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Main Article:

The Conversational Self:
Structured Reflection Using Journal Writings

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Abstract

This article presents an approach for structured reflection by a designer through journal writing. The journal writing situates the agency of the designer, using a range of internal conversations as a way to expand horizons and perspectives. Through a structured approach using journal entries, experiences of the design process are introduced as reflective internal talkback. In the approach that is described, decision points and perspectives are negotiated and potentially contested through a series of voices of self as I, Me, You, and We. These voices are intertwined within the journal narrative and are proposed as a useful framework for negotiating and effectively engaging with design complexity. The article introduces the conceptual backgrounds with reference to conversation as a process of learning. The specific dynamics of the journal writing approach are explained and then illustrated in a case study. The case study describes how the approach is applied for a specific design project.

1. Introduction

This article illustrates journal writing during the design process as a way to conduct internal conversations that support reflective design practice. The article describes a particular schematic approach where a variety of written materials are shown to provide insights about a design process as it unfolds over time. This is termed the *conversational*

self approach, where the designer seeks to capture a variety of viewpoints about the design space being explored. The scheme involved is based on two main elements, first, the uses of alternating written entries by the designer as both *subject* and *object* to establish a dialogue about the design process at any point. Second, the use of five *conversational pairings* for writing that can be used about any aspect of the design process. This conversational self approach is informed by Pask's (1975) *conversation theory*, where the inherent value of maintaining and evaluating multiple feedback loops is highlighted. Glanville (2008) discusses the value of Pask's conversation theory and its significance for generating new knowledge in design research.

The conversational self journal writing approach being introduced in this article draws on cybernetic theory to engage with how multiple feedback loops are employed by designers during a design process. In order to establish this approach, the journal is constructed as a conversational writing space where, as a "team of one" (Goldschmidt, 1995), the individual designer is positioned as key agency within the design process. As key persona and narrator, the individual designer then engages with a variety of written journal reflections through writing both personal *subjective* and more distant *objective* journal entries. This is shown to produce a set of possible voices of self as *I*, *Me*, *We* and *You*. The range of possible conversations that may take place amongst these voices of self is further extended by the use of five conversational pairing constructs. Together, these structural elements are described as a scheme for helping generate a diversity of conversational topics, and drawing out of a range of reflections as narrative journal entries.

The conversational self approach thus offers a way in which designers might engage concurrently with a range of reflection modes that take place during the design process. Schön (1983) notes three distinctive modes of reflection that he suggests occur at different stages of the design process: *reflection-in-action*, *reflection-on-action*, and *reflection-on-practice*. Reymen comments on the differences among Schön's three modes and how and when they occur as part of conducting design practice. Her comments highlight the importance of time, context, and personal experience as key factors in the way these reflective modes might be used to inform a design process--as reflections taking place in the present, looking back over what has been done; and also as reflection on one's own habits and patterns of behaviour:

> *reflection-in-action* is reflecting in the midst of an action without interrupting it. Designers sometimes think about what they are doing in the midst of performing an act. When performance leads to surprise (when something fails to meet our expectations), pleasant or unpleasant, designers may respond by reflection-in-action: by thinking about what they are doing while doing it, in such a way as to influence further doing.

> *reflection-on-action* can take place after the fact in tranquillity or designers can pause in the midst of the action to make a "stop-and-think." In either case, the reflection has no direct connection to the present action. Designers

can pause to think back over what they have done, exploring the understanding that they have brought to the handling of the task.

reflection-on-practice includes surfacing and criticising tacit understandings that have grown up around repetitive experiences of designing. Examples are becoming aware of having fallen into an unfortunate pattern of design behaviour, such as "falling in love with an initial design idea." (Reymen, 2003, p. 2)

In her evaluation of the uses of three modes, Reymen poses a series of questions about the process of selection and the effectiveness of particular modes when used separately and together. She highlights the value of developing structured reflection as a research approach that potentially opens up improved understandings about the complexity of influences involved in design decision-making processes. Further, her comments specifically highlight the ways in which personality, the inherent specificity of individual tasks, and collaborative communication can be seen as having impact on a design process:

Besides the study of each type separately, it is also worth studying the *combination* of two or three types of design reflection. Interesting questions are: "Do the types occur together in practice?", "When supporting two or three types, what are efficient time intervals for each type of reflection?", "What can be said regarding the effectiveness of combined reflection types?", and "Is the preference and effectiveness of a certain type of reflection related to the personality of the designer, to the composition of the design team, to the design situation, to the moment in the design process, and or to the type of design task? (Reymen, 2003, p. 9)

Reymen's questions highlight the difficulties inherent in attempting to develop a structured approach to reflection. She uses the term *reflection research* and describes this as a potential new area for interdisciplinary research development that could be developed through engaging with disciplines from outside the design field:

Because the three types of reflection are situated on three different levels and are being studied from different theoretical perspectives, and because research can be performed, descriptive, prescriptive, and evaluative, different (new) research methods will be needed. Further collaboration with researchers from disciplines like design, (design) management, psychology, and philosophy that are interested in reflection research can be sought to set up joint (interdisciplinary) research programmes. (Reymen, 2003, pp. 8-9)

The conversational self approach that I outline in this article seeks to build such interdisciplinary dialogues that contribute to the field of structured reflection, and to explore how it can be useful for design, by drawing on theories from the fields of cybernetics, social theory, and educational psychology. Theories from these fields about reflective learning and creative interactions have assisted in the development of a

schematic framework that is suggested here for reflection research. These theories are introduced as scaffolding to better understanding the designer's role as key agency, and for conducting learning conversations with oneself through reflective journal writing. In order to explain this approach in more detail, I summarise the key theoretical influences on the schematic approach being described as the conversational self, and then show how this is applied for a specific case of design practice in order to generate reflective content.

2. "The Conversational Self": A Mode of Reflective Learning

The idea of a conversational self facilitating reflective design practice draws on a range of sources and disciplines. As well as Schön's work on reflective practice that is introduced above, the ontology of conversation is explored and theorised in fields including cybernetics, social theory, and educational psychology. These conceptual frameworks are now briefly summarised as a basis for introducing the conversational self as structured reflective approach using journal writing.

2.1. Conversation in Cybernetics

Pask's (1975) conversation theory from cybernetics describes the ways in which conversations between two or more participants lead to knowledge emergence. Conversations are understood as a process of negotiating shared understandings, between two or more participants. Pask describes this ontology of conversation as one that leads to the formation of new, shared concepts. In Pask's theory, participants may agree, or agree to disagree, but will always acknowledge a new thought about what is being jointly considered. In this way, Pask's theory describes the possibility that human society has the means to continually renew and reproduce itself, to create the new, the unpredictable, the imagined, to engage with differences, through engaging in learning conversations.

Goldschmidt (1995) and Glanville (2008) suggest that the individual, in conversations with self, about the situation at hand, can also conduct conversation. It can be done playfully, as a challenge, in a supportive way, but with the aim of introducing new thinking about diverse viewpoints and points of consent or disagreement. Through conversational exchanges in collaborative contexts, norms emerge, which provide boundaries around the emerging *topics*. As Goldschmidt's "team of one," finding a way to engage meaningfully with conversation with oneself offers ways to explore design as a process that seeks to engage with knowledge for action, as forms of knowing that are emergent. Glanville comments on the importance for designers of making such a distinction between "knowledge of" and "knowledge for" and how this is a key principle of second-order cybernetics:

> However, designers look for a direct knowledge for. Often, knowledge of simply gets in the way. Second order cybernetics is the field that constructs knowledge for action in the sense that it is always concerned, not so much with knowledge, as with knowing, with knowledge that is generated by and concerned with action and the actor: with observer-involved knowledge for. (Glanville, 2007, pp. 1199-1200)

2.2. Conversation in Social Theory

Archer's (2003) theory about social learning describes a dialogic interplay between object and subject selves, as participants in an internal conversation. The dialogues between these two participant voices provide a framework for beginning to explore the different spaces and perspectives of self as agent, and self as person, as a relationship within and between voices of the self, where all manner of reflective and reflexive concepts can be discussed. Archer's two voices of the self--*subject-self* and *object-self* voices--are configured as the key real-time individual participants in the journal-writing format discussed in this article. These are the means by which the individual writer constructs the space of *I* (subject) and *You* (object), who are also in conversation with the *Me*, and *We* of the "team of one." These voices of self are all involved in the journal writing process as identities of the designer/self as various forms of agency. Understandings of the productive and creative qualities of human endeavours are what Archer (2003) describes as the self-made qualities of human subjects, which she terms "project-makers."

Archer describes how an understanding about how the *I* speaks to itself, is a pivotal guiding feature of the human subject. She describes the ways in which time is configured within this construct, as the future possible self (the *You*) is conditioned by the past self (the *Me*), and shared with the *We* of social public identifications. Archer describes these as "morphogenetic processes," which take place over the life span of an individual. Her theory describes the personal power that comes from understanding the self as agency, as a recursive process of deliberation, reflection, and finally action, for all manner of life projects. This is a distinguishing of agents and persons, which Archer describes as an important and critical distinction:

> What we make of ourselves, through the 'ultimate concerns' that we endorse and the projects we conceive of in order to realise them, represents the other part of our self-constitution. This process of becoming the kind of Actor whose role is the social expression of our personal identities, though not accomplished under circumstances of our choosing, is *voluntaristic*; it is an expression of our activity rather than passivity. Personal identity also has *causal efficacy*, an important instance of which is the power to transform our initial agential placement and to modify subsequent placements, without however being able to nullify the fact that we always have an agential status. As persons we also have the causal power to personify our roles as Actors in a unique manner, to modify them incrementally, or to find a role personally wanting once we have come to occupy it.

> The importance of distinguishing between agents and persons can now be made clear. In a nutshell, the person can deliberate *upon* her objective status as a social agent. In other words, when we talk to ourselves, one of the things that we talk *about* is our agential placement. (Archer, 2003, p. 122)

Archer's positioning of the past *Me*, collective *We*, and future *You* around the present *I*, means that the *I* is constantly evaluating and monitoring actions with a view to actively

shaping reflexive thinking around the things that are deemed to be of importance. Shared negotiations become the possibilities for *We* through empathy and as agreed meanings and understandings from wider public contexts. The *Me* is continually looking back, at the past narrative and qualitative frameworks which have been brought forward into the present, and which may resonate with the future as considered judgments by *You*, as the mature Actor self.

Figure 1 illustrates this understanding about the self as a unity of various identities and agencies working together across the knowledge domains of private and public, individual and collective in a design problem space. These knowledge territories are already present within the design context, and become more clearly defined through the structured reflection that is made possible as a result of these internal conversations. The identities of self in Figure 1 are similar to Archer's notions of the agential self (*I*), primary agency (*Me*), corporate agency (*We*), and actor (*You*). In this way, the self converses with itself, as both observer and participant, across past, present, and future. Figure 1 shows how these four domains of self, and self-as-other, can be used as a structure for conducting internal conversations. These conversational exchanges tale place through journal dialogues where the author writes as both subject self (SS) as (*I*) and object self (OS) as (*You*). As part of the developing conversational context, the (*Me*) and (*We*) agencies of self are also important in helping build new perspectives about the topics that emerge. Overall, these internal dialogues between self-identities facilitate and guide participation and open-ended learning across the spaces of personal and public as a methodology for professional inquiry.
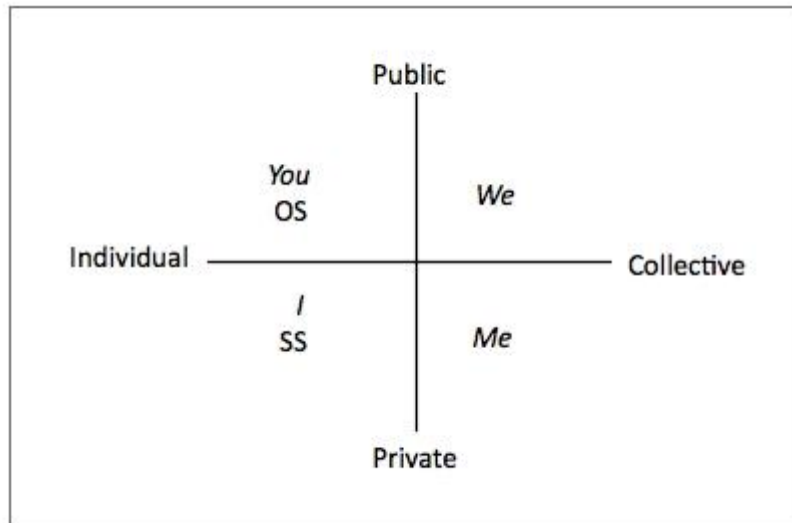

Figure 1. Self, agency, and knowledge contexts.

The internal conversations that take place using this approach collectively foster a structured reflection by providing points of entry into a design space. These begin with conversations generated from individual perspectives that then grow to include collective understandings about more commonly shared viewpoints.

2.3. Conversation in Educational Psychology

Baker, Jensen, and Kolb (2002) describe five kinds of learning conversation that involve specific dialectic pairings, for exploring different states of mind, action, being, and thought. Baker et al.'s five pairings are: (a) apprehension/comprehension, (b) reflection/action, (c) doing/being, (d) inside out/outside in, and (e) ranking/linking. Their set of dialectic constructs encompasses a holistic approach to the ways experience and knowledge can be understood through human communication, thus facilitating learning to take place. Their five constructs are presented on the basis of research in conversational situations and evaluations of relevant field data about how humans learn, develop, and interact: "a holistic model of the learning process and a multilinear model of adult development, both of which are consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow, and develop" (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002, p. 8).

The dialectical constructs for conducting conversations that Baker et al describe are based on acceptance of differences, contradictions, and tensions within a topic of discussion, and acknowledging that there is a multiplicity of views about a topic of conversation. They describe each of the five pairings as a unique space for dialectic interactions about topics to take place, leading to the formation of new thoughts as a result. Baker et al. describe these five dialogic conversational pairings as ways in which learning can be achieved, "through the interplay of opposites and contradictions" (2002, p. 53). They describe them as:

> Learners move through the cycle of experiencing, reflecting, abstracting, and acting as they construct meaning from their experiences in conversations. As such, a theoretical framework based on five process dialectics will be proposed as the foundational underpinning of conversational learning. As participants engage in conversation by embracing the differences across these dialectics, the boundaries of these dialectics open a conversational space. (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002, p. 52)

Through conversations that are loosely structured around an adaptation of these five dialectics, layers of meaning, perception, value, and belief expose implicit and explicit perspectives about everyday experience and knowledge. Baker et al. describe this learning process as one that can be directed by a teacher/leader, who encourages participation and acts as a facilitator rather than the authoritative source of knowledge. Baker (2004) comments on these five pairings from Baker, Jensen and Kolb's work, as a particular model for learning, through the interplay of different perspectives which emerge as a result of using the framework of the five learning constructs in a cooperative and inclusive manner, ranging across all five constructs for any particular theme. They stress the importance of working with all five constructs in order to facilitate quality learning through conversation:

> When the perspective at the extreme pole of any of the dialectics dominates the conversation to the exclusion of others, conversational learning is diminished. These five dialectics are not intended as a rigid model. Instead

they are an attempt to describe these and similar dialectical contradictions that generate the content of conversations. Therefore, using a conversational learning approach implicitly means that participants in the conversation intentionally strive to draw on the widest range of differing perspectives as resources. Gaining new understanding and insights through the interplay of opposites and contradictions, although often not easy, enriches the mutuality of learning. (Baker, 2004, p. 695)

3. Internal Conversations in Journal Writing

The idea of conversational self has been implemented in the context of professional inquiry using some of the contributions of Archer and Baker et al. presented above. It assumes the form of a personal journal that is written following a particular format. The journal aims to capture the internal conversations between a subject self and an object self, developing around a broad set of themes signified by the five dialectical pairings. This provides an organising scheme for locating, negotiating, and managing themes and perspectives within a particular context. Each dialectical pairing refers to a pattern of reflective thinking which enables the production of concepts relevant to that dialectical pairing and the associated state of being. For example, apprehension/comprehension refers to a state of beginning to speak about personal misgivings, hopes, and questions, alongside clarifications about what is known about a particular context. In contrast, inside out/outside in refers to the relationship with the external environment, which is context-specific and relevant to shared stakeholder objectives and values. The following case study shows how a familiarity is developed with patterns of reflective thinking through a written personal narrative that is structured by these five dialectical pairings.

What is of particular relevance is the ways that each of these five pairings offers a way to generate knowledge and knowing--not an either/or, but rather, an ambience of conversational flow and exchange, for building topics and possibilities, as a basis for ongoing conversations in the journal. Figure 2 shows this journal-writing methodology as an organising scheme for self-generating, deliberative productive conversations.
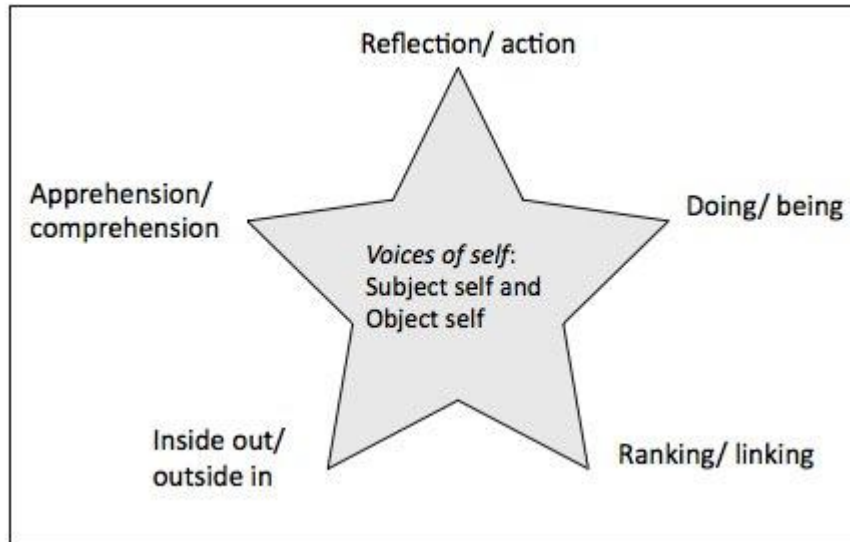
Figure 2. Organising scheme for internal conversations using pairing options.

Baker et al's five dialectical pairings shown in Figure 2 are similar to Kolb's (1984, 1999) definition of *learning styles*, which describe four key patterns of thought in learning activity. These are his *accommodator*, *converger*, *diverger*, and *assimilator* styles. Reymen comments on Kolb's learning styles, and the need for designers to be aware of the value of maintaining a balanced, cohesive range of thinking possibilities for practice:

> each learning style focuses more on certain and less on the other activities in the experiential learning cycle. This means that some people pay less attention to reflection than others do. When people are aware of their learning style, they can correct their behaviour to balance the activities of the experiential learning cycle. (Reymen, 2003, p. 4)

As Reymen suggests, a self-aware learner (designer) is one who is able to balance out a range of perspectives that apply to a particular project context. In becoming more aware of one's own learning styles, the designer is also gaining insight into how they engage with Schön's in-action, on-action, and on-practice types of reflection. Using the journal writing approach of the conversational self mentioned above, one immediately becomes enmeshed within a diversity of thinking approaches to a theme, which at the same time, are explicitly structured around an intention to write in a particular way by using any of these five dialectical pairings. These journal narrations are similar to what Krippendorff calls "ecological narrative"--as a multi-faceted window, which opens up ways of seeing, and perceiving realities and design problems through forms of narrative design:

> Ecological narratives can continually expand their participants' understanding by bringing the narratives of each into the context of all others. This expansion requires access to as many narratives as practical but,

above all, a participant's openness to expand his or her horizon. Superior perspectives, completeness, accuracy or finality are anathema in ecological narratives. (Krippendorff, 1998, p. 16)

Krippendorff comments on how language through conversation is critical in this understanding of the workings of the ecological narrative:

> An ecological narrative is not social, political, or international because it *represents* social, political, or international phenomena (as theorists must claim for the their theories) but rather because its *distinctions are an acknowledged part of what is being narrated*, enacted, and hence experienced by its participants. Such a narrative cannot be modeled after or emulate a mechanistic, organismic, or mentalistic system. It may instead be understood in terms of a *dialogical concept of language*--namely, through *languaging* or *conversation*. (Krippendorff, 1998, p. 10)

The conversational self journal-writing approach that I introduce in this article seeks to provide a means for having what Krippendorff terms ecological narratives that explore social contexts through "a dialogical concept of language." The idea of conversational self provides a space for documenting wide ranging self-reflexive interpretations. The case study I describe below explores social and cultural contexts using photography for storytelling through visual layout designs. The photojournalism project explores processes of dialogic layout design.

4. Photo-Essay Case Study: Jimmy's Garden

In 2007, I was engaged in a design project that explored ways in which individual subjects carried out everyday routines. The aim of the project was to investigate rituals of the everyday as social sharing and interactions with the local environment.   I used the journal-writing scheme described above to reflect my internal conversations associated with identifying and selecting design options. The story context for this photo-essay is a seaside village where Jimmy, a local gardener, produces home-grown vegetables for several weeks during the tourist season. A section of the hand-written journal text (see Figure 3) has been transcribed below. The transcript shows how a set of initial themes emerges in the journal text based on how the signage at the garden is used as a system for communicating with potential customers. The conversation between subject self (SS) and object self (OS) continues through question and answer, and through the framing of different dialectic pairings, to guide the different conversations. As the uses of this approach show, shared points of agreement and disagreement result from these internal conversations to shape the structure and content of the visual essay, which seeks to include multiple perspectives.

As the subject self (*I*) begins with longer form narrative writing that describes details and observations. This entry is made in the formulating stages at the start of this photo-essay project, using a reflection/action pairing. The object self then comments on this entry, as *You* and also, as *I*, as the conversation develops around observing hand-written signage

objects, as a service system for information about produce, and as a means for transmitting local knowledge through anecdotes told at the point of sale. As part of this reflective process, the subject self is able to generate emotional and descriptive thinking about the subject, whereas the object self guides the conversation through analysis, questions, and the abstraction of narrative details into concepts and themes. Figure 3 shows the initial descriptive writing leading to a series of key thoughts about the role of signage. These points are then further explored in the journal about signage and the environment, the history of the village, and the service system of the local garden around a focus on of Jimmy, the local gardener.

In Figure 3, the object self (OS) responds analytically and rationally to the social and cultural observations made by the subject self (SS). Initially, the text is designated as a reflection/action dialogue in the SS voice. The reflection-in-action describes the scene in a broad way as general observations of the scene. The writing then shifts to being a reflection-on-practice, as a commentary about how the author felt while taking photographs at the scene. Following this, the author's voice shifts to being reflection-in-action as OS. In this voice, questions are asked back about what is being observed and reflected upon. The OS voice then proceeds to expand on possible wider environmental themes that could be explored such as landscape erosion, and how one might place a value on local cultural artefacts. Eventually, SS voice replies by commenting that the designation is more of an inside out/outside in rather than reflection-on-action. What this shows is how the format of writing is self-conscious, and able to use the five dialectical pairings to signify important dimensions of deliberative thought.

In Figure 3, OS defines a list of possible expressions of local cultural value that are implicit within the scene. Throughout this exchange, what is of note is that the writing engages with all three of Schön's reflection modes that work together in the journal narrative to generate a reflective chain of ideas around the theme. This is largely as a result of using the dialectical pairing of reflection/action as a structured reflection.

> # 5 Jan 2007, Monday, Reflection/Action
>
> SS
>
> I was there at 9 am when the garden opened. There was a few customers, and a lot of vegetables. Jimmy went into the garden and got/dug up carrots, lettuces, etc, as the other guy yelled out the order. The sign was backed up with other signs, saying exactly what veggies + herbs were available today. The customers were both locals, and the holidaymakers. An odd mix of country, old people, and middle and city urbanites and young families.
>
> It's a really country feeling buying his organic veggies. The tomatoes taste amazing--fresh and tasty. Nothing like supermarket ones.
>
> No one minded me taking photos. I am going back tomorrow to try to talk to them about their garden and get more of a personal insight.

OS

OK, good. You have some initial photos now of the scene and surrounds. What story angle is there? What's the role of this signage? What does it do to shift/regulate/influence local behaviours? What kind of "value" does it bring to the ambience of the village?

Can this be mapped as emotional/nostalgic charm? Can a "value" be placed on that?

Signage →values →identity emerging and changing demographic →co-existence of competing and often conflicting lifestyles →contrast the old beach fibro houses with new eco-friendly and designer architecture. Consider the beach erosion →the weed piling up →forces of nature →council "control management plan"! Removal of asbestos tip →renewal beach patch →a scar on the landscape. The "underbelly" of the charming picturesque beach. So docile and calm, then the forces of nature and chance.

SS

This was more an "inside out/outside in" conversation!! You are linking a lot of things together in a chain of related "values" and "contexts". This is an evaluative scanning process. You have lifestyle →architecture/ethos/

Activities--bingo/charm Natural forces →beach erosion →Human impact → asbestos tip/regeneration

OS

Expressions of value

- veggies signage
- handwritten
- suggest natural abundance
- local labour and business
- local "yarns" and "gossip"
- the story about the spicy sauce making night (Jimmy and friend)
- the use of tape to block out what's not available
- the list of herbs and veggies
- spelling—phonetic

OK This is like scanning. Now "problem solving" how would you link these ideas together, to structure an interesting [visual narrative]? (Transcript of hand-written journal entry, January 5, 2007)

Figure 3 shows the style, flow, and tempo of the above journal entry in a hand-written form as the dialogue between subject self (SS) and object self (OS).

#5 cont'd.

⑩

05 | OK, good. You have some
initial photos now of the
scene and surrounds.
What story angle is next?
What the role of this signage?
What does it do to
shift / regulate / influence
local behaviours?
What kind of 'value' does
it bring to the ambience of
the village?
Can this be mapped as
emotional / nostalgic charu?
Can a "value" be placed
on that?
Signage → values → identity →
emerging & changing demographic →
co-existence of competing
& often conflicting lifestyles →
Contrast the 'old' beach fibro
with 'new' eco-friendly
& designey architecture
Consider the beach erosion →
the wead piling up → forces
of nature → conflict "coastal

(11)

SS — This was more a inside out / outside in conversation!!! You are linking a lot of things together in a chain of related 'values' and 'context'. This is an evaluative scanning process. You have lifestyle → architecture / ethos activities = bingo / charm natural forces — beach erosion / human impact - asbestos tip regeneration.

OS — Expressions of value
    — Veggies, signage
    — hand written
    — suggest natural abundance
    — local (abor. + business
    — local 'yarns' and 'gossip'.
    — The story about the spicy tomato sauce making night (Jenny + friend).
    — The use of tape to block out what's not available.
    — The list of herbs + veggies
    — Spelling - phonetic -

OK. This is like scanning. Now 'problem-solving' → how would you link these ideas together, to structure an interview +
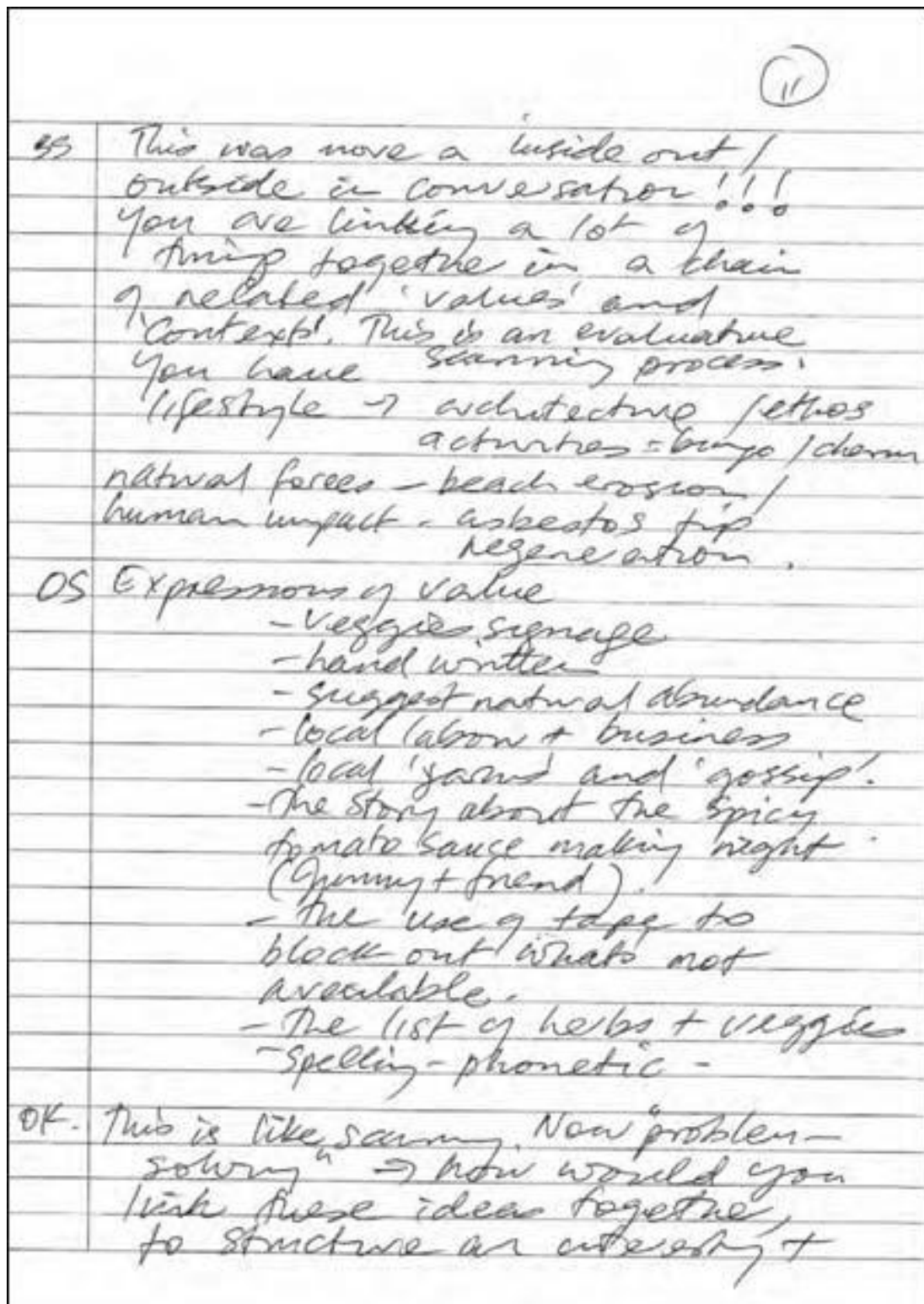
Figure 3. Original hand-written journal entry by the author, January 5, 2007.

What is significant from the extract overall is how the initial description of the scene gives way to a focus on determining and reflecting on the notion of value within the situation. This is an unfinished thought, a continuum of thinking that links elements within the situation as part of the writing process, as a kind of incomplete inventory of objects and signifiers, leading towards a point of view which might inform the story design.

The process of sharing and negotiating through conversational writing creates a dialogue where several options and possibilities are explored in parallel. As a result, there are several strands of concepts and ideas that keep recurring as multiple possibilities for reading and interpretation of the topic. The design challenge effectively becomes how to best incorporate and select from these various thematic strands, and then, how to combine and weave together a visual narrative that best communicates the interpretations being made. The journal provides a space for conversations about drafting layout options through image selection, editing, and cropping. As a design process, this journal writing approach offers ways to generate ideas, and then to visualise these as possible layout assemblages.

The journal narrative continues to explore the social and cultural context of the street through daily site visits by my-self as researcher. I continue to explore the social and cultural context of the street through daily site visits, taking a number of photographs of the street and its surroundings. Through journal writing, my SS and OS voices discuss ways of organising and selecting these photographs for use in the photo-essays. I record a series of drafts and sketches in the text, which explore the arrangements of selected images and phrases.

Figure 4 journal extract shows layout sketches for Jimmy's garden. What these portray is an intention to include a wide range of story elements from the conversations within the layout assemblages. The elements being noted include the village going through redevelopment, the service offered by the local produce stall, the artefact of the hand-drawn sign, and the quote from one of the workers at the stall. The journal conversations provide a means for accessing and developing a range of ideas and perspectives that can then be used for the final layout. This process offers a way to plan the development of visual interactions and relationships across and through a specific story looking closely at the scene from several angles simultaneously. The journal sketches are similar ways that Schön (1983) refers to the important role of sketching as a process of revealing and transformation, as one's ideas become clearer through the iterative processes of doing design.
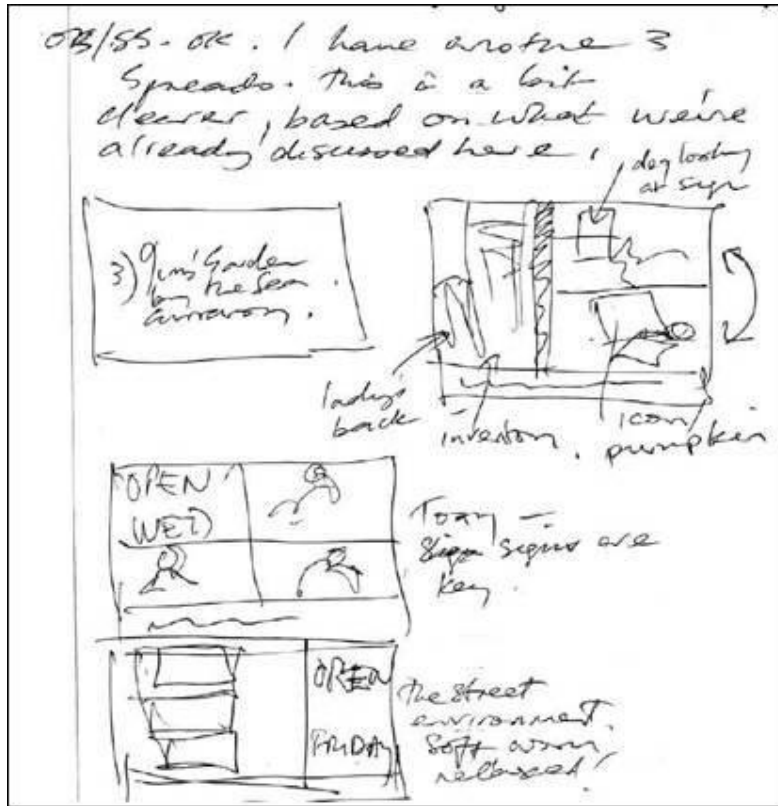
Figure 4. Layout sketches for Jimmy's garden (depicting inside-out/outside-in conversation).

Figure 5 shows a final layout for the photo-essay, which came about as a result of the thinking involved in the journal-writing process.

Figure 5. Final layout spread for Jimmy's garden photo-essay.

5. Analysis of Journal Entries

In evaluating the merits of using the approach, I summarise the journal entries for the project. Table 1 shows the way in which this is achieved by aligning the different voices of self from the initial entries for the Jimmy's Garden project showing the flow of themes and conversational exchanges as commentary about the conversations. These are made as apprehension/comprehension (A/C) and reflection/action (R/A) pairings. Initially, object self is shown commenting on the potential for uses of the five pairings across the project. The distinctive voices of *Me* and *We* are then introduced as conversationalists within the journal text, reflecting on the shared and agreed approaches which are developing as a result of the ongoing entries by subject self and object self. The journal summary shows how the format provides a space for keeping a range of perspectives at the forefront, not to make decisions without a comprehensive and careful consideration of a range of views and expectations.

While these are productive results, I have often found the process involved in using this approach can be time consuming, and at times self-consciously awkward. However, over time and with greater familiarity, it has become much easier to work quickly using the constraints of the writing format to help guide journal writing. The scheme offers writers a way to jump in at any point by selecting a pairing, and getting started without thinking too hard about what is to be written. The pairing option means that once writing begins, the style of writing itself is dialogic in requiring a response using both pair elements. What has also become evident is how the selection of a particular dialectic pairing influences what is written as each of the five pairings has a particular leaning or emotional nuance. This is a form of offer to the writer to engage with that mode of thinking around the subject at hand. In this way, it can be understood as a system of possibility that is being introduced for the design investigation, as the five pairings are always used relative to the others, not in isolation. The active use of the subject self and object self as actors establishes a space for internal conversation that is creative and potentially transformative. As a result of using the two initial actor voices, the voices of *Me* and *We* emerge through the writing. These two perspectives then provide a wider scope for emerging ideas, and reinforcement of emerging themes.

Table 1. *Journal Summary*

Entry Details	Subject Self Voice	Object Self Voice	*Me* and *We* Voices
#1 (28.12.07) Apprehension/ Comprehension (A/C)	Background thoughts/the scanning process	Supportive/explains and describes context challenges Mentoring tone	Comment and reflect on long term and objective goals for the project--what *Me* wishes to achieve and what is at stake in this problem situation
#2 (29.12.07) Reflection/Action (R/A)	Reasons to do this in an intensive time frame--justify method for documentation	Comments on possible uses of more Inside out/Outside In and Ranking/Linking pairings Clarifies the importance of using A/C and R/A in the initial stages of a project scoping	*We* is used as a commonly held view--a sense of cohesion and agreement as a starting point for the project observations
	Comments on the usage of A/C and R/A in this particular project as it is more of a personal kind of interest--not involving other stakeholders directly		
	Questions the layout and format of the journal--feeling a bit constrained by the style	Reminds SS about the process--but also suggests that the page could be used more freely not so tightly in columns	*We* is interjected into the dialogue
#3 (30.12.07) Reflection/Action (R/A)	Comments on the value of writing in R/A--a very direct relationship--a comment which is followed up by a suggestion for action		Confirms this approach as being useful for observation of details of the everyday for building a narrative
#4 (6.1.08) Reflection/Action (R/A)	Description of Jimmy's Garden as a story which is rich with local knowledge	Questions what is of value and reminds about the need to balance internal and external factors	

6. Conclusion

The approach described in this article involves naming and framing one's self as a situated and reflective agency within the design process. The case study described above demonstrates a constructive application of this approach as a means for starting design thinking at any point of the process, engaging with a range of thinking styles, through the use of five dialectic pairings to structure learning conversations. These are reference points for the dialogic interplay between subject and object voices of self with which to begin to explore experiential forms of knowledge and interactions with design processes. What this achieves is bringing together rational and intuitive modes of thought and action through internal conversations.

This approach is proposed as a way to help capture and shape one's own design activities. It works through a series of levels within the conversational text. Nothing is fixed except what emerges as agreed and shared understandings, which are constantly subject to review and change. As knowledge propositions and concepts are formed through initial formulations and observations, procedural and tacit patterns of practice also become topics for consideration. It is proposed as a means to engage with experiential knowledge and knowing through multiple readings of situations that may be personal, social, and cultural understandings and observations of everyday experiences and events. As Enquist comments, design is a social practice which needs to engage with the integral relationships between human ecology, sociology, and artefacts:

> When distributed to different artefacts, the self appears in a multitude of shapes, characterized not only by its materiality but also by the necessity to preserve at least an illusion of a core self. The experience of a continuous evolution of these overlapping "selves", many of which are materialized together with others' overlapping selves, cannot be captured by traditional design approaches, nor can ethical aspects and conflicts of the right to express yourself through artefacts. . . . No meaningful separations are observed between the human ecology and sociology and the artefactual ones. Instead, it is the whole system of people, practices, values, and technologies in a particular situatedness that is meaningful to pinpoint and elaborate. (Enquist, 2008, p. 1)

Enquist's comment highlights the multiplicity and complexity of all kinds of assemblages from everyday life, where the self is meaningfully engaged. A better understanding of how to think about the connections and interactions between selves, objects, systems, and practices presents particular challenges for design research--for negotiating and mapping ways to address and respond to complexity. The idea of conversational self is introduced in this article as a possibility for further consideration by researchers in tracing experiential knowledge pathways as structured reflection, working through action.

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