



# SelfDesign®

identity, communications and public websites

review and recommendations

hanif janmohamed  
vanilla five creative inc. august 2013

# SelfDesign®

identity, communications and public websites

review and recommendations

the following pages present the results of a review of SelfDesign's brand, identity, communications, and public website properties.

SelfDesign is a learner-directed, enthusiasm-based educational methodology. SelfDesign's life-long learning programs seek to co-inspire wonder, joy and integrity in all learning experiences and relationships. The various programs enable authentic self-discovery and empower all learners, young and old, to assume responsibility for their own learning paths.

the organization is currently experiencing growth in its programs and offerings. it has grown largely by word of mouth and personal recommendation for many years - and at the same time there is a demonstrated potential for strong growth outside the reach of this grass roots circle.

SelfDesign is also engaging in some core changes to its organizational structure and administrative practices. undertaking, at this time, the important initiative to revitalize the organization's brand and identity, will help to galvanize that process, and a well considered plan for redesigning SelfDesign's communication and public presentation, from the ground up, will tap into the growth potential.

A comprehensive assessment of SelfDesign's current branding and identity, suggests a fragmented, unfocused, confusing and outdated communication. It also reflects a program-centric bias, which misses the mark of communicating the true value, dedication and unique programming that SelfDesign offers to learners and parents.

the re-design project will result in a more contemporary, articulate, focused and vital expression of the organization, its philosophy, and its programs. it will reach out to a large group of potential SelfDesigners who are waiting to hear about it, and it will reinforce the growth and positive alignment within this unique community of learners.

this document is intended as a point of reference and as a working paper for discussion and agreement towards the definition of a revised SelfDesign brand, identity and communication platform - one that better represents the strengths and qualities of the organization.

the focus of these pages is on presenting those areas where significant opportunities exist for improved communication and design, along with recommendations for positive change.

in this document the term *user* represents the people we want to engage - both those potentially interested in SelfDesign, as well as learners, parents and consultants within the community.

*hanif janmohamed, august 2013*

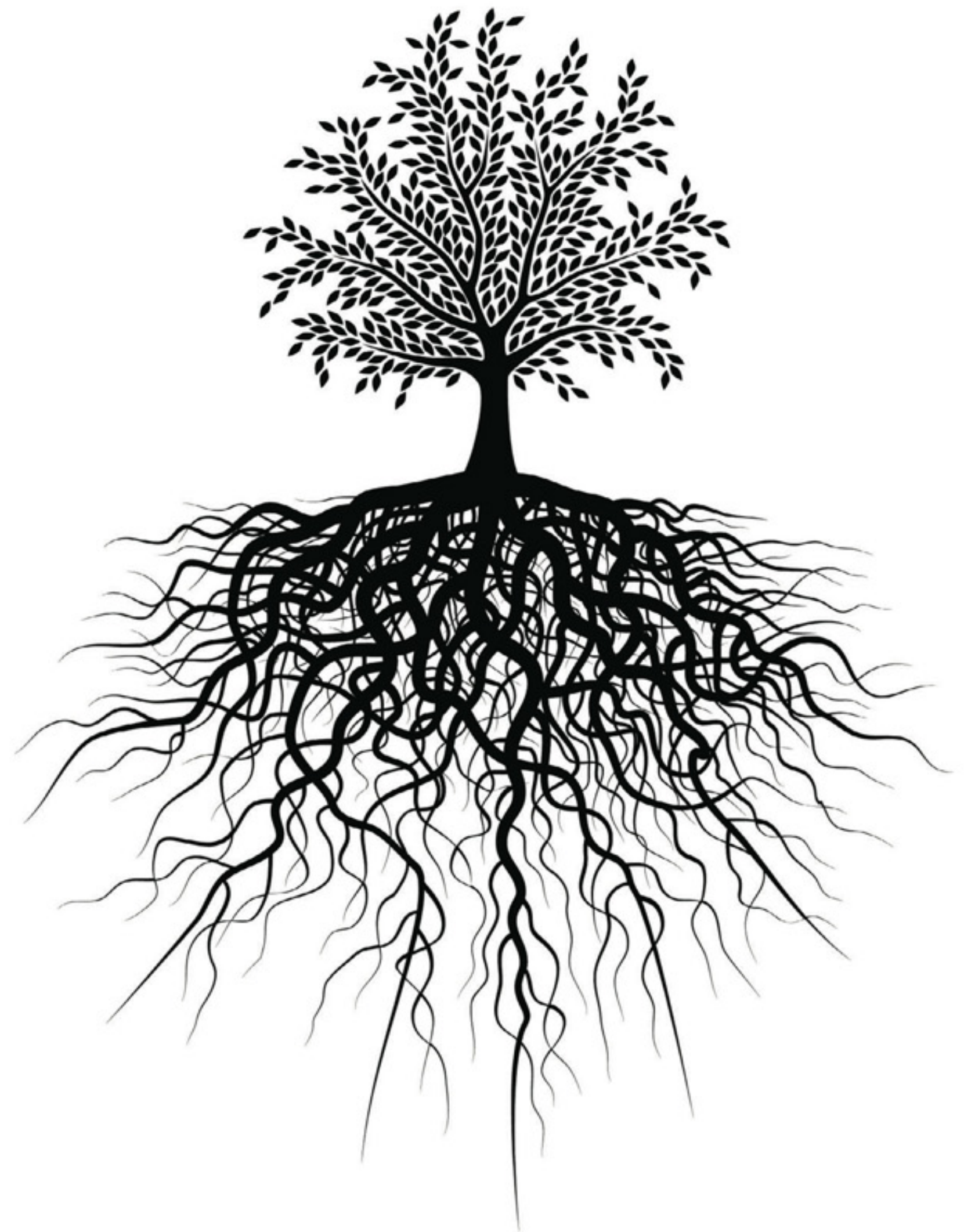


Foundation (Canada)  
Foundation (USA)  
Community (BC)  
Institute (Washington)  
Systems Inc.  
250-354-1310  
V1L 5P9  
Office 604-224-3640  
K 74560  
V6K 4P4  
866-550-354-0202  
7-0112  
ameron  
fdesign.org  
g and .com  
tute.org

Brent Cameron Ph.D.

SelfDesign Learning Foundation (Canada)  
SelfDesign Foundation (USA)  
SelfDesign Learning Community (BC)  
SelfDesign Graduate Institute (Washington)  
SelfDesign Learning Systems Inc.  
Nelson Head Office 250-354-1310  
Nelson PO Box 300, V1L 5P9  
Vancouver Operations Office 604-224-3640  
Kitsilano PO Box 74560  
Vancouver, BC V6K 4P4  
Sirdar home 250-866-5500  
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brentcameron@selfdesign.org  
www.selfdesign.org and .com  
www.selfdesigninstitute.org

Choice overload



*complexity begins at the root.*



*simplify.*



## "SelfDesign?"

When the name is first heard, the question frequently asked is:

"SelfDesign?" - "What's that?"

"SelfDesign is...." and that's where it gets a bit tricky, and answers can get a bit long winded, and they can take many forms.

- Its not really a thing - and yet it must be, its got a name – SelfDesign.
- It's a process? – that of designing your self – "Self-Designing"
- It's a relationship? – which we have with ourselves, in the world?

Is there some contradiction in the language, resulting from the particular combination of words, that results in ambiguity? It certainly has complexity:

**SelfDesign sounds like a thing.**

It has 'noun-ness' – **Self**, *n.* – defined by wiki: *The self is an individual person as the object of his or her own reflective consciousness.*

**SelfDesign sounds like a process.**

It relates to an action – **Design**, *v.* – is a term used as liberally as salt, with just as many uses (its also sometimes a noun – 'my design' – a cross-dresser perhaps?)

Its an odd relationship – Maybe it wants to be a more like a verb?  
'SelfDesigning' feels easier to grasp – it sounds like an action:

"Hey, what're you up to?"

"I'm designing my self – I'm a SelfDesigner"

"Cool, i'd like to do that - where d'you learn to do that – SelfDesign?"

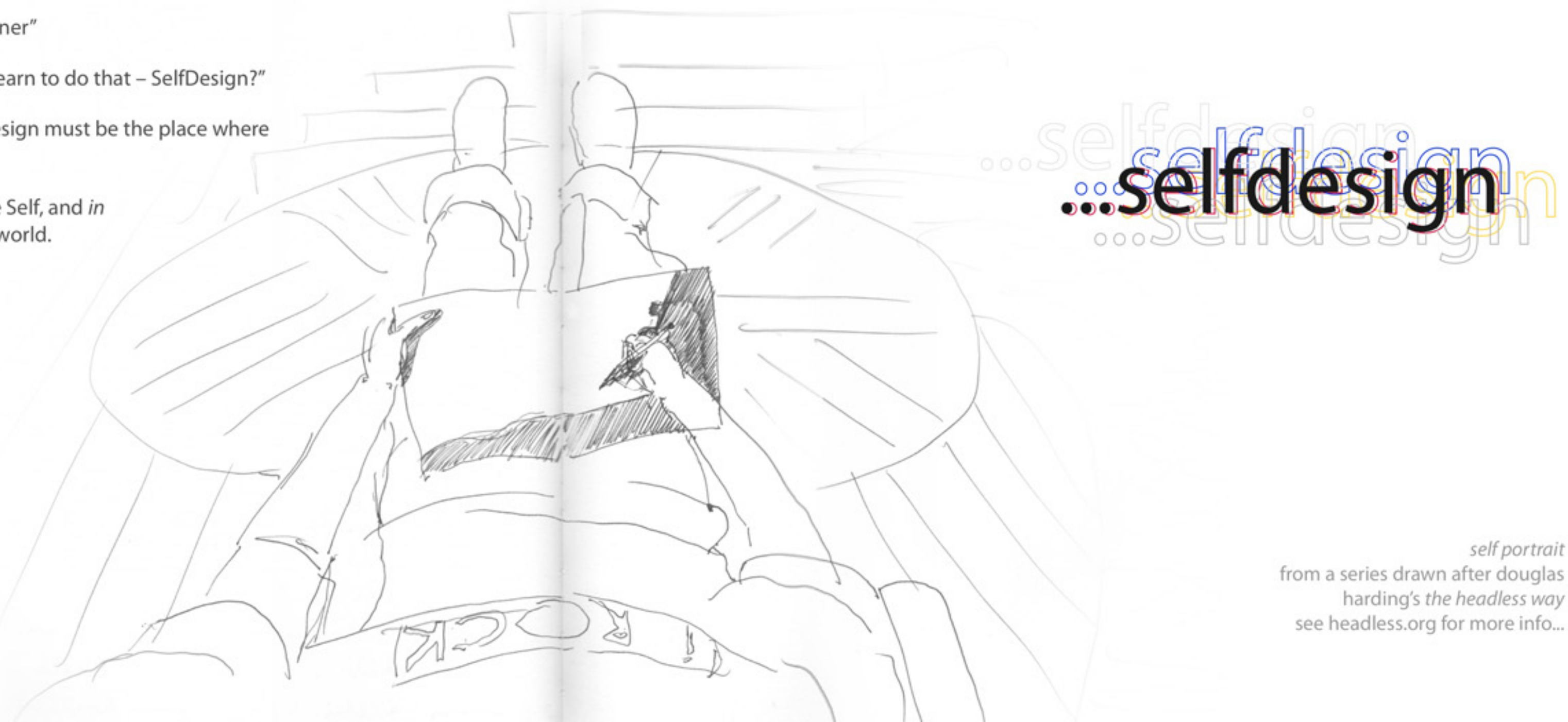
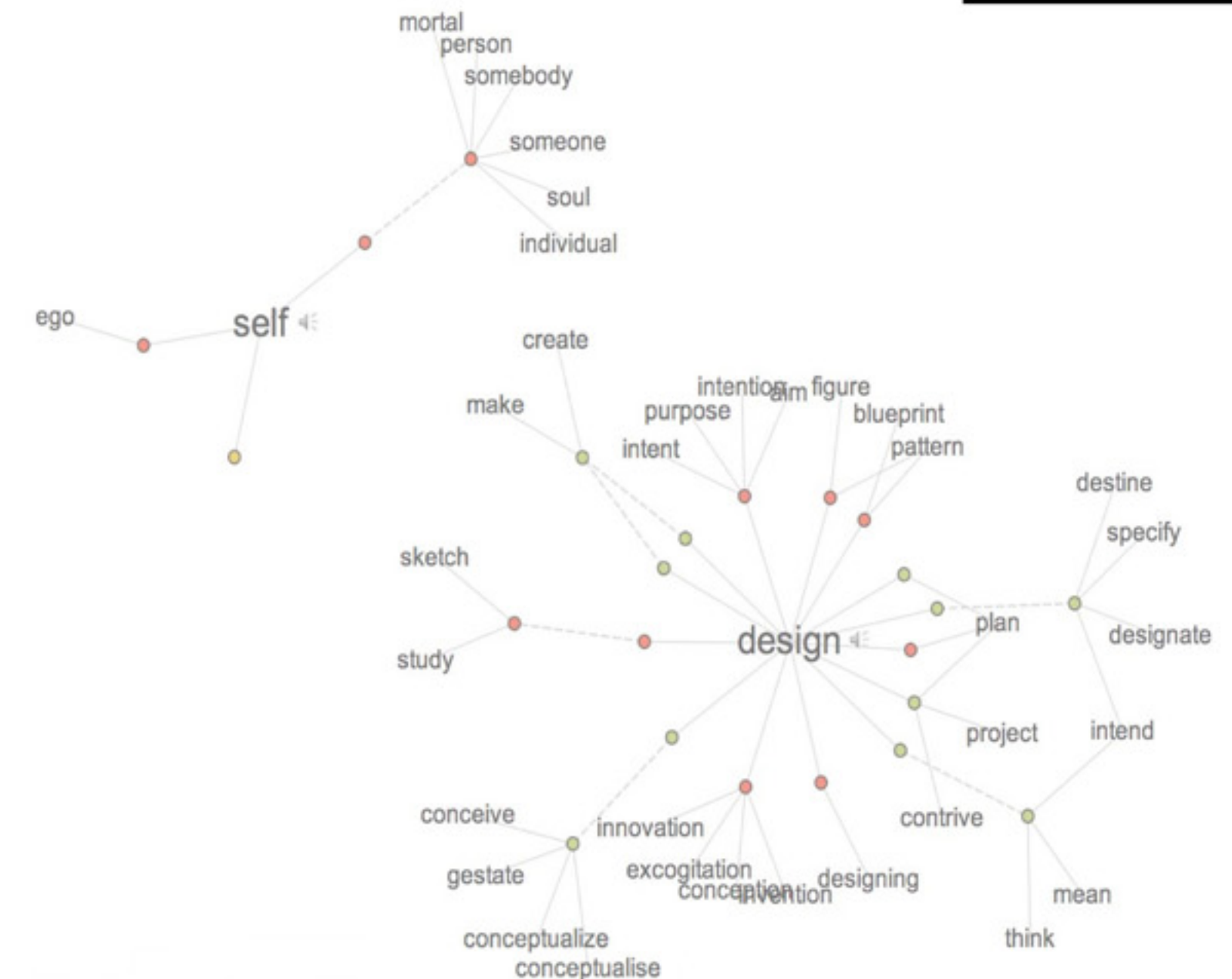
maybe its stuck with being a noun - SelfDesign must be the place where you learn to be a SelfDesigner?

And yet the locus of SelfDesigning is *in* the Self, and *in* its interactions and relationships with the world.

"SelfDesign?" – its complicated.

What's in a name?

naming



self portrait  
from a series drawn after douglas  
harding's *the headless way*  
see [headless.org](http://headless.org) for more info...

...what is it?

naming

...an organization's name?

...a process?

SelfDesign®

an ambiguous term?  
hard to resolve?

*the term is...*

- an unfamiliar combination
- not easily reconcilable
- feels incomplete
- not a name
- not a thing
- asks for interpretation

... a thing?

“a way of being”

*resolve the ambiguity.  
attach a qualifier to help users understand it?*

SelfDesign learning community

academy  
multiversity  
college  
system  
institute  
institution  
reformatory  
forum  
platform  
abecedary  
fellowship

*SelfDesign Learning Community (a thing?)*

*SelfDesigning (a process?)*



naming

...what are its qualities?

*add a tag line?  
make the tag line evoke something.*

SelfDesign®

how to locate it?  
what can it do for me?

SelfDesign  
everchanging

...what does it do?

...what's the story?



is  
**SelfDesign**  
**SelfReferential**  
?

*make a fundamental change:*

*shift the frame of reference in all forms of communication - from that of the organization to that of the user.*



*address:*

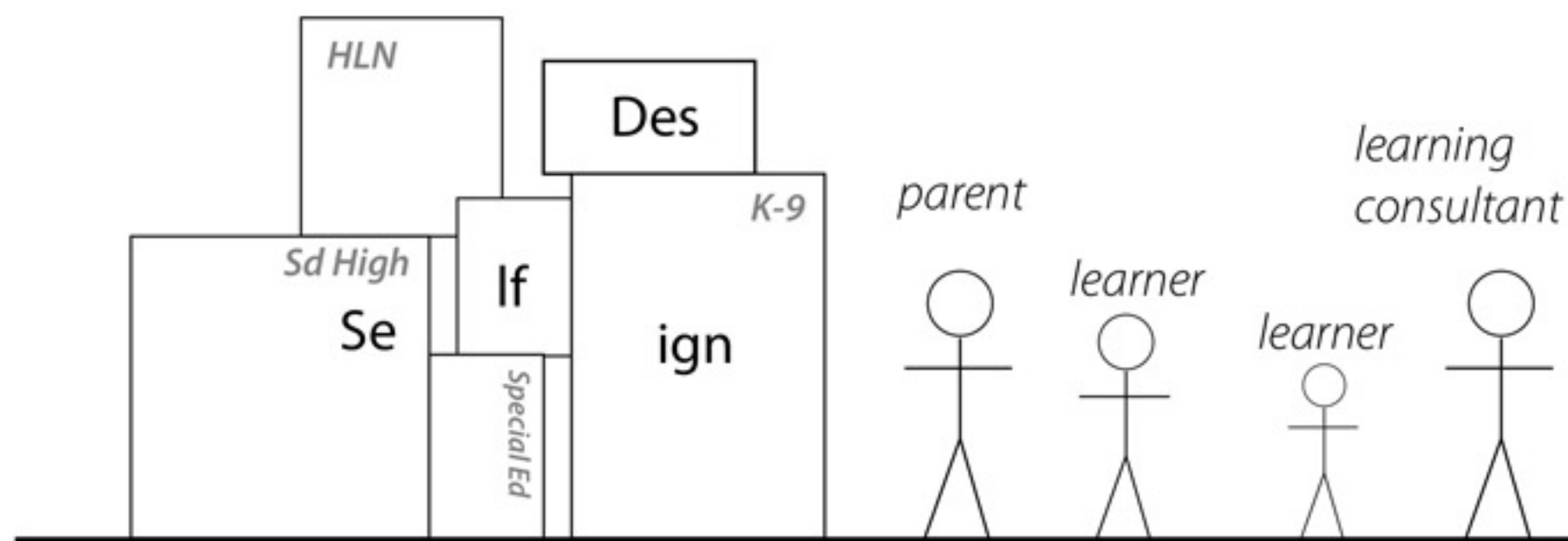
- users' needs
- users' frame of reference

*from there, illustrate:*

- SelfDesign's important difference
- and why we believe that

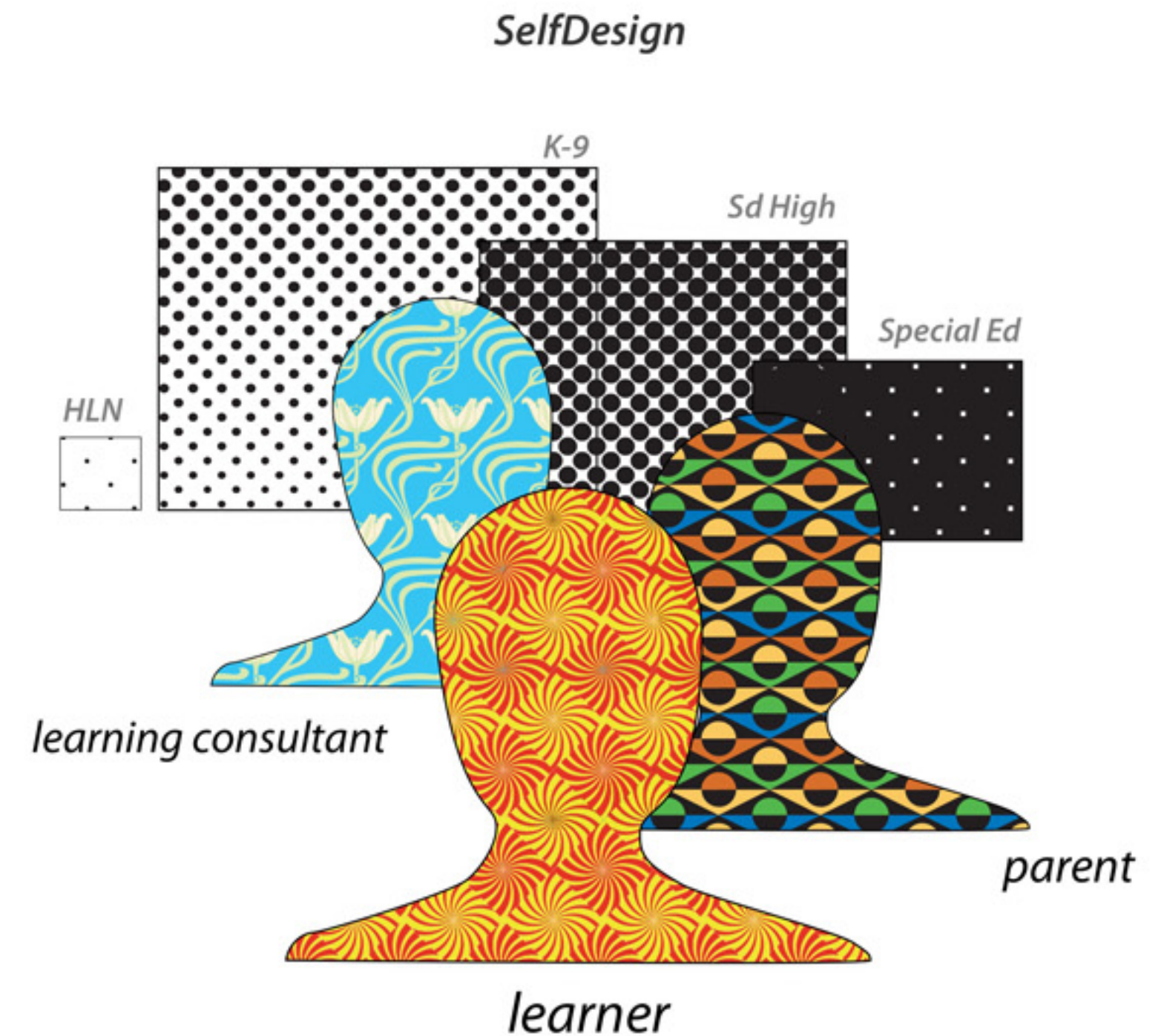


*shift the frame of reference to the user.*



### Flat Presentation

current communications - particularly on the websites - provides information in a flat horizontal presentation. offering little to draw users in, and requiring them to seek and glean pertinent information for themselves.



### Differentiated Presentation

- *speak directly to users needs in an engaging way.*
- *differentiate SelfDesign's offerings.*
- *illustrate how SelfDesign supports that need.*
- *make site navigation an intuitive and engaging experience for the user.*



*shift the frame of reference to the user.*

## SelfDesign

Institution Centric

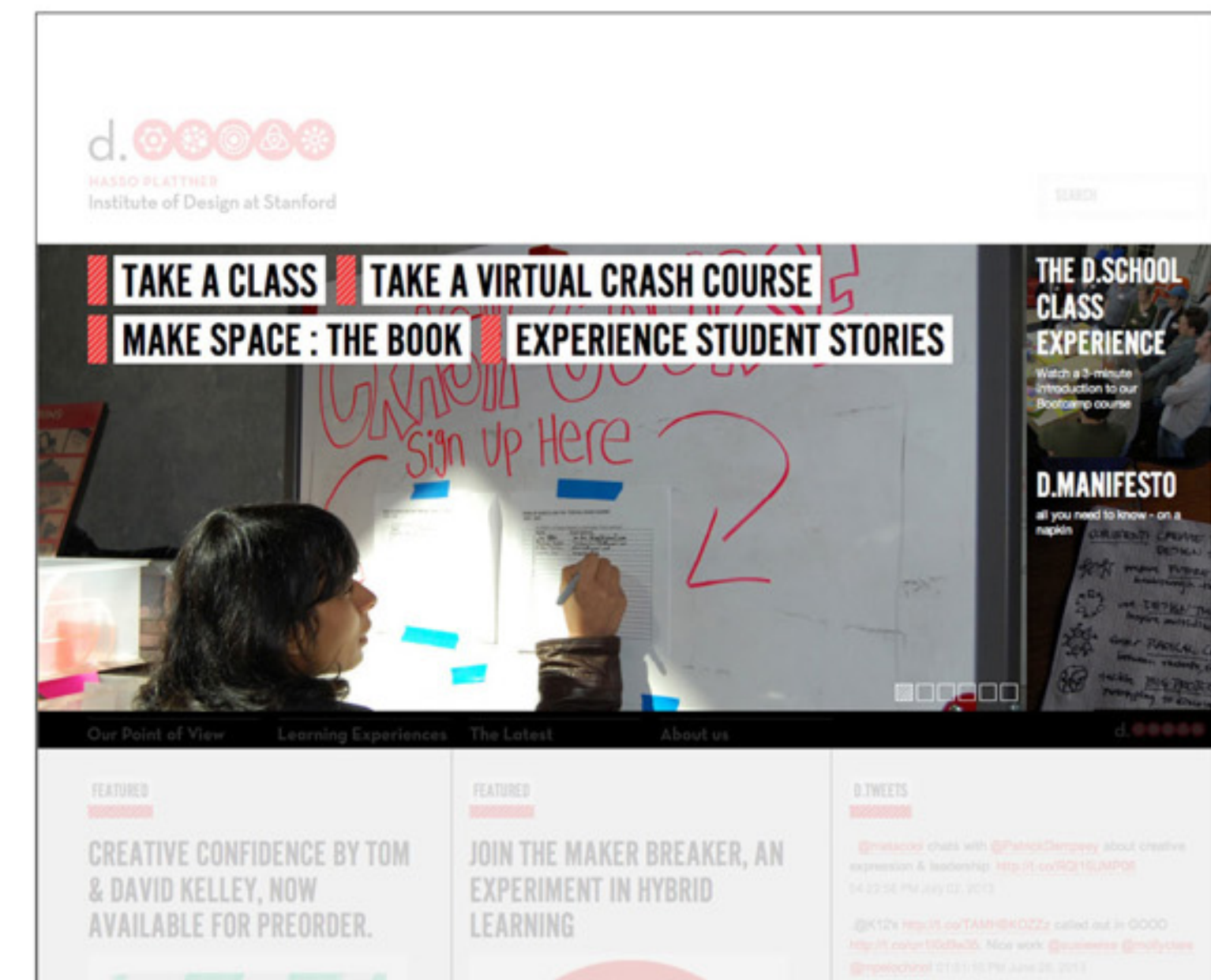


- hub and spoke model of organization.
- no visual hierarchy.
- no compelling reason to click anywhere.

the focus of the page is on displaying the structure of the organization - which is presented without differentiation. the frame of reference is based on a representation of the institution, rather than the engagement of the user's needs or interests.

## Stanford design

Viewer Centric



- *adopt the viewer's frame of reference*
- *differentiate viewer's interests.*
- *guide them towards areas of focus.*
- *offer a call to action.*
- *represent the institution's support of the user's needs.*



## telling the story

"...there is a deep appreciation for the diversity of the group, they're awake to the fact that they're there for themselves and that they are designing their learning."  
EOS Mentor

"I never wanted to go to school before, now I get up early"  
EOS Learner

"Oh, I get it now, I'm here for myself"  
2011 EOS Learner

- *ask selfdesigners to talk about SelfDesign.*
- *share their stories.*
- *testimonials say more than description.*

## the village of conversations

- *a compelling concept.*
- *bring it forward.*

- *provide users with a glimpse into the conversations that are taking place.*
- *encourage members to share stories with users - explore the nexus.*



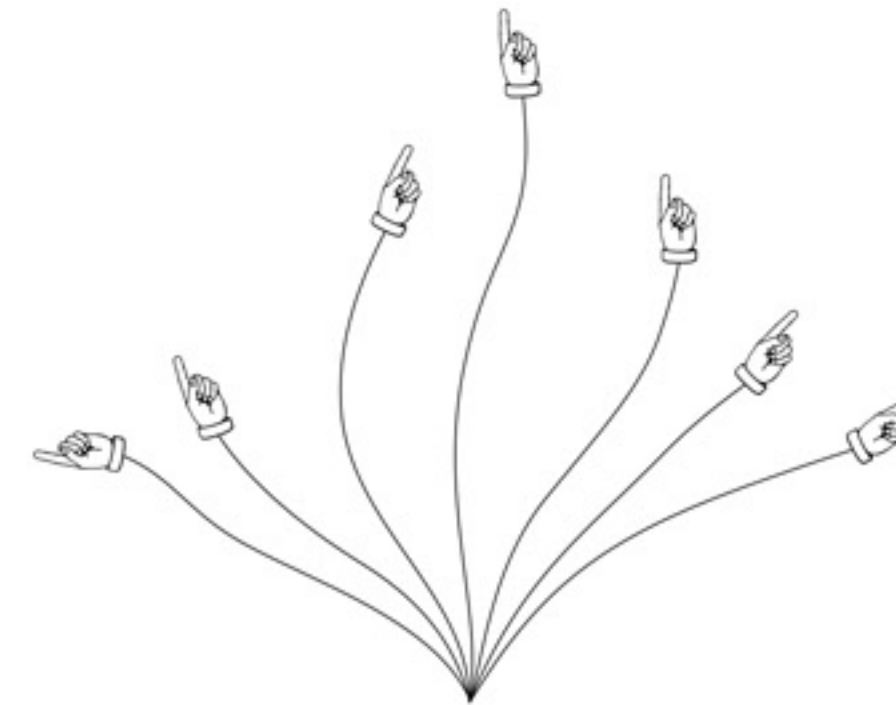


## logo

### the spiral

- the spiral is a 'core' symbol of selfdesign
- it represents growth, change, natural progression, harmony
- it is used as a primary reference in the creation of selfdesign's models and philosophy
- it is a beautiful construct that is ubiquitous in the natural world
- it embodies growth

*expand on what works.*



### multiple paths

- *the use of multiple paths expands on the symbol to embrace the notion of the other.*
- *still metaphoric of opening and outward growth, it also symbolizes choice, and is inclusive of multiplicity.*
- *the depiction of multiple paths underscores a richness of opportunity, and the importance of individual choice.*

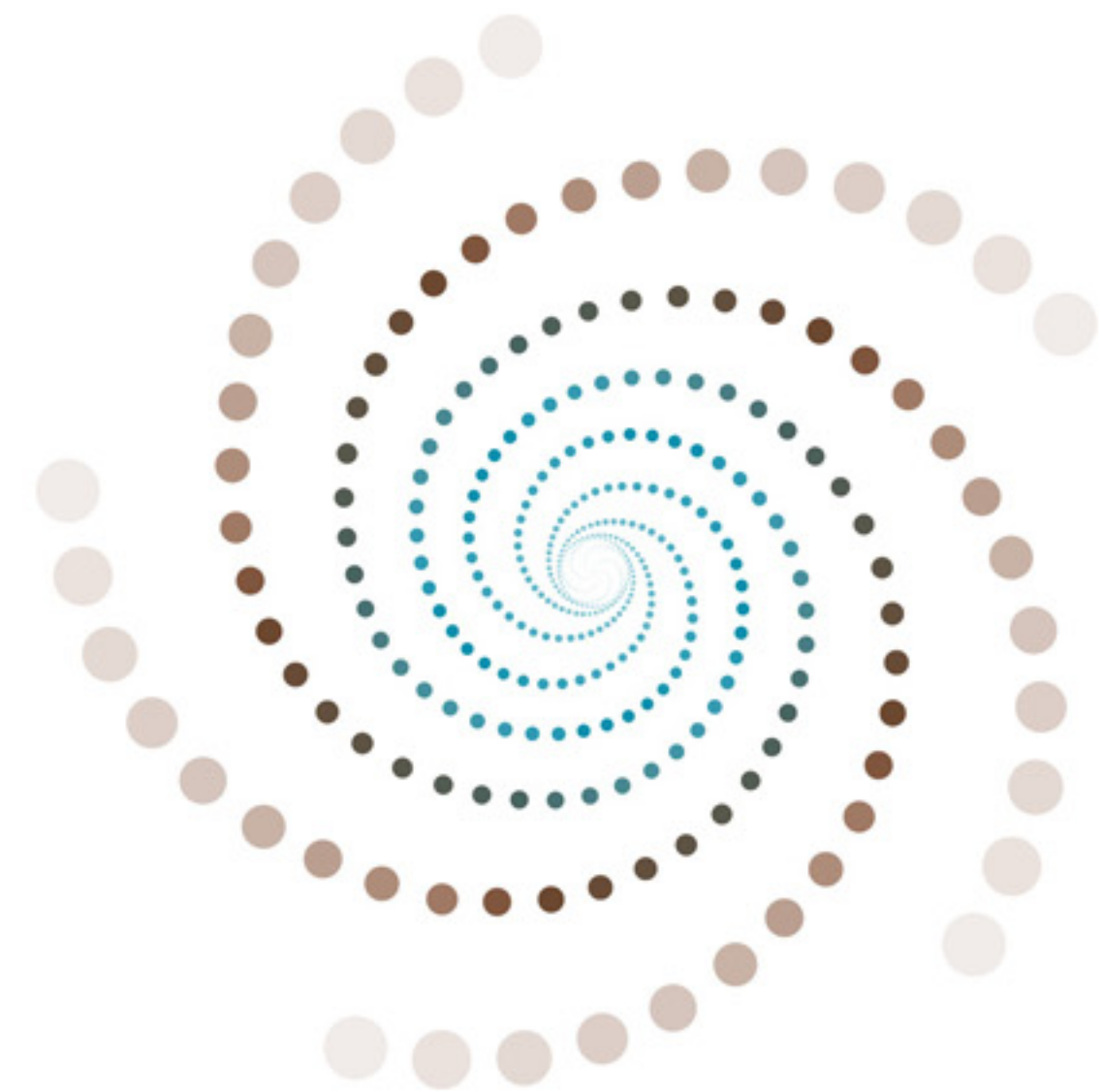
### the solitary path

- the spiral, as used in SelfDesign, represents *the path of life* - it is symbolic of the journey of life, from birth to death.
- if the spiral is seen as a motif of the human journey - the single spiral can also be seen as an unfolding of life along the path in a uniform progression, for each of us.
- the intention of this symbol is an expression of growth, unfolding and opening, however its singularity also speaks to linear progression, prescribed progression and constraint.

logo

*expand on the logo's spiral theme.  
create movement. illustrate multiplicity.*

Spiral galaxy NGC 1232



spiraling spirals spiraling?





logo

*expand on the logo's spiral theme.  
create movement. illustrate multiplicity.*

The Great Wave off Kanagawa, Katsushika Hokusai



catch the wave?

## choices



## categorize

- *categorize from users perspective.*
  - create categories of information that are useful from a user's perspective.
  - categories need to speak to the chooser, not the choice maker.
  - shift frame of reference to the user's when articulating a choice to be made.

## reduce complexity

- *simplify complex processes.*
- *help users in choice making.*
  - use progressive disclosure to help users work through complex choices
  - shift frame of reference to the user's and see the choice framework from the outside looking in.

## cut

- *minimize choice overload where possible.*

choice overload reduces:

- engagement
- quality of decision
- satisfaction



## SelfDesign Compass

(Our Purpose, Assumptions, Orientations, Tenets and Core Processes)

*SelfDesign is a way of being*

*SelfDesign is a lifelong learning journey*

*SelfDesign is living enthusiasm into the world*

*SelfDesign offers opportunities for people of all ages to connect, learn and grow in freedom, unfolding their wisdom and potential.*

### Our Social Purpose

To offer children and adults, individually and in collaborative communities, ongoing opportunities for lifelong learning and living with conscious intention.

### Our Economic Purpose

To grow and sustain the organizational, ecological, and financial health of SelfDesign to support the people with whom we connect and the communities where we learn and grow together.

### Our Service & Product Purpose

To offer learning opportunities, resources, technological innovations, and services based on SelfDesign methodologies to assist people of all ages in realizing their human potential and personal goals.

In our SelfDesigning, we find the following assumptions, orientations, tenets, and processes to be worthwhile compass points on our life's journey.

### Assumptions – values and beliefs

- We are born as loving beings, seeking connection and meaning.
- As individuals, we learn optimally through spirals of discovery, introspection, integration and expression, following our own natural rhythms and personal developmental cycles.
- As family members, we live optimally in loving engagement, conversation, and mutual respect.
- As community members, we live optimally through co-inspirational activities and relationships that enrich and sustain the well-being of the group.
- As global citizens, we optimally work with nature to live elegantly within the web of living systems.
- Optimal learning and living contributes positively to the physical, emotional and spiritual health of individuals, families and communities.

### Orientations – positions and views

- We recognize that both our direction and our manner of moving in that direction influence and shape our lives and relations with others.
- We orient ourselves in this present moment, understanding that our vision and our goals are future manifestations of our present self.
- We recognize that we have choice in how we frame our life, as well as how we view and describe our experiences.
- We live in a manner of love, co-creation, co-inspiration, accepting other perspectives and systems of meaning as legitimate.

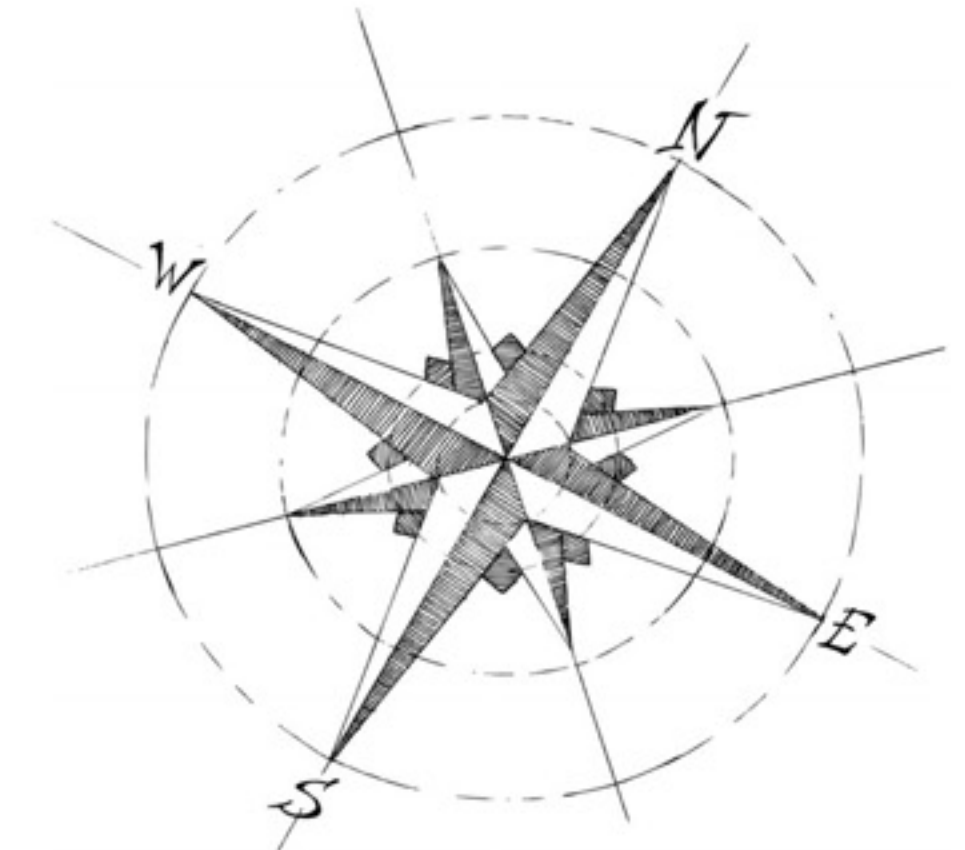
*re-write/edit text so that it is concise and meaningful to the users who are investing time to read.*

### • be brief.

*SelfDesign offers opportunities for people of all ages to connect, learn and grow in freedom, unfolding their wisdom and potential.*

### distill.

*SelfDesigners connect, learn and grow for life*



### • be articulate.

*SelfDesign is a way of being?*

### • create clear and meaningful communication.

*SelfDesign is living enthusiasm into the world ?*



## language

*create common ground with language.*

*identify selfdesign as different from conventional education programs, articulate those differences, and express their value.*

*and...*

*in pursuit of that differentiation, use common language in a clear communication that expresses selfdesign's unique learning programs and culture.*

common ground

border region

- *simplify language.*
- *create clear communication.*
- *avoid invented terms.*
- *limit jargon.*
- *use language to create a shared space.*



value proposition



## personalized learning

- *clarify the value proposition for each audience*
- *express it in simple, clear terms*





# brand values

- *distill and articulate SelfDesign's brand values.*
- *focus on those that differentiate SelfDesign.*

## SelfDesign Brand Emotions (Current)

- inclusive, a sense of belonging/connection, acceptance, supportive, feel recognized, understood, values alignment

- centered on me, acknowledged just as I am, intimate/personal, meets my unique needs, strengthens my relationship to self

### Valued/Affirmed

- Co-inspiring, collaborative, organic relationships within
- Natural gifts are nurtured, supported and shared to the betterment of all
- supported in uncovering my life purpose
- zen, comfortable environment
- open, sense of space, clarity, nature inspired/organic, light, elegant and ecological
- friendly, welcoming, non-judgemental
- balanced and harmonizing energy
- calm, relaxed, centered

### At Ease

- sound philosophy and methodology behind SelfDesign,
- safe, trustworthy
- conscious choice, responsible risk, investment in future, synchronistic, foundation for the future,

### Reassured

- dynamic, emergent, ever-changing, expectant, growth, fluid
- different approach to learning
- vital, life enriching, wellness, healthy
- freedom to choose

### Aspiration

- enthusiasm, joy, playful
- open-mind/open-heart, possibility, curiosity
- learning as a lifelong endeavour, the curriculum is in your heart
- sense of richness in understanding one's self, adventure,

### Wonder

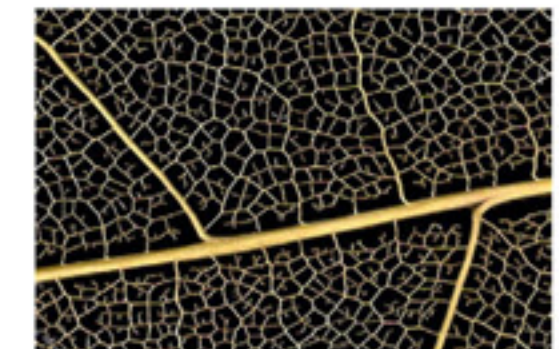
- connectedness, co-inspiring, interdependent
- values the intimacy of relationships and community
- higher awareness of all I am relating to
- I am in the world and the world is in me
- brings spirit into action
- connects people together in trust
- seeks our best understanding for ways of living in harmony and integrity

### Agreement Based Relationship

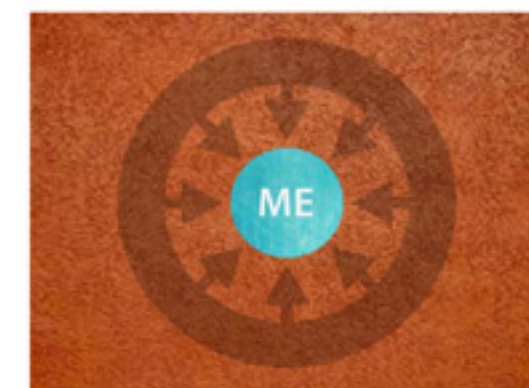
- values the intimacy of relationships and community
- higher awareness of all I am relating to
- I am in the world and the world is in me
- brings spirit into action



WONDER



CONNECTED



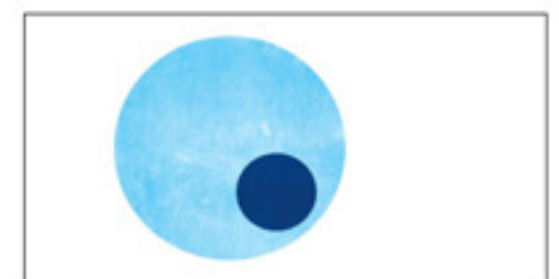
CENTERING



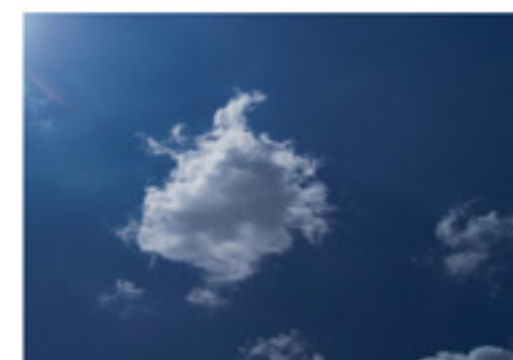
AT EASE



BALANCED



INCLUSIVE



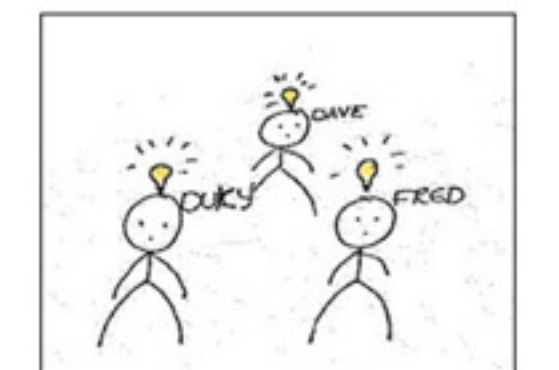
ASPIRING



AFFIRMING



VALUED



AGREEMENT BASED



## use of images

- use images to good effect.
- use evocative images, that fuel the imagination.
- invite users to 'picture' themselves



2007, Victoria, BC, Minister's Offices

*image from SD website*

while this type of image may be of historic importance and value, sharing it with users does little to engage them emotionally. in addition, it reflects an institution-centric perspective that is prevalent in the current communications, and one that distances users.

*image as document...*



*image as impetus...*



## brand elements

"Somewhere over the Rainbow, way up high  
There's a land that I heard of, once in a lullaby."



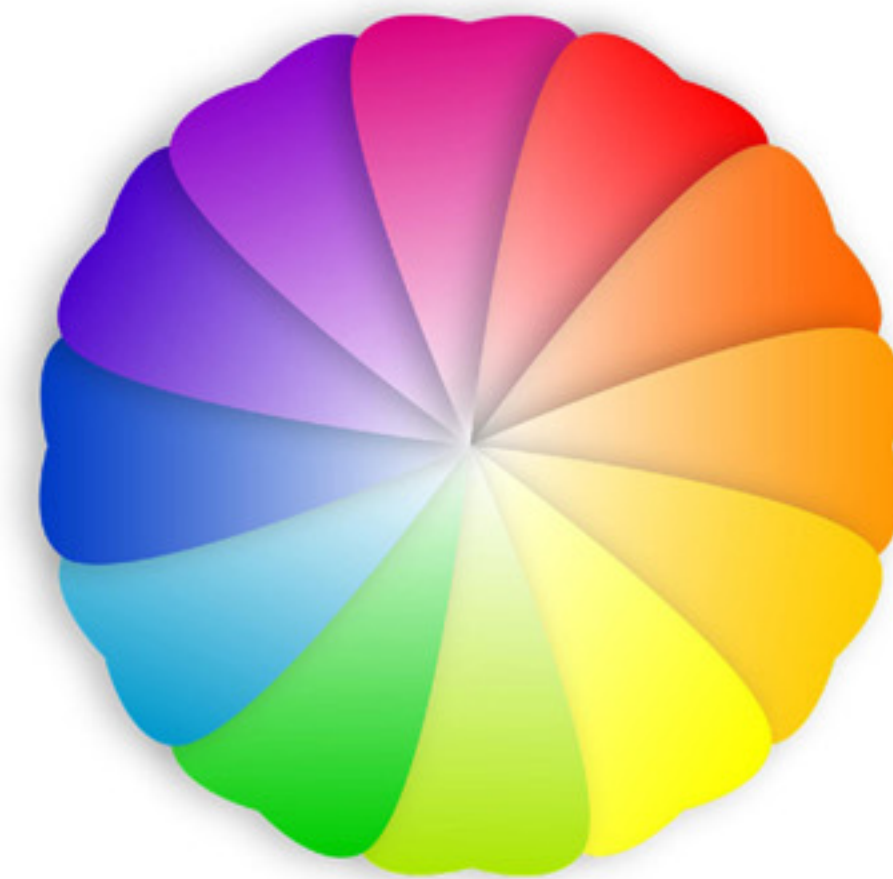
Life  
Hope  
Divinity  
Promise  
Creation  
Initiation  
Potential  
Provision  
Harmony  
Expansion  
Ascension  
Spirituality  
Connection  
Transformation

### the rainbow/spectrum

- the rainbow or spectrum is used extensively in the depiction of SelfDesign models.
- it is symbolic of promise, among other things.
- it is essentially a spiritual symbol, and is rich with implication.
- it represents magic and a sense of an ideal or utopic vision.
- it can be seen as elemental - representative of the 4 elements, and symbolic of change and initiation.
- it can be seen as a bridge, when represented as an arc.
- in its use and adoption it is seen primarily in the gay community, and in hippie culture.

- *the rainbow's use as a brand element is inconsistent*

*bring it forward...*



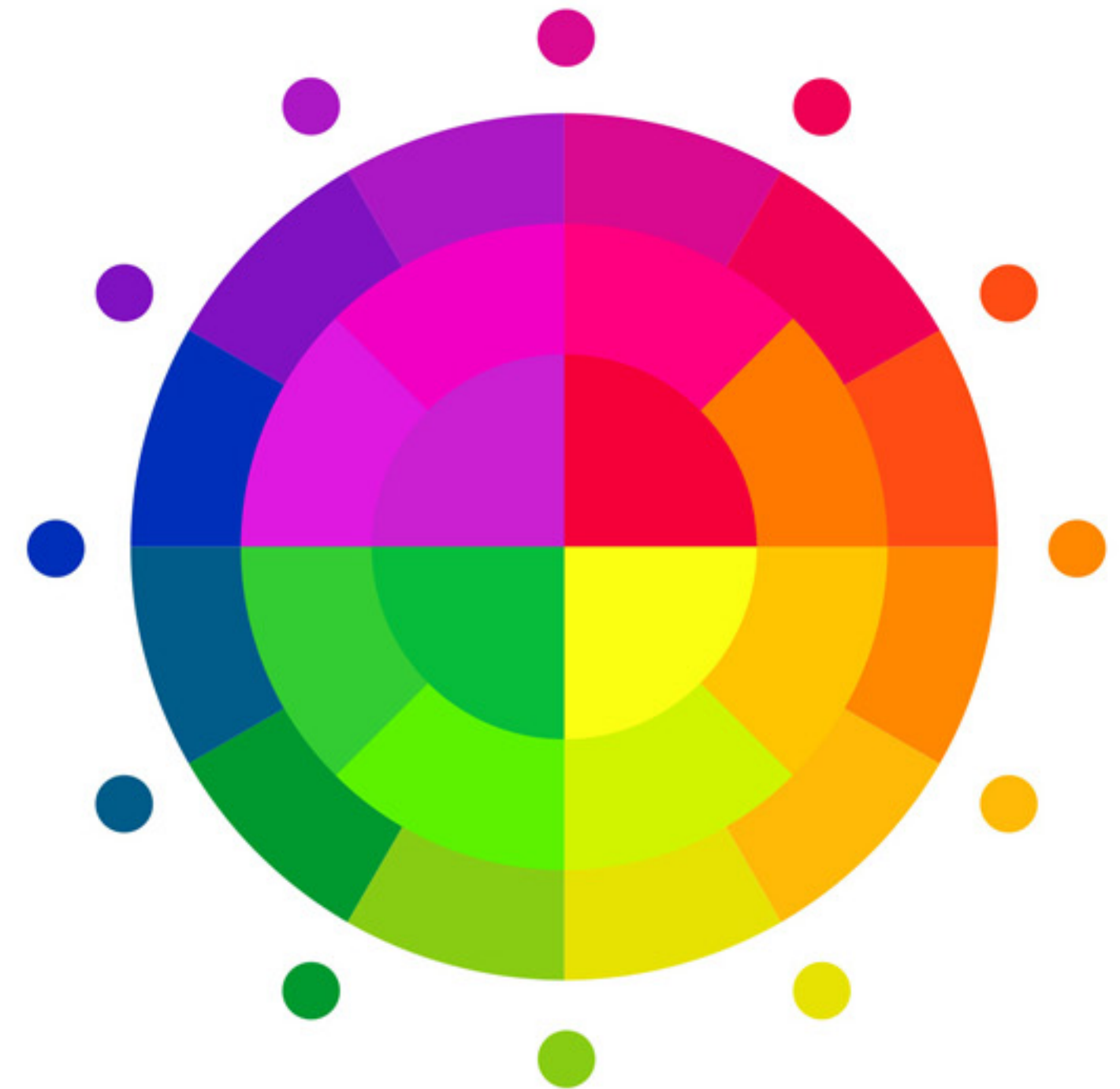
*or make it recede.*



## brand elements

organic, light, elegant  
vital, life enriching, wellness,  
enthusiasm, joy, playful  
dynamic, emergent, ever-changing,  
open, sense of space, clarity  
safe, trustworthy

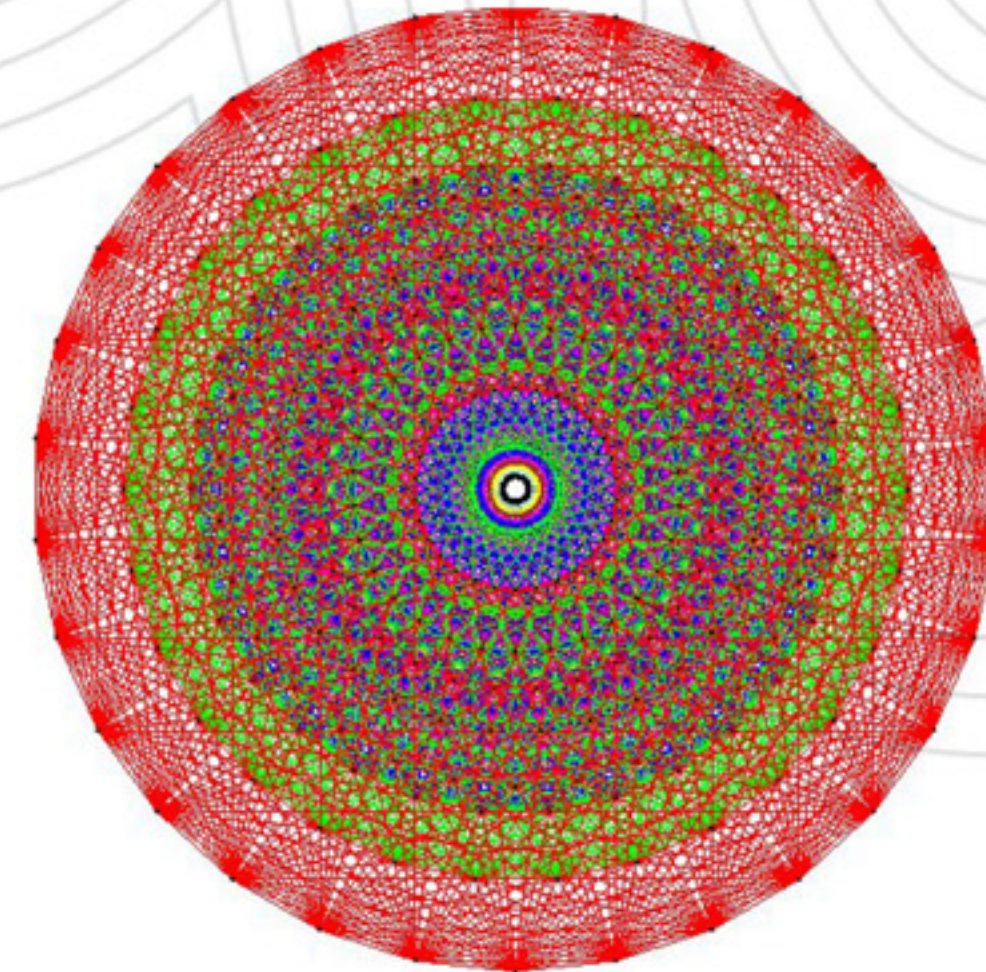
• *use color as a strong brand element.*



*colour can convey emotion better than words.*



brand elements



## the mandala

- *bring the mandala forward as a brand element.*
- the mandala is a significant symbol in SelfDesign's models and philosophy.
- it could be used to good effect as a brand element.



# SelfDesign

live life. learn.

- *embrace change*
- *enable growth*
- *empower people*



## review and design process

While undertaking this review, and working through the material and discovery process with the SelfDesign communications team, the Japanese concept of *Shibumi* came to mind, and I began to engage its principles through the review, and in creating this review document.

*Shibumi* could be translated as 'effortless perfection'. it implies 'a simplicity of spirit; an attitude of refinement without pretension, honesty without apology, beauty without artifice.

*Shibumi* favours simplicity, tranquility, and balance - harmony in action.

The quality of *Shibumi* evolves out of a process of engaging with complexity, though none of this complexity shows in the result. It is a valuable process when addressing particular design challenges.

When applied to design thinking, *Shibumi* can lead us to clear and simple solutions in complex spaces. When something has been designed well, it can have an understated, effortless beauty.

I found it valuable to consider the 7 principles...

*hanif janmohamed, August 2013*

## 7 shibumi principles

### KOKO

restraint  
exclusion  
omission

*refrain from adding what is not absolutely necessary in the first place*

### KANSO

fresh  
clean  
neat

*eliminate what doesn't matter to make room for what does*

### SHIZEN

of nature  
and yet  
distinct

*incorporate naturally occurring patterns and rhythms*

### YUGEN

subtlety  
leaves more  
room to imagine

*limit information enough to pique curiosity and leave something to the imagination*

### FUKINSEI

imperfection  
asymmetry  
incomplete-ness

*leave room for co-creation and provide a platform for open innovation*

### DATSUZOKU

break  
the  
pattern

*make an interruptive break a part of any breakthrough*

### SEIJAKU

calm  
tranquility  
solitude

*doing something isn't always better than doing nothing*