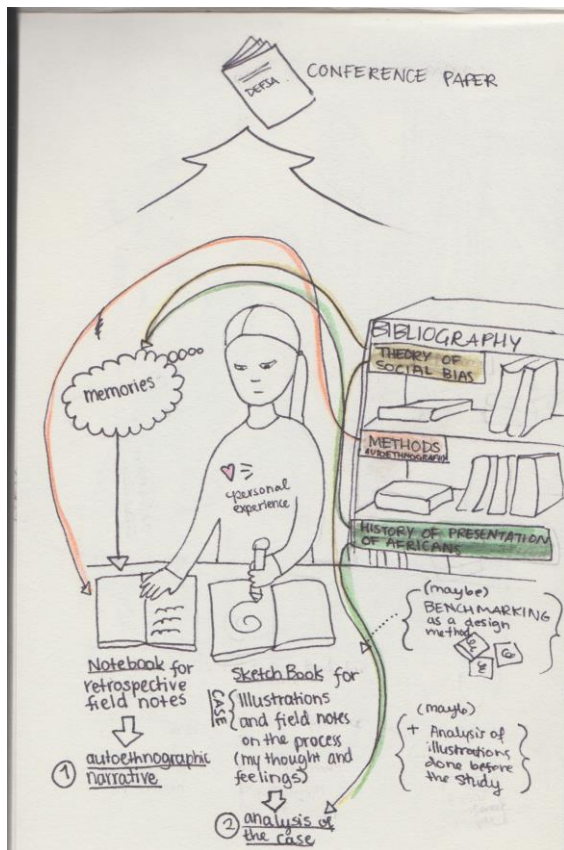


Thesis Proposal

Illustrating the Other

Becoming Aware of Racial Bias in the Design Process



I. Abstract

This study seeks to understand the factors affecting design process when portraying out-groups. Specifically it explores what role the surrounding visual culture, colonial heritage and personal experiences come to play when an European designer illustrates African characters. Furthermore the study seeks to explore the effect of consciousness of the designer's personal racial biases in the design process and outcome.

The study uses autoethnographic method. A micro level approach is taken to deepen understanding on the role of social bias in the design proses by going through personal experiences from the perspective of a graphic designer/design student. The study is an additional point of view to the ongoing conversation about de-colonising design, attempting to provoke further conversation on racial issues in graphic design.

Series of illustrations of African characters are produced. The design process is recorded in field notes accompanied by reflections of events in the past that have led to the designer's present perceptions. The field notes are reconstructed as an autoethnographic narrative.

Key words: colonial legacy, racial bias, design process, out-group, graphic design

II. Introduction

This study is about becoming aware of one's own biases as a designer and understanding how the colonial legacy affects the design process when portraying out-groups. How does the heritage of colonisation show in my work as a European designer illustrating African characters?

In my work as graphic designer in a public university in Ghana, African characters are often the subject of my illustrations. As a European portraying Africans I am in a position where I might be unconsciously reinforcing colonial attitudes. In order to avoid biased portrayal of a group, the designer needs to be aware of the colonial legacy and his or her own biases and the way these biases may affect the design process and, ultimately, the outcome.

III.Literature

Terms social bias —tendency to evaluate one's own ingroup more favourably than the outgroups (Dovidio, Hewstone & Glick, 2010, 1), and its sub term stereotype —associations and attributions of specific characteristics to a group (Dovidio, Hewstone & Glick, 2010, 2), are closely linked to my study.

Social Bias

Social bias can occur at the individual, institutional and cultural levels. Regardless of this diversity some common possesses apply to them all. Summarizing the work of Haslma and Dovidio (2010), Dovidio, Hewstone and Glick state that four basic factors foster and maintain bias: personality and individual differences, group conflict, social categorization and social identity. (2010, 11)

There have been three scholarly waves in the social psychological study of social biases from 1920s onward. (Dovidio, 2001, 830 and Dovidio, Hewstone & Glick, 2010, 15-16).

The first wave of research, largely based on Freudian psychodynamic theory, represented social biases as psychopathologic problems. It was assumed that if a people group with biased tendencies could be identified and their problem addressed the rest of the population would then be free of bias. (Dovidio, 2001, 830-831)

On the contrary, the second wave of research suggested that social biases are based on normal cognitive processes aiming to simplify and store large quantities of information. (Dovidio, 2001, 831). Stereotyping is based on our natural tendency to categorize. When you categorize it is easier to retain more detailed information for ingroup than outgroup members and to see outgroup members as "all alike".(Dovidio, Hewstone & Glick, 2010, 14)

One could argue that if social bias is natural to us, is it not then inevitable and efforts trying to get rid of the phenomena done in vain? The second wave studies suggest that changing social norms can help in addressing the issue in more general societal level. (Dovidio, 2001, 831)

The third wave from 1990s onward emphasizes the multidimensional nature of prejudice and utilizes new technologies to measure more subtle forms of prejudice. (Dovidio, 2001, 832)

Stereotypes

Fiske (2002), in her study of stereotype contents, suggests that interpersonal and intergroup interactions are the source of stereotypes, two important factors being status and competence, which predict dimensions of stereotypes (878). When people meet, they want to know the other's intent—their goals toward one's group (the degree of warmth), and capability—how effectively they are able to pursue those goals (879).

Fiske's Stereotype Content Model divides stereotypes into combinations of warm and competent. Different attitudes are applied: pity to incompetent competitors of high warmth, envy to competent competitors of low warmth and contempt to incompetent competitors of low warmth. (879)

IV. Objectives

This study is about the way social biases dictate the design process when it involves portraying outgroups and what affect does consciousness of the designer's own biases have in the process and the outcome of the design. The goal of the study is to shed light on the role of biases in the design process.

The outcome of the study will be series of illustrations of African characters exploring the theme of the 'house girl' phenomenon in Ghana.

The thesis will be published as a blog as the process evolves. This will hopefully invite further discussion among the public. For purposes of the University's record keeping a traditional thesis will be also produced. A link to the blog will be provided in the publication.

In addition to the actual thesis I will produce a conference paper. I will offer it to the 2017 conference of Design Educator's Forum of Southern Africa (DEFSA). The topick of the conference is "Design Educators reflect on the call for the decolonisation of education."

V. Methodology

Autoethnography

Autoethnography will be the core method used. It is a method where the researcher studies his or her own attitudes, emotions and reactions through a narrative. The aim is to evoke emotional experiences, produce writing of high quality and to improve readers, participants and authors' lives.

I will use this method to study how the visual culture surrounding me, the colonial heritage and my personal experiences affect the design process. I will write down significant memories dealing with the topic I am illustrating as well as images and phenomena that have affected my work. I will also compare the themes arising from my sketches and illustrations to the historical context of colonialism and its aftermath.

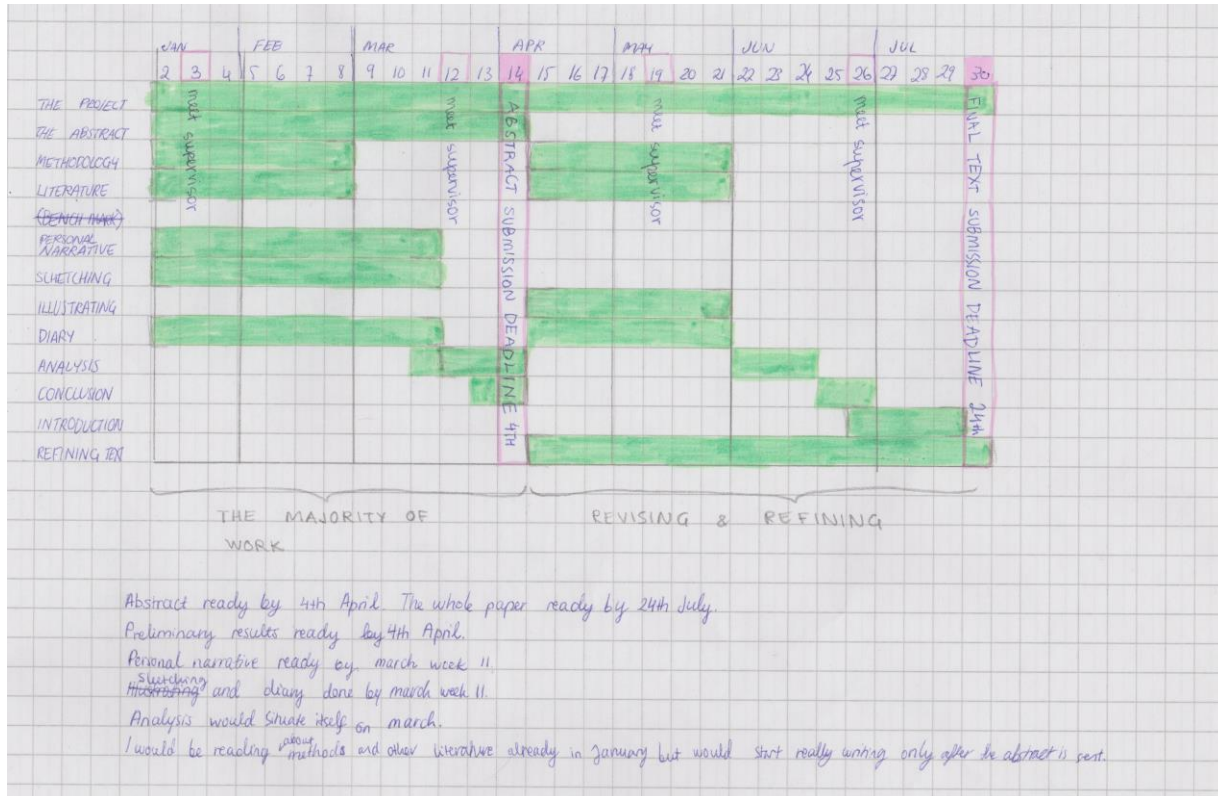
VI. Implementation

I will do a literature review on representations of African characters and some basic theories of stereotyping and visual otherness.

I will design illustrations which seek to provide a fair representation of African characters. Fair in this context referring to as free from bias as possible or at least aware of these biases. I will however start the design process before the results are ready to see how the process evolves.

I will keep a journal on my thoughts as I design. Based on the journal I will construct an autoethnographic narrative. I will also include my personal history of what has shaped my thinking about Africans. These stories will form the chore of my study.

Schedule



The process is estimated to start from January 11th and ends 24th July. The Abstract writing takes place on weeks 2 to 13. Majority of the work would have to be done before the abstract is sent so that I can include at least some preliminary results which in the case of auto ethnography are really pretty closely the actual results.

The Sketching and personal narrative will have to be done by the end of week 11 in the middle of March. I will then analyse them and draw conclusions before the submission date. I will not pay attention to language and looks at that point but will refine the text and execute the final illustrations after the abstract is sent.

Abstract

17th March Final Draft ready

22nd March Send copy to supervisor

24th March Meet with Supervisor

31st March Finish and Submit

4th April Final Submission Date

Final Paper

5th May First Draft

10th May Send copy to supervisor

13th May meet with supervisor

30th June Final Draft

5th July Send copy to supervisor

21st July Finish and Submit

24th July Final Submission Date

VII. Risks

SWOT analysis

<p style="text-align: center;">STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I find autoethnography and the topic very interesting and I hope my enthusiasm will show• I have knowledge of the topic from my career and private life so I don't have to start from a scratch	<p style="text-align: center;">WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The subject overlaps with social psychology and other areas that I am not expert in.• I have never written or read a conference paper before so I have to learn a completely new set of rules• I don't have much data to assist me with writing my personal history. I am dependent on my memory, which can cause distortion.
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• My supervisor can help me a lot with the method as he has used it before• Conference paper is shorter than a conventional Thesis so it should be possible to write in the given time• Taking part in a conference would be beneficial to the University as well as myself.	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Schedule is quite tight, will I be able produce quality text when I still have quite a lot of reading to do?• Will my paper be accepted even though I am not a design educator?• I'm probably not able to travel to the conference after all. Is there any other way of presenting the paper?

Ethical Evaluation

As I'm dealing with autoethnographic study I have to be careful when talking about people in my vicinity. I will have to balance between telling a convincing and detailed enough story without revealing identities of the people involved.

Another Ethical issue might be that of terms. I will have to be careful when talking of sensitive terms such as race. As and when I can avoid such terms I will use geographical definitions such as African.

One thing also to be aware is the temptation to make generalisations of the study. Autoethnographic studies by nature are not aiming at generalisation but to a deeper understanding of a specific case.

VIII. Draft structure of the Paper

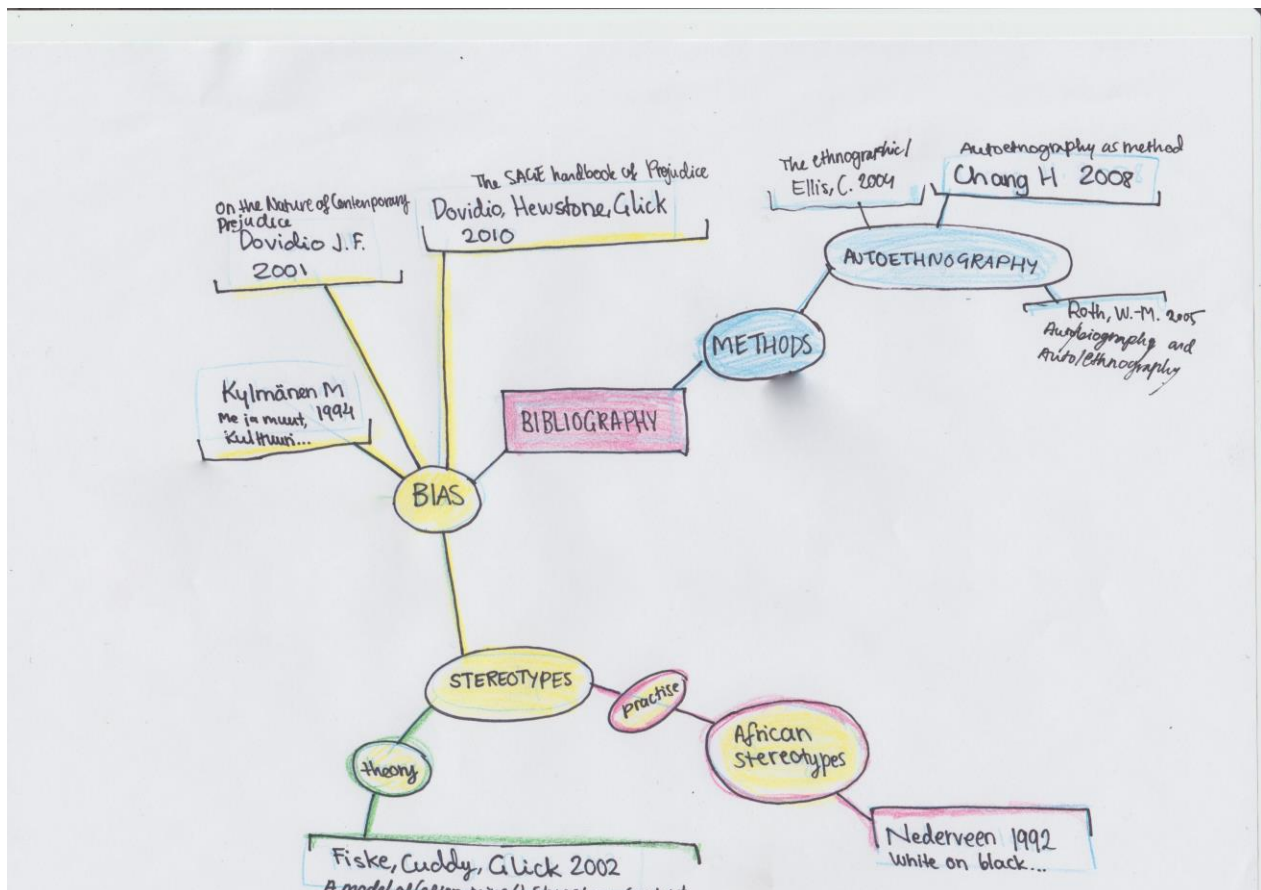
Abstract

1. Introduction
 - a. Background
 - b. Problematisation / Research Question
 - c. Goals
 - d. Importance
2. Literature Review (knowledge base)
 - a. Important terms and theories
 - b. The Historical Context
3. Methodology (what was done, how, why)
 - a. Autoethnography (why was it chosen)
 - b. How the data was acquired and description of it
 - i. Retrospective field notes:
 1. Images that have affected me
 2. Events that have affected me
 - ii. Previously done illustrations
 - iii. The sketches and working diary
4. Results (Data Analysis)
5. Conclusion
6. Discussions (How the results compare with other studies, reliability)
7. Recommendations

IX. Data / Research Material

The autoethnographic data will be my own memories, sketches, illustrations and diary entries.

X. Bibliography



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