

## The Third Lens

Making Sense of Thesis Complexities Now!

Questions submitted by

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**NextD**  
DEFUZZ THE FUTURE!

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**Jaime Barrett Introduction:** In pursuing my thesis studies at Emily Carr Institute, I have noticed a lot of buzz around your web site. Myself included, designers have benefited from the vast amount of interviews, postings and information regarding the future of design. While a lot of my studies try to seek out social sustainability, I am also interested in creating a dialogue with others to uphold the professional practice of graphic design in particular—looking into ways of encouraging cross-discipline working models; trying to link creative process from the designer and the learning process of the client; as well as integrating social sustainability. NextD discusses the practice of design as a thinking tool, which is a large component to my own research.

As a designer, I see a need to be able to engage in a new relationship with the client—one that benefits both client and their customer by way of creative process/thinking. I'm focusing mostly on social sustainability and this kind of research and process is part of my theme—crossing disciplines and collaborating with other thinkers.

I'm trying to get as many vantage points as possible and wondering if there could be a way to interview someone [at NextD] who could answer some questions as to how NextD came about to incorporate these new ways of thinking and creating? I understand you've got to be busy and I appreciate the time you're taking by reading this email.

**GK VanPatter:** Hi Jaime: Sorry for the delay but we have been swamped here. I will be glad to answer a few of your questions and suggest we engage via Ask NextD so we could share your questions and our answers with other graduate students. Eight questions is a good number. Fire away when you are ready.

**Jaime Barrett Question 1:**

I noticed [on the NextD site] that you have interviewed a lot of people who are at the forefront of participatory design, co-creation, etc. but I don't see a lot of designers, per se. Why is that?

**GK VanPatter:** OK I understand that you have been studying graphic design. Let me address your question in this way: I read the research paper that you sent to me entitled "Towards an understanding of the crisis: graphic design as a research tool to enable, empower and redefine." In your paper I saw reference to 80+ different people including an avalanche of high profile designers who are fixtures in the traditional design press including: Andrew Blauvelt, Meredith Davis, Jessica Helfand, Steven Heller, Jeffrey Keedy, Ellen Lupton, Katherine McCoy, Rick Poynor, Gunnar Swanson, Lorraine Wild, Donald Norman, Peter Bogaards, William Drenttel, DK Holland, Rudy Vanderlans, Clement Mok, John Maeda and numerous others. You obviously reference the work of many smart people. If you have read the works and points of view from all of those experts help me better understand where you are in your learning journey. What happened along the way? What is it that you seek that you have not already found? Why are you now writing to us at NextD?

**Jaime Barrett Question 2:** I'd like to answer your questions you've posed, and then respond with my own back to you. My own professional journey has led me to question the efficacy of the system typically found in graphic design: the client simply tells you what to do (assumes that you don't know what the client needs) and you do it.

I find this deflating as well as a form of stealing—from the client himself, the client's customers, and from the potential of the working design professional. I'd like to find working alternatives from this model while I'm in school.

The 80+ people I've quoted in my own essay are big names, most likely working outside of the typical model. They are thinkers, authors, and teachers—working to change the system in other ways. Most of those people are not involved in discussing Design 3.0, although many are interested. I unfortunately found out about NextD after I had written the paper. (Which was actually refreshing to know my journey has brought me to a place where others have been, but could have been helpful in framing my essay).

What I seek now in my learning journey is merely a series of connections and discussions that I can cull from people who have traveled other journeys—they can share their stories, teach me what they've learned and help me make up my mind about what I've seen and experienced as well. As I seek to understand you, your practice and the approach you take as a leader in this new model, I wonder how you decided to turn to a way of working that is probably difficult to administer in the real world. From an ethical standpoint, I see what you are proposing will help aid the process so that people who are working together can draw upon their strengths and come to the table as equals. In the previous model, designers were simply a smaller component to the marketing strategy. Now, the designer is gaining importance and influence, which is an exciting time, but also can bring about more challenges.

My question back to you at this point, is asking why you have chosen to present these ideas in the forms you have on the web: why a "dot org" platform? Why not become a tenured professor at a prestigious institution? Who are you trying to reach? and are they receptive?

**GK VanPatter:** When we launched NextD in 2002 we really had no idea that we would tap into something for which there was huge appetite in the design community. Much to our own surprise we quickly saw great interest in what we call "authentic views" into the conditions of design. The creation of NextD grew out of a concern that Elizabeth Pastor and I had regarding the present and future of design innovation leadership. Based on what we observed during the dotcom era we were concerned that designers were falling behind and missing out on opportunities to lead design, to lead innovation because graduate schools were not teaching skills that were competitive in the marketplace. Many design school leaders were simply not getting it. For the most part design was still being taught based on the mistaken assumption that it will always be designers leading design, leading innovation.

We knew that we were not the problem owners but we wanted to see, to experiment with the idea that we might be able to help by playing a small role in raising awareness around what the problems were and what the solutions might be. This model also fit with our own constraints since we are as practice leaders, constrained by time for this kind of activity. Even though we knew something about solution paths we knew that we were going to have to start by talking first about what the problems were since many in the community especially those in graduate design institution settings were unaware that the problems even existed. So that is why you see us going behind the scenes, behind the promo facades and talking about real issues in NextD Journal.

The sense-making logic that you see us using in the journal comes from our UnderstandingLab practice. There our focus is to make complicated things understandable to people.

In the process of applying that logic to design community research we found ourselves inventing a new kind of design business journalism, one that is focused on sense-making rather than promotion.

We created NextDesign Leadership Institute as an entity outside of our consultancy Humantific to enable us to engage in a different kind of community based research that we then share back with the community. Part of the reason why we chose this somewhat unusual route is that what we are talking about here are big paradigm shifting ideas. Most institutions look for instructors and administrators that will fit within their paradigm. For us to go that route would undermine much of the value that we bring to the table. Even today there are very few institutions around who are visionary enough to be working in the realm of Design 3.0 but we do see the picture gradually changing and hopefully we have played a small part in that change.

Many people considering undertaking a graduate degree write to us and ask where they can find the land of NextD.☺ Recently we have been asked to participate in designing a new innovation school in Madrid. We started it last month and we will be looking at the school site next week. I understand it is presently an abandoned building so looks like we have quite a chunk of work to do to get it up and running. We enjoy such adventures.☺

**Jaime Barrett Question 3:** I had a feeling you were going to discuss graduate schools in this regard, which is somewhat of a disappointment for the school system, but I am one to believe that it is the working professionals (not just designers) that must make this change in the world, not inside the moratorium of the academic system. However, many schools (and some even posted on NextD) are starting to use this system of which you speak. Do you see this as still being somewhat of a paradigm model you've discussed—that is, even though they are adapting your new system, it is still in the world of academia, government budgets, pedagogical methods that could be outdated / limited? Is it possible to take a model of what you are discussing on NextD and use it in the educational world? Or is this model best experienced while working in a professional setting?

**GK VanPatter:** I should explain that we created the Design 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 sense-making framework after completing many conversations with educators and others spanning a period of several years. Creating and explaining Design 3.0 took a lot of synthesis and work. It is in some ways one of the outcomes of NextD research. It is not so much a system as it is a way of looking at and making sense of the various states of design from a process point of view. Several other frameworks exist but most are focused on content knowledge. Some have identified hundreds of permutations of design practice from a content perspective. We thought a simple three part lens was more useful in terms of providing policy makers and others with a useful tool that they can use in everyday conversations. In meetings it catches on quickly.

One of the reasons why we created the framework was because the word design means different things to different people.

We wanted to try to make sense of how the new business press and others were talking about design. When the folks over at Business Week and Fast Company talk about this “design thinking” thing what are they really talking about we wondered.

Using the framework it becomes more clear that what they are talking about is primarily Design 1.0 and 2.0. What the two leading graduate schools are teaching in this country is essentially 2.0.

You can see the new business press and the two leading schools here walking hand in hand regarding 2.0. There is a lot of energy around chasing the next iPod. You can find those combined forces out there in the marketplace activity depicting 2.0 as the leading edge of the present and even the future of design. It is likely that they do not much appreciate that we have pointed out a 3.0.

To your point about practice versus academia, there is an emerging community of 3.0 consultancies and each have a slightly different take. Just as there are different ways to practice within the 3.0 space there are different ways to teach it. In essence what we are really talking about here is equipping designers to engage in the WHAT to do and not be constrained in the HOW to do the WHAT box while others take control of defining the WHAT. This expansionist view of design can present conflicts to those who have in mind keeping that strategic space for themselves, ie the folks who went to business school, ie the readers of the new business press. While others are on the move into the design space, designers have to be on the ball and on the move as well. Otherwise we will not survive in a form to our liking.

We believe the future of design rests on our ability to lead and help others define the WHAT and the HOW. The 3.0 framework defines fundamental attributes necessary to take on that kind of work. How and with what schools and practitioners do that is up to them. We are not here to prescribe our own tools and methods to everyone else on the planet. Our aim at NextD is to simply point out that there is more to design than 2.0. We do that with the understanding that the challenges facing organizations, facing the planet be they social, or otherwise can not always be solved by creating more consumer products services or experiences even though these things remain the primary skill offering in many design schools.

We believe design is capable of much more. To a large degree this involves grappling with the constraining politics of the marketplace, design history and getting out of the way of ourselves so to speak.

**Jaime Barrett Question 4:** This is an interesting point, to which I've spoken with other designers who have said quite the opposite—that to be a good designer, one must focus on the HOW and not the WHAT since there can't be enough time in the day to do both. I find there has to be a fine line between these worlds or else designers will never fully engage in the greater potential of creating meaningful artifacts beyond the limitations of the current models of research. When a designer has a bigger and clearer understanding of the HOW and the WHAT, I can only imagine more and more inspiration and innovation can grow from this way of working. Many companies are engaging in new these models, where the design could either end up being a tangible or intangible object—it doesn't have to be part of the cradle-to-grave system in which most designers trained (as well as the top design schools you speak of).

In my thesis work, since you and I have last talked, I have ventured upon a pursuit of researching ethics and social sustainability within the practice of design.

I'm wondering if you might have any interest in ethics of your own, as to the building of this Design 3.0 framework? Could this model be a stepping-stone that could lead to ethical ways of working?

(While I can see the obvious answer: a model of collaboration draws upon the specialties and skills of many others, which creates an atmosphere of encouragement and inspiration, versus an environment that promotes corporate-ladder-climbing and back-biting).

Was the question of ethics part of the puzzle for you when you first began this pursuit of defining Design 3.0 with those you interviewed and researched?

**GK VanPatter:** I see where you are coming from. Lots of graduate and post graduate students write to us and ask to visit. Each month we try to make some time for this activity and we learn a lot from hearing about what students are thinking about and trying to figure out.

As a graduate student studying design and as a design practitioner you will inevitably find many designers who are most comfortable with traditional modes of design. No big surprise there. You will find many practicing Design 1.0 and are quite happy to continue on that route. I would say most people practicing "graphic design" are operating within the 1.0 space and are happy to do so. You can see a lot of this kind of work celebrated over at the AIGA in the 1.0 hall of fame over there. At NextD we do not discount that work but rather talk about what 1.0 means in terms of process skills, interaction dynamics and scale of challenges. Design 1.0 skills are particularly useful in small scale challenges where intuitive process is all that is required. Those 1.0 skills tend not to scale well to larger more complex challenges that involve cross-disciplinary teams and stay open for long periods of time.

We are sometimes asked if NextD is trying to change the existing design community. The simple answer that we give is absolutely not. We are not that naïve. We are well aware that there are many strong entrenched forces against change in the design community and that includes forces in practice as well as in education. Not everyone is comfortable with change. Many in our community still have very restrictive and traditional notions of what a designer is and does. Many seek to hold onto that world as it is one that they themselves are masters of. Rather than trying to change those existing modes what we are doing is creating and explaining a new path through the forest. It is not intended to be a path for everyone. We seek to create more diversity of paths and in particular strategic paths through the forest.

On the other hand, when we present Design 3.0 we do talk in an authentic way about what we call the big squeeze on design today, the squeeze from the tactical bottom and at the strategic top that is already having tremendous impact on the present and future of design. We talk about the implications of the big squeeze for Design 1.0 that are already underway in the marketplace. Unless one is living in fantasyland it would be impossible not to know that the 1.0 activity space is collapsing.

If you are in design school learning how to add value by designing logos its probably a good time to consider changing majors. If you are here in North America a huge chunk of that old 1.0 work is simply gone. Do it yourself technology and off-shoring continue to take their toll on the 1.0 activity space. That's the reality of it.

Students who choose to build their careers in that direction should understand what it means to jump into that life boat. These are things that we try to authentically talk about in the context of NextD Journal. If such issues are not being talked about at your school they certainly should be.

The What/How distinction gets a little tricky. In fact in WorkshopONE one of the things that we teach is how to separate the what from the how. Much of what we teach is related to how. Regarding your questions: Is it teachable, the answer is yes of course. This is what we do in Humantific InnovationLab. In case you have not yet had enough of a career to notice, how is much more sustainable then what. How skills have much longer life spans while the whats keeps changing. Think of the what of the dotcom era.

The tricky part is that historically traditionally design has intermixed what with how knowledge. Sustainability is a what for example. Ethics is a what. Books such as John Thackara's "In the Bubble" and Alex Steffen's "World Changing / A Users Guide to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" are more about the what and less about the how. I believe the World Changing book has one page on problem solving! There are parts of our community who believe that the future of design rests in our ability to be content experts in sustainability, service, social issues etc. This is the activist model of design, designers as content experts, designers as moral, social and or environmental activists. (If you are interested in the history of this thinking see NeoTranscendentalism in the readers notes to Double Consciousness Conversation 9.2 between John Chris Jones and myself)

You are right to point out that many designers focus more on the how but what the how most talk about is the how of framed challenges. What we are talking about at NextD is how to equip designers with advanced how skills that will enable them to operate in the strategic space where the challenge and opportunity framing is occurring, the unframed space. Traditional forms of design did not engage until some one, often not the designer defined the challenge. From your comments above it appears that you have had first hand knowledge of this yourself. A so called design brief is a framed challenge.

The contrasting reality is that much of what we face in the world today is not framed up in conveniently siloed challenges all organized according to vertical disciplines. To say this is a slightly different way is not enough to focus on the how of framed challenges. It is the how of complex unframed challenges that is the steep learning curve for most practicing designers who were trained to grapple with challenges framed by others.

Of course there are many ways to contribute and there are always going to be some among us who want to contribute to world peace by designing posters for world peace while others want to engage in the actual challenges that are involved there. It really comes down to choosing a future for yourself and luckily we live in societies where we have such choices. The good news is that we are likely at a water shed moment in design education history. Each month we hear of new innovation related programs starting up and forming so we are optimistic that new generations of students will have many more choices to consider.

Lets keep in mind that no school is perfect and a big part of graduate education involves training yourself!

In the spirit of trying to help you as much as possible here in a short time span let me turn and ask you to help me understand what you mean when you say that you want in your thesis to focus on ethics and social sustainability? What does that really mean? What do you want to do after completing your degree and what are you trying to figure out?

**Jaime Barrett Question 5:** I could not agree more that a graduate education involves many things pertaining to one's decisions about the world, about professional practice and about breaking from old models (and coming to terms with one's identity inside this framework). My program is anything but Design 1.0—if anything I have a daily existential crisis—wondering what will happen to Design 1.0. I have lived that life, been successful and awarded within that framework. Design 2.0 is a world I've just recently dabbled in (and have been suspended in last semester) as I worked my way through different designers and their thoughts as authors (aforementioned in question 1).

Right now, I am standing at a juncture: to decide where to take my definition of design, where to take the skills I know I have and to be able to apply them to something I believe in. Design 3.0 is of interest to me, but I'm not sure how to get there being the only one in a city and environment that hardly has an interesting Design 1.0 scene. Another facet of myself personally, is someone steeped in the interest of working ethically with clients as well as with their customers. I now see these two as forming some kind of special union within myself and drawing conclusions, studying how to best reach customers—all through reconciling my love of branding with my love of best-practices.

I see the significance and the power of upholding the profession of design—and building designers as critical thinkers who can impart their wisdom—to inform a new way of thinking. This carries over to the idea that designers need to join the discussions of strategy, innovation, collaboration, economics, politics, and so on. A characteristic of a designer is typically someone able to sit and think about the unknown—to be comfortable for a spell with the gray area and to reframe, think through and work out ideas through the creative process.

I see your Design 3.0 model becoming so much more within the different realms of working—basically, the world's ecology of society, economy, culture—all would benefit from a huge brainstorm and creative process in order to get ourselves onto new ways of living and thinking. Designers have tools to share—the ability to learn, to play, to suspend our thinking in the fuzzy front-end (as Liz Sanders would say)—and to share these tools with others who have not been capable of this way of thinking, nor been taught it.

You are correct that the ethics are a WHAT (which comprises somewhat of a practical side to the thesis component), but the HOW, is a greater, unclear, unresolved component to my research. In fact, I see the HOW as something that you come to experience without creating too much of a framework around it since much of it will come from collaboration and an idea will be borne from the serendipitous co-creation, which will then fuse to a new idea.

What do I want to do after I graduate? I see so many potentials. I would love to teach clients the importance of design and the importance of the creative process as well as teach models of the creative process (individually and collaboratively). I would love to end up working with a research team in a design studio working and creating synthesis between the client, the designer, the researcher and the customer. I would like to make branding ethical. I would like to use design to defuzz the picture (the way your UnderstandingLab shows stories through image, diagram and graphs). I would like to help small business owners create meaningful solutions that are also sustainable.

I would like to fuse the thought process with the working relationship with the present-day political issues of corporate distrust. I also see a designer as capable of fusing thought, creating synthesis between ideas (strategy or otherwise)—I'd love to do this on many levels, not just design.

The question I have for you now is this: is this idea I am trying to work out in my own thesis pursuit seem to be lacking? I'm not sure how one goes about bringing up experiences and educating one's self on collaboration and thinking. You seem to be perplexed by my journey—and to be honest, I'm just starting to fill in holes here and there. I am concerned that I have I fooled myself into thinking there is a way to invite myself over to the innovative thinking table when, maybe, there are no chairs left? How do you make possibilities happen when no one is even aware what you are capable of doing?

**GK VanPatter:** Well you have many, many pieces there but rest assured that I am not at all “perplexed” by your journey. Yes, “standing at a juncture” is a good way to describe where you seem to be. Perhaps above all else and regardless of which direction or directions you choose for yourself it is important to hold onto your optimism, your energy, your sense of humor and even your courage. That's all great stuff. Some how I am getting the sense that this will not be a problem for you..:-) At the end of the day, whatever direction you choose for yourself it should be something that you like to do, that you can get paid well for doing and that you are genetically encoded to do. I learned this three part construct myself from Jim Collins and find it quite useful.

Many of the graduate students who come to see us during their thesis research seem to be grappling with the too many options and possible directions problem. For many this is a common graduate student experience. Your mind is opening and you can see many possibilities. It also sounds like you have been out in the real world to experience what is and what isn't going on there under the banner of design. That's all good fact finding stuff. You may or may not be aware of it, since you are inside your own story but you have many connected and unconnected pieces in your text above, in your thinking above. You have numerous fuzzy situations, facts, challenge formulations, solution formulations and even a few action implementation steps all intermixed.

While I am not exactly sure where you are in your thesis journey it sounds like you are trying to figure out what your thesis might be and in turn what you might become after graduate school. It might be helpful for you to apply some process. Hey what a concept! I have no idea if they teach any of this in your school or not. The interesting thing to consider is that the situation you personally face grappling with all the complexity of choice and intermixed challenges around you is not so different from the situation facing your clients.

Making sense of mountains of complexity, not data complexity or information complexity but rather complexity in the problem/opportunity space is likely going to be for you and your clients a great skill to have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century...:-)

Lets come back to this as it is related to figuring out what you are genetically encoded to be.

There are so many things in the mix here I am not quite sure from which direction to approach in this constrained format. Lets try this route. Lets talk for a moment about precisions. In every graduate school you learn a set of precisions that are most often based on those that the faculty have mastered.

Typically in the land of graduate graphic design education the precisions involve communication theory, design history, type, framed format problem solving, conceptualization, technology tools etc.

That is all great stuff and very few of those precisions will help you make sense of the complexity facing you, the complexity that you are writing about here. So what does that mean? Very simply it means there are likely other precisions that you will need to master if you want to engage in large scale complex social challenge work. You can be a heroic adapter of your precisions to other contexts but it will be extremely difficult without appropriate precisions mastery. This is getting back to the posters for world peace story. In the marketplace, in part being driven by design education institutions you can find lots of energy to encourage young people to take on world hunger and world peace and little acknowledgement that new skills, new precisions might be needed. The point is in your text above I see numerous big activity space ideas. You might find your activity ideas out in front of the skills you are learning in your program. Unfortunately this too is not an uncommon graduate school experience right now.

Also in the mix here is likely your own problem solving preferences. When we see some one who has a zillion ideas and wants to hold onto them all this tells me this person is likely a Conceptualizer. I have no idea if your school provides you with any insights into this aspect of who you are but it can be extremely useful, quite important.

Now equipping you with B4Design precisions is not going to be possible here. There is no instant pill you can take for that but there are a couple of things we can do that might help take the fuzz off the many possibilities that you face.

So first things first, lets get you to do your profile and then I want you to reflect upon this question.

When we meet with candidates applying to Humantific we try to determine which world their brains operate best in, which are they inclined to do naturally. In your story above you make reference to both so it gets a little confusing. At Humantific we separate Strange-Making from Sense-Making. Strange-Making is about making the familiar strange. Sense-Making is about making the strange familiar. Historically much of what has been taught in design schools is Strange-Making. Most brand related work is Strange-Making, that is about differencing, how to make one box of cornflakes or company look different than another. That is an entire industry unto itself and many designers enjoy working in that realm.

Strange-Making won't help you much if you have a lot of Sense-Making to do, thus we find it quite difficult to find folks from traditional design backgrounds who are genetically geared towards what we do. Making sense of the complexity in the problem/opportunity space most often requires high degrees of Sense-Making. See what I mean. While all forms of design involve both, the proportion in most design companies is BIG Strange-Making, SMALL Sense-Making. At Humantific the proportion is the reverse, especially in the UnderstandingLab work that you made reference to earlier.

So think about what your own story and your own brain. Reflect on your own thinking. Are you a natural born Sense-Maker or does your brain incline naturally towards Strange-Making? If you had to make a choice which would it be?

**Jaime Barrett Question 6:** My instant answer would be to say that I probably have a bit of both in my blood. But when I think about what I get more excited about (which could perhaps point me in the direction of knowing what I'm better at in these terms), I intuitively think more about (and more passionately about) the Sense-Making scenario. If I look at it from this angle of personal interest, then I see that I am definitely more excited about thinking through the world of Sense-Making. I've never really bought into the Strange-Making phenomenon through branding (then again, I'm not really a firm believer of originality, but that's another story).

Maybe a personal example of this would be what a fellow grad student once said to me in our philosophy class. She has made reference to my comments in class as always being able to find the baseline—the thread of the ideas that we discuss in class—and to point out the thing to which we are all trying to get at, in a way, that I synthesize several of the ideas stated at once into a common theme.

I guess you could say I'm somewhat of a practitioner of this type of Sense-Making in my own personal life as a grad student, too—I recognize at this point in time the lack of frame around my own thesis ideas is in many senses, this type of Sense-Making experience. I know full well that I have to eventually move beyond the fuzziness of the thesis, but I really enjoy being able to conceptualize and generate ideas about what my thesis could be, what I want to do with myself as a designer, and what design means. I see design becoming a possibility to create synthesis and translation for many other groups of people using your models of Design 3.0. I see designers bringing a rich dialogue to the table of the “strategy.”

I also wanted to insert this as a postscript: that the studies I am involved with at Emily Carr are very much closer to a very open-ended model. I have not really delved into any type of constrictive graphic design environment. Most of my studies have focused around philosophy, current general ideas of design (all types, not just graphic) and have centered on thinking, conceptualizing and theory. I have hardly practiced the classical term of design (except for freelance which is another conundrum as well!) Its one thing to study and think through all the places you want to go, but another to educate the client to your full potential and actually put the theory into practice (which is another reason why I approached you in the first place)!

As you suggested I have completed the Innovation Profile. You guessed correctly, I am a Conceptualizer / Generator.

**GK VanPatter:** Yes, I recognized your profile preferences in your thinking and expressions. Conceptualizers prefer to gain knowledge by abstract thinking and use knowledge to generate ideas. They are dot-connectors, pattern makers. Conceptualizers are quite comfortable in the fuzzy front end. They often have some difficulty making decisions and moving to action. Conceptualizers love ideas so much they like to hold onto them all even when they have more than is needed...:-)

OK so you are a Conceptualizer interested in Sense-Making. Have you ever heard of Richard Saul Wurman?

**Jaime Barrett Question 7:** I'm familiar with his work but I can't say I know of him very well. He seems to be an interesting graphic designer who has used his talent to both author projects and frame ideas (derived from his own research)?

**GK VanPatter:** Richard was an early pioneer in the understanding business. He coined the terminology Information Architect long before the term was high-jacked and its central meaning altered during the dotcom era by folks in the web business. Richard has created numerous books, many of which you will want to read if you seriously want to go the Sense-Making route. For many of us discovering Richard's work was a turning point in our careers. For sense-makers finding sense-making feels a little like arriving at our genetically encoded home finally. Elizabeth and I were lucky enough to work with Richard some years ago.

In case you might not know, most of the 80+ design celebrities referenced in your "Towards an understanding of the crisis" essay are focused in a very different direction. That might be part of the reason why you have not found what you are looking for there. By reading Conversation 6.1 in NextD Journal you can get a sense of how and why Richard Wurman was making known his view of the "crisis" many years ago! To use a Richard phrase it's about "what drives the train". In sense-making work, aesthetics is certainly on the train but is not driving it as is most often the case in the traditional graphic design business. A good place for you to start would be to read Information Anxiety 2 which Richard republished a few years ago. It is getting a little old now but its still a classic as an introduction to Visual Sense-Making. You can see how a professional information sense-maker thinks there.

I believe we agreed upon you asking eight questions so we are rounding the corner towards that goal. So far we have done some fact finding and utilized two Sense-Making lenses. You have decided that you are a Sense-Maker more so than a Strange-Maker and you have determined that you are a Conceptualizer / Generator. There is one more lens that I can share with you before I go but before we get there lets link back to the beginning of your story and tidy up some of our fact finding. Tell me quickly what you mean by "ethics" and "social sustainability." In your mind, in terms of what you were thinking of doing, what do those two terms mean? If you can tell me that I will make one last suggestion.

**Jaime Barrett Question 8:** Fair enough. This has been very helpful—and quite interesting. I didn't think I'd learn so much about myself in this process. I see ethics and social sustainability being an underlying current that many designers think about but can't seem to fully exert their wishes (and then others don't really think about this).

In my mind's eye, I see ethics is a methodology—trying to maintain an overall responsible approach to design. This is what I mean when I talk about ethics—staying responsible, humble, as selfless as possible and not designing for the sake of self praise, awards, or anything that would bring it back to yourself. I see it as a method of fairness and best-practices. Social sustainability is a branch of ethics—trying to maintain relationships, to maintain well-being in health, emotion, etc. Sustaining humanity instead of trying to gain something off of the backs of others. Trying to do what you would want done to yourself.

I have also tracked my previous 3 year career so far as one trying to reconcile how I feel about designing for large, bottom-line driven corporations (usually linked somehow to unethical practices in third world countries—sweatshops, outsourcing, overseas printing). I do see this as a source of self-conflict. A bigger issue I see is inter-personal relationships where designers always try to impose style much to the client's chagrin, as well as working within a world of disconnect from the client's customer. I see participatory design as a way of releasing the designer from their office space and moving them into a space where they draw inspiration from the customer, completely overstepping the client part. This is where I also see a link to what you are discussing at NextD—if designers engage in more of a co-creation model using it during the fuzzy front end part, this could be a way of engaging in ethics (consciously or not). And I see many opportunities to discuss why NextD and the Design 3.0 model just may be more ethical along these lines (and more sustainable all around, not just socially).

I am curious to link all of these thoughts back to how companies say they are more ethical, but still keep many things hidden (such as BP looking for other methods of fuel, while still maintaining their oil refineries, etc). I hope that this movement of asking the customer what they would want, buy or need would become more of a way for people to empower the economy, take some power away from large corporations, and use that power for the customer when they are *asked* what they would like, not told.

I also see power in being able to connect all designers and encourage dialogue and ways of discussing the ethics issue (in a similar way that you've created a site that networks, collects and disseminates information on Design 3.0). It is a way of building community and talking about ideas instead of keeping them hidden—and publicly displaying the power of readership, of people who are engaging in Design 3.0. I could see the benefit of engaging all sorts of designers and publicly acknowledging, by way of the web, to publicly discuss ethics through Design 3.0—many other designers struggle, and have struggled, with this issue. And what can we all do collectively to push our influence in ways it should be pushed.

I am also trying to think through ways that people learn. What I enjoy about Wurman's work is the ability to give the information to the people and they can make their decisions regarding what he's displayed. I think too often, we don't discuss the WHY with our audience. I see this linking back to ethics and social sustainability, and also co-creation. (This is a new thought, so one that hasn't fully surfaced, but I would like to study more about storytelling, narrative, and new methods / studies of pedagogy). I would like to give more people tools to inform their lives to make their own decisions outside of the pop culture world we live in.

And I want Design to stay. I don't want to lose the talent I have of making logos, branding and organizing information. I like what I do, and I don't want to see people losing clients just because the client has PowerPoint and feels that its just not necessary for a designer to do it (and costs too much). This is quite a sore subject, actually.

Does that help to clarify for the next lens you speak of? :)

**GK VanPatter:** Just when I thought I was getting out...you pull me back in!...:-) This is a complicated set of issues that you have tossed on the table here. We could expend eighty questions just talking about these alone. In addition in this last bit of text you are, whether you know it or not, moving beyond your challenge formulations and starting to reveal a few glimpses of your ideas for possible thesis solution paths. In your suggestions I can see several entanglements that you might not be aware of. This tells me your fact-finding has not yet uncovered a few key issues that might not be visible to you from your present vantage point.

Right now we seem to be in an era where many young people are charging up the hill with "AdBusters", "In the Bubble", "Inconvenient Truth", and "World Changing" under their arms. That's all great stuff and I wish the schools were doing more than inciting advocacy as many of these challenges are huge, by that I mean completely out of proportion to the process skills being taught.

Ok the good news as I stated previously is that you have many more choices today than I had two centuries ago when I was where you are today. As you are finding out, the difficult part is to make sense of it all.

With only a short time left before I have to get on an airplane let me think quickly about how to sketch an imperfect picture that will hopefully be useful to you. Perhaps this might round out your fact-finding and then we will quickly do the third lens in closing. This will hopefully give you lots to think about.

To be brief: Many professionals want to get into the teaching thinking and innovation business. It sounds and looks easier than it is. Many seek to bring various forms of content knowledge, various forms of advocacy and intermix it with thinking skills. It is important to keep in mind that numerous disciplines other than design deeply study creativity, thinking and innovation. Some know a great deal about these subjects. It is unlikely that you will hear this from your design professors but in the context of cross-disciplinary co-creation work traditional design has considerable catching up to do. The difficult news is that depending on what is really being taught in your school you may or might not be quite ready for this extremely competitive arena.

This might be useful to you: I once asked Dr. Edward deBono if teaching thinking skills had anything to do with conveying a particular way of looking at the world?

Edward replied: *"Many people argue that thinking can never be neutral that it must always be moral or political and that to teach thinking is to teach some particular political idiom. It is true that to teach thinking is a political decision, since some political systems would prefer people to follow rather than to think. But beyond that, teaching thinking is neutral. Using a microscope is not in itself a political activity. A microscope is a device to enlarge our vision. Thinking is a device to enlarge our perceptions."*

*Thinking is as neutral as a pair of spectacles. To deny someone spectacles because within clearer vision they might find you out is a political decision. It is just possible that with spectacles they would see a wider context and come to understand and appreciate what is being done. It is only deception that fears clear vision."*

For a moment step outside of yourself and reflect upon what Edward said. Are sustainability and ethics political idioms? Switch hats; Imagine some among us place high value on religion, could they teach thinking skills? Should they bring their religious predispositions, their advocacy to the teaching of thinking skills? What if others valued horticulture, technology, money, service could they, should they bring their predispositions, their advocacies to teaching thinking? In a diverse and free society the good news is that yes they could and they certainly do. Would it be, is it, the same as what Edward is talking about. Not likely.

This is difficult stuff to talk about, somewhat like describing oxygen when we are surrounded by it. Teaching thinking as Edward and others describe and practice it is not the same as becoming a specialized problem solver in service, sustainability, ethics, products, brands or experiences. To think metaphorically for a moment: Edward is talking about a foundational language. The others are, metaphorically speaking dialectics of that language. Unfortunately most schools are teaching dialectics and not the foundational language. This impacts ones ability to move up into the strategic space where challenges are not yet framed.

Who helps when we do not know what the challenges and opportunities are? What happens if you are a specialist in service, sustainability or ethics or all of these things and you encounter clients and a world in general where change is constant and many other types of challenges exist. Do you take your specialized sustainability knowledge and adapt it to non sustainability related challenges, or do you say sorry I can only help you if your problem is sustainability, service, or ethics?

At the end of the day you must decide what kind of activity space you are comfortable in and geared up to operate in realistically. Becoming a sustainability expert and advocate would not likely make you a masterfully adaptable universal problem solver. I would be misleading you if I left you with that impression.

Switch hats for one last time: Could a sustainability expert step out side of his predispositions, his advocacies to teach what Edward is talking about? Yes if he had that underlying knowledge. What would that knowledge look like? That's what we are talking about on the NextD site. What does that look like? Among other things it's about knowing more then one process language, including the underlying one. Knowing that language makes it possible to relate to and make sense of all other processes.

Understand too that there are many ways to get to what you want to do. Many designers operate across multiple channels and vehicles today. Here we have Humantific, NextD and Innovation without Borders. Within NextD we also have NextD University a loosely organized initiative began last year at a clients request that includes some of our Humantific Collaborative associates from various specialized firms. (This might be the place for sustainability/ethics advocacy...☺) Combined this is more then enough to keep our minds busy and our hearts fullfilled. Oh by the way don't forget about making a living and having a life outside of design.

OK the third lens. I am going quickly now as time is running out. We use the third lens in many of our conversations with graduate students who visit us. The third lens is challenge framing. Remember we talked earlier about different kinds of precisions?

A person with challenge framing precisions can see in your text above numerous challenges, facts and proposed solutions all mixed together. While in traditional design a so-called design brief might contain one challenge, your text above is a good example from the real world of a student where many, many perceived challenges exist simultaneously. If your school has not taught you how to do sense-making by that we mean challenge framing in the fuzzy front end of the problem/opportunity space it would naturally be difficult to see them and sort them out.

Below are 60 challenges that I see embedded in your story above. We frame challenges as yet to be addressed questions. They can be addressed by generating possible solutions.

How might Jaime:

1. create a dialogue with others to uphold the professional practice of graphic design?
2. look into ways of encouraging cross-discipline working models?
3. link creative process from the designer and the learning process of the client?
4. link creative process from the designer to social sustainability?
5. engage in a new relationship with the client?
6. escape the system where the client simply tells you what to do?
7. seek a series of connections and discussions that I can cull from people who have traveled other journeys?
8. make up my mind about what I've seen and experienced?
9. understand NextD and the approach it takes as a leader?
10. help aid the process so that people who are working together can draw upon their strengths and come to the table as equals?
11. research ethics and social sustainability within the practice of design?
12. decide where to take my definition of design?
13. take the skills I know I have and to be able to apply them to something I believe in?
14. get to Design 3.0?

15. study how to best reach customers?
16. reconcile my love of branding with my love of best-practices?
17. uphold the profession of design—and building designers as critical thinkers who can impart their wisdom?
18. teach clients the importance of design and the importance of the creative process?
19. teach models of the creative process (individually and collaboratively)?
20. end up working with a research team in a design studio?
21. make branding ethical?
22. use design to defuzz the picture?
23. help small business owners create meaningful sustainable solutions?
24. fuse the thought process with the working relationship with the present-day political issues of corporate distrust?
25. creating synthesis between ideas (strategy or otherwise)?
26. determine what might be lacking from my thesis pursuits?
27. determine if I have fooled myself into thinking there is a way to invite myself over to the innovative thinking table?
28. make possibilities happen when no one is even aware what designers (me) are/is capable of doing?
29. create synthesis and translation for many other groups of people?\*
30. maintain well-being in health, emotion, etc?
31. help to sustain humanity (instead of trying to gain something off of the backs of others)?
32. Help designers think about sustainability?
33. Help designers fully exert their wishes regarding sustainability?
34. reconcile how I feel about designing for large, bottom-line driven corporations (usually linked somehow to unethical practices in third world countries)?
35. not impose style on client's?
36. draw inspiration from the customer?

37. completely overstep the client?
38. infuse ethics into process?
39. take some power away from large corporations?
40. create ways for people to empower the economy?
41. think through ways that people learn?
42. encourage public dialogue and ways of discussing the ethics issue?
43. create vehicles to talk about ideas instead of keeping them hidden?
44. learn from how NextD shares knowledge of Design 3.0?
45. publicly discuss ethics through Design 3.0?
46. use my thesis to resolve my source of self-conflict?
47. release the designer from their office space?
48. help designers maintain an overall responsible approach to design?
49. help designers stay humble?
50. help designers stay humble be as selfless as possible?
51. help designers design not for the sake of self praise or awards?
52. push our (designers) influence in ways it should be pushed?
53. provide useful information to help people make decisions?
54. connect ethics and social sustainability, and also co-creation?
55. study more about storytelling, narrative, and new methods?
56. give more people tools to inform their lives?
57. give more people tools to make their own decisions outside of the pop culture world we live in?
58. help ensure design stays?
59. keep and use my talent for making logos, branding and organizing information?
60. help to sustain humanity?

Not surprisingly for a Conceptualizer/Generator, you have no shortage of challenges there but without the sense making lens you have a big murky mud pie...☺

Unpacked you can see that these are all different challenges, at many different altitudes, with potentially different solution paths. Some might be quite tactical. Some are extremely broad. Some are likely interconnected while some might not be. Broad challenges such as these two below may or may not have anything to do with prescribing sustainability.

How might Jaime give people tools to make their own decisions outside of the pop culture world we live in?

How might Jaime give information to people so they can make their decisions?

These types of challenges tend to lead more towards cocreation but are less prescriptive which may not suite your advocacy interests.

In any case you will be able to go through your challenges and group which connect most strongly to Sense-Making and which connect to Strange-Making. That is entirely up to you of course. In practice we would make a map and show how the challenges are interconnected. I hope this has been helpful. Challenge capturing, framing, declumping, sorting is at the heart of much of what we do. This is another form of Sense-Making that requires more than visualization skills. This lens is likely the most important of the three. It is difficult for me to imagine practicing without this knowledge. Even in this simple form you can use it to help others. I mention this because helping others seems to underlay much of your own stated intention, your stated goals. In any case I hope you found each lens useful.

I have to run so will leave you with one last thought. Among the most important facts in your story, for me at least, was that you are 29 years old. Be mindful that some of your goals are very ambitious. From my perspective it is not so important that you are at a point in time where you can “*educate the client to your full potential*”. This might be in your time line tomorrow or at a considerable distance from today...☺ Regardless the more important thing is for you to find/create and decide upon a path that makes sense for you. I will leave you now with one of my favorite quotes from Richard Wurman:

“Understanding is a path, not a point. It’s a path of connections between thought and thought; patterns over patterns.”

**Jaime Barrett:** Many, many, many thanks for all your time and effort to help lil ol' me figure out what I'm about! It has been very meaningful to me.

**GK VanPatter:** I wish you good luck Jaime Barrett. Keep in touch. Hey we might be hiring in May...:-)

Additional References:

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*Examining Design's Reconstruction*

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