

Telling Utterances

Education, Creativity & Everyday Lives

Volume One: **imagined monologues, dialogues & meditations**

Diane Peacock

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Abstract: Education policy, in practice so singularly an experienced phenomenon, may be irreconcilable to single forms of academic interpretation. The questions and possibilities raised by this proposition animate the core of this study.

Why, given the volume of noise generated by the multiplicity of agents and agencies with critical interests in education policy and practice, do some voices dominate while others are unheard or silent? What might this mean for those being educated and for art and design education?

Responses, rather than being articulated as a series of arguments in a traditional research format, are presented as a series of imagined texts comprising dialogues and monologues.

The texts fuse a wide range of sources into a series of performed analyses of education policy and creative practice. Primary, secondary and archival sources bring together the voices of: artists; designers; other creative practitioners; educators; researchers; politicians; policy makers; national agencies; social theorists; and art and design undergraduates who were part of a three-year longitudinal field study.

The theoretical and methodological formations underpinning the analysis are woven into the content and form of the texts themselves. Normal citation conventions are suspended until after a performance or reading, in order to aid unfettered interpretation.

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Context: This study, undertaken over six years, draws on creative arts practice and dramaturgy to formulate alternative platforms for the articulation of critical discourses on education policy and creative development. Volume One contains a series of *re-constructed monologues* and *imagined dialogues* created to be intelligible to those inside and outside academia. Collectively they represent a series of *enactments* of the impact of policy on the everyday lives and creative development of individual art and design students.

Readers are politely invited to read all of Volume One before reading Volume Two. The temporal separation of text from source provides a space for those who are willing to reflect on the forces that might be at play when reading (or writing) texts such as these.

Monologues: The content of the five *re-constructed monologues* included in Part One was collected as part of a longitudinal field study based in three post-1992 English universities. The monologues provide readers with some examples of those thoughts and opinions that individual undergraduates studying art and design disciplines were willing to share. Other examples are contained within each of the five dialogues. The monologues originate from donated material transcribed either from interviews or handwritten responses to survey questions completed by participants over their three-year period of undergraduate study. A small part of the content originates from transcriptions of handwritten notes or an individual's digitally recorded responses to specific questions, telephone interviews, clarification emails or transcriptions of digitally recorded mediated and unmediated focus groups.

In all monologues, an *italic* font indicates a participant's own voice transcribed directly from written or spoken sources. A regular font [in square brackets] indicates proxy-linking phrases inserted to aid linguistic flow. [...] is used to indicate small deletions. The use of a regular font, in every other case, denotes the re-wording of a multiple-choice question and the participant's selected response(s). Non-disclosed changes made to verbatim texts include: additions of capitalisations and dashes; substitutions of verb forms, for example in some written donations, replacing 'I have ...' with the more conversational 'I've ...'; deletion of some speech fillers (for example "um" and "like") or repeated phrases in spoken donations; the disguising of sensitive information with substitute words or terms, to protect anonymity; and the clustering of content into themes, the order of which varies slightly from monologue to monologue.

Dialogues: The order of the *imagined dialogues* that form the core of Volume One – with the exception of Dialogues Four and Five, which are in inverse order – reflect the timescale and context of their creation and dissemination over a five-year period between 2008 and 2013. They take the form of a series of ‘scripts’ for dramaturgical readings and performances. They represent, in dialogic format, an extended analysis of the relationship between education policy and practice, and individual creative development. The content of the five scripts has been gleaned from a wide range of sources. Primary sources are interwoven with secondary and archival sources from academic articles and books, parliamentary papers, specialist visual arts publishing and from literature and the media.

Unlike the monologues, all scripts are presented in ‘regular’ font format to facilitate oral fluency during live readings and performances. For interpretive purposes:

- Verbatim text appears as black regular font;
- Headlines and named actors as **boldened regular text**, and stage directions and guidance for actors as **[bracketed boldened regular text]**;
- **Red text** or ... (3 x red stops) indicates small modifications or deletions or additions to a verbatim text, inserted to aid readability and/or promote dramatic flow;
- The presence of (4 x red stops) is indicative of a more substantive, deleted and/or re-ordered section(s) from a source text;
- A very small number of colons and semi-colons have been deleted. Some have been replaced with **red** commas or **red** dashes.

Meditations: The *meditations* take the form of a series of short attributed quotations, appearing at the beginning and end of Volume One and are embedded into most dialogues as prologues and epilogues. Their function might be likened to a series of two-way mirrors.

... the language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanisms capable of producing this complicity, based on misrecognition, which is the basis of all authority.

Pierre Bourdieu, 1982.

David: re-constructed monologue

Spring 2008: *Ideas for me often generate more ideas. I always feel more positive about my work or project when ideas are flowing. I instantly become more motivated and become excited about the task in hand. Mainly ideas come when I'm not thinking too hard about the task. [...] As soon as I get one idea, more seem to come in a flurry – sometimes at the same time, or shortly after one another. [Thinking too much about the work when I'm away from it] often doesn't help [...] me, ideas usually come when I have the work near me or have recently been in contact with it. [Inspiration helps, it] spurs me on, [it's] a motivator. [With drawing I personally] find it hard to 2D visualise because of my confidence but I do find it important to get ideas down when they come to me. [What about materials and equipment?] These don't really matter. Ideas come and go regardless of what tools are at my disposal. [But] I've drawn influence from lots of artists [...] mainly their styles [...] not their concepts. Books [to me are] more useful than the Internet, [it's] hard to find inspiration on the net, I [can] never find what I am looking for. [Yes, I've had creative blocks] I feel frustrated and de-motivated. It often helps to talk to someone about it, or totally detach yourself from your work [...], clear [your] mind. When developing ideas I tend to start with lots of ideas then quickly narrow it down to one [or] start with one idea, expand to lots then decide to go back to the first one. Usually the more effort I put in the better my results are. However sometimes I have achieved – but not put in much effort. Risks, for me, mean experimentation [but] it's hard to take risks [...] because I lack confidence. Taking risks has produced good results, however I still find it hard. I work better if I plan and leave enough time, however 'last minute' has also worked in the past. [But] I generally work better when I'm not stressed.*

[Influences, well], *my dad is very creative and practical, not artistic [as such]. My creativity wasn't recognised in primary school but in secondary school my ability to make things [was, as was the fact] I could draw and sketch accurately [and] my art teacher always showed enthusiasm for my work. When the researcher asked which out of a long list of characteristics I thought I was like, I ticked: willing to take risks, sensitive, pessimistic, team-player, confident, enthusiastic, open-minded, responsible, cautious, self-critical and easily distracted. [I'd say I'm] about averagely self-motivated when compared to my peers [but more creative than some of them]. [And yes], I'm determined to have a successful career in design.*

Summer 2009: *[I chose to study art & design at undergraduate level] mainly because it's been something I enjoyed inside and outside of school. If anything [this year] I enjoy it even more, it takes an even larger place in my spare time and my hobbies [but having said that] I feel that Year two is more specific, even restricted. The briefs are all after something in particular. It is hard to be as creative as you would like sometimes. [However] I've certainly become more motivated. I find ideas come better recently. I also have a close peer group who are highly motivated; this helps because you feed each other. I feel as if I 'belong', doing what I am doing. [Outside of uni] I do recreational graphic design and photography, not only because I enjoy it but to give me the edge in my portfolio and skills.*

The problem with [the opinion of tutors] is that it is only 'opinion' [and] sometimes I find their opinion unhelpful or incorrect in my eyes. [With peers] it depends on who. If it's not [...] someone who I respect as a designer, I take it less seriously. Industry people's opinions, such as designers and clients, are important because it's from these people

that I'll make a career. Probably my closest friend in the class [has been my biggest inspiration and] I'm inspired by his motivation, skills and ethics. I'm very critical of my [own] work. Being a perfectionist helps me maintain a high standard. I've always thought critically about my work, for as long as I can remember. I think the [assessment] system is bullshit to be honest. Education continues to be about 'jumping through hoops' instead of raw talent. I feel that it restricts, I hate doing pointless elements in projects just to tick the boxes on the criteria. I am feeling the need to do everything I can to get the highest grade. Sometimes you have to do pointless things to do so. This makes me frustrated during some projects. [To me] my ability to meet the criteria has nothing to do with my creative potential [so in some ways I don't agree with the high marks I've been getting]. Taking creative risks and making mistakes in order to find out new things, having a questioning attitude to what I am required to do and following my own creative path [are all important to me, more important than getting high grades]. [For me] a sense of belonging [and] getting a buzz out of what you do [is very important].

What do I think educators could do to encourage art and design students to be more creative? *Be less restricting in briefs, teach skills catered to the individual rather than trying to teach all students small amounts of the same skills.*

Summer 2010: *[Two years ago] I said I was about averagely self-motivated when compared to my peers [now] I feel [...] more highly motivated because of my career and ambition. I've always been more highly motivated when I am happy with my work. [Last year I felt that assessment restricted my creativity.] I hate[d] doing pointless elements in projects just to tick the boxes on the criteria [and] I still feel that's the case. I've not made any extra efforts this year to 'conform' to what tutors want to see. I don't care what I get so long as my work is strong.*

My peers have played a huge part in my development, through ideas and inspiration [and their] general support. Being within such a creative environment as this has benefited me a great deal with inspiration and motivation. Being a perfectionist in this industry can only be seen as a good thing. I have been strict with the quality of my work, am focused towards my goals and have ambition to succeed. Having creative friends means I am always being creative and discussing creativity. It has frustrated me a great deal when tutors' opinions conflict [with] mine, when there is no right or wrong answer. Being a perfectionist means [I] stress needlessly over trivial things [and] sometimes I worry too much about what is right or wrong. [As well] living with five people I don't get on with has added unwanted stress, and anxiety and minor insecurities means I waste time in the gym.

Over the last three years, I've significantly improved the *quality of [my] work*, [become more] *self-critical and, developed [my own] visual style*. In the final weeks of the course my aim [is] to *produce work I'm happy with, get the grade I deserve [and] make [my] parents proud*. [I want my final show to convey] *attention to detail, [design clarity], and make people wonder what sort of employee I would be*. [What's influenced me most? I'd say] *fashion, photography [... my] photography skills have been hugely beneficial*. [The theoretical part of the course] *hasn't had any influence on my practical work, if anything [it's] hindered it, [taken] time [away]*. [And no, my work] *literally doesn't address any broader cultural issues apart from maybe, a longing for the past? Britain [in particular]*. [Exposure to professional practice, on the other hand, has been] *great, [for my work, and my] understanding. My knowledge of the industry and those adjacent to it is far greater than when I started. I have hugely enjoyed my time here and given it everything,*

not only socially but academically. On reflection I couldn't think of a better place to come and study, it's been fantastic and I have benefited greatly from it.

I come from a family and social group where grades are important, [but the degree classification I achieve] only matters to me on [that] level.

After graduating I hope to be working full-time for an art and design related organisation while working freelance as an artist/designer when possible. [In five years' time], I want to be happy and comfortable in my career and [with] the work I'm producing. I'll still be a designer – you can count on that!

Imagined Dialogue One: theory & practice

Prologue: You know, it's not easy to retrace the development of one's own sensibility. One can readily see what one has *become*, which events have shaped the course of one's life. But what always stays out of reach, what remains more or less concealed, is precisely what might have catalyzed these events, the "something" that caused one's mental life to take a particular turn.

André Breton, 1952.

Theorist A: It's indisputable that, from the students' perspective, clear standards and goals are a vitally important element of an effective educational experience.

Theorist B: Absolutely, [nodding head] and ... if assessment is at the caprice of the individual tutor, there is little guarantee that students' learning, across their degree studies, will be broad in terms of the qualities which are developed, let alone balanced. What they learn to do will be arbitrary.

Theorist C: We think you all agree [glancing at theorists A and B] learning outcomes give students a good indication of what they should be learning, and how they should prepare to prove their learning to us through assessed coursework and exams. Learning outcomes should show students where the goalposts are – and indeed how big the goalmouth is. For example: "By the end of this lecture, you should be able to solve the problems on the last page of your handout, applying the Second Law of Thermodynamics to heat pumps, refrigerators and chemical processes". But remember in art and design subjects, where possible, it may be helpful to enable students to be involved in establishing or negotiating the criteria for assessment, so that they are able to understand fully what is expected of them. The amount of subjectivity involved in evaluating artifacts and productions needs to be recognised and articulated, so that everyone concerned understands the rules of the game.

Expert A: In '72 I argued that basically there were two possibilities. One is the professional response to a given problem that emerges from recognizing previous successful solutions to similar problems. To a large extent using successful formulas with relatively predictable results is professional yet, by definition noncreative. A more meaningful kind of procedure occurs when the problem is not susceptible to a reliance on previously successful formulas or to an intellectualizing of the content. The creative process is essentially a blind process where you do not pre-structure and you have to allow information to arise in a spontaneous way uncontrollable by the will.

Novice A [looking directly at expert A]: Hey, I'm not really sure I understand [pause] but, say you've got two options [pause], you can either go with ... a straight edge, ... or you could just go off with – like a jagged edge. I'd rather go with the jagged edge to see how that could develop and how that could lead to something. ... If you just go with the straight edge, that's it! All you've got is a straight edge. Whereas if you go with something quirky or jaggedy, you've got something ... to play with ... and it can lead to something else! [Smiles at Novice B.]

Novice B [smiling]: I always need to take risks, find the limits of the material. It's essential to my development.

Novice C: Well, I know exactly what you both mean, there's a huge relationship between risk and development generally and I think you have to take risks and be prepared for your efforts to fail miserably, if you really want to push yourself creatively and see what's possible.

Theorist D: Absolutely and ... one of the worst effects of performativity is its denial that anything is learned unless it can be demonstrated in clearly measurable learning outcomes. In the second place, it restricts what happens in the lesson to what is clearly specified in advance as a means of realizing the learning objectives. This is objectionable because it is a part of good teaching that learning should be allowed to develop in new

and unforeseen directions in the light of the responses and developing understanding of the students, their interaction with the teacher and with the demands of the subject-matter itself, and the dynamics of the particular occasion. Good curricula require exactly this.

Theorist E [addressing expert A and theorist D while glancing periodically at theorists A, B and C]: *I'd put it this way*, the idea of learners being encouraged to take risks [...] suggests a pedagogy that is not totally controlled by specified learning outcomes. It suggests a flexible teaching *and* learning space that attempts to accommodate unpredictable or unexpected directions in learning. Encouraging learners to take risks in their practice, by implication, suggests that teachers themselves are also taking risks in that they have to be able to "let things happen".

Novice D: *When I was at school*, a secondary teacher [...] pushed me to think "outside of the box" and to be as creative as I could, despite the stifling atmosphere of my art course. *Sounds like I was lucky.*

Theorist F [speaking in a tone that could be agitation or frustration]: *Years ago we argued that* lighter-touch accountabilities and sensitivity by evaluators to academics' expertise, especially in furthering complex learning such as creativity, might free spaces for collegiality and good learning.

Novice E: *Good intentions, but not enough.*

[End.]

Epilogue: The party's nearly over. But the guests are going to stay: they have no place else to go. People who weren't invited are beginning to arrive. The house is a mess. We must all get together and without saying a word clean it up.

John Cage, 1973.

Emma: re-constructed monologue

Spring 2008: Getting an idea *feels exciting. Makes you feel proud, you want to tell everyone about it.* [Mainly ideas come] *at night, alone in bed, when the day is finished and you've just turned the TV off to go to sleep.* When developing ideas I start with one idea, expand to lots then find a new final one. [Usually for me], *linking the first idea to similar objects, sounds, films etc.* [leads to more ideas]. [Thinking too hard is not good for generating ideas], *it's too much, [...] makes you tired. No good or inspirational idea comes from intense thinking, I find most of my ideas come from flashes of inspiration. Even if you have been thinking for a while, the idea always comes in a flash.* [When generating ideas] *drawings [by] other people help with making [my] own style of drawing more comfortable.* [Drawing also gives you] *ideas about colour [and] 'look' and the way [the work] is presented. Experimenting with different media can [help] generate ideas [for example when working with] fabric, the more equipment the easier it is to express your ideas and develop them. Looking at other people's work [also] gives you inspiration e.g. looking at paintings, [say] 'action painting', can give you ideas for a print.* [Doing] *research develops ideas, [as well], better, stronger ideas.* [Yes, I have had creative blocks], *it's frustrating, makes you feel upset. Taking a break and searching for inspiration helps.*

[When developing ideas towards a finished piece] *I start with one idea, expand to lots, then find a new final one.* I [have to] *put effort into the work to achieve the maximum creative result, [something I'm] happy with. I also [have to] spend quite a lot of time, mainly on research.* [Even so], *sometimes you need to take creative risks to make creative development [and] sketches can be drawn quickly to achieve a more creative result than spending hours.* [When I was asked about planning and organising I said it was] *very important – without planning and organisation, the work will not be completed to the satisfied standard.*

[My creativity wasn't recognised in primary school, but in secondary school my work in practical art subjects was]. [I have a relative who] *went to art college, [and] I enjoyed GCSE art subjects [and] got good grades, which made me feel good.* [I think] I'm more self-motivated than most of my peers [and more creative than some of them, and] I'm determined to have a successful career in art and design. When the researcher asked which out of a long list of characteristics best matched what I thought I was like, I ticked: sensitive, optimistic, team-player, enthusiastic, stubborn, energetic and easily distracted.

Summer 2009: [I chose to study art & design at undergraduate level because] *fashion interests me. I wanted to learn more about it [and] would like to pursue a career in this field.* [Now I'm in the second year, I] *still want to pursue a career in fashion [but] it's made me realise that a lot of work is involved and organisation and time management are very important. Year one was more structured. Year two lets you make more decisions independently.* [Being here has] *sometimes been inspirational and made me feel more confident, [but not always].*

Feedback [from tutors] helps you improve the work and their opinions help you develop as a person. Feedback from students also helps improve the work and relationships working in a team and discussions about work develop the person you become. Friends'

and family's opinions matter a lot. It's nice to show people what you have done and generally everyone is very interested. Family and tutors push me to do better. I [do] find [it difficult] to talk about the negative aspects of my work but talking to someone else [can] influence the positives about it. [Being self-reflective is] very important [...] you must reflect on how you can improve. [Although I agree with the marks I've been given, being assessed] has made me realise how much work is involved. Good feedback increases my confidence [but] maybe [it's also] made me less creative as you concentrate on how you can get the grade. [The thought of getting a classified degree] puts pressure on me to do well. [When asked what I thought educators could do to encourage art and design students to be more creative, I said to] put less pressure on students, [provide] funds for materials etc. Less worries for students would help [them] to be more creative.

Summer 2010: *[In spring 2008, I said I was more self-motivated than my peers and I still feel the] same. [Last year, I felt] maybe [assessment had] made me less creative as you concentrate on how you can get the grade [and I still feel the] same. [Over the last three years what's helped my creative development? I'd say] peers within the group, sharing ideas, tutors, general tasks [...] for projects such as research etc. [For example] attending lectures, working independently and socialising with people in the group [and] being quite open-minded. Not being as organised as I would like [has made it difficult for me and] change of opinion from tutors, [has led to] slight confusion. I [think the fact that I now] know that I must do the work to achieve my career goal – 'innovative thinking' [has really helped my development, but having better organisational skills] would give me more time to explore the different ideas I have. [Maybe as well], living at home has made it difficult] as I would probably thrive more in an independent environment.*

I work harder now because I can see the end and I am closer to my career goal [and] having my own workspace with visuals and work [around me], helps a lot with my creative development. [Technical skills are important too if you want] to produce sound and well-made garments. Poor technical work would mean poor work overall. [Having to do theory] has broadened my knowledge but also added pressure, I prefer practical work [but I can see that it's provided] me with information I didn't know about before. [And having more understanding of fashion as a profession] has made me work more efficiently and to a higher standard.

[Looking back to when I started my undergraduate study I think,] I work harder now because I can see the end and I am closer to my career goal. [For me] fashion is aimed at a wide range of people [and] I think my [final] collection could be worn by many including people of different cultures etc. [Over the next eight weeks I want] to have six [...] outfits made to a high standard and to be proud of what I have achieved. [I want my final collection to show potential employers] my skills, my creativity and my personality. [The degree classification I get is important] because it shows future employers how well you work and to what quality. [How do I feel about leaving?] I'm relieved but also scared. I'll be sad to leave my group and [...] think it will feel a bit strange at first but I hope to keep in contact.

When asked to select from a list what I thought I might be doing in a year's time I selected working full-time for an art and design-related organisation while working freelance as a designer when possible. [And when asked what I hoped to be doing five years from now I said I'll] be living in either Paris or Milan, as a stylist either freelance or for a high-end company.

Imagined Dialogue Two: tales of value & worth

Setting and staging: It is a grey winter day. The action is set somewhere in northern England in a large country hotel, a popular venue for weddings and conferences. The performance takes place in the hotel's largest room. The room's once-grand provenance is still discernible in the seven elegant windows that flank its length and the elaborate, carved wood double doors rooted in the centre of the opposite wall.

A long table is positioned directly in front of the windows, its precise structure concealed under black baize. Fifteen large grey-topped circular tables, now stripped of their white linen, are arranged in three rows between the long table and the double doors. Around each table are twelve equally spaced chairs. The only distinct colour emanates from the wild swirls of deepest aniline greens and blues of the wall-to-wall carpet and the peppering of bright red from the orderly clock-face arrangement of folders on each round table. It could be any time from the last fifteen years of the 20th century to the present.

The performance is in **two acts**.

Prologue: A highly embroiled quarter, a network of streets that I had avoided for years, was disentangled at a single stroke when one day a person dear to me moved there. It was as if a searchlight set up at this person's window dissected the area with pencils of light.

Walter Benjamin, 1928.

Act One: eavesdropping

[The scene opens with the audience only barely able to see what is happening in the space. Just visible are the 48 actors who play conference delegates. Some, already seated, talk intently amongst themselves, others looking about. Others, flanked by empty chairs, sit alone, glancing occasionally towards the long table in front of the window. While precisely what is being said is inaudible, a hum of quiet expectancy pervades the space. The double doors slowly open, shedding light from the corridor outside onto a round table positioned directly in front of the doors. Four delegates ensconced in conversation are now clearly illuminated. Other actors playing hotel guests, and wearing youthful apparel, walk brusquely down the corridor absorbed in animated talk. On hearing the word “assessment” the four delegates simultaneously cease talking, their attention rooted on the corridor.]

White: ... assessment? So, I know I'm not perfect and I know my work isn't. I know I can do better but still not to 1st standards.

Red: Well, in my first and second year, I always got fairly good grades. It motivated me to work hard to boost my grade to a 1st. Occasionally I felt disappointed with a grade but this was when I knew I'd not put the work in. Getting a good grade gave me confidence that I was pleasing tutors, the university and doing better than peers – but it didn't make me feel my work was real, validated or would get me anywhere in the real world. ... Now I'm fairly sure I'll get a 2.1. This is extremely important to me because I know I am capable of this – to get less would be terrible for my confidence and sense of achievement. [Pause.] How do you feel?

Orange: So for me, ... each assessment helps me to improve, whether I get good or bad feedback ... I always try to improve. If I am honest ... I think it helps me to work harder knowing I get a degree at the end – but I do what I do because I enjoy it ...

Blue: I tended to know when I'd done badly in the first year, so I always put off reading feedback ... In the second year I ... wanted to get my feedback so I knew where I had room for improvement for the next project. At this university the tutors give really fair feedback so I have never felt disheartened by it. ... Like, now I'm in the third year and the grades actually count towards my final BA, I'm more concerned about what I get. So my work reflects that because I am trying to hit each grade outcome.

Yellow: Well, my second-year assessment had a very positive impact, ... I received a far better grade than I felt I would get. So in terms of confidence, it was a real boost. It was also nice to hear exactly what the tutors say about your working practice. ... But now I'm in the third year I believe the unspoken necessity to 'jump through the hoops' when it comes to assessment ... feels as if hitting particular assessment criteria is more important than taking risks with projects, which I feel is the wrong way around in terms of encouraging creativity.

Green: Yeah, I know what you mean but you need to think about yourself, there's no doubt assessment had a monumental impact on my creative development in the first and second years. Whatever feedback I received I tried to channel it to improve the ways in which I worked. When I received a grade I tried to assess how and what I needed to do to improve and possibly raise my grade. ... Only in the third year have I started to make 'work' for myself. ... Before ... I was making it to try to get a good mark.

... I've got to the point now where in this last project, I let go of that, I haven't thought about my marks, I've gone "just make this piece of work and make sure it's really good".

Purple: I think in the second year, assessment helped me gain confidence, far more than the first year Talking to someone who is marking your work makes you realise that if you don't feel confident about your work when you're in front of them, then you will never feel confident enough to continue producing work or exhibiting work. It helps a lot in the most nerve-wracking of ways! Now I'm nearly at the end of my course, it matters a lot to me that the exact classification matches up to how I feel I have been doing over the three years. I want my art to hit the grade! ... **[Pause.]** But funnily enough, the actual end of the third year has been the highlight of the three years for me, because you carry on doing work and you sort of get wound up doing so much and "going for it", then you actually sit back and realise that you are in here with so many other students that have become your really good friends and your personal development has been aided by all these people that are around you – it's an amazing experience and I've just loved it.

Orange: Come on you lot, we need to get ready!

[End of Act One.]

Act Two: listening in

[The scene opens in total darkness and the action begins with bright light illuminating every corner of the large room. The double doors are wide open and a steady stream of delegates in ones and twos enter the room and take their seats around the circular tables. Some beckon others to join them. Most are talking amongst themselves, or leafing through folders with bright red covers. Others check the time on mobile devices or scrutinise what is happening near the long table, where two or three actors, adopting the gestures of organisers, are now assembled. As the empty chairs are finally filled, the lights and sound fade. Moments later a single overhead spotlight illuminates one circular table.]

Nº 1: ... there's a real danger that uncritical acceptance of increasingly prescriptive, standardised outcomes will create cynical, instrumental attitudes to learning in teachers and students alike and remove critical dimensions of student-centredness from higher education. If unchecked, I'd say ...

Nº 2 [clears throat]: Well, I think I need to remind everyone that a programme specification is a concise description of the intended learning outcomes of an HE programme, and the means by which the outcomes are achieved and demonstrated. ... Also these intended learning outcomes relate directly to the curriculum, study and assessment methods, and criteria used to assess performance.

Nº 3: Yes [nodding vigorously], learning outcomes demonstrate what has been achieved – and the assessment criteria demonstrate how well students perform as a result of tackling the learning outcomes. Students ask the question, quite legitimately, “What do I have to do to get the best grades?” at some point in the project. The answer must always be, “Achieve the learning outcomes and aspire to the assessment criteria”. There should be no hidden agendas.

Nº 4: Whether or not what assessment is trying to assess is clearly specified in documentation, students work out for themselves what counts, or at least what they think counts, and orient their effort accordingly. They are strategic in their use of time and ‘selectively negligent’ in avoiding content that they believe is not likely to be assessed.

Nº 5: Some of you will be aware I've argued for some time that summative assessment is in disarray, said that formative assessment needs attention and implied that so too does the nature of curriculum in higher education. I've also claimed that there is little to be had from discourses that blame problems on defective methods, less-than-competent teachers, scant resources, or failures to apply the linear systems thinking of rational management practice. The deficiencies of which they speak have long been with us. Better I suggest for us all to explore assessment as complex systems of communication, as practices of sense-making and claim-making. This is about placing psychometrics under erasure while revaluing assessment practices as primarily communicative practices.

Nº 4: Well, I think it's clear that many universities are imposing quality assurance guidelines and regulations that virtually guarantee that student learning is damaged, [pause] I'm very sorry [purposefully gathering together papers and belongings] but I'll have to leave you with that thought. [Stands up.]

Nº 2: Hang on a minute! UK higher education providers are autonomous, independent bodies with responsibility for the academic standards of the awards they make and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide! Our agency maintains a set of reference points, which help them to do this. Moreover, the evaluation of our academic infrastructure published last month found much evidence to support the view that the impact made by its introduction ... on UK higher education has been very positive. The evaluation has also provided evidence that ... it has created a framework for assuring the academic threshold standards and academic quality of higher education provision in the UK. [Pause.] OK, there was a minority of opinion that suggested the academic infrastructure had constrained innovation in teaching and learning, and

in some cases created a perceived increase in bureaucracy and therefore had not always contributed to establishing comparability of threshold standards as well as it might. **As well, ...** some questions were raised about how consistently the ... infrastructure had been adopted by higher education providers, with the view that a lack of consistency could limit its effectiveness.

[THREE SECONDS SILENCE]

Nº 6 [concealed within the grey void that engulfs everything beyond the spotlight, a voice filled with subtlety, and silent until now, quietly states]: Surely, the real test **is** our ability to maintain the highest ethical standards in recognition that we hold in our hands the lives of **students** who trust us to do so.

[End of Act Two.]

Epilogue: We come now to the basic dialectic. In their capacity as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged. ... But *qua* performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realizing these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized.

Erving Goffman, 1956.

Lucy: re-constructed monologue

Spring 2008: *[Having] a new idea is a satisfying and 'good' feeling that makes me feel like I have achieved something. Not only does it help towards my work, it [also] makes me realise that I've thought about it – on my own – me being creative, [...] like I've created something new! Meaning [...] I've done it, I'm the one [...], there has been nobody else telling me, "oh do this" or "that's a good idea". It's [...] me doing my work, and it's my ideas, which I can then generate. That's like the biggest thing, to be able to know that I've done it single-handedly and there's been no other help whether it be tutors, whether it's been peers, it is just me. [When generating ideas] I mostly tend to prefer to work alone and find being in my room – alone – a stimulant to produce ideas, I can [then] bounce off each idea, developing it [further]. I [do] find talking with other peers very helpful [too] they can help improve any idea, giving their view or how they would do it. I find that once you grasp the idea you are then able to form new ideas from it as you see how it works and where you are coming from [... and] you see its full potential. [Being away from the work] means that other things can influence and change your perception of the idea, your mind is [...] freed from what is going round your head constantly. I find that doing something completely different helps to how you see your idea and [...] when you go back to it, you can more [...] easily develop it. [When I get flashes of inspiration] I'm able to think "wow, that's good", or "I could do mine like that" [...] allowing me to see my idea from a different viewpoint, [to see] how I could approach ideas in the future. [As well], teachers really help me to see what I could do to develop ideas. [With research] when I look at magazines or advertisements they influence the way I think and how I put pen to paper when beginning an idea [but] but don't have any more influence at the end of the idea stage. [The work of other designers affects the] way in which I can refer and relate to [a design brief. I read a book recently written by a designer] and found that [by] following similar steps, I could create and develop ideas more easily. [And], teachers really help me to see what I could do to develop ideas. Research plays a large role [too]. I especially find the library very useful. Being able to sit and spend time researching through books helps [with] how I use the information [...] in my own work. I find the Internet can change the way I think and push me into an area, which is false. [Creative blocks? Well] yes, I think most people have [them] sometimes, but when it happens to me I try and do something different. I take my mind off it so when I do go back to it I feel refreshed and more able to progress. I've realised that it isn't a bad thing to go through; sometimes I think it 'should' happen so I can be better from it.*

[I have various ways of developing ideas, sometimes] I start with lots of ideas then quickly narrow it down to one [or] gradually narrow it down to one or sometimes I start with one, expand to lots, then decide to go back to the first one. I'm always striving to achieve and be the best [and] personally believe the more [time] you put in and do, the better the result. However this may not always be the case. You may put a lot in, but get rubbish results. So it differs. I personally would spend a lot of time trying to develop and be creative in order to get a better majority of results. [Are there any links between creative development and taking creative risks? Yes] a lot, you have to take risks when developing, as how else would it be to be creative? Many people stay in their 'comfort zone' but I think there are times when it is necessary to take a risk, if it means improving an idea. Planning and organisation are very, very important. I'm a well-organised person who hates [it] when things go wrong or I can't complete them. It's a crucial point – how else how do you manage to complete a piece? I also plan what I need to do and use a 'cross off' system where I plan stages of completion, the more I cross off the better.

At primary school my creativity wasn't recognised, [we] weren't allowed to be ourselves, we had a routine we had to follow. [At secondary school] I was good at art and design and was awarded achievement certificates every year at speech night. I was generally good at every subject but excelled in art and design. I found it satisfying and incredibly enjoyable – more so than other [subjects]. One of my teachers took the time to help, and realised that I was creative and had the mind to pursue a career in design [and this had] a significant impact on my decision to study art & design]. My sister was [also creative], but ended up doing a [humanities] degree. She did influence me when she was in A-level but then she chose to go to do a degree she didn't really want to do. She only did it because of money and what would be better for the future – not what she enjoyed or had a passion for. When the researcher asked which out of a long list of characteristics best matched what I thought I was like, [I ticked all of these]: willing to take risks, sensitive, optimistic, obsessive, a team player, confident, playful, enthusiastic, focused, open-minded, stubborn, responsible, able to concentrate intensely and energetic. I've always been exceptionally self-motivated and driven [and I'd say I was much more creative than many of my peers]. [Yes and], I'm determined to be recognised as outstanding in my career in art and design!

Spring 2009: [I didn't complete a survey or meet the researcher this year.]

Spring 2010: In spring 2008 I said I'd always been exceptionally self-motivated and driven. [Nearly two years later] I totally agree with that statement, I think that [...] now, I'm constantly motivating myself on all levels. I'm always looking [and] thinking of new ideas, new ways of doing things. I love it when I succeed or get to a level I am happy with. [In terms of] planning and organisational skills, not much [has changed since 2008 either, but] I think the 'cross off' system is part of the younger me as now, it's not about just ticking things off, it is about taking it to the next level, have I worked properly and concisely to the brief – does it answer all that is required? I am still very aware of how much I complete and whether I have answered my own requirements.

[Looking back] tutors, resources, facilities and friends, [have] all contributed to my [creative] development and idea generation. Generally [I benefited from] being in a student-learning environment, as it is not a work/office [environment, more] a place to further develop. I'm not afraid of a challenge [and] am very adaptable and can apply my skills to anything, which allows me to work in different media [and so on]. I'm a dedicated individual; I love all aspects of my study – research, development, idea-generation, design. I'm committed and think this shows – if I can't do it, I learn how to do it! If something [is a problem] I find a way of solving it and moving on. Friends and boyfriend have been the 'rock' I needed [and] I do a lot outside uni – read books [and] magazines on design, visit galleries and travel, these all influence my work. [I am aware that] sometimes I do too much research, [...] then don't leave enough time for design. But this is by no means a problem, as I am learning.

[Thinking about my work over the last three years, I have definitely developed my] applied knowledge – I do a lot of research, which opens my eyes to the world around me. I am a better designer, [in other words] I know what looks bad/good – what works/doesn't and I strive for more; I constantly push, analyse, evaluate my progress [as I] design. [I've had lots of influences] installation art and design, design with a meaning or

purpose, social responsibility for designers, sustainable [design, in other words] engaging and effective design. I'm very aware and concerned [and] have done several pieces of work based on [broader cultural issues]. I feel like I am 'making change', [...] I am the new designer, I should be more aware and want to influence others. [Theoretical studies has definitely had an impact too], a lot! My essays and dissertation had a direct link to studio work and opened my eyes to the [...] industry. I learned a lot about influential people [in design], and ways of speaking to the consumer – this has helped me approach projects, e.g. who I aim at. [Professional practice] has given me broader knowledge of the 'world' I want to become part of. I am very much interested and want to know. Why wouldn't I?

[Over the next few weeks of my course] I want to get done all that I can – [and that means] a lot –and do it well. I want to use the resources in the uni as I won't have them outside [...] and I want to produce good work and a study that reflects my skills and creativity. [I want my final show to convey that] I am acutely aware of design [in] the world around me and I apply this to my own work. [I want it to say] I'm different – I'm a fresh, conceptual designer [and] I'm a dedicated and passionate designer – I love design and all that it involves. [The degree classification] is about competition and actually doing it. It signifies the end and all that I have done.

I'm scared but excited [about leaving]! Nervous about the amount of work to do but I also know it will fly by. Do I want to leave? Am I ready? Yes and no, I think. I want the future, I know I'm ready to move on – and now is the time. In the twelve months after graduating I hope to be: working full-time for an art and design related organisation while working freelance as a graphic designer when possible. [In five year's time] I want to be in a challenging and unique role that allows me to develop and continue to push my skills, ideas and thoughts within a design-based agency. I want to have control over the work I do and would like to work towards a higher position within the company. I want to be doing successful and powerful work that engages and impacts on other people's lives, [...] then I feel like I've succeeded, I've achieved my own personal goals.

Imagined Dialogue Three:
acts of compliance
& resistance

Setting, staging and characterisation: The setting is a large featureless space referred to throughout as 'the stage'.

The stage is connected to various indeterminate backstage spaces by doors, some of which are ajar. All spaces (those visible and invisible) are furnished with chairs. Some contain tables and technology for broadcasting or projecting data. None has windows or wall clocks. The action takes place on and off the space designated 'the stage'.

Everyone present is an actor. Some are readers and listeners, and others take the speaking parts of named characters. The ensemble of actors present should think of this event, in dramaturgical terms, as a 'first reading' of a performance yet to take place.

The performance is in **three acts**.

Prologue: At long last the aim has been achieved and a tremendous amount of work and effort has borne fruit. All the authors have been put into uniform and awarded suitable ranks and distinctions. In this way chaos, lack of criteria, unhealthy artistic tendencies and the obscurity and ambiguity of art have been removed once and for all.

Sławomir Mrozek, 1958.

Act One

[Three characters are standing together at the centre of the stage. Some distance away to their right, another character is seated.]

Nº 1: Our earlier study, which I believe you are aware of, though modest in scale, indicated that different patterns of assessment are associated with markedly different student learning responses and it's possible to identify which characteristics of assessment environments are associated with positive or negative learning responses. For example, [slight pause] traditional assessment patterns – characterised by frequent formative-only and oral assessment, within weakly defined curricula, and with very infrequent summative assessment – were found to be associated with a wide range of positive learning responses.

Voice A [speaking from somewhere backstage]: I'm no expert but I'm at university now and if you ask me you need to redesign ... course structures so that there is less emphasis on meeting academic criteria and more about just completing a course so that there is the most benefit to students and they feel their time has been well spent. More also needs to be done to facilitate creative development like having the right environment, removal of tedious problems ... like shortage of teaching staff etc., which overshadow creative work.

Nº 2: Mmmm [addressing Nº1] of course students should ... expect to receive excellent teaching. I know we're not here to discuss this but the changes we're making to higher education funding will in turn drive a more responsive system. To be successful, institutions will have to appeal to prospective students and be respected by employers. Putting financial power into the hands of learners makes student choice meaningful.

Nº 3: We talk about the quality of teaching, or rather others talk about the quality of teaching, as a given in terms of the experience of students ... but of course it's not just about teaching. Teaching is part of the way in which learning is facilitated within institutions and it's the nature of university education and the nature of the students' learning experience which is particularly significant in terms of what they achieve Students go to university to learn, not necessarily to be taught, and when I first went to university many years ago the prevailing theory then was that students went to university to read for a degree. It was the responsibility of the individual to pursue their interests in their study and for the teaching, in a sense, to be part of the way in which that programme of study was managed and organised by institutions. So there is I think a big public debate to be had about the nature of higher education. [Pause.] But yes, [looking directly at Nº 2] in the context of what you were saying, I think our role may well change ... I think there'll be increasing expectation from students both individually and collectively about protecting their interests as investors in higher education Increasingly I think we're going to find ourselves focusing on what may be defined as a sort of consumer protection role of looking after the interest of students to ensure ... [interrupted by Nº 4.]

Nº 4 [seated and leaning towards the standing group]: Can't you see the university is in crisis, almost everywhere. In the broadest terms, the university's position as simultaneously inside and outside society – as both a participant in and an observer of society, always precarious – has been eroded. With the exception of a few hold-outs the ivory tower has gone. We face enormous pressures of instrumentalization, turning the university into a means for someone else's end. These pressures come in two forms – commodification and regulation. If commodification raises the question of

knowledge for whom, regulation raises the question of knowledge for what? All the mechanisms of regulation, whether through ranking systems or through standardization, repress the reason for producing knowledge.

[Footsteps can be heard. Three figures carrying placards enter the stage. They approach the group, stand still for a moment, then turn. As they leave the lights fade.]

From somewhere backstage, wave after wave of indistinguishable talk fills the stage.

After a few seconds the talk subsides and a single voice can be heard.]

Voice B: I graduated in 2010 and would I have gone to university if annual tuition fees were over £6K? No, I wouldn't! ... I was entitled to full loans and grants, which was necessary as I received no money from my mum as she couldn't afford it, and I still had to **have** a part-time job to be able to afford to live. The debt I am left with now is more than enough of a headache ... for someone my age. It's not a question of whether I would have gone to study art and design, it's a question of whether I would have gone to university to study anything at all. Especially as the increase in price won't be reflected in any increase in course and teaching quality, as it will only be filling the gap that the withdrawn government funding will create.

[End of Act One.]

Act Two

[On the stage a group of characters is seated around a large table.]

Nº 5: Are we all here? [Brief pause.] We'll begin then, [clears throat] as we were saying, although the current academic infrastructure has no legal standing and is not mandatory, there's a consensus expectation that HEIs will take the elements into account in their management of the standards and quality of their programmes and awards. The QAA judges the extent to which they meet this expectation. For example, in the context of today's discussion you will be familiar with the Code of Practice, Section 6, Precept 2, which requires that institutions publicise and implement principles and procedures for, and processes of, assessment that are explicit, valid and reliable.

Nº 6: Some time ago I argued it was indisputable that from the students' perspective ... clear standards and goals were a vitally important element ... and that any lack of clarity ... was almost always associated with negative evaluations, learning difficulties and poor performance.

Nº 7: In our university we've ensured that courses and modules must each have stated aims and intended learning outcomes, which the curriculum, structure, teaching and learning methods and forms of assessment are designed to fulfill. ... We make it very clear that the purpose of the summative assessment is to enable students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the intended learning outcomes of the module.

Nº 8: Yes, and we publish a series of learning and teaching definitions where we explain that assessment criteria are descriptions of what the learner will have to demonstrate in order that learning outcomes specific to a module have been achieved. We say clearly that the purpose of assessment criteria is to establish clear and unambiguous standards of achievement in respect of each learning outcome ...

Nº 5 [nodding]: Our recent evaluation ... found much evidence to support the view that the impact made by the introduction of the academic infrastructure on UK higher education has been very positive. The evaluation has also provided evidence that it has created a framework for assuring the academic threshold standards and academic quality of higher education provision in the UK.

Nº 8: The problem we have with A-levels is that students come to us very assessment-oriented. They mark-hunt, they are reluctant to take risks, they tend not to take a critical stance, and they tend not to take responsibility for their own learning. But the crucial point is the independent thinking. It's common in our institution that students go to the lecture tutor and say, "What is the right answer?" That is creating quite a gap between how they come to us ... and what is needed at university.

Nº 9: Yes, we received substantial evidence that teaching to the test, to an extent which narrows the curriculum and puts sustained learning at risk, is widespread in schools.

Nº 10: Unfortunately, the current system not only creates strong incentives for schools and colleges to steer students onto post-16 vocational courses they can easily pass. It also creates strong incentives for awarding bodies to make passing easy.

Nº 11: With respect, that may be the case with schools and further education colleges but I think the quality of teaching in higher education has certainly improved over the

last 30 years and certainly part of the evidence comes from the National Student Survey, the largest independent survey conducted on behalf of Government, and indeed there is a clear indication that the students are well satisfied with what they have received.

Nº 8: The UK has one of the best higher education systems in the world. Our rigorous quality assurance system has been vital to this success. It's encouraging that government is seeking to strengthen this system while lightening the bureaucratic burden on universities. It is crucial that this tough quality assurance system applies in the same way to any new providers of higher education.

Nº 5: We fully endorse this view.

Nº12 [leaning towards a character to their right. Voice barely audible]: As far as I'm concerned, there's abundant evidence that assessment and feedback are broken as practised in higher education today. Yet the people who have researched assessment and feedback are in complete agreement about what can be done to make assessment and feedback work well, and take their rightful places as important steps in making learning happen for our students. Our task is to take due notice of all the research which has been done, and change our ways.

Nº5: Perhaps this is a good time to pause?

[As the lights fade, soaring above the din of backstage voices now filling the stage, a single clear voice can be heard.]

Voice C: Are they talking about us?

[End of Act Two.]

Act Three

[The stage is in complete darkness. The action takes place somewhere offstage.]

Voice D: Hey, I seem to be the only FE student here at the moment but I think with assessments ... it feels like when you are sitting with the tutor there's some third party there who you and the tutor are responding to. When he's writing down all these things about you on the sheets of paper and things, it feels quite de-personalised.

Voice A: Well I'm an undergraduate and it's also made me concentrate more on the academics of meeting the criteria and less on my own development as I feel if I just let myself explore my own creativity I will not get a good classification, which will look bad, [slight pause] be a waste of fees.

Voice E: Exactly, I think the system is bullshit to be honest. Education continues to be about jumping through hoops instead of raw talent. I feel ... it restricts, I hate doing pointless elements in projects just to tick the boxes on the criteria.

Voice F: I agree, in one way there are certain hoops that we have to jump through academically, you know we have to back up our work with research and context, in a way that they want it displayed, so that tutors can prove to the people who mark them that they're showing the students the right way to do it. ... I see my work and practical research as two different things – I have to marry them together. But what I give my tutors, doesn't determine my artwork.

Voice G: Yeah, I know what you mean. [Pause.] I'm careful to do the 'box ticking', fill out the forms and so on but also I work practically more and try different things out, to hopefully get a higher grade because the 'box ticking' will only get you so far and doesn't really relate to how good your work is. I think often the 'box tickers' don't have the strongest work.

Voice B: I haven't said this to anyone before but, although I currently feel confident in my work – and my grades are good – but ... when I compare it to the quality of work from my peers, I worry I have achieved them by fulfilling criteria, not for the creativity – this may be me being too critical on myself.

Voice H: I feel differently, I always strive to do well and have luckily ... received good marks so far, which encourages me to progress. Being assessed has enabled me to see where I am going ... right or wrong. Getting a classified degree makes me determined to do well and work for it.

Voice I: Me too, it makes me push my ideas more – definitely. And made me competitive!

Voice J: Well, I'm at uni to learn about the subject and better myself to get a good job. The 'degree' is only something to write on your CV.

Voice K: That's interesting 'cos for me, getting a classified degree makes me work in the way I know I will gain marks, like I document things that maybe I would keep in my head. It keeps me motivated to keep working and to try to improve. [Pause.] Possibly makes me quite single-minded in focusing on the goal of getting a good degree?

Voice L: I don't like how ... we go through 20-odd years of our lives relying on a number or a percentage to make us feel a certain way about ourselves. ... Although I am doing very well with my work, I shouldn't rely on a piece of paper ... to confirm my self-belief. I wish we just had feedback and no grade at all. ... **OK** – I would be overjoyed to get a first ... but if I feel I have worked the hardest I could and created the best work possible, I should be proud of that – and the grade shouldn't matter. ... **Easier to say**, than do, however. **[Shrugs shoulders and smiles].**

Voice M: Even if I came out with a Third at the end of the course, it's still a degree to me. Like, because there's no one in my family with a degree. I've got friends with brothers who've got Firsts and Seconds and they think they have to live up to expectations.

[Without warning, bright light fills the empty stage.]

[End of Act Three.]

Epilogue: It pleases us that from time to time characters live according to *their* will, obeying *their* imagination more than the director's intelligence. A sticky problem, perhaps, for the latter to reckon with the imagination of his own characters.

Nora Mitrani, 1951.

Robert: re-constructed monologue

Spring 2008: [Having a new idea] makes me feel excited, as if I can't wait to get started on it. As I develop the idea in my head it gives me a huge buzz. I see things that inspire me and I can think them over. Ideas develop so far in my head until I feel I need to put them down on paper. Then by drawing from the original idea, the new ones can develop normally [...], one step at a time. [Standing back and thinking intensely about the work] helps so much, [regardless of whether] I am struggling or [whether] I think it's my best ever work; time away helps me think and see things that I might want to include. The more I push, the more I get out of it. I very rarely have sudden flashes [of inspiration] my ideas are normally built up in my mind one step at a time. Drawing helps [me] to see how new ideas can come out. It's the way I push my development further. And is how thoughts become design. [Other artists and designers have had a] huge [impact on me]; most of my ideas [and] designs start off as something that has caught my eye in the first place. I take it and make it my own. [...]. I fill pages of [my] sketchbook from these sources to help me develop and improve my designs. I think of the best idea I can and then push it as far as it will go to make sure it is the way I imagined it. Materials can be changed to fit [ideas]. [Yes] I've had creative blocks, [but] I pushed through it; it was frustrating, unnerving and worrying as I was turning up a blank for everything.

When deciding which idea to develop I [either] start with lots of ideas then quickly narrow it down to one, start with lots of ideas and gradually narrow it down to one [or] start with one idea, expand to lots, then find a new final one. *When developing [ideas] the further I go [with them] no matter how small they are, the better the end result [...].* [I think of] development [as] slow [and] calculated whereas a risk is a jump from one idea to a completely different idea – one that could end up anywhere. I try to plan but no matter how much you write things down, it always takes longer because when it is my work, I find it impossible to just settle for it.

In primary school I messed around mostly [...] and we had very few art lessons but my art teachers at secondary pushed me to think of bigger and better ideas until I could not settle for second best. A close relative is the most creative [one in my family but] my mum and dad pushed me to achieve [...], as it was what I dreamt of. When asked which out of a long list of characteristics best matched what I thought I was like, I ticked: willing to take risks, sensitive, optimistic, team-player, confident, playful, enthusiastic, focused, open-minded, responsible, cautious, energetic and self-critical. I think I'm about averagely self-motivated when compared to my peers [but would say I'm much more creative than many. Longer term], I'm determined to have a successful career in design.

Spring 2009: [I chose to study art and design] because it's something I believed [would] interest me for many years to come. By studying at [degree level] I have decided this is something I definitely want to do. Over Christmas I realised I'm here because I want to be and not because I have to be and I now feel happy in my work and do it for enjoyment, like I used to at school [... and] it's made me realise what I want, career wise. [The main difference between Year one and Year two] is the amount of work that we are expected to do]. But more so the quality of work around me, I feel everyone has developed so much and this keeps me on my toes. [Being at uni,] has mostly been an inspirational experience, made me more reflective and self-critical and made me feel I belong, doing what I am doing.

[The opinions of tutors are important because] *they've been in my position and know what challenges I will have to face therefore I believe they'll help me make my work successful.* [Talking to tutors] *gives me the opportunity to see my work from their side.* [Fellow students] *are in the same position [as me], they will be people I compete against for work so it helps to know what they are thinking.* [The opinions of people outside uni are important as well] *because, they are the general public [...] the main target audiences for my work in the future.* [Being self-critical] *is very important, [because] if you ever feel your work is perfect you will get complacent.* [Who would I say has had the most influence on me now? Well, the] *art and design teachers at school and my second year tutors at [uni]. This term [because of having more] interest in the work around me, in the industry and in my own work [I've felt more part of a creative community with] people on my course [in particular with] about ten out of my class.* I [now] feel I 'belong', doing what I am doing.

[The assessment and grading process has] *not [had a] good [impact on my confidence]. I feel a little disappointed with grading as all feedback states 'better work [needed]'. [...] I know my work still has a long way to go [but] sometimes I feel I feel the old grade influence[s] the current one, even though I have developed.* [On the other hand] *it has helped me to push harder [creatively] and want it more.* [When I think about the degree classification] *it becomes more of an issue the closer the assessments for Year two get, [because] this is the one chance [for me] to get a strong grade.*

What do I think educators and institutions could do to encourage art and design students to be more creative? *More flexibility. People who want it will achieve more however, the unsure would suffer.*

Spring 2010: [Two years ago I thought I was] *about averagely self-motivated when compared to my peers. [Now], I would describe my motivation as the same as last year. However I am finding it hard to maintain, with the massive workload [and] with the short deadlines I feel even less happy with my work.* [In terms of what's had the most positive impact I'd say] *people have helped me, there's a friendly competition between us to do well.* [Also with the] *big workload – I've been unable to distract myself [as much, plus] the fact that I don't like disappointing people and want to achieve for everyone who has [helped me] me.* [And] *not giving in [when I'm told I could do better] criticism is part of the industry.* [On the negative side], *the structure – although it provides a good working experience, the facilities are weak [and there's] too many briefs at one time [which] means that my ideas have to be limited to be achievable.* [Another problem is me] *getting fed-up and distracting myself.* [Although] *having a long-term girlfriend in a design-based course [means] we can discuss briefs, [but on the other hand] not living with friends from the [graphic] design course [could have restricted my development].*

[I think the three most significant developments in my creative development so far have been: the] *inspiration I take in, the quality production of final pieces [and] giving all aspects of design 'meaning'.* [And my main influences? I'd say] *other designers' work. I find looking at design blogs can start the smallest idea, which can turn into a project.* [In the last eight weeks of the course] *I am planning on improving my standard of work, revisiting some previous work and building a strong portfolio.* [I want my final show to convey] *I'm confident in myself, and my abilities [and that I'm] a strong graphic designer*

and an interesting person. [I do want] a good grade as I want to know my time here has been well spent. [The theoretical part of the course] has provided a welcome break providing something to help me to keep thinking, but not creatively, I feel more confident writing long bodies of text and definitely read more. [Exposure to industry means] I think now I know what is looked for. I am developing work in this direction.

My thoughts [now] are all to the future and what the next chapter of my life holds. I am proud that I have achieved this. [In the next twelve months I am likely to be doing something entirely different] – it will take time to find a design career. [In five year's time] I hope to hold a position as a graphic designer specialising in print-based graphics. I am not sure what type of company I want to work for 'in-house', corporate or a studio.

Imagined Dialogue Four:
creativity played out as
utility, conformity,
subversion, pleasure
& power

Setting, staging and characterisation: The script you are about to read is in **three acts**.

The setting for **Acts One and Two** is curiously ambiguous. It might once have been a schoolroom, an artist's studio, a government office, a public meeting place. A fireplace, enshrined in layers of paint, is anchored to the floor and lower walls by blueness. The space is tall and lit from one side by natural light from four sash windows positioned too high to evoke domesticity. On opposite walls closed cupboards and boxed-in structures steal corners and conceal layers of space. A dark brown door out-stares the gaping fire grate. A slim blue door to the left of the fireplace offers the possibility of a discreet escape.

The room is empty apart from chairs and tables whose form and function speak of a modern 'institution'. Wall texts, floor markings and some primitive technology complete the setting. As the silence deepens, more can be heard.

Act Three: the action takes place *elsewhere*.

For the purposes of this 'event' **everyone present is a participant**. Participants have had to make a special effort to take part in this event. They approach in ones and twos, milling around in the corridor outside the space, unsure of what to do or of what lies ahead. After a while a convener welcomes them and invites them to enter the space.

In dramaturgical terms, participants should approach this event as their first '**read-through**' of a play they will later rehearse and perform. Those **willing to voice texts** will be invited to adopt speaking roles.

Those **who prefer to remain silent** are invited to adopt listening roles.

During the 'read-through' it is likely that all participants will find themselves daydreaming. Some may be unable to repress the desire to make unscripted asides.

N.B. The script is typographically presented in the same format as all previous *imagined dialogues*. In addition:

- **Emboldened stage directions without square brackets** will be voiced by the convener
- In Acts One and Two when speakers are required to make more than one contribution, it is indicated by * asterisks. The number of asterisks corresponds to their *first, **second, or ***third contribution
- Two black lines separating blocks of text, see below, indicate a scripted aside unnoticed by those with speaking roles:

texttexttexttexttext

Prologue: How concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life.

Gaston Bachelard, 1958.

Act One: a persuasive case

[It is the morning of Thursday 30th May 2013. The space is in complete darkness. Without warning, bright light illuminates every corner of the space revealing twelve formally dressed persons, seated in a circle, engrossed in soundless talk. To their left, sits an operative (operative A) who is setting up a laptop. Another operative (operative B) is arranging lines of chairs near to the main door and occasionally checking that the door opens and closes smoothly.

The layout of the space, and the space itself, characterise the rituals and formal orderliness of certain types of regulated, and self-regulated, social interaction. The relative informality and rapidity of the verbal exchange about to unfold evokes those compressed moments of less-guarded gamesmanship that precede formally structured encounters.]

Expert A: and the literature [pause]. So, [slight pause] we determined, which part of the objective stated the behavior intended, and which stated the content or object of said behavior. One of the major problems, with regard to 'knowledge' was always determining what is knowable, for there are different ways in which something can be, "said to be known" [nods and smiles]. Once we'd proceeded to divide the cognitive objectives into subdivisions from the simplest behavior to the most complex, we then attempted to find ways of defining these subdivisions in such a way that all of us working with the material could communicate with each other about the specific objectives as well as the testing procedures ... [takes deep breath in].

***Expert B [clears throat]:** Your objectives model of curriculum design and planning is no doubt a useful one, but it has severe limitations. ... It's wrong that it should be taken for granted, or advanced as universally applicable. Knowledge is provisional. Instruction tends to hide this under a veneer of certainty, but an element of uncertainty is necessary in all education of quality.

Expert C: But hang on, multiple meanings can cause problems, confusion even. Ambiguous terms make it hard for students to see what they are trying to achieve in their studies, and see what they have to do to pass.

Expert D: I quite agree with my colleague [looking directly at expert A] but we needed, first, to decide what kind of knowledge was to be taught – declarative or functioning. Then to define the *intended learning outcomes* that referred not only, to the content to be learned but also, as you were saying, to make it clear what's to be done with that content and to what standards. I think everyone would agree that there's a persuasive case for *intended learning outcomes to be* expressed from the students' perspective, ... in the form of action verbs leading to observable and assessable behaviour, and related to criteria for assessing student performance and so on. [Short pause.] And – as important – we need to use assessment tasks that directly address the outcome and that enable us to judge if and how well students' performances meet the criteria, and finally [with emphasis] transform these judgments into summative grades.

***Expert E addressing expert D directly:** Yes, and back then I certainly felt in fulfilling these principles here in the UK ..., teaching and learning systems would become transparent to the point where teachers and students – and also quality assurance bods, external examiners and external peer reviewers – could 'see' how the teaching and learning system articulated. It also seemed to me that perhaps this transparency was an important feature

of enacting these principles [slight pause]. And what's more, implicit in this policy framework was also a theory of learning – learning through reflection and actions stemming from the reflective process – which promoted the types of self-awareness and behaviours in students – and hopefully teachers – that were necessary for your model to work effectively.

Agency representative: Absolutely and what's more our current deliberations suggested that the focus on learning outcomes ... encouraged more creative thinking in the design of programmes, and the qualification descriptors help in the articulation of the differences between provision at different levels. Looking forward and picking up on your 'transparency' point, [looking directly at expert E] the Government, on behalf of tax payers, has a legitimate interest in knowing that the public funding which goes into higher education is well spent in supporting the UK economy and society. Students and employers also need to know what the expected outcomes from periods of study are.

Agency representative adjusts spectacles and all but two members of the group 'freeze' poised in an array of interested, uninterested and 'elsewhere' bodily and facial expressions.

****Expert B [in a whispered aside to an American colleague who has not yet spoken]:** Our colleagues would be mindful to note that in part, the pressure in the US, certainly in schools, came from funding agencies, being able by the use of the objectives model to operate an over-simplified but comforting payment-by-results system in making curriculum research and development allocations.

Expert F [leaning towards expert B, whispers]: Mmmm, and 40 years on, our schools are facing huge challenges, including a dropout rate that approaches 50% in some demographics, a narrowed curriculum and strict focus on standardized testing that teaches students to fill in multiple choice bubbles instead of how to think creatively and problem solve, skills that are essential for helping them to compete in today's economy. Like the UK, there's an achievement gap between our highest and lowest performing students that is ever-widening and what's as worrying, are those teachers who want to reach out and engage their students, but lack the tools with which to do so.

After two seconds the action resumes as if the preceding exchange had not happened.

Expert G: But with respect, [fleetingly looking toward agency representative] we need to question assumptions about the nature of how and what students experience in contemporary higher education today. For example, the increasing diversity of the student body and of higher education's institutional forms; in particular, many students on full-time courses effectively study part-time while they combine study with paid employment and, or, domestic responsibilities. The consequence may be less time for and, or, different approaches to study. ... Trends such as this lead to an increasing awareness of 'differences' between individual students, between individual higher education institutions and between different national systems. [Pause.] And ... this ... inevitably raises the question of whether some experiences are better than others.

Expert H [appearing somewhat agitated]: Well, I intend to tell them that I think the agency ... should be refocused to concentrate squarely on standards. At the moment it concentrates on process. It's possible to come out of their processes with a glowing report but in fact have poor standards!

Expert I: Hang on, we shouldn't confuse the agency's mission with providing us with a basis for an accurate comparison of a First from Uttoxeter and a First from Oxford. That's not their job! ... It is absolutely fundamental to understanding the diversity of the nature of our institutions to realise that that comparison is too simplistic. The only way you will ever get there, as far as I can see, is by prescribing a national curriculum and having national examinations—which can kiss goodbye to the diversity and the dynamism of British higher education.

Alerted by talk of poor standards and the national curriculum, operative A, who had been daydreaming about dropping the kids off at school that morning, is now listening intently.

Operative A [catches the eye of operative B and silently mouths]: So where does this [jabs left thumb over shoulder towards group three times in rapid succession] leave my kids and me? [Scowling.] What the hell's going on?

****Expert E, representing the views of a former public body, [speaking in a voice that suggests this same point had been made far too many times before]:** We pointed out years ago that the massive expansion and increased flexibility of higher education provision, the rapid expansion of the university system and the student population, ... coupled to changes in public perceptions of the purpose of higher education, all contributed to concerns for the comparability of standards across the higher education system.

Public body representative [clearly frustrated at hearing the previous speaker]: Yes, but now we have a much more integrated approach. Higher education policies are developed by policy teams working in partnership with the sector and Government, informed by expert advice, consultation, and research and evaluation conducted both in-house and by external partners and any new or updated policies ... approved by our board. The Government recently asked us to consult on their proposal to introduce a more risk-based approach to quality assurance in England, by – and here I quote – ‘focussing the QAA's effort where it will have the most impact, and giving students power to hold universities to account.’

Operative B [speaking loudly]: Could you take your seats by the door now please, and turn off all mobiles and laptops. The panel will be with us in two minutes.

The lights fade as group members collect their belongings together and stand. After a few moments of complete darkness, a large text is projected on the white wall. As if transfixed, they gaze at the text, their profiles illuminated by its harsh, commercial presence.

***Tell us what you think about
your course and win £150!***

Only 28 days left!

After three seconds of silence and stillness, one member of the group, unnoticed by the others, slowly withdraws into the darkness and exits through the small blue door.

[End of Act One.]

Act Two: the boat

[It is Wednesday 5th June 2013. The 'panel' are seated behind a neat row of tables in front of the fireplace facing the main door. In the centre of the row, a figure adopts the mannerisms of a 'person-in-charge'. Suspended directly in front of the panel, approximately four metres away, in place of the usual rows of chairs for witnesses and observers, is a large, ceiling-to-floor 'state of the art' digital projection screen. An operative (operative C), seated to the right of the panel, adjusts settings on a laptop and activates the video conferencing screen. On screen, a glorious simulacrum of early twenty-first century logos float endlessly around a rotating globe on a bright blue background. Most of the seven panel members are leafing through mounds of papers while periodically scribbling notes or tapping into their mobile devices. No one is speaking.]

Person-in-charge [clears throat twice, leans forward and turns towards operative A]: *Is everything ready? Can we resume?*

Operative C: *Just waiting for the US witnesses to take their places.*

Slight pause before the screen-saver is transformed into a four-way split screen. In the top two screens groups of five or six witnesses are seated behind tables. Although there is no sound it is clear that both groups are in the full flow of animated conversation. The bottom left screen, that for a split second appeared empty, rapidly fills with witnesses taking their places. The final screen, rather disconcertingly for some panel members, offers up an image of themselves.

Operative C: *Ready now.*

Person-in-charge [looks directly at the faces filling the screen and smiles]: *Colleagues, I'd like us to resume now. Is everyone ready?*

[A gradual rumble of affirmation emanating from cyberspace fills the room.]

Person-in-charge [looking directly at the top left hand side of the screen]: *I'd like to pick up where we left off yesterday by asking practitioner Westcott to start us off with this idea that creativity thrives on 'uncertainty'* [looks left and right to secure the attention of all panel members]. *If I may?*

***Practitioner Westcott:** *Sure.*

Person-in-charge: *Then, I'll open it up to where anyone wants to take us. [Pen poised ready to take notes.] Do go ahead [nodding at practitioner Westcott].*

****Practitioner Westcott:** *Well, I've said before that creating work is a little bit like getting into a boat and rowing out to sea without being entirely sure where you're going but wanting to take advantage of the currents and the winds and feeling somehow that fate would steer you in the right direction.*

***Practitioner Quantrill:** *Yeah, ... creativity should be a journey ... I like being on a journey, I like the process and I know there has to be a destination especially with client orientated work but I don't really like knowing exactly how I'm going to get there or exactly where I'm going to get to. ... I ... have a fear that if I analyse how I work, to too great a degree, then ... I'll lose the magic and ... lose interest in the ... exploration of the ideas, or the adventure, which any sort of creative project should have.*

***Practitioner Dunham [nodding]:** That boat image definitely resonates with me too, I once said, the most meaningful developments in my work were those that occurred involuntarily and blindly, without my knowing what I was going to do, when I had enough faith in my own creative process to be willing to wait for it to happen without my will demanding it.

Practitioner Patterson: Yeah, it's often only 'after' a project that I can see the finer details of what influenced me. I think ideas often come from the 'crossing points' of all the seemingly random, unrelated sources of interest in your life, combined with trying to be open to everything in your environment. It's often a process that's very close to play.

***Practitioner Pettis:** I agree, when you begin a project, you're doing research in a void and you're looking at everything. Then you start to see a pattern, and hopefully there's an "Aha!" moment when you have an idea, and then the rest of your research is directed around that idea.

Practitioner Buskin: Mmm, definitely agree, it's ... like a little part of me has 'sparked', and come together with other existing knowledge to create something new. ... It's really motivating too

Practitioner McCurdy: Yeah for sure, creativity ... is ... our ability to tap into the mental pool of resources, ideas, insights, knowledge, inspiration that we've accumulated over the years just by being present and alive and awake to the world, [smiles] and then combining them in extraordinary new ways.

Unnoticed by those present and out of the sight line of those gazing in through cyberspace, panel member No. 1 scribbles a note and nudges it towards panel member No. 2: Hope we get time to explore what 'creative spaces' these people favour!?!

Glancing at the note, panel member No. 2 raises eyebrows, moves fingers imperceptibly towards mobile device and taps in: The possibilities are endless! #creativity.

Operative C, a #creativity follower, tweets a response.

Practitioner Sullivan [on screen]: Sometimes I wish that I wasn't creative because I feel that it gives you a sense of dissatisfaction. ... A restlessness, a searching thing that is painful. You learn fuck all by doing things right. Except just how clever you are. ...You learn ... by doing things wrong. Restarting it, doing it again. If there was no worry and everything was easy there wouldn't be many jobs. Yeah, it's great finding a new solution. That's what creativity's about, isn't it?

Practitioner Stowe: Yeah, but sometimes I have an idea, which at the time seems flawless but after further thought, turns out to be far from it! Maybe I'm a pessimist [chuckles].

Practitioner Beecher: Maybe [smiles at practitioner Stowe]. So for me it feels like I've been searching for something I've lost, I give up and then I find it right in front of me. Away from the work I can see the faults. Sometimes being too heavily involved ... can blind you. You need to approach your work with fresh eyes [slight pause] obtained from thinking.

***Practitioner Peddigrew:** Well as far as I'm concerned [slight pause], if the creative process isn't difficult, then there's no point in doing it.

Practitioner Martinez: Sure but ... ideas were my only source of happiness for many years, so I really love them. I owe ideas a lot. I realized that you need ideas to change things. It's a glorious moment when you realize you have something great in your hands. I still feel like a five-year-old kid.

***Practitioner Gatchell:** For me, nothing is stronger than the power of ideas, creativity and entrepreneurship.

Person-in-charge [raises left hand]: Thank you to everyone for those insightful contributions, [nodding and smiling at the screen]. I think we've probably exhausted this line of inquiry for the moment so I'd like to move us on. [At this point panel member No. 3 leans forward to attract the attention of the speaker.] You have a question, panel member No. 3?

***Panel member No. 3:** If I may – just one final question relating to yesterday morning's theme.

Person-in-charge: I'm going to have to restrict this to five minutes, we've got a lot more to do and we've addressed this issue fairly thoroughly already I believe – but go ahead.

****Panel member No. 3:** Thank you. [Now addressing the screen.] Over the last decade or more, creativity has become a focus of attention for policy makers in education. However, in my view, the increased interest in creativity has occurred as if without reference to any apparent value framework. I suggest that in fact Western individualism ... provides an invisible underpinning value framework, which, in turn is both supporting – and being driven by – the globalised capitalist marketplace [slight pause]. And so, I'd like to ask the design practitioners with us today, how desirable is this norm of innovation, demanded by the global economy? And to what extent is it 'wise' for educators to play any role in further developing and sustaining the 'throw-away' culture?

****Practitioner Quantrill:** It's a difficult one, but for me, it's not really about being anti- or pro-consumerism, it's a fact of life, if you live in a capitalist, western society you are a consumer. Once you stop producing your own food, making your own clothes and being totally self-sufficient, you engage in what will eventually become a consumer society, which is really interesting for us because it's very much about what we are, all of us – irrespective of our politics – I think that we are consumers, and there's no escaping that.

****Practitioner Peddigrew:** But we definitely do have to ask the question. To ignore the political aspect of our work is to have no critical awareness of the designer's place in society.

****Practitioner Dunham:** For sure, we'll all agree that design can certainly be subversive when its subtext is to undermine the assumptions of a political or social system But frankly I get nervous about ideologies, whether it's the ideology of business or the ideology of Bolshevism. I get nervous in the presence of absolute certainty.

****Practitioner Pettis:** Yes I know exactly what you mean but for me the idea that knowledge is culturally relative and that design exists as a language of relationships at work within a broader social realm remains crucial to my understanding of the discipline, and informs my practice and my work as an educator.

*****Practitioner Quantrill:** And when you consider that Coca-Cola sells ... something just short of one billion servings ... a day globally then you start to realise, ... there's more weight on our shoulders, there's more at stake there, for us being interested, fascinated by consumerism than there is in designing record covers.

*****Practitioner Peddigrew:** Most of the time when we design we just support the status quo and achieve nothing! OK, [pause] very positive statement [muffled laughter from some quarters]. But what we must realise, supporting the status quo is a political act in itself. What happens? We legitimise the action, we insist politics and design are separate in the hope that if enough people say it, it will appear to be true.

Practitioner Hutto: This is our take, [short pause], when the Lehman Brothers collapsed, so a new era was signalled and the baton ... passed on again. Mankind ... now ... has the opportunity ... to reclaim the cultural high-ground and risk something new, a creative breach in the barrier of exclusion that can allow some real growth and evolution, like a bright light shining through the cracks of a crumbling wall. The line of Dangerous Ideas has been interrupted and the path can be found again.

****Practitioner Gatchell:** Yeah and here's one example, if you can take a 'not-for-profit' that is really doing good and you can help them pull it together with a brand, that's going to catapult not only the brand's reputation and loyalty and drive some purchase along the way, but you can really, really elevate the 'not-for-profit' in a way that would take them so much longer to do on their own. ... I think it's a very, very exciting time to be in this space.

Practitioner Challen: It's clear to me that despite all that's been said, design can make a difference. Good design can solve social problems, educate, make people's lives easier, bring people together, motivate ... and even change opinions and attitudes.

Practitioner Hudspeth [aware that the person-in-charge is about to speak but unable to refrain from interjecting]: For sure, we can all talk about making a difference, [raises hands] we could make a difference OR [hands still raised and smiling] we can do both!

Person-in-charge: Really sorry to cut in, we've had our five minutes and it's been fascinating and most definitely pertinent, but I must move us on [raises shoulders, extends palms of hands towards screen in a gesture of regret, before a gradual smile mirrors face after face smiling back]. Thank you to everyone. [Slight pause to leaf through notes.] I want to shift the emphasis now and ask all our many witnesses and those who have followed this debate to reflect on how everything we've discussed over the past five days could be

[Suddenly the space is in complete darkness. Muffled sounds fill the void: murmurings, possessions being collected up and packed away, chairs scraping against linoleum, cloth brushing against cloth, footsteps in more than one direction, the opening and closing of more than one door. Finally, the sound of one set of solitary footsteps, a single door opening, closing, then silence.]

[End of Act Two.]

Act Three: a powerful feeling

A drama in 3 parts

Part 1.

[It is Monday 4th March 2013. A small group of academics have been meeting regularly to trawl through an online archive containing records of one hundred and eleven UK undergraduates who should have completed their art & design degrees in June 2010. What follows is an imagined dramaturgical 'enactment' of one small part of the archive relating to material provided by two undergraduates.]

[Archival dating suggests the source of the transcript about to be enacted was from spring 2007. There is no further information as to the context, or where or through what medium the exchange occurred.]

Anna: So, ... it's exciting and fulfilling. Clichéd as it may sound when ... an idea randomly pops into my head it's definitely a rush. It's a powerful feeling. If it's a crap 'flash' it doesn't matter, it usually turns into something else. ... Just recently I tried out lots of design ideas for a layout project and although they were quite 'out there' if I hadn't tried the more unconventional ones first, I wouldn't have created my final design. How about you?

Kay: Well, if it's for a project with a deadline, a uni project, then it's quite a relief to know I have an idea that I can work on. [Pause]. For other things with less pressure, I agree it's exciting and I look forward to what I can do with it. Like, mind wandering, I just try anything that comes up. I don't purposely 'think' – because it never seems to get me anywhere.

Anna: Yeah I know exactly what you mean, if I over-think ideas I get nowhere, it gets over complicated and my mind feels jammed. If this happens I have to do something different to refresh myself. I love using the library to source ideas and like to think about ... artists, filmmakers, musicians, novelists, people, when I'm brainstorming. I like the Internet too as it's visually quicker, [pause] but I don't like to rely on it.

Kay: That's interesting 'cos for me, looking at other designers doesn't necessarily help. At the time it either makes me feel more positive and cheerful or it makes me feel 'crap', like ... "I can't use my idea now because people will think I've copied", Or, if I really like the work, I think like "would I have thought of doing something like that without having seen it first?" And, when you 'have' to have evidence of research for the course, sometimes you don't really care what you're looking at, because you're doing it as a necessity [pauses] I'm not saying it isn't enjoyable to see what other people have done, when you actually take time to look at what you're collecting.

Anna: Yeah. My trouble is I'm a bit scrappy with the 'organisation' bit. I like making lots of scruffy notes and then once I've finished the final piece I put them into a more concise order. I do need to plan to succeed though!

Kay: I want to get a First, so I constantly aim to improve on what the lecturers say to maintain high grades and if it's a uni project, I won't try something completely 'off' what I usually do because time is valuable doing stuff like that. This means I always need to plan and organise the practical stuff, otherwise I might run out of cash to buy materials and time to print [pause]. But for stuff I do on my own like, I will take risks, because ... it's not going to ruin anything, it's not going waste time I need for something else. ... Like you say, if you don't give it a try, then you won't really know if it works ... and if you plan too much, ... then you know from the beginning what the end is, and it's like you've just got a big chunk of the

same thing, it's not different. I love it when, you can picture things that you could do, without anyone's input and think of absolutely anything, even the impossible [pause] I don't really talk to anyone about stuff like this.

Part 2.

[The transcript is dated summer 2008. No other information is provided.]

Anna: We've had less teaching than in the first year – which is understandable – but then the teaching was often interrupted by part time teachers who had joined the course on a 'try-out' basis who were often late and spent a lot of time ranting instead of talking about design or our work. So in a way, I've learnt even more that it was up to me to believe in myself, give myself a critique and work through creative problems on my own. If I couldn't depend on staff giving me guidance I would have to rely on myself. ... Hopefully this has put me in a better position than others in my year, including friends who still rely on ... tutors, even if the advice given is completely different to how they feel about their work. Despite these problems there has been one tutor who has given me a lot of insight into working as a designer, and what I can achieve. ... I don't feel I would have made the creative curve that I have experienced without that influence.

Kay: Well, I've realised that I'm better at ideas generation than I was. I constantly think of new ways of improving things – instead of switching off. ... I probably managed it due to my assessment lecturers. I want them to have a positive opinion of me, and ... when we were talking about weaknesses ... it really pushed me to improve I definitely want to get a 1st, so I constantly aim to improve on what the lecturers say. That way I maintain high grades.

Anna: I'd be overjoyed to get a First at the end of my degree. But if ... I've worked the hardest I could, created the best work possible then I should be proud of that, and the grade shouldn't matter. Yeah, I know [spoken as if she's raising both hands to the ceiling] that's easier said than done.

Part 3.

[The provenance of the following text is in dispute. Dated summer 2012, some academics believe it is a transcript of a fragment of synchronous 'chat' from a primary source such as Facebook or Bebo. No one is sure of the validity of its content. One academic suggests that it is silently read. The academics begin to read.]

Kay: HEY been trying to contact u4 ages, how u doing? I got a 1st. Expected it, but was well pleased cos there was a lot of pressure to "impress" make the family proud.

Anna: Great! I got one too. Was totally shocked!*! Always wanted to go to university and get a 1st ... but I didn't expect it ... was more of a dream than thinking it could happen. Not always been the most academic person, not like rest of family!

Kay: What u been doing since?

Anna: Internship and 2 months in – offered a permanent position as a junior designer ... in a ... design studio!*! Did 6 months, ... 5 days a week ... it was OK, but being in an office all day, at a computer was quite restrictive ☹️ to my creativity. Since then been really busy with lots of exciting freelance work and regular work for two very different, quite prestigious 😊 clients and done stuff for my old university tutor. AND I've set up various arts projects here too. It's all on my website. And you?

Kay: Well – I always said I wanted to work at a high profile design studio, with good people whose work I loved.

Anna: And????

Kay: Am 😊. Did four placements straight after uni. Dead lucky to be offered 2 jobs at the same time. Accepted a full time contract as a junior in Oct 2010. Now one of their designers! Check out my website, loads of stuff on there.

Anna: Great, I will.

[Someone rushes in, places a mound of papers on a table and, without speaking, turns and runs out of the door. The academics gaze silently at the closed door, their thoughts racing.]

[End of Act Three.]

Epilogue: When a thought offers itself to us like a truth running through the streets, when we take the trouble to develop it, we find that it is a discovery.

Isadore Ducasse, 1870.

Ruth: re-constructed monologue

Spring 2008: [Having an idea feels] *initially exciting. The thought of a new idea develop[ing] into an amazing piece of work is quite invigorating. [I like to work] alone mainly, as I feel to truly concentrate on an idea, I have to be in the right mindset. Also as I travel a lot on public transport [and find] trains a good environment to generate ideas. Generally ideas come when I'm not deeply thinking of a response but as I explore the possibilities freely and away from pressure. [Then] literally one idea triggers something [...], which creates a variation of the starting point and so on. Having an idea in one's head and visually representing it are often two different things. Drawing allows mistakes in the design to be identified and rendered before an idea becomes a 'thing'. [The role of materials?] Often none. An idea is only an idea in the head once transferred to paper becomes a visual representation of an idea [...]. [Research is important.] I don't seem to be able to merely pluck an idea out of the air without background research being done beforehand. [Yes, I've had a creative block], it was awful I might as well have lost my ability to see again it was that bad. An artist without ideas is not an artist at all. A lot of mind mapping and referencing got me out of it.*

Usually when deciding which idea to develop I start with one idea, expand to lots, then find a new final one. *I would say [the effort you put in matters] a great deal. This initial year at university I have slackened off with the amount of effort I put in, in comparison to my foundation course this has definitely been reflected in my creative results. Obviously the more time you spend developing and generating ideas the better the result, however there is a snap-off point where over-development can damage an idea. [A link between creative development and taking creative risks? I'm] not sure if there is any. [On the other hand], as I work in 3D, planning is [of] the utmost importance. [Not] knowing [whether] a piece can be completed to a deadline is pointless.*

[I've] always enjoyed being creative, but I think realising it academically it was while taking my GCSEs, [...] aged 16. None of my family are creative, in an arts-based manner, my sister and mother are very academic. [Was my creativity recognised in school? Yes, in primary school for] my drawing. I was asked to represent my class for a large-scale mural for the [school] hall; [in secondary school, it was for my] painting and still life. [Who had the most influence on me before going to college? I'd say] my art teacher pushed me a lot, as well as my mum. When asked which out of a long list of characteristics best matched what I thought I was, I ticked: optimistic, rebellious, team player, playful, enthusiastic, open minded, stubborn, self-critical and easily distracted. When compared to my peers, [I'd say] I'm more self-motivated than most of my peers [and more creative than some]. [And yes], I am determined to have a successful career in art and design.

Summer 2009: [I didn't complete the second survey or meet the researcher this year.]

Summer 2010: [In my first year I thought] I was more self-motivated than most of my peers [but] *I am aware that at the start of the third year, I wasn't very motivated as I had been [unavoidably absent] from uni. My review [half way through this year] was disastrous! And this kick-started my motivation. I now feel I'm very motivated, even after my work was handed in I have continued to make work daily due to the transient quality*

of my work. [When asked about the link between creative development and taking creative risks in my first year, I said I wasn't] sure if there [was] any. [Now] think there's a significant link between the two, I've learnt that 'playing safe' can be, and is detrimental to the development of my work. Even now I believe I have not taken enough significant risks to gain a top honours degree.

[Looking back on my creative development I would say having], a new relationship [...] has added stability and support to my development, [whereas] being off for several months [...] had an impact on my development as I've felt [as if I've been] playing catch-up, ever since. [Aspects of university life that have had a positive impact, well,] initially I thought the lack of motivation[al] contact with a tutor was affecting my development, however the freedom given from staff has actually encouraged me to pursue other ideas I perhaps wouldn't have. [What's held me back?] Late nights, the "I'll do it tomorrow" attitude of students has obviously impacted on my development, more so in the first half of the third year than the second.

I thrive on creative criticism, where many of my peers take suggestions and criticism personally, I find not "taking things to heart" a way of investigating other directions, in which my work could go. [The trouble is] I'm [also] scared to commit to an idea in case it's "wrong", however I have slowly come to understand there isn't really a right or wrong art work. I always want to do my best, and to an extent to be the best. This has allowed me to be very critical when producing my research portfolio [but again] worrying about not being or achieving the best has suppressed my creative development as I have struggled to commit to an idea. [On the personal side a new] relationship [...] with a talented man [...] has allowed me to discuss development [with someone that] shares the same ambition. [On the other hand, being ill] in the second year [and problems with a] friend[ship] made it difficult for me].

[I'd say that the three most significant developments in my creative practice over the last three years have been] allowing myself to take risks, identifying the "purpose" of my work, working on a selection of pieces that come under the umbrella of "observation". My [current] work hopefully looks into anthropology, the idea of space and architecture and how familiarity can be skin deep. [I've also been working on] ideas around [the] archive, [that are] forward-looking and retrospective-looking simultaneously. My work is text-based, [so] no technical expertise, other than basic computer and camera skills are needed. As I have been accepted onto a teacher-training course, I feel my artwork has naturally swayed towards educational, more academic approach than my previous work.

[Has the theoretical part of the course had a creative impact on me?] Absolutely, one hundred percent! Possibly too much, I did badly [at my final year review] for referencing too much literature and not enough of everything else. Equally I have been studying art history for A-level for two years and this has undoubtedly influenced my work. [What about my academic development? Well, ...] I feel it has been carried out alone, by myself. I'm disappointed I haven't learned more from the course itself. However, references I have followed up from my tutor have been very worthwhile and [had a big impact] on my personal development.

[In the final few weeks of my course] I wanted to make a work that my friends, family and I are proud of. Ideally I wanted it to be a work demonstrating an ongoing project that wasn't resolved as a piece, but could continue to evolve. [The degree classification is very important to me,] I DON'T LIKE FAILURE!!! [Having achieved] the highest possible

grades in my previous art-related courses, to do badly in my degree would be heartbreaking.

[How I feel about completing my course?] I'm not entirely sure, I would love to say I have enjoyed every minute of my degree, but I can't. I don't feel I've fully embraced the student or degree lifestyle and hope to develop further on my PGCE course starting in September. [So, what do I think I'll be doing in a year's time? I'll be] a qualified teacher, fingers crossed.

Imagined Dialogue Five:
knowing & unknowing –
methodology in the
interpretation of lives

Setting, staging and characterisation: The performance is in **four acts**.

Act One of the performance opens in a **small dark room** furnished with two chairs set in front of a large control desk linked to banks of video monitors. It is 5.45 pm on Monday 29th October 2012.

Act Two is set in a **large rectangular room** at 5.46 pm on the same day. The room's only significant feature is a plate glass wall, which the architect claimed would connect those inside with the natural world. Polypropylene chairs are scattered about the space. Aerial and wall-mounted video cameras document the actors' movements, physical characteristics and utterances.

The setting for **Act Three** is the same **large rectangular room**. It is lunchtime thirty-seven days later. The polypropylene chairs have been arranged in a circle.

No information is provided on the location of **Act four**, which takes the form of an epilogue.

For the purposes of this 'reading', **everyone is an actor**. Some are invited to adopt speaking roles playing: experts; agents; subjects; operatives; and visitors from afar. Some may elect to have non-speaking roles. All actors on and offstage, including readers, observers and witnesses, have a vested interest in the implications of the actions that unfold.

Act One

[Lit only by a flickering glow from banks of video monitors, two operatives (operative D and E) sit at a large control desk. Various files are open on the desk. While chatting to each other, the operatives constantly check that the screens are functioning correctly, and that sound levels are adequate to record all audible talk.]

Operative D: Eh, what about this then, [eyes darting from screen to screen] the anthropologist [intake of breath] ... who recorded 480 elementary units of behaviour in 20 minutes' observation of somebody in their kitchen?

Operative E: That's nothing, [grabbing a scrap of paper covered in calculations from a file on the desk and thrusting it in the face of operative D] last night, I sat down with pencil and paper and worked out how many seconds of this stuff [gestures towards screens] I'd watched The result, not forgetting to take leap years into account, was [pause] 140,912,984!

[At this precise point the attention of both operatives is drawn to the screens to their left. Operative E immediately adjusts the sound levels so they are able to listen in to exactly what is being said.]

[End of Act One.]

Act Two

[The stage is in complete darkness. A hubbub of sound gradually condenses into audible talk. Suddenly bright lights illuminate every part of the large rectangular room. Thirteen suited actors, playing the agents and experts, are seated in an apparently random pattern across the space. No two actors face in exactly the same direction or adopt the same pose. With small movements of their heads, hands and upper torsos, they change position to temporarily face – or ignore – whoever is speaking.

Offstage, the one hundred and eleven subjects are observing the performance from the other side of the now darkened plate glass wall. They are barely visible to the agents and experts. An exterior loud speaker enables the subjects outside to hear what is being said. In undisclosed locations thousands of other subjects follow the performance live on mobile devices, computers, radios and televisions.]

Expert 1 [inaudible then]: ... 111 meetings ...and received over 400 written submissions of evidence from people and organisations ... We then formally interviewed representatives from 90 organisations and 31 individual witnesses, and conducted informal interviews with many other people. Our five Appendices comprising six volumes gave the facts and figures on which many of our appraisals and recommendations were based.

Agent 1: In our case, as well as desk research, organising seminars and making a short overseas study visit, we received 73 written submissions, from a wide range of sources ... and held a series of oral evidence sessions with a range of [interrupted by expert 2].

Expert 2 [excited tone]: ... Well we used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods ... for the data collection and analysis. This included a document review, interviews. ... focus groups ... [emphasis on next word] and a survey questionnaire ... of 1,926 ... current and prospective students ... from across 38 educational establishments.

Expert 3: Some of you will already be aware that our study ... comprised ... various research strands, combining existing data with data generated specifically for the study. These ... included statistical analysis of matched administrative databases and qualitative in-depth interviews.

Agent 2 [with gravitas and emphasis]: I think we can safely say that everyone here agrees, for policy reform, the most important thing is to have the right evidence for reform.

Agent 3 [nodding vigorously]: Absolutely, we ... consistently argued for evidence-based policy, [pause] and social science has an obvious role to play in providing evidence to plan future government spending.

Expert 4: Well in our case, [short pause] after considering much evidence from many different sources ... we ... reached a common mind as to those developments, which we deemed ... desirable in our educational system.

Agent 4: Yes, and on the basis of this [looking directly at expert 5] we agreed that ... secondary education would be designed ... to give equivalent opportunities to all children ... so they could all make the most of their natural aptitudes.

Agent 5: Looking back it was obvious the need for reform was urgent. All the evidence showed this – international comparisons, ... inspection reports and, most recently, the depressing findings on adult illiteracy. We firmly believed what we were doing would raise standards, extend choice and produce a better-educated Britain.

Agent 6: Without doubt, there was great scope to increase school standards, autonomy and diversity, ensuring that every secondary school provided an education increasingly tailored to the needs of all its pupils.

Expert 5: It was indeed a unique sadness of those times [pausing briefly to look directly at agent 5, then agent 6], a unique sadness, that we had one of the most stratified and segregated school systems in the world, with a gap between our private schools and the state system wider than in almost any other developed country.

Expert 6: I've always said [sighs, almost imperceptibly] we need to see the educational system ... as a coherent whole, in which no section can prosper if the others are failing and in which the actions of each must inevitably affect the rest.

Agent 6 [suddenly aware of the large number of subjects pressed hard against the plate glass wall]: Colleagues, [pauses, looks around until everyone is attentive then says with even more emphasis] colleagues, [short pause] we may need to reassure any of our subjects who are listening in, that many lessons have been learnt, since then, about the delivery of major reform.

All experts and agents [speaking with one voice]: Absolutely!

Subject A [outside in the chill air, addressing no one in particular]: We've been in the system for so long. We've never been out of the system. We've been told what to do since primary school.

[End of Act Two.]

Act Three

[There is no sound. The stage is in complete darkness. Gradually, an expanding pool of what appears to be midday winter light illuminates the circular seating area revealing eleven informally dressed actors. Their movements and expressions are frozen, as in a *tableau vivant*. After five seconds, the action begins.]

Expert 9: Surely we'd all agree that professional practice could be improved if practitioners had better access to the products of a large body of relevant research. However in my view the evidence-based practice movement isn't likely to lead to a dramatic improvement in educational performance. In fact [pause], I'm arguing that it could even lead to a worsening in the quality of service. Also, the close contemporary association between the evidence-based practice movement and the 'new public management' means that it should be treated with the greatest caution. [Pause.] And

Expert 10 [interrupting, looking at watch]: Really sorry [half smiles at expert 9] but we've got just under half an hour left, to try to tease out some other perspectives. [Looks directly at expert 11.] You were saying earlier ...

Expert 11: Yeah, ... so for me, post-structuralism suggests two important things to qualitative writers. First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times; and second, it frees us from trying to write a single text in which everything is said to everyone.

Expert 12: Forgive me, but sociologists and anthropologists forget at their peril that there are robustly analytic ways of accounting for shared phenomena, and that there is no need to appeal to private, interior 'experience' in order to make sense of the narrative mechanisms of social action and reproduction.

Expert 9 [gesturing towards expert 12]: Indeed, and we've argued that there's been such a consistent emphasis on the rhetoric or "poetics" of ethnography that ... problems of logic and inference have been obscured.

Expert 13: I'd go further, I see the growth in auto-ethnography as almost entirely pernicious. It's essentially lazy – literally lazy and also intellectually lazy for six reasons: ... It cannot fight familiarity; it's hard to fight familiarity in our own society ... even when we have data; ... it's almost impossible to write and publish ethically; ... it's all experience and ... noticeably lacking in analytic outcome; ... it focuses on the powerful and not the powerless; it abrogates our duty to go out and collect data – we are not paid generous salaries to sit in our offices obsessing about ourselves and finally and most importantly 'we' are not interesting enough to write about ... , to teach about ... or to be the subject matter of sociology!

Expert 14: For sure, ethnography is not, and hasn't ever been, an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political. Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study. These performances are messy and pedagogical. They instruct our readers about this world and how we see it. The pedagogical is always moral and political; by enacting a way of seeing and being, it challenges, contests, or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other.

Expert 15 [leaning toward expert 16 on next chair, speaking in a confidential tone]: Sessions such as these that debate less-than-traditional thinking about qualitative research remind me that, even in academia, culture casts its spell, constraining as well as framing perception. And [pause] I would be less than honest ... if I didn't acknowledge that ... there appears to be more aspiration and assertion than specific strategies that take into account the policy-maker mindset, and much less evidence that strategies for linking cutting-edge qualitative research with policymaking efforts have actually worked.

Expert 16 [nods almost imperceptibly, then addresses the whole group]: Perhaps if we had some explicit and well-understood rules on how interpretivist and ... phenomenological inquiry provides cumulative knowledge – or cumulative understanding – we might have more fruitful dialogues, as well as being more systematically influential in policy circles.

Expert 17: ... Surely what is at stake is more than just the knowledge we make, it's the worlds we'd like to make, the kinds of people we want to be, the kind of work we want to do in the world.

[Pause.]

Expert 18: Yes and let's not forget there are few of us here who would like to be partialized, reduced to reified forces or in any other way made an object of sociological research.

[For no apparent reason the attention of all the experts is drawn to the glass wall. No one speaks. They are mesmerised. On its glassy surface, reflected in their own image, they glimpse the faces of thousands upon thousands of subjects.]

[The lights fade until the stage is in complete darkness.]

[End of Act Three.]

Act Four to be read silently

[You, the actors and readers of this text, are preparing to come *out of role* when you hear what some of you take to be a wartime tannoy system being tuned in. No one is quite sure whether what follows represents a conversation that might have taken place or a meaningless montage of random voices.]

Voice from afar 1 [inaudible then]: ... so burdened with attributes, signs, allusions that they finally lose their own form.

Voice from afar 2: I heard of a crowd that managed to push the police aside. They ran past the officer and the engineer and rushed toward the big gates of the estate. When they got there, they all stopped and looked up and down. No one stepped through the gate although it was wide open.

Voice of someone who has already spoken: Mmm, [pause] the rule's last trick is to cause it to be forgotten that agents have an interest in obeying the rule, or more precisely, in *being in a regular situation*.

Voice from afar 3: If that's the case then surely it's your duty ... to grab the stunned spectator by the hair and, with an imperious gesture, bring him face to face with the problems of today.

Voice from afar 4: You could make these arguments, but in all viable systems, there must be an area where the individual is free to make choices so as to manipulate the system to their own advantage.

Voice from afar 5: But what if there isn't? [pause] Surely "objectivity" must always be sacrificed to partisanship, if the cause fought for merits this. ... [sound of tannoy signal, breaking up].

[End of Act Four.]

Utterances receive their value (and their sense) only in their relation to a market, characterized by a particular law of price formation. The value of the utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speakers' linguistic competences, understood both as their capacity for production and as their capacity for appropriation and appreciation; it depends, in other words, on the capacity of the various agents involved in the exchange to impose the criteria of appreciation most favourable to their own products. This capacity is not determined in linguistic terms alone. It is certain that the relation between linguistic competences [...] helps to determine the law of price formation that obtains a particular exchange. But [...] by virtue of the languages spoken, the speakers who use them and the groups defined by possession of the corresponding competence, the whole social structure is present in each interaction (and thereby in the discourse uttered).

Pierre Bourdieu, 1982