

Interrogating rapid design ethnography: A strategy for exploring the indigenous visual vernaculars of
the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	Page
LIST OF FIGURES.....	i
LIST OF TABLES.....	ii
PLAGIARISM FORM.....	iii
Chapter One: Literature review	
1. 1. Introduction: overview of design ethnography.....	10
1. 2. The shift to rapid ethnography.....	19
1. 3. Indigenous visual vernaculars: Adinkra symbols	22
1. 5. Related aspects: indigenous and contemporary similarities.....	24
Chapter Two: Exploring Rapid Ethnography	
2.1. Introduction: background.....	25
2.2. Evolution of rapid ethnography.....	27
2.3. Research Process: preparation.....	27
2.3.1 Exploratory phase: research setting.....	27
2.3.2 Exploratory phase: open-ended questions.....	31
2. 4. Discovery phase: sampling.....	32
2.4.1 Discovery phase: visual mapping.....	33
2.4.2 Design phase: analysis.....	37
2. 5 Discovery phase: limitations.....	38
Chapter Three: Generative Phase	
3.1. Background.....	40
3.2. Design evolution.....	40

3.3. Design phase: conceptual ideation.....	41
Chapter Four: Rapid Ethnographic Design	
4.1. Reflection on the praxis of ethnography and design.....	48
4.1.1. Research setting: virtual online ‘field site’.....	48
4.1.2 Research tools: photographs.....	50
4.13 Research analysis: visual mapping.....	52
4.2. Concluding review: benefits of rapid design ethnography.....	54
4.3. Conclusion.....	56
Sources Consulted	58
Appendices	65

	List of Figures	Page
Figure 1	Leslie MacNeil Weber, Design research process, 2009.....	11
Figure 2	Leslie MacNeil Weber, The design ethnographic process, 2009.....	14
Figure 3	JP Spradley, The Ethnographic Research Cycle, 1980.....	18
Figure 4	Adinkra symbols, homepage Pinterest website, 2014.....	28
Figure 5	Adinkra symbols, home page Flickr website, 2014.....	28
Figure 6	Adinkra symbols, homepage Google website, 2014.....	29
Figure 7	Adinkra symbols, homepage Bing website, 2014.....	29
Figure 8	Tim and Jett Elmer, <i>Africa Everyday Adinkra Cloth</i> , 2014	34
Figure 9	Harvestgirl, <i>New Fabric</i> , 2014.....	34
Figure 10	Pilicciano, <i>Ghana Tribal King</i> , 2014.....	35
Figure 11	Carlo Natali, <i>Adinkra TransAfrica Togo</i> , 2014.....	35
Figure 12	Kgomotso Mashigo, visual mapping: experience model process	36
Figure 13	Kgomotso Mashigo, selected Adinkra symbols.....	38
Figure 14	Valencia.A Tetteh, <i>Nkyinkyim</i> , 2006.....	42
Figure 15	Kgomotso Mashigo, proposed ideation interpretation 1.....	43
Figure 16	Kgomotso Mashigo, Proposed contemporary interpretation 2.....	43
Figure 17	Kgomotso Mashigo, ideation implementation proposed of <i>Nkinkijim</i>	44
Figure 18	Kgomotso Mashigo, proposed ideation for <i>Nkinkijim</i>	45

List of Tables

	Page	
Table 1	Table 2: Elizabeth Tunstall, Matrix of the QAME of ethnography across three domains, 2008.....	15
Table 2	Marilyn Mitchell, Steps for conducting an ethnography adapted for ethnographies of language-like visual communication, 2008.....	16
Table 3	Kgomotso Mashigo, Suggested tasks for conducting an ethnographic design exploration of the Adinkra symbols adapted from Leslie McNeil Weber (2009:47), Marilyn Mitchell (2008:4), and Elizabeth Tunstall (2008:220)	26

	List of Appendices	Page
Appendix 1	Adinkra Symbols.....	66
Appendix 1	Adinkra Cloth Symbols Chart.....	67

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DECLARATION

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I declare that Interrogating rapid design ethnography: A strategy for exploring the indigenous visual vernaculars of Ghanaian Adinkra symbols is my own original work. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements.

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Abstract:**Background to study**

This study introduces rapid design ethnography as a research strategy that may be used in design as an alternative to conventional ethnography. It interrogates this strategy by means of a study of the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols. Adinkra is an indigenous graphic language that carries specific cultural narratives that embody proverbs and or poetic messages. In view of this, this study discusses how a collaboration between ethnography (and rapid ethnography) and design can be merged to create appropriate visual communication with specific reference to this indigenous visual vernacular. The study also highlights the evolution of rapid ethnographic techniques in comparison to conventional ethnography, as well as the way that these techniques may be of assistance to both designer and ethnographer.

To BaTau

(Moss and Sheila Mashego), Words and deeds are never enough to describe the sacrifices and opportunities, given one.

Dr. Duncan Reyburn, for patience and unconditional support. I cannot even begin to thank you, for the guidance, the hard truths and for the years of this journey.

God bless you all, and thank you.

1.1 Introduction: overview of design ethnography:

For this study, design ethnography is viewed as the overall strategy for the design research process. It is dependent on a varying number of techniques and a culmination of interdisciplinary collaborations of diverse processes as a means of negotiating complex connections, and can therefore be understood by first introducing and defining these terms: design, ethnography, and rapid ethnography.

Reyburn (2008:9) points out that “design gains knowledge from other disciplines in order to inform its own praxis”. Moreover, Friedman (2003:508) summarises the nature of design research as being “integrative” and “interdisciplinary”. In the light of this, design research may be considered a negotiator of complex strategies that influence the articulation and evolution of design knowledge. Cross (1999:6) explains that “...a major area of design research is methodology; the study of the processes of design, and the development and application of techniques which aid the designer”. Since design itself is an interdisciplinary discipline of sorts, this implies the need for interdisciplinary and collaborative methodologies.

In the study, the terms design research, design ethnography and ethnographic design will be used interchangeably. According to Owen (cited in Beckman & Barry (2007: 27) “[d]esign is the creation process through which we employ tools and language to invent artifacts and institutions. As society has evolved, so has our ability to design.” Owen’s descriptions can be similarly compared to the desired collaborative objectives shared by both designers and ethnographers to be explored further through this study. Owen (2007:27) further describes the design process as including: “recognizable phases, and these, while not always in the same order, nearly always begin with analytic phases of search and understanding, and end with synthetic phases of experimentation and invention.”

Weber (2009:15) states, “a typical design process involves the following activities: discovery, ideation, design, refinement, production, and reflection”. These activities work in a linear progression; Visocky O’Grady and Visocky O’Grady (2006: 68) mention that “design is often viewed as a linear process. It begins with formative research – define the problem – then progresses through concept development, design, production, and deliver”. Nevertheless, the process can also be cyclic, as the described activities hardly function in isolation to each other; instead they influence each other throughout the exploration, presenting opportunities to reflect and /or redefine considerations, as depicted in (Figure 1).

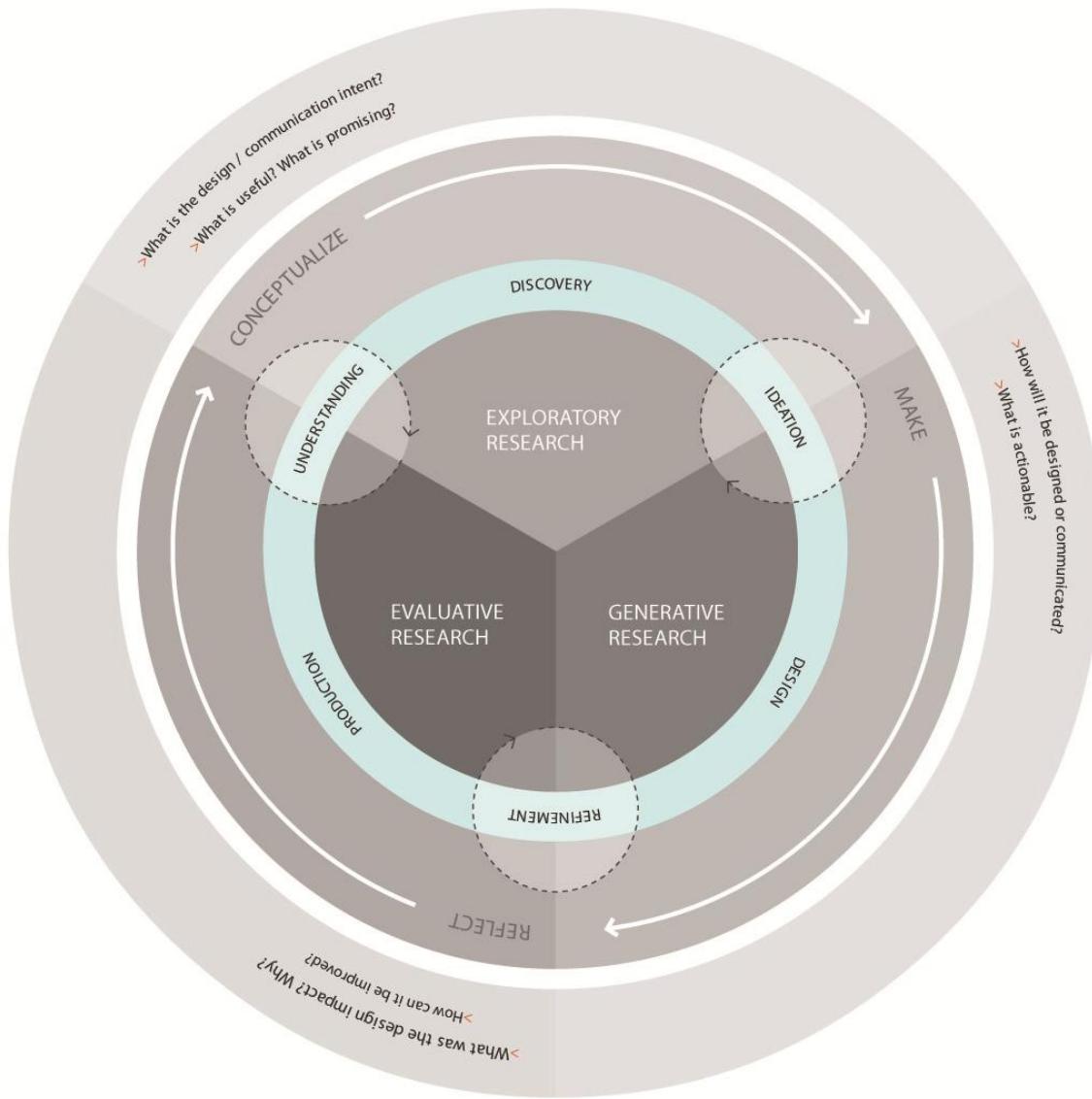


Figure 1: Leslie MacNeil Weber, Design research process, 2009.

This process is constantly challenged to evolve by adapting to diverse cultures, dynamic technologies and global trends, thus resulting in a need to forge interdisciplinary strategies for creating culturally relevant content while preserving the ethical and aesthetic knowledge of a given culture. For the study, I refer to ‘globalisation’ as described by Appadurai (cited in Boateng (2011:119) who states, “Globalization is also seen here as a multidimensional process that cannot be reduced to economic and financial conditions—especially in the current phase that has to do with the flows and exchanges made possible by advances in information technologies (including the ethnic, media, technological, financial, and ideological landscapes identified.)” There exists a growing need to further develop and articulate the contributions of indigenous design research. Van Veggel (2005:5) states “Designers approach ethnography for the practical reasons of gaining a rich and deep understanding of users that can easily be integrated into design projects and yet are quick and relatively inexpensive to obtain”. Designers therefore have the responsibility to fulfill the dual roles of both ethnographer and designer in engaging with diverse cultures. In this regard Cross (1982:224) notes that, “design is a process of pattern synthesis, rather than pattern recognition”.

Designers constantly have to challenge, are challenged and influenced by the ever changing global landscapes and trends that are often if not mostly dictated and propelled by western and commercial standards of utilisation. This global aesthetic makes it even more difficult for indigenous knowledge and indigenous cultures, like those of Ghana, as mentioned by Boateng (2011:12)¹, and their concept of visual communication design.

A further problem is a lack of formal documentation - ‘formal’ referring to the written forms of archived materials for research purposes. Boateng (2011:120) claims “In the current phase of globalization, the appropriating practices of Africans in the diaspora² constitute an important factor in the global circulation of African cultural product like adinkra and kente. These practices are also examples of long standing appropriation for nationalist purposes, which translates into widely accepted claims over culture but without the backing of formal laws.” The consequence of such can be attributed to certain key contributors that occurred in Ghana, such as colonialism and slavery. These need to be noted, but since the focus of this study is on the present-day appropriation of Ghanaian symbols, colonialism and slavery are not dwelt upon at any length. In most cases, indigenous knowledge is stored and limited to the sacred

¹Boateng (2011:12) states “Similar problems occur with the term *indigenous knowledge*, which often refers to cultural production that has medicinal and agricultural applications. Since this term is used almost exclusively to refer to the cultural production of non-Western peoples, it has the result of naturalizing Western cultural production. Knowledge is thus an unmarked category when it is produced within the conventions of Western science. Outside those conventions, it is marked as common, folk, or indigenous. The result is a ranking that accords the status of “science” to indigenous knowledge only when it is brought within the sphere of the former.”

²Boateng “ (2011:132) further states, in discussing the African diaspora, that it is important to note that this is not a unitary group but actually a number of different diasporas with the earliest created by the slave trade.”

gate-keepers of the Ghanaian culture who are slowly diminishing in number as mentioned by Jectey-Nyarko (2010:11).¹

This is a disheartening thought when one regards the wealth that exists in experiential indigenous knowledge. In the Ghanaian context, these gatekeepers include the *Okyeame* (chief linguists and advisors) elders, elected spokesmen, skilled craftsmen and craftswomen who are skilled to communicate and convey indigenous knowledge through various visual narratives, symbolic art forms, and proverbial narrative: they are the ones who hold the key to the philosophy of the culture and ensure that cultural knowledge is continued and preserved from one generation to the next. With these considerations in mind, interdisciplinary collaborative strategies have since emerged to adapt to indigenous research and indigenous design processes. This has helped to develop a synergy that connects diverse cultures, processes, users and products. This approach is further affirmed by documented accounts within the fields of industrial and interaction design in recent years, undertaken with the aid of design ethnography; including work by Wasson (2000); van Veggel (2005); Tunstall (2008); Suchman (2003); Glasnapp and Isaacs(2011); Szymanski and Whalen (2011); and Segelström and Holmlid (2012).

In the traditional context, ethnography is a technique used to gain an in-depth understanding of a culture, its philosophy, traditions, ethnicities, and way of life. It requires the researcher's immersion in a culture or social group. Crotty (cited in Pink 2013:32) describes ethnography "as a methodology; as an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles". It affords the researcher, or the designer, an opportunity to situate herself in contexts other than her own. AIGA and Cheskin (2006:4) state that "people and culture are incredibly complex. Ethnography offers a way to make sense of this complexity".

Ethnography entails various techniques that may be employed depending on the scope of the research strategy: data is collected from a range of sources and is accumulated through both primary and secondary research; accounts may be gathered directly from the original source and may include, although not be limited to surveys, questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, co-creations and observations to mention a few options that Weber (2009:21) highlights.

In the contemporary context, ethnography has since evolved and is evolving as a research methodology adaptable to design strategies. Tunstall (2008:218) mentions that

[E]thnography no longer "belongs" to any discipline; it operates between, across and beyond disciplines as diverse as anthropology, sociology, business, politics, design,

¹ Jectey-Nyarko (2010:11) mentions "another factor that limited the researcher in his study was the rate at which the elders who have a lot of first-hand information are dying. He continues "This was seen as a big threat to the preservation of indigenous knowledge".

engineering, medicine, and education. Within this diversity, it maintains its core intention to understand the present world.

It includes contemporary qualitative techniques that provide in-depth descriptions and interpretations of cultural complexities. Tunstall (2008:218) further states, “From the synthesis of the multiple ways of being and knowing the world, comes the “unity of knowledge” that is the trans-disciplinary¹ imperative”. To date, its offering may be described as a hands-on research approach that deals with distinctive characteristics of culture. This hands-on approach is at the core of design research, which is always to some extent informed by the idea that praxis and understanding are co-dependent. Ireland (2003:27) states that “ethnography is still evolving in the commercial realm, but it has come a long way. Like focus groups, ethnography has generated progeny of various shapes and sizes that help round out its offering.” Tunstall (2008:218) further points to the evolution of ethnography in stating: “Beyond its origins in anthropology, ethnography has virally replicated into forms of design ethnography, marketing ethnography, ethnographic evaluation of policy, educational ethnography, etc.”

Laurel (2003:17) suggests that “designers need to understand the tools of research, how they are deployed, how they map onto the various stages in the design process and how research findings can contribute to both innovation and evolutionary design practice”. With a solid understanding of these research tools, it becomes essential to enter the field of inquiry having the mindset of both ethnographer and designer when appropriating such strategies. To build on the above, Salvador, Bell and Anderson (1999:36) mention that “design ethnography is an emerging discipline that draws on many of the theories, practices and methodologies of anthropology, as well as other social science disciplines, such as psychology, sociology and communication”.

The process is predominantly occupied with an area of interest and influenced by an interweaving of activities; in this case indigenous visual communication design which henceforth I will refer to as the Ghanaian indigenous designs, selecting methods of data collection, identifying tools to be employed, and writing up ethnographic interpretations.² Throughout the process, the collaborative expertise of both ethnographer and designer are at work; influencing and supporting each other at varying stages of the design ethnographic cycle, as Weber (2009:47) explains (Figure 2). Weber details the ethnographic design

¹ Trans-disciplinarity concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines. Its goal is the understanding of the present world, of which one of the imperatives is the unity of knowledge – Basarab Nicolescu. 2007. Excerpt from the book Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity, ed. International Center for Trans-disciplinary Research.

² To describe the ‘ethnographic interpretations’, I refer to a term called ‘thick descriptions as described by Clifford Geertz (1973:5), who notes that “in anthropology what the practitioners do is ethnography. And it is in understanding what ethnography is, or more exactly *what doing ethnography is*, that a start can be made towards grasping what anthropological analysis amounts to as a form of knowledge. This, it must immediately be said, is not a matter of methods. From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these techniques and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, ‘thick descriptions’”.

process as following steps that include: proposal process, research planning, field studies, analysis or synthesis, and design.

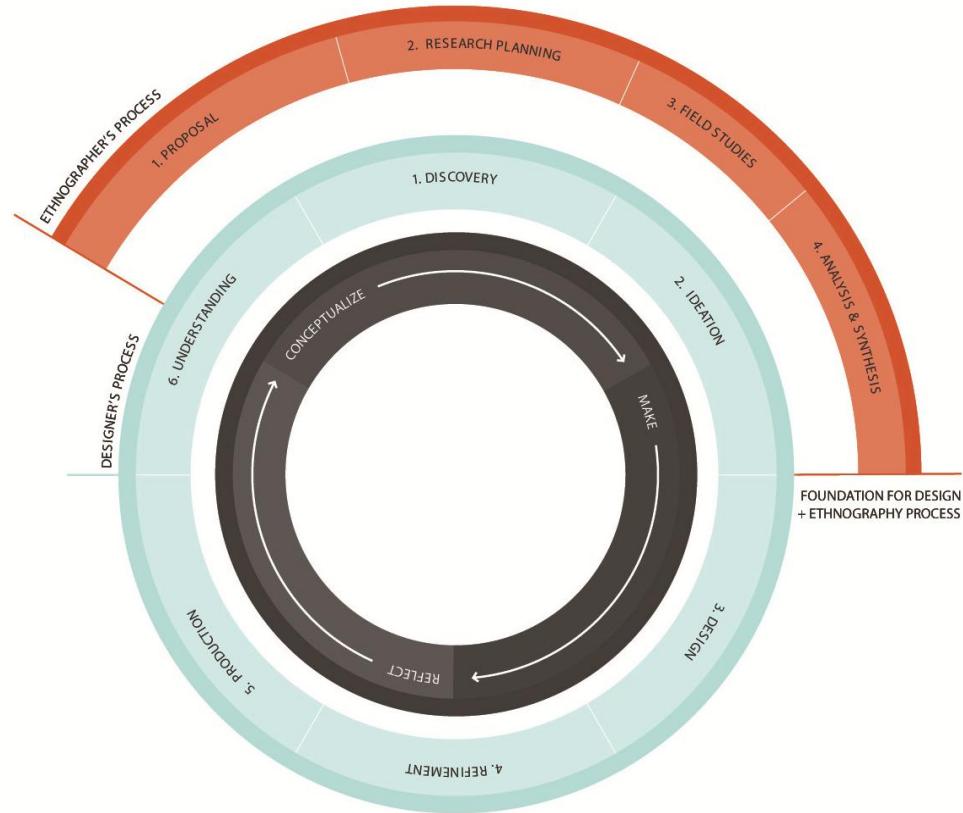


Figure 2: Leslie MacNeil Weber, The ethnographic design process, 2009.

Tunstall suggests adapting QAME as an appropriate framework for guiding design strategy into making visible ethnography's multiple meaning in differing domains; one such being visual communication design. She further notes that the approach is to further enhance the relationship between practitioners; so designers and ethnographers can improve interdisciplinary collaborations and better articulate ethnographies value in design research.

	Anthropology	Marketing	Design
Questions	What does it mean to be human?	How does one allocate resources to move customers to buy goods and/or services?	How does one design a successful product, service, communication, or experience?
Assumptions - <i>Issues</i> - <i>Roles</i> - <i>Scale</i>	- Origins, evolution, and meaning - Anthropologist as instrument - Qualitative significance	- Economic rational choice - Marketer as selector - Quantitative significance	- Context and user requirements - Designer as intermediary - Qualitative significance
Methodological approach towards ethnography	Preferred epistemological stance	“Intimate” consumer insight	Empathic intuition
Evidence	Informal conversation Experiential textual report	Formal presentation Strategic report	Concepts Prototypes

Table 1: Elizabeth Tunstall, Matrix of the QAME of ethnography across three domains, 2008.

Similarly, Mitchell (2008:4) depicts the activities that occur within the ethnographic cycle that may be adapted for language-like visual communication design strategies. Mitchell (2008:4) further notes that “researchers need not perform all the listed steps of analysis but may choose from among them those that they deem most suited to the particular study”. Her suggested steps are mere guidelines or a framework from which a designer can redefine the project objectives, tools and the methods to be employed, (Table 2).

Stages in the ethnographic research cycle (Spradley, 1980, p. 29)	Steps for conducting an ethnographic research (Spradley, 1980, pp. 180–182)	Suggested tasks for conducting an ethnography of language-like visual communication
Selecting an ethnographic project	1. Locating a social situation	1. Selecting a category of visual communication and identifying the social situations in which it is used
Asking ethnographic questions and collecting ethnographic data	2. Doing participant observation	2. Formulating open questions about the visual form of the communication and the situations in which it is used 3. Collecting examples of the visual communication 4. Selecting research tools to study how the design is used
Making an ethnographic record	3. Making an ethnographic record 4. Making descriptive observations	5. Writing descriptions of the visual communication and the situation in which it is used
Analysing ethnographic data and conducting more research as required	5. Making a domain analysis 6. Making focused observations 7. Making a taxonomic analysis 8. Making selected observations 9. Making a componential analysis 10. Discovering cultural themes	6. Selecting methods for and conducting analyses 7. Discovering themes within the data and applying existing theories as appropriate
Outlining and writing an ethnography	11. Taking a cultural inventory 12. Writing an ethnography	8. Outlining and writing an ethnography

Table 2: Marilyn Mitchell, Steps for conducting an ethnography adapted for ethnographies of language-like visual communication, 2008.

What differentiates QAME from Spradley's suggested steps is described by Tunstall (2008:219) in that "Barnard's framework is flexible because every domain has a set of questions it seeks to answer, a set of assumptions it holds dear, a methodological approach towards getting to the answers it seeks, and its own notion of proper evidence". The suggested elements are adaptable to the processes presented by Mitchell (2008), Weber (2009) and Spradley (1980).

Overlapping activities from the above mentioned processes were similarly aligned to identify activities that proved most beneficial for the exploration. This aligning exercise revealed points of intersections, opportunities, strengths and differences across all three processes. Weber (2009:25) states that

[I]n visual communication design, ethnography can help designers by uncovering insights that inform communication strategies – a plan, method, or scheme to communicate in the most effective and compelling way for a given situation. Like industrial and interaction design, ethnography can serve as an exploratory, generative and evaluation technique.

Both designers and ethnographers work under pressure and outcome driven environments both in business and private sectors; conditions prescribed to 'time' driven outcomes, as such "TIME" is always going to be a prerequisite when researching and operating in an information global arena that is constantly shaping and rearranging; in the virtual sense. Sandhu (2008:27) mentions "There are many factors to consider in the design of rapid ethnographic research, but time in the field is often a primary concern, particularly time constraints in the applied work. These constraints motivate a need for "rapid" or "quick" methods." This study leans more to the ethnographic detail and activity Mitchell proposes, as it is well suited to the concept of design ethnography in two ways: the indigenous visual vernaculars embody the intrinsic characteristic qualities resembling language-like visual communication; and the process itself necessitates ethnographic techniques to conduct the exploration. The activities described below were originally adapted from Spradley's (1980:29) ethnographic research cycle (Figure 3) in which Mitchell characterises the cyclic activities as follows: formulating open questions about the visual communication and the situations in which it is used, collecting examples of the visual communication, selecting research tools to study how the design is used, writing descriptions of the visual communication and the situation in which it is used, selecting methods for and conducting analyses, discovering themes within the data and applying existing theories appropriately, and outlining and writing an ethnography.

The above-mentioned processes represent collaborative opportunities that require further investigation, especially in the light of the evolution of design research and recent trends to promote designers and ethnographers to have a more shared and immersive approach - one that can be fostered for future

indigenous visual communication design related projects. Rothstein (1999:3) mentions, “As a qualitative research method, contemporary researchers argue that ethnography should be understood as fundamentally iterative and emergent rather than linear and self-evident”. Spradley (1980:28) explains, “I believe ethnography seldom fits this linear model; instead, the major tasks follow a kind of cyclical pattern, repeated over and over again”. With this in mind, Spradley (1980) reinforces my notion that both ethnography and design processes ‘seldom fit a linear model’ and can therefore be synergised as a collaborative strategy

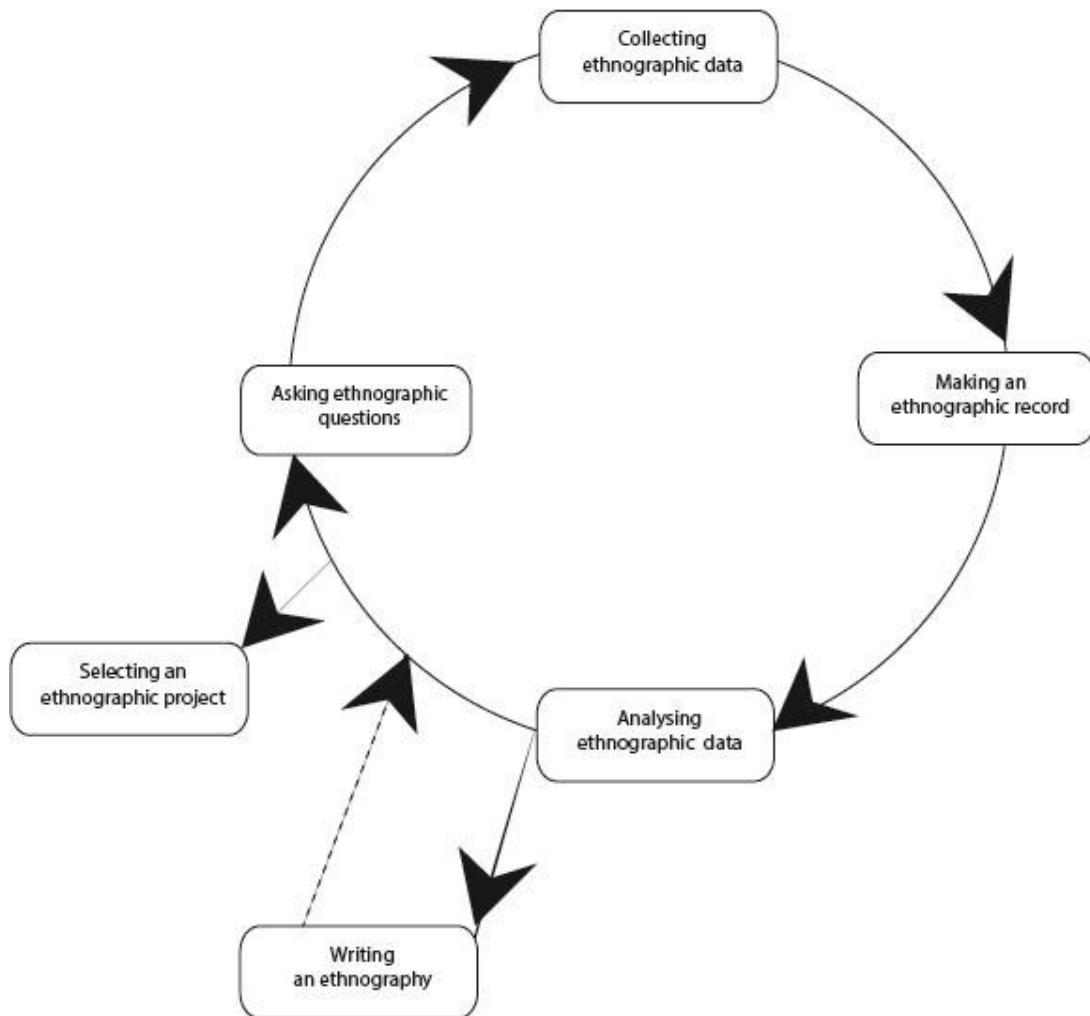


Figure 3: JP Spradley, The Ethnographic Research Cycle, 1980.

Based on the recognition of this synergy between design and ethnography, I play the dual role of ethnographer and designer in this study with a critical focus on the functions of each skill without preempting the conclusions. The goal is to align my design background with the ethnographic considerations to assist my engaging with the complexities surrounding the Ghanaian cultural connections. This connection of interpretation and representation can add value, as Mc-Donagh-Philip and Lebon (2000:115) note, “only...if it is culturally and emotionally significant to the target audience”. Rhea (2006:2) supports this by encouraging designers to “care about ethnography because it can help produce more compelling, innovative design that really connects with users in a way that creates delight.” While the efforts of design ethnography continue to evolve as a strategy, the study aims to explore rapid ethnography as a sub-methodology for exploring indigenous visual communication design. It is therefore this notion of rapid ethnography that I now turn.

1.2 The shift to rapid ethnography

Rapid ethnography is a fairly new sub-methodology of design ethnography. The term *rapid ethnography* indicates some of the limitations of the traditional process of ethnographic research as we have come to know it. Kluwin, Morris and Clifford (2004:1) introduce the methodology as something that “starts with assumptions about culture as conventional ethnography. However, it is not constrained by the assumption of cultural ignorance on the investigator’s part”. In the case of the present study, I approached the research as one already familiar with the indigenous visual vernaculars, owing to a prior study¹ that I had undertaken. My aim was both to further my knowledge in indigenous visual communication design, as well as explore the possible benefits and disbenefits that rapid ethnography has when it comes to exploring the application of indigenous visual communication design in a contemporary, Western context. Handwerker (2001:4) explains rapid ethnography, (also called quick ethnography) as follows:

[T]he methods I call Quick Ethnography (QE) consist of a package that integrates conventional means of collecting cultural data (like key informant, structured, and cultural mapping interviews), analysing cultural data (like grounded theory forms of texts analysis and conventional statistics), and a project management (like Gantt and PERT charts) with more novel forms of data collection (like successive pile sorts) and analysis (like the application of multivariate statistical procedures to similarities among informants).

Handwerker’s descriptive process of quick ethnography details the characteristics of the technique(s) to be employed so as to align them with the design ethnographic cycle proposed by Mitchell. Handwerker (2001:4) notes that “each individual tool for collecting or analyzing culture achieves specific,

¹ The prior study was a final design project for an Honours programme: titled Afrogensis. The project explored indigenous visual vernaculars, Adinkra as an indigenous typographic system submitted as a typographic study to the International Society of Typographic designers (ISTD) in 2009.

complementary and overlapping project goals; their integration yields findings with high reliability and construct validity". For the purposes of this study, the technique(s) used in rapid ethnography ought to be strategically aimed at assisting in developing an outline for exploring indigenous visual communication. In particular, they should shorten the period of time spent in the field, produce reliable and admissible information without compromising the quality of the process; and similarly aid in fulfilling the objectives of the design ethnographic process. Handwerker (2001:5) mentions that "lack of time [does not] have to mean poor quality if you use explicit methods to: create a clear vision of where you want to go, create a clear vision of how to get there, get there without getting lost, and use personal time to greatest advantage when in the field." In the light of Handwerker's recommendation, commonly used rapid ethnographic techniques within design ethnography include, but are not limited to the following: field ethnography, interview ethnography, digital ethnography, photo ethnography, and rapid ethnography. Online explorations become important; rapid ethnography can therefore be described as a kind of virtual ethnography. Riopelle (2012:38) confirms this as follows:

[V]irtual work is no longer confined to a traditional, geographically bounded "field site" with accompanying *in situ* participants' observations. Ethnography today is becoming a hybrid methodology, in which both conventional ethnographic methods and IT-based methods are used as ethnographers alternate between investigations of physical and digital spaces.

The basis of this is to highlight the shift in research methods available to ethnographers and designers. This also indicates how and where on-line communities are emerging and trending while sharing common interests. Burgess and Green 2009 (cited by Glasnapp & Isaac 2011:193) mention that "this form of on-line media has become so popular that it is profoundly shifting the way communities of interest communicate and influence one another."

As a result I have adapted internet based on-line rapid ethnographic techniques to conduct my primary data collection and to further support the benefits of rapid ethnography. The decision presented opportunities, including: (1) aligning similar on-line visual applications to fulfill maximum task activity (2) provided diverse and differing types of visual documentation (3) shortened the data collection procedure, and (4) this procedure stipulated the type of visual to be sourced, in the form of photographic documentation. A key distinction here between 'rapid ethnography' and a literature review is that rapid ethnography makes use of more than just literature. Multiple modes of visual communication are sourced; Riopelle (2012:38) further mentions that such "technology-based ethnographic methods" may be defined "to broadly mean the use of information technologies to capture, analyse, and share data. The opportunities these methods present is one of exploration and experimentation in 'being there' both in the physical and digital spaces as part of an extended ethnographic investigation, thus reframing the

traditional meaning of an ethnographic ‘field site’ and participant observation’ to routinely include digital life.”

From the above listed techniques, based on the specific project goals and requirements for the study, rapid ethnography may be used within the confines of a particular strategy. It is more goal-directed, since the outcome has been specified beforehand. Weber’s (2009:45) introduction to the technique of rapid ethnography explains:

[T]he newest ways for quickly conducting ethnographic research, rapid ethnographies consist of a collection of techniques that are intended to provide insight while drastically reducing the (or removing) the amount of time a researcher needs to spend in the field. Flickr ethnography is one such recently founded ethnographic method. Researchers conduct keyword searches on Flickr, an [on-line] photo management and sharing application, to gather images that provide information about the target users groups or culture or application and representation of usage.

Weber’s description certainly highlights the evolution of ethnography into that which accommodates this rapid ethnography in that it is no longer restricted to traditional modes of anthropology which seek to understand a way of life rather than just, as in this study, a way of communicating.

Rapid ethnography in this study is viewed as an evolving sub-methodology working alongside guided conventional techniques and in some instances taking the lead where necessary; it includes the promise of adapting relevant technologies to address the complexities surrounding both contemporary and indigenous visual design communication. Rapid ethnography continues to break ground, making information available through varied media that are less stringent, producing reliable and valid information over shortened periods. Furthermore, on close inspection, rapid ethnography encompasses characteristics of combining digital and photo ethnography into a single technique for the purposes of study. Weber highlights the prospects of many emerging techniques that may be incorporated in the design ethnographic cycle; with the aim of validating design ethnography as a strategy validated by rapid ethnographic techniques. The identified contemporary techniques support the endeavours of design ethnography, and can be said to align with Handworkers’ (2005) description of the use of explicit methods without, at least in theory, compromising the quality of the research. The differences and similarities of the identified rapid ethnographic techniques will be detailed and compared to the traditional technique.

I make reference to the visual as it functions on various levels in the study in the form of photographs, used as tools for the data collection and as a means of situating the researcher in differing contexts, allowing her to engage with indigenous visual documentation for interpretive purposes. Pink (2001:19) states, “the ‘ethnographicness’ of any image or representation is contingent on how it is situated,

interpreted and used to invoke meanings and knowledge that are of ethnographic interest.” In the light of this, visual research plays a dual role, both as a tool and technique for the study; while revealing underlying aspects of the subject under investigation. Furthermore, the visual provides something of a sense of the collaborative synergy between ethnography and design, both contemporary and indigenous, and also acts as a data collection tool and tool for representation. Pink (2001:17), also mentions that, “visual research methods” are not purely visual. Rather, they pay particular attention to the visual aspects of culture.” That is, the wider socio-cultural context must always come into play. Bloustein (2003:1), states that “the visual images are present in the form of cultural texts or they represent aspects of ethnographic knowledge and methodological tools”. Pink (2003:1) further explains the role of the visual as a fundamental tool for contemporary design research. This gives her reason to promote a shared approach for interdisciplinary collaborations:

[A]s we delve into the ‘new’ visual research literature, it becomes clear that contemporary visual researchers from different disciplines have common interests: reflexivity; collaboration; ethics; and the relationship between the content, social context and materiality of images. I shall argue for a more collaborative interdisciplinary approach to visual research whereby disciplines might learn from each other without seeking narrative foils to assert the supremacy of their own discipline at the expense of others.

As an example, while photographs are referenced in this study, I relate the context of their use from the various views presented above as methodological tools as well as a means of presenting, indicating that the designer will always be guided by the context as much as possible in understanding visual rapid ethnographic research.

1.3 Indigenous visual vernaculars: Adinkra symbols

Ghanaians have for a long time used their own visual vernaculars to evoke and express their cultural values, philosophies, attitudes, emotions and beliefs. Adinkra symbols originate from a core collection of the six traditional symbols of Ghana. According to Dzobo (1996:14) these include the *Adinkra* symbols, stools symbols, linguistic staff symbols, religious symbols and oral literary symbols that communicate special sacred messages within the Ghanaian culture. Among the Akan of Ghana, the term *Adinkra* originates from the *Twi* word meaning *to say goodbye* and constitutes an aesthetic communication involving both verbal and visual imagery. Originally it was created and commonly used in textile design as a communicative traditional cloth worn during burial ceremonies to announce the standing of their wearer and / or the deceased. Furthermore, *nkra* in the Akan language means *message* and all *Adinkra* cloth is imprinted with symbols and *edwene* – a *Twi* word meaning *designs* – that have symbolic significance. Blay (2008:7) states “the term “di” means to “to make use of” or “to employ” and the term “nkra” means

“message”. Literally, then, adinkra means “to make use of a message.” In most if not all cases, the symbols embody proverbial narratives and poetic messages projected through graphic illustrations.

Dzobo (1996:14) notes that Adinkra “symbols are used to communicate complex knowledge, abstract truths and ideas about life and its meaning”. Dzobo (1996:14) continues to point out that “a symbol is therefore a vehicle of communication for the conception of an object, enabling us to conceive or form a view of an object; it calls forth mental images”. This indigenous visual communication is comprised of intangible vernacular narratives that evoke tangible (visual or graphic) aspects; these can only be deciphered and understood in context; thus, making sense of such narratives requires a certain level of interpretive insight into the culture. According to Labi (2009:43), “these intangible narratives accompanying artworks are considered to be an important part of the work, and are preserved as part of the Akan history and culture, as authentic abakwasem”. *Abakwasem* refers to “intangible heritage” or to “important historical, ethical or cultural information” Labi (2009:43). Boateng (2011:22) further notes “the adinkra symbolic system has been characterized as a form of writing that refutes standard accounts of African societies as preliterate prior to contact with Europeans.” In most cases Adinkra are summoned for differing purposes, which in turn produce the context of use. Addo (2001: [sp]) mentions that, “the [Adinkra] language is rich, picturesque, and expresses a hidden or obvious wisdom”. Documenting such indigenous narratives into formal structures is therefore an important exercise for preserving indigenous knowledge for future reference. According to Appiagyei-Atua (2000:165) ”The *adinkra* symbols are perhaps the most important signpost of Akan culture and denote the level of freedom of expression that the people had and enjoyed.”

The aspects Labi (2009) references – intangible narratives, artworks, cultural history - display similarities relatable to the collaborative process of design ethnography from an indigenous perspective. The intangible cultural essence and philosophies of the Ghanaian culture are communicated, transmitted and preserved through the designed graphics, resulting in an interweaving combination of design features. Dzobo (1996) reinforces this notion when stating that “a symbol is therefore a powerful instrument of thought and conceptual abstraction”. It may therefore be taken as largely similar in intent to any other form of ideographic¹ writing. Delaquis (2013:33) states “There is a profound ideographic mode of communication and a bonafide language encompassing codified wisdom and knowledge embedded in its stylistic visual form.” Adinkra have the ability to communicate and impart knowledge in a singular form or when employed as a collective of symbols to evoke a complex visual vernacular. According to Boateng (2011:14) “[t]he place of adinkra and kente in the Asante and Ghanaian contexts points to their status as culture in the anthropological and aesthetic sense of the word—that is, products that are specific to a

¹ According to Delaquis (2013:33) “Ideograms bear similarities to pictographs, however, they do not necessarily communicate what they may portray visually, but may stand for abstract and complex or plain and simple ideas.”

social group and reflect its beliefs and values and exemplify aesthetic distinctiveness.” A table detailing the knowledge of the Adinkra descriptions is illustrated on the appendix page.

1.4 Related aspects: indigenous and contemporary similarities

Of particular interest is the reference by Labi (2009) to the *dwumfour*, meaning craftsmen or craftswomen: “the people who possess the unusual skills and abilities needed to translate unseen things and ideas into visual forms are highly respected”. To contextualise the setting from a research designer’s perspective, the skills described by Labi (2009) interweave processes from both ethnography and design in translating the intangible aspects into tangible forms. In turn, this translation resonates with the expertise carry out by the *dwumfour*. Labi (2009:44) further elaborates on two aspects that the *dwumfour* carry out: “He or she firstly translates an idea, belief, or something that cannot be seen into a visual form. Secondly, he or she creates that form – sometimes an article for use, sometimes an artwork – out of raw materials, intending it to be understood and to give pleasure to the user or viewer”. I would like to think of the *dwumfour* as both ethnographer and designer, as he or she is familiar with his or her culture, skilled in both research and design techniques and also skilled in producing a tangible visual communication, product or artifact.

Similarly, the process akin to design ethnography is adapted by the *dwumfour* to develop an outline for a contemporary indigenous visually designed communication. One might therefore suggest that rapid ethnography and design skills are comparable to how Labi (2009:44) describes the *dwumfour*, when he states the following:

[T]he dwumfour needs a wide range of knowledge and skill. They need to know how to choose raw materials for their durability and characteristics. They are expected to be familiar with different types of tools, manufacturing and creative techniques and processes and finishing materials and [the] effects they each produce.

In the light of the above preparation and understanding, the expertise of the *dwumfour* is considered as a result of the following objectives: first, to outline and communicate the evident similarities to the activity of a research-designer in the context of design ethnography from an indigenous perspective; and second, to reiterate the evolution of the sub-methodology of rapid ethnography captured in Labi’s descriptions of knowing how to merge intangible aspects to evoke tangible visual communication design.

Chapter Two: Exploring Rapid Ethnography

2.1. Background

This chapter outlines the design ethnographic cycle for the study, provides an overview on the research setting, the data collection and tools, and the research methods and limitations of design ethnography. The exploration is a single case study focusing on the process of interpretation and production; therefore one cannot separate the design ethnographic methods from the context of use. The exploration in this chapter is presented on two levels to delineate the relationship between rapid ethnography and design.

To begin with developing the preliminary activity, I adapted Mitchell's (2008) process as a base for classifying the indigenous visual vernaculars and, as an '*aid-de memior*'¹ to conducting ethnographies of language-like visual communication. I also incorporated Weber's (2009) process to assist in defining the activities that occur in the exploratory, generative and evaluative stages of the design ethnographic cycle.

According to Tunstall (2008:228), "Design ethnography seeks human understanding in order to design the product, communication, or experience that could be bought." From this, I sought to understand the complexities surrounding the Ghanaian indigenous designs; I modified and redefined my approach by selecting activities adapted from Mitchell (2008), Tunstall (2008) and Weber (2009) that I deemed best aligned to the project goals. In doing so, I identified key activities to guide my evolution of rapid design ethnography for this exploration. Table 3 below describes the suggested key activities for the design ethnographic cycle: (1) literature review (preparation and background understanding), (2) exploring rapid ethnography (evolution of rapid ethnography, discovery and limitations), (3) generative phase (design evolution, design phase: conceptual ideation), and (4) rapid ethnographic design (reflections on the praxis of ethnography & design and concluding review). These are then discussed in relation to the exploration of Ghanaian indigenous visual communication design.

¹ 'aide-memoire': French *aide-mémoire* (literally "memory aid"): A memory-aid; a reminder or memorandum, especially a book or document serving this purpose.

Suggested tasks for conducting an ethnographic communication design exploration of Adinkra symbols adapted from Leslie McNeil Weber (2009:47), Marilyn Mitchell (2008:4), Elizabeth Tunstall (2008:220) and originally adapted from JP Spradley 1980.				
Stages in the ethnographic design		Suggested tasks for conducting an ethnography of	Suggested steps applying QAME of Design ethnography	Suggested tasks for conducting a rapid ethnography for indigenous visual
1	Ethnography: Proposal Process	Selecting a category of visual communication and identifying the social situations in which it is used	Question: How does one design a successful product, service, communication, or experience?	Title of study: Interrogating rapid ethnography as a strategy for appropriating the indigenous visual vernaculars of the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols - (Cover) & Abstract (vii)
2	Research Planning	Formulating open questions about the visual communication and the situations in which it is used	Assumptions: [1]. Issues: Context and user requirements [2]. Roles: Designer as intermediary [3]. Scale: Qualitative significance	[1]. Literature Review: Preparation: & Understanding [1.1]. Overview of Design Ethnography - Pg 1 [1.2]. The shift to rapid ethnography - Pg 10 [1.3]. Indigenous visual vernaculars - Pg 11 [1.4]. Related aspects - Pg 12
3	Field Studies	Collecting examples of the visual communication		2. Exploring Rapid Ethnography [2.1]. Background - Pg 13 [2.2]. Evolution of rapid ethnography - Pg 15 [2.3]. Exploratory Phase - Pg 15 [2.4]. Discovery Phase - Pg 20 [2.5]. Limitations - Pg 28
4	Analysis / Synthesis	Selecting research tools to study how the design is used	Methodological approach towards ethnography: Empathic intuition	
5	Design	Writing descriptions of the visual communication and the situations in which it is used		3. Generative Phase [3.1]. Background - Pg 30 [3.2]. Design Evolution - Pg 30 [3.3]. Design Phase: Conceptual Ideation - Pg 30
6	Refinement	Selecting methods for and conducting analyses	Evidence: Concept Prototypes	4. Rapid Ethnographic Design [4.1]. Reflections on the praxis of DE [4.2]. Concluding Review: benefits of RDE - Pg 43 [4.3]. Conclusion - Pg 44
7	Production	Discovering themes within the data and applying existing theories as appropriate		
8	Understanding	Outlining and writing an ethnography		

Table 3: Kgomotso Mashigo, Suggested tasks for conducting an ethnographic design exploration of the Adinkra symbols adapted from Weber (2009:47), Mitchell (2008:4), Tunstall (2008:220) and originally from Spradley 1980.

2.2. Evolution of rapid ethnography

In developing a rapid ethnographic approach for this study, the approach is constructed on several layers to build the rapid ethnographic approach for this study to include: (1) employing appropriate online photo management ethnographic tools and techniques; in turn this will inform the type of visual to be documented, in this case the focus is limited to five sites; making the visual the universal photographic tool across the selected, (2) photographs are thus the primary tool and the mechanic of representation, and (3) the process of rapid ethnographic analysis, is conducted from various levels; including: categorisation, open-ended questions, and visual mapping that lead to ideation of individual design pieces that make up the ‘whole’ manual.

Conventional ethnographic techniques require the research-designer to immerse herself in the field of inquiry to carry out the investigation. Therefore, a key part of the background required me to narrow the focus to an appropriate scope, select the appropriate tools, consider the indigenous skills of the *dwumfour*, and to set the expectations on the depth of the outcomes. Certain conventional ethnographic processes questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, snow balling and / or participant observations to mention a few are excluded, since these would negate the very definition of rapid ethnography.

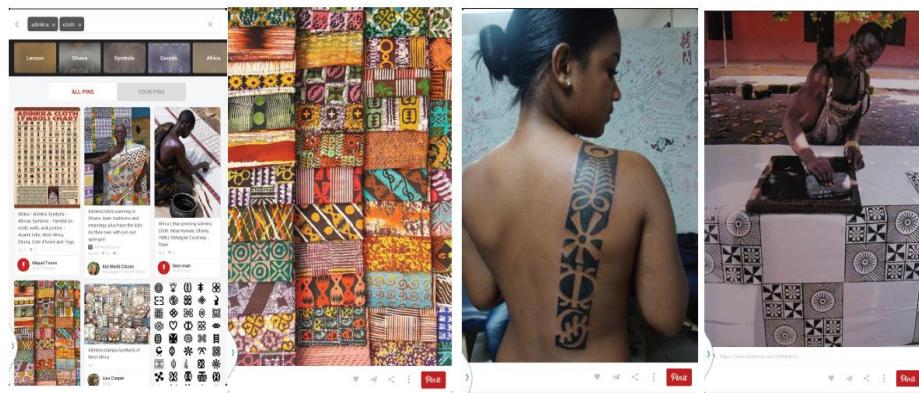
As a result, the employed rapid ethnographic tools and techniques had to encompass the following: (1) It had to be ‘rapid’ in production and in use, thus allowing data collection to be inexpensive and also to take place in a relatively shortened period; (2) it had to include tools and techniques that relate well to both the processes and product; and (3) it had to afford a ‘non-local’ research-designer an efficient and, insofar as it was possible, realistic accounts of the ‘visual online field site’, where culture, language and other resources could be limiting. With this in mind, the exploration focuses on the validity of rapid ethnography, while gaining the designer a general understanding of how this methodology may be adapted to the design project proposed in the form of a visual communication design manual.

2.3. Research process: preparation

2.3.1 Exploratory phase: research setting

Owing to the nature of the exploration, the above preparation and famailiarness to the subject; the exploratory phase is situated in a ‘virtual field site’ primarily utilising on-line digital application within a real-time context. In so doing, the study employs online photo-management applications that include Bing, Flickr, Google, Instagram and Pinterest, to mention the ‘newly found’ contemporary rapid ethnographic sources (sites) in Figures 4, 5, 6 & 7. The use of on-line methods is grounded on the following: (1) evidently what is documented of the collected photographs conveys countless uses and applications of the Ghanaian designs; and (2) this further conveys the import, adaptability and versatility

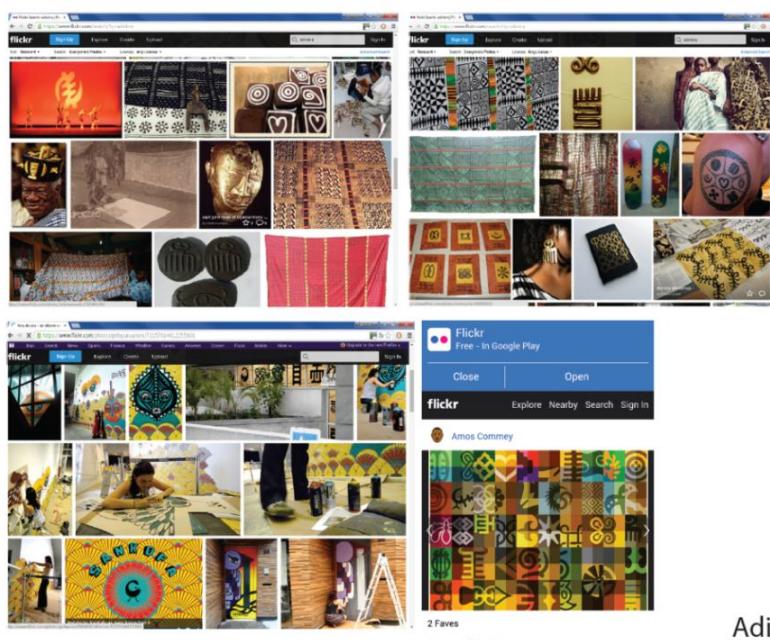
of the Adinkra from various geographical locations within and outside Ghana in contemporary, religious, traditional and cultural use.



Adinkra: Pinterest

Figure 4: Adinkra symbols, (Author unknown [A] 2014).

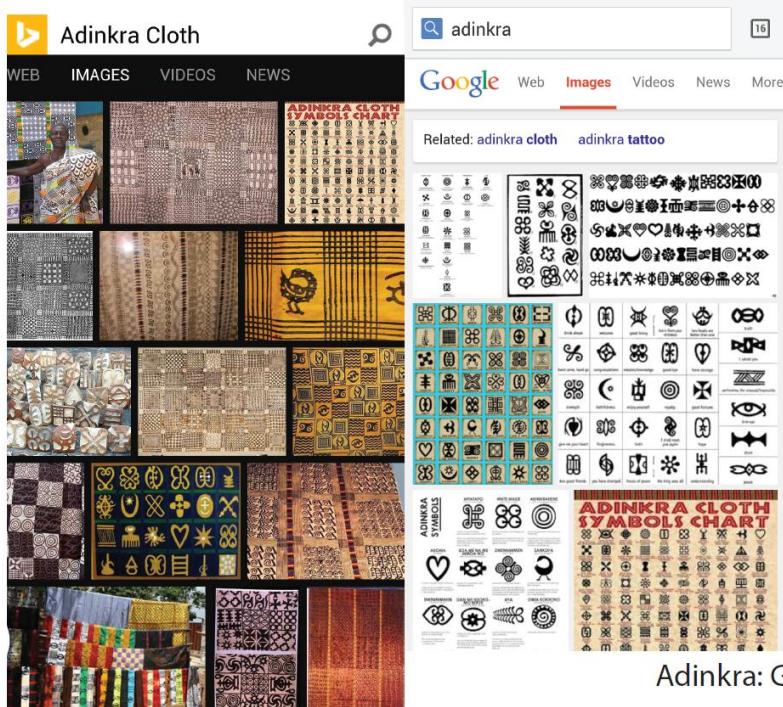
home page Pinterest website, 2014



Adinkra: Flickr

Figure 5: Adinkra symbols, (Author unknown [A] 2014).

home page Flickr website, 2014



Adinkra: Google & Bing

Figure 6 & 7: Adinkra symbols, (Author unknown [A] 2014).

home pages Google & Bing websites, 2014

The field site in this instance becomes collocated at the convergence of the various online photo management applications employed in real time; thus making the ‘research-designer’ a crucial player that mediates and aligns both conventional and virtual ethnographic research. This process thus aligns with the definition of employing ‘rapid ethnographic’ techniques and tools.

The research designer draws information (knowledge) from similar platforms (on-line digital applications), from various on-line contributors (sources) that have shared (common) interests in indigenous visual communication, sourced from differing geographical locations within and outside Ghana, over varying time intervals whilst narrowing the focus in providing a wealth of valuable indigenous knowledge within a structured time frame, spanning a two month period.

The advantages of appropriating the on-line ‘rapid ethnographic’ strategy presented opportunities and considerations especially when time and budget constraints emerged. With this background understanding, each online photo management and sharing application is treated as an individual ‘field site’; the photographs collected are transcribed into ‘field notes’, better yet photographic ‘notes’ as a basis of classifying the findings. Moreover, I was able to examine the collected documentation as ‘live data’

available in real time, across the online photo management applications and in some instances repetition of visuals (photographs) between applications that are linked or shared; resulting in a cross pollination with some photographs between accounts. The data collected in ‘theory’ provided diverse ‘ethnographic’ documentation of the Adinkra symbols in various forms of interpretations, representation and uses. Of course, this posed a challenge when discrepancies emerged. While providing a wealth of data; this also raised the question of the authenticity, reliability and validity of such photographs, and whether these documentations can be classified as visual communication design.

The purpose of this digital (online) stratification is to provide a basis to answer the selection of both digital and photo ethnographic techniques on the sub-question of ‘rapid ethnography’. The fact is that rapid ethnography makes authentic descriptions and interpretation of the indigenous proverbial narrative accompanying each symbol, difficult to discern. Thus, prior knowledge of the field becomes a vital consideration for generating appropriate interpretations. Despite the novel advantages availed by these online photo management applications, I turn to Kozinet (2010:142) who suggests that “for research ethics purposes, we can regard the use of some types and uses of computer-mediated cultural interactions as similar to the use of texts”, as such is the case with the collected data when compared to conventional field notes.

Photographs were then sorted into six primary categories created to include: (1) true symbols, (2) textile design, (3) body art, (4) manufacturing processes (5) architectural and interiors designs, and (6) a miscellaneous category that contained things like stationery, hair, and jewelry to mention a few. This suggested the need for a smaller sample size going forward. Thus category segmentation further assisted in filtering the photographs and aided in determining what to include and exclude for the remainder of the exploration. Categories that proved beneficial to the remaining activity contained the true symbols, textile design and manufacturing processes.

The approach further enables the researcher to discern whether the online strategy employed achieves the set of needs of what is classified as rapid ethnography in the study. In a differing light, the preliminary preparation provides a unique opportunity in comparison to conventional techniques when one considers a contemporary “field site”, data collection and the methods of data analysis. With the above understanding, it is my aim now to define the various identified factors of the visual vernaculars of the Adinkra symbols that I have needed to keep in mind as I have undertaken the rapid design ethnographic process.

2.3.2. Exploratory phase: open-ended questions

With the established considerations from the above preparation, I compiled open-ended questions¹ specifically designed to identify common and differing characteristics from the selected categories with the aim to establish: (1) the type of indigenous visual vernacular addressed, (2) the form and use of the (Adinkra) (3) what enables the Adinkra to be interpreted (deciphered), (4) how the Adinkra function in the Ghanaian system of meaning. The use of open-ended questions, on one level relates to the process proposed by Mitchell (2008), when conducting ethnographic research for language like visual communication and which in ‘theory’ is resembled by the Adinkra symbols. Thus criteria for evaluating certain anchoring qualities related to the larger socio-cultural aspects of the Ghanaian ethnography were developed. Furthermore, I considered (1) what features / characteristics the Adinkra symbols contain, (2) how indigenous designers ‘dwumfour’ use the Adinkra, (3) how the Adinkra are created / designed or manufactured, (4) whether ‘contemporary’ design and / or graphic elements are evident in applications of Adinkra , (5) how the Ghanaian culture reads, or receives or adapts designs created from the Adinkra, (6) how Adinkra lend themselves to contemporary visual communication design interpretations, (7) whether there can be any cultural misunderstanding when Adinkra are incorporated into contemporary visual communication design, and, (8) finally how Adinkra can be used to appeal to a diverse audience that is familiar with the culture under investigation.

The emphasis of employing open-ended questions enables the researcher to discern whether the online strategy employed achieves the set needs of what is classified as rapid ethnography for the study. This relates to the proposed approach suggested Mitchell (2008). To compensate for lack of clarity with the online data collected and to determine best practice for interpretation purposes, I made reference to the previous study and included material from journals, articles, proceedings, published and unpublished thesis and library resources, especially work by Domowitz (1992); Dzobo (1996); Appiagyei-Atua (2000); Kreamer, Roberts, Harney and Purpura (2007); Danzy (2009); Blay (2008); Labi (2009); Boateng (2011); Marfo, Opoku-Agyeman and Nsiah (2011); Clement (2011); Onuman (2011); Delaquis (2013); Kquofū, Amate and Tabi-Agyei: (2013). This process assisted me in formulating a consistent approach of addressing the on-line interpretations where discrepancies² existed; this serves the primary objective, which is to decode my findings and align related aspects allowing for the relevant themes to emerge. The literary resources: addressed certain shortcomings in the absence of interviews, questionnaires and / or

² The use of open-ended questions in the study is best described by Robert Probst (cited in Rothstein 1999:4). [E]nables designers to fully explore problems prior to developing solutions. It gives them the opportunity to “seek out problems and cause things to happen, to exert continuing influence on project development from the early stages of problem definition and research through final production.

³ Discrepancies that emerged include: the correct naming and translation of symbols and their accompanying proverbial narratives. Interpretations to the indigenous graphic and design elements; to symbolism attached to the use of colour, interpreting the tangible and intangible aspects of each symbol, etc.

focus groups, served to validate the discrepancies and the reliability of the on-line descriptions, Moreover they assisted in identifying gaps between the intangible and tangible by validating the authentic symbol names and proverbial narratives, and (3) emphasised design and graphic elements to be considered when selecting symbols.

2.4. Discovery phase: Sampling

The complex nature of Ghanaian indigenous design, as described by Labi (2009) combines intangible and tangible aspects that require an explorative qualitative approach and allow themes to emerge in the process of examining and interpreting the collected data. Jones (2006:84) mentions that:

themes tend to be specific to an area of study, such as understanding how people plan their social lives, and developed with a view to identifying design opportunities and influencing design solutions. Developing the themes involves analysis of ethnographic fieldwork. Themes are illustrated with strategically chosen exemplars and are often accompanied by design or messaging recommendations and guidelines.

I was therefore able to start managing the data and identifying possible key themes that incorporated both indigenous and contemporary aspects with my understanding of the ‘thick descriptions’ of the Adinkra. All the while, I tried to work with these considerations suggested by my interpretation of the *dwumfour*.

After an initial assessment I was able to start analysing the data, which indicated the following: (1) Adinkra are a form of graphic symbol designed to communicate and transmit aspects of the Ghanaian *Abakwasem*, with the intent to be seen, read and heard by the culture in context, (2) in appearance, Adinkra visually display organic and geometric features related to nature, animals, plants and /or reference a specific historical event or period, (3) the proverbial narratives or symbol name contain the *Abakwasem* – intangible aspects that enable the (visual) elements that evoke the tangible graphic form allowing for the transfer of a shared communication, (4) in construction, the *dwumfour* combine natural materials, tools and resources to craft the symbols; (5) design and graphic elements evoked in the detail contained: shape, colour, form, typography, pattern, movement, rhythm and materials; and (6) these skills and processes are similarly aligned to the expertise that would be carried out by a trained designer.

These guiding principles (attributes) motivated for a further classification analysis that may consider the following criteria when preparing for the design (ideation) phase; namely (1) to capture the authentic essence and ethical representation of the Adinkra in a contemporary light, (2) to consider indigenous design and graphic elements, materials and manufacturing requirements, (3) to accommodate a more universal design appropriation legible and interpretable by locals and non-locals, (4) to incorporate the indigenous and contemporary features without compromising the authentic symbols or proverbial

narratives; (5) finally, the design project should reflect in construction visual design communication; presented by a formal documentation of the process undertaken.

It started to become clear how the symbols (Adinkra) are layered in construction and use. At this stage in the exploration I incorporated the technique of visual mapping, similarly related to Handwerker's (2001) description of using a project management system in the form of a Gantt or PERT Chart to start analysing and reworking related or differentiated aspects and to further filter the data from the shortlisted categories into relevant themes. Beebe (2001:52) elaborates on the value of this in stating that “[m]apping can be used for collecting data, presenting data, understanding data, and planning action.”

2.4.1 Discovery phase: visual mapping

For the purposes of the exploration, I relate my process of visual mapping to what Jones describes as an experience model. According to Jones (2006:88)

an experience model is the result of three main activities. Firstly, a rich set of data on an insider's view of [the] areas under inquiry is collected, in other words, solid ethnographic research data. Secondly, the data is analysed so that patterns of behavior are identified and clear themes emerge from the fieldwork. It is important to consider different types of categories, such as, categories of users, categories of objects, categories of goals, and categories of strategies. The analysis is phenomenological in character. Thirdly, the phenomena are reduced to their essential components and structured into a narrative representation that can be visually depicted. The final representation is known as the experience model. These activities overlap, each activity builds on the one before it, and each activity is highly iterative. An experience model is the result of additional analysis to the traditional phenomenological analysis that involves conceptualization.

Symbols incorporated in textile design became the key focus, as they displayed an organised arrangement of visible design and graphic elements, including colour, pattern, form, movement, rhythm and differing texture treatment, depicted in Figures 8 , 9, 10, & 11. The selected categories also contained elements that incorporated features from both the true symbol and manufacturing processes. According to Boateng (2011:28) “Given the social importance of cloth in many parts of Ghana, it is not surprising that adinkra and kente producers regard the appropriation of their work in textile form more seriously than in other forms.” As such, the selected categories focus the exploration on the original use and application of the Adrinkra symbols by incorporating the focus of the textile, true symbols and manufacturing processes. Boateng (2011:28) further mentions “The designs of adinkra cloth, easily lend themselves to appropriation in non-textile media such as jewelry, masonry, and stationery. In Ghana, they appear in the insignia of churches and universities and in the open work walls of patios and courtyards.”

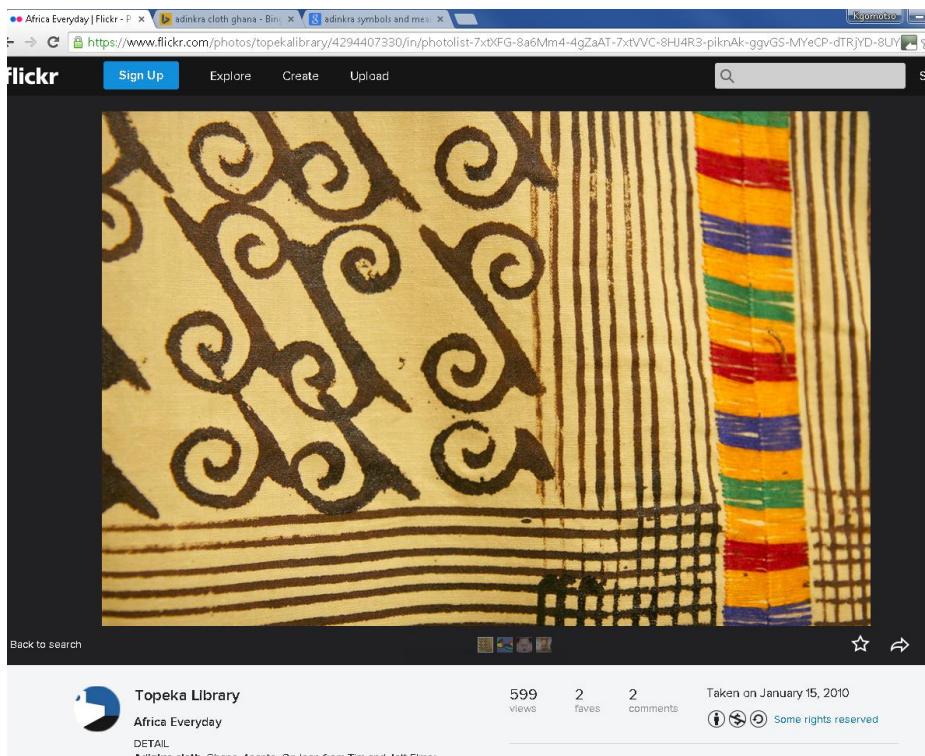


Figure 8 : Africa Everyday Adinkra Cloth, (Tim and Jett Elmer 2014)

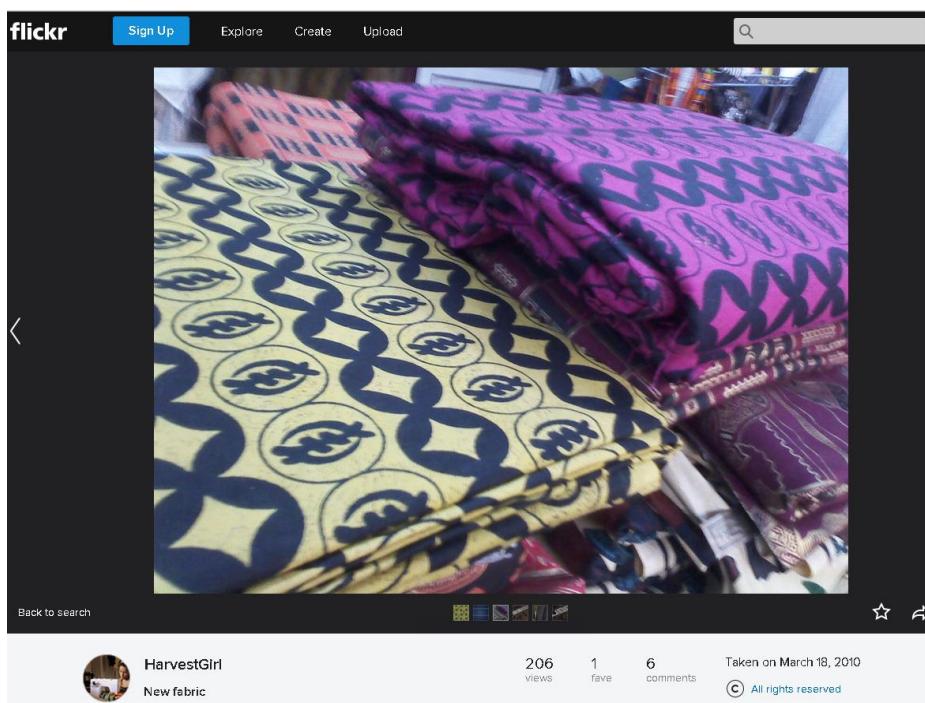


Figure 9 : New Fabric, (Harvestgirl 2014)

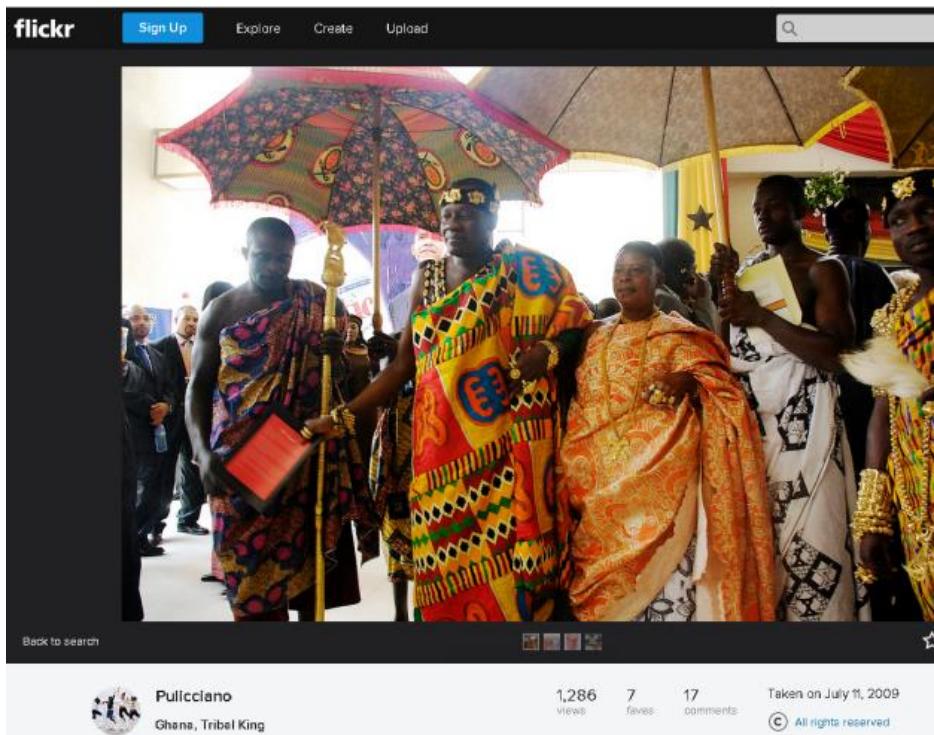


Figure 10 : *Ghana Tribal King*, (Piliccciano 2014)

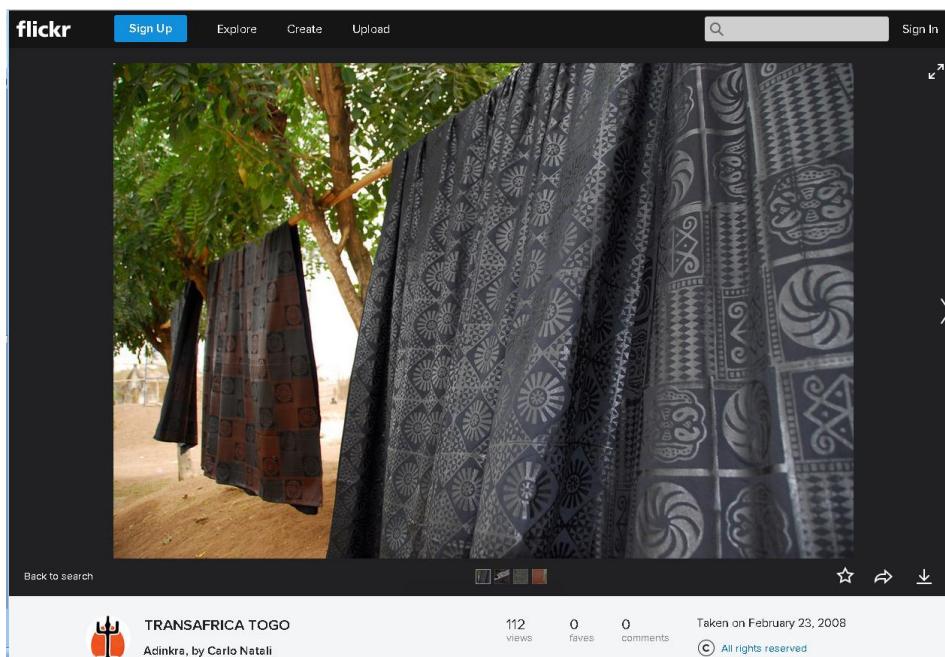


Figure 11 : *Adinkra TransAfrica Togo*, (Carlo Natali 2014)

With the aid of visual mapping, I was able to visibly and visually connect related and differing key aspects that emerged from the textile category at this phase in the exploration, (Figures 12). Furthermore this was a visual display of the ‘true rapid symbols’ as individual metaphors incorporated in; thus making the visual mapping approach visual ethnographic mechanical and analytical tool that both designers and ethnographers can share in design ethnographic strategies.

Blay (2009:147) mentions “Colour symbolism among the Akan represents a complex language through which to read the beliefs of the people, [and] which are related to their ontology and cosmology.” Its use as an indigenous design element is further attached to the overall communication of the Ghanaian design. Blay (2009: 147) continues to state that “[i]n the case of Adinkra cloth, the combinations of both colours and symbols imply particular messages related to morality, ethics, socio-political status, and faith in the power of *Nyame* (the Creator or Supreme Being)” in the Ghanaian culture. Prominent colours emerged and recurred from the evidence documented in the textile design category, resulting in rich and bold infused arrangements transmitting symbolic messages; it was noted that not all symbols contained these symbolic aspects.

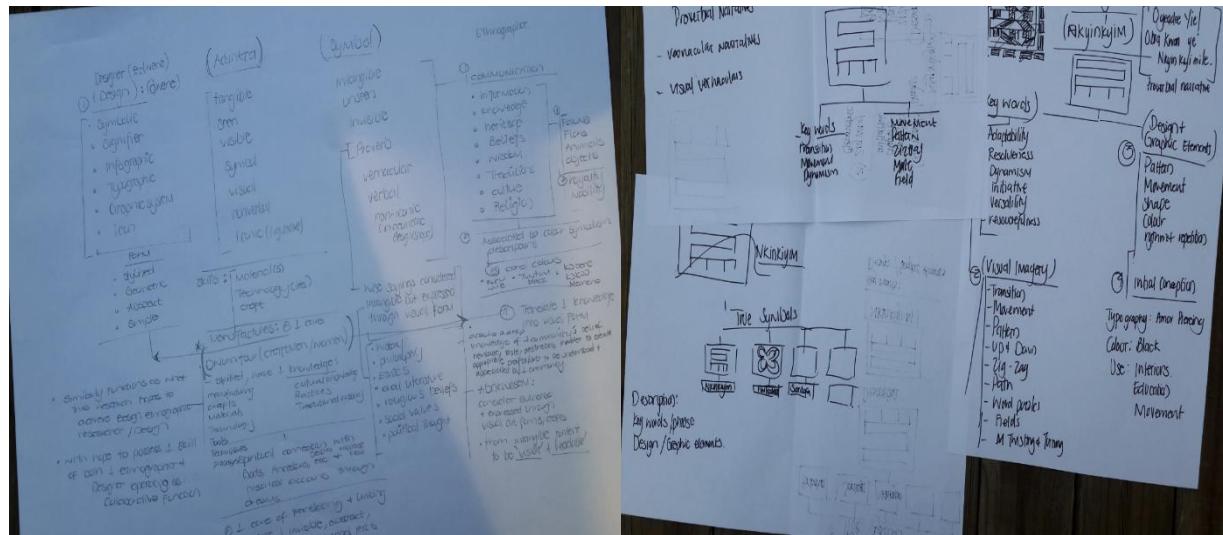


Figure 12 : Kgomotso Mashigo, implementation of visual mapping, also known as an Experience Model, 2014

Findings that emerged from the visual mapping process are echoed by Labi (2009:42) when he suggests that symbols “reveal the technology, materials, beliefs, cultural practices and the circumstances under which they were made as well as their relations with other cultures and people”. This idea has been noted in the preparation and discovery phases of the study, conveying the various dynamic cultural complexities and symbolic values attached to the Ghanaian designs.

2.4.2 Discovery phase: analysis

After conducting an extensive exercises of sorting and rearranging, the details that emerged for the above process include: (1) identifiable visual characteristics that contained contemporary and indigenous visual design communication elements (2) prominent symbols that emerged and reoccurred through popular use and association, and (3) symbols that had the potential characteristic to be recognisable to non-locals and still appeal to the locals (Figure 13). Nevertheless, it became clear that some explanatory text would be necessary so that those unfamiliar with the Adinkra visual vernaculars could at least gain some access to the meaning suggested by each symbol. The designer, in some sense, remains a translator.

With the activity generated from the previous steps, specifically visual mapping; the focus placed on the textile category presents a helpful way of decoding how each Adinkra might be re-interpreted (re-represented) in a new light. In turn, each symbol’s interpretation would evoke the fundamental graphic and design considerations as a contemporary inspiration. This means, by decoding a single Adinkra proverbial and visual description, I was able to apply my understanding by adapting identifiable themes to contemporary encoding of indigenous visual communication design. Decoding the Adinkra, interpretations pointed to additional cultural aspects attached to Ghanaian philosophies, including educational aspects of authorship, transmitting, transferring and preserving indigenous cultural knowledge. I also suggested an ethical use of indigenous symbolism, as this indigenous visual language is an import of a culture, a visual communication system, and a tradition of Ghana.

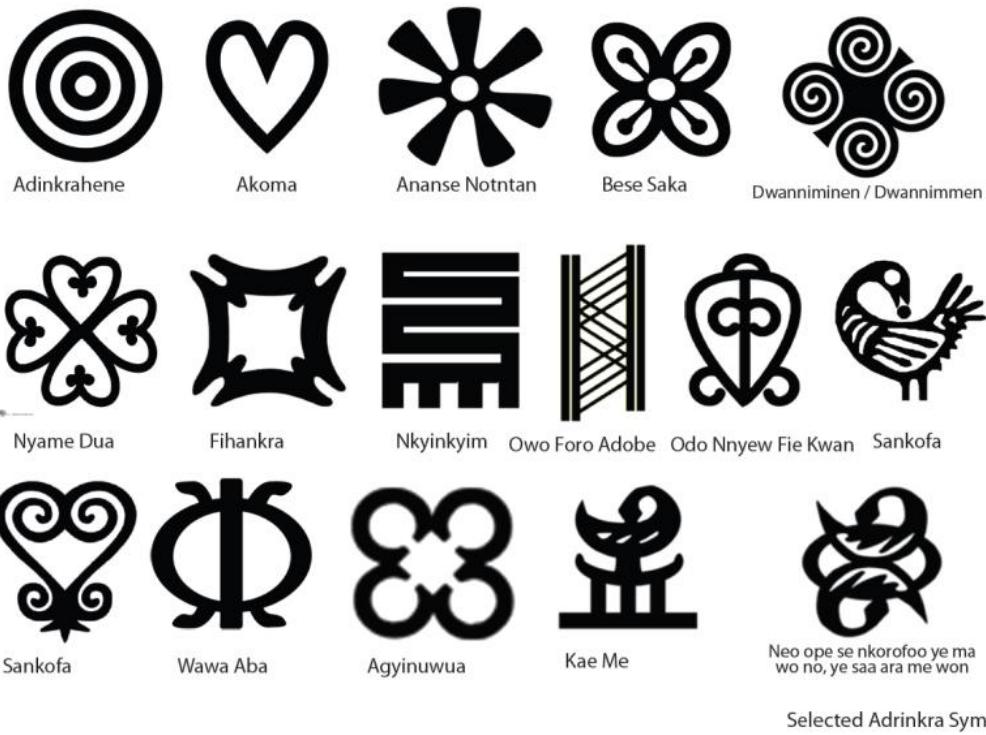


Figure 13: Kgomoctso Mashigo, selected Adinkra symbols, 2014.

2.5. Discovery phase: limitations

As a whole, insight generated to guide the creation of an initial outline for the exploration. One is then able to compile (formulate) a ‘brief’ that will direct the framework that may be employed when approaching ethnographies of indigenous visual vernaculars.

Although note, limitations exist for a single case, as with this exploration undertaken in a specific context; there are advantages as well. The exploration is an opportunity towards theory-building, rather than theory-testing given the methods and techniques appropriated. According to Sayer’s (1992:242) framework, “In intensive research the primary questions concern how some causal process works out in a particular case or limited number of cases.” As such is the case with the study and the exploratory activity undertaken thus far to prepare for the generative activity. Sayer’s (1992:244) further affirms that

intensive research focuses mainly (though not exclusively) on groups whose members maybe either similar or different but which actually relate to each other structurally or casually. Specific, identifiable individuals are of interest in terms of their properties and their mode of connection to others. Instead of lying upon the ambiguous evidence of

aggregate formal relations among taxonomic classes, causality is analysed by examining actual connections.

Given my current understanding of design ethnography, specifically the sub-methodologies of rapid ethnographic techniques, the approach assisted the research-designer to develop and construct a logical approach to documenting the process in providing evidence through each phase of research and development, which I have described above. Limitations encountered are further addressed in the chapters to follow, when critically comparing conventional and rapid ethnography.

Chapter Three: Generative Phase

3.1 Background

This chapter discusses the analysis process in reference to the ‘thick descriptions’ described by Geertz (1973). The following is a rendition of my ‘thick descriptions’ surrounding the Ghanaian indigenous designs through the employment of rapid ethnographic strategies. This study is a single application and not intended to present a complete description of how rapid ethnography ought to be undertaken in all cases. Nevertheless, it does provide some clue as to how rapid design ethnography can be undertaken. My interpretations of the Ghanaian indigenous design and the various rapid ethnographic activities encountered may be understood as a reference that will be legible and comprehensible to designers, ethnographers, students, locals and non-locals on a strategy that can shed light on the translation of indigenous visual communication design into a more contemporary form.

3.2 Design evolution

In developing the contemporary visual communication design ‘brief’, true symbols identified in the previous chapter are individually addressed as a way of decoding – how each Adinkra might be deciphered, read, and re-encoded in a new light. To contextualise the section and process to follow, Arnold and Fischer (1994:63) who write on the interpretation of qualitative data as such:

The meaning of a whole text is determined from the individual elements of the text; while, at the same time, the individual element is understood by referring to the whole of which it is a part...Specific elements are examined again and again, each time with a slightly different conception of the global whole. Gradually, an ever more integrated and comprehensive account of the specific elements, as well as of the text as a whole, emerges.

The process of decoding the Adinkra, from the open-ended questions pointed to additional cultural aspects attached to the Ghanaian philosophies including educational aspects of ethically transmitting, transferring and preserving indigenous knowledge ethically. This also conveyed the visual language is entrenched in various layers of symbolic metaphors limited to those with the knowledge to code and decipher the messaging. Through deciphering each symbols proverbial or poetic narrative and / or visual features, I was able to extract words, word phrases, and design elements pertinent to an ethnography of the ‘thick descriptions’, which is always an attempt to present the meaning of a cultural text/ artefact/behaviour in a way that it would appear as meaningful to an outsider.

I made use of art-based methods to address the indigenous essence of the proverbial or poetic narrative and / or visual features highlight the communication of design and graphic elements related to contemporary features such as: shape, arrangement, pattern, colour, typography, rhythm, movement and line. Better understanding the role of these visual elements creates a better sense of the ‘whole’ of the visual communication design manual following Thompson, Pollio and Locander (1994:433) when describing ‘a methodological process for interpreting qualitative data’, which is

an iterative one in which a ‘part’ of the qualitative data (or text) is interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the developing sense of the ‘whole.’ These iterations are necessary because a holistic understanding must be developed over time. Furthermore, initial understanding of the text are informed and often modified as later readings provide a more developed sense of the text’s meaning as a whole.

To further expand on the process undertaken, I turn to the examples of *Nkyinkyim*; which are considered as an individual visual text for the design manual.

3.3 Design phase: conceptual ideation

To decode and interpret *Nkyinkyim* (Figure 14), in appearance the symbol was selected for its simple structure that would be accommodative to a non-local and provide an identifiable introduction to the thought process applied. I turn to Opoku (cited in Okopu (2011:131) who introduces the indigenous visual vernacular as such:

[N]kinkyimii or *Nkyinkyim* – twisting. This contorted figure stands on four legs in spite of its shape and it symbolizes the strength and ability to stand erect and firm in spite of the twists and turns which life inflicts on us. The boldness, resilience and resourcefulness needed for a successful journey through life are represented by this symbol.

This appearance captures the meaning of twisting and zigzagging, which in turn further confirms its name. The indigenous meaning accompanying the symbol is ‘Oyeadee Yie! Obra Kwan ye nkyinkyimile’, which is translated as “You with the many parts to play; life’s path is full of ups and downs; twists and turns; playing many roles” (**Tetteh 2006:16**). The narrative certainly conveys various symbolic meanings; encompassing concepts of adaptability, resoluteness, dynamism, initiative, versatility, resourcefulness and toughness.



Figure 14, Valencia.A Tetteh, *Nkyinkyim*. 2006

To describe *Nkyinkyim*, key words that emerged that evoked visual images representing a transition were journey, word puzzles, up and down movement, mazes, fields and grids. This inspired possible concepts involving the collaboration of indigenous and contemporary design elements Furthermore, these keys words and phrases allowed me to reference additional cues from what emerged from the visual mapping. With this detail, I was able to visually plot specific detail attached to the ‘thick descriptions’ surrounding *Nkyinkyim* visually depict what emerged as the themes, proverbial narratives, design and graphic considerations, and translate those findings into possible contemporary visual design communication representations of *Nkyinkyim*.

With reference to Figures 15 and 16, the initial concepts produced during the generative phase of *Nkyinkyim*. In representation, the foundation of each initial interpretation had to resonate with the original state of *Nkyinkyim*. To bring in colour, the characteristics that complimented *Nkyinkyim*, translated to the use of black; translating to “physical aging that comes with spiritual maturity, new things get darker as they mature.”

In the case of *Nkyinkyim*’s and all other related pieces designed for the manual, the ‘new’ visual text interpretation conveys a two part visual communication design (Figures 15 & 16). The selected representation is designed as such to provide a means to convey each symbol’s distinctive narrative, and visually display the elements that interweave the intangible and tangible, indigenous and contemporary aspects constructing the whole of *Nkyinkyim* re-encoding. Simply representing (Figure 15) as a standalone would not be enough of a translation without bringing the interpretative elements and considerations that merged to bring forth the essential features that evoke the ‘new’ design piece of *Nkyinkyim*. The pieces are designed keeping in mind both local and non-local audiences, without limiting the transfer of indigenous knowledge.

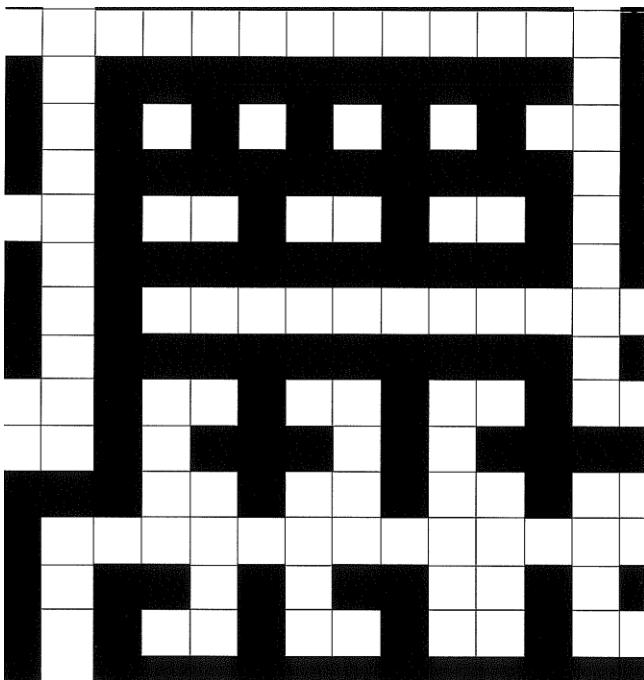


Figure 15, Kgomotso Mashigo, implementation of ideas 1, 2014

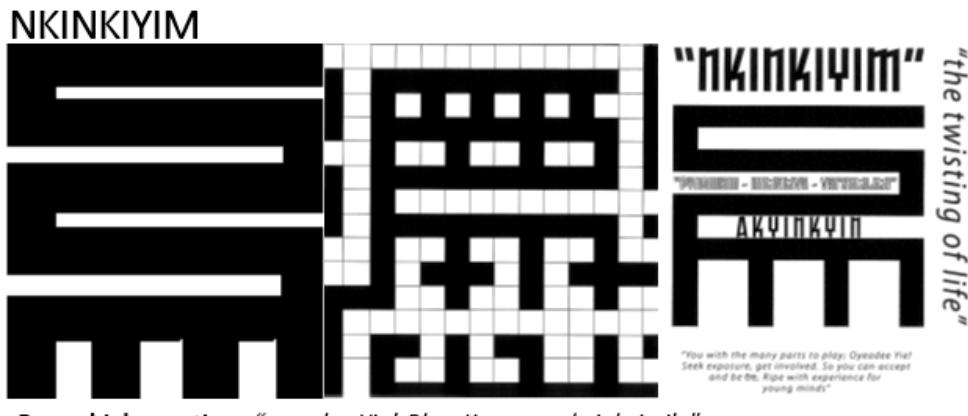


"You with the many parts to play; Oyeadee Yie!
Seek exposure, get involved. So you can accept
and be; Ripe with experience for
young minds"

Figure 16, Kgomotso Mashigo, proposed ideation interpretation 2, 2014

Figure 17 below, suggests the renditions and the steps undertaken to guide aspects that emerged from the intangible vernacular interpretations that directed the arrangement and considerations to include for the ‘new’ pieces. At this point the case of *Nkinkiyim* is still a work in progress as these are the initial design concepts that required evaluating taking into account the ‘brief’ requirements defined earlier.

The design translation of *Nkinkiyim* captured in (Figure 15), as an initial attempt. In appearance it simply resembled an adaptation to a word puzzle lacking the connecting essence of the indigenous and contemporary aspects. To establish and determine features I may have overlooked during the ideation process, I re-examined the keywords and visual imagery inspired by *Nkinkiyim* as a form of abstraction refined what had been created.



Proverbial narrative: “*oveadee Yie! Obra Kwan ye nkinkyimile*”

Keywords: adaptability, resoluteness, dynamism, versatility, toughness

Visual imagery: transition, journey, up & down, zigzag, movement, word puzzles, mazes

Design & graphic elements: rhythm, pattern, shape, line, colour

Colour: Black – “physical aging comes with spiritual maturity, new things get darker as they mature”

Typography & font:

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Figure 17, Kgomotso Mashigo, ideation implementation proposed for *Nkinkiyim*

Through this process, it was clear that I had not considered the detail that translated as follows: (1) strengthen and firmness, (2) the bold appearance of the *Nkinkiyim* and (3) the zig-zagging aspects that bring in the differing shapes and dynamism to the design piece. The final composition (Figure 18) captures what I have come to understand of the ‘thick descriptions’ surrounding *Nkinkiyim*. The above process of interpretation was possible with reference to what Spiggle (1994:497) describes; “In

interpretation the investigator does not engage a set of operations. Rather, interpretations occur as a gestalt shift and represent a synthetic, holistic, and illuminating grasp of meaning, as in deciphering a code.”

Furthermore, the interpretative process raised considerations reading the time period in which the symbol was conceived, as well as the difficulty of relaying a sense of its historicity; additional, the difficulties the author (*drumfour*) would have been experiencing at the time of creation became somewhat apparent. I may not know the ‘true’ origination of *Nkinkijim*, but after deciphering the symbol, additional thoughts emerged to encounter the above suggested; and as such relate back to Labi’s description about the layered socio-cultural symbolism attached to a symbol. This layeredness is somewhat lacking given the limitations of the rapid ethnographic approach.

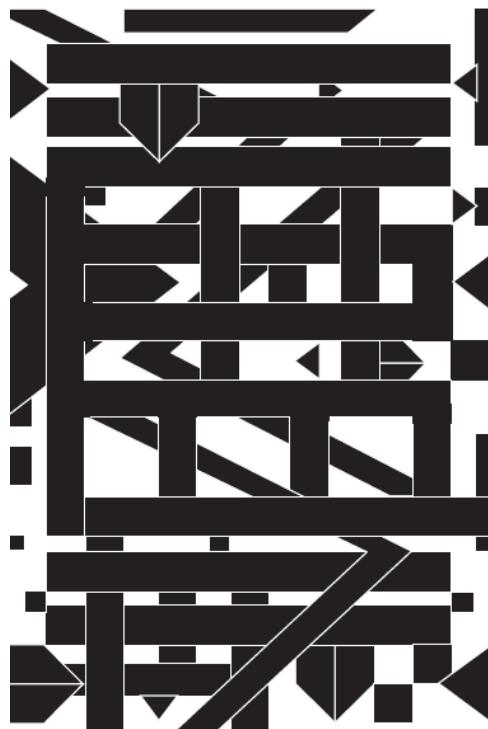


Figure 18, Kgomoctso Mashigo, proposed ideation for *Nkinkijim*

Each symbol was deciphered, and it must be noted that not all symbols were accompanied by a proverbial or poetic narrative. In this instance, I drew conclusions from the symbolic names meaning and visual aspects. The same processes were applied to the selected symbols to start generating the various interpretations for compiling a conceptual design project. Not all the selected symbols are included in the

final design manual as discoveries emerged that affected the exclusion of certain designs. These discoveries included to complete the visual design process, I further selected visual texts that aimed to capture a sense of the indigenous visual communication.

Cross-checking the various meanings attached to each symbol, it became vital in the process. The manual had to retain the ‘true symbols’ with their original encoding as an anchor. To account for common meaning for constructing the manual, I chose to carry through the following characteristics that emerged:

- (1) While symbols could be created as standalone visual text communication, they could be used as a collective to transmit an even deeper meaning as well as be read as a single contemporary narrative;
- (2) Originally in the indigenous design process, commonly used raw materials that emerged were the black of the dye or ink (*adinkra aduru*), the hand craved stamps from the calabash (*apakyima*), and white of the fabric (cotton cloth), before colour was introduced.
- (3) The cloth, constructed of panels is divided into blocks utilising a comb-like brush to inscribe and section the blocks on the fabric with three to eight lines blocked divisions or as required for the design, this sectioning process was evident in most fabrics and not all and assisted in identifying a font in the absence of a typeface to be used consistently across the individual text visuals;
- (4) I selected a primary typeface that captured the raw organic nature of the carving of the stamps from the calabash and would visually translate with the different symbols: as each symbol was conceived of this process, while also having its own identifiable features to amplify the communication. The secondary typeface to differentiate the indigenous from the contemporary and identifiable levels of importance,
- (5) Colour is incorporated as a form of binding the panels together to complete the visual messaging, as used by the *dwunfour*; I chose to focus on the colours that contained some degree of symbolism and characteristics related to the symbol. I selected a palette that resembled the Ghanaian national colours to convey the origination of the symbols.

I treated the above as well-known features that would be identifiable through the varying pages of the manual. No doubt, each visual text has its own distinctive messaging and flavour, yet my aim was that each element would complement the whole which was completed through the use of typography, colour, pattern, and layout. I set up each visual text as a contemporary Ghanaian visual communication design transferable on various applications; this was a means for further conveying the multiple uses and interpretations that can be adapted of the designs.

The creation of this new visual communication suggests an aesthetic that could be appealing to both locals and non-locals, but its aesthetic alone is not the main focus. My aim has been to pay attention to ethical representation. In this instance the visual texts lend themselves to more uses and applications than it was originally designed for. By this I mean, redistributing them as visual text on the very photo management sites used as sources of data collection and sharing them as visuals with an attached connection that allows for an even wider audience. This also conveys the adaptability and import of the Ghanaian designs outside of their context of origination.

To me, the outcomes do suggest future possibilities available to the transferring, transmitting and preserving of indigenous knowledge through contemporary applications outside of an original context. This exploration is a transitional entrée to the evolution of the opportunities that exist in the virtual arena, and how designers can interweave interdisciplinary strategies and techniques with the possibilities of conducting visual communication design. This is a subject I would like to further explore with more rigours and immersive ethnographic approach. Despite the advantages presented and afforded through this study, by the employment of such a strategy, there can be no doubt that conventional ethnographic interventions are better at dealing with the complexities of cultural texts. Rapid ethnography should always be regarded as secondary to any more immersive research process.

Chapter Four: Rapid Ethnographic Design

4.1 Reflections on the praxis of ethnography and design

Keeping in line with the adopted activity outlined in the exploratory and generative phases, the following chapter is a critical examination of rapid ethnography, which takes into account the exploration of the design ethnography of the Ghanaian indigenous designs. This forms the evaluative phase of this study.

As indicated in the introductory chapter, this study sought to employ contemporary rapid ethnographic techniques as a necessary alternative when conventional ethnography is not possible. I proposed new ways in which ethnography may be incorporated and used for design research, especially where limitations exist in the form of time, budget, distance, language and culture to mention a few key considerations. Put otherwise, this evaluation of rapid design ethnography is thus the appraisal of the appropriated rapid online ethnographic techniques and the documented research design strategy. It considers the strengths and weaknesses of rapid ethnography in relation to conventional ethnography by reflecting on the chosen research strategy, research setting, research tools, data collection and analysis conducted for this study.

Set against the backdrop of conventional ethnography, rapid ethnographic techniques and methods have sought to offer appropriate strategic features with the aims of producing reliable, authentic, and interpretative descriptions on the study of the Ghanaian indigenous designs with expected limitations. To begin with, the study required the narrowing of a focus, which is why one visual vernacular was chosen to emphasize the activity entailed during the process of developing rapid design ethnography. Moreover, it seeks to define the key activity and research method(s), and through this, allowed me to select the appropriate ethnographic tools as per the suggestions of Handwerker (2001).

4.1 .1 Research setting: virtual on-line ‘field site’

In the study, the ‘online rapid ethnographic’ strategy undertaken presents opportunities, challenges, and limitations that the researcher had to process given a particular visual environment, albeit a digital one, in order to gain insights into the possible uses of certain forms of visual communication. Isaacs (2012:105) states “The benefit of having a narrow goal is that it helps you triage and exclude so you can focus on the data that is most useful for your purpose”. Since the aim was to produce a visual product, this predominantly visual form of research makes sense. However, if the final aim were something akin to a

written document on the nature of the culture examined, conventional ethnography would no doubt have been preferable.

This rapid approach can be viewed and defined from differing perspectives. I refer to Kozinet (2000:5) who notes that “However, despite the many names researchers have given methods, *there are very few, if any, specific, procedural guidelines to take a researcher through the specific steps necessary to conduct an ethnography of an online community or culture and to present their work.*” (emphasis in original). In my particular exploration the strategy seemed appropriate given that I had previously engaged with the subject of the Adinkra symbols. That said, however, I still lacked the formal exposure, training and expertise of an ethnographer. The online setting reveals the following key benefits appropriated to visual communication design considerations: (1) by relying on this virtual ethnography, the researcher can situate herself in the context of the study to compensate for field work scenarios. (2) This setting assisted in narrowing and identifying the appropriate online visual photo management applications; which then became the primary sources. (3) This then made the data collection process accessible in ‘real-time’ across similar identified online digital applications. (4) The online process thus became the primary catalyst for focusing on unifying visual the aspects that simulates the procedures of more conventional ethnographic methods. (5) This online approach suggests online communities and cultural engagement with the subject under investigation, and (6) this afforded me the chance to track the activity and frequency over a framed time period. Kozinets (2000:8) mentions that “[i]ncreasingly, however, we are also seeing communities composed of people using audio information (iTunes playlists perhaps, or most certainly podcasts), visual information (Flickr), or audiovisual information (YouTube). Communication is the exchange of meaningful symbols, and all manner of human symbol systems are being digitized and shared through information networks.” Evidently what makes a study of this kind feasible is the fact that it involved exploring an indigenous visual vernacular in a predominantly visual way. Thus, the appropriate field site was within a visual online environment. Photographs found online became the core informative tool for this study.

Furthermore, the virtual setting emphasis the role assumed by the ‘research-designer’ as mediator and interpreter, observer and translator, to one that functions as an interdisciplinary field agent (negotiator) between conventional and online rapid ethnography. Riopelle (2012:38) mentions that “[i]n conventional approaches to methods, the ethnographer is the primary research instrument. However, information technologies are making it difficult for ethnographers to continue in this primary role without embracing the new technologies to help them.” This suggests that in the end it may be preferable to see rapid ethnography as a supplement to conventional ethnography rather than a substitute for it.

Despite the evolution of the technology age, conventional ethnography remains thorough in its pursuit of understanding the complexities of people, cultures, and communities, as well as its aim to research and redistribute of indigenous knowledge. Technology too has its shortcoming, which should be addressed. One must therefore be careful not to presume that the use of this online approach should surpass what conventional methods have to offer. Again, the rapid ethnography conducted in this study was sought as a response to particular limitations, which did not allow for more conventional ethnography. The need for such a response fits with the fact that such limitations seem to be inevitable in design practice today.

4.1.2. Research tools: photographs

Through the process, I merged digital and photo ethnography, this becoming the identified universal primary data collecting tool and mechanism of collection. More importantly, photographs anchored the dialogue between design and ethnography, as well as indigenous and contemporary. The choice of photographs allowed for vast amounts of data collection, since they depict the Adinkra in various settings, applications, and manufacturing processes and textures. Online searches provided an overload of digital data. The various applications found still showed Adinkra symbols created by different people, found in various geographical locations, and uploaded at different times. These, though, were bound together by a common interest in Ghanaian indigenous design in its various forms in a relatively short period. Concerns nonetheless arose about issues of authenticity, reliability, intellectual property, ethical representation and authorship to mention a few, as well as the complications and limitations encountered during the study; these issues were kept in mind as the study progressed. Riopelle (2012:40) emphasises that “[a]ll these obstacles can be overwhelming to sort out and to comprehend. However, the effort involved in harnessing the massive amount of digital data is worthwhile because data can be a valuable source of insight a complement to conventional ethnographic methods for ethnographers who are willing to engage with the digital work stream.”

Riopelle (2012) in this instance does not discard conventional process as being unimportant, but addresses the challenges presented by the emerging rapid online tools and techniques. In an ideal conventional setting, I doubt I would have had been afforded the time, leisure, budget and exposure to encounter what I was able to collect online, in its vastness. Thus, in this sense, rapid ethnography can be seen as somewhat preferable to conventional ethnography. Riopelle (2012:39) further contextualizes the comparison in stating that “[a] field site” was generally geographically bounded, and relationships were visible for participant observation. All those forms of work still exist, but they are now-and have been for some time-moving to the background, while a new digital landscape and communication ecosystem permeates today’s workspaces.”

Time (urgency) emerged as a concern in this study, and what is deemed justifiable when it comes to having solid engagement. This in itself challenges the once off immersive approach of conventional methods that could be limited to days in the fields and the amount of repeated visits one can or is allowed to encounter. The technique in itself was carried out over a two month period, allowing for intervals depending on personal circumstances. This allowed for new materials to be downloaded from the various sites and also helped to avoid the repetition of documenting the same information. The use of digital ethnography in this instance supports the procedures of Handwerker's (2001) description of creating a clear vision of where you want to go and how to get there, in meeting your objectives without getting lost.

With this form of visual data collection, patterns of repetition between and across applications became evident; in some instances the visual appeared more than once as a result of linking or sharing between users and various online platforms. This also prompted a mention of the interaction, import and exchange of Ghanaian indigenous design between and across the virtual world, where invisible boundaries existed but not enough to stop the proliferation of the indigenous design in less authentic representation; this raising the question of authenticity, intellectual property and authorship, and as a non-local such issues were not that easy to discern. This is certainly a problematic aspect of rapid ethnography.

The various photo management sites were field harvests, allowing repeated visits after periodic intervals to review if new material had been added or shared. Beebe (2001:60) conveys this as a part of conventional ethnography when stating “[t]he almost constant shifting between data analysis and additional data collection is an iterative, or recursive, process. An iterative process is a process in which replications of a cycle produce results that approximate the desired results more and more closely. Each cycle of data analysis and data collection is expected to produce better and better results.”

For the study, the photographs became my field notes '*aid-de-miors*', in the absence of interviews, questionnaires, surveys, as prescribed by conventional ethnography. Through a systematic and continuous reviewing of the data, I was able to cluster¹ my findings into patterns that emerged or were notable. Furthermore in categorising the photographs into the six identified groups; it made it easier to re-work each category and a repeated activity I was able to clarify discrepancies and zoom into the specific detail, which would be my focal point going forward.

Millen (2000:283) suggests that “[t]he analysis programs allow the researcher to explore and understand the qualitative data by filtering (searching and subsetting), conversions (annotation or coding),

¹ Beebe (2001:71) introduces clustering as “clumping things into classes, categories, bins” (248) and involves putting together things that are like each other.”

summarsation (counting, subsetting), and visualization (comparison, sequences, and relationships)."

Whilst Millen's descriptions relate to applied ethnography, it is similarly relatable and comparable to the process conducted in this study; especially with the visual mapping activity. This was especially evident in the first phases of analysis when narrowing the vast amounts of data towards identifying themes, patterns, and codes. Evidently this paved way to a second phase of sorting and filtering of data from the selected categories: true symbols, textile design and symbols in the manufacturing categories. What did prove to be a challenge was authentication, a topic under review within and outside of as addressed by Boateng (2011: 146).¹ After all anyone could have posted the visuals outside of the ethical, cultural, traditional and indigenous boundaries. The usual checking mechanism of interviews is not typically available in rapid ethnography and this proved to be a serious shortcoming. Still, the volume of visual information available in the form of photographs still provides a fair degree of self-checking; as patterns emerge, visual anomalies, which are likely to be less authentic, become more apparent.

4.1.3 Research analysis: visual mapping

The incorporation of visual mapping contributed to the visual representation of the design and graphics elements that emerged. These elements addressed both intangible and tangible aspects of each symbol and established concrete relationships between categories and symbols. The advantages of appropriating this form of visual analysis are described by Beebe (2001:53) when he writes "Mapping can quickly collect and present complex information in a simple form." This process assisted in facilitating the visual representation of opportunities that emerged or may have been overlooked in the phases mentioned earlier. Jones (2006:87) states "I believe we need to extend ethnographic analysis and develop a representation that more tightly couples ethnography and design. This would create something tangible which could guide the creative process and take the understanding forward into the development process". This position suggested by Jones (2006) promotes ethnographic research especially in the idea that it should take a formative role in design rather than merely pushing for collaborative interdisciplinary mergers where design is concerned. At this stage in the study, (1) one was able to link indigenous and

¹ Boateng (2011: 146) states "This is what has happened with adinkra and kente and countless other examples of indigenous cultural products ranging from textiles to music. Their production has shifted from local communities to sites that can optimize labor and markets. Along with the loss of revenue to the original produces, there are changes in symbolic power and cultural expression. An adinkra symbol that means "unity" in Asante becomes, simply "Africa" on its new context. While such changes in symbolism are an inevitable aspect of any dynamic culture and important to the working out of cultural identities, they also have significant economic ramifications." Boateng further mentions, "...those exploiting the situation were "the Abidjan people," namely, entrepreneurs from the Ivory Coast, which was the initial source of mass-produced imitation kente in Ghana. Outside of Ghana the production of imitation cloth was on an increase and Boateng further states "Increasingly, however, the most effective producers of "African" cloth for global markets are not African at all but Asian."

contemporary design elements, (2) incorporate and select the appropriate colours to convey the indigenous elements, and (3) identify a typeface that resembles the indigenous aspects while appealing to a diverse audience.

As with any process adaptation, limits will arise. Jones (2008) expresses this when she mentions the limitations of experience models are still unknown and what to determine as best practice. For the purposes of this study, the use of visual mapping is beneficial for a number of related and obvious reasons in the exploration: (1) To begin with, the researcher designer has the ability to visually observe the variables between unrelated and related categories before, (2) modifying and redefining similar or related design and graphics elements with an aim towards creating a design manual. (3) Then where possible, the researcher can build synthesis between contemporary and indigenous design considerations. (4) Moreover, the secondary aim focuses on the visual, thus making the methods applicable to the process undertaken. Millen (2000:284) explains, “This rapid shift from purely descriptive representation of our observations to preliminary analysis is consistent with the view of a more analytic view of ethnography.”

What supported this strategy in the absence of conventional techniques was that it presented both opportunities and weaknesses. From a rapid ethnographic standpoint, while highlighting the gravitation to virtual or online tools, techniques and methods data is collected from differing perspectives and carries a biased reliance on the views of the sources who may not convey the authentic ‘true’ interpretation. In a conventional setting, the locals could be selective in unpacking meaning because it is deemed sacred knowledge limited to the privileged few, or the mere presence of the researcher could be perceived as limiting. On the other hand, the approach provided alternative ways considering how the photographs convey multiple messages; through their layered meaning and link to larger socio-political affiliations. As with any study, inconsistencies emerged with symbol interpretations and the literary resources assisted in clarifying such discrepancies, which drew back to conventional applications to assist with clarification with the narratives. This also signaled the powerful role constituted by conventional techniques and methods with this contemporary digital age.

In the light of this, the adapted preparation, processes and techniques appropriated in and for this study are particular to this single exploration of Ghanaian indigenous design. Still, it supports the notion implied by Riopelle (2012) of applying contemporary rapid design ethnography as a research strategy. This exploration could be further developed to the advantage of both online and conventional methods. This could result in an adaptation to the complexities and demands of culture, digital research and design research. Certainly there exists an interest in indigenous visual communication that requires formal documentation for the preservation of the Ghanaian heritage and the transfer of skills before they

diminish as an indigenous functional aesthetic and as newer symbols are being introduced within the virtual arena.

4.2. Concluding review: benefits of rapid design ethnography

What is clear from this study is that rapid ethnography must be taken as a cyclic evolution that both complements and challenges tradition conventional techniques in the light of internet based (online) research opportunities. It is certainly an alternative strategy for conducting design research.

In the broader sense, the lack of formal indigenous documentation provided opportunities to delve further into the exploration by redefining existing processes and identifying alternative methods to compensate for conventional techniques. Beebe (2001:65) mentions that “There are numerous ways of analyzing ethnographic data. There is no one best way and ethnographers often are informal in their approach to analysis.” The continuous sorting and filtering in the earlier phases of this process further narrowed the focus and alleviated gaps. It also visually presented points of intersection between researcher and designer, indigenous and contemporary, as well as rapid and conventional ethnographies.

To account for the limitations and shortcoming, I refer to the designed project as a tangible outcome of the study which can further be developed for future use. Given that some of the self-checking mechanisms of conventional ethnography were absent, it must be taken as a prototype, following Tunstall’s (2008:229) idea: “Acceptable forms of evidence in the design community are design concepts and prototypes. Design concepts are ideas for solving problems. Prototypes are the built and iterated manifestation of those ideas”.

The limits of rapid ethnography may not necessarily be fully determined here. In fact, such limits would only become fully apparent if the present study and design outcome were repeated, but with a focus on undertaking a more conventional ethnographic study. For the purposes of this exploration, rapid design ethnography is regarded as ‘emerging’. This is not necessarily viewed as a limitation but rather suggests an opportunity to interweave, challenge, and align disciplines, processes, discussions and topics for a greater yield of outcomes. It would be detrimental for an emerging strategy and sub-methodology; I would rather consider the limitation as advantages as described by Rothstein (1999:5) when he refers to Bill Stumpf who mentions:

...[R]esearch is less the application of rigorous methods than about enlightening interpretations. In this sense, he champions design research as more art than science. This often entails digging beneath the surface of appearance and research findings to get at the truth. Stumpy concludes that there is poetry to design research, an intuitive process that leads to an understanding of, what he calls, the “unmeasurable aspects” of people’s daily lives.

The exploration provides specific insight into measurable degrees of interpretation and analysis, which when employed appropriately will create a clear vision of the desired direction as described by Handwerker (2001). Limitations become another topic of investigation as these ‘contemporary online rapid’ ethnographic techniques continue to define their offering. Despite the online employment of rapid ethnographic techniques for the study, the approach does have its limitation, some of which I have already noted. I refer also to Riopelle (2012:51) who states

The technology is not perfect; it does have cracks in its armor and needs a critical eye to assess its utility. This is where ethnographer’s five senses come into play once again, on the ground, to add this missing dimension. In the final analysis, the ethnographer remains the unifying instrument to integrate the physical and the digital world for an insightful ethnographic story.

Some of the questions raised during the process of navigating such limitations included (1) deciding on the sample size, how big or small, how many or how few online photo management sites I was to employ to conduct my data collection and what is deemed as an adequate sample size; (2) time, which was also a consideration on how long is long enough when engaging with the online photo management sites to gain a substantial understanding of the on-line documentations, (3) analyzing, verifying and evaluating my interpretations with reference to the design outcome; and (4) seeking to understand whether the final communication ethically conveys and captures indigenous knowledge while using contemporary methods. This last consideration is especially important considering how difficult it is to check back with ‘informants’, as is the case with conventional ethnography. For this study, I reiterate what Jones (2006:91) says when she states:

[I] believe ethnography could play a more effective role in design if we were to extend ethnographic research analysis and develop experience models. Experience models are one example of highly successful representations that offer an analytical device, a generative tool and a shared reference point.

I would like to describe the process and strategy as a constant work-in-progress as ethnography continues to evolve through new media opportunities, and research design can contribute to the articulation of online rapid ethnographic research offerings, as such I turn to Riopelle (2012:38) who states “I argue that conventional ethnography and technology-based methods are not polar opposites on a straight-line continuum but rather are complementary methods.” This is an argument I have tried to investigate and translate with the exploratory study and one I hope opens up new possibilities for more immersive approaches, which can be used in conjunction with rapid ethnography in building research design.

4.3. Conclusion

This study explored methods and employed non-conventional techniques in the construction of a contemporary Ghanaian design manual. The appropriate elements comprise of several layers that emerged in this exploration and may be said to be the guiding steps for a visual-based '*rapid design ethnography*' exploration.

To a large extent, the benefits of rapid ethnography may be challenged as the very approach and techniques employed are on a continuous evolution of defining and redefining their offering to design research, formulating the concept of contemporary '*rapid ethnographic*' research. This fits with what Salvador and Mateas (1997:166) write when describing design ethnography, which is "a set of data collection and analysis perspectives, assumptions, and skills that can be used effectively and efficiently to understand a particular environment, or domain of people for the express purposes of designing new technology products".

The various activities conducted in the exploration were inter-dependent and included appropriate rapid ethnographic aspects to validate '*rapid design ethnography*' thus making rapid ethnography the focal tool and technique in the study, and in totality validating the strategy of *rapid design ethnography*.

Information sharing is of great significance if we are to preserve indigenous knowledge for future generations within and outside Ghana. Making it accessible and available will also signify its importance to other forms and definitions in the near future. It is therefore the purpose of this exploration to bring to light some of the possibilities offered by *rapid ethnography* albeit in a limited way, in and for contemporary explorations.

The exploration validates a number of dynamic features that function within an interdisciplinary collaborative framework including revealing the dynamism of design and ethnography, conventional and online, and indigenous and contemporary adaptations for meeting the demands of contemporary cultural communities. The strengths and weaknesses of '*rapid design ethnography*' should be considered and examined from various standpoints, particularly in an area where Ghanaian design still relies on oral communication to convey sacred texts. Still, at the very least, I feel that the process has better equipped me to handle the visual texts of another culture, even if there is nonetheless room for growth.

In summation I turn to Riopelle's (2012:50) recommendation: "To address the modern world with its increasing technology sophistication for data capture, analysis, and sharing, my recommendation for students and faculty as well as for practitioners is "join in and try and keep up." The fundamental skills of observation and pattern recognition remain relevant today."

To date, ethnography is evolving when one considers the time invested in this short study. It provided a glimpse of the possibilities that have emerged - available to visual communication design, designers, design students, graphic designers and ethnographers, to mention only a few. As designers we live in the digital age with consequential bearing that requires designers and design practice to be proactive with the roles they fulfill and the quality of their work. They should be equally aware of the ever changing online 'ethnographic' landscape, since designers operate in a transitioning global environment; including the evolution, of how knowledge is gathered, stored (archived), shared and redistributed in the information digital age.

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Appendices: Adinkra Symbols

	ADINKRAHENE	"chief of adinkra symbols"	greatness, charisma, leadership
	AKOBEN	"war horn"	vigilance, wariness
	AKOFENA	"sword of war"	courage, valor
	AKOKONAN	"the leg of a hen"	mercy, nurturing
	AKOMA	"the heart"	patience & tolerance
	AKOMA NTOSO	"linked hearts"	understanding, agreement
	ANANSE NTONTAN	"spider's web"	wisdom, creativity
	ASASE YE DURU	"the Earth has weight"	divinity of Mother Earth
	AYA	"fern"	endurance, resourcefulness
	BESE SAKA	"sack of cola nuts"	affluence, abundance, unity
	BI NKA BI	"no one should bite the other"	peace, harmony
	BOA ME NA ME MMOA WO	"help me and let me help you"	cooperation, interdependence

ADINKRA CLOTH SYMBOLS CHART



Adinkra is the name given the colorful, hand-stamped and hand-embroidered clothes used for mourning and other special occasions by the Akan people of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire (the Ivory Coast). Stylistic symbols called adinkra symbols are woven onto these clothes. Used for mourning, the symbols express the wearer's feelings and sentiment about the deceased person. Used for other special occasions, the symbols convey such messages as hope, peace, bravery, faith, and love.

Adinkra literally means "saving good-bye or farewell." In the language of the Akan people, who comprise about one-half of the population of Ghana, Adinkra cloth symbols have been in use for hundreds of years and constitutes an ancient African writing system of verbal and visual imagery. The symbols are figurative and stylized geometric images that embody poetic messages. Some of the symbols express the legendary history of the Akan people, and others are cultural metaphors and aphorisms about philosophy, myths, legends, beliefs, rituals and social values. They contain multilayered meanings and

profound truths. They provide a framework of moral virtues and lessons for the good life. They epitomize the Akan world view and their quest for truth and righteousness in the world.

The stamp designs are made from carved calabash which are dipped into a specially made ink called adinkra adaro (adinkra medicine). The designs are then stamped onto a variety of colored cotton clothes to be worn for all occasions.

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