Crafts, Creativity & Postmodernism
an Elective offered for post graduates-
Willem's report
a g rao

The above 'Elective' evolved to create legitimate place for bamboo craft in the Post graduate design curriculum. Often 'Bamboo craft' is equated to a skill with no significant requirement in thinking.

Frame works for 'Design of Craft products' in the contemporary context have not been addressed so far.

Craft approach of Bauhaus, seems to be only frame-work one can refer to. I have been positioning bamboo craft in the 'Post modern frame work'. My papers on this topic, presented at Hong Kong and Brazil can be seen in my website www.agrao.in under Articles and Papers.

Creativity in Crafts has a special place for developing cognitive creative abilities. In the elective, 'Creativity' is dealt as a holistic enterprise to see its deeper roots in one's personality, manifesting across disciplines. Design of 'Craft and industrially produced products' thus can enrich each other especially in the postmodern framework!

The elective has been open to other areas of specialization. M tech and Phd students from other departments in IIt have also been taking the course, in spite of difficulties of fitting into IDC curriculum framework !

Several students from abroad attended the course as well. One of the foreign students Willem made an elaborate report of the course for submission to his school, which gives a glimpse of the course.

Willem van Mensvoort - Roll no. 06613202

Crafts Creativity & Postmodernism

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BambU Workshop – IDC - IITBombay

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Introduction

This report is the final work of a course about how to make a combination between the craftwork of bamboo work men with the use of different creative methodologies and a Postmodernism influence. The course consisted of 3 weeks of lectures in the morning, including all kinds of subjects touching the Crafts, Creativity and Postmodernism.

I followed the course during my internship period of six weeks in the Industrial Design Centre of the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. The fact that it was possible to do this during my holiday of Technical University Delft made it a nice opportunity to get a short insight into the course and into the IIT in general. It gave me the chance to experience the Indian way of designing, learn a lot about crafts and learn to experience creative methods in a non-western way.

It was a very interesting course to follow being a Dutch student, although completely different than I expected it to be. I thought that I would learn a lot about bamboo constructions, I thought that it would give me an insight into bamboo strength design tools. Nothing about that was true, maybe it was even better. Nevertheless I learned a lot, I had a great time and often it went late when I worked with the craftsmen in the BambU studio.

The Course

Postmodernism

Firstly I would like to put Postmodernism into a small timeline, because I think it is impossible to see a design movement without context. From around 1850 the Arts and Crafts were the first design style that could be seen as a larger style, it was a reaction on the industrial world that was coming up and which didn't seem to care about the producer or the looks of a product. After that the Avant-garde and Bauhaus come up around 1920, it makes everything even more geometrical and styled. Nowadays this is seen as the start of the modernism style. Though other styles can also be seen as input for that, for example Streamline and Functionalism. In the seventies and eighties again something changes, creative people are going to make a kind of anti-modernism. It is about the way of making products, it is about the coincidence, people should have their own opinions about it and it looks like a little mess sometimes. This so called Postmodernism has never become a substitute of earlier styles, but it has been there next to the others. Sometimes it looks as if everything could be called Postmodern except from modern styled products, though that's not really the case.

During the course we've had quite some discussions about this Postmodern style, although you could say it is not only a style, it is a way of designing. The discussion was not only bonded to designing as I'm used to, because there are people with a lot of different backgrounds in IDC the talks were very broad. I appreciated this broad discussion because it stimulated me to have and to give my own opinion. The table below shows the most important keys for me as a designer to establish a Postmodernism design.

Modernism	Post modernism
Production	Reproduction
Things	Cervices
Centralized	Decentralized
Autonomy	Intertextually / contextually
Original	Copy
Closed product	Process
Straight lines	Organic
Functional	

Crafts

During the course we got a lot of information about bamboo. Every morning a few hours of lectures were given and theoretical information was shared about bamboo species, about bamboo crafts, about other crafts, about how craftsmen are organized, about bamboo treatments and about bamboo arts.

It was interesting to see that there are so many different bamboo species existing, and that it is very difficult to distinguish one from another. It is impossible to only see the species from a piece of bamboo, you also need a living tree and its surroundings with it to verify the kind of material you're dealing with. This information is rather difficult to find because it is not widely shared by the workmen because they only know the species around their living place. Making a

bamboo design with a lot of different varieties of bamboo might be a beautiful solution in adding value to the bamboo, in practical it is difficult to bring all these materials together because of high transportation costs and expensive managing of the production process. Right now the bamboo is mostly cut, processed and sold in the same village. Although this course was not really about organizing craftsmen to work together some points can be seen in how the previous designs are improved. For example it is almost impossible to get two baskets with the same dimensions without using a good mould. Also for getting the same strip thickness and width it is needed do use measurement methods

Creativity

Before the course started we had to fill in a few questions about how your creative process is normally evolving. I know my inspiration will come with deeply analyzing the problem and than a lot of sketching. At the start of a lecture Professor Rao lets everybody 'tune up' first. This means that relaxing music is used to create one mindset. The first few creative sessions made me think about my own creative process and about the creative processes of other students. I think it was really remarkable to see that a lot of visual communication students were trying to create forms and shapes while the other students were more making symbolic images. We used several commonly known techniques like diverging and converging. From the different creative methods we used a few standard rules were subtracted. Normally after 20-30 ideas a brainstorm session will stop. By clustering and by using the following rules a lot more ideas can be generated.

Cluster and perform one of the following steps:
Minify/magnify
Add/multiply/substitute/divide
Adopt/modify
Rearrange/reverse/combine

Another method often used during a brainstorm are synectics. Synectics are used to connect things that are not connected at the moment, there are four ways of using synectics.

Synectics
1. Direct Analogy. A kind of metaphor from nature or from other fields of design.
2. Personal Analogy. Think you are the product yourself. How are you used? How do you feel if you would be used like that?
3. Symbolic analogy. Compare it to an abstract principle.
4. Fantasy analogy. A personal wish gets involved in the design.

A for me completely unknown creative method used was the meditation session. Sitting in a relaxed posture and by playing calm music in a calm and dark surrounding we got completely di-stressed. We were first told to relax from toe to head, all body parts were separately mentioned. After that we started floating and flying over beautiful mountains and seas. In the end we arrived at a castle, all kinds of different designs were there, your imagination was the limit.

Once we were also told to become aware of the beauty of a tree, not only by considering it as a simplified symbolic thing, but by seeing the shape every different tree has. Another time a nut was given, but we firstly had to taste the nut without really putting it into our mouths. This already gave the feeling of eating a nut and it made me aware of how it would taste. After that we really tried the nut and it was more delicious than ever, just because I was aware of my own senses.

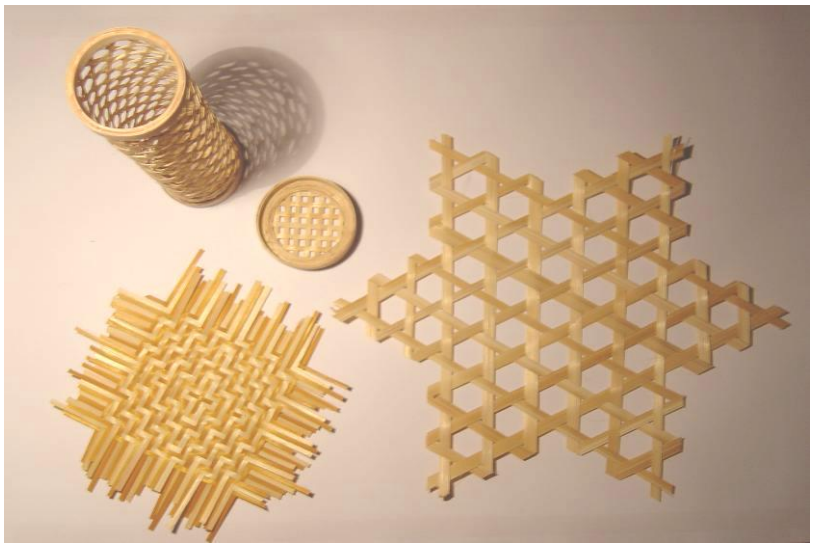
We used this sort of generative methods a few times during the course, it really helped me in generating ideas. It made me aware of how we look at the beauty of certain things and why we think some things look attractive while others are ugly. In creative sessions this method can be used very well if a shape has to be found, although in a western world it can be more difficult to make people believe in these kind of generative methods. I do not think it would work if a real solution for a technical design problem is needed, because the input and the outcome would be too vague for that. One thing was a problem for me, I felt a little hindered by not being able to write down good ideas. I was afraid to forget these good ideas and I was so hindered by this that I could not easily come up with new or better ones. Maybe I should just have let go but I was too anxious of forgetting my ideas that I was not able to do that.

General course

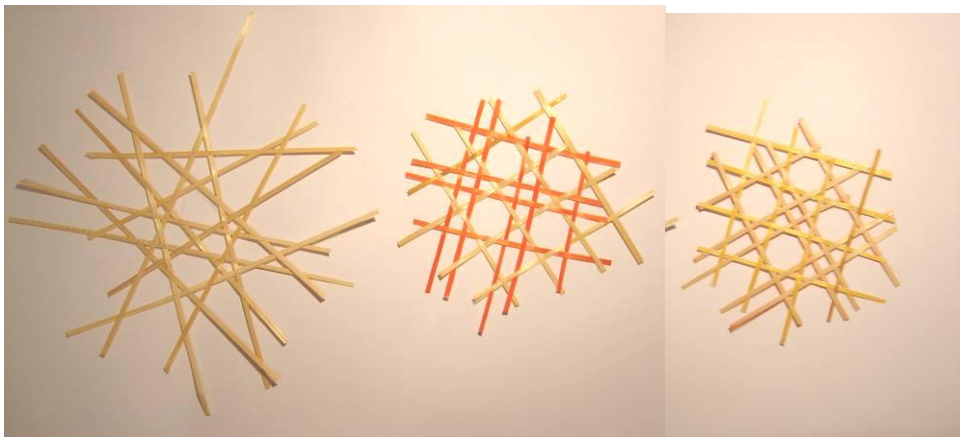
According to Prof. Rao an opportunity to make really new designs for the bamboo workman would be using Postmodernism. This would suit perfect because in Postmodernism it is possible to think freely, of course generative methods have to be used in this to get these new ideas. This free way of designing, even the way of designing and the making belongs to the design, is needed because bamboo design is nowadays firmly tied to products that we see as having less quality. Although making a bamboo object requires quite some skills, this is not rewarded in price or status. By making better and more appealing designs the craftsmen can earn more money and respect for almost the same work. But making things and designing things are two different issues, one can not expect the craftsmen to come up with completely new or innovative solutions themselves. This can also be read in the paper written by Professor Rao: Search for New Aesthetics in Bamboo Craft.

Bamboo Design

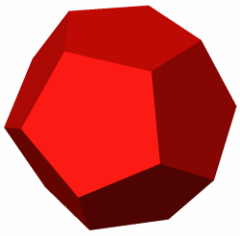
In the lectures in the morning we of course got a lot of information about bamboo designs, about what it could be and why. But to get to know the material better first a few practical exercises were offered. A coiling method, a weaving method to make a flat weave with a pattern, a more difficult hexagonal tube weave and I even made a newspaper basket. A few results of these practices are shown below.



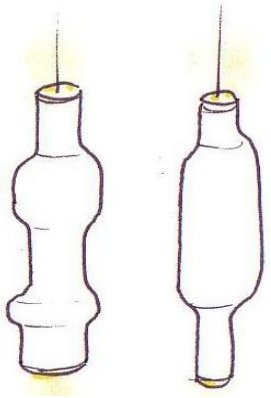
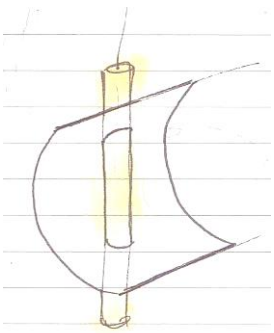
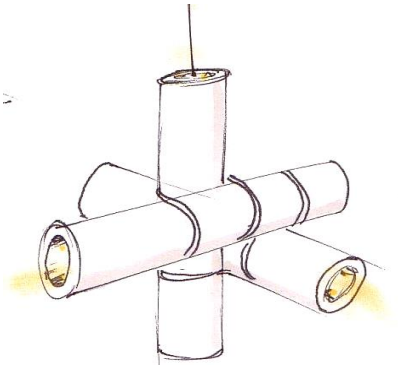
After this an analysis of what was possible with the weavings started. I tried to make all kinds of different patterns, even with colored strips and 3d weaves. I was fascinated by the hexagonal weave and tried to make a pentagonal flat weave too, but it ended with larger and larger unrecognizable stars, as can be seen in the picture on the left.



A small design research was done in the direction of pentagonal sphere. The result was kind of nice but not really fascinating enough to make it a real good solution.

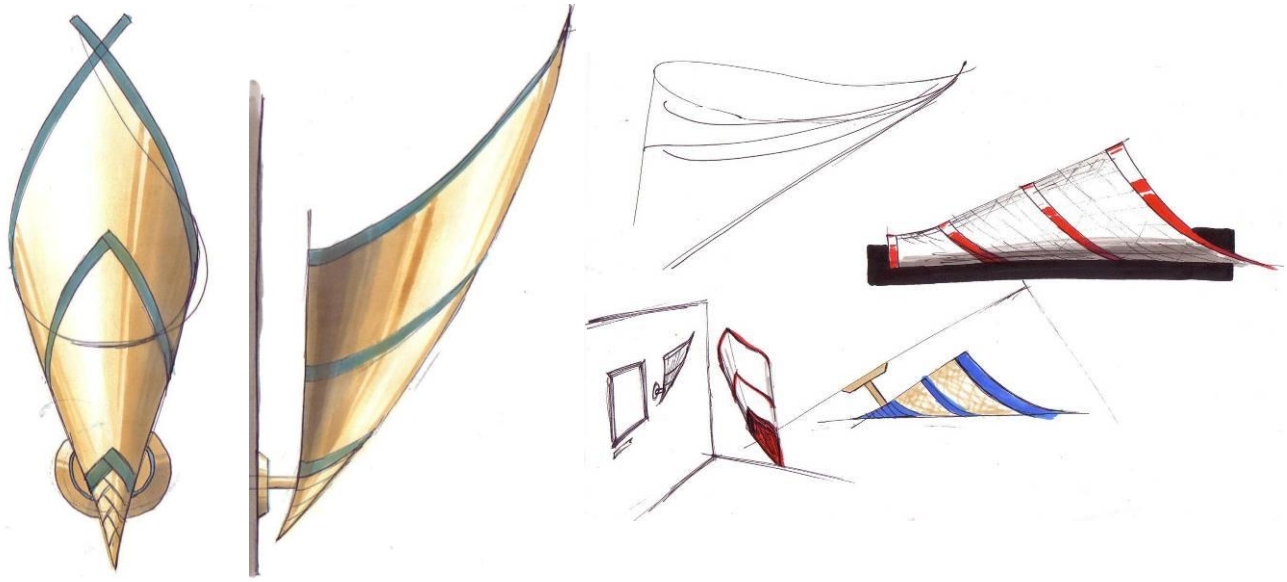


Simultaneously we were also performing creative sessions, by sketching, thinking and refining a few ideas were developed. Because my feeling with the material is elegant and natural I tried to give my ideas the same kind of shapes. At the mean time I was looking for a way to introduce the personal touch into a design, which is possible because every product is manufactured separately, but this was a difficult design feature to achieve. The results of this idea generation phase can be seen in appendix 1.

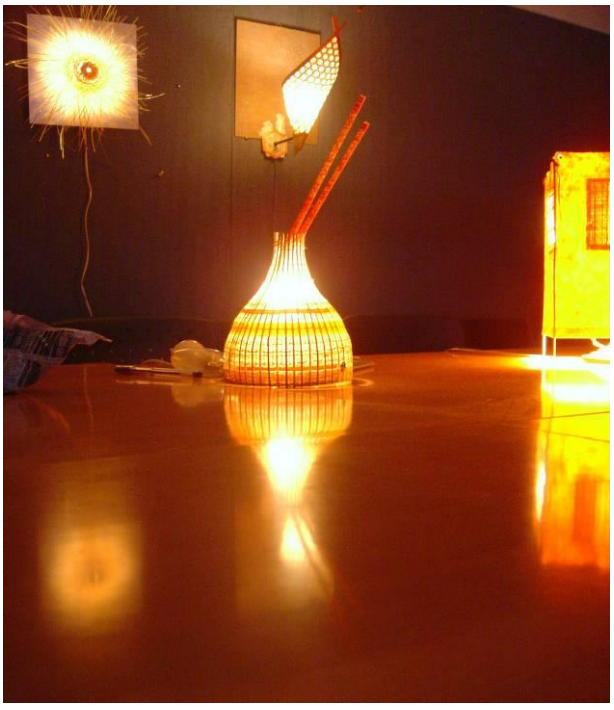




The ideas I came up were nice, but not really special for the bamboo material. I wanted to be more inspired by the craftwork, so I tried to seek for a special weaving coming up. While busy with making a hexagonal weave I suddenly thought of connecting the weave so it would look like a kind of torch. While I was trying to make this shape I found out that it was possible to make it with one interconnected weave, without having to make a glued connection.

As soon as I got some sort of a final shape I did not consider any other composition than the torch variant. I made some differentiations at the connection part but I decided to keep the shape as smooth as possible.

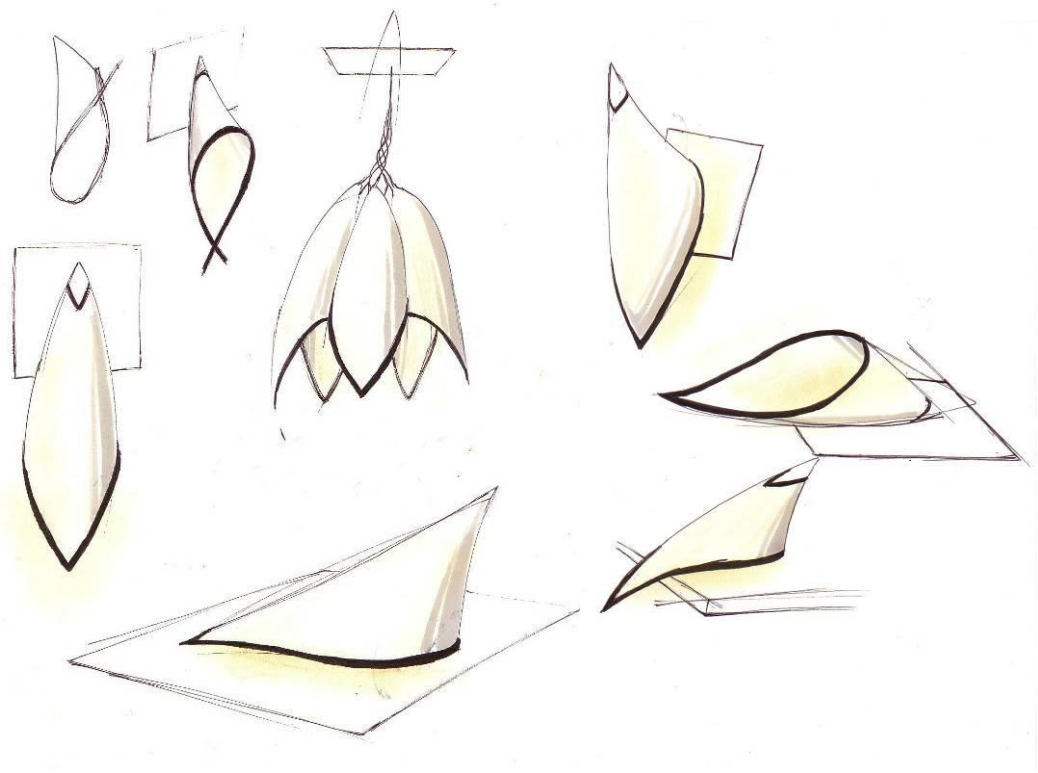


During the second group presentation I showed my lamp as I thought it would going to look like. I received some comments about the connection with the wall. It was not part of the total composition and the language of the shape of both parts was different.



In the picture at the left another Ad Hoc idea can be seen, it was quick model of an unfinished bamboo hat glued on a square of plastic. This was constructed to make a statement about how simple a Post-Modernism lampshade could have been. Off course it was not developed well enough to come even close to a developed design.

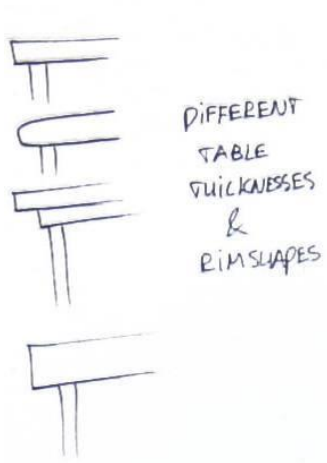
So I started drawing again to see the different arrangements in which the lamp could be placed. A few of the considered options are shown.



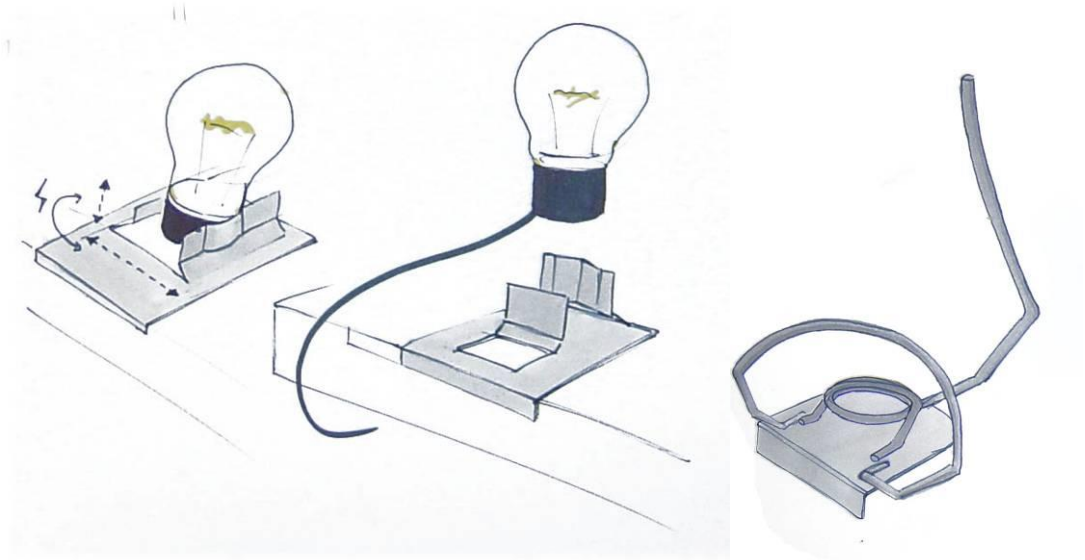
In the end the table version of the lamp has become the final proposal. The torch becomes a kind of pyramid with a tail. Underneath the tail the wires can easily be hidden to connect the lamp with a plug. With this in mind I changed the model again and started looking for the final details. I discovered that when the lamp is almost a centimeter above the table it gives a kind of feather light feeling. When the lamp is off this creates a nice curved shadow that shows the clear boundaries of the object. The floating effect brings a round and faded glow when the lamp is on. The lamp is positioned in the middle so all parts of the inside paper are also lighted in the 'tail' part.

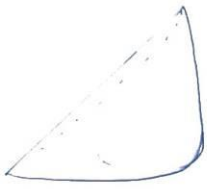
Manufacturing

Small problem in manufacturing the lamp is the realization of the floating idea, while keeping the lamp stable. It is already standing on the edge of a table so one could imagine that it can fall off easily. At first I thought of making a thick metal plate so it would be too heavy to slip off. But this would make the lamp a contradiction in itself: it looks nice and lightweight but it would be very heavy. So in the end a clip clasps the lamp to the table to prevent it from falling. The clip is made out of metal wire.

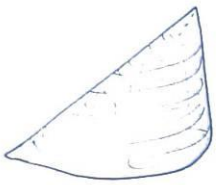


Another metal part also holds the light bulb in the center of the table lamp. The bamboo shade is kept on its place by two other metal wires. By bending them standard in the same direction of the weavings these wires are almost invisible. This is needed because otherwise their shadows would be disturbing the lines of the weavings when the light is on.



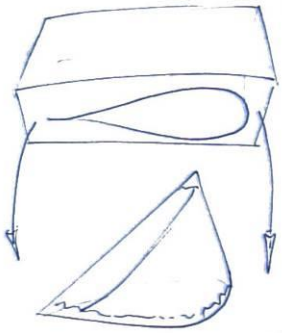


1



2

HEXAGONAL BASIS WEAVE

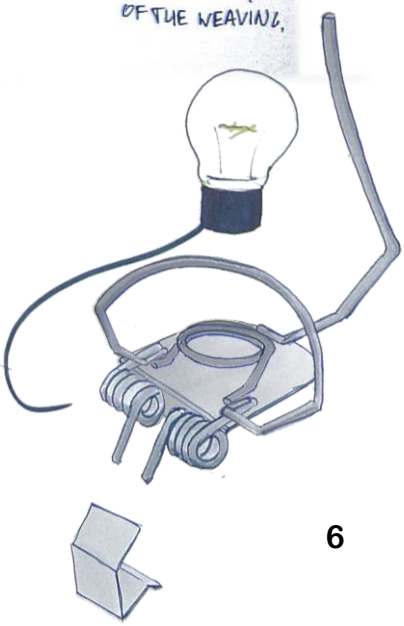


3

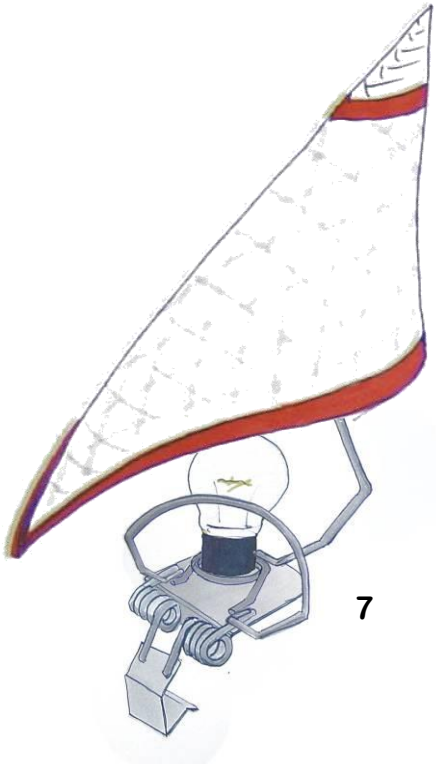
NATURAL LOOKING TRANSLUCENT CLOTH MOULDED ON THE INSIDE OF THE WEAVING.

4

5



6



7

Here can be seen how the lamp is made in the different steps. Firstly the weaving is done. After that the cloth is moulded inside, then the tip and rim are finished.

The metal parts are manufactured separately, all the wires are welded on the plate. The clip is welded to the springs to make it possible to grip to the table.

Last step is to install the bulb and place the shade over the wire frame.

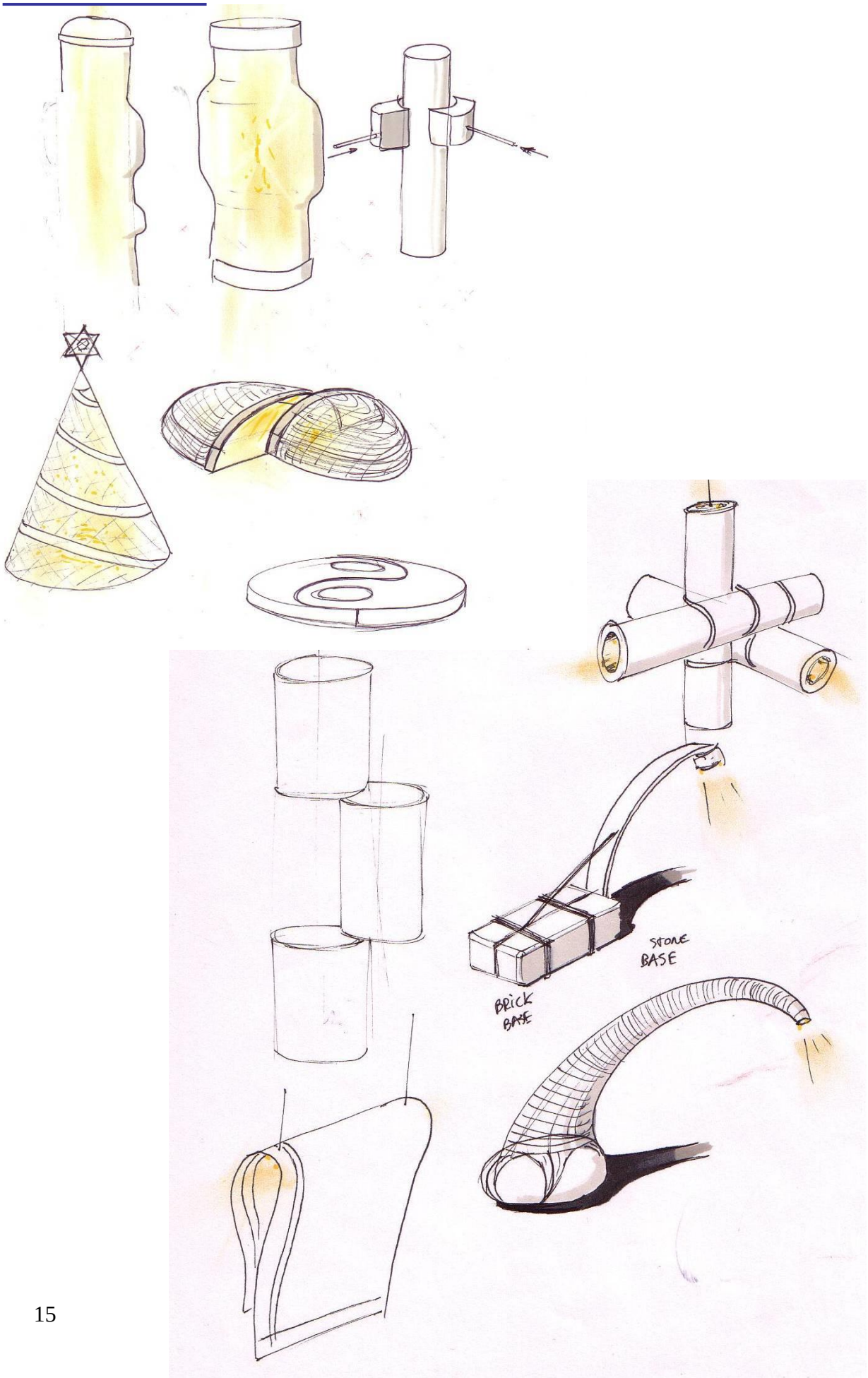
Evaluation

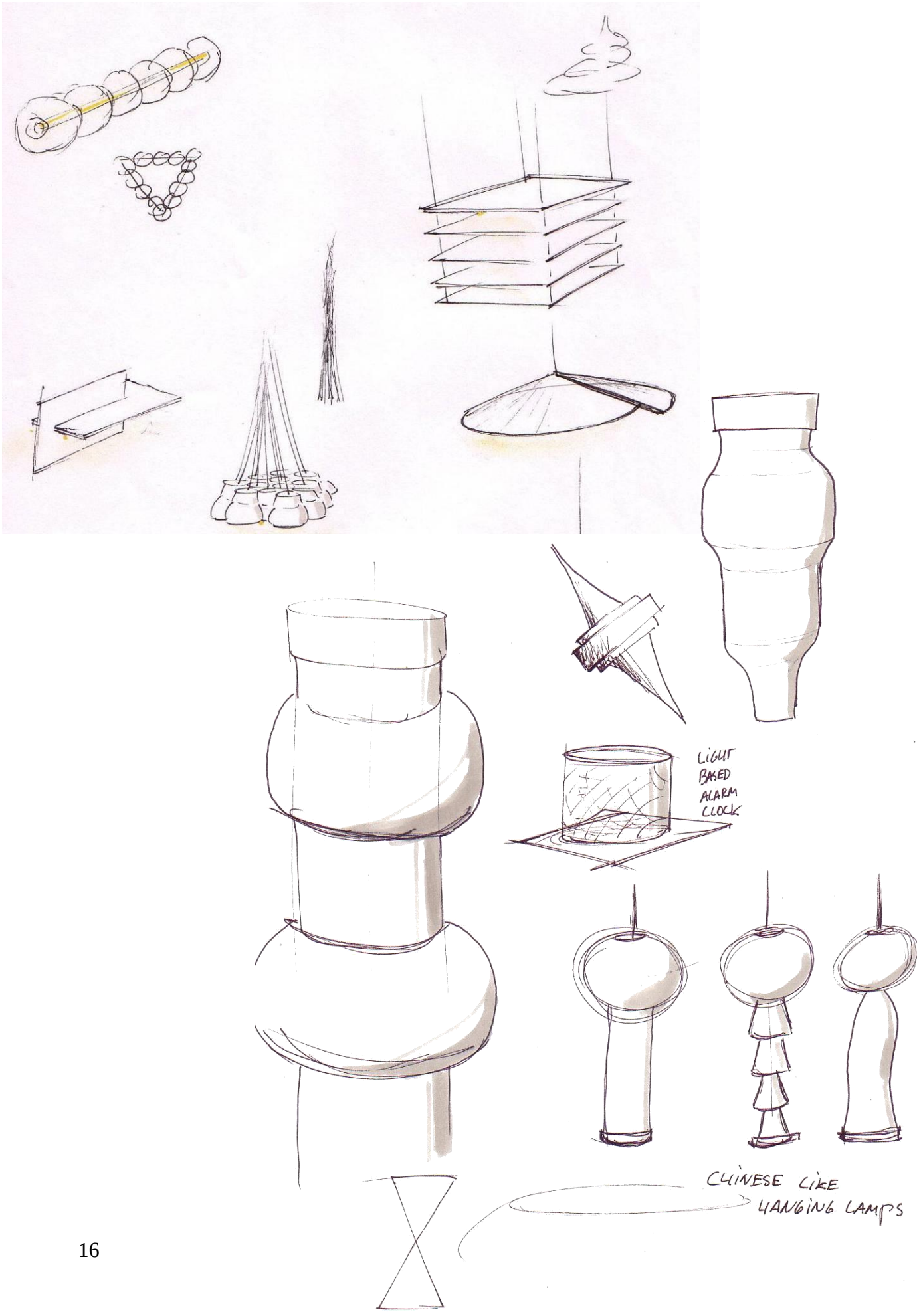
The final product proposal looks light and has a natural shape that somehow connects it to the bamboo. The hexagonal weave brings simplicity in the purest form. Only a few colored lines are used to accentuate the streamline of the shape. The smoothness of the product is a little contradicting with the mostly straight lines of a table edge. Though somehow these two are also connected because of the flat surface of the part that floats above the table. Altogether it makes it a touching design to look at, whilst it is also functional and easy to use.

In the end one could think this is a nice lamp or not, but the main issue is if there is a market for it. This was for me difficult to determine because this product will be mainly produced for the Indian market and I'm clearly no Indian consumer. While being in India it was easier to get a feeling of the potential users than being back home in the Netherlands. This made the last part of the process more challenging because this was carried out far away from the roots of the project. At least I think there would be a market in Europe to sell these products, though if one would design for the western market some design considerations play another role like transportation costs.

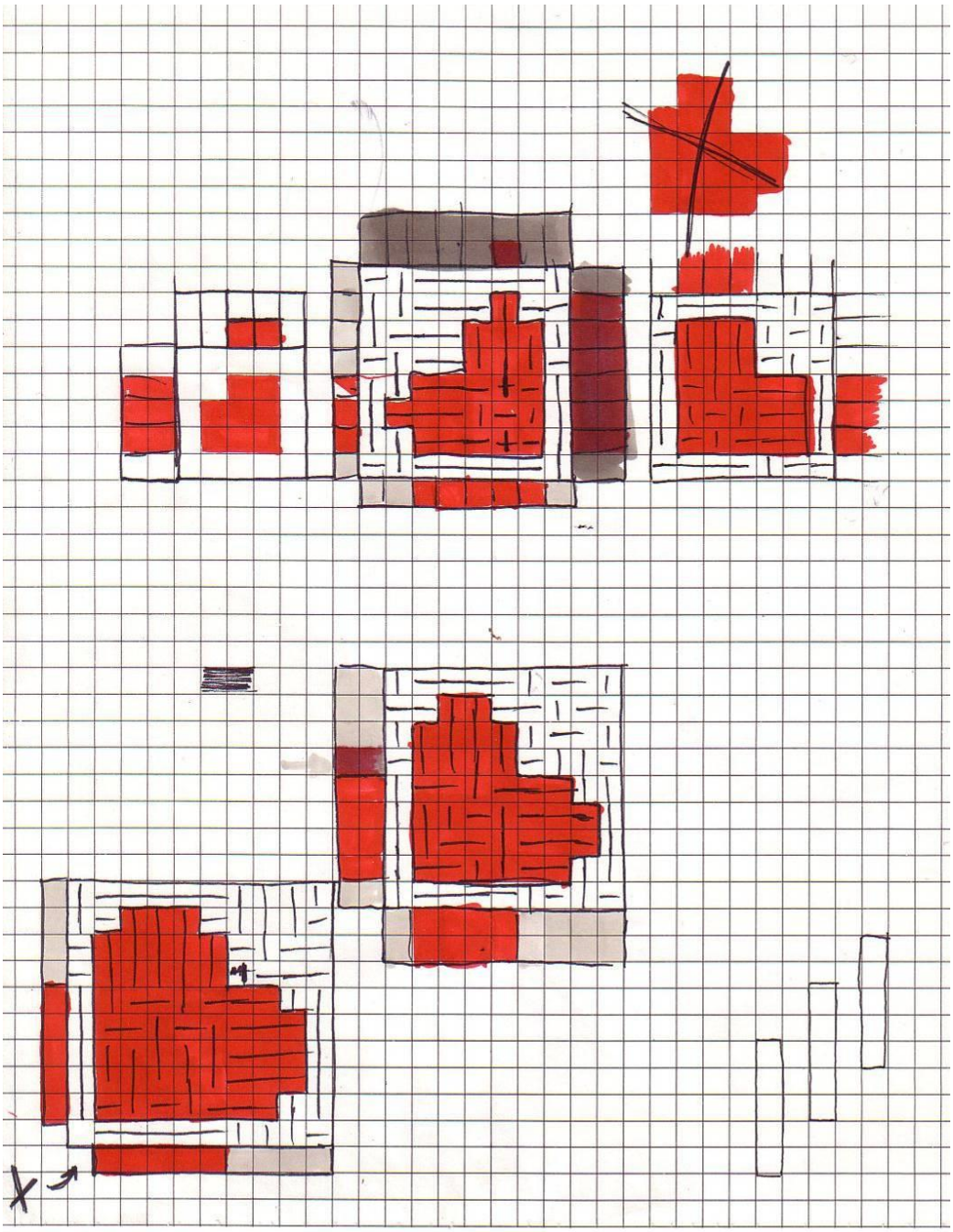
My own experience is that I had a wonderful time being able to follow the course in IDC. Compared to the Netherlands so many thing are different and I had already discovered this when traveling around but this course made me think about it in a new way. Completely different methodologies that I had never heard of, and which I was able to practice right away. It was so nice to put effort in learning to use the material, just by making products in a way that would be priceless in a western country. Also It was such a challenge to work with the craftsmen, they were not able to speak a word English and I could not speak any Hindi. Though we were all fascinated by the material and that created a enjoyable bond between us. Only in the end it was very difficult to come up with the final report when the adventure is over. I would recommend everybody to do something like this; being an educational tourist is a extremely good opportunity. An opportunity to discover a lot about a design school, about a course, about a country, but you also discover a lot about yourself.

Appendix – 1- idea sketches




LIGHT
BAKED
ALARM
CLOCK
CHINESE LIKE
HANGING LAMPS

Appendix 2 – alternative weaving patterns



Appendix 3 – Images of me

Name: Willem

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	least imagination, comes with known ideas						X		Highly imaginative comes with unusual/crazy ideas
2	Rigid in his/her approach. Difficult to work with			X					Flexible easy to work with.
3	Dull can't understand new situation quickly						X		Very intelligent, sharp in understanding new things
4	Slow			X					Quick in doing things
5	Confused. Many times. does not know what to do				X				Clear what he/she is doing. No confusion
6	In efficient					X			Very efficient
7	Least exposed (Koopastha Mandook)						X		Highly exposed. Knows many things
8	Does not show 'enthu' Doesn't smile at all						X		Always enthusiastic smiling
9	Has no hobbies						X		Has many interests and hobbies.
10	Selfish			X					Helps others inspite of his/her problems
11	Does not share with others miserly				X				Shares things with others generous
12	Quarrelsome					X			Friendly
13	Least capable. Becomes helpless in new situations						X		Highly capable. Can solve problems in any situations
14	No leadership quality						X		Has leadership quality
15	Socially inhibited cannot mix with new people / opp. sex easily						X		Highly social
16	Depends on teacher						X		Self learner
17	Un organised / messy			X					Highly organised
18	Less courageous fears of authorities							X	Bold not afraid of authorities
19	Evasive runs away from conflicts					X			Ready to fight for a cause.

Image of: Name: Willem Filled by: Name: SNORRE

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	least imagination, comes with known ideas					✓			Highly imaginative comes with unusual/crazy ideas
2	Rigid in his/her approach. Difficult to work with						✓		Flexible easy to work with.
3	Dull can't understand new situation quickly					✓			Very intelligent, sharp in understanding new things
4	Slow			✓					Quick in doing things
5	Confused. Many times. does not know what to do								Clear what he/she is doing. No confusion
6	In efficient						✓		Very efficient
7	Least exposed (Koopastha Mandook)						✓		Highly exposed. Knows many things
8	Does not show 'enthu' Doesn't smile at all					✓		✓	Always enthusiastic smiling
9	Has no hobbies				✓				Has many interests and hobbies.
10	Selfish						✓		Helps others inspite of his/her problems
11	Does not share with others miserly						✓		Shares things with others generous
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15	Socially inhibited cannot mix with new people / opp. sex easily					✓			Highly social
16	Depends on teacher						✓		Self learner
17	Un organised / messy				✓				Highly organised
18	Less courageous fears of authorities							✓	Bold not afraid of authorities
19	Evasive runs away from conflicts						✓		Ready to fight for a cause.

Appendix 4 – Motivation assignment

1 Why did you select “Crafts, Creativity and Post Modernism” as an elective?

I choose the course because I liked to do something different tan I get normally thought at my home university in the Netherlands. There we only get plastic courses and a few wood things. This is a totally different material, while you design for it you have to think about its material aspects, instead of choosing the best suitable plastic after you designed your product. And there is a enormous cultural background that one has to know before a design can be made. I choose to learn a little about this background by doing this course. Besides that I think a designer never has too much creative methods, so it's interesting to see if there are other methods in use in India than in the Netherlands. I don't know what to expect from the Post Modernism part, I will see..

2 How do you get new ideas?

My creativity comes with a lot of hard working, that is the only way. By doing a good and in depth analysis, some ideas might come up. But after that a somehow structured sketch phase makes me come up with a lot of ideas. After a long time of focusing on one subject, while sketching, some good ideas are always there. Most of the times I start to model it in foam right away, to be able to see if it is really as good as it seems to be on paper.

3 Give brief description of situations when you were most creative?

At home, during sketching of course. Although the first start and the first empty paper is always difficult to start. Sometimes during traveling, because your head can be so empty at that time. And just before I fall asleep can also be a good moment of creativity. I think it is because you are so relaxed at that time.

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