



## 26 minutes - North Acton to St. Paul's 12 th January 2018

Andi wanted to put his toe on a crescent. On its pointy edge, to be precise. It wouldn't poke or tickle, he was sure; because, though the ends looked sharp – Andi knew – their sharpness was soft. Anyone who painted crescents would tell you that – and Andi loved painting crescents. He even had a blue, bow-shaped pillow and recently, Nana had gifted him a wind chime with smiling stars and a twinkling sliver.

Whether it was a black ruler with up and down buildings or a rocket with fat fire at its tail, Andi painted a crescent in all his pictures. He would carefully wash his brush in purple-green- that-looked- brown water.

Then, wipe it dry – even more carefully. Next: purple-green would go down the drain, a new cup would toddle to the table, and the brush would be dangled and dried once again. A clot of blue had spoiled his drawing once and ever since, Andi remembered to check the bristles before dipping them in white. Mrs. Sprightly had taught him to lower the nib just until its broadest part, and she had also taught him the word 'crescent'. Now Andi used it everywhere.

Dripping paint had spoiled another painting. So, he always stroked the brush before starting. Tip to the paper, lightly at first. Then his hand would descend in a chubby curve, increasing its pressure as it moved towards the stomach of C, swelling up and finally, letting go. Just perfect, that slanting smile.

So, if you looked closely – like Andi did – the ends of a crescent were sharp but soft. Painted with a brush, not coloured with a pen. Though, it was strange that Andi wanted to place his toe there, and not touch it with his fingers. He would have held it, were he granted two wishes; but he worried. What if his grip was too tight, and the crescent crumbled to dust? No, no. Toe on tip was safer. Nana had also asked about the round moon, but Andi never liked it. It had dirty spots like the ones on Nana's photo with his friend. He had tried to erase them, one afternoon, but they stubbornly remained. Not even getting lighter! Besides, Andi was sure the round moon was squishy, like fungus.

All this was three years ago, before he learned that crescents and round moons were one and the same thing. They only looked and felt different to us, depending on the day and where we were. The ball was a boomerang on some days, and the boomerang, a ball. And there was no way to confirm whether it felt like warm dust or fungus because we can't hold the moon. Andi stopped painting then.

by Niyoshi Shah





## Excerpt from a larger body of works about stripping and sugar dating, currently untitled.

Date 1: I met Ed at Red Emma's at 5. He was talking to the barista who I knew from an open night where I'd performed. He arrived early and started beaming when he saw me. He talks in a shout. "I'm so glad to see you!" I feel awkward and don't want to draw attention to myself. Ed and I go out to his car. It's a very unassuming Honda. The inside smells sour like elderflesh. I look at him and try to be open, but I focus on a mole by his ear with long hairs. He tells me he wants to learn how to be hip. He tells me he's a geeky nerd. I laugh because it's true. We're supposed to go to the AVAM and he starts driving us in that direction, but the museum closes at 6, and it's 5:30. I tell him it's not worth it, that we should just go and get dinner or generally do something else. When we hit a traffic jam he acquiesces. We turn around. I tell him we should go to Petit Louis. We drive up to Roland Park to a building styled after a large European country cottage. We enter and the restaurant is empty aside from an older white couple. We are seated and immediately receive great service from people with French accents and pressed uniforms. I want to drink. The waiter cards me and then proceeds to be very attentive. She is in her late 30s, perhaps 40 and has a diamond studded engagement ring and a plain wedding band. Her hair is in a ponytail coiffed in a single curl. Ed and I decide on our first two courses. I choose an eggplant dish and he gets the prix which is a "festival of asparagus." Earlier in the car he had asked me about my parents, how I'd ended up in Oklahoma from Manhattan. It's like Oklahoma is one thing and NYC is many intricate parts. I tell him about my parents' whirlwind engagement and marriage. I tell him about my father's abandonment and my mother's abuse. I tell him about caring for my sister and being a star student. I don't want my story to sound like a tragedy ending with me as a stripper looking for sugar daddies after a life of abuse. He tells me about his family. His parents stayed together until death. His sister is the eldest at 68, his older brother is 66, his younger brother is 54. His parents met in Hawaii in college. His father went to Cornell to study tropical landscape. He became a professor. His work led him to travel to Monrovia in Liberia and the Philippines. He eventually moved back to Hawaii and taught at a college. He said his father was a big fish in a small pond. His mother had died this year in April. She was 96.

Ed had spent many years hang gliding. He stopped after his second major accident about ten years ago. In '83 he crashed for the first time. He had to get a tracheotomy. His hip was fractured. His face was disfigured. He had to get plastic surgery. He lost three days of memory. It took a week before he could move his toes, and then feet and legs. He crashed a second time a decade later and called it quits. He was part of a community of fliers, people able to intuitively ride the high and low pressure air pockets to rise and fall through the sky. He tells me there are fliers and there are people outside of the community. Now he is outside of the community. He tells me today had been stressful, he's behind on projects. I ask him how many hours he usually works. He tells me usually 8 billable hours and then more depending. I tell him that's a lot. He agrees. I ask him if he would normally be working at this time. He tells me yes. I receive my dish of fried eggplant stacked on tablespoon hills of olive tapenade mixed with goat cheese on a runny pesto sauce. For my meal I receive roasted chicken on a bed of fingerling potatoes and brussel sprouts in a creamy mushroom sauce. The sommelier comes by and we request wine pairings. For dessert we both get rhubarb tarts with fresh dollops of whipped cream on top. We get a sparkling dessert wine and I'd never had such a lovely pairing. I pretend like I know anything about wine tasting. With the meal wine I take the tester and swirl it around my cup, dip my nose into the glass, take a small sip and hold it in my mouth while inhaling. Then exhale and swallow, exclaiming that "yes, I want that one." I ask Ed if he's happy. He tells me he hasn't stopped smiling for three days. I smile at him. I'm very full. He asks to see pictures of my family. I show him a picture of my mother. He reads off her name. He still calls me Alana because I haven't told him my real name. We go out to the car and I begin navigation home. Before we leave the parking lot he tells me he has a white envelope he can give me now or later. I tell him either works so he hands it to me and asks me if \$600 seems fair. Payment feels so strange. I don't know what services I'm providing other than company and I wonder if he is very lonely. I accept the envelope gleefully. I hadn't been prepared to negotiate money. At my house he does not ask for a hug or kiss, but I hug him and give him a peck on the cheek. Then walk into my house feeling hoodrich.

by Christianna Clark



# The world is your oyster \*now including the oceans\*

Since David Attenborough's seminal Blue Planet II, broadcast by the BBC in October 2017, the ocean and all it contains have received unprecedented media attention. Some watery inhabitants get raining votes of sympathy as we read about their impending extinction from overfishing and pollution, whilst other constituents are radically demonised and served with an immediate eviction notice. Here, I am of course talking about the new kids on the block, the not-so-welcome microplastic, villains of the ocean.

The media tsunami - triggered by provocative footage and the wisdom and seductive voice of Sir Attenborough - has resulted in a public outcry to remove plastic from wherever possible: our cosmetics, our water bottles, our clothes, and our supermarket aisles. Highly visual campaigns have been sweeping through social media since Christmas, and people have been quick to pledge their support with little red hearts, tiny thumbs-ups and the ubiquitous plasticfree hashtag.

As we desperately attempt to shed our plastic selves, the solutions offered to fill the gaps are mainly plant-derived alternatives: natural fibres such as hemp, paper, and bamboo; or natural polymers - commercially known as bioplastics - typically made from corn or potato starch, algae or seaweed. Individuals and businesses alike have been quick to adopt these alternatives. At the RCA food outlets, disposable cutlery, coffee cups, and sandwich bags are now procured with good intentions for their biodegradable and fossil fuel-free virtues. But could these 'solutions' in fact be a red herring, distracting us from a problem that is more systemic and ingrained? Let's zoom out a bit.

## 1. Upstream

Replacing oil-derived traditional plastics, the natural alternatives come from plants that require land, water, and often the addition of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Given the continued growth of global population, there is the ethical question of how our limited resources are used. In the same way that it is vastly more efficient to grow fields of soya for human consumption rather than feed cattle soya for meat production, we could argue that growing plants to produce the disposable cutlery used to eat the soya or beef is even more absurd.

And I am particularly nervous about the promise of seagrass and seaweed. In recent years, research projects on these plants have claimed to invent eco-friendly materials that are derived from resources that are plentiful and untapped. They have received accolades from the press and investors for their promise as a quick fix. Agar Plasticity, by the Japanese design collective AMAM, is one such example. But do we really think that plundering another natural resource, extracting it from a fully functional ecosystem, is a good solution? Given that seagrass can absorb more CO2 per hectare than an equivalent area of rainforest, while also providing a good chunk of the ocean's oxygen, we should be wary of such profitable opportunities. If global forests are anything to learn from, we will inevitably extract more from the wilderness than we can ever hope to replace.

## 2. Downstream

After we've enjoyed the last bit of tasty tofu from our seagrass takeaway plate, it would be logical to assume that this natural polymer can simply be binned. It will find its way to a landfill and eventually return to earth - that's what you thought right? The phrase 'zero to landfill' is not a lie, but it misses out the other half of the truth: '...100% incinerated'. In London and in most of the UK there is no more landfill;

We started using landfills - or systematically burying our problems - at the turn of the last century. But now that we've run out of space, and realised it wasn't such a bright idea anyway - plan B is to burn it. London is currently served by four incinerators which last year converted two million tonnes of 'general waste' into electricity, and aggregate for road building. So in reality, the closest that friendly Vegware™ cutlery and coffee cups will ever get to the soil will be as cremated, pulverised specs of ash, lying beneath a new road.

But what about the 'bioplastics', I hear you say? Yes, they can be reprocessed in theory, but in practice they require different treatment to the current mainstream recyclable plastics (HDPE and PET) - and this infrastructure doesn't exist yet. Compounding this is the fact that since January this year, China has refused to import the bulk of our recyclable waste, leaving the UK with an over-supply of traditional plastic waste and a lack of demand for recycled plastics, necessary to stimulate a thriving plastics industry.

## 3. The System

Putting this top and tail together around our disposable object culture reveals that we are simply retrofitting our linear system of consumption with 'natural' materials. It feels satisfying and it's easy to make a quick buck from it, but the truth is that we are merely upgrading our old system with new bugs to solve later. Surely, it would be more effective to design and gradually implement a new operating system? The good news is that it's been on the drawing board for a while now: the circular economy is a concept that sees all elements of the supply chain as resources. Nothing is considered waste. What is frustrating is that despite the best efforts of Michael Braungart, Ellen MacArthur and others, this model is in danger of collecting dust backstage, whilst the greenwashing Punch and Judy show continues to entertain audiences with a jamboree of biodegradable props.

Let's not forget that we have spent the last eight decades concocting, producing and throwing away plastic, which is now dissolved in our oceans, our water supply, and buried in our soils. It's not all going to disappear if we immediately ban plastics and switch to natural alternatives, even if this feels warm and fuzzy. The real challenge is to re-engineer all this surplus plastic that currently exists in a toxic format, bringing it back into useful, valuable, circular networks of use.

From a design perspective, plastic is virtually the most perfect material for protecting our food and goods - just bear with me here.... It's abundant, cheap, remarkably strong, lightweight, can be manufactured into almost any shape and can be recycled up to 7 times. It vastly increases the shelf life of most foods when used in modified atmosphere packaging and has greatly reduced the carbon emissions in transport by lowering the weight of packaged goods. The main issue is that it is very, very durable - as we already know, it takes years to decompose. But this durability is only an issue because we are not using the material to its full potential. A yogurt pot that washed up on a beach in Devon, 40 years after getting binned, illustrates this point perfectly. Why dispose of something when it still has material value? The Ellen MacArthur Foundation has worked out that about 95% of the value of plastic packaging material, worth USD 80-120 billion annually, is lost to the economy', highlighting how this issue isn't material based, but systemic.

What's important to understand here is that the narrative around this issue is grossly outdated and dangerously oversimplified. We should stop talking about plastic as the problem and address the current system which is dumping plastic in our ocean or burning it. By framing the huge challenge our oceans face around a particular material, we end up demonising what should be a productive resource in a thriving, sustainable economy.

The world is your oyster - now including the oceans - go figure!

by Becky Miller (MA Service Design) & Eddie Hamilton (MA Design Products)  
beckymiller.co.uk  
eddie-hamilton.com



*Cathy Marston is a British choreographer and artistic director whose international career spans over 20 years. During that time, she has created over fifty works and has been the director of the Bern Ballett in Switzerland (2007-2013) and Associate Artist at the Royal Opera House in London (2002-2006). I met Cathy while she was in London for the premiere of her latest piece The Suit for Ballet Black at the Barbican. Her highly acclaimed Jane Eyre with Northern Ballet comes to London's Sadler's Wells 15-19 May.*

**Let's talk about the process of building a ballet. Is economy of movement something you think about—do you ever feel inclined to do something because of its elegance or beauty and then realise it's not specific enough in terms of what you want to say? At what point do you let movement take over thought?**

Before I'm actually making the ballet, I work with the dancers to create a vocabulary for their characters. Let me think of an example: On Jane Eyre (that's what I was [working] on last week), Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper – an awkward one to choreograph because she's not the romantic heroine, she's not the woman in the attic. I write a list of words like 'fluster', 'chatty', 'out of breath', 'in a muddle', 'organise', or 'straighten'. And then with the dancer, we'll turn those words into movement. That doesn't mean to say we're trying to act those words out. We might try to convey "fluster" with our shoulders or our elbows, or 'organise' with our feet. Or for 'chatty', Mrs. Fairfax might make movements a bit like a chicken, capturing the quality of 'chatty', trying to translate that into the body. We'll make a whole load of movement for each character in that way.

Sometimes a character stays quite similar throughout the piece [like] in the case of Mrs. Fairfax. In the case of Jane Eyre, of course, there is a huge development, so even before we try to put her movements into the form of a duet or a scene we'll look at how that language develops [as the story progresses]. So I'll have a load of movement by the end of that process that hopefully (and fairly economically, I suppose, though I've not thought about it in those terms) conveys a specific character or person. And then the dancers and I will have those languages in our heads as we build a scene. Someone might need to come on from a certain direction and meet someone else – we'll recall the bits that feel right for that particular moment in the narrative. And then at that point we'll add in things – we might want Jane to support Rochester – maybe he collapses as she catches him, or maybe it's the other way around.

But sometimes you let the movement take hold. There might be what you're describing as a gesture that's just simply beautiful, capturing not only the shape of the body, but also the momentum and dynamic of the thing I'm trying to express. And sometimes to create momentum, you just have to get movement out and not think about it too hard. Then afterwards it either works or doesn't work, and then you can shape it more precisely.

When you have done the research, you're instinctively going to **make**

something that makes sense. Not always—there are things that are superfluous and unnecessary – but a lot of it will come out without thinking. You try to put all of those emotions in the body so that the body does as much work as your head when you're making it.

**I recently heard that motion creates emotion. Sometimes you have to start moving in order to figure things out.**

Absolutely. Years ago I worked with a choreographer called Kim Brandstrup. It was the first time I'd been asked to improvise as a dancer, which is much more common now. He explained to me afterwards that he found it much easier to work from a moving room. It didn't really matter what the dancers were doing, because as soon as things were happening he could say, "Okay, you be still." "You go on the floor" "Can you do that but faster?" It's easier to work like that than from everybody simply standing there. I [now] tell that to groups of dancers that I meet—something helps, whatever it is.

**Can a piece be built around a single movement? What kinds of things act as anchors for you as a work is built cumulatively?**

Sometimes it could be an image that I want to get to by the end or in the middle that could be the starting point or the ending point from which everything else builds backwards and forwards.

An image for me can either be a still frame or the image of someone taking someone else's hand or putting their head in someone else's lap or it could be a whole group of people just looking up to the sky. An image can have movement for me but it's probably not like a five-minute duet, it's probably a gif.

**If that image is a destination of sorts, does that destination ever change or shift as you're collaborating and experimenting in the studio?**

Yes, to some extent. I'm a real planner, so not massively usually, but for some choreographers absolutely it would. I think what happens more for me is that you might have an idea and you really don't know why, and in getting to the idea, you start to excavate it and it becomes inevitable.

**I read somewhere that in your work, you try to avoid acting out feelings. Can you talk a bit about that?**

Some choreographers don't want any expression in the face, they want it all in the body. But I also love it in the face. The other day, Cira [Robinson] who plays the female lead in *The Suit*, was in tears at the end of the piece. She was really in it, and I loved that. I suppose that can be described as acting. That's okay to me because it's real and honest and it's coming from inside. It's not just being put on like a mask. What I don't like is sticking something on top of a movement.

**What drew you to the short story that *The Suit* is based on? [The story we're talking about here is "The Suit" by Can Themba. It's about what happens when a man discovers that his wife is being unfaithful to him and uses the suit left behind by her lover to punish her, forcing her to treat it like an honoured guest.]**

It felt like a good story for Ballet Black. It's a South African story – the background is Sophiatown, a township of Johannesburg, in the 50s. And it's so simple. It's about emotions and those unspeakable things, which dance does so well. I love stories where there's no clear answer, who's guilty, who's innocent. It's such a metaphor for the more normal version that many people have experienced – of having had someone be unfaithful to them or to be unfaithful to their partner. It's so normal and yet it's expressed in such an unusual way. The story immediately grabbed me because it obviously is emotionally complex, and then [there's] an amazing theatrical image – the image of the suit.

**Are there other things that inform how you decide which stories to tell?**

As a storyteller, you have no desire to be limited by your experience. But whose stories can you tell as an artist, and who can you talk about? Whose shoes can you try on, and it be respectful and sensitive, or is it just that you do it with respect and sensitivity and empathy? How do I do that right? Are there other people that could tell them more authentically and if there are why are they not be given the opportunity to do so? These are things that I am throwing around in my head quite a lot at the moment.

**What do you think the average person often misunderstands about dance?**

That there's a clear answer. That they should be able to articulate what they liked, disliked, understood. It's not necessary – you don't have to be able to articulate what you've experienced. We work very hard in my pieces to be specific between us the dancers and myself – every movement has a meaning but that's not so that the audience has to be able to read it like a text. If the dancers are very clear about the meaning of every movement, gesture, and interaction then it should be felt by the audience, rather than necessarily understood.

by Ann Kim



Stay safe, read The Pluralist  
[thepluralist.info](http://thepluralist.info)

Notice 5/7



## My Journey From Developer to Designer

“The only thing designers are good for is choosing nice colours”. As a software developer, I overheard many similar comments about designers from different disciplines. Over the last decade, I worked in several teams, in different organisations and industries. During this time, I saw huge gaps between design teams and development teams. Unfortunately, I never worked for one of those organisations people think about when it comes to new ways of collaboration or new innovative forms of work and flexibility. I am pretty sure that most of the organisations are still working in silos: Design vs. development vs. marketing vs. customer service. It is an absolute nightmare for communication between departments and it is difficult for teams to take ownership of a product. Often times, the involved departments are busy fighting each other instead of working together on a mission. This has a huge impact on the engagement and the motivation of the people involved.

Those silos are not just bad for the organisations. One of the biggest issues in my career always was that many projects and especially the managers still see human centred design as a threat for their budgets. To them, it feels counter intuitive to talk to users, because it is hard to measure the impact of their inclusion in the process. Often, I was confronted with arguments like: “They will just complain” or “They think they know it better”. This is the funny part. Of course they know better. They are the users. I remember one of the project managers saying: “We don’t need to test with real users. We can train them when we are ready with the application. We know what we have to implement, and we can do small changes afterwards”. The project never went live. The small changes were huge and meant a complete redesign of the software. One of the most frustrating things about such a disaster is the financial aspect of it. Imagine a team of six full-time developers and two interface designers working on a solution for about a year. Money burnt out of ignorance, arrogance and a closed mind-set of the management team and the product owner. All of them afraid of talking to people, because they can’t control the outcome in excel.

Personally, I have always believed in user centred approaches and spend uncountable days in discussions and arguments about including users in early development stages. It is funny though, that the terms, ‘Usability’ and ‘User Centred Design,’ were first used by developers, but still most of this sector doesn’t see the value and importance of understanding the user. For me, design was and is about solving a problem, a problem which needs to be fixed to make the life of the users easier. At the time of the project mentioned above, I was really frustrated. I read a lot of articles from Airbnb and others about interdisciplinary collaboration and how to work hand in hand between designers and developers. I understood the success of Amazon due to customer service based on user centred design. Still, people didn’t listen. Even as a Lead Senior Developer, it was almost impossible to access the right people and more importantly, to be involved at the right time in the project to have an impact on the process planning. Most of the time, developers come into the game when everything is already planned, set up, and ready to go. Even when the process uses agile methodologies, the backlog and the requirements are often already defined in the back of the head of the product owner. Even worse, a visual design team will have already created the layouts and mock-ups and moved on to the next project. I needed a change. I couldn’t work like this anymore. It was frustrating. I wanted to try to move to a position at the beginning of the chain, not the end, but I was lost. I didn’t know how to approach the problem and how to begin a career change. The usual step for developers of my stage is to either become a software architect or switch to project management.

When I heard about service design for the first time, I thought ‘This is exactly what I am talking about.’ It works to break down silos through a co-creational model in multi and interdisciplinary teams. Today, I am working on my final project for my Masters degree in Service Design at the Royal College of Art. It was absolutely the right decision to come here, not because of the course in particular, but because I have learnt a lot about design and designers. I met talented people over the past year at the RCA, all with different backgrounds, interests and future goals, but the foundation and the understanding of design is pretty similar for all of them. This gave me a much better insight into how designers think and how they really work. Designers are really skilled at finding problems and coming up with ideas to solve them. They are used to dealing with uncertainty and all kinds of up and down feelings. This work style is very different from my past experience. Developers are much more about implementing solutions for a known problem or, implementing given requirements. Even if developers start working in a field or with some kind of technology they don’t know, some sort of documentation or a manual is usually available to look into for an explanation. Designers don’t have a manual, even if some methods try to give guidance. I don’t believe someone can become a designer after reading a book about design thinking.

My time here at the RCA changed my mind, my thoughts and the way I approach things a lot. I notice how I see things differently in the tube or at a restaurant. I am much more proactive. I used to think, ‘Oh I could try to do that, someday’ and now I say to myself, ‘Let’s do it, now.’ On the other hand, I have those days when I am feeling lost and I struggle to accept and cope with the uncertainty of design projects. Maybe these feelings are inevitable.

by Florian Tiefenbach



Stay safe, read The Pluralist  
[thepluralist.info](http://thepluralist.info)

Notice 6/7

# Are you hearing voices?

so difficult. This process has been divided into an ABC process of acculturation: A – affective (emotional) factors. This usually refers to individual psychology: how does each student feel? Are they stressed? Individual attitudes within the group are probably very different, with differing levels of openness, and different ways of coping with the diversity.

B – Behavioural factors. People may have become used to behaving in particular ways, and have developed subconscious 'norms' of behaviour. It might be worth identifying these apparent norms, to consider other ways of doing things. For example, in a group, there may be a variety of ways of turn-taking; interjecting in the flow of discussion; inter-relational roles and hierarchy among participants. How do people interject in a group discussion? Is it a very fast-paced 'first-come-first-served' method? The way people interact and take part in a conversation can be ingrained from early educational methods. Some communities rely on the personal confidence of the speaker in the strength of their idea or argument to put it out to the group for spontaneous critique. Other group behaviours make use of reflection of an idea before it is shared with a group or before another idea/argument is considered. For some cultures, the considerations across the group are taken into account before another idea is shared.

Of course, personalities differ and these examples are generalised, but it might be worth considering why someone behaves the way they do. We are all socialised in a particular cultural context, and surely anyone would agree that you cannot change a lifetime of behaviour patterns in a few hours, days or even weeks. If someone has rarely or never been asked their opinion by a tutor or to contribute to a controversial discussion in an open forum, is it reasonable to expect this behaviour to be adopted immediately? Does this mean that opinions are not held? That is highly unlikely – the challenge lies in unlocking the voices within: in accessing the 'other' voices. Or we could just carry on hearing from half or a third of the community. Perhaps the 'C' in the acculturation process could help...

C – cognitive factors consider how everyone processes their world, and builds knowledge. This part of the acculturation process might benefit from some introspection: to look at those thought of as 'others' and then reflect...and imagine being 'the other'. To take away each person's of cultural values and 'norms', and challenge these, an outsider can be very liberating. To take all the behaviour that is 'just the way things are done', can be to challenge assumptions. In the discussion scenario, this could mean to consider whether there is another way of doing things, rather than a 'free for all' in a discussion: other ways of critiquing, other ways of exploring ideas. If a group discussion or groupwork is to generate, process and exchange ideas and knowledge then surely it is worth exploring ways in which as many ideas and as much knowledge and as many different perspectives as possible can be shared.

If ideas could be produced in written form at first, people could have time to reflect on their ideas and arguments. People could be given time to wander round a room looking at written thoughts displayed on the walls. Or people could work in pairs or in small groups to share ideas without the pressure of a large group.

One person could then be responsible to summarising the small group discussion and then report back to the group. These varied scenarios could allow for a variety of learning styles:

1. Enabling time to reflect
2. Removing the need to address, and therefore consider the approval of a large group
3. Avoiding the temptation to revert to the hierarchy of student – tutor roles
4. Allowing for many voices in the room which do not need to compete for a break in the speed and dominance of a few

Consider these three examples of many: A student is being questioned about his design project. He accepts the suggestions from his group and tutor and says thank you. He perceived an attitude from the group: why isn't he challenging the suggestions or defending his decisions? This student remembers this situation when he first arrived in the UK. He was a successful and articulate student, but remembers how frustrated he felt. He knew he should explain his decisions but at first the 'reverse current' of years of being expected NOT to do this prevented him. He said he would have felt as if he was being weak and making excuses if he had tried to explain.

Another very common scenario: the 'silent' student is sitting in a group and listening intently to the flow of the argument. In amongst the cultural references and use of idioms, he/she is more-or-less able to follow the points being made. He/she thinks of a very relevant example which could bring a very valuable alternative perspective to the discussion...just like trying to join a motorway from a slip road he/she inches mentally forward, getting ready to leap. In the blink of an eye, the moment has passed! The conversation has taken a sudden turn, and the moment is lost. The 'silent' student and those useful perspectives remain locked away.

And finally, an example around the significance of cultural references: in a seminar group, a reading text refers to 'revolution' and a discussion ensues among half the class. Among the others, one student is trying to connect with the concept of 'revolution' being discussed: it is very different from her cultural reference point. She wants to ask why the other students about their perspective of revolution but is worried that this will seem as if she doesn't understand the meaning of the word. She locks away the questions, and all her rich cultural heritage around the word revolution.

Addressing these issues does not require 'dumbing down'. It could just mean thinking outside the standardised box and doing things differently. All of these people who have travelled outside the comfort zone of their cultural community, whether across communities or countries, have a wealth of cultural capital.

There is a myriad of experiences and perspectives that could be unlocked, and the voices we could hear.

by Sian Lund

Knowledge exchange and ideas generation rely heavily on verbal communication and can be a significant part of art and design disciplines. However, the college community may experience these exchanges in very different ways, with very different perspectives. Reflecting on expectations and assumptions around verbal communication may reveal very different feelings, not always positive ones.

Although group work sessions and seminar discussions are the bedrock of many learning outcomes at the college, communication may not always be fruitful in these contexts, and a feeling of time being wasted sometimes results. Considering what is at stake, it might be worth exploring why the exchange was not as fruitful as hoped and what an alternative scenario could achieve.

When considering the elements involved in communication, language is of course significant. Poor language skills might be blamed for poor communication. But there are many different reasons why a group discussion may not be a fruitful experience. Behaviour styles, learning styles, identity issues and status may all play a part in how messages are conveyed in the discussion. Contextual knowledge and cultural reference might also restrict understanding within the group. These all form an integral part of the communicative act because language is not used in a vacuum; we are not automated machines which churn out static structures unaffected by context, emotions and prior experiences. Language performance is affected by individual psychology, group psychology, behaviour styles, learning styles and many more factors. Have you ever felt tongue-tied or better still more eloquent after a few glasses of something strong? Losing inhibitions, being with a familiar group of people, being comfortable with local banter – these are all factors which can help with communication, regardless of the level or your language competence.

For people who have moved out of their comfort zone, have come to a new country or community to unfamiliar territory, such difference in behaviour and attitudes can be overwhelming and can affect identity as well as behaviour, and ultimately language performance. This process of change is known as acculturation and has a huge impact on the success of community relations. Success is unlikely if the process is one-way: if people entering a 'new' community have to adopt wholesale new value systems and reject previous ways of behaving. The process of acculturation is this movement of different groups of people and the changes which inevitably occur among everyone, not just those who are moving, but also those who have not moved out of their comfort zone.

Perhaps in the seminar discussions mentioned earlier, everyone is sitting around perhaps behind tables, perhaps haphazardly around the room. A tutor might be leading a discussion, perhaps related to a reading text, a current theme, or a recent talk. Some students are not participating – they are sitting silently and relying on others to speak. Other students have to 'keep the conversation going' 'come up with ideas' 'critique the arguments'. In this scenario, some group members might wonder why others don't speak. This is a complex area with many contributing factors, but the underlying process of acculturation that is ongoing during this scenario might help to understand why communication is



Stay safe, read The Pluralist  
[thepluralist.info](http://thepluralist.info)

Notice 7/7



## Nemo (Part 2)

Soon enough, 'Nemo' users had stopped posting pictures of themselves. Instead they chose photographs of their rare architectural details, such as ornate cornicing and high ceilings, which in particular were at a premium in London at the time.

Sexual positions, in general, once favoured the two people involved in the act. Missionary, for example, allowed an unbroken and direct gaze between lovers. Porn and the invasion of the camera introduced a third eye into the situation, so gestures and sexual positions were developed to display the body to the camera instead. These new positions took on another meaning in the wake of 'Nemo' allowing people to disengage with each other and be beheld and objectified only by their own possessions; and not just cameras, but tables, sofas, doors and bookshelves, even string-of-pearl cornicing, petite window mullions, and the groin between two walls. This fetishisation of objects — and the objectification of the people using those objects — became so widespread that high-end luxury goods quickly increased in value if they could be reappropriated to take centre stage in sex acts. One such item was the Philippe Starck Ghost chair (without armrests), which allowed, through its use of expensive transparent materials, an uninhibited view of the naked body using it.

Over the years these sexual interests developed in their sophistication, and perversions usually concentrated solely on breaking the great rational modernist dictum: 'Form Follows Function'. As in the ghost chair for example, the original function of its form was defiled and contradicted. This was done in much more intricate, thoughtful and intimate ways than simply having sex in the kitchen, and the objects became part of the body and the optic through which it was viewed.

In such increasingly lavish surroundings, and with the body merging with objects and architecture, even the most perverse and degrading sex acts could be ameliorated. This was another lesson 'Nemo' learnt from pornography; a gangbang in a Croydon council flat would seem exploitative, and one conducted in a Hampstead mansion decadent and luxurious.

by Matthew Turner

*Please watch out for further notice*

