



CROSS_CURRENTS

NEGOTIATING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN DESIGN



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



This has been an arduous but rewarding foray into the world of research, and it has only been the latter with the help and support from the following people:

Big thanks to my supervisor, Richard Goodwin, for the sagely advice and straightforward attitude. My sincerest gratitude goes to the interviewees of this study, Ruth Hadlow, Norman Day and Louise Goodman, for generously donating their time and effort, and doing such inspirational and innovative work. Thanks also go out to those that were able to lend an ear as well as their valuable input: Dr. David McNeil, thanks for those critical spanners to throw in the works, Nikos Papastergiadis for a quick conversation, Althea Francini, for revealing the marvels of the mechanised whiteboard, Katherine Moline for keeping things on track, Cameron Tonkinwise for letting me have *The Design Way* on ‘extended loan’ and Maria Zueva and the learning centre for added perspective.

Finally, love to my family for support and understanding, and to Tessa for, basically everything.

This work is dedicated to Cecilia Logge, the strongest and most resilient person I know.

CERT. OF ORIGINALITY



I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Date: ____/____/____

ABSTRACT



“Two Europeans using English as a common language were watching two Chinese men on the opposite side of the street. One of the Chinese was squatting to rest – a common habit there – and I overheard one of the European men say to the other: ‘Look at these Chinese – they sit just like monkeys’. Perhaps not a pleasant experience, but for the fact that at almost exactly the same moment my few months of Mandarin immersion brought to my ears a snippet from the Chinese men on the other side of the road: ‘Look at these hairy foreigners, just like monkeys.’”

- (Greenhow, 2004)

As the networks and linkages between different cultural groups become tighter and more entangled in our contemporary, globalised world, situations of cultural exchange are bound to occur with greater frequency. Aside from the fact that to each other, we all somehow resemble monkeys, the ways in which we understand and engage with cultural differences can have serious and sobering consequences.

This study seeks to critically examine situations of cultural exchange that occur within or around design practice. By linking current design thinking with theories of cultural translation and exchange developed in the field of art, this research questions current models of understanding exchange within the western institutional design discourse. Through the qualitative analysis of Ruth Hadlow’s recent textile work *Kain Adat Kehamilan/Cloth for a Timorese Pregnancy* and of the work of Norman Day + Associates in *Reconstructing East Timor*, these cases are put forward as exemplars of a more positive and engaged approach to exchange across cultures.

The results of this study identify a range of recommended strategies for approaching and understanding cultural exchange within the context of design, as an ongoing, dynamic and transformative process, in which the benefits of dissonance and connectivity are evenly shared.

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1_ INTRODUCTION



The multiple effects of globalisation on our contemporary world have been widely discussed and debated in a range of fields and disciplines. Within these debates there is a growing concern that despite the emerging opportunities for greater connectivity and exchange, local cultures face the threat of homogenisation, whereby the nuances of difference and diversity are eroded by the necessities of a unified ‘global culture’. This study will investigate design which occurs at the confluence of disparate cultural groups or communities, made possible by the conditions of globalisation, as examples of ‘cultural exchange’ or translation.

HYPOTHESIS

Current understandings of ‘cross-cultural exchange’ within the wider design field are problematic and out of date with contemporary cultural theory. By establishing links between particularly progressive cases of cross-cultural design practice and theories of cultural translation and difference explored within the field of art, it is hoped that new models of approaching cultural exchange can be developed.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Through an investigation and analysis of cross-cultural design practices can we establish new models for understanding cultural exchange?

AIMS OF THE STUDY

To advance the proposition that cross-cultural design practice offers potential for developing new models of cultural exchange.

To investigate different ways of understanding cross-cultural design practices and artefacts and propose new ways of understanding and interpreting cross-cultural design practice within the field.

To promote ways of thinking about and understanding the role of the designer that operate outside of traditional western Eurocentric modes of practice.

To establish links between intercultural design practice and critical theories developed within the field of art, which deal with issues of globalisation, difference, translation and cultural exchange.

SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE OF THE STUDY

This research responds to a lack of writing and research which attempts to link design practice to theories or bodies of knowledge developed in other disciplines. Design historian Victor Margolin asserts that to date, design researches have failed to challenge the dominant paradigm of practice by “investigating new subjects, making new connections with colleagues in other fields” (Margolin 2003). The value of linking design to external theoretical discourses lies in making design more accountable as a producer of culture and meaning within a broader critical context.

Specifically, I will be drawing a connection between cross-cultural design practice and key issues of globalisation and post-colonial theory as discussed within the field of art criticism, primarily focusing on displacement, translation and cultural difference. These issues are particularly relevant to the field of design, as increasingly designers are finding themselves working in situations of complex cultural and political confluence, made more acute when practice takes place under the rubric of ‘design for need’

The subtle negotiations which take place within these exchanges have been theorised and problematised by people working within post-colonial studies amongst other disciplines,

however design as a field has not yet sufficiently engaged with this body of research. In particular, design theorists have yet to question the implicit power-relations involved in situations whereby practitioners from a culturally privileged or dominant Western institutional discourse, are designing for cultural groups, communities or clients of periphery cultures, or cultures which are usually defined as ‘other’ to this discourse.

This study will also attempt to counter a lack of engaged and critical analysis of individual cases of cross-cultural design practice where strategies of negotiation have been actively employed. By investigating these examples of design practice it is hoped that new understandings of the role of the designer outside of western, Eurocentric modes of practice can be accommodated and validated.

LIMITS OF THE STUDY

This research focuses on two local cases, responding to the imperative to concentrate on “the space that is adjacent to us” (Papastergiadis 2003, p. 1). Thus both reviewed cases consist of an exchange occurring between Australia and Timor. In exploring these examples I have sought to assess the processes and outcomes of negotiating difference, and have concentrated specifically on the western designer’s own personal experiences and perspectives of their engagement with cultural exchange, as this study operates primarily within the context of a western design framework.

2_ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



OVERVIEW

Understanding the problems and possibilities of cultural exchange in an age of globalisation is imperative. Increased movement of people, products and media has created multiple and complex networks of interrelation, which means that we increasingly encounter situations where we must negotiate cultural difference. In this chapter I will review the current understandings of globalisation as it relates to culture and examine closely the concept of translation as a metaphor for understanding cultural exchange. I will also link these theoretical frameworks to emerging understandings of cross-cultural difference within the design discipline.

GLOBALISATION. CULTURE AND EXCHANGE

Globalisation as a phenomenon is difficult to define, and attempts have been made across a range of disciplines to understand both its effects and its conditions. However, there is the risk that such accounts of globalisation suffer from a ‘one-dimensional’ interpretation which can be coloured by a given discipline’s “different traditions of thought, priorities and informing principles” (Tomlinson 1999, p.14). Theorist Fredric Jameson indicates that “globalisation falls outside of the established academic disciplines” (Jameson 1998 p.xi) and definitions of the term have been ‘hotly contested’. This echoes John Tomlinson’s concern that the multi-dimensionality of globalisation can be compromised by a singular disciplinary view, and indicates that an interdisciplinary approach will be necessary for this research.

I have chosen to concentrate on two particular texts which operate from different perspectives and academic fields, as a means of understanding globalisation and the ways

it relates to cultural exchange within our contemporary world. Tomlinson's comprehensive *Globalisation and Culture* attempts to 'slice into' the complexity of globalisation from a cultural perspective, and Bill Ashcroft's *Post-Colonial Transformation* links globalisation to post-colonial theory and networks of power. Both these texts provide insight into the problems and possibilities of cultural exchange today.

Broadly, globalisation refers to the contemporary phenomenon of 'global-spatial proximity' (Tomlinson 1999, p.4) created both representationally through communication technologies – such as the internet or mass media – and physically through a reduction of space with air travel. This increased proximity is described by Tomlinson as 'complex connectivity', whereby the actual and vast physical distances of localities are now experienced as "readily and routinely accessible" (Tomlinson 1999, p.4), and is a useful concept for understanding the many simultaneous ways in which globalisation operates. This multiplicity of linkages has intensified the 'flow' of goods, information, media, people and practices across territorial boundaries, and consequentially increased the opportunities for exchange between differing cultural groups.

There is a dialectical position within existing literature as to the nature, value and consequences of globalisation. These positions often coincide with two opposing views of culture and the degree to which it is either located or mobile. Some theorists see globalisation as an homogenising force (Mosquera, 2003) producing uniformity and standardisation, while others respond positively (Ohmae, 1995) to the idea of a so called 'global village' as a heterogenic celebration of diversity and multiculturalism. However, this binary is seen as an unnecessary essentialism by proponents of a third view, such as Nikos Papastergiadis, who consider the effects of globalisation on culture as a much more complicated and entangled process which has "heightened the need for a more precise vocabulary which can delineate the degree of impact and benefit of linkage" (Papastergiadis 2003, p.4). This latter view is the theoretical position adopted within this study.

In investigating cultural exchange under globalisation, it is necessary to examine current understandings of 'culture' itself. Culture has long been linked to the idea of a fixed

locality, however the connectivity of globalisation destabilises this notion. The context of meaning construction is now being altered, as physical mobility increases the ways in which 'local worlds' are encroached upon by distant forces, dislodging everyday meanings from "their anchors in the local environment." (Tomlinson 1999, p.29). As external forces come to bear on local contexts, points of exchange become a site where cultural meaning is communicated and negotiated. Theoretical models need to be further developed which allow us to understand exchange as a kind of 'interstitial moment', described by Homi K. Bhabha as a site of "collaboration and contestation", in which "strategies of selfhood and communal representations that generate new signs of cultural difference" (Bhabha 1994b, p.269) are elaborated.

Moreover, these exchanges involve complex power relations, which Bill Ashcroft argues are largely predicated on models of imperialism and Eurocentrism. In *Post-Colonial Transformation*, Ashcroft establishes a connection between globalisation and imperialism, situating globalisation within the historical models of power developed as a result of European colonisation. Both imperialism and globalisation are grounded in the dominant discourse of European modernity, and we need to be wary of reproducing colonial dominance when engaging in any form of cultural exchange in the context of contemporary globalisation. In light of this, models of cross-cultural understanding will need to acknowledge and respond to implicit weightings of power, with the grounding of western design discourse in European modernity and rationalism, warranting particular attention.

However, Ashcroft also destabilises this simplistic view by reading 'the local' as a site of tension and contestation, using post-colonial theory to reveal a much more complex and subtle process of engagement. In this way, cultural exchange becomes a potentially transformative and constructive force, in which local communities can "achieve agency under the pressure of global hegemony" (Ashcroft 2001, p.208). From this positive standpoint we will look at the concept of translation as means of understanding the transformative possibilities of cultural exchange.

CROSS CULTURAL THEORY & PRACTICE IN ART

“We could say that once we face the opaque mirror of translation, language and identity can no longer be the same” (Papastergiadis 2000, p.145).

The issues of globalisation and cultural exchange, in relation to artistic production and consumption, have been discussed in detail within the field of art. Many theorists have responded directly to the issues raised above, in particular Nikos Papastergiadis and Ien Ang have both discussed the concept of ‘cultural translation’ as a useful model for interpreting exchange between cultures.

My research will use this critical discourse as a theoretical platform from which to begin investigating cross-cultural design practice. However, this does not mean that easy answers are waiting to be plucked from a verdant and adjacent academic field, in fact these theorists have problematised and are constantly questioning the limits of their own discourse.

If we substitute the word ‘art’ for ‘design’, the following questions asked by Papastergiadis in *The Turbulence of Migration* provide a valuable lens through which we can begin to critique design practice:

Can contemporary [design] be defined from a universal standard? Does the proliferation of multiple cultural practices and perspectives presuppose the legitimacy of all ? If the [design] discourse ... engages with [design] from other cultures, will it also embrace other histories of practice, introduce new conceptual schemes for interpretation and appreciation?
(Papastergiadis 2000, p.135)

Specifically my research question responds directly to Papastergiadis’ statement that “we are clearly in need of new ways of thinking about the process of cultural exchange” (Papastergiadis 2003, p.12).

For Papastergiadis, 'translation' is a particularly valuable conceptual tool for developing such new understandings. Ang, building on the work of Papastergiadis, sees 'cultural translation' as a crucial and endemic process which should be extended to the spectrum of practices which make up everyday life. She stresses that with the increased cultural traffic of globalisation, the "need to understand and communicate with cultural 'others'" in our contemporary multicultural society has increased "not only in frequency, but in intensity and pervasiveness" (Ang 2003, p.30). However, there are certain limits and '(im)possibilities' which rest within this theoretical position, whereby subjects from diverse cultural backgrounds "*can and cannot* reach common understanding" (Ang 2003, p.30). Situations of cultural exchange, will inevitably involve processes of translation, thus it is worth untangling some of the complexity contained within this idea.

The limits of Translation

Cultural translation builds on a more traditional use of translation within language as a transposition of meaning from one source to another. In part this draws strength from the premise that culture is generated through the "systems of meaning that operate in language" (Papastergiadis 2000, p.127). However, directly using this model risks being caught in the presumptions involved when translation is seen as merely communicating "meaning from one language to another" (Papastergiadis 2000, p.129). If we are to understand translation as a dynamic and transformative possibility we need to first address two opposing views of language. On the one hand, there is the supposition that certain terms or ideas defy translation, suggesting an inevitable loss of 'fidelity'. On the other hand is the view of translation as a means of achieving an exact reproduction. This assumes that there are universal 'world-views' which allow corresponding meanings to be found across different languages.

These views represent the irreconcilable tension which can make translation problematic. The ability to elicit an exact duplication of meaning is constantly frustrated by the fact that certain meanings get lost in translation, which implies that the translator must either "reproduce the exact text meaning or be condemned to silence" (Papastergiadis 2000, 130). We need some way of moving beyond this apparent dilemma without rejecting a

‘too hard’ dialogue in place of a wholesale “appropriation of a foreign culture” (Papastergiadis 2000,.131).

Found in Translation

Translation is an especially important and useful metaphor for understanding the actual process of communication (i.e. cultural exchange) as it provides a way of understanding the mechanisms through which “dialogue and negotiation between cultures is possible” (Papastergiadis 2000, p.131). If we avoid the above dialectic views and instead see translation as a ‘dynamic interaction’, where conceptual boundaries are stretched and residual differences respected, a more radical understanding of the “multiple levels and diverse routes of cultural exchange” emerges (Papastergiadis 2000 p.131). From this understanding of translation possibilities are presented for developing new models of understanding cultural exchange. Importantly translation allows us to critically examine how “cultural differences are internalised and understood” (Papastergiadis 2000 p.124).

Papastergiadis refers to John Lechte and Gill Bottomley (Lechte and Bottomley, 1993: 24 cited in Papastergiadis 2000, p.136), who put forward the extremely useful concepts of *interweaving* and *retranslation* as dynamic and reactivating processes of translation that work towards cultural renewal. Interweaving implies that the constant interaction of diverse cultural practices leads to ‘mutual transformation’ . This negates the idea that culture is self contained, but instead it is in and through a negotiation of different practices that culture is formed. Retranslation is seen as an “ongoing practice of interpretation” (Papastergiadis 2000 p.136) as ‘foreign’ elements are introduced into one culture from another. These terms posit the act of translation as an act of transformation, moreover this process is ongoing, and ever nebulous, reject the notion of an ‘original’ which is authentic or ‘pure’.

Homi K.Bhabha also refers to this idea of translation as an ongoing transformative process. In the *Location of Culture* Bhabha describes the “performative nature of cultural communication” (Bhabha 1994a, p.228) as both a positive and generative process. As

with the notion of interweaving and retranslation, Bhabha suggests that the constructive power of translation emerges from the “constant state of contestation and flux” (Bhabha 1994a, p.227) between different social and cultural systems. By focusing on the foreign and effectively untranslatable ‘unstable element of linkage’ allow for new possibilities can be created within the zones of cultural difference. Working from the dialectic tensions of ‘negation-as-negotiation’ (Bhabha 1994a, p.228) becomes an important strategy for approaching cultural exchange. In identifying the “oscillations between what can and cannot be translated across difference” (Papastergiadis 2000, p.139) within the process of cultural exchange we can come to understand the complex levels of negotiation which simultaneously reveal the problematic and the possible.

CURRENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF CROSS CULTURAL DESIGN

Papastergiadis has spoken of the need to recognise and understand “the diverse sites in which cross-cultural contact occurs” (Papastergiadis 2003, p.12). I propose that design has not yet been sufficiently explored as one of these sites. Furthermore, based on the above understandings of globalisation and cultural translation there exists an untapped potential for a more theoretically engaged understanding of practices which take place within the ‘zones of contact’ between different cultural groups.

However, the issue of cross-cultural difference is by no means absent from the discourse of western, institutional design. In this section I will trace the trajectory of this slowly emerging discussion, using select sources drawn from such areas as object/industrial design, graphic design, architecture, design education and design philosophy, which represent the development of design thinking on these issues over the last fifteen years.

Cultural Identity and Design. 1989

This publication documents the proceedings of the two day, 1989, International Design Forum, Ulm Conference which focused on significance of design in a ‘global Worldculture’, and its effects on that culture (und Gudrun Neumister, 1990, p.11).

Occurring at the beginning of the ‘United Nations and UNESCO Decade for Cultural Development’, a concern for the “cultural decline caused by the growing loss of independent cultures” (und Gudrun Neumister 1990, p.13) dominated much of the discussion. With a particular focus on industrial designer and their role and responsibility as part of “the fast-moving conveyor-belt of modern production and consumption” (Childers 1990, p.36) a range of opinions were aired. Notably there was a call for the decolonisation of design history (Turner 1990, p.81) with reference to developing countries being “largely characterised by colonial structures which have stifled a genuinely independent development.” (und Gudrun Neumister 1990, p.13).

Despite the lapse of fifteen years, the issues raised and questions asked have an immediacy and relevance which resonates with current sentiments. Alexander und Gudrun Neumister, in particular, proposing that the many ‘complex factors’ which influence the designer from a cultural perspective “requires the provision of a specific set of parameters to be used as reference points Such parameters do not yet exist.” (und Gudrun Neumister 1990, p.13). One might argue that, as yet, such parameters *still* do not exist.

Cross-Cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace. 1995

Curiously, given the earlier analysis of the Ulm conference, Henry Steiner and Ken Haas compiled the ambitiously titled *Cross-Cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace* in 1995 on the understanding that “there was no book on cross-cultural design” (Hass 1995, p.vii). As a graphic designer working in Hong Kong, Steiner is described as a “world-class talent who had settled in Asia for the challenge of pioneering then virgin territory” who “deftly managed to mate the virtues of incompatible species without producing a monster” (1995 p.vii). Describing the cross-cultural design process through the metaphor of a pseudo-scientific process of inter-breeding recalls the concern of post-colonial theorists such as Robert Young, who have problematised the concept of the ‘hybrid’ form, given its historical allusions to “threatening forms of perversion and degeneration” (Young 1995, p.5). The connotation of cultural miscegenation implies that

initially culturally pure states can, using the right formula, produce a form of desirable half-breed.

Steiner himself indicates that the appropriate approach lies not in 'quotation' or 'mimicry' but in the stage of 'transformation' where "influence has been *assimilated* and the once foreign becomes personal and natural" (Steiner 1995, p.2, my italics). In assuming that assimilation is the key to effective cross-cultural communication Steiner's approach corresponds to model of translation which appropriates foreign culture according to the rule's of ones own and thus treats the original as "an inferior source that needs correction" (Papastergiadis 2000, p.131).

This book presents a problematic position whilst claiming to "define the issues and serve as a template for a range of cross-cultural problems" (Hass 1995 p.vii). Moreover, Steiner and Haas have been cited as authorities on the topic of cross-cultural design, especially in relation to graphic design, which suggests that such understandings requires closer scrutiny

Seeking an Effective Cross-Cultural Design Pedagogy. 1999

In a similar vein to the 1989 conference, the papers delivered at the 1999, 5th Colloquium of Architecture and Behaviour addressed the theme of *Architectural Knowledge and Cultural Diversity*. A number of the papers delivered considered implications of a globalised and multi-cultural world on architectural education. Echoing the issues raised in the Ulm conference there was a concern that:

"...universal values are not necessarily applicable, that particular cultures have particular architectural needs, and the architect, as well as the architectural teaching profession, has to respond to those needs" (O'Reilly 1999, p.7).

In his paper *Seeking an Effective Cross-Cultural Design Pedagogy*,(1999) Laurie W. Hegvold identifies key strategies for encouraging a 'critical self-consciousness' and awareness of cultural context within architectural education. Responding to the frequent

concerns of graduates working cross-culturally between Australia and Malaysia, who found it difficult “translating what they had learned about architectural design into an appropriate regional language”, Hegvold asserts that it is essential that the “study of culture form part of architectural education” (Hegvold 1999, p.94). This concept of translation could greatly benefit from the more complex and dynamic models explored in art theory, indicating that design needs to build connections to other disciplines.

Global Weave: Teaching cross-cultural Education. 2004

This short article appearing recently in *Desktop Magazine* considers the online potential for cross-cultural collaboration between both individual designers and design teams. For McArthur this collaboration would ultimately lead to an “embracing of differences and distance” and the “creation of a new design language” (McArthur 2004, p.30) which would potentially enhance global communication.

Primarily, McArthur focuses on emerging online educational programmes as an important step towards fostering this mentality. The perceived benefits are that students would “develop culturally literate design of an international standard” as well as gaining “new perspectives about the ‘other’ and new confidence in being able to express themselves and their own experience of the world”, leading to a retention of “diversity within design and across cultures” (McArthur 2004, p.31). This project represents a promising step towards new forms of cultural engagement. However, in failing to participate in a dialogue with relevant theories being explored in other disciplines, the understanding of cultural exchange on which these claims are based remains simplistic and underdeveloped.

Design Philosophy Papers. 2003 -

The online journal *Design Philosophy Papers (DPP)* aim to create an “informed understanding of design and the agency of design in the made world” (Willis 2003), with a recent issue was devoted exclusively to discussing ‘Design and it’s Other’ (2003). Just as Matthew Turner proposed that design history undergo its own process of

'decolonisation' this DPP issue expresses concern that Eurocentrism, whilst widely and rigorously debated in other fields, has "hardly begun" to be considered within design (Willis 2003). This is despite the observation that design, "as a professional practice has either been complicit with, or a more active agent of, cultural imposition in the geometry of power relations between the west and the rest of the world" (Willis 2003).

The position taken by this journal demonstrates that important questions of cultural difference and interaction still need to be seriously investigated within the design field. Despite the proactive and promising work of the 1989 Ulm conference, the progression of these debates desperately need to be accelerated if we are to match the rapid rate momentum of globalisation. At this stage of the game the big questions still "beg further explanation"(Willis 2003)

DESIGNING FOR NEED

"Architecture for Humanity is challenging the creative world to design the perfect pitch in Somkhele an area with one of the highest HIV/AIDS rates in the world"
(<http://www.architectureforhumanity.org>)

As our world becomes increasingly globalised, we will continue to see a growing gap between those that 'have' and those that 'have not'. And as the problems faced by those in 'need' increases, designers wishing to practice in an ethical manner have looked towards using their skills to better the conditions of the impoverished and underprivileged. From the charge of Papanek's 'new crusade' to address the "vast areas of need, and concomitantly need for design" (Papanek 1974, p.39) which exist the world over, to contemporary collectives such as Think Cycle (www.thinkcycle.org), Design for the World (www.designfortheworld.org), and Architecture for Humanity (www.architectureforhumanity.org), the practice of designing for 'need' appears as a just and worthy cause.

However, as this type of design practice gains currency as well as immediacy, it becomes increasingly important to ask critical and informed questions of such undertakings.

Questions such as “do developing countries need more design?” and “how can [design] be taken up and used in societies that have value structures entirely different from those that have shaped design into what it means for us (westerners) today?” (Reijonen, 2003) as asked by Kati Reijonen, suggest that the role of the ‘western’ designer in such projects is problematic and requires rigorous investigation and careful evaluation.

With a growing awareness of these problems through various media channels, and taking into account the virtual space of the internet, the possibility of designing for other places, cultures and peoples, even from the comfort of your own home, becomes a more ubiquitous challenge for designers. Given this situation, there exists an urgent need to approach these problems from an informed position, which acknowledges the implicit and problematic power-relations which may hover beneath the shiny veneer of a seemingly righteous cause.

3 METHODOLOGY



This qualitative study investigates two cases as a means of providing ‘insight’ into and ‘advancing our knowledge’ of models of cross-cultural exchange within design (Stake 1994, p.237). One looks at the work of Ruth Hadlow, an Australian textile artist working in West Timor, and the other involves the reconstruction of East Timor by Norman Day + Associates, an Australian architectural firm based in both Melbourne and Vietnam.

Each case has been “looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinised” in order to “advance our understanding” of an external interest (Stake, p. 237). This research therefore has elements in common with instrumental case study. However, each case was also of interest in and of itself, with both representing very positive and promising approaches to cultural exchange, that were perceived to have value in the task of building new models of understanding that process. The two cases were chosen to represent the broad spectrum in which experiences of cultural exchange can take place, with Hadlow’s work occurring at the level of the personal and the everyday, and Day’s work operating on a much larger, macro scale.

In Hadlow’s case an extended interview was conducted with the practitioner herself, being the sole producer of the work. I also attended a public presentation of her text piece, at the College of Fine Arts on the 24th of August-2004, and drew further from the written version of this piece. In the case of Norman Day + Associates, two separate interviews were conducted, one with Norman Day via a series of emails, and the other with Louise Goodman in person. To support this data, an independently produced television documentary, screened on the ABC on Sunday 18 July 2004 was used as source material, as were reports of the project written by Norman Day, and published in the journal *AR Australia* and Melbourne newspaper *The Age*.

The interviews with Hadlow and Goodman were conducted in a semi-structured and informal manner, so as to allow for personal observations, reflections and narratives to

emerge. The email interviews with Day were based on a set of specific questions, as a follow-up to the initial interview with Goodman. In both cases the use of multiple sources amounted to a triangulation of results, to give further validity of my interpretation of the findings, and to “reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation” (Stake 1994, p.241).

Case study was deemed an appropriate methodology for this research, due to its capacity to allow for an in-depth insight into personal reflections on the complex and subtle process of exchange. This level of detailed engagement would not have been possible if a more exhaustive, quantitative method was used.

4_CASE STUDY ONE

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_RUTH HADLOW

_KAIN ADAT KEHAMILAN/CLOTH FOR A TIMORESE PREGNACY

_THE UNSTABLE PROCESS OF TRANSLATION

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OVERVIEW

Ruth Hadlow is a textile artist who is currently living in West Timor. A recent work of hers entitled *Kain Adat Kehamilan* or *Cloth for a Timorese Pregnancy* deals with the sense of displacement which she experienced when living within another culture, while a written piece, *The Unstable Process of Translation*, partially interprets the first work.

I have chosen to look at Hadlow’s work for a number of reasons. Though she identifies as a textile artist, she has lectured at The College of Fine Arts in both the design faculty as well as fine arts. She has also in the past worked as a set designer for the theatre. Her current work spans art, writing and performative dialogue, and can be seen to occupy the liminal space where disciplines meet. Thus it is useful to view Hadlow’s work as a potential bridge between how cultural exchange is explored in the field of art theory, and how it is manifested in current design practice and thinking.

Ruth Hadlow’s situation was such that she found herself moving to Timor for “a series of practical reasoning around relationships and economic survival” (Hadlow 2004) , and is representative of the common experience of turbulent migration as explored by Nikos Papastergiadis. Her story of displacement brought about by this movement, as we shall soon see, demonstrates the ability of the migrant to “participate in and reshape the social worlds within in which they move” (Papastergiadis 2000, p.21).

I will be analysing Hadlow's experience of negotiating and translating difference on two different levels. *Difference and Tension* identifies the 'unstable elements of linkage' (Bhabha 1994a) that have emerged through the experience of 'living between two worlds'. *Practice and Possibilities* reveals the manner in which Hadlow's textile practice has drawn from the possibilities presented by encounters with difference, and is an example of the ongoing practice of interpretation of 'retranslation'.

DIFFERENCE & TENSION

"As ever, the experience of migration varies from the traumatic to the opportunistic"

(Papastergiadis 2000, p. 24).

Ruth Hadlow's own migration from Australia to Timor proves no exception to this observation. Both problematic and frustrating, the various "complexities of cultural displacement" (Hadlow 2004) have proven equally as enriching and full of potential. The nuances of culture difference were experienced in this case at a personal and everyday level, supporting the assumptions of Ang that cross-cultural discourse is an "ordinary part of everyday life" (Ang 2003, p.40). Importantly, it is the manner in which each of these differences were overcome through complementary strategies of negotiation, that are of use for developing models of cultural-exchange.

LANGUAGE

A significant hurdle to overcome in this situation was language difference, which was manifested in different ways, and on a range of levels. Given that language is the primary means by which we make sense of the world, it is not surprising that this is where difference and displacement would be most keenly felt. In response to this, Hadlow used a number of different strategies to address and negotiate the difficulties associated with the experience of being without her first language.

Initially, when unable to speak any of the local languages which are used in West Timor, Hadlow felt a very strong sense of displacement which was directly linked to the loss of voice and conversation which language provides. Hadlow explains that she now realises she does “a lot of [her] processing of experience through talking”, and being unable to converse, especially “about anything to do with ideas, artworks etc” (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept.) meant that this lack of communication became a source of frustration. To overcome this problem Hadlow relied on being able to write, transferring the need for spoken exchange to a conversation between “the pen and the hand, the page and the mind.” (ibid)

However, gaining the ability to speak one of the local languages did not necessarily equate to the elimination of this initial sense of displacement. Her outward appearance as a Westerner generally meant that it was assumed she could not, in fact, speak the local language. Based on this premise locals would generally talk around or over her, condemning her to an isolated, silent space.

“I become invisible, like a hole in the fabric of surrounding sound. There is just my internal stream of thought, which intersects randomly with the musical soundtrack. I am just a space in a loud, incomprehensible world.” (Hadlow 2004)

This invisibility suggests a lonely alienation and removal from reality, but there rests within this disavowal a certain control. When she does happen to speak in Indonesian “the invisible silent space evaporates” (ibid). Displacement through language is thus transformed into a variable position of permeability that she can shift between. This subtle shifting from displacement through loss of language to a strength in silence reveals the inherent complexity and dynamism of exchange.

Adding to this complexity was a third and final stage in the process whereby language became an opportunity for overcoming difference. Once she could pick up on the nuances of the language and mimic the local accent, the nature of exchange shifted yet again. This became especially clear during extended conversations. After the initial double-take upon discovering a ‘foreigner’ can speak Indonesian, once “they get caught up in conversation” (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept.) the similarity in language allows for a

momentary suspension of ‘foreignness’. Language is working here as a kind of cultural camouflage, disrupting conventional understandings of difference. By actively adopting the local accent, Hadlow moves from displacement to a sense of acceptance and identification with a culture and community.

CUSTOMS

*Jangan berjalan dekat kali atau tempat sepi: **Don’t walk near rivers or other dangerous places***

*Jangan minum air es: **Don’t drink iced drinks***

*Harus mandi sebelum gelap: **You must shower before dark***

*Jangan makan terlalu pisang: **Don’t eat too many bananas***

(Hadlow 2004)

Hadlow moved to Kupang, in West Timor, when she was five months pregnant. Combined with the difficulties involved with not being able to speak the local language, she also had to negotiate her way around the different cultural customs associated with pregnancy.

Within West Timor it is customary for members of the community including “family, neighbours, people in shops, at the market, in buses, on the street, men as well as women, complete strangers most of the time” (Hadlow, 2004) to inform the expecting mother of the rules according to the *adat* or traditional law of pregnancy. Within the cultural context of West Timor this is not an intrusive or offensive practice, as the *adat* instructions are a “means of ensuring a safe pregnancy and healthy baby”, and this is seen as a way of individuals “fulfilling their role as the interconnected community into which the baby would be born, and in this sense, embracing both [mother and unborn child] within the community.” (Hadlow 2004)

But from the cultural perspective of a newly pregnant mother with a tenuous grasp of the local language, who had just arrived in tropical Kupang from the middle of a Tasmanian winter, being repeatedly told “Jangan minum air es” by relative strangers was perceived as extremely rude and intrusive. Far from being an experience of interconnectedness,

Hadlow explains the cultural practice of instruction was seen as a restriction of her personal freedom and “at the time drove me incredibly crazy, I just about wanted to slap people every day” (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept.).

To deal with this, Hadlow acknowledges that “to react was meaningless – a response belonging to one culture, which had no place of reference in the other”, and instead adopted a strategy of “amateur ethnography” (Hadlow 2004). Collecting all the rules she was told, and writing them down was a way of “getting control” (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept.) over this cultural disorientation and frustration, “transforming the experience into an intellectual project about cultural practices” (Hadlow 2004).

This performative, strategic act of internal translation diffused what was initially a point of contention and frustration. By opting to, eventually, take a step back and observe, document and understand the tension generated by difference, Hadlow also discovered a rich potential source of creative exploration.

IDENTITY

A final cultural difference which required negotiation was the manner in which personal identity is framed. Within the culture of West Timor, “people don’t define themselves by what they do, they define themselves by relationships and interrelationships.”(Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept.) Within an Australian/western context where identity is constructed in relation to professional or occupational activities, the ability to define herself as an artist is central to Hadlow’s sense of self. When no longer queried about her professional status, Hadlow found that in Timor her “sense of identity” completely disintegrated (ibid). This loss of identity was made more pronounced through her simultaneous loss of language.

Hadlow acknowledges that she “exists in a different way now”, and having her previous markers of identity destabilised offer further productive and transformative opportunities (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept). In constructing a new identity which is ‘between two

worlds' we begin to see that in her own way Hadlow has engaged in the task of "re-imagining the cultural contract between self and other" (Papastergiadis 2000, p.139) as part of the ongoing processes of cultural exchange.

PRACTICE & POSSIBILITIES

What makes this case of particular interest to this study is the way in which these cultural differences have been negotiated by Hadlow and developed into avenues of creative exploration within her practice as a textile artist, rather than remaining a source of alienation and tension.

These processes of negotiation have been 'retranslated' to a western audience through two recent works: *Kain Adat Kehamilan* and *The Unstable Process of Translation*, a textile piece and a piece of text. Hadlow's particular approach to negotiating cultural difference as expressed in these works presents a number of possibilities for developing new models for understanding cultural exchange.

TEXTILES AS A BRIDGE

Kain Adat Kehamilan or *Cloth for a Timorese Pregnancy* draws directly from the strategy of 'amateur ethnography', using the gathered rules which were once a source of frustration as a productive starting point for her textile work. The piece structurally references traditional West Timorese textile practice in its design layout, but the collected *adat* rules are inscribed using another traditional weaving technique, embroidery, a textile language which is drawn from Hadlow's 'western and European' textile vernacular. Hadlow also intentionally adopts the form and conventions of the "*selimut (or beti)*" (Hadlow 2004) that West Timorese traditionally wear, as she considers the freedom that she has as a western woman corresponds to the "way men live in West Timor" (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept).

Through the interweaving and cross-referencing of elements from each culture, Hadlow's textile practice becomes "one of the few bridges between those two worlds" *Kain Adat Kehamilan* was created by Hadlow as a reflection of her experience of living between two cultures and is also a way of building a place for herself in the "funny in between space" (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept).

In producing *Kain Adat Kehamilan* whilst she was pregnant and coming to terms with the various confrontations caused by cultural differences this work reflects and translates the complex process of exchange which Hadlow experienced, representing a way of negotiating and reflecting on difference through a process of making and creating. In terms of cultural exchange, *Kain Adat Kehamilan* presents a tangible synthesis and an interwoven unique position created out of the "in-between spaces" (Papastergiadis 2000, p.139) that exist within the differences in culture, meaning and textile design of West Timor and Australia.

TEXTILES, LANGUAGE & TRANSLATION

Hadlow cites two particular works as 'framing' *Kain Adat Kehamilan*. One is the work of an English woman, Elizabeth Parker. Made in the 1830's and classified as a sampler piece, it is "essentially not a sampler at all" (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept). Using red stitching on simple cloth, it is a private document made up entirely of embroidered text. Beginning with the words 'as I cannot write' it documents the maker's struggle with the idea of committing suicide.

The other is a piece by Ima Lalak, a weaver from the West Timorese village of Bessie Khama. Hadlow explains whilst researching textiles in West Timor, she was eager to find an example of a similar cloth she had encountered earlier. She found instead:

"This new cloth that I saw, was the same layout, the same design formats but it used very western images, so there were brick houses and jeeps and peacocks and flower arrangements and I kept thinking 'where did these images come from?'" (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept).

As it turns out, these images came from a cross-stich and embroidery pattern book and had been re-translated through the local Timorese weaving technique. For Hadlow, this overlapping of the ‘exotic’ and the ‘familiar’ in this situation presented ‘interesting territory’.

“...she took the exotic and made it familiar, and yet to me those images are not exotic at all, they are tediously familiar, like all the other tediously boring images that come in cross-stich design. And yet the situation to me was very exotic, so we were in reverse positions, and it brings up that whole things about the stranger, the foreign and the other. But in that case I was confronted with, heres me – the other, looking at something so familiar , but she considers something I consider familiar exotic” (Hadlow 2004, pers. comm, 2 Sept).

Hadlow explains that she wanted to explore the space in-between these works. Both have the technical language of embroidery in common. Both talk about language. One use textiles to voice what she ‘cannot write’, the other expresses ideas of translation with regards to both a language of images and textile techniques. Betwixt these works *Kain Adat Kehamilan* operates as an interpreter, mediating between the different times, places and cultures. The piece also translates for a western audience the complex and entangled exchange between multiple threads of the dissonance and correspondence to be found in Hadlow’s cross-cultural experience, narratives and textile practice.

NARRATIVE AND THE UNSTABLE PROCESS OF TRANSLATION

In addition to the textile work Hadlow produced a written work: *The Unstable Process of Translation*. Delivered either as a performative piece which plays on the format of the artist slide-talk or as a printed text for publications with the accompanying images, the structure of the piece reflects the West Timorese textile design of the *selimut* which the textile piece also uses. Interweaving a range of written styles from the personal narratives of diary style entries to the more academic and museological descriptive writing, it is interspersed with sections told solely in Indonesian as well as containing the collected adat sayings both in Indonesian and English. This new forum for exploring the ideas

which were addressed in her textile practice grew directly from the strategy of writing which Hadlow used to counter her initial displacement through language.

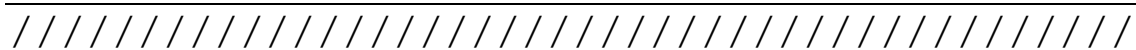
Intended as a companion piece to *Kain Adat Kehamilan*, this work reveals the processes and complexities at play whilst the textile was made. In so doing Hadlow opens up the possibility for further interpretation and exchange to take place. As a result of being put in a situation of displacement and needing to learn that language out of necessity, she is able to translate a sense of that alienation and displacement to a western audience within their own comfort zone. Recalling the concept of retranslation as “part of the ongoing practice of interpretation ...central to the very construction of culture” (Papastergiadis 2000, p.136), *The Unstable Process of Translation* works to create an ‘opaque mirror’ which allows us to better understand the processes and narratives of cross-cultural exchange leading to art and design artefacts such as *Kain Adat Kehamilan*.

5 CASE STUDY TWO



_NORMAN DAY + ASSOCIATES

_RECONSTRUCTING EAST TIMOR



OVERVIEW

In 1999 East Timor voted for independence from the rule of Indonesia. This independence came at a price, however, with the capital Dili and many other parts of the island left devastated by the ensuing violence. Upon returning to the country, the now vice president of East Timor, Jose Ramos Horta, likened the capital to the cities of Dresden or Hiroshima after World War II, with between seventy-five and eighty percent of buildings destroyed (*Dili Reconstruction* 2004). A month after the vote, Norman Day, of Norman Day + Associates, was invited by Jean Mclean, an active and committed supporter of the East Timorese independence movement, on behalf of the leaders of the newly independent East Timor, to assist in the massive task of reconstructing the nation.

An initial multi-disciplinary study group of “like-minded colleagues” (Day & Hulley, 2002, p.39) was assembled, consisting of Jean McLean, David Brand (a conservation architect and Port Phillip City Councillor) architects Kirsten Hulley and Norman Day, photographers and filmmakers Samantha Spicer, Rebecca McLean and John Gollings, urban designers Gerry McLaughlin and Steve Whitford, landscape architect James Sinatra and Steve Dunn who represented the City of Port Phillip. The group flew to Dili in February 2000 under the name ETUDE (East Timor Urban Design Enterprise), “to see what could be done, how we might assist and to document the state of the place”. (Day & Hulley, 2002, p.39).

Following this initial visit, Norman Day has remained actively involved in the reconstruction process, a relationship which has also extended to other members of his architectural firm, including architect Louise Goodman, who traveled to East Timor in 2001. The project has also since become affiliated with Architects Without Frontiers, a non-government organisation of independent architects working to help rebuild “communities devastated by natural or manmade disasters and armed conflict”, and seeking to “change lines of contention into zones of connection.” (Charlesworth 2002, p.28).

My analysis of this case has been broken down into two parts to help identify the elements of this project which best lend themselves to developing new models for understanding and approaching cultural exchange. *Negotiating Differences* focuses on a key aspect of this project, the manner in which the designers have acknowledged differences in levels of power and expectations relating directly to the conditions involved in working within a different social and cultural context. The second section, *Empowerment and Exchange*, explores how these strategies of negotiation are facilitating a process of transitional empowerment, and enabling a genuine and productive exchange to take place.

NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCE

“We need to investigate the means by which people, with different cultural histories and practices, can form patterns of communication and establish lines of contact across their differences” (Papastergiadis 2000. p128)

Identifying significant cultural differences is but the first step in working towards an improved understanding of cultural exchange. However, difference and local specificity can be approached in both positive and problematic ways. What makes the work of Norman Day + Associates in rebuilding East Timor such a relevant case study is the degree to which differences have been explicitly acknowledged and sensitively negotiated, in both a responsive and adaptive manner. Norman Day, the Timorese people and their leaders can be seen to have established a number of ‘lines of contact’ across a

range of differences regarding the reconstruction process in East Timor, resulting in an engaged response from both parties regarding the nature, scale, timeframe and goals of the reconstruction process.

Investigated below are aspects of the project where differences were recognised and negotiated in order to find solutions which more appropriately fit the needs of the Timorese people and their country.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE ROLE OF THE WESTERN DESIGNER

As mentioned above, the study group which visited Dili in 2000 was called the East Timor Urban Design Enterprise. Implied in the naming of the group was an initial perception that their contribution would take the form of urban design solutions and planning suggestions. However, Norman Day makes it quite clear that this title and its implicit assumptions were inappropriate for what was required in reconstructing East Timor. The title was dropped after the group discussed the intentions and needs of the Timorese people with the nations leaders.

Day describes that when it became evident that significant urban design was not required, “we altered course – listening not telling” (Day 2004 pers com, 27 Oct). This indicates that the role of the designer can often be ambiguous and in some cases may not involve any actual ‘design’ at all. Being receptive and open to adapting beyond the duties conventionally attributed to the ‘designer’ is especially relevant to post-conflict situations such as East Timor.

Esther Charlesworth of Architects Without Frontiers, observes that providing “a final design blueprint or master plan” is not necessarily the best solution to “post-conflict chaos” (Charlesworth 2002, p.29). She goes on to suggest that the “individualistic and object-obsessed” attitude of the western designer needs to be replaced with a more collaborative and consultative approach to practice. Norman Day’s work in East Timor in many ways exemplifies Charlesworth’s call for designers operating in post-conflict

situations to reposition themselves as “mediators, urban peace builders and design politicians”. (Charlsworth 2002, p.30)

TIMING IS EVERYTHING: APPROACHING THE DESIGN PROCESS

Along with the reassessment of the role of the designer comes new understandings of the required design process. This was most evident in the East Timor project in the two very different understandings of timeframe. Initially the design team expected to reach some sort of resolved solution within a ten year period. This idea was debunked in a discussion with Xanana Gusmao, who explained that a more realistic timeframe would extend over the next three generations. Day believes that this difference in outlook stems from the East Timorese experience in fighting for independence, “they don’t have any rush, they’ve waited a long, long time for their freedom, and they’re going to wait a long, long time to get things right, but they’ll wait” (*Dili Reconstruction*, 2004).

This substantially longer timeframe has changed the focus from material outcomes to an ongoing process, part of a “very long term commitment” (Goodman 2004, pers comm, 27 Sept). Day himself explains that “I have the rest of my life to help. It is not a professional/commercial relationship, so whatever I can do I will” (Day 2004, pers comm, 27 Oct). Such an extended personal commitment enables more involved and engaged relationships to develop, opening up avenues for the “dynamic contact [and] genuine collaboration” which so rarely characterises cultural exchange under globalisation (Papastergiadis 2003, p.3).

THE TRADITIONAL AND THE NEW

“Whoever invented the corrugated iron to be used as a roof for the tropics should be arrested and fined. Its unbelievable . I have been to many houses in Dili... It is like being in an oven. It is so hot you can actually steam a fish in one of those houses ... You could fry a couple of eggs, you can do omelette, on the roof. Its so unhealthy, so I hope we get rid of those materials”

- Jose Ramos Horta, (*Dili Reconstruction*, 2004)

As Ramos-Horta so eloquently describes, the ill-considered introduction of new materials into a local environment can have serious consequences. In East Timor, corrugated iron roofing kits were initially made available by International aid organisations to meet immediate shelter needs. However this introduced technology, which enables much quicker and more efficient construction and repair, is in many ways deficient to traditional local techniques, which have evolved over time in response to the East Timorese climate.

This example points to a wider tension between perceived benefits offered by new materials and existing, locally developed technologies, which are often more sustainable and appropriate for local conditions. As a new nation, the East Timorese understandably want to “be involved in new ideas” (Goodman 2004, pers com, 27 Sept) with a sense that new materials can also represent progress and contemporaneity. Often this push comes from the younger generation of architects, who are “quite enthralled with the ideas of contemporary materials” and “very much look to the West”, while the older Timorese are more conscious of the need to make sure valuable local skills and technologies “aren’t lost” (Goodman 2004, pers com 27 Sept).

For a western designer negotiating this situation, there are complexities involved with advocating either the traditional or the new per se. Post-colonial theory has problematised the view that developing countries need to become ‘modernised’, and thus dependent on the west to be brought up to speed. On the other hand, pushing for such communities to remain ‘authentically’ traditional can also represent neo-colonialist assumptions that cultures in these situations need to be preserved, and denied any entitlement to change.

For Norman Day, negotiating a balanced synthesis between the old and the new is guided by the need for reconstruction to “always be sustainable” (Day 2004, pers comm, 27 Oct). In East Timor, traditional building systems such as the thatched grass roof were identified by Day as a more sustainable choice than imported materials. Rather than imposing this position however, Day assumed the role of observing and documenting these local building traditions, leaving the final decision-making process in the hands of the Timorese people.

In so doing, a complex negotiation like this is allowed to be resolved locally, and Day’s work functions simply to “contribute to the thinking and the imagination, to the creativity and to the consciousness of the people and the leadership” as well as to encourage “a certain type of architecture that is consistent with the vision and needs of the country”. (Ramos Horta, *Dili Reconstruction*, 2004)

CONCEPTS OF HOW SPACE IS ORGANISED

" We will stay with our land, we will not live in big cities, we exist for our families and our kin, our clans and our 'sucos'" (Gusmao quoted in Day 2003).

Different cultural conceptions of how space is organised, at the level of national infrastructure, was another complex issue that Norman Day + Associates had to negotiate. Initial presumptions were that the work would mainly entail rebuilding and consolidating the destroyed city centres, an approach based on the western model of urban development. However, extensive discussions with the Timorese leaders revealed that this ‘urban design’ plan ran contrary to existing models of spatial arrangement within the local context, and risked disrupting established cultural and social systems.

In response, Day abandoned the initial plan as “plainly misguided”, working instead towards a model of even resource distribution across the whole island, which would enable subsistence patterns of communities “living off the land” (Day & Hulley 2002, p.41) to remain intact, and even be enhanced. Where a disproportionate concentration of

jobs, education and housing in expanded urban centres would have resulted in dramatic social upheavals and urban migration, the new plans aim to spread “the gains of work and independence across the land and its people” (ibid, p.41). This proposal builds from pre-established models of spatial arrangement, which in the context of such physical devastation may not be immediately apparent to the western designer, but are nonetheless deeply embedded within local social structures. In this instance engaged and open dialogue has allowed for the generation of appropriate and effective planning solutions which best fit the local social and cultural context.

EMPOWERMENT AND EXCHANGE

“The thing that you should never do to a nation like this is to take away their empowerment, to take away their own ability to reconstruct their own lives.” (Day, Dili Reconstruction, 2004)

In any situation of cultural exchange there are implicit and explicit power relations at work, and particularly under globalisation, “there is no doubt that exchanges are uneven” (Papastergiadis 2003, p.16). When involving design for communities in need or crisis, this balance of power becomes far more acute, and is often disproportionately skewed towards the western designer. For Norman Day, operating in this context requires a conscious effort to transfer the level of power and control over the design process to the local community.

Central to the ways in which Norman Day has negotiated the above cultural differences, is the ultimate objective of empowering the local community, allowing for the “level of equity [to] shift to the indigenous population over time and with experience” (Day & Hulley 2002, p.41). In working towards this goal, rather than a particular material outcome, the nature of the exchange taking place has fundamentally shifted. ‘Designing’ across cultures now involves the transferral of skills, ideas and control, rather than design solutions in and of themselves.

SKILLS TRANSFERRAL AND STUDENT EXCHANGE

“Ours is not a design project, we have designed nothing but a system to empower people through education and guidance”. (Day 2004, pers comm, 27 Oct)

One of the most important aspects of the Reconstructing East Timor project has been its facilitation of the education of Timorese architecture students, allowing them to “take control of their reconstruction” (Day & Hulley 2002, p.41). Following the Independence vote, an unstable political situation meant that East Timorese students, who had previously been studying in Indonesian-controlled West Timor, could not return to their studies for fear of reprisal. A training and educational program was established to enable these students to complete their studies, by gaining accreditation through a course at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology whilst working to rebuild East Timor. This process has been supplemented by the rebuilding of the Dili Polytechnic, which was largely destroyed, to provide local architectural education, ensuring that in the long term, “it heads in the sort of direction the Timorese want it to” (Goodman 2004, pers comm, 27 Sept). Future plans include a student exchange program between Timor and Australia, but these plans are tempered by the reality of more immediate needs on the ground... “keep people alive, feed them, clothe them, educate them, house them, enable babies to survive their first months, provide water to villages ---- give them a chance” (Day, 2004 pers comm, 27 Oct).

TAKING STOCK FOR THE FUTURE: MAPPING AND OBSERVING

As mentioned previously, the level and nature of the designers’ input has been in this case considerably reconfigured. Norman Day + Associates have made a deliberate choice to remain “in the background”, handing ownership of the design process over to the Timorese, and simply “assisting where possible” (Day & Hulley 2002, p.41). This assistance has largely taken the form of observing and documenting, collecting a stockpile of information about the extent of the damage and “what needs to be done to repair [it]” (Day 2004 pers comm, 27 Oct).

This process mainly involves photographing, drawing and videorecording the state of buildings, structures and areas, but also extends to mapping “culture, land, people, vegetation, structures, art, materials, weather, history, traditions, vernacular manners [and] religions” (Day 2004, pers com, 27 Oct). Effectively, the goal is to take stock for the future by recording as much as possible, creating a “database of all these different buildings types and areas” which will hopefully “be of use to the Timorese” (Goodman 2004, pers com, 27 Sept).

While Norman Day + Associates are currently conducting the bulk of this research, they are also actively working to pass on these skills, by employing and training local Timorese people. In this way, people are given an income and an opportunity to “learn about their nation”, as well as the ability to carry on the mapping process themselves so that it can “go on forever” (Day 2004, pes com, 27 Oct).

CONTROL AND DIRECTION

“And one area that has been quite neglected and few Timorese have ventured into is architecture” (Ramos Horta, Dili Reconstruction, 2004).

Throughout this whole project, Norman Day + Associates have been working towards enabling the people of East Timor to have their own “top class group of architects”, who can then take complete control over the nation’s reconstruction (Ramos Horta, *Dili Reconstruction*, 2004). An extensive, engaged process of collaboration and mediation has taken place, in which exchange is characterised primarily by a flow of skills and authority from the western ‘designer’, to the local community.

The strategies used by Day to negotiate this complex encounter were developed in order to eventually give the Timorese control, ownership and direction over both their built environment and their future. This represents an effort to “re-situate the flows of exchange” (Papastergiadis 2004, p.8) such that the “asymmetrical power relations that structure contemporary points of contact” (Papastergiadis 2003, p. 16) are destabilised,

and replaced with a more collaborative and productive exchange between diverse cultures.

6_ THE CASES CONVERGE



“New models of cultural engagement [are] necessary at this juncture of rapidly expanding global exchange and heightened anxieties over national identity”

(Papastergiadis 2004, p9.)

In the following discussion I will compare these two very different cases in relation to the complexities of cultural exchange, exploring symmetries between the work of each practitioner. These connections can then be used to formulate new understandings of cross-cultural design practice at a wider level.

Identity & Transformation

In both cases cultural exchange can be seen to have had a transformative effect on both the role or identity of the practitioner, and the nature of the work they produce. In the process of encountering difference, key points of dissonance were located and turned into new possibilities. In each case this involved questioning basic assumptions and critically re-examining the boundaries of their practice.

For Hadlow, a loss of language and professional identification led her to build a new sense of identity, constructed *between* the two cultures she was negotiating. This personal change also fed into her practice, which became reconfigured as a conceptual ‘bridge’ between Timorese and Australian culture, expressed through a synthesis of different textile techniques.

The East Timor project has similarly produced a shift in Day’s conception of his role as a designer within that context. The nature of practice here has been reformulated in direct response to the evolving process of cross-cultural exchange. Operating more as a mediator between western architectural knowledge and the desires of the local

community, the work of the designer becomes ‘de-centred’ and re-imagined in terms outside of dominant Eurocentric assumptions within the field.

Restless/Ongoing/Dynamic Exchange

Both these practitioners have approached cultural exchange as a constantly evolving process, in which engagement is an ongoing source of renewed vigour and productive energy. In Hadlow’s case, the experience of living between worlds has been continually reinterpreted and retranslated into new artistic possibilities, building from her base in textile practice into performative writing and experimentation with sound and installation works. This is paralleled by Day’s long-term commitment to the reconstruction of East Timor, and deeply personal investment in a dynamic and responsive relationship, which in three short years has already undergone considerable adaptations.

These understandings of exchange move beyond the idea of cross-cultural design practice as a one-off, or bounded experience, pointing instead towards an ongoing transformative process based in extended cultural engagement and dialogue. Such an approach correlates with theories within art that interpret cultural translation as a dynamic and restless force, continuing to “reinscribe itself in the process of journeying” (Papastergiadis 2000, p.139).

Going With The Flow

Within the context of globalisation and post-colonialism it is important to critically examine situations of cultural exchange in terms of the “degree of impact and benefit of linkage” (Papastergiadis 2003, p.4). On one level these two cases represent opposite sides of a dialectic between traditional Eurocentric assumptions that the western professional has much to offer, but little to learn from, indigenous communities, and contemporary practices of appropriating local specificity, without offering reciprocal gains. In both these positions the ‘benefits of linkage’ are disproportionately skewed to preference the western agent.

However, both of these case can be seen to subvert these models, demonstrating a level of complex entanglement and a more fluid network of exchange. On the one hand Hadlow's practice can be seen to draw traditional forms and techniques from the local Timorese culture, while she alone benefits from the final artwork as product. However, Hadlow is also an active participant within West Timorese culture, as both a researcher and supporter of West Timorese textile practices, and a new migrant with marriage and family ties to the local community. For Day, the potential imposition of western design skills has been consciously avoided, and replaced by a transferral of skills and control.

Both Hadlow and Day have employed strategies of 'silence', and been conscious of when it is appropriate to withhold their own input into the process of exchange across cultures. In East Timor, Day worked from a position of "listening not telling" (Day 2004, pers comm, 27 Oct), while on the other side of the island, Hadlow's "invisible silent space" was used initially to avoid cultural confrontation, and later understood as a powerful source of "shared strength" (Hadlow 2004). In both approaches, a space of responsive engagement is opened up, in which productive dialogue can take place and the benefits resulting from this exchange can be negotiated and shared.

7 CONCLUSION



This study has identified some productive and valuable new understandings of cultural exchange, which are of considerable significance for designers working in cross-cultural situations. As globalisation has created greater and more complex connectivity between localities, and concomitantly increased opportunities for exchange, so too, do models for understanding cross-cultural design need to reflect this complexity. More engaged and ongoing research therefore needs to be conducted in this area by design theorists and critics. This study has also shown that a more critical approach to this topic is urgently required within design discourse, despite the presence of multiple calls for this to happen.

This research has demonstrated that one valid approach to filling this gap in knowledge lies in building links to theories and practices in other disciplinary fields, particularly that of art. Analysis of the cases of Ruth Hadlow and Norman Day + Associates, in relation to such theories points to the need for design practitioners to develop new models of understanding cross-cultural exchange.

Such exchange can be usefully re-thought of as a dynamic and transformative site of negotiation, or a form of cultural translation, in which radically new forms of identity and practice can emerge at points of dissonance. The nature of exchange also needs to be understood as a more ongoing or long-term process, which is constantly re-inventing itself, and providing productive new possibilities. A level of personal commitment to this process can also be seen to enable a greater degree of engagement and investment in the gains of the exchange.

Our understandings of cultural exchange within design also need to acknowledge that negative impacts and productive values can be unevenly distributed between those engaging in exchange. Designers involved in such situations need to work to ensure that the benefits of linkage are shared, and to develop an awareness of the often complex and entangled effects of interconnection. In these cases the designer's most valuable

contribution may not rest in material outcomes, but in a capacity to listen and respond to needs emerging from the process of exchange, in dialogue with the locality of culture.

The following recommendations for practice are proposed as potential ways forward for the western designer operating in situations of cross-cultural exchange, and involve working the need to work towards:

- Recognising that negotiating difference can begin as a displacing experience, but can conversely be used to generate productive, creative and connective possibilities.
- Rendering the complexities of exchange visible, through articulating the process of mediation between differences, and exposing the designer to a level of accountability.
- Constantly and actively engaging in discussion and dialogue which enables the needs and positions of users to emerge and be heard. Knowing when to be silent is an important aspect of ensuring that this dialogue flows equally in both directions.
- Being aware that conventional understandings of the role of the western designer are based on culturally-specific assumptions, and may therefore need to be reconsidered or even abandoned in cross-cultural situations. These presumptions also involve the nature and forms of design practice, such as conceptions of space, technology and time, and impact directly upon the agency of design in the made world. Recognition of these cultural differences is a key aspect of productive exchange.
- Acknowledging and attempting to destabilise implicit power relations, which have been prefigured by colonial structures and continue under globalisation, especially necessary in situations of 'design for need' or crisis.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW WITH RUTH HADLOW

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INTERVIEW WITH:
RUTH HADLOW
2.9.04

Karl Logge: Your work was a very personal work, yet it still deals with this problem of work that appears between cultures or at the mid-point of various cultures, and I guess I wanted to start with a quick description of your work [Kein adat Kehamilan] and where it fits in with your research.

Ruth Hadlow: So the piece I did here last night is a piece called the unstable process of translation and its a two part work so initially there was a textile work which was made because there was a show I was invited into and that textile work was generated first and the in the context of ... I at the same time began doing some post-graduate study and in the process of doing that, because I have to be very objective about where I start working most of the time, because that was the work I had just most recently finished I sort of took that as my stepping off point into the research alongside the fact that within those 12 months I had just moved to West Timor. So, both of them started from the position of looking at the situation of being without a first language and what that meant. They also started from a second, not necessarily secondary, but a second position which was that textiles is often seen as one of the few bridges between those two worlds. I went there in the first place to study textiles, I met the person who is now my partner, and now I live there. But the sort of textiles that are practiced there are back-strap loom, hand woven textiles .. I'm not interested in becoming a weaver, I trained in weaving years and years ago, so I know that I'm not interested in doing that. And the way I mostly work in Australia, and in a way the textile work that is called "Kein Adat Kahamilan" or "Cloth for a Timorese Pregnancy ". That work is a very unusual piece in that its a single piece of work, and for quite a number of years, and still that piece is almost like an aberration within my normal way of working.

So that object is really an aberration because for quite a number of years most of the work I've generated has been either in pieces, generally instillation work, ah – either piece work that is installed onto walls as a number of small units that make up a bigger image or ephemeral instillation work which again consists of potentially thousands of small units which might be anything from torn paper to cut leaves, pinned onto walls, a lot of the time during the residencies. So that particular piece "Kein

Adat Kahamilan” was done in a very different set of circumstance in that it was the first time I had a domestic life in probably 20 years; I had a small baby that I had never had any experience of; I was living at home which I haven’t done for a very, very, very long time prior to that. And I had to find another working, and I went back to a way of working that belongs almost to a prior era. And I’m still not sure how I even feel about that piece, I’m not comfortable with it because its really outside of the way I have been working for a long time now, and in a large way outside of what interests me. And I was feeling pressured by a number of things: one was working without a studio, one was working in a very dislocated situation of being interrupted constantly, whereas the residency way of working is, you know, your in situ, hot-house kind of thing working really intensively from anything from sort of 4 – 8 weeks. I also had had a lot of pressure on me to not make works that were going into touring shows that were so labour intensive for other people to install. Because I had previously to that sent three large works in touring shows that all of which had comprised of about 100 pieces minimum, and you know the feedback I was getting was people hate installing them so I was feeling pressured by that, so it was a combination of all of those.

So that kind of is the background to that piece, I’m not sure how I feel about that now, and I haven’t seen it now since I sent it off, and usually you finish a bit of work and you send it off straight away, and then it tours for how ever many years and you get it back and you think, “oh god, did I make that?” Its sort of like you’ve got no relationship with it...

Anyway, the piece of writing that I developed in relation to it , came out of the fact that I started doing the Masters, which has now become a PhD. And within that, once I had final finished putting a proposal together which was very laboured in terms of what was expected, it was then like, “right, now you better start doing some work...” and because I had spent the bulk of first six months of the semester actually doing that textile work [interruption]

I had to start doing some work within the masters, I’m studying long distance from a university in Adelaide. I’m studying in a context where there is no contemporary art world around me and very few people who speak English let alone anyone who can have a conversation with you about anything to do with ideas, artworks, etc, etc. The contemporary art world only exists in Java and Bali, certainly not in West Timor. So essentially working on my own from home, and again that’s a context that’s completely out of my experience. So I though oh well, I’ll start from starting from that piece. So I basically, one of the things I really wanted to do with post-graduate study is develop writing because I had been playing with it a lot. Because I’d done a lot of freelance teaching over the last eight or so years, and a lot of that in Art school’s, all the time I’m asked to do slide talks. I got very bored doing slide talks, just describing my artwork to other people, its incredibly boring for me and its incredibly boring for them, and I cant stand it when artists just describe or explain they’re own artworks because

there's no room for interpretation. So I had been playing with a model of developing pieces of writing that explore the territories of ideas behind an artwork without actually explaining the artwork. And I had gone into it out of frustration with curators misrepresenting or misconstruing artworks and writing all sorts of things in catalogues which had nothing actually to do with the work, and all to do with they're own idea about how they were framing a show. So that was what sent me off on the writing tack but Id become very interested in it and I have no background in it but it really fascinates me, and what really fascinates me a lot is how might an artist write, because I presume that an artist will write , well certainly myself anyway, from a makers position, which is different from a curators position or an academics position or a theorists position (I should say theorist rather than academic) but you know a theorists position. And a long side that one of the tings I had become really aware of with the slide talks was, people really respond to story telling and that really fascinates me because most artist's slide talks are just descriptions of artworks and sometimes a little bit of contextualising. But as soon as you launch into, you know – and I guess a lot my artwork has quite a lot of personal and private contexts – as soon as I start revealing some of the more personal territory people respond in the most extraordinary way so that sort of launched me off into thinking of the artist slide talk as a vehicle for storytelling or for narrative. And because I had my background or training in writing, I sort of though okay, within this research that I'm doing what do I want to do, there's a couple of things I really want to do. I want to look at how I might, I want to try and learn how to write for a start. I want to try and look at how one might talk about traditional textiles, or textiles within a traditional sphere that takes it outside of the standard discourses that are derived from the museum and material culture approaches, because from what I've seen that's the only way that textiles that are produced in West Timor, which Ill just call traditional, I mean there are certainly very contemporary textiles produced there that are within the traditional range, we just call them traditional as outside of the contemporary visual art, Western visual art sphere. They are only ever to me, it seems, ever discussed either from anthropological or material culture, museum sort of territories. And for me I was like well, that's not my background but I find them very interesting and I find the experiences and relationships I have in talking to people buying textiles, talking to people out in the villages who are making textiles its a whole set of stories and ideas that, surely can be talked about in another way, so that is one of the major things I wanted to do, was actually look at how one might approach traditional textiles, outside of those conventional standard discourses.

KL: That seems to me like you are responding to what would seem a very Western, Institutionalised discourse, and I guess you are responding personally to the fact that that's not how it really works...

RH: Not so much not how it really works, but its not related to me. So what I started in terms of trying to define what I was going to research was, there's a number of different points, there's a very broad base that I'm starting from, I'm saying: "here am I in Kupung, in West Timor, what's

happening for me is I'm living between two worlds I'm married into the Timorese community, so I am sort of an insider, but I will never not be a foreigner. I'll always have white skin, and English will always be my first language. So I can never be a true insider but I'm also not an outsider in the sense of a tourist or a visitor, or a researcher who comes from outside and leaves again. So I'm in a very peculiar sort of place. Which has all sort of things available within in (including frustrations of various kinds) but within that what does that mean, things have come up and sort of made themselves clear –

I can think with an anthropological eye or mind, not necessarily an informed one but just that sense of I'm an outsider and I'm observing what's going on within that other culture, so there that aspect.

I can think from a museum perspective as in I have done a lot of research previously, and in a way still continue to do it, on the textiles of West Timor. And yet I don't work or operate within the museum field. But certainly I have been trained to think and can perceive things in that way and do that as well because on technical terms, in terms of the whole field on its own, there's been very little documented about the textiles there. So I can certainly think and do interact with it on that level.

I am also an artist so I respond in that particular way, I also think a lot in story telling. And in a way the story telling an writing is like a kind of conversation, a way of having conversation that is not available to me there other than through writing. Because very, very few people there speak English and those few people that do are not necessarily interested in talking in the way that I'm used to talking. In fact what I am used to and what I have realised over a long period of time is that I do a lot of my processing of experience through talking. So I make sense of life through talking through conversations, when I am in that situation when I am living there I cant do that. So therefore the most immediate way of making sense of life, and not going crazy, is to write as its like a conversation as it bounces the ball back and forward between the pen and the hand, the page, and the mind. So what I was looking at was can I draw all of those things together and stay with that thing that textiles is the bridge that links me because my background/training was in textiles. Even though in this world I don't actually literally work with textiles either. Most of the work I do is very ephemeral, conceptual or instillation based works that reference textile traditions and languages while not necessarily working literally within that field. So in a way I don't really belong to either of those, I don't belong to the textile world here in a way, and I don't belong to the textile world there in a way, and yet I do belong to both, I have a relationship with the histories and languages of both and so I saw that as being the bridge.

Okay so there's the points, there's the anthropological perspective, there the museum or material culture practices, there's the visual arts practice, there's the writing practice. The thing that has interested me most within the territories of literature over the last few years has been memoir, and memoir written by Australian writers, because I think there been a lot of writing that's been going on

in Australian contemporary literature that has been playing with memoir in an interesting way. And I've read something – and I've got no idea who wrote it – but it was looking at the fact that Australian writers to some degree – and it was written by an English writer – she was saying that Australian writers have a lot of freedom. And she was using Patrick White's *Flaws in the Glass*, it might have been Dracilla Majesca actually who had worked in the UK before here. But whoever it was for saying... just for example, Patrick White's *Flaws in the Glass* which is I think sort of a semi-autobiography – I haven't read it – but she was saying: "Here's someone who is right up there on a pedestal in Australian culture, and all he is looking at is all his mistakes, and his flaws for a start, most biographies that came out of the UK wouldn't be discussing the holes in people, or the bad bits, or the scratchy bits. What they'd be discussing is how fabulous they were, and how they got to be so famous and blah, blah, blah, blah. They were pointing out that because Australia doesn't have a tradition of the grand master or the grand dame in that very hierarchical sense that a lot of that English and European cultures have. Because we have that much more flat culture and also I guess that tall poppy syndrome which potentially feeds into that, but I don't see that as a negative, personally. But what people tend to do is write from a very honest perspective that talks about all the sorts of lumps and bumps and everything else. The other thing that interests me most in Australian memoir that I have read is that people like Dracilla Marjesco or Robert DeSae or a variety of other people tend to weave personal narratives in amongst ideas – conceptual, literary, historical, whatever – but they have tended, and do tend to interweave a language of the intellect and the field of ideas in with the subjective narrative or the subjective autobiographical. And I find that very interesting. I tend to work in a very autobiographical way with my own artworks, my own practice, so it made sense to reference that field.

K All of these things start to paint a picture, not only of your work, but also a working methodology. And I'm most interested in this idea that the piece itself felt like an aberration which seems to me to reflect the other idea you pointed out which was that you felt dislocated and not belonging to both these very specific cultural contexts – the museum research context and the very traditional West Timorese context as well. And I guess this is the thing that I'm interested in particularly for my study are these tactics of negotiation between cultures. And not so much how it can be overcome, but, I guess, this acknowledgement, and I am searching for ways that we can begin to acknowledge how we acknowledge it. Both in the process and the end result?

R Um, what I've identified as some of the key things that I am, trying to play with are: starting points that belong to language, text and textiles as being three key areas that I am trying to draw, tease out, draw conventions from and then cross reference. So there's those three. And then you've got those other fields memoir, or let's say contemporary literature in say the stream of memoir, anthropological

writings, material culture writings- the more formal ways of writing around textiles – and then visual art practice. Alongside those there are some other things to do with cultural studies and so on that I'm trying to look at. But its hard to do too many. So those four would have to be the four major ones. Within that what interests me very much is to say well okay, if I take languages or conventions that belong to one of those can I rework them across into another context and what happens. SO for example that text *The Unstable Process of Translation* it picks up on what I started to with the textile artwork. In the artwork what I was doing was working with exploring that situation which I then described in the text which was while I was pregnant just after I had moved to West Timor I had very, very little language. People were always telling me all these rules about pregnancy, things that I should or shouldn't do. And at the time it drove me incredibly crazy, I just about wanted to slap people everyday. So as a way of getting control over that I though well okay I've got to come at this form another perspective, so I started collecting all the rules and writing them down, every time someone would say another one to me, I would write it down if I didn't already have it on the list. And because I already had this deadline of having to make this work, I though, okay I'm going to make a work that's based on that. The form of that artwork is derived form the form of the men's textile, which is traditionally made in three pieces that re then joined together. There's a centre panel and a top and a bottom panel, or two side panels joined to the centre piece. So I took the text of all those rules that had been spoken to me, and I embroidered it I used a textile technique that is a language from my own European, Western and European set of languages, so I used embroidery, I didn't use a weaving technique. But I'm referencing the design format, or the design layout of a textile language that belongs there, the men's textile, and I specifically chose the men's textile because as I said during the talk, although I'm not male, the freedoms that I am used to having, and continue to have there are closer to the way men live in West Timor than the way women live which is much more circumscribed and related to the home and I still retain quite a number of the freedoms that I have here having grown up as a Western woman. So, there was a particular intention using a men's textile as a reference. And I worked with the other convention that is quite common to a lot of Timorese textiles which is the two side panels

Basically replicate each other and they are usually different form the centre panel. And a lot of Timorese textiles are striped. So it took the notion of the stripe but I worked with the way a text becomes a stripe. So the written text, written over and over again in rows replicates the notion of a stripe [interruption] so you can see what is going on there with the textile piece is that I am playing with a number of conventions and cross-referencing them. I'm also playing off (and I forgot about this) two key textiles, but in relation to that body of work one that I am only really speaking about which is a textile by an English woman called Elizabeth Parker, a sampler. Now I just wrote a preface for my thesis, or a potential preface for my thesis, in the last month or so, and what I really realised there was two key textile works or textile objects that frame what I am doing I think. One is that particular sampler by this English woman in the 1830's and its just a simple, very plainly cut cloth,

plainly woven cloth, and its embroidered with red cross-stich and its just text, it is a whole piece of text. And it starts off with “as I cannot write” which I find quite extraordinary because the whole text is writing, and its finished halfway through a line, it is quite possible that she committed suicide, and its basically something between an autobiography and a confession and a plea to god. It starts off in quite a basic autobiographical way but then it moves into just being a very direct conversation with God, and its clear that she is struggling with the idea of committing suicide. And its a very, very unusual piece of textile, its classified as a sampler in the Viennese, but its essentially not a sampler at all. It doesn't fit into any of the sort of things about samplers. Its not a trying out of stiches, its not a showing off of skills. Its a very private document. And I find it completely fascinating because its so contradictory in so many ways – “as I cannot write” and then she goes on to construct this whole text. And then its also why would you make something as private as that, which must have been very shameful for her, why would you make it so public? In the sense of not necessarily making it in public but its so permanent because its embroidered. And its written in a way that's basically to do with, its very emotional the text and yet its so laborious doing cross-stich embroidery, I've tried doing it, it takes forever, just to construct one word can take half an hour. So its not what happens when you write in a diary or have a conversation, so I find it a very fascinating object. So there's that on one hand, on the other hand there's a textile that I saw, two textiles actually from my very first trip, before I went to Timor I was doing a research project at the museum and art gallery in Darwin, they've got a big collection of Eastern Indonesian textiles. I came across one textile from West Timor that really fascinated me, it was a red textile, it was a woman's cloth, its absolutely crowded with images and, its got even a joke woven into it. And its just a very fascinating textile and it was nothing like anything else there and there was no other information about it. When I first went to Timor which was just after that to do formal research on textiles I was looking for other cloths like that because I didn't know where that one had come from because it wasn't documented. Eventually I was taken to a village by the person who was translating for me he said it might have come from somewhere around this area and off we went to this village and we just asked somebody, anybody in the village “are there any weavers here?” and this old lady was sort of pushed forward out of the crowd and someone got sent off to her house and they brought back this cloth. And the cloth they brought back was not the same as the one in the museum but it was so similar, and yet it was completely different, because the one in the museum would probably have been woven half way through last century – 1950's or 60's – and it was very traditional in its motifs. This new cloth that I saw, was the same layout, the same design formats but it used very Western images, so there were brick houses and jeeps and peacocks and flower arrangements and I kept thinking “where did these images come from?” Because we were sitting in this dusty little kampong, this little village – where did she get these images from? When I asked her she said “from the book” and I'm thinking “what book?” it doesn't look like there's a single book in the whole village so someone went off and gets this little book and it this tiny little brown paper coloured book and its all cross-stich embroidery patterns and designs and she had completely,

faithfully reproduced the images in it. But she had translated them in a completely different technical language, so they were designed to be cross-stich embroideries, she taken those images and had translated them into a supplementary weft weaving technique that was particular to that area. And she had re-translated them out of these single techniques into this incredibly crowded design field, again, traditional to the design languages from the area that she comes from. SO those two textiles really framed the whole project. One of them is about translation, and in a way they way I interpret between those two cloths, the cloth in the Museum and the cloth form Bessy Kahma is that she took what was exotic to her and repositioned it into the local languages, into the local design field. Its like she took the exotic and made it familiar, and yet to me those images are not exotic at all, they are tediously familiar, like all the other tediously boring images that come in cross-stich design. And yet the situation to me was very exotic, so we were in reverse positions, and it brings up that whole things about the stranger, the foreign and the other. But in that case I was confronted with, heres me – the other, looking at something so familiar , but she considers something I consider familiar exotic. And so there's very interesting territory there. SO between the sort of autobiographical, personal, textual narration, or narrative of the English sampler, in a language of embroidery that I am familiar with, the technical languages I am used to using . Through to this translating of these other cross-stich...Cross-stich is the thing that they both have in common one of them is using cross- stich the other one is translating cross-stich patterns. So for me there's a whole...The two textile frame the space that I want to work within, one of them is about narrative, or one of them is a narrative, the other isn't one of them is a translation. There both talking about language, but in different ways. One of them says: "as I cannot write" so her relationship to language she sees it in a particular way. So I want to sort of plays with, if there the two things that frame it what's the space that in between. I don't live in England, and I'm not Timorese. I have a relationship to English embroidery traditions, because its part of my cultural heritage and I have a relationship to the Timorese in that I have married into that community and I cannot completely disassociate myself from it either. SO operate in this funny space in between, so I'm trying to find a way where: what sort of space can one describe when one lives in this funny in between space when one can speak and be familiar with languages from both worlds that depending on the context of them need to be translated, and be lost in translation or what happens if you re-contextualise or de-contextualise those languages. So for example what I was playing with then was again to take conventions out of one field or context and re-apply them to another is probably one of the things that interests me most. SO again looking between those three territories. Language, Elizabeth Parker has a particular relationship with language, she thinks she cannot write and yet she can write with a needle even if she cant write with a pen. Ima Lalak the woman who made the textile in Bessie Khama she can't write and she cant understand Indonesian either, I can now speak enough Indonesian that I'm fluent but I cant speak Teton which is the language she speaks so everything she says to me has to be translated, so its still going through a layering process that inevitably distorts it in some way, she sees me as exotic I see her as exotic

KL: Well that sort of brings me to the crux of what I am actually trying to research, is this cultural exchange and interaction, and almost how design, artworks, these piece can mediate and often offer processes and representations of these very real exchange that happens at all these levels.

RH: In fact one of the things that I found most interesting through living in Timor is to realise that we – lets say we as Westerners, we as middle class Australians – go to places like Timor and see it as foreign. The Timorese see us as exotic and foreign and its very parallel, I mean I go to a village and I am fascinated by what I see there and I'll sit and I'll think and I'll take notes or I'll take photographs, the Timorese are doing exactly the same things about me. I become an exotic foreign object imported into their space, they don't have the money to come here, but luckily for them someone's come there, and uts very parallel. As much as I exoticise them, they exoticise me. If I naturalise them, I can learn to do that, obviously the more language that I have and the more time that I spend there the more things become naturalised and less exotic. And the same thing happens there, one of the things that I've notice very strongly just for an example is when people first meet me there the first thing they see is white skin, white skin has a whole lot of associations, not least of which will be wealth, but also foreignness and exoticness and a sort of social status to do with the foreign. After I open my mouth and begin speaking though, because luckily for me, I think I've got a good ear and I have learnt to speak English with a very local accent because I can here the sounds very easily and I have learnt to mimic the local sounds. So people are often very taken aback by both my fluency, now and the fact that, and they don't realise this to begin with but I can see it happening, when I start speaking in Indonesian, firstly there's a shock, Oh she can speak Indonesian, so I'm not outside, that cant speak about me so I can understand them. Secondly, the next thing is after we have spoken for quite a while and we start having a conversation because my accents so familiar to them they forget that I'm foreign. And so this really funny thing takes place where the first thing is absolutely like a billboard – foreign, white – the second thing is the sort of double take with the language, the third thing is the language fools them and it makes them forget and they get caught up in a conversation and the sound of the language that I'm using is adequate enough that it tricks them and they forget, and then I can see them doing another double take: I'm talking to her like she's a local, but she's not a local, she's a foreigner. And so its just very fascinating. And what fascinates me, and one of the things that I've really started to want to play with is that I started off working through the idea of making instillations and making artworks so I'm getting more and more interested, I mean I was always interested in the idea of writing but I'm becoming more and more interested in the idea of recording and actually taking sound and taking language and putting it into and oral/aural situation where you can actually play with some of that territory of what language does, what it can do. It can do what I did the other night with that talk where it can block out for you, like I spoke in Indonesian in that text and the intention of that was to give most people in the audience the experience that I had when I first went

there, which is I didn't understand anything that was being spoken to me. And that's very confronting, especially when you come from a monolingual culture like here. What is interesting there though in Timor the majority of people would grow up hearing multiple languages, and they would be very familiar with not understanding some of the languages that they hearing around them, so they would be used to that. Most people would speak at least two languages, some more, some less. Bu the majority of people would always have the experience of there being other languages going on around them that they cant understand. But where not used to that in Australia. We are used to being able to understand everything that we hear, so there's a certain set of assumptions that go along with that, when you get into that territory where you cant understand everything, you either have to do a huge amount of interpreting or guessing, or accept that you cant understand everything in the world, which I think is probably much more realistic. So that territory of actually playing between language and text

K Well it seems to becoming more important...

RH: It is...

KL: Your actually adapting your won process to ...

R:... the situation...

KL: Well, yes, especially the situation of change, I mean that's actually what I found most interesting about the written piece. What you are doing in the first position is a tactic for dealing with that lack of language, that is your own language, but more and more now its actually starting to translate those feelings that you have to an audience, of that sort of exchange...

RH: Yes, absolutely, and that piece, the written piece, *The Unstable Process of Translation* essentially that was an experiment in trying out a number of things, so the text is based on a textile I wanted to play with , can I work with the conventions that belong to the traditional textiles there and structure a piece of writing based on those. So can I import conventions, and a set of languages, from one field and work with them in another field, and set of languages. Can I bring in information that is put through the models or the conventions that belong to the material culture set of ways about writing and thinking about textiles and bring them into another context. So that text, I think I read in the notes after it is broken up into a series of segments and they play with different styles and conventions of writing. So there's some quite [diary like] stuff that's very much me in the moment, in situ in West Timor, so very much that internal though, thinking process of just being somewhere and the thoughts and feelings that go along with that. Some of is very straight museum style writing around the textiles within their traditional and particular contexts including technical information. Some of it is drawing

from theoretical backgrounds to do with books that I was reading and referencing in relation to ideas about displacement, dislocation, notions of home, anthropological texts, so some of it is sort of referencing the theoretical background. Some of it is talking more directly about language and experience in relation to language. So there sort of four streams of thought there and four conventions or fields that I'm trying to actually interweave to see if I can make them all work in one piece of writing or one spoken text. Outside of that, just to go before I forget, one of the major things that set me off on this idea are two reference points basically. William Yang's performance work which interests me very much. I worked in theatre as a designer for quite a number of years, and when I first saw William Yang perform *sadness* I was really fascinated because I thought okay, here's a visual artist, he's a photographer, visual artists, he's working between conventions, he's working between, from my perspective anyway, the way I would name what he's doing is he's working between the solo theatre monolog, that's quite a straight forward, theatrical convention, the artist slide night or the artist slide talk where he's showing slides of his work and talking in relation to it and the home slide night where he's basically telling stories about his family, and more personal story telling in relation to his slide show, speaking directly to the audience and he's taking stuff from all three conventions and I'm not sure if that was intentional or not but that's the way I could name what he's doing. And so for me he's taking languages that belong to three different conventions and interweaving them cross-referencing them and building some new model that plays from those three different sets of conventions. So I thought well that is really interesting and I would really like to play with that and the more that I had that experience of having to do all these slide talks over and over again and trying to find a new space work with, the more I thought about what he was doing. Personally, I'm not interested in working in the theatre. I've worked in the theatre for a long time behind the scenes in design. I'm not interested in being on the stage. I'm not interested in performing in a very formal sense, in the way that Yang does it. But I am interested in what has happened as I have opened up with the slide talks I've done, the more personal that I make the talks the more they are responded to immediately. So that interests me very much, people respond to story telling, that's very clear to me. So, I am interested in that and so then another question for me is well how might I work, if you talk about performance without it having to be very theatrical in that very over the top sense, how might a visual artist work in a space that takes elements of performance through, particularly for me the oral narrative. I don't like adlibbing, I've got a really bad memory and I don't like all the sort of, I actually like writing and I like what happens with writing. I like the rhythms and the other sounds that come into your head as you write and in reading writing I think you can actually catch those, that's what I try to do anyway with the writing and the readings of it. And again, that to me references another set of conventions which is the model of being read to in bed as a child, because I was brought up by parents that read a book, you know a story to us every night before we went to sleep, and I'm sure again that it references something to with that. I don't remember a lot of that but I know it happened and I think that operates a lot with radio, radio nationals been playing on that a lot I think, you know that narrated

story telling. And I think it feeds into a cultural convention that quite ingrained for a number of us , so its certainly very familiar to my background, so that sort of narrated story telling as a convention, as a performance convention. The artist slide talk for me is a model because I'm often asked to do them. So there is, rather than working in the theatre which Yang does, for me to work within the slide talk, the artist slide talk, but to manipulate it as a convention, to stretch the boundaries of it, what's possible there. And then to work with the writing which is like the base of the performance I suppose to stretch that and tease it and manipulate conventions and cross conventions and cross languages across those fields is what I'm trying to play with basically. The next thing that interests me most, or the next things I really want to play with along those lines is to actually when I go back to Timor and over the next six months or so, I'm planing on making a series of recordings there. So sound scapes basically , recording the sounds which are just the sounds in the ordinary landscape because there very different sounds. The sounds out on the street are different to the sounds here\ . The sounds of people speaking is different because the language is different. There's those three things: there's the sound scape which is very different, and it notates or narrates a different landscape, a different social landscape as well as just a different physical landscape. There's also I want to do some recordings of people speaking because there are numerous languages spoken and they sound very different, and I play games sometimes in the Bemo's in the minibuses, where I'm actually trying to guess what language people are speaking. And I don't know what they are saying but I can hear the sorts of sounds and I am starting to be able to recognise – its that language or its this language even though I cant understand it so that's like a personal game. And then thirdly I want to record some of my writings and then I want to try and actually mix those and see if I can actually create some recordings that actually are a mixture of those three and then potentially use them as radio pieces or as sound scapes for instillation works.

KL: Ill just finish off with one last question. I guess we've begun to sort of identify some of the ways you've worked previously in Timor and it seem that's going between these two cultures has opened up a whole range of possibilities both for you and your work there and you are starting to see that there are these new ways of dealing with

RH: The situation, new experiences...

KL: yes, and new cultures, and very much this position where you are totally out of your own comfort zone. So I guess you've already started to identify ways that you've adapted your process of art making. Do you feel that there are perhaps some better ways you can be getting to acknowledge that explicitly as opposed to implicitly and do you think that effectively it is a useful thing to acknowledge explicitly, and I think the writing starts to do that?

RH: The writing has been trying to do that. The writing is trying to name or to talk about being in that space between worlds and I don't think that I will ever belong to either of those worlds in the sense of singularly belonging to a sort of mono-cultural or singular situation, again I don't think you can once you live between worlds. You're stuck between them forever basically. I can't be in this world and not think of that one. I can't be in that world and not think of this one, you know you're always referencing the two, cross-referencing them. I don't have a political agenda, I don't tend to work in that way. I think that what interests me the most is playing with the new possibilities that occur through the new situation. Trying to be very honest to the fact that I'm not an anthropologist, I'm not a museum person, I'm not a writer, in Timor I'm also not an artist because that doesn't have any meaning there. So if I'm not any of those then it's actually, in a way I actually quite like having to be, I'm not anything, and anyone and also in that culture people don't define themselves about what they do. They define themselves by relationships and inter relationships. So in that culture I am Nina's mother, or Willies wife, or so-and-so's sister in law, or so-and-so's second cousin's wife, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So it's a completely different way of having to have to frame your identity. And I think that's very fascinating because here all we do is say what do you do, and that's who so-and-so is oh, their an Ethnographer, or their an artist or their a journalist. It's a completely different way, and what that does is, and I think I've gone through this and started to come out the other side of it. Your sense of identity completely disintegrates a) through lack of language, in the first place – because yes I'm relatively fluent now but I certainly wasn't for the first 18 months, so your sense of identity in being able to describe who you are, and describe anything that you think disintegrates, and then your identity through job disintegrates. I don't think in three years of living there full time I'd be lucky if two people have ever asked me what I do when I'm in Australia. Two people! So people don't care, they're not even interested in that, it's not how they frame their identity and it's not how they recognise me. So okay I have this very open space which means that on the one hand a complete disintegration of who Ruth Hadlow is, or who I thought she was, and b) a new space of actually saying well how do I exist within this world. I exist in a different way now, and I have to exist in a different way if I want to remain in any sort of stable or sane state of existence and for me there's a lot of freedom in that. But I think again that could only survive it by doing things like writing because it allows me to negotiate the scary bits, or the uncertain bits, or the bits where I feel like I have no idea what's going on, or it's falling apart or, you know, I'm in a crisis and I don't know why and out of all of that the thing that has become most important to me is to do with process. And that's been an interest for a long time. Most of the installation work I did before I moved to Timor was process based work where if I've got a gallery or a space, or a residency for X amount of time I will start working on the wall and I will keep working on a day to day basis until I run out of time. At the end of the residency that's when the work finishes. I photograph it that night, I take it down the next day. It doesn't exist anymore. So it's not that kind of thing like the classic artist thing or designers thing, you do all the work behind the scenes and

then there's the finished product, and that all the audience sees. What interests me much more, and what I think is completely fascinating to all makers is, whether they be artists or writers or musicians or whatever is the process of developing the work. That is where all the ideas and all the energy is. The bit that's fascinating, because that's the journey of finding out the territory that you are exploring. When you get to the end point, you're over it, you've finished it. There's some sort of closure whether you want here to be or not. And then that's the audience's turn. And they think that's the be all and end all but actually I think for the artist it's not the be all and end all. It's the end of that particular period of time, and that's usually just the beginning of the next period of time. And that interests me very much. And what interests me a lot then from that, is that I want to try and narrate that process because in narrating the process of experiencing, which is essentially what I'm doing through things like that piece of writing that I read the other night. That's really narrating the experiences, narrating the processes of experiencing. I also want to try and narrate the processes of making, the processes of generating the ideas, because I think that's where the creativity is, the most interesting part. And can you actually name that? Can you write about it? I'm not sure, but it's like an experiment.

KL: I think that that is very much what people are responding to, because you see, in your talk what is essential is that finished process but the work in and of itself is a process and that's very engaging.

RH: And I think there's a lot in it so that's why it's hard for me to define what post-graduate research is because it covers too many tactics, too many fields, too many eras, too many languages, too many conventions. But the heart of it is trying to narrate process, and trying to explore process. And I think within that, what that is, is it's just talking about living because whether we're being and experiencing, or whether we're making or creating or designing, that's when we're really in there. At the end point it's like you sit back, and you regard it, you know, you observe it, but the doing of it is the being in it, the being there the being of it, and that really fascinates me because I think we're not very good at talking about the end point, you know, we can critique things until the cows come home, we can pull things apart, we can apply things to them, we can do this, this, and that around the end point, no problem at all, but to discuss and make discourse around the process I don't know, I actually don't know, I mean there may be a lot of stuff that's written about it I don't know,

KL: But that's what you're interested in

RH: That's what I'm interested in though yeah,, and again I think that's where storytelling could be the most interesting thing, because in telling stories, you take people through, you take people on a journey, but when you get to the end point it's over, and it wraps up, and it might wrap up neatly or it might not wrap up neatly it might just fray out and disperse, and either of those might be intentional,

but it's through the journey that people are caught, and not caught like I'm trying to catch an audience, but that's what's always most interesting for us because it engages our creative minds, you're trying to work out where you're going, you're trying to work out what are all the different things that are part of that, and that's where it's all happening.. When you get to the end, it's over.. and that's like ...

KL: Well, that's a very interesting parallel then, I mean everyone always talks about the creative journey, and, but I mean it's interesting that that in itself can be a product as well.

RH: Or it can be the subject matter, not a product

KL: Not a product, but again, the focus can be on that process.

RH: The focus can be on that, yeah.

KL: And really, the end that you end up at, is kind of arbitrary because that journey is

RH: It can never finish, yeah.-

KL: the important part

RH: So, yeah, you have to, from my perspective, you have to step outside of all those clichés, because as soon as you say the creative journey or even creativity, they have, they're such clichés and they bring such bad baggage with them, and it's not that it all falls apart but it all fixes in concrete, and people say oh yeah, creative journey, oh yeah, creativity, you know, and it's just like, switch off, you know, and it's like, having to learn to work with language to keep it really alive in that space of the not-knowing, the not-knowingness of what it is about making and writing and thinking and experiencing, that's when it's at its most alive. Yeah

KL: And does it feel like, I mean you are writing research stuff now as well, but do you feel that that's sort of really come to a fore, now that you're out of your own cultural context? Out of that comfort zone I mean, you're in a totally new place so I guess what you do have is the process, the whole thing is a big process of (???)

RH: Yeah, except I've been there for three years now so it's not out of my comfort zone and it's normal now, it's my home now, you know I've lived there for three years and now it's my home, and I use Indonesian on a daily basis far more than I ever use English, so when I come back here it's like, oh god, now I've got to remember how to use English again, and half my vocabulary's disappeared,

and oh I'm supposed to be able to listen to people here, students they're talking about Sex and the City, and I haven't go the faintest, I mean I might have watched that program twice in my whole entire life and I don't know what they're talking about and I don't know why they're interested in it and, this is not my cultural comfort zone, you know,

KL: So you've almost come back again to a...

RH: And it's that thing of, again like I was saying, I married into that community there, it's my home now because I've lived there long enough that it's become my home, and this is almost, there's parts of this world here that are completely foreign to me, and may have always been foreign to me, you know, Sex and the City is not my comfort zone from A to B to Z, but ... I'm not Timorese, I'll never be Timorese, but I'm also not a complete and utter stranger or foreigner to that culture now, for example, one of the stories within the text that I read the other night, that I only read in Indonesian, was a story about being in a restaurant, and I heard a young woman talking with her mother and her auntie, and they were using a mixture of Indonesian and English, their English, her English was very fluent, the older women's not so, not so much, but not bad, and I was quite curious because there's not many people in Kupang who can speak fluent English, and I went up to her afterwards when we were all leaving more or less at the same time and I said to her, oh where did you learn English? You know, because she looked Timorese, and I just assumed she lived there, and she said to me, I'm Australian, I'm from Darwin! You know, it's like, where did I learn English! She didn't say that but I could see she was thinking exactly that, and as soon as she started speaking directly to me I realised how strong her accent was, she had a really strong, very broad Australian accent, much broader than mine, and I said to her oh, ok, so you live in Darwin, so have you got family here? And she said oh yes, you know, I have to come with my mother every year to visit the family, she said I'm bored to death, I can't wait to go home, and I'm so sick of this food, I'm hanging out for a Big Mac, and I was completely taken aback because I had projected an assumption onto the situation, I had assumed she was a local. She wasn't a local, she's Australian, Australian-Timorese ok, but she sees herself as being more Australian than Timorese obviously, her accent's broader than mine, she likes eating Big Macs, I've never eaten a Big Mac in my life and I'm not interested, and I came away thinking, she's more Australian than I am, and I'm more Timorese than she is, how weird is that! It's really weird, for me,

KL: All those signs just break down,

RH: And, all the clichés we make and all the assumptions and projections we make, you know, the more I live there, and the longer I live there, and particularly in certain places, and Kupang would be one of them, and Darwin would be another, Hong Kong I'm sure would be another, and Jakarta would be another, and Sydney possibly is, but I haven't spent enough time here to know, there are a lot of

places in the world I think where those crossovers are very crossed over and very blurred, and I think the clichés and assumptions aren't relevant. There's a lot of old blokes from Darwin, living in Kupang, with Timorese wives, their Australian wives probably deserted them thirty years ago when the kids finally left home, they're all old boozers, they're the sort of guys who hang out in pubs in the western suburbs here, they live in Kupang, they've got a terrible creole, you know, they've sort of got this awful mish-mash of Indonesian, bad Indonesian, tiny amounts of it with very broad Australian accents, smashed together with little bits of local language, again with broad Australian accents, and they use this amazingly dreadful Creole that I can't understand, but a lot of the locals can, because they're used to hearing it, they've got Timorese families, you know, they've got half a dozen kids, they've got a wife who's forty years younger than them, and they live there full time because the beer's cheaper than it is in Darwin, they've got their pensions, and they're perfectly happy. If they lived in Darwin they'd be lonely old bastards all the time at the pub, you know, no wives, no families, they'd just hate it, so they've got these extraordinarily sort of patched together lives, that work very well for them, and they're living cross-culturally, but we would never say, we would never use them as an example of cross-cultural sort of,

KL: But that's exactly it. I guess that's where all those sort of things start to really come out, is that these things happen all the time.

RH: Yeah. And that hybridity, you know the more I see of it, the more I think it's really normal there, there's a lot of people that I've met in Timor who, one partner might be from another part of Indonesia, they might have married someone else from there, there's people who call themselves Savanese, like Sava's an island off Timor, but in fact they're second or third generation Savanese, their father might be from Sava, they've never been there, they were never born there, they've lived in Kupang all their lives, their husband might be from Java or Sulawesi, or from god knows where, they only speak Indonesian at home, because they don't share a common language with, you know, a common regional language with their partner, there's all sorts of variables, there's a lot of people I've met there who say to me, you know, people out in the villages, you know, old people, and they say oh my son's married to an English woman, you know, oh no, no, it's usually the other way around, my daughter's married to an English man, or a Dutchman, and they live, I haven't seen them for thirty years because they live in Holland, and I think, amazing, you live in this really basic kampong in this tiny little village, and your son, or your daughter's living in Amsterdam, because it's always that way around, it's always the women married to the foreigners, and so that person lives, bit the parent, because they live cross-culturally by extension, and the child, who's off somewhere in another part of the world, who's parent, and who grew up in a village, and who's parent is still in that village, and they have that all the time, as a reference point, they can never not have that in their contemporary lives, and I actually think there's a lot of it that's gone on, but Australia maybe is much more isolated

from it, and I think anywhere that has had a colonial history has had this sort of mish-mash of things going on, that we consider to be unusual or very contemporary, and I don't think it is at all, like my partner's family, just for example, I could talk on and on about all of this, but ok, his family, originated, part of their name, their family name is Daskedati. Das comes from Ndaou, Ndaou is an island off Rote island, Rote island is off Timor and Ndaou is a tiny little island off that. A lot of people migrated via, I'm not sure why, potentially via the Dutch, to the North of West Timor, anywhere between three and five hundred years ago, a lot of them ended up in Oikusi, which is the Portuguese enclave, they married in with the locals, the Portuguese also had a policy of marrying into the local communities that they colonised, whereas the Dutch didn't, the Dutch stayed very separate, the Portuguese married in, straight away created a whole substrata of society that were basically, not hybrids but what's the word, but basically half-Portuguese half local, they became known as the Tapasas, the Tapasas eventually rioted and rebelled against the Portuguese in that territory and tried to claim it as their own, the Dutch were still fighting the Portuguese for that territory, and then we've got these people from Ndaou and Rote island who are seen as being foreigners by the locals, but they're more local than the Portuguese and they're more local than the Dutch, they would have joined various sides of the...

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW WITH LOUISE GOODMAN

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INTERVIEW WITH:
LOUISE GOODMAN
NORMAN DAY + ASSOCIATES
27-9-04

Karl Logge: Based on the previous interview with Ruth (Hadlow) discussing her work “Cloth for a Timorese Pregnancy” where she explored issues concerning the cultural differences she faced whilst pregnant in East Timor, I am becoming more and more interested in the personal narratives that are involved in negotiating across cultures. Intro etc

Louise Goodman: I think that with their initial visit they were under the impression that there was something more required because they went over with, you know, urban designers and landscape architects, and that there would be you know, some sort of urban plan required fairly quickly to get things moving and once they were there and spoke to the Timorese and met with Jose Ramos Horta and Xanana Gusmao and they realised that this would be a very long term, or ideally for the Timorese it's a long term process and they don't want people coming in and saying this is what you should do, although they also filled that immediate need for shelter and basic infrastructure and that's what the UN started to do with roads and that sort of thing. But I think that was sort of out of their hands as well, the way that was going.

So there was that combination of making sure that long term it heads in the sort of direction Timorese want it to and they are in control of it and they direct it the way they want it to go. So from that visit they and through discover that they came up with report which does have some ideas of urban planning and its starting off in that direction, but its more about the architecture students and putting something into their hands, through the trips and meetings, that they can then go off and start mapping and use the skills and hopefully continue to train with RMIT.

There were some projects [such as] the old museum which was an old Portuguese building in the centre, that needed to be renovated, and the mapping of these buildings occurred, but the realities were that these people that were students needed to work and they needed money and they couldn't

immediately start studying architecture there. So there was a scattering [of these students] over Timor into other places.

KL: So initially [the students] began working and have they managed to start studying at RMIT?

LG: I think that Norman has still been in that process and the link has been continued but they have actually gone out and started working and I think that's been the demands and the reality of the immediate needs for East Timor. When we were there we went down to Baucau and Norman was hoping to get in touch with a couple of students who were there, and they were no longer there, and during that trip we did some mapping down at Baucau and also Lacecha, not particularly in Dili. Its more just a process and not particularly to achieve an end each time and Norman sees it as a very long term commitment.

KL: So it is ongoing and doesn't have that linear path in that it begins, we work on it and there is a result. [Instead] there is a constant evolution with the project changing and adapting as the situation changes and adapts which is something you get a feel for in the literature and reports on the project.

LG: With the RMIT connection you would have to ask Norman specifically what is happening there, I know that link has been set up, but I'm not sure exactly what is happening with it. Because ideally it would be a transfer of students both from Timor and from [Melbourne] as a real cross cultural [student] exchange. And a couple of them kept working as Architects even though they hadn't completed their training but were doing that sort of work, and others were going off and doing road building and finding other employment.

KL: So you said that you were last there in 2001, how long was that trip?

LG: A week

KL: And you also mentioned mapping as well, so was the process involved very much a documentation process, or documenting with a view to providing advice?

KL: Norman has developed a great relationship with Kirsten Sordon and Xanana Gusmao, and we met with them and it was to do with, apart from the other issues, just personal projects which they wanted to push and develop, and Norman sees that as this ongoing relationship. And one of them was the Xanana Gusmao Reading room and that was an old building that needed some internal fit out, and that was one those little things that happens along the way and so it was meeting with them and discussing ideas with them about what they thought should happen.

KL: So it is very much an ongoing project that will last over generations...

LG: Yes, and there are other things. They've asked Norman to look at different things and he has provided proposals and I guess that all part of their research as well and they've gone off on different paths and sometimes taken things up. But in the mean time there's buildings happening and some of them you sort of looking at them and think its serving its purpose but its sort of happened out of necessity and it hasn't grown from some sort of urban design and you can see that driving around with some of their projects and things that have gone up. And they want to develop their tourism and there are other commercial realities, and hotels are going up and all of that is quite positive too. And in the documentary that started saying that they don't want high rises they want very much to control what it is and that it has that connection to their own culture and their own architecture. And there are all sorts of problems happening with the hotels and things where people want to put something up quickly.

KL: Is it a negotiation process with something like that or are they being quite steadfast and saying we don't want to muck it up and we don't want people charging in.

LG: I think that they are being quite steadfast and making sure you still have to go through all the processes. And initially in 2001 there were some things happening along the coast that looked like no one had any permission or control and they'd just put things up and sewerage was going into the sea and that's all a while ago, and that being controlled I think, but also since then they've had other occasions of violence and that sort of thing and things sometimes take a step back and there's all the health issues so I guess its a matter of priority But at that stage you could see, three and a half years ago, there was that danger that that was going to spread and happen. I think that's been held back a bit and controlled

KL: In the [ABC doco] Jose Ramos Horta was saying that it was ludicrous to put corrugated iron roofs on top of houses in such tropical conditions, in seems crazy to be putting on something that absorbs so much heat, when traditional methods have evolved to the specific conditions of the locality,. How did that start to come together in terms of the planning and the process and building up the suggestions, was that becoming a strong idea in coming up with the forms of these building might take?

LG: I think that that was an immediate answer to providing shelter, those sheets of corrugated iron and these kits that they could re-roof houses that had lost their roofs. They don't see it as a long term answer because traditionally they do use thatch and grasses and that sort of thing and its a more sustainable way of building, but also as a new nation they also want to be involved in new ideas as

well as a sort of a combination. But at the time it was in your face, all this corrugated iron because that was the immediate answer. And the craftsmen and tradesmen they are used to their traditional methods. I think that its just time though, it takes a particular amount of time. When we were there, there was one particular road along the beach and over that week we were sort of watching some people thatching a roof. It was quite amazing the skills [involved] but when you compare it to nailing on some corrugated iron it doesn't take as much time.

I think that from Jose perspective he want to make sure that it was something that was ...

KL:... temporary rather than a permanent measure...

LG: yeah...

KL: Its quite interesting the pragmatic necessity of say, getting a roof on a house to keep the elements out really highlights [the different options]. That thatch roofing which is [on the one hand] traditional and has evolved as a sustainable to the area, where as [on the other hand] there is still a view to adopting the methods that are available and its not just simply a matter of saying, well, the traditional way is the only way we are going to do it. Was there a lot of discussion in terms of evolving the local with wider technology

LG: Yes, I think so, the Timorese architecture students very much look to the West, and they are quite enthralled with the ideas of contemporary materials and that's inevitable. They might push more in that direction, and it might be more the older generation who are trying to make sure that those... things aren't lost...

KL: Indeed, I am quite curious to know if the discussion was seen as quite positive and that it was seen that there is now this opportunity to begin to really experiment...almost..?

LG: I don't know if it got to that point. I think it was more Normans meeting with the initial group it was more about starting to map demolished buildings and what needs to go and what needs to stay, I don't think it even got to that point.

KL: No, I'm sure that it didn't realistically, again it was something that comes out of the documentary, and I thought there might have been a focus on that idea, and I was curious as to how it featured... Again, with this sort of design it is very much focused on the practical. Initially I started out with a [strong interest] in design for need, or crisis design which, doubly, made this work that was happening in East Timor really interesting for me. Because I am exploring design which happens outside of the client/market model, design which is often [about providing the basic needs of] clean

water, shelter, electricity, sanitation etc. How can we provide those sorts of things quickly and efficiently within a small budget. As well as the practice of participatory design was something I was curious about...though I have moved away from that idea. Often there isn't time for [this sort of consideration] and it does come up when things are going too fast

LG: I think that's something that you would hope would happen. I mean initially its about water and electricity and the schools. And they've rebuilt the polytechnic, which was largely sort of destroyed and they've re-built that and students are now studying again there, so they've got these courses and things happening so it almost like, once these students are through ...

KL: Its almost that next stage or logical progression...I was curious about, with the gap pf knowledge that exists due to the students studying in Indonesia had their studies cut short leaving that knowledge and skills ... How much has your own experience as a designer come into play with the necessities of [the project]? When your working in [Australian] urban design you might necessarily be providing the same sort of basic infrastructure ... so what experience do you find yourself actually drawing from when you were over there?

LG: Well Its just observing, I mean your there for such a short time, And Norman has been there more often and I still think its a case of him still observing. I mean I was only there for a week so it just taking it all in. Its such an amazing place and there is that incredible history that mix of buildings – the Portuguese, The Indonesian and the traditional thatch buildings. So we did a lot of just recording with photographing and all of that and just absorbing ... So Norman has got an amazing database of all these different buildings types and areas and hopefully that could be of use to the Timorese. I think as far as all of that goes, its something that is difficult to actually... Because its actually absorbing information you don't get to actually put down a set of rules as too how you would then go about it. Its looking at local materials that have been traditional used, whether it is in the Indonesian buildings too,, the traditional Timorese and Portuguese... Its looking at how you reference that yet not pastiche it, copy it and keep to a contemporary way of looking at buildings, but referencing that. Its not some sort of kitsch theme park or anything

KL: Well, I think that is a very interesting point, especially when you do talk about things like observation it becomes very much a process of recording before working or before even beginning to think about the actual doing/building/constructing part [of the project]. Is there a much more involved element to that observation, compared to say your usual practice when mapping a site?

LG: There is other research that you then do with bamboo, methods of construction with bamboo – there are beautiful ways of connecting bamboo that I had never come across before – and that’s through, Norman had done some research and found some Portuguese texts and beautiful drawings – and it takes you on to other directions.

KL: DO you find that in that learning process it becomes very much about researching and learning for your own curiosity – and you begin to find out things you had not previously know about before – do you find that this presents a unique opportunity to [explore when working on a project like this?

LG: Yeah, because it has to be so specific, I mean a specific experience like that draws you in a certain direction and I guess Normans experience working in Vietnam physically you can actually see the building that has developed out of that, so he’s gone through that process as well, where as compared to Timor its not something you can... there different conditions working in similar climate, observing a new set of historical designs and putting it into practice, and you have deadlines. But in Timor, its happening in areas, say with the reading room or something like that. With one of the project there’s been discussion about using... José’s house he has a particular group of people who he’d bring over from the village to construct in a certain way. But that opportunity to source that specific knowledge and bring those people in to build in a certain way. I’m trying of think of ways you might set up a sort of..., similar to here where you have certain regulations, say your dealing with a historic building. You’re not encouraged to copy something or an existing design, your encouraged to build something that is contemporary and deals with that. They might hopefully set up the same or similar set of rules that apply to East Timor, and the will have all these amazing skills that they can source. Its all in they’re experience and they’re skill its nothing that’s written down. Here when you design something someone has a set of plans and details, and obviously you need that for a building in East Timor but where there is certain type of traditional skill {being used} your not going to give someone the details and say this is how we want it done. And that would be passed on by, I presume by an informal apprenticeship, though showing someone what to do.

KL: Well I think that highlights these interesting points of difference, where you are used to working one way yet you then have to rethink or negotiate another way of working...

LG: With a lot of the buildings that have already been built there, if its an architect form another culture or another country, often they will just end up getting builders and labourers from their own country, who know how to do what they’re building, that’s the fast way of doing it which is not particularly what they [the Timorese] want. But you know initially there were big building companies over there just getting things done. But to use particular local skills its going to be a particularly fast way of doing that if you’re trying to integrate it with... So the ideal way is that these local architecture

students are the ones who direct it. The best way is that you can work in association with them in the future or the can source outside skills and help but not as controlling what they are doing it s more that they are utilising what they need,. And that they are controlling the whole project.

KL: That really, for me, is the most positive an inspiring element of this whole project. That there is an acknowledgment of the fact that its not about ‘my way’ vs ‘your way’ rather it is about the idea of saying ‘its your area, and you can work to allow it to take on whatever form that you feel that it needs and we are here to assist’. Very much a supportive, instead of a directive role and the local architects, designers and builders... by relying on the local knowledge and experience, techniques and technologies you are reliant on the local architects directing how these buildings take they’re form.

LG: Its almost like facilitating how things can happen. And there’s many other people and groups that are I think focused on that idea. There’s a Baucau working group, they’re involved with a couple of local councils in Melbourne and Timorese who are looking at one part of Timor. I guess it were it becomes purely commercial that maybe those sort of processes get left by the wayside. But eventually there has to be a way of working and a way of them developing. because inevitably a lot of the construction is going to be commercial that will have to sort of working in. I think at the moment it is hopefully the start of...

KL: A process and way of working that filter through to that commercial level...?

LG: Yes...

KL: Actually I’d like to return to the point where you mentioned that you had to work with traditional crafts people and local builders I was curious as communication came into it. Were you having to mediate through a third party who would relay your idea to the builders?

LG: I hadn’t has that experience that experience, but Norman had worked with interpreters over there. A lot of the people we spoke with do speak some English but then there’s the danger that the true meaning is lost somewhere in between because often there is no way of translating.

KL: Actually, that is quite interesting, and I understand that perhaps Norman was the one with more experience here, but perhaps even in your discussions with him, I was wondering to what extent did [the projects] adapt or evolve, possibly even the idea of intuitively designing as opposed to a perhaps more controlled and planned out process, though granted the building process [here] is often problematic – councils etc. but I was wondering how [translation] would change the nature of the game...?

LG: It would have to, the whole way of working and communicating in East Timor is quite different. You know, listening to people like Xanana and Jose they tell wonderful stories to explain points of view, its not this quick linear way of doing things. And that's essentially their way they are [as people] then that is going to overflow into all the things that they do, and its totally unfamiliar compared to some of the ways you work here. We put all these constraints on time and budget and that sort of thing which, obviously their going to have that, but, as far as just learning about the way they work on communicating, yeah, like you said, it feeds off into other directions, and it takes them a while to end up at whatever point you might end up at...

There was a conversation we had with Xanana that was extremely sort of expressive and its not a matter of straight out telling you something in particular and I think that's the way... Maybe its a lot to do with the say even the climate as well...

KL: Well I guess this comes down to those personal stories that you might have from being over there. Did you feel – and this is something that came out of my discussion with Ruth, where she felt that not only is it difficult to take in all these cultural differences, but she also felt that like there was in one sense this silence that existed around her, when she would travel in bemo's people would act as if she wasn't there because she looks white and therefore she won't understand us and they keep talking, and all of a sudden she might say something in Indonesian, and all of a sudden they would become interested in how she knows Indonesian...So she talked very much about this ideas of when you do come to a place that's new you have a really different way of seeing things and slowly things might become familiar, though you might have not gotten that same feeling of the familiar given that you were only over there for such a short period. But if you could offer even some reflections on that initial feeling of being in a completely new place...?

LG: I guess with that initial group they had quite a short time as well, I think it was about a week, and trying to gather all these impressions, even apart from the shock, it was even quite shocking over a year later, there's still so many buildings that haven't been repaired or there's a lot of destruction still. There is all that to take in apart from the incredible contrast between blackened and destroyed buildings and beautiful coast line and beautiful mangrove areas. And the landscape is just incredibly beautiful and the people are, you know, so gentle and absolutely beautiful as well. So your looking at all these things, this terrible destruction that they've had to experience, and even then trying to comprehend that its not some isolated thing that's happened it's been 25 years of unimaginable struggle.

I think that was the immediate, kind of, trying to sort of deal with all those sorts of contrasts and almost then to sort of observe, record and map certain buildings and areas. And you put all those things in together when you get back. And I think also, I mean I had this ridiculous, unfortunate experience of getting Dengi Fever when I was over there, which it was about 3 days after I got back I think, that I got quite sick. And I was really angry that that had happened, because I was pretty careful but obviously not enough, because then that broke the follow on, coming back as well, just to gather together what we had done. And we had done quite a few drawings, and we had all the video recordings and photographs. But with that break...Then finally getting back to looking at it all again and there was another gap, which maybe was quite an interesting way, with my fever...But the whole experience was pretty incredible. But Norman, it would be quite interesting to get his perspective because he's been back again and again, and just seeing the development too and the changes, and in that we it's been really positive to see that things are happening. And there were, sort of, in and around Dili, businesses and shops opening, and restaurants and markets, and there was the textiles market, people were selling cloth and things. I think that 18 months latter, or so, there was some more violence and a couple of those places took a backwards step, so that was an incredible process there...

I'm hopefully going back there with Norman soon, and looking forward to seeing it again. And there are some things that might be happening soon, we'll hopefully be going when... I think this year he's probably had two trips and its probably been more communicating and gathering together information but maybe the next one there might be some more concrete stuff happening. Again its so ridiculous saying that because you're not sort of looking to that immediately anyway, because its such a slow process. But maybe with the students, I don't know how he's going with that. I mean as far as impressions go, we did travel quite a bit, but as far as that goes it was such a short period of time, people have been there for much longer periods than that, and even at that stage only a year after the referendum the UN presence was also another big sort of major impression because they was a huge ship moored out in the harbour, and the UN vehicles, you felt that the over riding presence in Dili was the UN, which was more the kind of, you know the UN headquarters, the vehicles, the ship, were the sort of major thing and around that there was the markets and the fish markets along the beach and small differences happening, there are just so many contrasts.

Because its taking on the climatic factors, with tropical structure of the buildings, the scientific side of that and the emotive side of that and these varying historical traditions that they have, the skills that are available, the material that are available. And even with the issues to do with siting and ownership of land because that was particularly difficult, because that was even unclear as most of the people had fled, so who did the land belong to. And building in Dili which is low lying and basically its like building in a swamp area, where as up in the mountains its much cooler and the volcanic soil and a real myriad of issues there. And I think that visiting Timor you can see immediately the particular

buildings that answer an immediate need and have gone up fairly quickly versus something that has local craft involved...

KL: Does that fit in better, or even make more sense...?

LG: It helps to develop this picture of what's happening there.

KL: Do you see your own involvement with this project as something that you feel it is something you can contribute to.

LG: Yeah, definitely. And I guess that Norman has sort of enabled that by allowing us to be involved. But even outside of that I hope to be able to somehow contribute in whatever way. I think once you've been there and met people, you want to be able make an effort to help in some way and hopefully we are doing that too with the embassy..

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW WITH NORMAN DAY

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Interview with:

Norman Day

Norman Day + Associates

27.10.04

Karl Logge: Within your article in AR Australia (2002) as well as in the documentary featured on the ABC you talked about the fact that the initial study group began by calling itself ETUDE but it was later decided that this was the wrong title for the group. What were your initial expectations of what you were going to be doing and can you tell me about the process whereby you reassessed your role in East Timor? Did the group actually create another name for the project?

Norman Day: ETUDE was “en rip-off francais”. Meaning – ET Design enterprise – when it became clear plain there was no urban designing of significance required at that time, we altered course – listening not telling. We had no idea when we started what help we could offer. No other name for the group seemed needed

KL: My research hopes to uncover ways in which negotiating the differences in cultural understandings and needs can be both problematic and positive when working on projects such as reconstructing East Timor. In what ways did you negotiate cultural difference and how important do you think negotiation is to the process or outcomes of a design project?

ND: Ours is not a design project, we have designed nothing but a system to empower people through education and guidance. There may be cultural differences, but my experience - in Australia with our indigenous people, in Timor Leste and in Vietnam - is that people are trusting, reliable, happy, willing to engage, honest, friendly, creative - and - needy, poor, conniving, complex, damaged, destructive. Same same.

KL: I think that one of the most positive and interesting aspects of the project has been the implementation of a transferral of skills through a student exchange program with RMIT. How important do you think it is to the project for there to be a two way exchange between East Timor and Australia, and how is this element of the project going?

ND: We need to empower them to rebuild their own nation. How that happens is an educational model and that is negotiated with individuals as we go. We do not really want to take skilled people away from Timor Leste, the nation needs them, so the idea of student exchange is a limited one, better to train them on site and have the training contribute to a better understanding of the country, skills, architecture, traditions, possibilities, extent of damage, etc.. There are some student exchanges in place, but I reiterate, our major concern on the ground is to keep people alive, feed them, clothe them, educate them, house them, enable babies to survive their first months, provide water to villages ---- give them a chance. No rules for this. Exchanging people between nations is a part of the idea, I am still not convinced that "doing good" by us travelling to Timor Leste and meeting people is the answer, part of the answer only. Better much to donate the cost of that travel to the Alola Foundation so people can eat and live - for now.

KL: In the interview with Louise we discussed the use of both traditional & contemporary materials and techniques in East Timor, particularly to do with the use of many traditional building technologies such as thatching and bamboo joinery. I was hoping to find out your view on the issue – perhaps even specifically in relation to any experiences and meetings you might have had with the Timorese architectural students who Louise referred to as looking “very much to the West and ... quite enthralled with the idea of contemporary materials”? To what extent has there been a negotiation between the local and traditional with the new and global in your work in East Timor?

ND: Reconstruction must be sustainable. Many materials and ideas from our world do not work: for example:

- steel cladding / the Murcutt shed.
- glass walls.

- air conditioning.
- any material imported.
- carpet.
- stud walls and plasterboard.
- stormwater drainage systems.
- plastic fabrics.
- 'disposable' emergency housing.

Poor nations (and I would class TL as the poorest I have seen - 5th or 6th world) aspire to their understanding of progress and western culture. They imagine skyscrapers, glass walls, air conditioning as symbols of development and success. Just when the rest of the developed world is looking at sustainable futures like thatching, organic architecture, non-fueled cooling, sustainable outcomes and renewable materials.

KL: In your AR article you also talked about the fact that the Timorese leaders did not believe in consolidating their infrastructure in city centres, but intended to support the traditional patterns of village living. Have you begun identifying some design outcomes which will assist or enhance the lives of people in remote areas on the island? What form is this sort of design taking? What experience and ideas do you draw from when designing in this way, which may be very different to the 'urban design' you would do in Australia?

ND: We are designing nothing at all.

The idea is to maintain Dili and Bacau as 100,000 and 75,000 cities. So, no plans to extend either city. If accommodation and jobs are unavailable in those centres, the people will return to their villages. There, they can live as ever, communities stay intact. Government agencies will be located all over the half-island, not centred in Dili. Opportunities for living and learning will be made all over not centralised. Collections of villages, known as succos, will provide places for meetings, schooling, gathering,

celebrations, and will be fitted with means of communications - computers, email, WWW-net.

KL: Both in the interview with Louise and in the articles you have written, the mapping and documentation process has been described as a large and very important part of the project. How has mapping featured in your previous work and was the mapping process in Dili and Timor in any way different to other mapping processes you would use in different cultural settings (for example in either Australia or Vietnam)? To what extent will this mapping be used as the project progresses?

ND: Mapping is simply collecting information, learning and understanding the scope of the problems - and employing people in TL so they have an income, something useful to do, they learn about their nation and we all understand better the state of damage and what needs to be done to repair. I have not operated in a war zone before, so I have not done this before. Vietnam is different. But always the mapping I refer to is like geographical mapping. So it takes into account culture, land, people, vegetation, structures, art, materials, weather, history, traditions, vernacular manners, architecture, religionsetc. It should go on forever.

KL: As you mentioned in the documentary, reconstructing East Timor is going to be a long term project, and understandably so. How do you feel about the idea that this is working on such a long time frame, and what opportunities does this bring to the project?

ND: I have the rest of my life to help. It is not a professional/commercial relationship, so whatever I can do I will. But remember, we are reconstructing the skills of the people who will themselves reconstruct their nation.

KL: At what stage did the East Timor project become connected with Architects Without Frontiers, or was it an AWF initiated project? To what extent do you feel that this project is building and/or working with the AWF objectives?

ND: AWF came about with Esther Charlesworth asking us to join our Timor Leste work

with her efforts in Bosnia, etc. We agreed the two tasks seemed related and hope to use AWF as a vehicle for funding and gathering other people who might assist in Timor.

KL: How much has your own experience as a designer come into play with the necessities of the project? What experiences do you find yourself drawing from when you are working in East Timor?

ND: Listening, looking, keeping an eye and a mind open, hoping, caring, treating people with respect. Just normal life matters really.

Regards, Norman