

Alice Lo asked me to write from this brief: ***Risk getting lost and ideas being rejected! Students are confused about different comments made by, and diverse ideas of tutors and peers. There are advantages and benefits—prepare to get lost in order to learn! Unless you are confused, you are not learning anything. Total dedication and ambition are required to endure the journey.***

I have decided that Alice herself has written the bones of the argument. There is no reason to repeat it in my own words, or to try to improve on it. Instead, I shall reflect on different aspects of what is said. These are my meditations on Alice's sentences.

In each page, there is an empty space. You should add your thoughts there, too. Treat this as your meditation on the sentences. My text is not meant as argumentation, but for contemplation.

**Ranulph Glanville**

### ***Risk getting lost and ideas being rejected!***

#### ***Fear***

When we are faced with the unfamiliar, we often feel fear. This can paralyse us, leaving us unable to face the new and its challenges.

But the reason we study is to be faced with, and eventually master, the unfamiliar.

How can we overcome fear?

A therapist told me that the opposite of fear was faith, and I have found this to be so. When I am afraid, I say to myself "It will all be ok." As long as I keep saying that to myself, and acting in accordance with it, I have found I am, indeed, always ok.

#### ***Improvement, not perfection***

Designers deal with the inexact. Not everything can be specified, and, even if it could be, the complexity this would generate would be incalculable. We can't hope to find perfection, at least a measurable perfection. What perfection we may find will be the perfection of recognition: where what we have designed is "just right."

Perfection is, anyhow, not a very useful criterion. In terms of "What is perfect?" the concept "perfection" suggests that the criteria are explicit beforehand (that's how the measurement can be made). In contrast, the perfection of recognition leads, if anything, to the listing of criteria only after the event.

What's much more useful is the concept of improvement. We don't try for perfection, but we try to do better than we did before.

### ***Learn how to learn: error as a way to improve***

The art is not so much to learn, but to *learn to learn*: to understand the subject "learning."

If we can learn from our errors, how much more can we learn not just from our errors, but from the ways we make our errors.

This is important when we are facing new situations. How can we *study* what is changing and new? We can't, because, by definition, what we study is that which is already known, not that which is yet to be discovered.

Designers always face new problems, new situations. We can't study what to do about each of these problems and situations specifically, as it arises: but we can study how to deal with problems and situations in general.

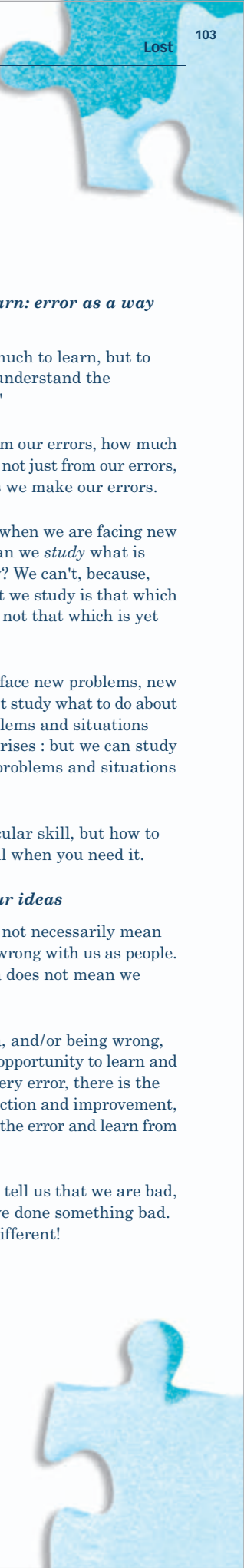
Learn not a particular skill, but how to acquire a new skill when you need it.

#### ***You are NOT your ideas***

Being wrong does not necessarily mean there is anything wrong with us as people. Having a bad idea does not mean we are bad.

Having a bad idea, and/or being wrong, leave, instead, an opportunity to learn and to grow. For, in every error, there is the possibility of correction and improvement, if we will examine the error and learn from what we find.

When our parents tell us that we are bad, they mean we have done something bad. And that's quite different!



**Students are confused about different comments made by, and diverse ideas of tutors and peers.**

#### **What you think and what I think**

We can't usually specify what is needed in anything we are asked to design. We know, for instance, that a kettle should contain and boil water without being dangerous—and that we should be able to pour from it safely. But it's hard to define everything which will constitute it (why should it be purple?). One reason is that there are many different weightings that each of us gives to such items. For instance, you may like the kettle to be very sleek. For me it may be important that it is ecologically sound. If you and I talk about it, we will talk about different things in different ways.

What's confusing about that?

#### **Different insights are gifts**

Every opinion that is not ours gives us an opportunity to learn, to grow, to cover more than we could before.

Each view that is not already our own is a free gift to us!

We should welcome the views of others, the variety, the inconvenience of disagreement, and the opportunity this gives us to find out what we think, and to accommodate more and more.

All we have to do is listen and see, without prejudice: and then decide honestly if the opinions of others can help us.

#### **Only connect**

E.M. Forster wrote:  
*"Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die."*

Designers are the great connectors.

Have you ever seen something where everything is connected? Confusing, isn't it?

#### **Why should we agree?**

We don't all see the same things.

We don't all understand what we think are the same things, the same.

We don't all value the things we see the same.

Why, then, should we expect to agree?

Why, then, should we be forced to agree, and why should we submit to such force?

When there is disagreement we should celebrate life's richness.

***There are advantages and benefits—prepare to get lost in order to learn!***

#### **How delicious**

If we have no aim, everything is a surprise and everything is, in principle, equally acceptable, always a joy, a discovery and a delight. All is discovery. And we are lost: we don't know where we're going.

But, how delicious, we may know where we are. And, at the next moment, we may know, again, where we are.

#### **Let in the unexpected**

We cannot hear if we are always talking.

If we know, we cannot learn. That's how a little learning may be a dangerous thing.

Be lost in not knowing! Learn to listen. Not to be silent as words pass you by, but to listen!

Let in the unexpected!

#### **Design: risk, fun and adventure**

When children go out to play, they may get hurt. They fall off the bottom of the slide, they slip and graze their knees. But they have fun and adventure. Children are natural adventurers. Adults often lose this sense of adventure. Children discover the world and all sorts of possibilities in it through play. Why should adults be different?

We're not!

Risk is inherent in play. Risk is tied up with error. Error is tied up with learning, and with the act of design. So risk is desirable: without risk, there's no play. And play means fun and adventure. Regain the child within!

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#### **Design and complexity**

Design is a way of handling complexity. In design we create wholes: wholes make one where before there were many. So one item satisfies many requirements. Often these many requirements cannot be listed. They certainly are so many that we cannot keep them all in mind, and they rapidly become incomputable in principle.

But complexity confuses us. We have to learn how to choose which thoughts to handle, which fit together, and all the time this involves making new wholes out of old parts.

So not only do designers create new wholes that are outcomes and usually are physical objects: to do so they have to create new wholes that are made up of their thoughts.

No wonder designing is confusing. No wonder learning designing is even more confusing.

And, if we design all our thoughts together, and our understandings and what we know, it's a miracle we are ever not totally confused!

***Unless you are confused, you are not learning anything.***

#### **Design is involved in change (and confusion)**

The point of what we produce, as designers, is that it should change our lives. The root of this change lies in providing new items that allow us to do different things, or familiar things differently, and to do so with items that work well and bring delight into our lives.

Each thing we make changes the world. Maybe only in a small way—yet the effects of that small change may be big: the butterfly beats its wings and, thousands of miles away and some time later, a tsunami rears up in the ocean. To introduce change is, all too often, to introduce confusion (even when the change makes clearer or simpler). Inserting something new can create uncertainty and unrest: in our minds as well as in the world out there!

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### Habits

We bring old habits to any new activity. If these habits are not helpful for this activity, we need to change them.

But it is difficult to change habits. Mostly we have to be prepared to get very lost as we move beyond them. This lostness results in feelings of confusion.

One of the best ways of breaking old habits requires the use of confusion. When we are confused, we are vulnerable and thus we can open up to the new.

Confusion is an important feeling, and it is an important device. When we come to something with our minds already made up, the introduction of confusion is one of the most effective and powerful ways of effecting change.

**Total dedication and ambition are required to endure the journey.**

### Taking a line for a walk

Learn to enjoy the journey, to enjoy being where we are. Do not rush to be where we might suppose we should be. Take time.

Paul Klee, talking of drawing, said the following: *"The original movement, the agent, is a point that sets itself in motion. A line comes into being. It goes out for a walk, so to speak, aimlessly for the sake of the walk."*

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We should learn to enjoy the walk, and think of our ideas like that line; let our ideas wander.

Take pleasure in the travelling, rather than missing the journey because we are so impatient to arrive that we are blind to being where we are now.

The next time we are in an aeroplane or a boat, enjoy just being there.

Never arrive!

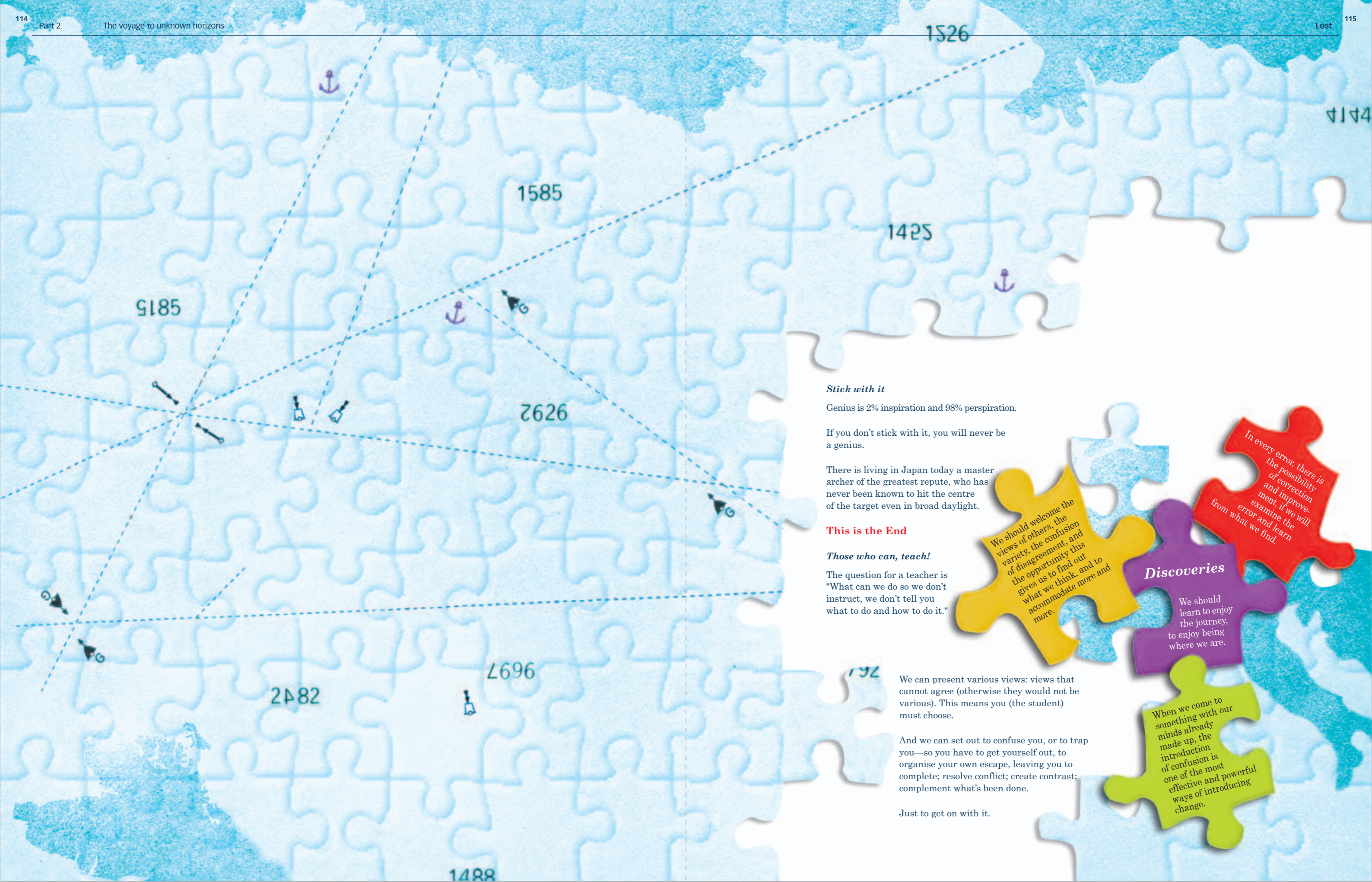
### Design is a way of living

We design how our thoughts go together, and hence our understandings and our lives: we live as designers.

When we design objects and processes, the items designers make, we are doing this, but even more explicitly.

It is not easy to do this, but there is no alternative. We have to do it, and we have to stick with it. We must do our own thinking. We must design ourselves for ourselves by ourselves to be ourselves.

Do you really want me to have your ideas for you?



**Stick with it**

Genius is 2% inspiration and 98% perspiration.

If you don't stick with it, you will never be a genius.

There is living in Japan today a master archer of the greatest repute, who has never been known to hit the centre of the target even in broad daylight.

**This is the End**

**Those who can, teach!**

The question for a teacher is "What can we do so we don't instruct, we don't tell you what to do and how to do it."

We can present various views: views that cannot agree (otherwise they would not be various). This means you (the student) must choose.

And we can set out to confuse you, or to trap you—so you have to get yourself out, to organise your own escape, leaving you to complete; resolve conflict; create contrast; complement what's been done.

Just to get on with it.

We should welcome the views of others, the variety, the confusion of disagreement, and the opportunity this gives us to find out what we think, and to accommodate more and more.

**Discoveries**

We should learn to enjoy the journey, to enjoy being where we are.

When we come to something with our minds already made up, the introduction of confusion is one of the most effective and powerful ways of introducing change.

In every error, there is the possibility of correction and improvement, if we will examine the error and learn from what we find.