

Preface

I am fascinated by patterns. From the braid on the hem of my skirt to the similarities in the ways people behave. I am especially enthralled by patterns that have four specific characteristics: they iterate, they can be used to bring order to complex networks of information or events, they are playful and they adapt themselves to change.

Iterating patterns mutate and sequences do not duplicate themselves over and over, but change a little each time they are repeated, like family resemblances. An example of this is found in the Afrikaans word sequence “kloutjies,” “boutjies” and “bakkies”. The pattern is clearest when the words are spoken as opposed to written, since the ‘tj’ combination is pronounced like a ‘k’. The words mean ‘little claws’, ‘little bum cheeks’ and ‘little face’. Without the word “boutjies” the two words “kloutjies” and “bakkies” would have little in common.

This pattern also adheres to the other characteristics of the kinds of patterns I find interesting. It can for instance, assist in the ordering of apparent chaos and making sense of the complexities of living. It functioned in a time when I had to bath a six month old baby in the evening when I was at my most exhausted and running on reserves. Knowing then that if I had washed the “kloutjies”, “boutjies” and “bakkies”, I was okay, it gave me a sense of control over the task of cleaning a splashing, playing, and sometimes screaming or squirming infant.

Furthermore, the pattern is flexible enough to keep up with growth and change. So, when the baby started crawling and his feet also had to be scrubbed, I enjoyed finding the right word that would perpetuate the pattern: “hakkies”, ‘little heels’.

Finally, this pattern turns the task into a game, lightening the mood and the task load. Hence it is playful in that it is non-prescriptive or does not have to follow a particular route. By this I mean that any other pattern may have served just as well. I could, for instance, have made a pattern to order the task of running the water, undressing the baby and washing him. Or I could have chosen different words for the same body parts. The rules for the pattern can be made as the game unfolds.

While patterns had fascinated me since childhood in the songs I made up as an eight year old to the duvet cover I picked out as a teenager, my academic interest in

patterns emerged as I was studying theology and philosophy as an undergraduate. In my academic search I identified a need to understand and describe the social context of living in South Africa and the world in the early 1990s and of being human in general. I searched, like most scholars in the Humanities, for the 'rules' of what it means to be human. In Old Testament studies I was struck by the similarities between the many creation myths across the globe and the pattern that seemed to emerge. In Philosophy I met Claude Levi-Strauss and was captivated by his attempt to show the underlying pattern to world mythology in his structural anthropology (1963). Somewhere, it seemed to me, there was a kind of blue print for the stories people tell to make sense of their world. Yet, as my studies continued I was convinced by the arguments of post-modernist thinkers, and most particularly, post-structuralist philosophers (Derrida, 1978, 1979, 1997; Foucault, 1972, 1975, 1988, 1990a, 1990b; Rorty, 1979) concerning the inaccessibility of such a blue print and the contingency of knowledge in time (Heidegger, 1962; Nietzsche, 1961, 1989). The notion that we are always and for ever caught in the reality of our own cultural interpretation of the world was like a conversion and it made me free, able to play and frolic in my attempts to find meaning.

Of course the question of relativism and subjectivism was often discussed and used to attack these notions, but my lecturers in philosophy (Cilliers, 2001; Cilliers, Van der Merwe and Degenaar, 1999; Van Niekerk, 1987, 1989a, 1989b, 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Van der Merwe, 1992, 1994) showed me a way of finding truth without the need to search for The Truth. Without here regurgitating four years of study, I will summarize my understanding in three steps. Firstly, I learnt about the notion of self-reflexivity; that is, the ability of human beings to gain distance from themselves and observe themselves in action, thought or feeling. Secondly, impressed upon me was the idea of identifying seemingly recurring patterns in this action of self-reflection: thought patterns, patterns of behaviour and emotion. Under the self-reflexive gaze of a thinker, these patterns emerge from the ebb and flow of signs in the complex network of language games and systems that make up our understanding of life. Even though the identification of the patterns may be subjective, by virtue of the self-reflexivity of the human thinker, it is always possible to find a way of describing the standpoint from which the pattern is identified. Finally, I was drawn by the idea that, instead of using The Absolute Truth, which was

now shown to be unknowable, as a standard for what is good and right; it is possible to use the utility or practicality of an idea as one of the measures of its 'goodness' or 'rightness'. Such utility or practicality will of course always be relative to the context of its application and so I was drawn to the field of Applied Ethics. Here the utility of some philosophical solutions which can make the lives of human beings flow with a greater degree of harmony between them and their world and between themselves and others impressed me deeply (Macintyre, 1981; Nussbaum and Sen, 1989; Rescher, 1969). Yet, for me, even this field of study was not useful and practical enough for the everyman on the street who now had to deal with an ever changing reality where his Absolute Truths were questioned and where the answers to his questions became less obvious, less given. Finally my search led me away from the ivory tower of academia to find solutions that could function there, where people were living working, expressing and surviving.

I had displayed an interest in drama since the age of 3, according to my mother. I had taken drama classes since the age of 9 and when I left the ivory tower it was here that I turned for answers although I did not quite know where to look. Then, as I opened my own drama school, I searched for a handbook to guide my lessons and I picked up a book entitled "Dramawise" (O'Toole and Haseman, 1987). This book changed my thinking and the trajectory of my life journey. In it I found not only the principles for making meaning in drama and theatre, but also the useful and practical patterns that could help Everyman to frame and understand his own struggles in everyday life. It occurred to me that the same things that help us make fictional stories are the things that help us write our life stories. If these principles were combined with the powerful ability of self-reflexivity, it could lead to a methodology that could help Everyman everyday in his struggle for making sense of his world.

For the next four years I played around with many of the ideas in *Dramawise* (O'Toole and Haseman, 1987). I used it to structure self-awareness workshops for adults, teenagers and children. I also started integrating ideas from a book that I found on a colleague's shelf: *Games for Actors and Non-actors* (Boal, 1992). All the time my faith in the power of dramatic principles to impact people's lives dramatically increased. Then, towards the end of 2000 I stumbled upon the notion of educational drama: the use of drama to teach something other than itself. This was what I had been looking for.

Furthering my studies in this field could lead me to discover the techniques and principles in drama that could be used to teach people, not about theatre, or English, or History, but about themselves and their social contexts.

My studies in Educational Drama bring me back to the kinds of patterns that fascinate me and pose a way of coping with everyday living. To me theatre and drama form a complex network of iterating patterns that people could use to make sense of life and existence. We already use it in a creative and often playful manner to frame events by telling stories and to simplify our interactions with others by using roles. The patterns are alterable to fit any kind of scene, period or circumstance. The classic structure of tragedy can for example tell the story of *Oedipus the King* to the ancient Greeks, *Macbeth* to Elizabethan audiences and *The Titanic* to contemporary film audiences. As Jean-Paul Sartre (*Nausea*) had said:

A man is always a teller of tales; he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others; he sees everything that happens to him through them, and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it. (1964: 56)

This thesis, then, is my attempt to combine this dramatic framing of reality with the power of self-reflexivity to come up with a method for self-awareness and self-understanding and eventually self-induced change and growth. It represents the culmination of my quest for playful dramatic patterns that would help people understand who they are and why they behave the way they do. The only remaining thing was to pick a specific target group for the experiment. I chose a group who are particularly vulnerable and in need of tools to make sense of their changing world: young South Africans, caught in a time of transformation from dominance to equality, from a divided nation to one where unity is created amidst diversity, a time that is riddled with complicating factors such as globalization, HIV/AIDS, poverty, crime and unemployment.

In keeping with the search for patterns, I have used extracts from contemporary literature to highlight some of the elements of a pattern that are focussed upon in the relevant section of the text. I have also chosen the mythic tale of The Red Shoes to accompany the process throughout and comment on the argument from outside. The choice of this particular myth is explained at the end of the thesis in the Postscript.

Of course in some instances the search for patterns itself can be likened to the search for a metaphysical truth. This is especially true when the language one has at one's disposal is riddled with concepts that refer to such a truth, concepts like 'universal meaning' or 'quest for truth' or 'search for the magic boon/elixir'. Yet, to me Drama and stories does not take the place of such a metaphysical truth, rather it becomes a conversation partner of life in a way that makes them inseparable and yet different from one another. My understanding of metaphysics is now closer to Peter Abbs explanation:

I use the word to refer to a primary engagement with the making of meaning, with the search for understanding, with the desire for an encompassing sense of life. My assumption is that in a postmodern age the word metaphysical has to shift its meaning so that it refers not so much to those impossible systems of ultimate explanation but more to the process of questioning and questing which lie behind them. Metaphysical in these pages refers to the dilemmas of consciousness, to the open predicament of being human, a predicament which requires a creative response. (2003: 4)

Metaphysics and the search for meaning then become an attitude, not a thing in itself to be discovered. It becomes a process and a journey, not a destination or a goal. So let us don the adventurers garb, bundle up our most prized possessions and set off on our quest...