image. Even though the connection to the original photograph may be significantly reduced through distortion and manipulation it is not your own material. This reduces the authorship of the work dramatically. The resulting work basically has two authors - the editor or manipulator and the originator of images. There is a lingering sub-conscious message that plays in the back of the mind of the designer that this design work is not totally original. The designer is detached from the images that they use; there is no personal involvement. The designer chooses images that are valued predominantly from visual aesthetic qualities rather than personal attachment and meaning. I must concede that the non-appropriation issue only became a personal issue as I progressed through the practice, which was not a concern in my early collage work. Early work clearly uses
downloaded images.

**Photographic image gathering**

**Camera:** To ensure and maintain originality and minimize the need for appropriation and utilization of stock imagery, I decided to purchase photographic equipment for my entire image taking processes. The research was quite considerable and time-consuming in the acquisition of photographic gear. Each camera and the associated lenses were researched thoroughly to ensure the most appropriate model was chosen. The major criteria for purchasing a camera were to maintain originality and lessen the need for utilizing stock imagery. Many brands were considered, reviewed and examined before placing my final decision.

Canon 550D – DSLR (18 megapixel) affordable, features & reliable brand.
Canon 18mm-135mm zoom lens – general coverage of focal lengths.
Canon 100m 2.8 Macro Lens – close-up textural images.
Kenko Extension Tubes – higher magnification when needed.
Nissin 622 external flash – additional lightning.

My photographic expertise was much less than my ability in creating design work. I invested considerable hours reading websites and books in order to increase my level of proficiency and knowledge. There was a realization that photography incorporates considerable technical knowledge with aesthetic skills. My aim was to deliver a high return of successful and useful photographs that could be used in digital collage. The introduction of using my own photographic equipment and photographs pushed the timeframe of this research as it was so very time consuming.

Stock images in contrast provide considerable convenience with exceptional efficiency. Designers have become proficient editors of photographic material, but I became increasingly original in creating photographs. The result was a gain in knowledge, flexibility and a higher level of skill in this designer’s repertoire. It also can be said that locating absolute correct photographs from stock material can be quite frustrating and delaying when completing a specific project, so that creating your own photographs may help to save time eventually. Using self-generated photographs also maintains originality, personal achievement and authorship.
Scanner: Another form of image taking that can be innovational and original is the flat-bed scanner. Either organic or constructed objects can be placed on the scanner’s glass surface to create a digital scan. General objects can be considered an inspirational resource, for example scrap pieces of carpet, flyscreen, and an orange peel may create a wonderful texture or pattern that is useful in collage design. The result can be quite unexpected as it is often difficult to ascertain the resulting scan. The flat-bed scanner is efficient, economical and an easy form of image creation that is often overlooked by many designers.

Close-up & Textural Abstractions
Close-ups of various organic and man-made objects create new ways of seeing. Interesting textures and patterns are discovered creating rich material for collage manipulation. Magnifying from small to large creates impact and creates new possibilities. I became increasingly interested in macro photography as it provides an abundance of textural material suitable for collage design. Close-up photography can easily be achieved within the home environment; there is little need to travel to exotic locations. It encourages you to look around your personal environment to find possible solutions for colour, design and effect.

Capturing close images requires special photographic equipment. Acquiring the right equipment reduces errors and increases the overall success of producing excellent imagery. However, the cost can be quite substantial. Research revealed that there are several methods of attaining quality macro photographs:
1) Reversing the lens with a lens mount.
2) Using a screw dioptre, this fits onto the front of the lens.
3) Replacing the standard lens with a macro lens.

I chose the third option of fitting a macro lens to the camera body. For all the macro photography I used a 100mm 2.8 fixed lens as previously stated in the equipment list.

In order to obtain excellent images in close-up photography, there are a few technical issues of concern.
1) Depth of field (DOF) and focusing – The area of sharpness is decreased when using high magnifications. Only a small section of depth is in actual focus. Setting the aperture to a high level counteracts this problem.

2) Lighting – To ensure clarity with the correct exposure. Lighting needs to be diffused without harsh shadows. An external flash between lens and subject is one method that secures a good result. These are referred as a ring light or flash. External flashes with a soft box are another alternative that gives a pleasing result.

**Digital software: Camera Raw**

Gathering images for the forthcoming production work is one of the main criteria in the resource stage regarding my methodology. A collection of photographic images grows rapidly and must be evaluated for technical correctness. Each photograph is viewed in Camera RAW to determine the accuracy of exposure, temperature, clarity and any other factors. Camera RAW provides an opportunity to alter photographic values. There is little need to use the main Photoshop program as Camera RAW’s facilities are much more efficient and effective. Photoshop Raw provides 16 bit-processing capabilities that enable a high level of control in the correction process that is direct and easy to understand. It is a particularly useful tool in adjusting exposure values that are either too light or dark. Photoshop RAW reduces the wastage and therefore incorrect exposed photographs do not need to be discarded or redone.

**Investigative, Mapping and Divergence Stages**

**Digital Software: Adobe Photoshop**

For all my postproduction work, I utilized Adobe Photoshop as my main production tool. It fulfilled the requirements of the investigative, divergence and mapping stages stated in my methodology. It is an exceptional platform to explore potentially stimulating visual effects that traditional paper environment cannot not support. The paper environment may be considered quite limiting in creating various textural and lighting effects in comparison to Photoshop’s array of filters, blending modes and levels of transparency. The possibilities seem to be endless due to the combination of processes and techniques that can be applied. Photoshop upholds my needs in terms of
functionality and practicability and clearly does not disappoint as an editing program. It helped to extend my artistic practice without restriction and delivers the necessary tools for photographic manipulation, collage construction, and painting, suitable for investigative inquiry. However on a few occasions I did use Corel Painter to complete additional painted backgrounds. Photoshop provided an excellent canvas to create and explore the process of digital collage making. The program’s electronic scissors accommodated seamless transition across the all the photographic elements and had an excellent supply of various effects. Photoshop is the key ingredient to the in the creation of digital collage material, the manipulators craftsman toolbox of choice and is usually regarded as industry standard. Generally there are no obvious constraints; however I would like to see more distort tools as they accommodate more possibilities in manipulating forms and pushing paint. Usually the designer’s restrictive knowledge, skill base and personal imagination are the limiting factors in the process. The interaction between designer and the program has a bearing on the outcome of the work. Benjamin Weil (2002, 523) argues that digital tools have become readily accessible as pencil or clay, mastery trends tend to be about pushing the technology to the back of the stage, where it really belongs. With computing the notion of representation is further established in the realm of filtering, editing and reconstructing, so as to create new meaning.

Photoshop provides a technological digital environment for the designer to explore new possibilities that traditional media cannot embrace. The combination of filters, transparency, and blending modes provides an inexhaustible playground that supplies a multitude of new and unfounded visual effects. Tacit knowledge and experience are certainly utilised; however the core of Photoshop is amassed in the intuitive and cognitive practices. The designer develops a ‘feel’ for the programs where the personal mastery of program is largely accomplished. The designer hopes to project personality and individualism into their work that will identify them as a worthwhile and unique designer.
Photoshop technical construction based on practice

There are numerous effects and techniques that Photoshop can create. Below is a list of favoured tools that I frequently used in my investigative research:

a) Layer mask – Layer mask blends one image into another. Layer mask enables to reveal or conceal any portion of an image. It reduces the need to make selections and is completely editable.

b) Liquify - Liquify is generally used to push flesh for distorting or correcting people disfigurements. In my practice I used Liquify to move and blend paint in background areas. It helped in pushing paint around a particular surface.

c) Blending modes – Blending modes supply various lighting and transparency effects between images. Blending modes can be quite an intuitive method of working as it is impossible to predict the exact effect from combining images together. Overlay, colour and hue were used routinely in my work.

d) Layer styles. Layer styles have many functional capabilities and it was a useful tool in creating impasto technique in painting.

Animation in display

To clarify the stages of my process more clearly, the layer structures of my work have been systematically revealed through a process of animation. By exhibiting the animations, I want to communicate to an audience how the work was created as well as exhibiting final prints. The animation strips away the complexity of layers to illuminate my intentions and decision-making processes. Many viewers of collage design often speculate as to the development of the viewed work – the decisions made, materials used, techniques, and the concept behind the work. The animation should help the viewer to see the journey the designer took and gives a clearer analysis of composition, colour, element positioning and texture. Each decision executed by the designer has meaning and purpose to the overall structure of the work. The exhibition of work was disseminated through various display platforms – hardcopy, art community websites and animation.
Evaluative Stage

Accident in design

As a continuing practitioner, I analyse other well-known practitioners in the design field. There is a constant obsession of researching art community sites that are associated with collage design. It’s a practice that occurs within the all the stages of my methodology. It provides a source of visual guidance but more importantly a reference point of evaluation. Generally my research is divided into two pathways- one pathway goes with written research, the other follows an aesthetic path. Continual observation of styles and trends that are contemporary and digitally manipulated is regarded as an essential requirement. Once discovered, I analyze the techniques, method, practices that the artist might apply. It is impossible to be certain of the actual processes but they lead you into your own practice. The discovered techniques become a starting point. However it is almost impossible to duplicate the exact same effect and you may end up with a totally different aesthetic to the one you set out to complete. This is where the concept of accident comes into play. There is an intention to create a particular effect, but due to inaccuracies in defining the correct steps there is an unintentional outcome. These unexpected outcomes are a major part of the investigative stage. Not all investigations are totally planned with a known result. Furthermore the unknown result may be beneficial to a designer’s learning experience and be guided to new solutions. Great successes have been attributed through the process of accident. Accident is not always guided by the designer’s thoughts, skills and experience, but can be a totally unplanned outcome based on a ‘what if I do this’ policy rather than systematic intention. Eventually the designer creates a library of techniques developed in the investigation stage which can be mapped to further projects.

Experience versus experimentation

Although programs give a designer an ability to do a huge range of effects, the technology may be restricted due to personal style. Specific beliefs and design paradigms can push the boundaries towards experimentation but a designer’s personal style may restrict continual exploration. It is impossible to experience and learn everything that can be created in the software environment, even if you try to push the boundaries of the software. However, reasons for the apparent limitations of software
may be compounded by the habits formed during considerable years as a design practitioner in the areas of employment and teaching. Personal background, past experiences and prejudices play a role determining the discovery of new techniques and possibilities. As a practicing designer, experience contributes to making particular design work, as well as knowledge in design theory such as ‘the principles and elements of design’ and ‘gestalt theory’. Design conditioning from previous graphic design experience is evident in the works that I create and it is difficult to escape from these boundaries of habit. I am confined by my gained knowledge of experience and subsequently am not working in an area of indiscriminate exploratory invention like an artist without a past history of design conditioning.

It is uncertain whether design experience is a valuable attribute or a hindrance to innovation. Design knowledge helps in creating audience success but may be detrimental to new discoveries. As a practicing designer and lecturer my main objective is to create positive feedback from an audience, which includes praise from other practicing digital collage artists. I am constrained by my belief and obsession in making the work visually striking as opposed to creating innovation, meaning or narrative for its own sake. Designers who require audience approval and praise will often seek out the devices that are common in the works of considered merit. Looking for the commonalities helps in understanding the devices favoured by most of the practitioners in your field of digital art. However the methodology that has emerged in this study counteracts rigid design habits by demanding that a reflective, critical cycle of evaluation be part of the process.

**Establishing criteria**

Collage is an art form based on multiple elements and their relationship within the image. Each element placed in the collage is evaluated through a set of criteria developed by the on-going practice, usually based on subject, colour, size, texture, shape and positioning. Cognitive thinking combined with exploratory technical investigation are important factors in the positioning and placement of the next element. Roughs or plans for any of my work, significantly reduces spontaneity of my decision-making however I am still very conscious of the artistic build that is being created in the work. It must be of high aesthetic value and have personal value. There are gestalt and
design principle theories that guide the designer to achieve aesthetic success. The designer may be persuaded by intuition with regards to the next response in the work. For example, a certain feel or intuition towards colour, line, texture, space creates a subconscious guidance in creating work. The stipulated criteria may be constructed through the guided grounds of theory and knowledge but can be loosely associated with personal feelings. The criteria may change due to the development and unexpected growth of the work, but criteria should be continually evaluated by the designer’s own set of design values, visual outcomes, and a conscious effort towards innovation. Criteria on individual images in this research are outlined later in this chapter.

Innovations in display and exhibition

The following images selected from my body of work illustrate the implementation of the design processes outlined in this study. The collages show a significant progression from early to later work. The early work is defined by the detailed usage of interlocking curved shapes. Each shape in the early collages has a strong relationship with each other in order to build a successful composition. There is an obvious commitment to include a considerable amount of detail to captivate audience attention. However, the subject matter or content in all my collages was secondary to the overall look of the work; meaning and narrative was of little importance.

A significant change of direction took place within the mid-project work. Random objects that had little meaning were replaced with figurative elements. There was a shift from appropriated images to self-generated images. The camera gave me original images that I so desired for creating collage work, as there was little need to sort through stock images. The work became more personal with the introduction of my family members offering some narrative and deeper meaning to the work. The objects that surround the figure are more strongly connected than in the previous set of work. In mid-project stage, attention to and fascination with texture became a vital ingredient that influenced my latter work. Photoshop provides an exploratory platform for experimenting with texture. By using transparency and specific layer construction,
texture can be treated, enhanced and manipulated to the artist’s desired visual stimulus.

Textural design is even more pronounced in the latter work. There is evidence of extended use of textural effects gained through macro images of household objects such as detergent, bread, orange peel etc. My preference for magnified images pushed the textural investigation further and delivered quite interesting and intriguing imagery for collage making. The figurative element was still present, but there was an emphasis on compositional uniqueness in displaying a partial representation of the face. The portrait originates from the edge communicating a sense of mystery to the figure.

Most of my latter work is dominated by an intense use of textural layering. Layers in Photoshop were blended and manipulated to enhance a sense of richness and atmosphere. The textures became the ‘hero’ of the work and occupied a major portion of the space. The figurative elements are not central but accumulate around the edges, which frames the textural area.

Modularity is another influence in my work. Object parts were dissected and rearranged in order to create new organic structures. This type of ‘visual surgery’ produced a unique and alien appearance to the new-formed object. Recognizable visual objects underwent a transformation to something totally unrecognizable or ambiguous, which adds interest to the work.

In the following pages I have deconstructed the collages referring to each stage of the emergent methodology within my practice. It should be noted that the evaluative stage is part of an on-going process as well as a final part of the methodology.
Figure 2. Paul Morris  *Serenity*, 2010
Early work

Serenity

**Conceptualization Stage:** The concept is based on an abstract conglomeration of various shapes and elements. The objective was to find relationships within the elements and create a composition with limited photographic reference regarding the butterfly and flower. The other elements are purposely-distorted shapes and flowing lines that encourage eye movement and sensitivity to the overall design.

**Resource Stage:** My preference for imagery at this stage was to utilize the convenient resource of Internet stock photography websites. High quality imagery can be found on websites, which reduces the workload in comparison to creating original photographs. The shapes surrounding the butterfly were constructed in Illustrator and distorted in Photoshop to generate spontaneity and harmony in the design. All the shapes were completed prior to construction and assembled in Photoshop.

**Investigative Stage:** My investigation led me to the relationships between shapes and photographic imagery. I wanted to examine whether shapes are a relatively effective substitute in collage design in preference to total photographic imagery. I found that deliberate distortion could bring harmony and fluidity to lines and shapes, and create a fundamental framework to formalise relationships between each element. Unifying the shapes into a focal point creates a foundational building block within the design format.

**Mapping & Divergence Stage:** After experimentation, the shapes were organised into a structure that frames the butterfly. Distorted shapes were refined to create a balanced relationship with the surrounding elements. Each element was carefully examined and built into an interlinked structure. Added lines and letter characters increased the detail of the work and enhanced the contrast of size.
**Evaluation:** Evaluation is ongoing and is represented in Figure 1 (Methodology) by the arrows that link the stages of design. I decided to refine the collage further by changing the colours of the collage, including the background and some of the objects. I found a neutral background was the best solution in the final image for isolating the collage elements and a co-ordinated assortment of magenta colours worked quite effectively to contrast colours.
Figure 3. Paul Morris  A Journey into Mobilization, 2011
A Journey into Mobilization

**Conceptualization stage:** After completing Serenity, my ambition was to complete bigger work utilizing the same technique of combing shapes and photographic images. In comparison to the previous collage design Serenity, this work infuses more photographic images with abundance of cyclic shapes that give a sense of unity and cohesion. A journey into mobilization encompasses a theme around a multitude of transportation machinery. A fascination with machinery gave me the theme for this work.

**Resource Stage:** Resources were gathered through the same stock imagery site as stated in the previous work Serenity. I downloaded images that were applicable to this theme. To introduce an atmospheric effect to the work I also downloaded clouds as the background image to the work.

**Investigative Stage:** A journey into Mobilization involved a considerable amount of preliminary experimentation before the rendition of the final work. The inquiry led to experimenting with particular shapes that would have aesthetic appeal and be capable as a constructional unit. Influenced by natural design, I found the simple shape of a leaf with a double ‘S’ curve inspired me. The curves add a simple harmonious flow that stimulates eye movement around the work, and are part of the design motifs that occur throughout my practice.

**Mapping and Divergence Stage:** Successful experimentation processes from the previous investigative stage were kept and finally assembled to a final rendition. I distorted the ‘leaf’ shapes through Photoshop’s distort filters to reduce the conformity of the shapes. My preference was to keep the image floating and this is supported by the image of the clouds and butterflies. Lines are simply overlaid to enhance detail and provide a richness of sensitivity. The colour scheme is deliberately kept warm.
with a distribution of yellows and ochre’s that dominate the work. The content of the machinery is not as important as the delivery of a spectacular imagery through the structural layering of elements. All of the early work utilizes design devices & conventions that are learnt through industry experience.

**Evaluation Stage:** Evaluation of this image was maintained throughout its overall development. Tonal enhancement and overall colour scheme is finally refined to make sure there is even consistency through the work. The levels involving highlight, gamma and shadow are used to adjust the overall value of the work. I used levels to enhance the section of the clouds to give a sense of the dramatic. Evaluation of tonal values is important to the overall success of the work, which is based primarily on visual impact in this image.
Figure 4. Paul Morris. Desert of Oblivion, 2011
Mid–Project Work

The Desert of Oblivion

Conceptualization Stage: The Desert of Oblivion was a major change in direction during my study. The image starts to move away from the shapes and lines that predominate in my previous collage compositions, and it is more original than previous work, as I have utilized my own images and photographs. My motivation for this work was to create a narrative or story; the intention of the preceding work was for it to be enjoyed from only a visual perspective. Desert of Oblivion provokes and pushes the audience into providing an explanation and narrative for the combination of elements in the image.

Research Stage: During this part of my practice, I was intrigued by Maggie Taylor’s (2004) work in print and film. Her rendition of the beginning titles for the TV program “Ghost Whisper” inspired me to research her work. She provides a sense of narrative throughout her work, even though the meaning may be quite obscured. I further investigated other collage practitioners that provided symbolic and narrative meaning. To maintain a high degree of originality in this work I utilised original photographs that were taken by myself. I was interested in using the subject of my wife Marilou’s pregnancy for the image, and the photograph was one that stood out because its expressive content but a better camera was needed. Subsequently I researched and purchased a new Canon DSLR camera.

Investigative Stage: As I progressed with Photoshop’s tools and effects, my interest was aroused towards the possibilities of creating texture. I discovered that Photoshop has an ability to create an endless variety of different textures. This excited me to explore and push the boundaries of textural experimentation. An accidental discovery was that photographic images do not need to be used in isolation – paint and photography can be successfully combined. For example, embossing paint strokes in Photoshop provides a relief stucco effect that simulates contemporary oil painting effect.
Mapping and Divergence Stage: Many backgrounds were developed in the investigative stage; I eventually chose a painted background that would be applicable for creating a narrative collage composition. The image of my pregnant wife with a troubled expression was positioned in the collage in the bottom right corner – she is the dominant figurative element within the design. The narrative was built through the progression of the work, not determined prior to the final stage. Landscape features of silhouetted trees and pool like streams were overlaid on the paint in order to create foreground and background perspective. The whirling texture of red and yellow paint implies a fiery danger to the work and to communicate these further, helicopters were added to heighten the drama. Finally the halo was included to symbolise a protective element from the engulfing background elements.

Evaluation: Evaluation was based on both visual and narrative perspectives. The visual appearance included the narrative dialogue based on the collage elements and figurative expression. The abundant red colour that dominates this image is enhanced through using the saturation in the hue/saturation options. My objective was to create a fiery combination of colours including reds, oranges and yellows to give a sense of heat in the scene. Final adjustments were completed by fine tuning levels and using the burn/dodge tools.
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Figure 5. Paul Morris  Peaceful Sebastian, 2011
Peaceful Sebastian

**Conceptualization Stage:** My family is a major inspiration to my work. With the birth of my son last year, my attitude became more nurturing with an underlying devotion towards my family. I wanted to express this event visually in my work communicating the innocence that a new baby brings into a family. Images that define a degree of ‘softness’, ‘innocence’ and ‘nurturing’ were utilised to communicate meaning.

**Research Stage:** I photographed a numerous range of objects that fulfilled the above criteria. All the images were taken with the 550D canon camera with a much better resolution than my previous camera. The sleeping figurative pose conveyed the best solution in terms of the baby’s innocence. An array of items that signified softness such as veils, children’s toys and other appropriate wall textures needed to be included to make up this collage.

**Investigative Stage:** The collected images were explored with transparency and various blending modes that gave the best impression of softness. High contrast and bright photographs were purposely desaturated to portray a sense of calm and quietness within the image this was completed in Camera Raw. Investigation transcended into applying various blending modes and transparencies to deliver the correct effect. Elaborated painted textural backgrounds did not work in this case, as it deliberately interfered and obscured the veil textures. After considerable experimentation regarding background composition, a simple vignetted background was chosen. This was in keeping with the style of my previous work and is seen as one of the preferential habits of my practice. The vignette frames the collage to emphasize the foreground elements within the composition.

**Divergence and Mapping Stage:** I gained considerable confidence as the investigative practices started to deliver the desired results. Photographic elements and experimentations were assembled to bring the whole work to coherence.
Essentially ‘Peaceful Sebastian’ portrays a multitude of soft textures that communicates aspects outlined in the conceptualization stage. Sections of a veil are incorporated below Sebastian with a deliberate soft feather effect. The interpretation of the soft veils draws a symbolic reference to the protection of mother and father. The extra toys provide security to the sleeping child. The composition is purposely composed of elements in an inverted ‘V’ shape that portrays a psychological arrow, which intentionally points to Sebastian. Colours were meticulously kept subdued with a subtle sense of warmth. The software framework blends textures with transparency and accentuates the concept of softness.

**Evaluation:** Part of the evaluation process is dependent on the precise positioning of images that supports the composition. An intuitive sense of placement when deciding compositional factors was continually assessed through the developing stages. Each part of the image must communicate a soft innocent quality that is essential to the success of this work. In Photoshop I altered the colour of objects surrounding Sebastian. The process was one of saturating and desaturating colour to enhance the softness of the overall composition. To accentuate the softness of this particular image I applied a layer mask to each layer so that I could feather the edge using a brush. It was a process of fine-tuning to obtain the best visual image that communicated the innocence and softness of early childhood.
Figure 6. Paul Morris  *Sebastian’s World*, 2012
Sebastian’s world

Conceptualizing Stage: Textural effects became a passion with my work in the post-production area. My idea was to capitalize on the previous success utilizing textural backgrounds (mix of paint and photographic) and figurative elements. There was evidence of a unique style evolving within my work. My particular style was characterized by the usage of macro imagery, portraiture, textural backgrounds and layering around figurative elements. I wanted to focus on Sebastian’s attractive face and try to tease the audience into what may be his thinking. Textural images would draw a line towards his eye to emphasize his presence within the image.

Resource Stage: Macro photography became a strong interest in the latter parts of my practice. My expertise in camera techniques were limited and therefore research into photographic macro techniques was eagerly sourced through technical websites and magazines. I resourced many suitable macro objects simply by walking through parks and investigating household objects. A feather a bird had dropped in the park particularly intrigued me and as a result – the feather became prime textural source for this collage. Many macro photographs were taken and were used as the prime source of texture in the collage. Appendix 1 illustrates a range of experiments done during this stage.

Investigative Stage: Through my practice I engaged in the exploration of composition, which is one of the most critical areas of collage design. Composition focuses the audience to certain areas of importance, but above all transmits crucial eye movement around the encompassing space. In this work, the portrait photograph of Sebastian is literally halved. It is a move away from the conventional structure of a full face and rises to a sense of mystery of wonder as half the face is represented. This type of unconventional composition should make an impression with audiences and
deliver a sense of wonder, due to the masking effect on one side of the face. A further investigation involved the layering of feather images to discover the effect it created. An assortment of applied blending modes was experimented to find the solution that fulfilled my expectations in visual aesthetics. To unify the work as a whole I explored various colour choices that gave the work a unique appearance to my progressing work. I opted for desaturated warm hues with a slight overlay of green and brown. My preference for warm colours in my work is apparent though all the collages.

**Divergence and Mapping Stage** – Learnt practices in the investigative stage were applied to build ‘Sebastian’s World’. The composition follows a particular path from left to right drawing focus on Sebastian’s portrait. The intertwined images of the feather were subsequently layered and masked to create a definite textural surface. The painted background utilizes the liquefy filter which distorts creating a three-dimensional surface quality. To maintain and emphasize the importance of Sebastian, a vignette was applied to obscure distracting areas.

**Evaluation Stage** – Evaluation was procedural throughout the development of this collage. Evaluation was largely self-critical, utilising little references to other contemporary collage imagery. Confidence in collage construction was gained considerably through my previous digital collage practice. I refined this particular image by applying the ‘dodge and burn’ tool in Photoshop. I wanted to darken the background to reduce unwanted detail, as my priority is to emphasize the textural structure emerging from Sebastian’s half face. Combinations of textures are structured together to make an arch which establishes eye movement.


Symphony in Rapture II

Conceptualization Stage: My ideas and concepts were more formalized and ingrained at this time. I wanted to discover and explore a new direction in utilizing close-up photography of everyday objects as an underlying principle in texture development. Macro photography can be a fairly instantaneous resource when using the immediate environment. Downloads are efficient with the ability to re-photograph quickly if desired.

Resource Stage: My photographic skills were gaining in ability and confidence. I gathered macro photographic resources from the kitchen area of my home. Various food and fluids were photographed from a close-up viewpoint to capture interesting examples of texture that could be useful in collage design.

Investigative Stage: My aim was to find examples of investigative practice that could be applied in the latter stage of ‘divergence and mapping’. Considerable time was spent examining possible combinations of layers to find the most dynamic effect. Layering of textures was not predetermined and in this case gave unexpected and accidental results. In particular, colour in areas interacted in dynamic ways with certain textures. The central area gave rise to incredible golden hues of various highlights and contrast. The dark areas around the image created a natural vignette which helped to frame the half portrait.

Divergence and Mapping Stages: In this work I have tried to push innovation further. The compositional structure is more unique than the previous work. The face is halved but with a different counter-clock wise perspective. Underneath the face, various textures of everyday objects found in my kitchen are exposed. Layered close-up images of detergent bubbles intertwine with the surface texture of bread. These textures have an ethereal appearance of floating clouds, which is emphasized by the
sideways floating portrait. Hues are kept warm with a subtle green blend, which is a colour effect that gives my work consistency throughout. By keeping certain colours and hues consistent, there is defined obvious link between collages.

**Evaluation Stage:** The main criterion for this collage was to engulf the design with a rich textural surface that had an ethereal quality. Evaluation was significantly directed to the qualities of combined layers – how the layers are integrating and reacting. Refining layer tonality and colour coordination is a continual practice throughout the work. Using Photoshop’s burn tool I added a slight vignette at the bottom of this image, which gives more emphasis to the portrait.
Figure 8. Paul Morris *Inspiration V*, 2012
**Inspiration V**

**Conceptualization Stage:** The concept behind this work is quite similar to the previous collage “Symphony in Rapture II’. The concept is well established with the inclusion of a layer mix of close-up photographic textures and figurative elements. However for this work I wanted to bring in meaning into the work by providing more elements that explored the internal world of a child.

**Resource Stage:** Images were gathered from my own personal photographs. An array of close-up photographs depicting certain types of bread gave interesting textural results. Photographs of my son Sebastian were collected as the figurative element. The bulb typically signifies a new idea, illumination and inspiration, which coincided in my life with the birth of my son. The bulb is positioned over Sebastian’s head to enhance his importance and give him a childlike star attraction. The light streak animates the path of the toddler, which signifies the overabundance of energy.

**Investigative Stage:** Less time was devoted to the investigative stage as the conceptual and experimental practices have been already formulated in previous work. I could predetermine the result of the layer mix and therefore the need for experimentation was reduced. I fundamentally used the previous investigative practices as my visual research for this work.

**Divergence and Mapping Stage:** Many of the works in this practice support a background and figurative foundation. The construction of this collage is mapped from my previous investigative work. My intention is to observe the effect from sandwiching and combining potential textural and paint layers. Relationships between certain areas of textures are important in the whole unification of the work. Each texture must hold significant value, quality and positioning to be successful within the compositional structural environment. A vignette is used top and bottom to maintain
clarity and importance to the figure and light bulb.

**Evaluation:** Evaluation processes were starting to lean away from a direct comparison to practitioners in my field. The assessment of my work now involved comparing previous work and making sure there was significant consistency in style, content and colour scheme.
Conclusion

The digital collage provides the designer-educator with an opportunity to explore a range of aesthetic possibilities and various techniques without being confined to commercial pursuits. Collage is an activity that encourages the designer to investigate visual ideas in the hope of finding something unique and different. I discovered and extended my practice through research that systematically explored the usage of mixed media with photographic and paint elements within a compositional framework. Collage can breed new life into design with the ability to arrange elements utilising an electronic scissor and layer system that promotes undiscovered interesting textural observations. The designer is constantly involved in a process of investigation, endlessly searching for the best aesthetic solution to a self-defined problem. Ambrose and Harris (2010, 10/11) state that the process seeks to generate a number of possible solutions and utilizes various techniques or mechanisms that encourage participants to think ‘outside the box’ in the pursuit of creative or innovative solutions. However, it is the methodology and methods of the researcher designer that leads to superior outcomes in the image.

The contemporary designer is compelled within a paradigm of digital tools that provide a nonlinear workflow. Pushing the boundaries often leads to an accident of unforeseen expectations and give rise to new aesthetic meaning. The ‘accident’ is usually a response from a spontaneous action of related or unrelated steps that is roughly constructed in our minds. The steps hold no guarantee that there is a valid aesthetic outcome but can be in some circumstances quite ground-breaking. Positive accidental rewards occur quite regularly through the experimentation process of trying new methods and conceptual ideas and critically reflecting on them. Numerous textural and lighting effects in my work were a direct outcome of the process of ‘accident’ rather than intentional steps driven by past experience. Even though the digital tools are important part of the process, the designer contributes considerably towards the work. The designer’s set of prejudices, beliefs, and background experience impose an influence on the final designs. Information moves kinetically back and forth between computer and designer.
The digital workspace, now part of the designer’s culture, provides a cross-disciplinary environment that opens up new areas of discovery such as photography, animation, and video. Designers can easily migrate into other areas of digital art. I purposely created an animation sequence of my layer construction in few examples of my work. The benefit of animating a sequence was that the process of critical evaluation and the final evaluation stage (see my diagram on p. 19) were made visible within the process of constructing the images. The designer has also been extended with the advancement of social and media technologies and is not necessarily committed any more to a rigid structural brief associated with industry practice. Design software platforms, social media and community art websites have helped to promote collage design as a valued social art within the community, where technology provides the tools and means for everyone to design. This pushes and promotes collage making and design images to the mass community.

Methodology plays an important part in organising and guiding the designer to create the best outcome. A structured systematic methodology based on a set of guided steps helps the designer to focus more clearly on the problem and find an appropriate solution. Each stage of design methodology provides the designer with a set of specific intentions to be reached before further progression. My methodology incorporates a pragmatic systematic procedure but allows the designer to explore other areas of inquiry. Exploration provides the groundwork for research that may uncover new discoveries in aesthetics and technical knowledge. The constructed methodology is encased in a recurring cyclic evaluation process, which helps to refine the work and consolidate visual meaning. It is not a totally linear process; the digital collage environment provides an opportunity to move back to previous stages of progression.

Ellen Lupton (2011, 4) argues that design is a messy endeavour. Designers generate countless ideas that do not get used. They often find themselves starting over, going backward, and making mistakes. Successful designers learn to embrace this back and forth, knowing that the first idea is rarely the last and that the problem itself can change as a project evolves. My progression of work in this research study rarely progressed in a straightforward manner without any return to a previous stage. The diagram that I constructed as a reflection on my design practice confirms that
problems can and do change as work evolves, and that both accident and critical reflection are part of this process. Evaluation is continual throughout my methodology and is not a practice that is implemented exclusively towards end of the work, however the anticipation of an audience expectation is a significant factor in evaluating work and delivering appropriate outcomes.

My methodology is a guideline for graphic designers to implement in their work progression. The methodology can be used in the commercial environment as well but may need slight adjustment due to the inclusion of a brief in commercial contexts. However this research was based on an individual working through a succession of works and my constructed methodology reflects this practice. The process of graphic design is ever changing, as the work may drift into other directions that are not considered by the artist. It is a dynamic moving process that promotes ideation and inventive solutions. Utilising a flexible systematic approach with the embodiment of artistry, imagination, personality and innovation, creative thinking is a major strategy in creating exceptional work.
Supplementary Material

Appendix 1
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