

**School of Design and Art**

**The significance of knowledge of social contexts to concept  
development in graphic design practice in New Zealand**

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**This Thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
Curtin University of Technology**

**May, 2010**

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person, except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any other university.

## Abstract

This thesis investigates the question; what is the significance that a cross-section of New Zealand graphic designers placed on using knowledge of social contexts to inform their practice? It reveals whether graphic designers in the research, drew on knowledge of social contexts that arose from implicit knowledge, whether they relied on dedicated research to locate knowledge of social contexts and the extent to which that knowledge of social contexts was significant to their practice.

The theoretical framework for the research was primarily based on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, social structure and practice, to find the degree to which knowledge of social contexts came out of either a conscious process of enhancing cultural capital in designers' day-to-day practice, or from dispositions inculcated over designers' lifetimes through habitus at various levels. Bourdieu's sociological perspectives are particularly applicable to this research, because of the way in which he places great emphasis on cultural knowledge as the basis of cultural investigation.

The ethnographic research modelled on Bourdieu's methods, in which empirical studies are essential to theoretical research, used conversation analysis in which the reflexivity of the interviewer contributed strongly to the collection of data. The research method was based on a series of seven case studies conducted with New Zealand graphic designers of varying backgrounds and working situations, between 2002 and 2003. The research investigated how they had acquired knowledge of social contexts for practice and the importance that they placed on bringing this knowledge into their practice. The research group ranged from recent graduates to senior and accomplished graphic designers.

Graphic designers showed the significance of knowing about social contexts, through the cultural capital that was important to their practice and to their positions in the graphic design field. This research has highlighted the difficulty that designers encountered, to varying degrees, in identifying how knowledge of social contexts came into their practice or even how they had acquired this knowledge.

Knowledge of social contexts was shown to be derived from designers' own social structures and the durable dispositions and practice relative to their background, from the habitus of the internal culture of a designer's firm, from within the wider field of graphic design practice and the changing dispositions arising from it and finally, from graphic designers' external social worlds. This research suggests that contextual knowledge also needs to be brought into the teaching of graphic design, rather than being seen to arise implicitly in conceptualisation and studio practice.

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## Acknowledgements

There are many acknowledgements I wish to make. I am very grateful to Professor Suzette Worden for supervising me through my research and thesis writing journey. Her advice and counsel have been immense and have kept me focussed and able to understand the requirements the research. Dr Leong Yap also assisted me, in the early stages of developing my ideas for the research. I have appreciated the assistance received from Dr Terence Love. I am indebted to the late Professor Roy Nash for the way that he was able to assist me to understand Bourdieu's theoretical ideas of primary importance to the theoretical framework for the research. I also wish to thank Dr Lorna Kaino for helpful supervision and comments on my thesis as it has progressed.

I wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Curtin University of Technology in providing a grant to undertake this degree. I am also grateful to Whitecliffe of College of Arts & Design for the research leave granted and the assistance offered to attend conferences to present the ideas developed in the thesis, to an international audience.

To Raewyn, thank you for personal support through this task and your contribution in proofreading the writing.

Finally, I wish to thank the designers who took part in the research, who spoke openly and were prepared to share their experiences and discuss their positions in the field of graphic design.

## Preface

The motivation to start this research can be linked back to the dismay I encountered when as a lecturer in an art and design institution in the early 1990s, I found that a significant part of the programme material was devoted to contextual studies, often far removed from the studio practice I had previously been involved in. It was also delivered by staff who did not necessarily have experience or knowledge of the particular requirements of design practice and practice knowledge. I came to my lecturing position on the basis of my accomplishment as a recognised graphic designer, able to bring up-to-date studio practice methods and knowledge to an Art and Design school that was in the early stages of moving from a diploma course to a bachelor level degree course programme for graphic design, yet the cultural studies I was encountering, were largely outside the reading and resources for graphic design practice at that time. Even allowing for my fine arts background thirty years prior, I had to give serious thought to the value I placed on these studies. A graphic designer and company partner that I had worked with, had had no design school education whatsoever, but had learnt on the job and been quite autodidactic in fitting himself for a professional life as an art director and, in our firm, a graphic designer. He was regarded as one of the most accomplished designers in New Zealand, at that time by both his peers and his clients.

As I reflected on the new social and cultural knowledge students were studying in the art and design school course, I considered that all knowledge has value, but kept asking myself how closely these studies came to feeding into the requisite knowledge for graphic design practice. Were the design schools more informed than the graphic designers themselves in terms of knowing what knowledge was needed for participation in graphic design? Were design schools adopting the established fine arts curriculum steeped towards a broad education in social and cultural studies? Did social and cultural studies contextualise studio subjects or were they distant from the requisite knowledge for practice?

At this time in New Zealand, technical institutes and art schools were taking on more of the university departmental programme models, following course formats from the United Kingdom in particular, where the art and craft courses at art school level were being re-evaluated as these schools became absorbed into universities as art and design departments (Jackson, 2000). With the move to universities came a more theoretical aspect to courses in which broader knowledge bases became more significant (Durling & Griffiths, 2002).

Compared with the insular activity of graphic design I had been accustomed to, this broadening of course knowledge could be seen either as something I had completely overlooked in my work, although client marketing departments had often provided data in

these fields relative to consumers, or studies that were too far removed from the needs of practice. The boundaries of graphic design knowledge were being extended by the need for knowledge of computer technology at a time when the field itself felt less secure, because of the emerging desktop publishers whose work was being confused for graphic design by some clients. At the same time, from another quarter, the computer had given clients a tool for production that undermined the previous production skills of graphic designers.

My concerns that new entrants armed with computer skills were reconfiguring the graphic design field gave me cause, in 1999, to embark on research in a Master of Design Management degree, to consider changing boundaries for practice. This research showed how graphic designers needed to work more closely with the business field, pointing to the way in which graphic design could be taking on a social dimension that could question the primacy of visual sensibilities. This research revealed that a new area of knowledge was becoming more important for practice, the knowledge related to understanding audiences for design. With a realisation that literature was emerging that made the case for knowledge of social contexts and cultures of design (Sparke, 2004; Woodham, 1997), clear evidence was emerging, for an argument for greater knowledge of social contexts as requisite knowledge for graphic design practice. Yet many of my former colleagues in graphic design practice seemed to convey an image of detachment from the social aspects of practice knowledge that reflected a gap between the theory of academia and the practice of the studio. I envisaged that a research project on the scale of this thesis could provide an understanding of whether graphic designers need to know about social contexts as appropriate knowledge for practice. I also saw this research being a means to assist me to understand the relevance of contextual studies to graphic design studio practice, at a tertiary education level.

The research I have undertaken since 1999, has enabled me to solicit wide-ranging viewpoints about the issues I have considered, firstly, from designers who have been open and generous in revealing often their innermost thinking, and also through writing and presenting conference papers at international academic design conferences. In *The design manager as boundary-setter* (Mauger, 2002), I discussed the need to distinguish between computer production by non-designers and the cultural capital afforded by accomplished designers. *Research into Theory and practice: One field or two?* (Mauger, 2003a) questioned whether there was a gap between the pragmatism of professional design practice and the theoretical themes debated in academic design studies. Two of the thesis case studies were tested in *Relating social contextual knowledge to graphic designers' practice* (Mauger, 2004). In *Government partnerships with design and business communities: Evaluating the New Zealand Design Taskforce Project* (Mauger, 2005), I explored the ways in which a developing knowledge base between the field of design and the field of business has been

recognised by the New Zealand Government and the implications within this for designers' understanding of consumer audiences. In *Assessing the importance graphic designers place on learning about social contexts related to consumer cultures*, (Mauger, 2008), I was able to discuss the conclusions of my research with an international audience of professional designers, design managers and design educators. The informal discussions from these conference papers have added to my understanding of the questions and issues I have presented, enabling me test the ideas of my research with international audiences.

# Chapter One - Introduction

The graphic design profession demonstrates heavy reliance on tacit knowledge and loosely identified professional experience. In client-designer working relationships, knowledge related to practice is typically generated from a number of sources including the client briefing for a specific project, the cumulative experience arising from a history of solving client-generated design projects, and the accumulated knowledge of visual aspects of problem solving employed in resolving these design problems. While graphic designers recognise that the visual form they give to their concepts is a core aspect of their expertise, they are less certain about the relative importance of knowing about the social contexts to their work or how knowledge of social contexts may be acquired (Howard, 1997).

## **The main research question**

In order to understand ways in which knowledge of social contexts informs graphic designers' conceptual processes, this thesis explores the following question; what is the significance a cross-section of New Zealand graphic designers placed on using knowledge of social contexts to inform their practice?

## **Aims**

To answer the main research question this research set out to establish the importance that graphic designers in the study, placed on building up knowledge about the social world and relating this knowledge to their work. This research also aimed to see whether designers saw adequate knowledge of social contexts arising from the level of understanding and knowledge coming out of their day-to-day experience or whether they needed to acquire information of social worlds through wider enquiry outside the studio. This research also aimed to establish whether knowledge of social contexts resided at the level of broader personal backgrounds in implicit understanding rather than being consciously acquired.

## **Research objectives**

To accomplish these aims, it was necessary to interrogate the practice of a cross-section of New Zealand graphic designers to see the degree to which they were able to identify references to social contexts in their practice and problem solving, by understanding graphic designers' professional and social backgrounds, and how they had become designers. It involved seeing how they had built up knowledge of social contexts through experience. It was also necessary to consider what knowledge of social contexts designers revealed that they needed in practice, and how this knowledge related to concept development.



### **The relevance of knowing about social contexts, in graphic design practice**

In graphic design practice, the relevance of knowing about social contexts has become a subject of debate at a number of levels. There is discussion within the graphic design profession in informal web blogs, at Icograda's<sup>1</sup> web forums and at international design conferences. The growing debate within a developing discourse critiquing graphic design in the professional design publication media provides an alternative viewpoint to the early literature on graphic design conceptual processes as demonstrated by Rand (1970), whose reflections on his work relate mainly to form and function related to communicating ideas in graphic design, rather than explaining the social basis to developing the ideas expressed.

In the academic design community, there are arguments in favour of greater attention to a theoretical base to design education and practice, where concerns for understanding social contexts are now well established. The topic has been thoroughly explored in articles and papers (Friedman, 2000; Durling & Griffiths, 2000, for example) to address the need for systematic thinking about design, particularly with regard to contextualising design practice. These articles show the importance to design practice, of knowing about social contexts. The importance of knowing about social contexts is discussed at conferences and in journals promoting 'design thinking' (Cross, 2001). The *Designing in Context Symposium* (Lloyd & Snelders, 2001) for example, included a stream on design and social contexts, demonstrating visibly the critique that supports the interest in knowing about social contexts. The Design Research Society's annual international conferences include papers on design and social contexts. At a professional design level, AIGA's<sup>2</sup> annual conferences also include both presentations and conference themes related to design and social contexts.

The importance placed on knowing about the social contexts which encompass lifestyles and issues related to consumption and society, varies widely for many in the field of graphic design compared with those who seek to understand graphic practice from a more theoretical position (Poyner, 1998). There are differing points of view between those concerned with theoretical aspects of design and those situated in design practice. At the extreme of computer-aided production, for instance, there is often little need for knowledge outside the technical means to produce graphic design. At the other extreme, the world design academic community places high value on social and lifestyle knowledge in critiquing graphic design practice.

It is clear that graphic designers operate within a social setting, in which knowledge of culture, lifestyle, economic and environmental issues are inescapable in the daily

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<sup>1</sup> Icograda, the International Council of Graphic Design Associations is discussed further on p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> AIGA is an abbreviation for the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

interactions with clients and the related problem solving activity (Woodham, 1997; Howard, 1997; Sparke, 2004; Barnard, 2005), but research is needed to understand how well individual graphic designers recognise the social and contextual knowledge base they draw on and what factors determine the uptake and integration of this knowledge.

### **Theoretical perspectives**

Within the academic design community, there has been considerable interest in the way that implicit knowledge related to practice is identified through reflective practice (Schön, 1983). In this concept, there is heavy reliance on intuitively based implicit knowledge drawn from designers' repertoires of practice. While implicit knowledge can be seen to underlie practice (Polyani, 1966), Schön's concepts stop short of explaining how designers have acquired knowledge for practice. This thesis takes a different approach to identify the knowledge in practice that owes much to the social structure and implicit knowledge of the individual, by using Pierre Bourdieu's framework of structure, habitus and practice (Bourdieu, 1984). The insights gained from exploring these concepts provide an understanding of contextual knowledge needed in practice, the knowledge bases of the whole graphic design field itself and the forms of capital needed within it (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78).

'Social context' is viewed as cultural practice in this investigation and cultural capital itself is a sociological concept about culture. It considers specifically aspects of culture that are acquired or inculcated through individual habitus<sup>3</sup>. Bourdieu's cultural investigation brings together the objectivity of social structures and the subjectivity of personal decision-making in the concept of habitus. In Bourdieu's broad concept of sociology, culture is not subsumed, it is made central (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 1) in concepts of markets and cultural goods. In Bourdieu's concept of field (Bourdieu, 1993), used in the research, a relationship is shown between the internal knowledge implicit in social contexts relative to designers' individual habitus and the external knowledge within the field of design, both of which inform design practice and contribute to the formation of design discourse.

### **The Significance of the Study**

This research is relevant to designers' practice because there is a need to understand more about the relationship between designers' recognition of the importance of this knowledge to their practice and what resources they need to draw on to acquire it.

This research provides an original contribution to the 'social context - pragmatic practice' debate in the developing discourse of the sociology of graphic design, by investigating the importance that New Zealand graphic designers in the study placed on understanding social context in their practice. It has gone further than regarding social context as merely

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<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu's concept of habitus, social structure, practice, cultural capital, and field are introduced in Chapter Three, p. 71.

background to design practice (Barnard, 2005), by focussing on the conceptualising process that a designer undertakes in mediating the relationship between elements from the social context and the visual domains of style based on formal or technology concerns. The study indicates the extent to which graphic designers consider tacit knowledge to be sufficient, and to what extent they recognise that issues within social context are important in their practice. However, a tension between social context advocates and pragmatic designers exists in professional design practice in New Zealand. Those within the graphic design profession generate very little critical writing related to contextual issues. While professional graphic design journals now include critiques of practice and theoretical critiques, most graphic designers are not participants in the writing that informs this discourse. Most critical enquiry originates from academic research. If knowledge of social contexts is fundamental to graphic design practice, surely the evidence and application should be found within design practice, rather than mainly being identified externally by the academic community.

This research is significant because it provides data regarding how far graphic practice has shifted to rely more heavily on a social context framework to inform design conceptualisation. This data is also relevant to those responsible for developing graphic design education programmes at a tertiary level. The contextual studies programmes developed in New Zealand design schools at a polytechnic and university level increasingly include a focus on cultures of consumption and wider questions of the impacts of social contexts on designers and consumers.

This research shows the responses graphic designers have to this facet of the education of graduates that they will employ, posing questions about the assumed importance of these studies in tertiary learning cultures versus the client-related and business-related settings of graphic design firms.

There are aspects of practice that call for understanding theoretical aspects of social contexts and the function, role and achievement of design is enhanced by that theoretical knowledge. Knowledge of social contexts can provide a fund of knowledge distinct from formal problems in the studio, but nevertheless relevant to solving problems that rely on knowledge of social settings. The broad questions of design theory and practice are also debated under the heading of design disciplines or design science (Simon, 1996). A comprehensive search of Te Puna<sup>4</sup> database has revealed little research at this level has been published in New Zealand, and the results of the study are likely to be of interest for the academic design

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<sup>4</sup> Te Puna is the national library database for all libraries at both community and academic level in New Zealand, accessible only to libraries. (Refer to <http://nbd.govt.nz> for literature and for Journal articles and periodicals <http://innz.natlib.govt.nz>).

community, those planning degree education in graphic design and for design professionals seeking research about practice knowledge.

The reflexive methodology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) used in the studies will provide direct benefits to graphic designers by suggesting ways in which they can analyse the theoretical aspects of their practice (Archer, 1995) and adopt positive changes arising from greater understanding of their practice. This will also contribute to designers' ability to distinguish their competencies from the non-designer<sup>5</sup> or those working within the technology fields that interface graphic design, like digital technology related to website design.

This research also provides empirical data and theoretical insights that can inform contextual debates in tertiary education, which are of importance to academics developing contextual and liberal arts programmes related to designer education (Durling & Griffiths, 2000). There are important implications in the findings of this study for graphic design education at tertiary level, through the way in which it contributes both empirical data and valuable theoretical insights.

### **Thesis outline**

Chapter Two provides a background to the research in order to make clear how the aims and objectives presented in Chapter One apply to the field of interest for the research. In the first section of this chapter I will discuss various factors that have helped to shape requisite knowledge for graphic design practice. This introduction serves as an overview of the growing complexity of practice in relation to the development of the graphic design profession, changes in relevant knowledge for design education and to the role that the New Zealand Government has played in both education and in promoting the value of design to the field of business. Wider social, political and economic factors will be discussed in relationship to the field of business and to the field of graphic design. I will show how graphic designers' relationships with society and business have contributed to the requisite knowledge for practice that may be derived from these fields expressed as cultural capital.

In the literature review in Chapter Three I will bring together literature from three main sources in order to critique these viewpoints in relationship to the research question. The first section of the chapter will draw on literature from consumer cultures to demonstrate the relevance of these viewpoints to understanding the social contexts for graphic design practice, as they relate to consumer culture.

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<sup>5</sup> Williams, (1994, p. 11) describes 'non-designers' as those with "no background or formal training in graphic design".

Through the literature, I will review the underlying knowledge base to graphic design practice that will be seen through considering varying design discourses in the graphic design field and, in particular, the importance given to recognising how knowledge about social contexts may inform practice. In the next section of the chapter I will discuss theoretical positions about implicit knowledge in practice, relevant to graphic designers' practice. This will be followed by an explanation of Bourdieu's framework, to build on these concepts and provide a way of understanding relationships between socialisation at the level of family and other groups and implicit knowledge that both becomes part of practice and in turn contributes to the formation of the social structures that bring about the generation of implicit understandings.

Bourdieu's framework of structure, habitus, practice, is further developed and related to the research methods presented in Chapter Four. It explains the sociological values contingent upon the individual and the influence of objective social structures. I will outline how Bourdieu's framework is used as both a means of developing reflexivity within the interviews and in analysing the accounts of the graphic designers in the research.

The thesis case studies in Chapter Five provide individual responses from subjects about the underlying knowledge that they have each brought to their conceptual thinking, drawn from wider social contexts and lifestyle influences. They contribute to understanding the research question by showing the varying significance placed on knowing about social contexts and reflect related, but different positions in the graphic design field. Through the case study commentaries in Chapter Five, the backgrounds and practice of the designers in each case study are shown to differ widely, offering different situations and responses to practice and in particular, to the significance given to acquiring knowledge of social contexts for practice.

In the discussion in Chapter Six I will analyse the ways in which designers establish positions in the field by the distinctions that they make about the relevance of knowledge of social contexts to their practice. This will be presented through the discussion of themes arising from the case studies and by mapping the significance of implicit and explicit knowledge of social contexts to graphic designers in the study and how they have expressed knowledge of social contexts in their practice. This will be followed by an assessment of how the significance of knowledge of social contexts can be related to the ways in which graphic designers have assumed positions in the graphic design field. The chapter will validate the usefulness of Bourdieu's concepts both for collecting the case study data and analysing it. This chapter will conclude with an assessment of how the aims of the research have been met.

In Chapter Seven, I will discuss the implications for the findings of the research by considering how the conclusions I have drawn from the research can impact on graphic design practice and consider the opportunities to use Bourdieu's framework as a model for Design Studies.

## Chapter Two – Background

The changes in graphic design practice in New Zealand since its early origins, have carried with them different priorities for knowledge. This chapter provides a background to understanding how these changes have arisen. Without attempting to provide a comprehensive survey of graphic design movements of the twentieth century, I will show in the first section of this chapter, how requisite knowledge for graphic design practice in New Zealand has changed, by discussing key stages in this evolution. I will show how the scope of graphic design has encompassed areas of practice beyond the visual concerns of early graphic design that has increased the need for graphic designers to understand how knowing about social contexts has become essential to their practice.

Having traced these changes, I will discuss the requisite professional knowledge identified by graphic designers' professional body, the Designers' Institute of New Zealand (DINZ) and then describe the response to changing knowledge bases, by graphic design educators responsible for tertiary graphic design education.

This will be followed by a discussion of the changing knowledge requirements for graphic designers to be able to work with the business sector that comprises a significant part of graphic designers' client bases. I will then review the wider social and political forces that have shaped graphic design and that in turn provide resources for graphic designers in understanding the social contexts of consumers. These economic, political, and social backgrounds to practice are explained in this chapter to provide an understanding of their relevance to practice knowledge, through a brief overview of New Zealand's economic background and its relationship to the field of business.

### **Changing knowledge for graphic design practice in New Zealand**

In graphic design's path from early practice where visual values could be linked to art movements of the early twentieth century, to contemporary practice, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of graphic design's interrelationship with the field of business. Graphic design in New Zealand has come to require changing knowledge bases and technical skills that have become increasingly important for practice. In New Zealand the term 'graphic designer' was relatively unknown until the 1960s (Naismith, 2000, p. 276). By that time, as Naismith states, the term 'commercial artist' had become an inadequate description of the work of the new generation of graphic designers (Mauger & Schaer-

Vance, 1985, p. 80). Commercial artists had produced hand lettering, advertising layouts and brush lettering for display cards often as subcontractors to publicity companies, retail stores or advertising agencies. Graphic design, on the other hand, involved strong client-consultant working relationships more closely aligned to typography and printing.

### **Graphic design practice based on visual standards**

Compared with the decades that followed, graphic designers often referred to visual, formal or standards-based criteria in discussing their work, as in the profiles of the work of New Zealand graphic designers in *Designscape* magazine for example, rather than making reference to contextual or business knowledge outside their studio practice. The *Designscape* report on the graphics for the New Zealand Commonwealth Games, for example, was predominantly a description of visual aspects of the work with very little deeper critique of the work (Mountier, 1973, p. 8).

### **Graphic design practice and corporate image**

The impacts of the business world, familiar to graphic designers in the decades that followed, were yet to be fully felt as those in the graphic design field in New Zealand moved out from the mantle of commercial art and into the wider field of graphic design. New Zealand lacked the culture of graphic design established in Europe, Britain and America. Corporate image design was a growing area of interest in graphic design of this period. It was promulgated through works like F.H.K. Henrion and Alan Parkin's *Design Co-ordination and Corporate Identity*, (1967) from Britain, as well as from design annuals and early books published on graphic design. Design magazines like *Design*, *Graphis*, *Gebrauchsgrafik* and later *Communication Arts* were also to be increasingly influential in moving graphic designers away from a commercial art base. In magazines and in books on graphic design like *Modern Publicity*, *Graphis Annual* and *Penrose Annual*, the emphasis was largely on reproducing photographs of designers' work with very little critique of the problems that were solved. Few details were offered about the sources that graphic designers drew on to produce the work.

### **The influence of the International Style on New Zealand graphic design**

The International Style had reached New Zealand by the 1960s (Thompson, 2003) and this served to influence formal aspects of graphic design in particular, in the work of the group of designers versed in the ideals of modernism to which it was closely related (Livingston & Livingston, 1998, p. 117). The International Style and in particular, the 'Swiss School' of design had had a profound impact on European graphic design. It represented a development of earlier design principles pioneered by designers of the De Stijl and Constructivist movements and taken up by Bauhaus designers notably by Herbert Bayer and Lázló Moholy-Nagy (Meggs, 1998). But it was Jan Tschichold who brought these principles



together in 1928, in 'The New Typography'<sup>6</sup>, in a philosophy that was to be influential on the European, printers and designers. However, Meggs (1998, p. 321) sees Théo Ballmer's early experimentation with page grids and Max Bill's arithmetical page construction together as "the roots of the International Typographic Style", a style that found its most visible development in the work of Swiss and German graphic designers in the 1950s. For New Zealand graphic designers working in the International Style, this new approach was immediately identifiable as fresh contemporary work even though the International Style was embraced by a minority of New Zealand graphic designers (Thompson, 2003, p. 10).

### **A changing knowledge base for graphic design practice**

Others who had entered the graphic design field with advertising agency backgrounds, could draw on marketing information to enhance the conceptual aspects of their work. For graphic designers without this background, the writings on graphic design principles by leading graphic designers like Paul Rand provided an awareness of the limitations of concentrating on the visual and stylistic aspects of graphic design without a corresponding recognition of graphic designers' function to communicate with audiences.

Like the graphic designers' work in the International Style that continued to be influential in the graphic design field until the early 1980s in Europe and elsewhere, the potential for graphic design to communicate ideas was seen to be its *raison d'être*. 'Communication' in these terms involved not only visual sensitivity towards the form of work but also a consciousness of the function and authority that could be ascribed to the work (Rand, 1970, p. 9). However, Rand stopped short of recognising that social sciences had any link with design practice.

### **Audiences and market knowledge**

By the 1980s added concerns for corporate and business aspects involving a greater focus on audiences and markets were to be added to the heightened interest in composition, use of photography and refinements in typography, established by graphic designers working with this approach to their work. Considerable sophistication had developed in graphic design practice in New Zealand. By then, a number of graphic design firms had built up associations with consultants in management and marketing. Greater importance was placed on the ideas underlying visual aspects of work, noticeable in the late 1980s 'annual report boom' where New Zealand client companies were often able to devote significant resources to elaborate annual report design (Bohling, p. 28, 2004).

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<sup>6</sup> Refer Tschichold, 1998.

## **The digital age in graphic design**

With the advent of the computer, a new medium for communication was available to graphic designers. From the 1980s the computer was to cause a radical reorganisation of the field of graphic design (Labuz, 1993). Initially graphic designers saw computers as a studio tool that would assist faster production. The reality was that the capability of the computer caused a rethinking of the new requisite technical knowledge for expertise within the field of graphic design and opened up the field to those entering it on the basis of desktop printing software knowledge and developed skills in presentation. Wendy Richmond, in the American graphic design magazine *Communication Arts*, discussed the integration of digital technology and graphic design practice in her regular articles during the 1990s. Richmond was able to comment on practical aspects of computer use as well as more general topics, and how, in particular, the business use of computers could be related to graphic designers' situations. Her position in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab enabled her to bring up-to-date information about developments from the lab to her global readership. The computer also provided an ideal medium for designers wishing to surpass "the sematic limitations of modernism" (Woodham, 1997, p. 198) expressed in the International Style. April Greiman, for example, was able to build on the typographical experimentation and deconstruction applied to graphic design pioneered by Wolfgang Weingart (Livingston & Livingston, 1998, p. 92) to develop 'hybrid imagery' (Greiman, 1990) that was facilitated by the new capabilities of computer software. With these experiments came distinctions between graphic designers intent on solving formal problems through technological experimentation described by Andrew Howard as "Macintosh-devoted design" and those working with more conceptually based work that recognised a more "message-related" approach (Howard, 1997, p. 195).

Graphic designers in New Zealand were able to follow the regular articles like those of Wendy Richmond's, in the international graphic design press to learn of new developments in the advancing field of computer production. However, accomplished graphic designers were critical of the way in which computer production could ignore basic design thinking loosely referred to as the 'craft' of design by Ken Cato in the early 1990s.

Computers are the newest tool for devaluing design. My company is not computer based, it's thinking based . . . Computers have generated 'New Wave' design which is very interesting but it has been used as an excuse to ignore basic design values. It has almost become a fine art – which doesn't deny its possible communication value, but it does deny the craft. (Cato cited in Smythe, 1994, p. 40)

The aspect of craft to which Cato refers did not concern hand processes that were becoming lost in an advancing age of computer production, but to understanding the visual and

conceptual aspects of graphic design built up over several decades including, but not limited to, the International Style. The reliance on computers without a corresponding understanding of graphic design conceptual processes caused Michael Bryce, (1996, p. 54) to be concerned about the threat that “electronic collaboration” posed to “face-to-face interaction of the design process” in the absence of the stage-by-stage manual visualisation of ideas, that had frequently necessitated client interaction as ideas developed.

### **Impacts of the computer era on graphic design knowledge**

An essential aspect of discussions about the impacts of the computer on graphic design was its pervasiveness, relating it as much to the field of business as to the graphic design field. Increasingly, graphic designers were seeing some of their clients producing their work *in-house*, a euphemism for often having the work done by non-design staff with computer knowledge. Seen in terms of Michael Porter’s Model of Competitive Advantage, (Porter, 1980) a number of forces had come to bear on graphic designers as they faced competition from the new entrants in the field of graphic design. These new entrants had come from technical fields like printing, computing and drafting as well as the business field itself. They were increasingly able to access technology from suppliers as costs of acquiring computer software and hardware decreased (Mauger, 2002). Julier (2007, p. 44) terms this “design entryism” suggesting that the emergence of these new entrants has been possible because of the lack provision by the of the graphic design profession, of structures or systems to prevent it<sup>7</sup>.

Graphic designers needed to be able to gain, or access via other staff, the necessary technical knowledge to be able to compete with these new entrants. Desktop computer production became more threatening to their viability where clients were unable to distinguish between the work of new entrants and that of accomplished designers (Mah, 1996). Accordingly, in the changing graphic design field of the 1990s, the established graphic design profession had to consider the ways in which their knowledge and capabilities for practice could preserve their position in the graphic design field, in the face of the new desktop methods of production. Some graphic designers embraced the computer era, securing their position by offering clients developed technology production. Others concentrated on new strategic relationships with clients seeking graphic design expertise in brand identity design (Pavitt, 2000). Further diversification has occurred as the graphic design field has seen the development of expertise in web design on one hand, and print-based work on the other.

These changes served to open up the graphic design field, making graphic design an industry as much as a profession, for many in the field. There had always been a sense by those

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<sup>7</sup> See p. 31 where this is discussed further in relationship to contemporary graphic design practice.

within the Designers' Institute of New Zealand (DINZ<sup>8</sup>) that they took it upon themselves to conduct their practice in a professional manner. With the computer era graphic designers both inside and outside DINZ could see themselves belonging to a graphic design 'industry' (Massey, 2002) as well a profession.

### **Definitions of graphic design**

The term 'graphic designer' can be traced back to book designer William Dwiggins who is credited with originating it in 1922 and at that point, as Meggs observes, "an emerging profession received an appropriate name" (1998, p. xiii). However, the use of this term was not widespread in Britain for example, where the term 'commercial artist' was also applied, until the 1960s, to designers involved in various aspects of publicity design, whether allied to the publishing field or to advertising. Keith Murgatroyd could already see the limitations of this term by 1969 when he made reference to the way in which graphic designers were becoming more authoritative and were exercising the potential for graphic design to determine social values (p. 8). Jeremy Aynsley's, definition of graphic design as "the activity of organising signs and symbols, or words and images, for public exchange" (2001, p. 6) was more apt.

The new opportunities for the use of technology opened up by the advent of the computer have also served to change the definitions of graphic design, bringing in new processes and new terminologies to describe scope in digital media available to designers. Some designers working at the periphery of multimedia have even rejected the term altogether. British design group Tomato, for example, prefer to term their work "information sculpture" (Poyner, 1998, p. 142), whilst others, following the terminology of the Ulm School of design, see 'visual communication' (Lindinger, 1991) as a better term to describe the increasing breadth of practice and the growing interdisciplinarity of their work (Aynsley, 2001, p. 9).

The changing definitions of graphic design are reflected at an international level in the International Council of Graphic Design Association's (Icograda) description of graphic design practice. Over less than two decades, it has moved from stressing "artistic sensibility, skill and experience" of the designer (Icograda, 1984), to "identifying analysis, organisation and communication in cultural or social spheres" (Icograda, 2002). This shift reflected the way in which the practice of graphic design is being constantly redefined as a reaction to changes in the technical, organisational and social parameters in which it operates. The use of the term 'graphic design' has also recently been brought into question. As Icograda President Jaques Lange states:

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<sup>8</sup> Incorporated in 1991.

The term 'graphic design' no longer adequately describes the diversity of activities that designers working in the sphere of communication engage with during their daily professional practice. The staggering pace of technological advancement and the rapid expansion of knowledge in the management science provide designers working in the field of communication with vast opportunities to expand their services and increase their scope of practice. Today, graphic design is just one of the many dimensions of the constituency that I represent, and almost daily, new dimensions emerge. Therefore, one of the most profound developments of the past year is the emergence of 'communication design' as a more representative professional descriptor rather than the term 'graphic design'. (2007)

This change to a broader descriptor for graphic design practice was subsequently expressed in the brief definition ratified by the Icograda General Assembly 22, La Habana, Cuba, 26 October 2007, as follows:

Communication design is an intellectual, technical and creative activity concerned not simply with the production of images but with the analysis, organisation and methods of presentation of visual solutions to communication problems. (Icograda, 2007)

Through all of these changes graphic design has increasingly focussed on its relationship to audience and consumption. With these changes, have come issues about how graphic designers understand the social contexts related to cultures of consumption and the functioning of the field of business and production.

### **Recognition of graphic design expertise by DINZ**

In the contemporary graphic design field, the membership qualifications awarded by DINZ place value on professional knowledge and recognise the need for designers to distinguish their knowledge expressed as expertise, from those less endowed. Their established knowledge base and its recognition by DINZ serve to distinguish accomplished graphic designers from those with less design expertise, securing their position and practice in the graphic design field, where this expertise is valued by clients. Graphic designers use evidence of their expertise to distinguish themselves from those who, with less expertise, attempt to move into the graphic design field (Bourdieu, 1993). 'Evidence' refers to recognised qualifications from DINZ as well as tangible examples of work and work case histories documenting design process and working relationships with clients.

This principle (Porter, 1980) explains the need for graphic designers to find ways to maintain their position in the social space of the graphic design field. Bourdieu's concept of 'field', discussed more fully in Chapter Three, illustrates how symbolic means can be used to affirm designers' place in the field and ensure valuation of their practice within it, by those for whom they work. This need to amass recognition explains the importance that

some designers place on seeking membership of DINZ and enjoying the perceived benefits that certification offers. Graphic designers depend on professional recognition of their expertise to build and maintain a client base, for their survival in practice. Their position in their field is consolidated by recognition of their peers and that recognition has the effect of potential domination (Bourdieu 1989, p. 111).

The practice of graphic design is by its nature both an insular activity (Soar, 2002) produced in the confines of design offices and at the same time an openly competitive occupation where locating and keeping clients and the work they provide, brings about recognition by those placed in the hierarchy of the field (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 165). Graphic designers have a means to acquire recognition, through qualifications gained in design education, and through evidence of accomplishment in graphic design in studio and theoretical aspects, related to practice. Degree studies at a tertiary level are particularly valuable as an entry qualification and a preparation for professional practice in graphic design. These studies and other academic qualifications may have varying value in comparison to the credibility of the accomplishment of the actual graphic projects presented in folio presentations to clients or prospective employers. Besides the professional credibility achieved in these ways, the endorsement of graphic designers' standing in their field by DINZ provides recognition through affiliate, full member and fellow appellations. Application for full membership has certain conditions, being

Available only to Associate Members who have gained experience as practising designers, and who, in the opinion of the Council of the Designers Institute, have attained a high level of professional competence and meet the requirements of admission set out in the regulations. (DINZ, 2007a)

While DINZ states as its mission, “to have professional designers valued and rewarded for the contribution that they make to the economic, cultural and social growth of New Zealand” (DINZ 2007b), applicants for membership do not necessarily need to prove their understanding of the economic, cultural and social factors that underlie practice. The knowledge of the applicant is assessed through work experience and design accomplishment.

### **Accreditation**

Although DINZ offers graphic designers within its membership a professional qualification, it lacks the stature that would be provided by a requirement for membership by other graphic designers to be accredited to be able to practice. Articles in design journals have considered advantages and disadvantages of the concept of accreditation (Shapiro, 1997; Swanson, 1997; Ng, 2002; Mauger, 2003), and the evidence of successful accreditation programmes elsewhere in the world, but the graphic design community in New Zealand has been reticent

to join the debate. Little progress has been made towards recognition of expertise and accomplishment in New Zealand through accreditation. The case studies documenting design problems and their resolution, built up and maintained in portfolios of work, in physical or digital form are seen to be more important credentials than professional membership qualifications for graphic designers outside DINZ.

### **Entry to the graphic design field**

While DINZ has established qualifications recognising expertise, it lacks the “norms and systems of conduct” (Julier, 2007, p. 44) that could present a barrier (Porter, 1980) to entry that can be found in other established professions. As Julier asserts, “Desk Top Publishing programmes provide easy-to-use templates for designing to different formats, thus obviating the need for a specialist to do the layout” (Julier, 2007, p. 44). Such a viewpoint leaves judgements about professional expertise to clients, since it suggests an adequacy in desktop production. It excludes any benefits that may accrue from accreditation or professional recognition of standing by DINZ or any other similar design association for example, to differentiate desktop publishing from the work of accomplished graphic design professionals.

Whereas technological barriers to entry (Porter, 1980, p. 9) to the graphic design field may have existed roughly between 1985 to 1995, in New Zealand, that could be attributed in some part to the limitations of the use non-industry specific software, these have tended to dissolve with the falling cost of the main Adobe software programmes that can now be purchased together at a much lower cost than buying them individually, as was required previously. A number of Open Source alternatives are also available for Adobe software programmes. Open Source software is free and can be downloaded from the Internet. It is characterised by the following features:

Source code must be distributed with the software or otherwise made available for no more than the cost of distribution.

- Anyone may redistribute the software for free, without royalties or licensing fees to the author.
- Anyone may modify the software or derive other software from it, and then distribute the modified software under the same terms. (Weber, 2004, p. 5)

The ability to modify source code is particularly useful to designers working in web design, with an understanding of technology. While Open Source web design templates are available for anyone regardless of design expertise, some websites have established a community of designers who contribute web-site design as models to be shared by others with similar levels of expertise. Distinctions between the use of recent digital technology by Desk Top

Publishers and designers with more expertise<sup>9</sup> suggest that easy-to-use software is not solely the domain of new entrants, but it is nevertheless a factor in the movement of new entrants, into the graphic design field.

### **The promotion of design**

In addition to the credentials of membership, DINZ has promoted recognition of designers' knowledge and expertise through its annual *Best Awards* event since 1989. Award winning work is published in *ProDesign* and periodically in a 'Design Book' as well as being exhibited in Christchurch and Auckland. This serves to identify work from both DINZ members and designers outside the Institute, held by their peers to be worthy of awards of excellence. Recognition through DINZ serves to enable designers to gain stature in their field and recognition by those in the field of business who form a captive, potential client or employer group.

Because of the collaborative nature of graphic designers' work the achievements of many go unnoticed internationally, unless they promote themselves through their websites or in occasional articles in the world graphic design journals. The success of New Zealand fashion designers like Karen Walker, Trelise Cooper and Kate Sylvester, internationally, and the acclaim of the work of animators in the work of Peter Jackson's Weta workshops have created an awareness of the creativity of New Zealand designers.

However, for most, it is more likely that the work of New Zealand graphic designers is better known through the client work that is exported, rather than through their own attempts at self-promotion, as New Zealand attempts to build markets around the world. Graphic designers are intimately involved in marketing and promotional material for exported products. Early Government recognition of the significance of designers' contribution to the development of exported products was to be found in the 1963 Export Development Conference. The New Zealand Government, has also promoted the value of design in both the establishment of the New Zealand Industrial Design Council in 1966 and later in the Design and Business initiatives in Better By Design.

### **Relevant knowledge for graphic design tertiary education**

As the requisite knowledge for graphic design practice has changed, tertiary education institutions have needed to consider relevant course content to reflect the changes in the graphic design field. Until the advent of the computer as an essential part of graphic design practice early in the 1990s, entry to the graphic design field could typically involve either

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<sup>9</sup> Expertise is used here in the sense of Lawson's identification of expertise in design (2003, p. 37).



being employed as ‘finished artists’ for pre-press aspects of graphic design production or by emerging from an often fine arts-based diploma course at a tertiary institution. In each case career development depended heavily on ‘learning on the job’ through professional experience. While learning from the practice of others continues to be important in graphic design firms, graphic designers increasingly need to know more about both design practice and the social world to which their work is directed.

In the 1970s design education was offered by university schools of fine art and technical colleges (or polytechnics) with clear distinctions between courses that tended towards a ‘portfolio’ approach where emphasis was placed on technical knowledge and presentation for employment, versus the three-year diploma and later, university degree courses, that offered more theoretically based education including Art and Design History and Cultural Studies.

Since the late 1980s, there has also been an increasing expectation of New Zealand tertiary education providers<sup>10</sup> responsible for educating a significant segment of those entering the graphic design field, that there should be, as Naismith states, “a widening discourse of design” (Naismith, 2000, p. 277). Tertiary education in graphic design has become significant as a prerequisite for employment as graphic designers. This has placed increasing responsibilities on the design education sector to develop programmes that offer an appropriate grounding in both studio practice and wider aspects of knowledge surrounding graphic design that may assist in providing an understanding of the knowledge bases that provide a resource for concept development in graphic design.

In the decades to follow, technical colleges such as Auckland Institute of Technology and Wellington Polytechnic, for example, established degree courses and were in many cases eventually to become university schools. With this move has come significant upheavals in programme writing in which some institutions have achieved, as Durling and Griffiths have advocated, “a fundamental shift in thinking from a physical skills-based vocational training to a more abstract education through design” (p. 2000, p. 29).

From 1990 in a period of neoliberal government policy that can be traced back to the policies of the fourth Labour Government (Goldfinch, 1997), it was possible for a number of privately funded providers to establish short courses for the increasing numbers of students wishing to study graphic design and computer publishing. In the early years of this change the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), attempted to improve the outcomes of tertiary education through the establishment of Unit Standards for a wide range of subject

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Provider’ is the New Zealand Government’s New Zealand Qualifications Authority term for an institution providing education.

areas. One of the NZQA objectives was to ensure uniform quality standards (NZQA, 1992, p. 4) across qualifications so that they became 'portable' and recognised by various providers offering similar courses (NZQA, 1994, p. 3).

Unit standards for design, including graphic design, were developed by the Design Advisory Group of the Design Construction Consultants Industry Training Organisation (DCCITO). The assumed need to reduce the varying standards between programmes offered in tertiary education in New Zealand was one of the drivers for the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (New Zealand Government, 1994, p. 3) to develop Unit Standards from 1993, for a wide range of subject areas. The design standards set up by the Design Advisory Group within The Design and Construction Consultants Industry Training Organisation (DCCITO) comprised largely DINZ members. The standards were written over a long time period and lost much of their specificity in the process of frequent revision to fit the NZQA writing models.<sup>11</sup> The panel of advisors, whose individual backgrounds combined both professional design experience and tertiary teaching tended to be more prescriptive about the practical aspects of each module of learning, encountering as Durling and Griffiths (2000, p. 32) suggest, an inability to be similarly prescriptive about aspects of creativity.

During the process of completing the unit standards, universities steadfastly exempted themselves from needing to adopt them and State tertiary technical institutes took advantage of the option to use their own 'local' modules. Towards the final stages of completing the design unit standards, the NZQA decided not to proceed with extending the framework to degree standards as originally proposed by the Ministerial Tertiary Lead Group (New Zealand Government, 1994, p. 3). As by this stage Universities and a number of Technical Institutes were offering degree course in graphic design, they were under no obligation to adopt the design Unit Standards written for the NZQA *National Diploma in Design* qualification. In the event, hardly any State institutions have taken up these unit standards<sup>12</sup>. Consequently, much programme development for graphic design has continued to reside in the tertiary institutions themselves. This independence to develop local modules, nevertheless, still required institutions to register module frameworks with NZQA. It was therefore possible for individual providers to determine the balance of studio related topics and theoretical contextual studies included in their programmes independently of NZQA Unit Standards.

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<sup>11</sup> I was advised of this by Douglas Heath, the Design Unit Standards writer, in my capacity as Chair of the Advisory Group of the DCCITO.

<sup>12</sup> For example, out of 179 candidates that have been awarded the National Diploma in Graphic design (Based on New Zealand Standard qualification 0567 since 2002, all have been from Private Training Enterprises (Source: correspondence, NZQA 2-3-10).

Since 2003, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) has encouraged tertiary providers to establish different emphases in the constitution of programmes offered, to distinguish them from other institutions offering courses in the same disciplines. As tertiary institutions have increasingly moved towards competitively marketing their programmes to obtain funding and growth, the old system of balancing the intake numbers of students with expected industry demand and strict control of course development as in the 1970s, has given way to an education 'free market' under the neo-liberal policies of the New Zealand National government of the 1990s. Kelsey (2001) argues that education policy continues to be constrained by these policies, referring particularly to the importance of economic priorities over more traditional concepts of the university as a place of learning.

### **The commodification of design education**

In New Zealand as elsewhere, (Bierut, 1994)<sup>13</sup> the increasing number of design graduates emerging from tertiary institutes each year<sup>14</sup>, bears little relationship to the growth of employment opportunities in the graphic design sector (Kitson & Lawson<sup>15</sup>, interview, 15 May, 2007). As Bill (2004, p. 1) states:

Two decades of educational reform in New Zealand has resulted in one of the most market-oriented regimes of higher education in the OECD. In this environment, enrolments in design and other creative degree courses that seem to provide an opportunity for individual expression and self-development have greatly increased. However, representatives of traditional industry sectors complain that there are hardly any jobs for these graduates, and little in the way of career paths.

There have been calls for diversification of design programmes to combine design and management. Peter Haythornthwaite, as president of DINZ, was advocating this in 1993, in arguing for more course opportunities for students as he stated:

They have become a squandered resource, prepared for potential greatness but ending up disillusioned, seeing no future and considering that they have probably failed. Reasons for the 'drop-out' rate are numerous, ranging from the candidates' unsuitability for a design career to poor quality education, and from institutions producing an oversupply of students, to business not understanding the economic benefits of design. (. . .) Courses are needed which prepare graduating students to create successful design focussed businesses as opposed to being trained for jobs that don't exist. (Haythornthwaite, 1993, p. 9)

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<sup>13</sup> The situation has become even more problematic since Bierut's article from *Statements* in 1988 (re-published in 1994).

<sup>14</sup> In 2002 the New Zealand Design Scoping Review stated that there were "32 providers teaching design education in New Zealand delivering programmes ranging from certificates and diplomas to four year professional degrees and postgraduate study" (Massey, 2002, p. 3).

<sup>15</sup> Kitson & Lawrence is a well established human resources consultancy specialising in design and marketing placement.

Inevitably, in an age of commodified educational opportunity (Kelsey, 2001) questions have to be raised about whether the increased numbers of candidates entering design education have the potential ability to pursue a design career (Kitson & Lawson, interview, 15 May, 2007) or whether criteria for entry is strongly weighted by providers' needs to increase EFTS funding<sup>16</sup>. Certainly, there continues to be an over-supply of students for the jobs available in the field of design (ibid). Haythornthwaite's concerns suggest that design students need more education in aspects of the field of business and therefore an understanding of consumer cultures and marketing. From the perspective of the field of business, it must be questioned whether failure to find employment in graphic design reflects not so much the quality of design education, as the recognition by businesses of the economic value of design.

### **The influence of DINZ on New Zealand design education**

DINZ has been influential via the individual activities of its membership as much as by organised committees. Graphic designers are employed as part-time or full-time faculty by most of the New Zealand tertiary providers that offer graphic design degree or certificate programmes. Other graphic designers provide a voice to contribute to a discourse on professional issues via *Prodesign* the official journal of DINZ. The dissemination of practice knowledge has come through individual members' experience and the contribution of accomplished designers both locally and from overseas in their links with DINZ.

DINZ has been less successful in influencing design education policy via education subcommittees that have been largely concerned with coordination of activities and have had little direct bearing on the quality of programme development, other than through collegial cooperation and information amongst heads of departments in some design schools. Activities in education that may flow through to practice have been limited to designer seminars and facilitation, stopping short of being prescriptive, as is the case with the American Institute of Graphic Artists (AIGA), for example, that offers models of curriculums to design education providers (Davis, 2001). There is also an absence of professional development programmes for graphic design education by the DINZ Graphic Design Sector, compared with AIGA's design education conferences and its published code of ethics for graphic designers (AIGA, 1998), for example.

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<sup>16</sup> EFTS is an abbreviation for Effective Full-time Student.

## **Design and business**

### **Government support of design for business**

A fundamental aspect of the practice of graphic design is that designers design for a client, even where they are their own clients. There is a business relationship between designer and client. The very existence of the business interface with design involves not only constraints and opportunities, but also the necessity for graphic designers to understand the economic aspects of the markets for the products they are implicated in marketing. The concept that design can assist business carries with it the economic realities of promotion, marketing and identity. It is these aspects in particular that have brought about successive New Zealand governments' support of design including graphic design.

The New Zealand Government support of design and industry can be traced back to the formation of the New Zealand Industrial Design Council (NZIDC) through the Industrial Design Act of 1966. The NZIDC was set up following concerns that New Zealand products needed to be better designed for export markets and at the time many New Zealand products fell very short of the design quality of similar products overseas. As the Act stated, the general function of the Council was

to promote the appreciation, development, improvement and use of industrial design in New Zealand with the objective of improving the quality, efficiency, packaging, presentation and appearance of both goods produced in New Zealand and produced overseas from designs originated in New Zealand. (New Zealand Government, 1966, p. 231)

Although the instigation of Government to establish the NZIDC came initially from the Ministry of Commerce and in particular, from the efforts of W.B. Sutch, strong lobbying from designers in the New Zealand Society of Industrial Designers (NZSID) helped to ensure its establishment. Even though the NZIDC had limited funding, it served to gain the attention of some companies in a business community that had been often unaware of the potential value of design in marketing products for export. Through case studies and articles about design in its publication *Designscape*, the NZIDC brought a wider understanding of design to the business community while also informing the emerging New Zealand design and design education sectors of developments in New Zealand design.

In the period from 1983<sup>17</sup>, design's relationship with business in New Zealand has depended largely on enlightened companies seeing the value of designer contribution to their

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<sup>17</sup> The Council was merged with Telarc in 1988. Contrary to the undertaking by Government that it would "continue to perform the historical functions which it should be responsible for" (New Zealand Government, 1988), its ability to continue former roles, including the publication of *Designscape*, vanished when it merged with Telarc.

organisations. The link between design and business has recently been made more visible and tangible through the promotion of design in business following the establishment of the New Zealand Government Design Taskforce (2003) and the Better by Design organization arising from it. The importance of re-establishing government support for design was identified in the New Zealand Design Scoping Review (Massey, 2002).

### **The Design Industry Scoping Review**

Conducted in 2002 by Massey University and commissioned by Industry New Zealand, the Design Industry Scoping Review reflected a return to Government interest in supporting design. Recognising that the design field was already becoming more diverse, the review included digital media, film and environmental graphics as well as the graphic design and other established design sectors as defined by DINZ. The review, which was subtitled “an appraisal of the current status of the New Zealand design profession/industry” encompassed both professional and industry interests within the field. The survey sought the opinions of designers, final-year students and those in industries related to design to understand opportunities and barriers to growth in the New Zealand design field. While the review took as its brief, the assessment of the New Zealand design industry, strong links were made between the practice of design and its significance to the New Zealand economy, as the review stated:

. . . the design industry functions at a number of levels and in a variety of ways. Design is a significant contributor to the economy by providing services, goods and outputs that increase our economic competitiveness, enrich and improve our quality of life and express our cultural identity. Products, environments and communications produced as a result of design services generate overseas earnings and thus contribute to growth in our GNP. The same outcomes also contribute to growth in our domestic economy GDP. (Massey, 2002, p. 3)

The review made a number of recommendations advocating the strong economic growth of the New Zealand design industry. Economic values were identified in the “natural attributes” it asserted that New Zealand could provide in “the natural geography of New Zealand” and in “demographic traits” (Massey, 2002, p. 5).

### **The New Zealand Design Taskforce**

These Government initiatives to involve and promote ‘design in business’, in New Zealand show how the State saw the importance of supporting design-led business. Compared with the NZIDC, the establishment of the New Zealand Design Taskforce in 2003 marked an unprecedented level of Government interest in recognising the importance of design as a means of providing and assisting innovation and providing fiscal gain for the nation in two important respects. Firstly, the emphasis moved from promoting “good design in industry”

as stated in the objectives of the Industrial Design Act (New Zealand Government, 1966, p. 226) to “designing a broad strategic framework to enable New Zealand businesses to succeed through the use of design and the adoption of the design process” (Design Taskforce, 3003, p. 8). Secondly, the design audits conducted by teams through Better by Design have required a much greater commitment in time and professional expertise than the processes to award Designmarks under the Industrial Design Council.

Whilst the Scoping Review may have recommended establishing Government support for design, the initiatives for the establishment of the Design Taskforce came, not from presentations from the designers’ own professional organization, (DINZ), but from business members of the Growth and Innovation Framework (GIF) earlier set up by Government in 2002. This framework project aimed to assist long-term growth in the New Zealand, in productive sectors of the economy. In particular, it reflected “a growing understanding of the values of policies that impact directly on innovation” (New Zealand Government, 2002). The establishment of industry taskforces was one of the GIF initiatives.

Through its successor, Better by Design, administered by New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE), a number of companies have undergone design audits by one of three ‘Design 360’ teams, in an attempt to help companies to make better use of design by improving their design capability. According to NZTE

Better by Design has worked with over 130 companies, with an increasing focus on larger scale companies across a broader spectrum of industry sectors (. . .). Independent research carried out in 2008 showed the programme is meeting its target of helping companies generate an average of NZ\$10 million per year in additional export earnings. (2009, p. 12)

These design audits are provided under Better by Design’s Design Integration Programme which offers companies an in-depth assessment, a prioritised action plan (to implement best practice design, innovation, and productivity gains), access to funding and on going support (Better by Design, 2009). In addition, Better by Design has set up a Design Directory providing access for companies to a network of designers and consultants. Profit by Design executive workshops have also been offered to promote the benefits of integrating design within organizations. Better by Design has also promoted the concept of developing sustainable products and processes in their 2009 conference,<sup>18</sup> and supported DINZ in their Design in Business Awards programme (New Zealand Trade & Enterprise, 2009, p. 12). The New Zealand Government’s initiatives via NZTE have gone some way to addressing concerns about the value placed on the economic benefits of design by the field of business.

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<sup>18</sup> The Better by Design CEO Summit was entitled *Sustainable Design for the Bottom Line*.

They have lent greater importance to the involvement of designers, either through direct involvement in audit teams, or in consultant working relationships that may flow on from a greater awareness of the value of design from these initiatives. In direct contrast to some business leaders like Roger Kerr of the New Zealand Business Roundtable (Ibbotson, 2005), or even designers themselves (Draper, 1998), who argue against Government partnerships with the business field, the design profession has often advocated Government support for design (Smythe, 1998; Mulane, 1998 for example).

### **The creative industries**

The initiatives for setting up the Design Taskforce reflected advocacy for viewing creative industries as contributors to economic value, prevalent at that time. John Howkin's *Creative economy* (2002) made a case for the creative sectors being a source for economic growth, valuing intellectual property above traditional manufacturing. Richard Florida's *Creative class* (2002), identified those who could contribute creativity to business to create economic gain. In this group he included

people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content. (p. 8)

A new term 'design-enabled business' (Design Taskforce, 2003, p. 24) appeared in the Taskforce report, reflecting the rationale for its establishment stated in *Integrate!* (Innovation & Systems, 2002), a review of the interface between business and design, that had been commissioned by the Taskforce. Two primary objectives were stated in the review. They were, firstly, to increase the use of design by business and secondly, to add value to exports for specific overseas markets (p.2). In addressing each of these objectives, design funding has only ever been indirect in that the Taskforce was focussed on assisting businesses to value and use design, rather than funding design directly.

### **The influence of the business sector on knowledge for design practice**

The benefits to business of employing design were well documented in case studies in the Taskforce document (Design Taskforce, 2003) and in the period following, on the Better by Design website<sup>19</sup>. These successes show how design capability can combine with business resources in the development of innovative products by New Zealand businesses. New Zealand designers have long expressed concern that their expertise was not sufficiently utilised in business. While the facilitation of the Taskforce initiative through Better by Design has opened up opportunities for these partnerships, the better by design Advisory Group has restated the emphasis on understanding the business interface to design, in design

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<sup>19</sup> The Better by Design website address is [www.betterbydesign.org.nz](http://www.betterbydesign.org.nz)



education courses, set out in the initiatives of the Taskforce (2003, p. 46). This is particularly pertinent, as participation in design audits by designers in these programmes, requires a better understanding of the field of business as well as high expertise in design. The Taskforce called for designers to be ‘business savvy’ (Design Taskforce, 2003, p. 5) to be able to contribute to those businesses choosing to be design-led.

### **The integration of design with business through education**

In awarding project funding in education, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), under the initiatives of the GIF and the Better by Design Advisory Group, has placed an emphasis on undergraduate and emerging graduate designers’ acquisition of business knowledge as a means of better understanding the scope for innovation. The New Zealand Government policy embodied in the original GIF priorities is strongly influenced by economic drivers in its delivery and funding. However, there is a reluctance by Government to increase funding for design education itself, outside innovation projects that have strong ties to economic outcomes. Similarly, the Design Taskforce suggested that there was “the need for more commercial content in design education and greater connection to business, to assist engagement and integration of designers with business (without compromising their creative focus)” (Design Taskforce, 2003, p. 29).

The responsibility for education aspects of the strategy advocated by the Taskforce became the responsibility of Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) in 2003. Contestable funds have been allocated for projects involving, in the case of design, students within Tertiary institutions and the related business organizations. These projects under schemes like ‘Growth Pilots’ “aimed at building the capability of Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) to engage with industry and enterprise” (TEC, 2005, p. 4) sought to improve knowledge about design applied to innovation in business through this funding. This has resulted in design internships being set up for emerging undergraduate and graduate designers, to offer better understanding of design and business processes to those involved (Shiner, 2006, p. 7).

At a TEO level the 2006 Academic Forum provided an opportunity for bringing together senior academics from design, commerce and engineering courses to see how better integration could be achieved between courses in these faculties. These TEC projects have involved a relatively small number of participants. There are parallels in the Design Taskforce where much of the participation in design innovation projects involves only a representation of the design field. Their report (Design Taskforce, 2003) was not in any way prescriptive about how design knowledge may be built up in the design profession. In fact

the focus of the report was clearly on how design could assist the field of business. It states that it was

. . . in essence a design strategy in support of the Government's Growth and Innovation Framework. It does not set out to position design for international markets; it is not a strategy for the design industry, but rather a strategy to make more businesses design capable. (Design Taskforce, 2003, p. 5)

Providing education and professional development for the design profession was seen to be outside the scope of available funding for the project, other than through education initiatives, the results of which necessarily require a period of time to develop.

## **The business environment**

The importance of understanding the forces of the business environment is stressed by commentators from the field of business, as it impacts upon business strategy (Quinn, Mintzberg & James 1988, for example). Understanding external threats and opportunities (Inkson & Kolb, 1995, p. 135) is a fundamental aspect of business strategy in which importance is placed on organizations "scanning" the external environment before formulating business strategy (Hunger & Wheelen 1998, p. 54). The external world recognised in business strategy takes into account, the interconnectedness of social forces, the impacts of government economic policy on spending power on both business and social worlds and the importance of recognising the widespread applications of new technologies (p. 55). Hunger and Wheelen argue that these social forces in society are significant in providing opportunities for developing products and services and show the interrelationship of social, economic, technical or political aspects of the social world.

Whilst little agreement exists on the primacy of any of these forces, the close interrelationships between political and economic factors that form the basis of contemporary sociologists' use of the term 'political economy' (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2000, p. 264) provides a useful entry point into discussions of these forces. In order to show how interrelated these social forces can be on the consumer society to which graphic design interfaces, it is necessary to briefly consider the way that New Zealand's political and economic policies have evolved.

### **Political economy in New Zealand**

The changes in the New Zealand economy since early colonisation show the significance of political policy on the economy and the impacts of these policies on society. The following discussion is a brief overview only. A more comprehensive discussion would call for a

critique of the impact of Marxist, Keynesian and monetarist policies implicit in New Zealand's political economy. Such a discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.

In its colonial origins, New Zealand became an exporter of primary produce to Britain and also provided a market for British goods (Maitra, 1997). As New Zealand developed its own manufacturing capability, a phase of import substituting industrialisation followed, often assisted by foreign investment and the support of the New Zealand Government (*ibid*). Maitra, (1997) points out that since 1984, there has been as he states "a further phase of economic nationalisation involving deregulation of markets and the shift from import substitution to export substitution" (p. 23). These government policies have had impacts on the economy and on society.

### **The welfare state and neoliberalism**

New Zealand had also led the way for social service in a so-called welfare state in the first half of the twentieth century but in the period of deregulation came decreases in provision of state services and welfare, privatisation of state services and freeing up of foreign trade (Maitra, 1997). Government policy moved to export substitution of non-traditional exports for primary produce and economic internationalism. This diversification brought the setting up of brands for niche products and marketing boards for more processed primary produce. New markets were sought for primary produce. By 1984, The New Zealand Government relaxed its control on foreign exchange markets and deregulated financial sectors and allowed an increase in overseas ownership of New Zealand interests (*ibid*). There was a concurrent growth in service sector employment in the period, aided by international investment and new communication technologies, education and research (Maitra, 1997, p. 33).

The new free-market has brought about rapid growth in part-time employment, requiring more flexibility in employment patterns (*ibid*). All of these changes have had social impacts ultimately affecting the developing consumer society. While Maitra points out that "welfare expenditure implies social consumption and expenditure, not investment" (p. 36), suggesting incompatibility between the welfare state and capitalism, Kelsey (1999) on the other hand questions the efficacy of neoliberal policies based on a free market philosophy, saying that:

Whilst they make perfect sense in economic theory, although many economists would dispute that, as the philosophical foundation for human society they are fundamentally flawed. The economy is not some self-regulating market place detached from the society in which it operates. Pretending that economic and social reality can be reconstructed to fit the free market model creates practical problems for the productive economy, and social costs that become unacceptable. (p. 3)

As Vowles and Roper put it, “Neoliberal strategy is to ‘roll back the state’, reduce its interventions, and allow market forces to distribute resources with only residual provision for social assistance to the those in extreme need” (1997, p. 103). More than any other nation, in the late 1984 to 1990 period, New Zealand’s neoliberal policies aimed at revitalising the economy that had created a growing gap between “richest and poorest members of society”, where the anticipated trickle down effects failed to provide benefits to the poor (Giddens, 2001, p. 314).

### **Globalisation and the New Zealand economy**

Besides the impacts it made on society, deregulation was to have other ramifications on the economy. Jesson argues that since the opening up of the economy, many New Zealand firms have been affected by competition from imports as “globalisation has killed them off” (1999, p 184). Maitra refers to an assumed need by government for the “negation of state intervention so that market mechanisms could operate unhindered” (1997, p. 37) under the influence of the International Monetary Fund, The World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. This policy promoted globalisation of production (ibid).

While globalisation can be viewed in political and economic terms, Du Gay (1997) points out that a cultural dimension of globalisation exists as well. Kelsey (1999) demonstrates this by referring to the way in which, as an ideology, globalisation has affected the way New Zealanders’ see the world. She refers to the way in which, commodities like fast foods, movies, branded fashion goods have served to make New Zealand more cosmopolitan. Small retail enterprises have given way to franchised retail chains and a significant sector of New Zealand manufacturing has disappeared and service industries have grown in their place (p. 2). Globalisation can therefore be seen to affect both economic and cultural aspects of society. The limitations of New Zealand’s earlier reliance on primary produce had been recognised, and exposing the nation to unprotected international trade called into question the niche industries that should be promoted (Crocombe, Enright, & Porter, 1991). New Zealand’s earlier ventures into globalisation in exporting primary produce were made possible by improvements in transportation and technology. In the current era, it has become viable to develop diversified agricultural exports and niche products across technology and service industries.

### **The knowledge economy**

The niche products forming this new group of exports have benefited from the developing technologies involved in their manufacture. Romer (1990) explains the need for emphasis on knowledge within these technologies in his concept of the New Growth theory, where knowledge has become the third factor of production. Others have placed even greater importance on the value of knowledge in promoting the concept of a knowledge economy in

which, as Giddens (2001) states “Much of the workforce is involved, not in the physical production or distribution of material goods, but in their design, development, technology, marketing, sale and servicing” (p. 378). The New Zealand Ministry of Research, Science and Technology’s view of the factors in the growth of the knowledge economy bear a striking similarity to globalisation itself. They identify “the economics of abundance, the annihilation of distance, the deterritorialisation of the state, the importance of local knowledge and the investment in human capital” (MoRST, 1998) as characteristics of the conditions of the knowledge economy.

More specifically, Rylander, (2008) attributes the characteristics of the knowledge economy to the ‘knowledge intensive firm’ (KIF). This distinction is of particular relevance to my research because it draws attention to the discourses of the field of business that surround this approach to knowledge and that according to Rylander, have increasingly focussed on management approaches that prioritise strategy, rationality, analytical expertise and scientific constructions of knowledge.

In this general overview of the external environment to business and design (through its connection to business), I have identified issues in the changing economic and political situation in New Zealand that are of relevance to the advancing consumer culture in New Zealand as elsewhere.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have explored the external backgrounds that have had an increasing impact on the knowledge needed for practice by graphic designers in New Zealand. I have shown how, with the development of the graphic design field in New Zealand, former knowledge bases are no longer adequate for practice, as graphic designers confront a complex practice environment moderated by increasing influence by the social worlds with which they daily interact. Having embraced the advent of digital technology and the attendant obligations for shifting knowledge bases and new opportunities for creative practice, graphic designers have increasingly had to confront the need to know more about their external worlds. I have shown in the chapter, key influences for these changes, firstly from the field of business in the increasing need to be business savvy (Design Taskforce, 2003), and secondly from the impact of Government initiatives that have sought to bring business closer to the design world that they see as creative force for economic gain through the concepts of the knowledge economy and the creative economy.

I have shown how underlying these external changes to graphic design practice, there is an obligation for graphic designers to recognise the economic, political, social and technical

factors in their external worlds that contribute an understanding of the changing wider contexts for practice and the influences that affect changes in the consumer society to which their creative work is directed. I have not been able to show how significant graphic designers have seen these factors to be to their practice. That is the function of the research. However, in the following chapter I will show the significance that commentators from various discourses propose that knowledge of social contexts should have for practice in the graphic design field.

## Chapter Three - Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the diverse literature sources explaining the significance of knowledge of social contexts, to graphic design practice. In the first section, I will present literature drawn from academic studies of consumer society to show how it provides explanations of the cultures related to it. Having discussed this literature, I will show in the second section of the chapter, how aspects of this knowledge are taken up in the discourses related to the field of graphic design seen through considering the differing perspectives of academic design studies, published professional design discourse, graphic design practice and graphic design education. Underlying my discussion of each discourse is the issue of the significance placed on understanding the external social worlds that have a relationship to graphic design practice. The literature from the various design discourses is presented to show how each discourse has its own shared viewpoints based on, “common assumptions . . . [which] make certain things sayable, thinkable, do-able but others not” (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2000, p. 99).

In the third section of this chapter I will present viewpoints that examine the acquisition of knowledge within practice. Theoretical propositions are made to explain how graphic designers’ learning may take place and in particular, the significance that theorists place on implicit knowledge in practice. This literature is of significance because it shows how knowledge of external worlds outside the designer’s formal knowledge<sup>20</sup> is seen by theorists to be built up in practice. The concepts of communities of practice and of tacit knowledge both offer explanations of an implicit basis to graphic design practice considered in relationship to the significance of the acquisition of knowledge of social contexts to practice. Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, cultural capital and field are closely related to these aspects, because they form a model of a theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1971), which is the basis of the methodology in Chapter Four and the case study analysis in Chapter Six. The literature about theory and practice issues is particularly relevant to the research because it both provides a context for the empirical research and highlights gaps in the theoretical perspectives reported in the literature.

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<sup>20</sup> Here referring to ‘form’ as in the visual aspects of graphic design.

## SECTION ONE

### The relevance of wider social contexts to graphic design practice

The term ‘social context’ is used in this chapter to refer to the social world outside the realm of studio experience and excludes the formal<sup>21</sup> aspects of graphic design. In this section of the chapter I will explore through the literature sources presented, how aspects of social contexts are seen to have relevance to graphic design practice.

The changing social setting of the practice of graphic design discussed in Chapter Two offered explanations for the way in which knowing about social contexts has become increasingly relevant to graphic design practice. In this section of the chapter, literature is drawn from the field of consumption as evidence of the ways in which these factors are expressed through lifestyle and consumer culture (Featherstone, 1991).

#### **Consumer culture and society**

Social, political economic and technical aspects of social contexts are brought together in consumer culture (Featherstone, 1991, p. 13). Consumption is a social process which stands in contrast to the welfare state where there is a reliance on “a collective provision of welfare needs” (Slater 1997, p. 8). In this it reflects both the individualism that neoliberalism promotes (Knorr Cetina, 1997) and market and economic values. According to Slater, it is through these values that “the continuous self-creation of the individual” is made possible “through the accessibility of things which are themselves presented as new” (1997, p. 8). Consumer cultures are characterised by rising consumer affluence in which, according to Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, identity is taken “as much, if not more, from their activities as consumers and from their leisure time as from their work” (2000, p. 71).

There are complex issues arising from the impact of forces of marketing and production on one hand and from the individual freedom of the consumer on the other. In Featherstone’s critique these are seen as a

growing salience of leisure and consumption activities in contemporary Western societies which, although greeted as leading to greater egalitarianism [...] and individual freedom by some, is regarded by others as increasing the capacity for ideological manipulation and seductive containment of the public from some alternative set of better relations. (1991, p. 13)

#### **The forces of marketing and production**

Consumption is mediated by market relations where the distribution of economic as well as cultural resources is in turn determined by market relations (Slater, 1997, p.24). Product

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Formal’ here refers here to form as in visual aspects.



obsolescence is related to both product durability and fashionability (Zukin & Maguire, 2004). A characteristic of consumer culture is to manufacture and produce for mass consumption, rather than to individual consumer requirements (Slater, 1997; Galbraith 1998) having the role of “persuading, seducing and manipulating people into buying products or services” (Olins, 2003, p.7). Kötler and Armstrong’s reference to marketing strategies that either ‘push’ consumers to purchase, or ‘pull’ consumers to demand a product (2004, p. 426) are examples of marketing’s power to generate demand.

### **Active Consumption**

While accepting that consumption is never entirely an expression of personal freedom, Slater (1997, p. 27) proposes that ‘consumer sovereignty’ reflects an individual’s choice to consume in a manner that expresses their interests. Zukin and Maguire develop this concept by suggesting that consumption may be construed as a construction of personal identity (2004, p. 3). Miller (1987) also links consumerism to concepts of alienation and de-alienation. In Hebdidge’s view, products of consumer culture are re-appropriated through *bricolage* in the expression of the individual freedom that seeks to adapt them to the user’s needs (1979, p. 104).

### **Cultural economy**

However persuasive the concepts of either market-driven or active consumption may be, the economic and the cultural aspects of society are interrelated. As du Gay points out, there is a case for the “mutually constitutive relationship between the economy and culture” (1997, p. 2) within society. Du Gay uses the term ‘cultural economy’ to suggest the indivisibility of economic and cultural aspects of society. In du Gay’s view the production of goods is a cultural phenomenon indivisible from economic processes, as du Gay states:

More and more of the goods and services produced for consumers across a range of sectors can be conceived of as ‘cultural’ goods, in that they are deliberately inscribed with particular meanings and associations as they are produced and circulated in a conscious attempt to generate desire for them amongst end users. (1997, p. 5)

There is a complementary relationship between cultures of production and the production of cultures (du Gay, 1997, p. 5) that shows the limitations of explanations of consumerism on the basis of either market manipulation or through consumer sovereignty. Instead, there is as Zukin and Maguire (2004), express, “a complex interdependence of consumption with its social context” (p. 8). Fiske (1989) demonstrates this interrelationship between social context and consumption, in his ideas about popular culture. In his analysis, the economic system of production creates an ideology to produce in the consumer “a ‘false consciousness’ of their position in society” (p.14), where it is argued on one hand that

consumers are unaware of the conflict of interest between the ruling capitalist (the Bourgeoisie) and the consumer (proletariat), and on the other that there is a misrecognition of their common interest with others in their social class or consumer group. In this view, Fiske proposes that ideology works to 'naturalise' the capitalist system, although he does not make distinctions between the specialised interests related to popular culture and any basic commodity products of mass consumption which may stand outside the commodities of popular culture.:

### **Lifestyle**

Consumption also provides a potential means of constructing personal identity within lifestyle choices (Featherstone, 1991), through both goods and the related consumer cultures. Nixon refers to "the erosion of mass audiences" (1997, p. 202) and the segmentation of lifestyles of a diverse consumer society. Within marketing, approaches have been developed to understand these lifestyle choices using analysis of consumers' activities, interests and opinions (AIOs). Etzel, Walker and Stanton, summarise these criteria as "how you spend your time and what your beliefs are on various social economic and political issues" (1997, p. 167). The use of demographic analysis has become viewed as being inadequate to recognise the increasing individuality in consumer lifestyles (Nixon, 1997). These studies "abstract consumers from their social contexts and the integrity of their individual lives" (Zukin & Maguire, 2004, p.14).

Bourdieu's concepts of lifestyle provide an understanding of lifestyle from a more sociological perspective. In Bourdieu's view, lifestyle comprises a system of social practices that reveal distinction and taste being "signs systems that are socially qualified" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 172). Bourdieu sees a relationship between differing lifestyles and varying levels of cultural and economic capital, reflecting individual positions in social space. Lifestyle is, in his view, to some degree socially conditioned through the influence of social structures and habitus derived from family and other social situations (Bourdieu, 1984; 1998, p. 4). These expressions of lifestyle carry with them socially inscribed meanings that escape the survey methods of AIOs.

### **Taste**

For Bourdieu, lifestyle is bound up with taste, because taste is expressed in personal properties, serving to classify the individual, by "a generative formula of lifestyle" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 173)<sup>22</sup>, "whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others"(Bourdieu, 1984, p. 6). Bourdieu offers some expansion of this concept by suggesting

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<sup>22</sup> These classificatory schemes involve the concepts of habitus (p. 69) and cultural capital (p. 72).

that groups within society are distinguished by the volume and composition of capital<sup>23</sup> they have generated in their social space (1984, p. 114). According to Bourdieu, distinction is expressed through taste and taste is reliant on the individual's cultural capital, the ability to distinguish difference (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56). Taste in consumption is expressed through the values attached to style which serve to distinguish commodities. Slater suggests that this is achieved through the "aestheticisation of commodities and their environment" (1997, p. 31). This concept builds on the view of Featherstone (1991) that there is

a further convergence in the process of stylisation and aestheticisation of everyday life between the popularity of artistic lifestyles and stylistic presentation and display and the development of a differentiated and sophisticated range of consumer goods<sup>24</sup>. (p. 97)

The proliferation of these aspects of style is made possible by the communication of culture (Featherstone, 1991, p. 93) and the culture industries which, according to Rifkin (2000, p. 138), are the fastest growing sector of the global economy. Information about these industries is communicated through the mass media comprising "television, newspapers, films, magazines, radio, advertisements, video games and CDs" (Giddens, 2001, p. 452) at a global as well as local level.

### **Cultural mediation**

Is it through these media that the cultural meanings of commodities are communicated and signified by cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 325), those engaged not only in the production of television and radio programmes or features for newspaper publication as Bourdieu identifies, but also those producing design, advertising, and marketing. As du Gay (1997) argues,

These practitioners play a pivotal role in articulating production with consumption by attempting to associate goods and services with particular cultural meanings and to address these values to prospective buyers . . . they are concerned to create an identification between producers and consumers through their expertise in certain signifying practices. (p. 5)

An essential aspect of cultural mediation is that those who assume this role are both immersed in consumption, drawing on their social contexts, as well as being exemplifiers of the culture that they reproduce or promote (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1991). They mirror Giddens's assertion that practice<sup>25</sup> both structures the social world and is structured by

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<sup>23</sup> Refer to p. 119 for a discussion of forms of capital.

<sup>24</sup> This viewpoint is in opposition to the views of graphic designers opposing a reliance on surface style. This question is discussed more fully in Chapter Six.

<sup>25</sup> "Practice" refers here to action in a wider sociological sense rather than studio practice.

the social world (2001, p. 5). This is a point of view encapsulated by du Gay (1997) in his comparison of the production of culture and the cultures of production.

### **Audience values in relationship to consumption**

The mediating function of graphic design<sup>26</sup> involves a need for designers to understand audience values in establishing communication goals (Tyler 1998, p. 104). As Lloyd and Snelders argue, design works when it embodies “ideas that are held in common by the people for whom the object is intended” (2001, p. 238). This point of view is shared by Preece, Rogers and Sharp, who in their critique of interaction design, emphasise the need to create “user experiences that enhance and extend the way that people work, communicate and interact” (2002, p. 6). This focus on consumer experience applies particularly to website design where graphic designers need to recognise worldwide audiences, as more users connect, and the variable knowledge of web users (IdN 2000).

The concept of ‘audience centred design’ may appear to be self-evident. Notable graphic designers like Paul Rand and others before him placed great importance on the communication aspects of graphic design, even though they were often working in the period of universalised visual genres arising out of the thinking of the Bauhaus. Where audience-centred design varies from their approach is that it places more importance on understanding the cultural contexts of the audiences to which the graphic designer’s work is directed. This approach is important in brand identity design where in the jargon of ‘branding’, understanding audiences is fundamental to building ‘brand stories’. As McCoy (2003) says:

Over the past century, designers developed professional methods to serve clients effectively and to interpret messages in eloquent graphic form. Now we must learn more about our audiences. Because global society is diverse, designers must be prepared to 'speak' graphically in many different graphic languages instead of using just one language, whether it is the Bauhaus 'one size fits all' universal design idealism or just the designer's own personal graphic expression. I am exploring how designers can design messages that speak appropriately to targeted audiences with tailored messages that resonate with each audience, language, cultural values, needs and preferences. I have been thinking of this as audience-centred design for 'cultural sustainability' - the celebration of the unique communication styles that belong to national, local and sub-cultural audience groups.

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<sup>26</sup> There are some exceptions to the idea that graphic design always involves persuasion. Formal or book typography, for example, may be designed purely to assist legibility. Sign systems may similarly be designed for clarity of information and not to favour one point of view over another. However, for much graphic design a concept involving values of some kind is involved.

Audience-centred design has been the subject of theoretical writing. Frascara (1997), for example, argues that graphic designers need to create more ‘audience-centred’ work, because graphic design has great potential to change public knowledge, attitudes and behaviour but that to do this they need to be better informed about the consumers who are their audience and in particular to recognise that graphic designers have a role to create consumer ‘experiences’.

### **Mediating audience belief**

Tyler asserts that belief is shaped through the designed object, functioning as a means of communicating a concept (Tyler 1998, p. 104), even where the audience may be seen to comprise passive readers interpreting a visual statement. Applying the definition of rhetoric, as “the art of formulating arguments, or of using language, to persuade others” (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 2000, p. 299) to graphic design, the importance of persuasion within communication becomes clear. In Tyler’s analysis, the rhetorical point of view puts the audience in the position of participant in considering the argument mediated by the designer and involves using existing beliefs to transform social values through argument. The use of rhetoric in graphic design requires graphic designers to recognise their ethical and social responsibilities in communicating beliefs to their audiences.

### **The value of ethnographic research to know more about consumers**

According to Sherry (2002, p. vii), in an experience economy designers are implicated in “shaping the experience of others” and there is new interest in undertaking ethnographic research into consumer behaviour. Sherry concludes that both marketers and graphic designers producing marketing material are implicated, as are consumers, in the “active processes of consumption” (p.viii). Importantly, Sherry suggests that designers need to be able to access this research information to be informed about the audience to which their work is directed, suggesting that

ethnography lays bare the cultural erotics that consumers employ to animate the world of goods, and renders those principles accessible to creatives (designers, advertisers and other visionaries) whose job it is to translate them into artefacts and relationships”.

(p. x)

Graphic designers need to consider the ways in which they can access this social knowledge, (Byrne & Sands, 2002), and move from a traditional design apprenticeship learning curve in which they are “creative insightful and prolific artisans” to becoming partners with social scientists and conversant with “socio-cultural research design” (p. 48). These collaborations can be successful if, as Wasson (2002, p. 72) suggests, designers and ethnographers can work in an integrated way, with respect for each other's expertise.

## **Summary**

The discussion of consumer cultures presented through the literature sources in this section of this chapter has served to identify the importance of this knowledge for graphic design practice. I have shown graphic designers' need to understand wider social contexts to be able to perform their mediating role within consumer cultures. The references to audience centred design, the persuasive functions of graphic design and the value of ethnographic research presented through the literature, underline the need for graphic designers to understand the social worlds outside their studios. The interrelationships between, taste, style and self-identity encapsulated in Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital which I have related to lifestyle offers explanations of lifestyle values within consumer cultures that is of significance to the case studies in Chapter Five and the discussion Chapter Six.

## SECTION TWO

### Graphic design discourses

#### **Academic design discourse**

An academic discourse, intent upon critiquing design and establishing a theoretical base to practice, has arisen and this is expressed through conference presentations, journal articles and published literature. These critiques relate to design studies, design history and design culture. The debates within each have significance to understanding social contexts related to graphic design practice.

#### **Design Studies**

This critique of design has emerged as 'design studies'. In recent years the discussion from the academy under the umbrella of design studies has become more articulate. Debates within the academic journals *Design Issues*, *Design Studies* and scholarly publications by Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan, for example, attempt to reinvest the profession with greater credibility by locating practice explicitly within a theoretical base. They have debated the issue of theoretically informed design versus designers' intuitive understanding of social context and its implicit contribution to practice. This issue is discussed further in the second section of this chapter. Other theorists question the adequacy of relying on tacit knowledge to inform practice, and suggest that broader theoretical knowledge related to understanding social contexts is required.

Clive Dilnot (1982, p. 139) argued from the perspective of a design academic, that design must be considered as a process to be carried out within a social context. He urged theorists and professionals alike to pay attention to the intricate web of social structures and practices within which the designer's decision are made. He saw even then, that graphic design, like other forms of communication, contributes to the formation and maintenance of societal norms and values rather than being merely a technical activity isolated from the social world within which it is placed and to which it contributes. McCullagh (2000) also states that the tacit knowledge generated through practice is inadequate to address the external societal forces impacting on the profession. Others advocate greater recognition of the implication of the knowledge of social contexts to practice. Meurer (2001) exemplifies this approach, suggesting that social forces need to be recognised and incorporated within a broader concept of design, which includes “social political and cultural scope of action” (p. 52).

### **Design history and culture**

The importance of knowing about social contexts has been stressed in design history studies within design discourse. Adrian Forty challenged notions of the creative autonomy of designers, as he termed it, proposing that in addition to exercising their own originality, designers are “agents of the ideology, subcontractors of a bigger system” (1986, p. 242) subject to external influences on design practice outside their control. Others, (Dormer, 1993; Woodham, 1997; Sparke, 2004 for example), have continued to widen the academic critique within studies of design history, to concerns for the context in which design is created and of the society for which it is intended. These are clear arguments for the way in which design practice is determined and sustained by a social context that encompasses as Sparke (1986, p. xiv) states, a number of economic, political and technical forces. Sparke (2004) exemplifies the interest amongst design historians in moving from viewing historical aspects of design culture as a chronology, to reflecting design in its cultural context. This recognition of the importance of relating social contexts to design is offered as a necessary basis for understanding the history of graphic design.

While these design historians have increasingly advocated the importance of recognising the social contexts that inform design, graphic design lacks the developed recognition of this external knowledge apparent in the field of business and developed through business strategy (Quinn, Mintzberg & James, 1988 for example), as discussed in Chapter Two.

## Design critique

An alternative graphic design discourse has arisen that draws from a number of sources including reprints of design articles, conference papers, and writing by commentators on the graphic design profession. The alternative discourse arising out of the design literature, has served to identify and critique the issues that have arisen as graphic design has become less reliant on a craft base of production and moved to having a high reliance on digital technology. This practice-theory tension is evidenced in the contradictions and conflicts in the alternative graphic design discourse dealing with critiques related to design practice.

Within this discourse, Howard (1997), sees the social context in which graphic design is produced, to be significant as a means of showing its communicative function, making it more than purely personal creativity. Graphic designers' knowledge of the social contexts that surround and inform their practice helps to address the deficit in "social function and purpose of graphic design" that Howard (1997, p. 196) refers to in his critique of Ken Garland's *First Things First* manifesto (1964). Andrew Howard makes a case for a focus on the way that graphic design is a form of social production and should be treated no differently from others in terms of the social forces that impinge on it. He suggests that there is a need for greater recognition of the wider social context in which design is practiced.

Howard's article reflects a design publishing genre consisting of republished articles prevalent in the mid-1990 period that presents theoretical writing advocating a critical reflective approach, and contributes to the professional graphic design discourse. *Design Literacy* (Heller & Pomeroy, 1997) and *Looking Closer*<sup>27</sup>, are two of the better known series that provide collections of previously published articles largely drawn from graphic design magazines and graphic design conference presentations. In his review of *Looking Closer 3*, Soar, (2002, p. 274) alludes to the value of this writing with reference to "visual aspects of contemporary culture", stating that:

Although there are many formal distinctions between design writing and scholarship, both discourses are concerned with the most readily accessible, visual aspects of contemporary culture. What these books lack in terms of formal knowledge-building is compensated for in the novelty of their insights and their sensitivity to the fact of cultural production. (...) While graphic design, in its most marginal or spectacular manifestations, has been discussed in cultural theoretical terms – graffiti, mod culture, zines, culture jamming – the more normative activities that characterize everyday professional practice have remained largely unexamined. Since these constitute the lion's share of graphic design output, we could do worse than draw on the expanding

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<sup>27</sup> Various authors.



body of writing that seeks to understand it from vantage points within this insular profession.

Here, Soar draws attention to an emerging alternative discourse that attempts to contribute to understanding everyday professional graphic design practice and to credit it with being its own form of cultural activity. It is a discussion of a form of production of culture (du Gay, 1997), removed from the more scholarly academic discourse that critiques cultural and sociological aspects of society in relationship to design. Nevertheless, within these alternative design discourses writers have attempted to relate practice to more theoretical critique. This has created a problematic situation for some graphic designers which Poyner, a leading commentator, refers to as “an uneasy tension between the pragmatics of the studio and the assumed speculations of academic conjecture related to theoretical aspects of practice” (Poyner, 1998, p. 28). Similarly Burdick (1993) refers to the way she sees that graphic designers might be expected to welcome the shift to a more theoretically informed practice, but instead she identifies a reticence by designers to analyse the content of their work. There is now considerable debate regarding the importance of the profession's recognition of theoretical issues that may provide a basis to practice, in international graphic design journals and published work that takes a more theoretical approach to graphic design (Crow, 2003; Bennett, 2006 for example).

## **Design education discourses**

The discussions about contextualising knowledge outside the formal aspects of graphic design are presented by those involved in design education at a number of levels including doctoral design education conferences, university design education conferences and professional design conferences. In addition there is a resource of published literature drawn from each of these discourses as well as from individual contributors that serves to fuel ongoing debate about aspects of social contexts seen as relevant to design practice. At another level, the internal decision-making arising from programme planners within university and other tertiary design educational institutions is influential in determining the theoretical course content of tertiary design education.

### **Doctoral and postgraduate design conferences**

Presentations made at doctoral design education conferences have made a case for a recognising social contexts to design thinking that have implications for design education. Friedman (2000a), for example, has included social aspects of the human world expressed within a taxonomy of design knowledge. Krippendorff (2000) has alluded to social aspects of design knowledge by identifying the importance of understanding consumer cultures

within audience-centred design. In *Design Thinking* conferences Button (2001), and Eckert and Stacey (2001) are examples of theorists who have made the case for understanding the social contexts that inform postgraduate design research in these conferences.

### **University design education conferences**

Presentations directed at those in tertiary education to take in concerns for social contexts with reference to consumer-led design (Whitehouse, 2000; Naismith, 2000), social identity (Candy, 2000) and lifestyle (Durling & Griffiths, 2000, p. 33) for example, were made at the Curtin conference *Reinventing Design Education in the University*. These have promoted the idea of broadening design education. In New Zealand, art education conferences provide an avenue for discussion of the theoretical aspects of design education.

### **Professional design conferences**

The American Institute of Graphic Artists (AIGA) has regularly provided a forum for critiques of graphic design education. In these forums there has been discussion of the importance of including a social and cultural critique in curricula. Davis's presentation on experience design at the AIGA Loop Conference, for example, is notable for the way in which it placed a focus on the social and cultural knowledge needed for graphic designers, rather than primarily on the formal aspects of design (Davis, 2001). The International Council of Graphic Design Association's (Icograda) world design forums have included graphic design education paper presentations that include critiques of cultural and social issues relevant to graphic design. Icograda has also published manifestos that advocate a recognition of the cultural knowledge to design conceptualisation (refer Icograda, 2000 for example).

### **Individual publications**

There are individual publications advocating approaches to delivering theoretical knowledge related to design education. Heller (2003) has compiled design teaching course outlines that include examples of design theory topics that deal with social contextual issues relevant to design. There has been no similar published work in New Zealand. The *Looking Closer* series includes reprints of short critical articles on design education by academic as well as professional journalists and designers that make a case for the value of knowledge of social contexts for design practice.

### **Internal course planning within tertiary design institutions in New Zealand**

The changing programme emphases in New Zealand universities and schools of design has brought about an increasing awareness by those responsible for programme development that contextual studies that include aspects of social contexts need to be included in their courses. The registration of courses with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)

and the annual collegial moderation required by NZQA provides incentives for educators to ensure that course content includes contextualising topics.

## **Discourses of the graphic design community**

The informal social contact at various levels in the graphic design community in New Zealand provides sources of discussion about graphic design practice and issues related to it. It contributes to a professional graphic design discourse for those who place importance on the social networks that provide these opportunities either within the culture of their firms or outside them. While designers may not always be conscious of the discourses in which they engage in day-to-day practice, these exchanges are fundamental to generating design ideas. The professional graphic design discourse includes concerns for business methods, technology and other professional perspectives that impact on studio practice. To this must be added the recent interest in issues relating to sustainability (Twemlow, 2006)<sup>28</sup>. These understandings are also materialised in the work that graphic designers produce. The products of graphic design in turn depend on knowledge within a vocabulary built up and drawn upon in the shared discourse surrounding practice (Krippendorf, 1995).

A discourse is kept alive within the communities of its practitioners, by the diversity of practice of those within it. Wenger (1998) refers to “the different trajectories, practices, interpretations of style involved in individual practice” (p. 129) as well as the diversity of engagement. There is a level of interaction involving an interplay between production and the adoption of meaning which can be likened to language acquisition (Wenger, 1998, p. 202). These aspects of production and adoption are demonstrated in the development of design precedents, a concept proposed by Eckert and Stacey (2000) who argue that designers share a source language, which is important to the development of design ideas and which is often understood only by other designers. This familiarity, they argue, can be attributed to shared cultural references and a shared knowledge of existing designs. Designers, they assert, express these commonly held understandings about design as “stock categories” which in Eckert and Stacey’s terms, “provide a vocabulary for their mental representations of new designs” (2000, p. 527).

Eckert and Stacey’s concepts demonstrate how, in their practice, graphic designers rely on jargon<sup>29</sup> and syntax derived from the semantics that enable them to locate in their source-

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<sup>28</sup> Awareness of issues relating to sustainability has also been promoted through conferences on sustainability at 2007 and 2008 DINZ annual conferences.

<sup>29</sup> By ‘jargon’ I mean the non-perjorative use of the word, using the dictionary definition “words or expressions developed for use in a particular group, hard for outsiders to understand” (Pollard & Liebeck, 1994, p. 427).

language, a range of variables relative to particular design types or problems (Eckert & Stacey, 2000, p. 532). Lawson (2001) also refers to the significance of designers' conversations in connecting earlier design events to the problems they are working on. He has used the term 'precedent' to describe "either whole or partial pieces of designs that the designer is aware of" (Lawson, 2001, p. 136). While designers' conversations are held to be important in recognising precedents, Lawson (2001, p. 136) argues that the written discourse, particularly that stemming from professional design publications, is significant in this regard.

Amongst the earliest published discourses on graphic design in New Zealand, are those to be found in the articles in *Designscape* from 1969 to 1983, which tended to a report approach in presenting information on New Zealand graphic designers' work. There was no equivalent to the developed modernist approach of the Ulm School of design for example, in the articles on graphic design in *Designscape*. Now, discussions about issues related to graphic design at a professional level have taken place in articles in *ProDesign* magazine since 1992. Even though it is subtitled "The official journal of the Designers Institute of New Zealand" this publication is published<sup>30</sup> and funded independently of DINZ. It serves as the only regularly published New Zealand professional periodical for design disciplines including architecture, providing a place for designers to engage in professional discussions and critiques of New Zealand design. Articles tend to be written for a broad range of reader interests and are generally short pieces that reflect a professional discourse. Apart from occasional more scholarly critiques of aspects of design issues, the publication has built on a professional level of content that increasingly tends towards 'design and business' themes. Through over seventeen years of publication from 1969, *ProDesign* has gone some way to providing a record of design in New Zealand. However, unlike the fine arts, where a number of histories of New Zealand art exist (refer Dunn, 2003, for example), no comprehensive surveys of the history of graphic design have been written. The archives of *Designscape*, provide a useful resource for those publishing histories of New Zealand. In the work of each of these writers, the emphasis has been on presenting work examples with often only brief references to the conditions under which the work was created. Earlier issues of *ProDesign* and *Designscape* also provide a chronology of earlier work. The discontinued Designlogue section in *ProDesign* attempted to provide a more serious critique of design.

Recently there have been attempts to create an authoritative written history of New Zealand graphic design on-line. The Auckland University of Technology's New Zealand Design Archive a web based research initiative was established in 2001. More recently, in his

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<sup>30</sup> ProDesign is published by AGM Publishing Limited.

overview of design on the Better by Design website, Michael Smythe (2005), has critiqued and described significant<sup>31</sup> design work, including graphic design. In another area, notable work by Hamish Thompson, in searching design archives and conducting informal designer interviews has recently provided much needed biographies and critiques of the work of New Zealand graphic designers published in his survey of poster design in New Zealand (2003) and book cover design (2007). There have been publications (Benewith, 2009) and articles (Benewith & Olds, 2007) on Joseph Churchward. The now well-established *National Grid* has provided a forum for a wide critique of graphic design including articles in subject areas as broad as visual culture and popular music, as well as writing on the work of specific designers. With a circulation of 500, part of which is sent elsewhere in the world, the impact of this publication on the wider New Zealand graphic design field is unclear. However, as Triggs (2009) suggests the critiques of “little magazines” like this “have gone some way in documenting the history of the profession and its debates through content as well as designed ‘forms’”(p. 331). By contrast, Douglas Lloyd Jenkins has covered a wider design spectrum in book publishing (Lloyd Jenkins, 2006 for example) and magazines<sup>32</sup> of wide circulation that have included critiques of graphic design.

In New Zealand, graphic designers typically read international graphic design magazines<sup>33</sup> that provide a wider perspective on their field available from specialist magazine and booksellers or on subscription. Through these avenues they are able to obtain many of the graphic design periodicals available to designers elsewhere. Until comparatively recently, international design magazines and ‘annual’<sup>34</sup> style publications have published relatively short articles with a strong emphasis on visual examples rather than presenting involved case histories. Traditionally, design annuals, which were books rather than magazines, contained only a brief editorial section before launching into the remaining sectionalised visual presentation of selected work from an international spread of designers. This emphasis on the visual rather than the theoretical reflected a primary interest in the product of designing rather than on theoretical aspects, for many graphic designers. Poyner’s articles in the British graphic design magazine *Eye*, in the 1990s were a move towards developing critiques on practice related issues, as were other short articles commenting or theorising graphic design, in *Communication Arts*, *Print*, *Émigré* and the *AIGA Journal* in America. Whilst recent challenging articles in the international design press indicate a greater awareness of the

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<sup>31</sup> Work was “significant” because it influenced or was indicative of the design discourse of the period, representing original thinking as well as commercial success.

<sup>32</sup> I refer to Lloyd Jenkin’s periodic articles on design in the *New Zealand Listener*.

<sup>33</sup> *Communication Arts*, *Eye*, *Graphis*, *Graphix*, *Print*, and *Step* are examples of well known international graphic design magazines available in New Zealand.

<sup>34</sup> *Penrose Annual*, *Modern Publicity* and *Graphis Annuals* were amongst the first publications to provide an annual review of graphic design. Since then a number of other publications have appeared, following the same format.

importance of the knowledge base that supports graphic design practice, by both commentators and designers, many current graphic design publications still show a predominant concern for visual aspects of graphic design.

### **International networks for the graphic design profession**

Icograda also offers critiques of graphic designers' role in society and commerce, as it states, in “unifying the voice of graphic designers and visual communication designers worldwide” (Icograda 2002). Icograda has developed an international discourse through its website that offers news and comment about graphic design on a global scale with a dialogue on current graphic design issues often drawing on Icograda congress presentations. Icograda has been able to influence on graphic design practice and design education in New Zealand through these articles. Other professional graphic design associations such as the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) and the Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA) perform a similar role. There are also a number of online forums for discussions and online versions of journals. *Design Observer*, for example, like other web forums on graphic design, provides an immediate means of gaining responses on professional issues from a global design community (Twemlow, 2006). As well as joining these online communities, graphic designers have been able to both draw on and contribute to the wider interactive web communities now available. Bennett and Polaine point to a developing “philosophy of online creativity”, stating that these associated technologies are “so everyday that we need to take account of new ways of working, socialising and collaborating that have subsequently changed” (2009 u.p.). As a demonstration of the way in which the developing Internet communities have opened up opportunities for communication and interaction of value to graphic designers, Bennett and Polaine state,

In recent years the rise of portable or time-shifted media (such as podcasts, the iTunes Music store and video equivalents), blogs and social networks have created an interesting shift in traditional relationships to everything from media, to education, to consumer and political behaviour (. . .) the strength of social networks and online communities is that they provide both a way through the enormous amount of information on the web as well as creating social bonds and capital”. (2009, u.p.)

Graphic designers are able participate in these interactive networks by drawing on the opportunities that Web 2.0 applications provide. Web 2.0 is described by O’Reilly<sup>35</sup> (2005) as:

the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a

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<sup>35</sup> Tim O’Reilly has popularised the term Web 2.0 and developed definitions (refer O’Reilly, 2007).

continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture of participation," and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences.

### **The influence of business discourses**

Once considered by some as external to design,<sup>36</sup> knowledge of business and the discourse that surrounds it have become increasingly important and accessible to graphic designers in New Zealand. Graphic designers are able to access information on business strategy through the main business publications<sup>37</sup> or from business databases, for what they need to know about marketing and branding, rather than relying on their own knowledge gained over a period of time. Apart from the value of knowledge about marketing and audiences of consumption discussed in the graphic design press and in business journals, there have been initiatives to promote the value of partnerships between design and business as in the objectives of the New Zealand Design Taskforce (2003)<sup>38</sup> and, more recently, the DINZ Design in Business Awards.<sup>39</sup>

From another quarter, the discourses of business are promoted through the articles in the *Design Management Review*, which links this knowledge with design and innovation. However, according to Rylander (2008), the discourses of design in 'design thinking' and business in 'knowledge work', as in knowledge intensive firms whose case studies are reported in the *Design Management Review*, reflect different epistemological bases that may explain different approaches to problem solving between designers and 'knowledge intensive firms'. As she states, "knowledge-intensive firms and design firms have different perspectives for framing a problem, different processes and resources at their disposal for solving a problem" (Rylander, 2008, p.1)

### **Summary**

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I have shown how the literature from consumer cultures has provided explanations about relationships between the lifestyles of consumers and for the way in which consumer cultures have found within consumption, a means of creating personal identity and the values related to it. Through the literature, it can be seen

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<sup>36</sup> Holland (1994) states that the early linking of design with fine art brought about a disdain for business, but that more recent initiatives by professional organizations have broken this down.

<sup>37</sup> In New Zealand they include the following journals: *Management*, *Better Business*, and *NZ Business*

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.industrytaskforces.govt.nz/index.html>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.designinbusiness.dinz.org.nz/docs/DIBA08>

how various discourses within the field of graphic design, have recognised the significance of identifying consumer values in relationship to the function and practice of graphic design. In the literature from academic design studies, I have offered explanations about this relationship, by providing a philosophical background to practice. I have made a case for valuing the theoretical knowledge arising from studies of consumer culture, as in the work of Zukin and Maguire (2004) for example. There has also been value in considering the way in which discourses from professional design publishing, graphic design practice and graphic design education have pointed to the significance of understanding the external social worlds that have a relationship to graphic design practice.

This use of discourse cannot be regarded as something measurable or exclusive. There are cross-overs where design academics may, for example, be contributing articles to the alternative discourse of graphic design. Practicing graphic designers, otherwise viewed as being situated in the professional graphic design discourse, may also be commentators contributing to other graphic design discourses. Design historians may be as much involved in academic writing as they are in design education discourses, as lecturers or in responsibilities for curricula development. Nevertheless, the distinctions made between the discourses that I have discussed have been useful in showing differing recognition of the significance of knowledge of social worlds outside graphic design studio practice.

### SECTION THREE

#### Theory and Practice

The literature on consumer cultures and the discourses of the field of graphic design have made a case for the relevance of knowledge of social contexts to graphic design practice and presented evidence of the variable importance of this knowledge in design discourses. However, they have not answered two key questions that can relate these viewpoints to practice. Firstly, how do graphic designers acquire knowledge of social contexts to inform graphic design practice and secondly, what significance do they place on acquiring this knowledge in their practice? These questions are explored by considering the theoretical explanations about practice that show how the acquisition of the experience gained from day-to-day practice contributes to implicit knowledge as a resource for practice in addition to explicit theoretical knowledge.

Distinctions need to be made between the meaning of theory and of practice to understand more clearly how practice knowledge contributes to a resource of implicit knowledge that may include aspects of social contexts relevant to practice knowledge. Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of 'habitus', 'disposition', 'practice,' and 'field' provide a logical extension of the



discussion of implicit knowledge. This discussion also provides an understanding his framework, further developed in Chapter Four.

### **What theory may be construed to mean in graphic design**

How knowledge of social contexts may be implicated in design practice is closely related to aspects of theory and practice. Before considering various viewpoints about any theoretical basis to graphic design practice, the significance of theory itself, needs to be considered. Definitions of theory vary. Mautner (2000), for example defines theory as “a set of propositions which provide[s] principles of analysis or explanation of a subject matter” (p. 563). Marshall (1994) offers a conception of theory as a means of arriving at generalisations, of testing data or of taking a realist approach to arrive at explanations of social situations (p. 532). Both of these descriptions suggest that theory refers to a set of concepts that guide an approach to a particular problem and also guide our interpretation of it, dealing with what is problematic in the world. These definitions of theory arising from the academic use of the term have limited application for design practice. There may also be limitations to the readiness of graphic designers to put themselves into a state of *academic* distanced reflection on what they do. To ignore this is to misunderstand the way that designers learn. Even though, for example, the manifesto writing of early twentieth century design movements attempted to develop theories about design, these are different from the ways that leading practitioners in fields of design codify their practice knowledge now. While Garland’s *First things first* manifesto (1964) may be regarded as a design manifesto, at the time of its publication, it failed to have widespread influence on practice. However, more recently these ideas have been taken up in professional discourses about design (Howard, 1997; McCarron, 2001; Poyner, 2002; Soar, 2002). Even though, as Lawson (1997) states, designers do engage in explicit forms of reflection on what they are doing and attempt to articulate this in a problematic way, for their own guidance and for the guidance of other people, it is predominantly in design discourses at an academic level, that theoretical aspects of design, are discussed and advocated.

In this academic discourse, debates suggesting greater attention to a theoretical base to design education and practice are now well established. The topic has been thoroughly explored in articles and papers (Friedman 1997; Durling & Griffiths 2000, for example). These address Friedman’s concern for the need for systematic thinking about design, as opposed to an “absence of reading or theory building” (1997, p. 56). The discussion seems clear to the academic community where design practice and education are argued to require a greater focus on acquiring the knowledge needed for problem solving, that moves beyond the formal visual and technological concerns that by and large, the designers with expertise have come to recognise (*ibid*). More specifically Friedman (1997, p. 59) refers to “the

generally poor knowledge of designers concerning the broad circumstances of life and work outside the narrow frame of design” which he asserts can be attributed to “a lack of an education for the theoretical complexity of the design task”.

Whilst these viewpoints attempt to relate theory to practice, they are written as contributions to an academic discourse that is less likely to be of interest to practicing designers than to those in academia. The opposition between theory and practice needs to be problematised constantly. It is an opposition that exists in universities where there is continuing distinction between theorists and practitioners.

There is also the question of whether there is a need for greater recognition of theoretical values in design practice or whether designers are involved in preparing themselves for a more practice-based field where academic theory is not at the centre of design problem-solving and practice. Theoretical papers and articles that aim to establish a credible discipline of design encompass theoretical thinking from two extremes. There are viewpoints that aim to build theory based on contextualising design practice by drawing on sociology, anthropology and other aspects of humanities. In contrast to this approach there are those who advocate that useful theoretical knowledge for designers is located firmly within the design discipline itself (Östman, 2006). Wenger (1998) supports the concept of practice based knowledge in his concept of ‘communities of practice’, advocating the importance of learning within practice through social interaction.

### **Practice**

Practice, according to Wenger always has a social dimension “not just *doing* itself and of itself” (1998, p.47), but through interaction. Wenger draws on Vygotsky’s interest in thinking out the relationship between individual and social cognition in which the fundamental argument is that people are able to think as human beings because they have acquired the ways of thinking of their community. For Vygotsy (1978) the solutions to problems are worked out within the social world, by the collective thinking of those within a community and are acquired by individuals through a process of internalisation. Vygotsky’s constructivist ideas are reflected in his view that collective representations become individual concepts, and this idea is taken up by Wenger in his concept of ‘communities of practice’, where those within these communities create repertoires derived from practice. These are shared within the related field of practice and expressed through the related discourses (Wenger, 1998, p. 129).

### **Discourse in practice**

Designers’ interaction in practice provides the opportunities for critique in which they are able talk about work in their own language, a language that they understand, and that people

who are outside the design field cannot decode. According to Eckert and Stacey (2000), the source language arising from discourse and materialized in genres is often unintelligible to others, and used by designers to refer to objects, images and abstractions. It is part of practice in the context of work, to build discourse related to the graphic design field. They argue that discourse forms a significant aspect of practice, enabling designers to gain identity through discourses within practice rather than solely through the work that they produce.

Mapping on top of discourse are the distinct genres generated in practice. The term genre has been used to show how different forms of discourse are used and marked off from each other. The terms discourse and genre go together, being used and explored in the work of Bakhtin (1981). The semantic aspect of designers' verbal and visual language serves to communicate how a proposed or new design relates to other existing designs, in the same way that Bakhtin distinguishes between the real world of the author and the reader of the work. Here Bakhtin views each individual creative work as a minor chronotope having its place in the present but representing "generic types" (1981, p. 253) located in prior time and space and thus able to be contextualised by the reader. These "generic types" otherwise known as schemas are the mental frameworks that are unlikely to be consciously or clearly defined, being as Drever (1952) states, "a vague standard, arising out of past experience and placing any fresh experience in its appropriate context or relationship" (p. 253). For example the role of genres relative to design within digital communities exists in a way that bears striking similarities to other design fields, enabling Yates and Sumner (1997) to observe that

designers rarely began designing from a blank screen; they nearly always began by modifying an existing design stored in a repository of previous designs, either on their hard disk or on the group's shared server. This style of document-production-by-modification both explicitly and implicitly propagated the community's genres. (p. 6)

Eckert and Stacey's research into the fashion design field arrived at similar conclusions. They concluded that, as they express it, "almost all design proceeds by transforming, combining and adapting elements of previous designs, as well as (from) elements and aspects of other objects, images and phenomena" (2000, p. 524). In their research they found that these sources were further delineated to include design ideas or components of them, derived from previous designs on one hand and proven precedents on the other, or use of both "solution principles" to determine the design. There may similarly be a number of precedents or schemas that are often used implicitly by expert graphic designers. This may be assumed because as Lawson (2003, p. 44) suggests, designers rely on their tacit knowledge of precedents to convey "domain specific knowledge" to other designers. Schön

(1983, p. 138) uses the idea of 'repertoires' in a similar sense, stating that "when a practitioner makes sense of a situation he perceives to be unique, he *sees* it *as* something already present in his repertoire". Drawing on Schön's (1983) concept of 'design as a conversation', Lawson (2001, p. 134) sees design, like the narratives in conversation, relying on some "reasonably well-defined and understood features", and makes a case for the reliance on episodic memory built up through the internalisation of experience in the absence of any well-developed theoretical aspect to memory, for arriving at design solutions. Rylander (2008) observes that distinctions may be made between implicit knowledge involved in designers' experience based processes and the greater importance placed on rationality in business thinking which may point to limitations in relying on either form of knowledge.

### **Internalisation of knowledge**

The internalised knowledge arising from practice in the individual's resource of experience-based expertise is difficult to identify (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Polanyi describes it as to "know more than we can tell" (1966, p. 4). Emphasising the importance of recognising that comprehension can be an outcome of indwelling or 'interiorisation', Polanyi, (1966, p. 55), theorises that "our body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge whether intellectual or practical". Tacit knowledge is therefore highly personal, subjective, related to experience and values and difficult to communicate or share with others in a codified manner (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 8). As Schön, (1984, p. 247) states

Often, we cannot say what we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we find descriptions that are obviously inappropriate. Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing . . .

Knowledge is seen to be, in these situations, "in our action" (p. 241). If tacit knowledge involves interiorisation related to experience as Polanyi suggests, an explanation is made for the way in which Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1988), referring to Polanyi's ideas, see experienced practitioners to be more concerned with 'knowing how' rather than 'knowing that', which they attribute to those less competent.

According to Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1988), the beginner's concern with objective facts and features demonstrates a priority for explicit knowledge in their skill acquisition. For the expert who is more concerned with using skill or understanding, knowledge has become very much a part of their practice and they need to be no more aware of it than their own body (p. 55). The actions related to the expert's practice reflect implicit knowledge rather than a reliance predominantly on explicit learning. Applied to experienced graphic

designers, the importance of implicit and experiential knowledge in practice could explain the often instinctive rather than conscious employment of this knowledge. Bourdieu has developed a similar concept in his idea of bodily hexis. Embodiment of knowledge turned into dispositions, forms the basis of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. (1977, p. 93),

### **Bourdieu's concept of habitus related to practice**

The concept of habitus in Bourdieu's work emerges from his reflections on the questions of instinctive action informed by social structures. Habitus is a term that concerns the way that dispositions of mind and body have been acquired and what the effects of practices informed by those kinds of structures are. The concept of habitus was developed from a theory about design in Panofsky's work. It comes from a realisation that the architects of the medieval cathedrals possessed a habitus that was structured in recognisable ways. Panofsky (1957, p. 30) argued that there was a common mental habit and the common element was that of clarification. He had looked at the architecture of the great cathedrals in the late twelfth century and understood that they were designed to maximise clarity. He argued that the forms of education in the medieval period provided the craftsmen who built medieval cathedrals with that kind of mental formation and that system of habits, so that when they went into an occupation, they took those dispositions with them and it therefore structured the product. Panofsky pointed out that these craftsmen had a habitus shaped in such a way, that only that form of architecture would be possible, given that structure of thought.

Questions of habitus relate closely to understanding the question of how tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge are implicated in practice and whether tacit knowledge can be linked to dispositions. Bourdieu's concept of habitus emerges from reflections on these questions, being:

an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all of the thoughts, all of the perceptions and all of the actions consistent with those conditions and no others.

(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 95)

Bourdieu describes artistic competence, as a product of a long process of inculcation often beginning in the family, and being in conformity with economic, academic and cultural capital, reinforced by the education system (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 12). In this there is a parallel for investigating the generation of habitus in relationship to graphic designers' backgrounds and practice. The following is an account from a designer whose work in graphic design and interiors is characterised by simplicity and minimalism that could easily be mistaken to have arisen out of a preference to work in that way, based on the influence of design movements. However, his approach to his work arose not from these influences, but from his own dispositions. His cartoons are characterised by minimal use of line and his preferences in

furniture and interior design are characterised by stark simplicity. In reflecting on the early years of his life he shows how implicit knowledge was built up through individual habitus and how the socially constituted generative capacities of dispositions were acquired, (Bourdieu, 1989 p.13) and were brought into his practice. As he states:

I was a member of the Swedish society of industrial design, which has been going since before the war, but people ask me, ‘Why are you attracted nowadays, to all this Danish and Scandinavian design?’ I have to tell you it’s not because of my actual design training. I think it’s probably more due to the fact that I was educated at a Royal Naval School from the age of nine and I spent nine, twelve, sixteen years scrubbing teak decks and scrubbing tables - dining room tables - and living on simple benches all in white wood, and polishing with stainless steel, dixies which food was served in and blanco’d ropes so that they were always white. In other words, I lived a very monastic life in a terrifying, awful Naval School and but for which I, somehow, in it all had instilled into me, a sense of great simplicity from simple materials, and I suspect that that is one of the reasons why I ended up with this feeling for scrubbed wood and soaped finishes and so on. I think basically, when discussing furniture as such or design I think being on the side of simplicity is something that is worthwhile practicing anyhow, no matter how you approach it. People sort of confuse minimalism or problems of simplicity with lack of form or function or expertness and they don’t seem to understand how to control things in such a way, that at the end, the whole thing works anyhow. It’s sort of a strange business because I feel I’ve done this in a natural progression. (Bromhead, 2004)

Bourdieu uses the term habitus to refer to the dispositions through which he sees a person responding, through the result of socio-cultural history, to their social and physical context (Bourdieu 1989, p. 12). The dispositions that the designer acquired through the strong influence of early years became ‘to some extent the product of the incorporation of social structures’ (p. 14), making “a particular way of being or thinking possible” (p. 16). The importance placed on simplicity was not solely reliant on any prevailing design discourses that may promote simplicity, like the international style era,<sup>40</sup> but on the designer’s individual habitus, which reflected the structure of the related social field and the social and cultural capital within it.<sup>41</sup>

### **A theory of practice**

Bourdieu’s theory of practice combines both the subjectivism described by Thompson (1991, p. 11) as “an intellectual orientation to the social world which seeks to grasp the way the world appears to the individuals within it” and objectivism, as the relations which

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<sup>40</sup> Refer p. 24 for an explanation of International Style related to modernism in design.

<sup>41</sup> Social capital refers to personal relationships and cultural capital to knowledge (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 230).

“structure practice and representations of practice” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 3). This model, in avoiding explanations of practice grounded in *either* subjective interpretations *or* objective structures, places practice in a social setting not limited by individual action or social structures. Cultural practices are seen in a relationship to social processes (Johnson, p. 1, 1993). Bourdieu’s theory of practice is grounded in empirical studies of “lived experience of the social world” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 25).

This thinking is encapsulated in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, structure and practice in which, as Nash expresses it, “socialised positions generate socialised dispositions and socialised dispositions generate practices” (2002, p. 273). In the case of the designer cited above, practice arises from his cognitive, creative and technical knowledge, expressed through disposition, where practice is therefore “to some extent the product of the incorporation of social structures” (Bourdieu, 1989, p.14). In Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, there is a perception of the individual in which action is grounded in objective social relations, in a way that, as Johnson (1993) states, “attempts to account for the creative, active and inventive capacities of individuals, but without attributing it to a universal mind” (p. 5). The generative aspect of habitus counters the idea of an individual held in a structured field of social reproduction.

### **Field**

In Bourdieu’s concept of practice, habitus is always related to field (1989, p. 116) and by field he refers to structured positions and interrelationships in which “various forms of capital are distributed” (1991, p. 14), and in which there are “stakes and power relationships” (1989, p. 87). Bourdieu has opened up the idea of field by using the term to refer not only to the anthropologist’s ‘field’, or to social structure, but also to apply it equally to professional interests and “whatever brings people to struggle with each other” (1989, p.88). To be able to exist in a particular field, those within it have to have an interest to, as Bourdieu (1989) expresses it “play the game” (p.63). To be able to play the game, calls for a “feel for the game” (Johnson, 1993, p. 5), based on the dispositions arising out of individuals’ habitus. The social structure of a field and the genesis of the individual’s habitus are expressed through the dispositions that generate practices. As Bourdieu (1989) states, “the generative aspects of dispositions, as a product of habitus, are socially constituted” (p.13). Bourdieu associates these embodied practices (1993, p. 150) with concepts of capital, providing a way to relate symbolic capital and social capital to the exercise of power or authority within the field and translate them into ‘structuring principles’ (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 90).

### **Capital in the field**

Social positions are expressed through various forms of capital of those who make up a particular field. Thompson (1991) defines Bourdieu's concept of field as "a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or capital" (p. 14). The position that social knowledge in the form of cultural capital assumes, with the changes in a field, is relevant to practice, just as are the reasons why the changes have happened. Those in a particular field seek to advance and promote the institutional, professional, and environmental interests that they share with others in their field. Competence in a process of assimilation, which Bourdieu refers to as 'aesthetic disposition', is a form of cultural capital (Johnson, 1993, p. 23), which, like other forms of capital, tends to follow unequal patterns of accumulation (p. 7). The education system is significant in this process in that it tends to cultivate a certain familiarity with legitimate culture and inculcate a certain attitude to creative work (p. 23), an approach that has relevance to understanding the generation of cultural capital relative to design practice for example.

### **Position-taking**

Bourdieu's view is that the field of cultural production is structured by the opposition between the relative positions taken, which constitute the stakes of the struggle in the field (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 34), based on external influences, and autonomy resulting from specific interests of those within the field (p.6). The positions taken by those in the field and the cultural capital that they bring to it are the two key factors that serve to structure a field (Johnson, 1993, p.7). The ability of those within the field to assume the positions they take is the product of both their dispositions and their 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 63). The ability to assume changing positions in the field is, in Bourdieu's terms, mediated by habitus (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 150). As a product of the habitus, strategies of the field are "a specific orientation to practice" (Johnson, 1993, p. 17) being the outcome of "dispositions towards practice". Strategy, in Bourdieu's concept of field, involves an orientation towards practice in which confronting issues serves to moderate positions in the field (Johnson 1993, p. 18). Bourdieu uses the concept of trajectory to refer to the "series of positions successively occupied by the agent in the field" (Johnson, 1993, p. 17).

### **Bourdieu's sociological approach**

Bourdieu uses the terms 'sociology' and 'culture' in his critiques in ways that show that references to cultures fit into the field of sociology. His analysis is that of a sociologist, in critiquing the social contexts of literary and artistic works in their associated cultures in *The field of cultural production* (Bourdieu, 1993). This is consistent with the view of Abercrombie, Hill and Turner who place Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, taste and social



structure within their definition of “sociology of everyday life” (2000, p. 336). They distinguish this area from the larger scale scope of sociology by defining it as dealing with “the small-scale analysis of the practices, reciprocities and cultural arrangements of everyday life” (*ibid*).

## **Conclusions**

In the literature presented in this chapter I have offered viewpoints, firstly, about aspects of consumer cultures and the variable significance for recognising the relevance of knowledge of these social contexts to practice in the discourses of the graphic design field. Secondly, I have reviewed theoretical propositions for the acquisition of knowledge implicitly through practice. Finally, I have presented the concepts of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework as a means of understanding a concept for practice. Each of these sections of the chapter contributes to clarifying the objectives of the research by providing viewpoints about the importance of knowing about social contexts in relationship to graphic design practice.

Within the literature on the wider social contexts to graphic design practice, I have provided an overview of aspects the consumer society of relevance to the research. The discussions of relationships between lifestyle and personal identity reflected in consumer culture are of significance to graphic designers in their mediating role, where they are positioned between clients who are often from the field of business and the consumer society to whom products are promoted and marketed.

A strong case has been made within the academic design discourse through graphic design history and culture for recognising the social contexts that inform graphic design practice and problem solving. The discourses of the graphic design field have each shown an increasing priority for understanding audiences for graphic design, reflecting values of the consumer society. Nevertheless, the existing critique of cultural contexts in the literature from each design discourse falls short in providing an understanding of the significance of knowledge of social contexts to graphic designers. While the existing studies of graphic design history cited in the chapter point to the ways in which cultures of design encompass the need to understand the social context with which designers interface, they do not attempt to state how graphic designers acquire the understanding of social context that these theorists propose.

The discussion of literature covering aspects of theory and practice offers explanations for the acquisition of knowledge through implicit means, suggesting that this could be a significant way for graphic designers to acquire knowledge to understand the social contexts to practice. Bourdieu’s concepts have been presented to introduce his model of practice as a means of understanding how graphic designers have acquired the knowledge revealed in

their professional backgrounds, assimilated through their own lifestyles or unconsciously in the forms of knowledge from wider social contexts that may be implicated in their practice. Bourdieu's framework will be developed in Chapter Four to show how an empirical study of practice can assist in understanding the significance of knowledge of social contexts to graphic designers practice, a method that will be used in the case study research presented in Chapter Five and discussed in Chapter Six to show the significance that New Zealand Graphic designers placed on knowing about social contexts that could inform their practice.

## Chapter Four – Research Method

The research method outlined in this chapter uses Bourdieu's theoretical ideas as a conceptual framework for data collection in interviews and as a means of providing concepts that may be employed in a substantive analysis of the data. Bourdieu's concepts are used to understand the relevance of the biographies of the graphic designers in the research, what kind of people they are and ultimately what positions they have taken, in relationship to the main research question, namely, what is the significance that a cross-section of New Zealand graphic designers placed on using knowledge of social contexts to inform their practice?

This research involved the following objectives. Firstly, to interrogate the practice of a cross-section of New Zealand graphic designers to see the degree to which they were able to identify references to social contexts in their practice and problem solving, by understanding their professional and social backgrounds, and how they had become designers. Secondly, it involved seeing how they had built up knowledge of social contexts through experience. Finally, it was necessary to consider what knowledge of social contexts designers revealed that they needed in practice, and how this knowledge related to concept development.

Key aspects of Bourdieu's approach to ethnographic research were selected as a model for collecting and analysing the data from the case studies employed to achieve these objectives. These methods are set out in the sections of this chapter dealing with data collection and data analysis. They are modelled on Bourdieu's substantial study reported in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu, 1999).

While in studies related to design since the late eighties, design historians and theorists (Julier 2000; Sparke, 2004) and sociologists (Fiske, 1989; Featherston, 1991), have often taken up the ideas of Bourdieu in research related to issues of taste and class distinctions, I employ his ideas as a framework to understand aspects of graphic design practice in New Zealand. Bourdieu's development of reflexivity in interviewing and data analysis has also been used in the work of researchers in the field of education (Nash, 1999). In these studies researchers have put themselves in the research process lending objectivity to the objectification of practice (Bourdieu, 1989), a reflexive concept discussed in the research design section of this chapter. As Jenkins (1992) suggests, Bourdieu's concepts are particularly useful to think with because they assist both a reflexive interview process and the analysis of data.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a relationship between theory and practice is encapsulated in Bourdieu's integrated concepts of practice-habitus-structure. Related

specifically to the significance of knowledge of social contexts in graphic design practice, I sought, in the research, to find how designers could bring aspects of habitus to their practice and how those dispositions may have arisen from the designer's location in the related social structures. Through using the concept of habitus the research also aimed to reveal sources of capital relative to the individual designer and to their needs in practice. I explore how implicit knowledge is built up through the dispositions within each individual habitus that designers bring to their practice. Bourdieu's concept of field is used in the research to provide the framework with which to find out how designers in the case studies have built up dispositions which carry with them various kinds of cultural capital related to the positions taken in the graphic design field.

## Research design

In the study I have explored the extent to which the practice of graphic design and current graphic design culture are influenced by the practitioner's understanding of social contexts in relation to concept development. Qualitative methods were preferred in the research for examining the extent to which graphic designers tacitly or explicitly drew on knowledge of social context to inform conceptualisation processes in their practice. Qualitative research offers a multi-method in focus, being involving and interpretive, where "researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, p. 2). This method is suited to the objectives of the research where case studies are used. It also relates well to both the use of a reflexive approach and to the ethnographical methodology within the case studies.

### **Ethnography**

As an ethnographic study, the research involved a basic requirement for close observation of the designers interviewed, involving listening to conversations, asking questions about practice, and collecting data to understand the issues forming the focus of the research from which to develop a detailed case study (Bryman, 2001, p. 291). These measures provided a means to gather the data needed to understand how aspects of Bourdieu's model of dispositions, habitus, structure are reflected in each designer's practice. The research design used in the study involved Bourdieu's ethnographical approach which enlarges on these basic ideas (Bourdieu, 1999), by emphasising that the ethnographical data collected to develop a case study must also enable the researcher to describe the working situation encountered. This involved accounts of the subject's background, including family background, and their place in their social structure.

## **Reflexiveness**

The reflexive interview method between researcher and researched revealed the “social conditions which have made a particular way of being or doing possible” (Bourdieu, 1989, p.15), and also interrogated the thinking dispositions themselves, dispositions that were grounded in the social conditions. By adopting a reflexive approach to the research, I have attempted to step into the social situation of the designer, and be given a comprehension of who the designers were, based on “a grasp of the social conditions of which they are the product – the circumstances of life and the social mechanisms that affect the entire category to which an individual belongs and a grasp of the conditions associated with a given position in social space. . . *Understanding and explaining are one*” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 613).

Reflexivity denotes thinking about designers’ objectivity about their practice, or in Bourdieu’s terms the *objectification of objectivity* (1989. p. 99). Bourdieu uses this expression to explain how the researcher uses their own objective knowledge of aspects of practice that interview subjects are, themselves attempting to be objective about (1999, p. 625). Reflexivity called for focussing on the “simultaneous practical and theoretical problems that emerge from the particular interaction between investigator and person being questioned”, and “monitoring on the spot, the effects of the social structure in which it the interview is occurring” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 607). The differences in the kinds of capital, particularly linguistic capital between the interviewer and the subject, reflected the varying objective structure between interviewer and designer.

As a graphic designer as well as an academic, the questions put to another designer, were asked by someone capable of, as Bourdieu (1999) states:

sharing virtually all of the characteristics, capable of operating as major explanatory factors of that person’s practices and representations, (and linked to them by close familiarity), their questions springing from their dispositions, objectively attuned to those of the respondent . . . Researchers have some chance of being equal to their task only if they possess an extensive knowledge of the subject, sometimes acquired over a whole lifetime of research. (p. 609)

As an academic I understand the field, but I am situated in another field, graphic design, as well. The research provides two accounts that have implications for being able to see, on one hand, that the participants’ critique is different from mine as an academic and on the other that I can view their responses with understanding, as a graphic designer.

This reflexive approach operated upon both the researched and myself as researcher in two interdependent ways. It revealed the relationship between each designers’ dispositions and his or her practice, and how they reflected upon this relationship in ways that rebound back

upon the practice itself. Through my own background I could be objective about the apparent objectivity I saw in the interviews as a participant in the field rather than an observer. The research process itself generated this reflectivity in the designers taking part and raised questions about what the consequences were for their practice. This situation was an exceptional opportunity for, as Bourdieu (1999) observes,

respondents to testify; to make themselves heard, to carry their experience over from the private to the public sphere and to construct their own point of view about themselves and the world; to bring into the open the point within this world from which they see themselves; to become comprehensible and justified, not least for themselves.  
(p. 615)

## Case studies

Case study methods have been used to explore both the differing practice of graphic designers in respective positions in the graphic design field and related cultural capital for practice. By using case studies, the research has been able to explore interactive relationships between graphic design and the wider social context by analysing designers' practices in applying contextual understanding to achieve effective practice (Langrish, 1993; Scrivener, 2000). Both observation and reflectiveness are basic to case studies, through the way in which researchers "seek out both what is common and what is particular about the case" (Stake, 1994, p. 238), avoiding generalisation at the expense of overlooking 'unique' data. The uniqueness of each case can be found in the comparisons of data arising from the criteria in common with the ethnographic approach to the research.

The research set out to reveal the working methods, client base and achievements of the designer, reflected through his or her historical background in each case. Graphic designers were asked to reflect on their professional development over time, describing their personal backgrounds, lifestyle, and work cultures to see how these were reflected in practice. Physical settings comprising working environments, facilities and processes were seen as rich sources of ethnographic data relative to each case. Other social contexts, including economic, and political were considered to show the designer's positions in the field. These were observed through looking at how social contexts were reflected in conceptualisation, external contribution and influence on design community, client 'brand' development and social impacts of designer's work. The case studies provided a means of investigating each designer's design sources. It was expected that in the course of each interview, in the absence of explicit comparisons with other cases, because of the confidentiality of the subjects in the study, information about designers' design sources had to come either from

the researcher's own reflexiveness in making comparisons with cases, drawn from published data. The main informant was seen to be the graphic designer, although observations in the designer's workplace were seen to be a means of providing insights into how the designer approached the conceptual aspects of his or her work.

The cases provided a means of seeing any relationships that may exist in practice, between graphic designers' ability to reflect knowledge of social contexts in their practice and whether these designers were in a stronger creative position through having knowledge of theoretical aspects relative to design that lay outside the areas of formal studio knowledge. The case studies set out to provide insights into how each designer saw the social structure in which he or she existed, the influences of experience, the habitus of the design firm and how these were made possible. The studies were designed to show social structure relative to the designer's acquired habitus, and how each designer could carry through values that came out of experience, their personal habitus and the habitus of the firm. The cases were a suitable means to consider practice issues, details of the way that each designer's organization functioned and how they fitted within it.

### **Issues related to interviews**

The issues involved in the research were open to consideration and analysis that was assisted by viewing them through Bourdieu's conceptual 'field' framework. By focussing on issues we are drawn to understanding each case (Stake 1995, p.17). In each case enquiry could be directed at issues that were used as a means of understanding the forms of cultural capital accumulated by each designer as they had become socialised into their field of practice.

The preliminary process of constant information gathering is what enables the improvisation of pertinent questions, genuine hypothesis based on a provisional, intuitive representation of the generative formula specific to the interviewee, in order to push that formula toward revealing itself more fully. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 615)

### *Practice influenced by social contexts*

The interviews in the case studies sought to provide data about how each designer coped with social and economic issues over and above stylistic concerns, to see whether they were moving towards more use and understanding of knowledge of social contexts in conceptual aspects of their work. The interviews sought to see how this was manifest in their practice, taking into account the question of the impact of a move to a knowledge economy in external fields as well as in the field of graphic design<sup>42</sup> in which specialised knowledge available from digital networks and the Internet in particular, outside the formal knowledge of the studio, is involved.

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<sup>42</sup> Refer to p. 71 in Chapter Three.

Within the case study research, designers were questioned whether they gave any primacy to their own social values and motives over those of their clients. Graphic designers were asked to reflect on whether they saw themselves in a purely 'service' relationship with clients or whether they were strategic partners, able to advise on aspects of social responsibility.

#### *Positions within the field*

The research sought evidence of how designers could both reflect and influence consumer values as cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1991), and whether distinctions could be developed through their understanding of lifestyle and consumer culture. It also attempted to view how designers constructed their own identities by expressing style that in turn could reflect social knowledge as well as their ability to work with aesthetic problems.

It was necessary to establish whether designers were able to distinguish their expertise from 'non-designers', where graphic design could be reduced to simple production or mainly based on computing knowledge. It was important to see how graphic designers saw the changing knowledge requirements for strategic aspects of design relating to business, as cultural capital that could distinguish their expertise from that of non-designers. Out of this data it was expected that it would be possible to establish patterns for the significance of knowledge of social contexts to graphic design practice relative to positions in the field.

#### *Habitus of the field*

The ethnographic approach in the case studies was selected to determine whether graphic designers reflected on their practice and to see what the relevance of existing theoretical knowledge about design was to their practice. It sought to understand to what extent tacit knowledge was sufficient or insufficient for practice and whether the designer's own background and dispositions affected their practice at a number of levels. In Bourdieu's theories links can be seen between habitus and the expression of taste and style<sup>43</sup> and where personal distinction requires cultural capital arising from the habitus of individual social space.

The research was directed to looking more widely at how habitus expressed through dispositions could affect other cultural capital for design conceptualisation. Interviews attempted to trace the extent to which designers could recognise reference to social contexts in their practice, made manifest in the creative work that they produced.

The studies revealed each designer's dispositions expressed in practice enabling comparisons to be made between what designers discussed as their beliefs, and what they

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<sup>43</sup> Refer to p. 50 in Chapter Three.



actually expressed through practice. Links between habitus of the firm and practice issues were sought to reveal insights into how organizations functioned, how individual designers fitted within the habitus of the firm, what the group habitus was and how it may be reflected in how those in the design firm worked and the values that they shared.

### **Reflectivity by graphic designers in the research**

Graphic designers in the research were asked to reflect on their practice, within the interview process and to state where knowledge of social contexts entered into conceptual processes. They were also asked to reflect on the knowledge of social contexts that they had acquired in various situations including family backgrounds and lifestyles and in the cultures of other design firms that may have generated understanding of the social contexts that may have informed their work. The designer's reflection on practice was of value in determining whether they placed value on theoretically informed practice. The interviews in the case studies were thus seen as induced and accompanied self-analysis (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 609) in the designer's own recognition of aspects of theory that related to their practice. For example, the interviews attempted to discover whether graphic designers engaged in explicit reflection on their practice that could be articulated in a problematic way, for their own guidance and conveyed as shared knowledge to others as theoretical beliefs and concepts. Aspects of theory and practice were interrogated through reflecting on practice to determine whether the creative practices of graphic designers were largely implicit, arising from personal or group habitus, or whether their explanation could be made explicit. In this way, the designer's understanding of social contexts could be identified in the interviews by both interviewer and designer alike.

## **Description of data collection methods**

### **Selection of participants**

The graphic design community reflects a diverse group of designers who variously consider themselves to comprise an industry or a profession. In developing as a field, graphic design has continued to call for varying knowledge for practice reflected in the discourses that have arisen<sup>44</sup>. To focus on the way that graphic designers have become designers and their reflections on it, as well as how they have constructed themselves through their own interpretations of their history and experience, it was necessary to select a varied sample of graphic designers to participate in the case studies comprising both designers known to me and designers referred by colleagues. The cases selected, represent different facets of the

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<sup>44</sup> Refer to Chapter Three, p. 54.

graphic design field<sup>45</sup> and out of that, different reflections of the social structure inherent in design. The cross-section of designers involved in the cases was intended to provide contrasting examples of how the cultural capital arising from having knowledge of social contexts can be recognised in practice.

### **Interviews and data collection**

The research group was selected from New Zealand graphic design practices to reflect both the diversity of the field and the differing interests of graphic designers within it<sup>46</sup>. The size of the selected research group reflects a diverse sample of graphic design practice in terms of experience and fields of interest. The designers in the group were at various stages in their careers, with varying levels of accomplishment. Participants included two recently graduated graphic design students, the principal of a large graphic design practice, a graphic designer in a technology based web-design company, a senior graphic designer with at least thirty years experience, a sole practitioner and an art director from a medium-sized company. Of the seven case study subjects five are male and two female.

The size of the research group has been kept small following Patton (1990) who asserts that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative enquiry. "Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the enquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done with the time available and the resources" (Patton cited Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, p. 123).

The interviews were conducted between 2003-2004. The graphic designers selected for the research were representative of the diversity of those in the field. Importance was placed on ensuring a spread of ages, professional experience, areas of participation and some (even if not an even) gender balance. The designers selected were all working in New Zealand. They were either known to me prior to the research or referrals from colleagues. There were three interviews for each case study, each following the different emphasis described below, although in some cases the nature of conversations led to discussion that did not fit neatly into the order intended. The plan allowed for the revisiting of participants, but further interviews were not needed, because the data gathered was sufficient for the study. In the first interview information was acquired about the studio setting of the graphic designer's practice, the designer's personal background including family life, early education and social structure. The extent to which the graphic designer reflected upon these ideas and sources outside of the studio context was discussed with a view to understanding how the designer saw the social structure in which he or she existed.

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<sup>45</sup> Refer Chapter Three p. 71.

<sup>46</sup> Refer Chapter Three p. 71.

In the second interview, the influences of individual professional experience as designers, the influence of the culture and practices of the design firm were discussed. The interview sought to explore how designers carried through values that had come out of experience, out of their personal habitus and the habitus of the firm, to their professional career histories. The habitus of the firm could be linked to practice issues concerning how the organization functioned and how the designer fitted within it. The interview aimed to reveal the group habitus reflected in how both designer and staff worked and the values that they shared.

In the third interview the graphic designer was asked to reflect upon the idea sources implicated in the resolution of a series of graphic design projects undertaken by the graphic designer and to discuss questions and issues that arose from the researcher's response to the data acquired in the first two interviews. The graphic designer provided evidence of the resources used in the conceptual processes related to work described in the case study. In the second and third interviews both the designer and myself, as the researcher, could be reflexive about the subject's practice and be offered theoretical insights into the contextual knowledge relevant to the designer's practice (Bourdieu, 1989).

Importance was placed on gathering information about briefing, client supplied data, sources of reference materials and aspects of research related to social contexts relevant to work selected, within the parameters of the research. Evidence of conceptualisation processes, reliance on tacit understandings, client interventions, levels of reference drawn upon during the conceptual processes were all noted and related in each individual case study. The three interviews were tape-recorded. The tape transcriptions were compared with separate notes and photocopies of data surrounding the conceptualisation in each case over the duration of the time in which the interviews were carried out. The ethics guidelines set out by Curtin University of Technology were followed in both seeking approval for interviews and conducting interviews. The identities of interviewees were also protected by changing their names, in the case studies presented in Chapter Five.

## **Data Analysis**

The cases selected represent different facets of the design field and, out of that, different reflections of the social structure inherent in design. Each case is substantive, demonstrating themes related to prevailing literature. The critiques of design history and design studies within the academic design discourse, the critiques from the design education discourse, the alternative graphic design discourse and the commentaries from the professional discourse have all provided theoretical points of view about the significance of knowledge of social context in graphic design practice. The data from the cases provides a response to these

viewpoints. Data from interviews is analysed in Chapter Six where the information from each designer is mapped according to selected criteria. To locate variations in the importance placed on drawing on knowledge of social context, subjects of case studies are classified according to their reliance on implicit as well as explicit knowledge of social contexts as well the importance placed on this knowledge in their practice. The case study methods also allowed an analysis of the relevance of contextual knowledge to understand different kinds of design practice reflected in subjects' positions in the graphic design field.

#### Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is used in the thesis research to make sense of each graphic designer's world through what they have to say about themselves in the interviews. As Bryman observes, "there is no one version in discourse analysis" (2008, p. 500). I have chosen to follow Bourdieu's realist understanding of the term that differs from Potter (1997), for example, who assumes an anti realist and technical use of the term (Bryman, 2001, p. 360). In Bourdieu's terms, it is superficial to analyse discourse without reference to the related field, or to fail to take into account the social conditions surrounding and influencing practice (Thompson, 1991, p. 29). Johnson's analogy in the field of literature emphasises the importance of recognising the underlying social conditions to an analysis.

By isolating texts from the social conditions of their production, circulation and consumption, formalist analysis eliminates from consideration the social agent as producer (eg the writer), ignores the objective social relations in which the literary practice occurs and avoids the questions of precisely what constitutes a work of art at a given historical moment and the value of the work, which constantly changes in accordance with structural changes in the field. Internal, explication, furthermore, ignores (...) 'what makes a given work a literary work' is a complex social and institutional framework which authorises and sustains literature and literary practice. (Johnson, 1993, p. 11-12)

Discourse analysis is used in an everyday general sense as Bourdieu himself advocates (1999). Out of the wide field of discourse analysis has been taken the particular approach that suits the analysis that I am doing. The designers' conversations are analysed in order to find out what each designer makes of the world they are living in, but in doing that I have taken a broad interpretation of transcriptions. Analysis is done within the discipline of graphic design to legitimate my research in my own terms, but I have reconstructed the available processes and techniques for my own purposes and given them a language of my own. My analysis reads into each discourse, the contingent structure of the interview and respondent's interaction, as well as the invisible structures in the social space relative to the subject's experience. When the conversation draws on prior knowledge of the realities

concerned, the research can bring out the realities it intends to record (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 618).

### **A realist approach**

Bourdieu's realist approach set out in *The Weight of the World* has been used because of its relevance to my work. To assume a realist approach involves understanding, as Bourdieu (1999) states, "that it is only when it rests on prior knowledge of the realities concerned, that research can bring out the realities it intends to record" (p. 618). In adopting his approach to conversation analysis, inevitably, case studies combine both commentary and analysis. The task has been to read each transcription and reflect on it, engage with it and communicate how meaning is being constructed and negotiated. My analysis reflects the way that people express through the interviews, their tacit understandings of practice and what has shaped these understandings. In presenting these designers' conversations, no attempt has been made to correct the grammar or to change the conversation into prose.

### **Theorisation of case commentaries**

Because of the centrality of the concepts of field, practice and habitus, it impossible to write a Bourdieuan analysis in my field of interest without making any reference to these concepts (refer Bourdieu, 1993) even though in the use of these concepts in data collection and its analysis, these theoretical terminologies are used as a means of viewing data rather than being viewed as an end in themselves.

Bourdieu's theoretical model provides a means to consider certain areas of the world and makes these problematic areas worthy of investigation. It provides some useful concepts that focus on what needs to be attended to but no more than that. The conversations in the cases provide a point of engagement in a conversation about the questions of practical or theoretical importance to the objectives of the thesis. I have applied the theory lightly making sure that what I have to say about these designers and their practice comes through.

Through the interviews and the commentaries developed from them it has been possible to understand the way that that graphic designers have become graphic designers, through their reflections on practice and how they have constructed themselves through their own interpretations of their history. Knowledge of each subject's practice builds on earlier research interviews with the same respondent (Bourdieu, 1999).

The reflexive approach to commentary writing in which the transcriptions have been interpreted and critiqued on the basis of my own "feel" or "eye" for the data (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 608) has been possible through an essential combined knowledge of the subject area, acquired over years of studio experience and also by a theoretical understanding of the

sociological aspects of the subjects practice as identified by Bourdieu. My interests are more in those substantive questions about how people are shaped by their environment in such a way that they, without very much apparent theoretical reflection are able to produce the kinds of designs that they think are appropriate for a given client or situation and what kinds of knowledge should be provided in education or experience in order to shape the knowledge that they draw on. Most of the people that have been interviewed have very little formal theoretical base to their practice and any theoretical kinds of underpinnings that they may have liked to draw on in practice come largely from the business world. There is importance in the developed critique of those companies in the commentaries, where their influence relates to the designer concerned. It has been encountered as a discourse and examined through the analysis of the cases via the related themes in the commentaries in Chapter Five.

The cases selected represent different facets of the design field and out of that, different reflections of the social structure inherent in design. There is an approach developed and used to show contrasts when the seven cases are brought together. The interviews with designers each reflect different situations in the field and different approaches to practice providing a different theoretical discussion drawing on Bourdieu's framework to make sense of the data.

As the researcher I have had a substantive interest in what people were saying, how they were saying it and what emerged from it, rather than in the method context, that conversation analysis in the narrow sense would require, which is to do with how the power in a particular episode is maintained. Silverman (1993) and others find their particular interest best suited in a fine-grained analysis of an interchange between respondents and the individuals that they interact with. The commentaries in this research analyse the cases by going beyond a descriptive report of the data recorded in the interviews to interrogate the designer's own narrative and treat it as problematic for the purpose of the study. The cases are integrated so that the commentaries contribute an analysis of them.

## **Conclusions**

The conversations within the interviews are analysed in terms of the way in which they related to matters of practical or theoretical importance within the graphic design field. The way in which conversation analysis is used follows oral history and reflections on biography more than formal conversation analysis in the specialised formal way that Silverman (1993, p. 120) defines it, which is to do with meta questions about the world. The commentaries draw together the Bourdieuan concepts related to issues of the field and the

forms of capital most closely related to practice. The realist approach adopted in the research has enabled me view the data in the context of practice, enabling me to see what themes unite the discourses of the interviews and how they all fit together.

The analysis of the case studies provides substantive arguments addressing themes found in the prevailing literature from the design discourses presented in Chapter Three. These include aspects of taste and lifestyle in consumer culture, the significance of knowledge identified by literature on the knowledge economy and the impacts of marketing knowledge and business strategy on practice knowledge. The commentaries provide insights into the development of habitus, the structures of the field and the degree to which the structures of the field reward designers whose work reveals the embodiment of a habitus structured by prevalent concepts and practice. In the discussion in Chapter Six these themes are brought together in a discussion of the significance of knowledge of social contexts in the graphic design field by considering the structure of the field, position taking within it, the genesis of graphic designers habitus, and the related cultural capital, viewed through the themes of the chapter.

## Chapter Five – Case studies



## **Gary:**

### Looking beyond media news: implicit knowledge for design practice

In this account, consideration is given to various ways that knowledge, beyond the formal knowledge needed to work with expertise in solving the visual aspects of design problems, is implicated in practice. In the study Gary shows the difficulties he found locating the theoretical and contextual knowledge that underlay the formal aspects of his practice. He had little difficulty in discussing reference sources for visual aspects of his work, but the sources of knowledge and inspiration that informed his work appeared to be much harder to recognise. On the other hand, his work clearly showed an understanding of consumer values that went beyond formal aspects of design like typography or colour choice, for example. The case shows how knowledge and values crucial to his work and yet less obvious to him, were derived, not only from an awareness of economic and political change understood at the level of media news, but also from several other sources including the field of business,<sup>47</sup> and habitus<sup>48</sup> at various levels. As well recognising these sources, consideration has been given to tracing the designer's own implicit knowledge resources, and the contribution that staff with differing backgrounds have made to the work of the firm.

#### **The design office**

Gary is a well-established graphic designer and the owner of a medium-sized graphic design company employing six staff. He was in his early fifties and had a wealth of experience spanning over twenty-five years, in most aspects of graphic design practice, through employment with a larger design company earlier in his career and latterly in the development of his own design company. His office was located in the centre of a business district and, unlike many graphic designers who prefer to work from home, Gary placed importance on situating his business in a downtown city location. The single floor office space was made up of the usual amenities and facilities expected in a professionally set up graphic design office, including a modest board room, a small office for himself, a reception space, and an open plan studio space with up-to-date computers and outputting peripheral computer related equipment.

His office also had Internet access to the businesses with whom his company worked. They were essential to communication and efficient studio production. The décor of this office

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<sup>47</sup> Examples of the way in which the knowledge supplied by clients both historically and in each respective brief, informed his concepts was evident in the work case studies he discussed in the interviews

<sup>48</sup> Bourdieu's concept of habitus is discussed in page 69, Chapter Three.

space was very low-key. Pastel colours and wood panelling with aluminium joinery predominated. No examples of recent successful work were visible on the wall space. Instead, attestation to the calibre of work and recent successes of his firm were validated by several *Best Awards*<sup>49</sup> certificates showing the classes of work and projects that earned his company recognition amongst his peers and also made a statement about the calibre of work that the company could produce. The other studio staff, usually up to three other graphic designers, were located in the work space behind the reception. Gary's office and the firm's board-room provided a psychological space between the staff workspace and the rest of the floor occupied by his company. Gary's office had full floor to ceiling glazing, providing excellent visibility of all traffic coming into the office and at the same time establishing recognition of him as the presiding identity of his design firm.

### **The designer's background**

As an individual and as a designer, Gary revealed dispositions that carried with them various kinds of cultural capital relative to his practice. These dispositions had arisen in his early years, through social structures related to education, in early professional experience and through lifestyle. Each of these stages provides a useful means to consider both the cultural capital needed in individual practice and also the cultural capital called for in the wider field of graphic design. His background reflects both established moral values on one hand and a tendency to unconventional standpoints on the other. Central to these dispositions is the strong influence of his parents, showing how the development of habitus may be attributed to "a long but subtle process of inculcation beginning in the family" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 2). The attitudes and behaviour that he described show a readiness to accept their beliefs and behaviour, in various ways relative to moral and political positions. His observation that "they believed in doing what was right, rather than what was the norm", carried with it references to both the strong moral code founded in their Christian values and how these were applied to political issues of the day. That his parents had expressed trust in him signified an assumption that his attitudes would be acceptable to them, but importantly, it established a need for him to develop his own values and to stay within the boundaries that he knew his parents expected of him.

I suppose my upbringing has had a huge affect on my lifelong interest and values and it's really those values that I suppose developed from my parents initially. That I can easily trace back to why I am what I am and my parents were, I suppose, when I was brought up in the mid sixties, where they were, they would think a little bit left of centre, politically. They certainly believed in doing what was right as

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<sup>49</sup> *Best Awards* is an annual event organised by the Designers Institute of New Zealand (DINZ), recognising work judged by local and international designers, to be amongst the best in New Zealand.

opposed to what was the norm. That came through initially from our church, which we were brought up in, whether we liked it or not right through until I was a teenager. I was expected to go to church on Sundays or youth group and that's had a very direct effect on where I stand on things. My parents' political beliefs also affected the way I thought. For instance I didn't like having to have my hair cut short so I attempted to push the rules as far as I could get away with. And I was largely supported at that by my parents as opposed to the school's line which was much harsher, but my parents thought that it had nothing to do with . . . you know . . . how good a person or student I was. And they didn't put undue pressure on me whereas most of my friends' parents would insist. So little things like that I suppose, where you were given responsibility where . . . I think my parents probably gave me more, or they were very trusting. They had trusted in my judgement from a very early age . . . that I would do what was right and that trust at times surprised even them, but because I had so much rope I respected it, and I stayed within the boundaries that I knew and that my parents entrusted me with.

The influence of his parents and his upbringing can be seen in Gary's view of a changing society of his teenage years compared with present society. In this comparison he observed a move away from a society in which there was a greater sense of community to a contemporary society characterised by individualism and self-interest. His beliefs mirrored his parents' belief that the interests of the individual should not override the interests of community.

I grew up as a teenager in those 1970s where we used to march against conscription, where we used to march to support abortion, women's rights, you know, all kinds of things . . . if it was the rugby tours . . . whatever political problems there seemed to be at the time. And they were things we thought were about bettering our society. They weren't about your own personal wages or someone being charged too much for the rates. They were less selfish ideals, I feel. And I suppose all those values, if I look at it holistically from the outside, and I haven't really thought about it. I think it has a real influence on the way that my career has developed.

A strong work ethic and acclamation for achievement is apparent in his father's values and later in his own values at school. Artistic interests were also there from very early on in his lifetime, visible in an early interest in music and drawing.

My father, from a farming background, believed in hard work. He always worked hard, and he was never idle and to our endless frustration he would never sit down and watch TV or just quietly read a book. He would always be doing something and it would annoy him if others weren't. I did inherit the enjoyment of working hard and standing back and seeing the result, and that result being acclaimed. People standing back and saying "well done, that's great, thank you so much", that's been a

help and I suppose that acclamation is something that I have constantly looked for in my career. It started off when the teacher would ask you to do a drawing on the blackboard to help with a particular lesson, because you were able to do it more easily than she was perhaps and people said “You’re talented, that’s great”. So I always enjoyed the pats on the back for being good at drawing and that carried through into my career, so I think that helped develop my feelings that I wanted to be a designer, although in the early days I wanted to be an architect, because I didn’t understand that there was a career in graphic design; there probably wasn’t.

Dating back to when he was seven or eight years old, Gary had recognised that the architect designed family home he lived in was different from others in the street. This was significant to him, and he considered that it had influenced him to tend towards a design career. Family physical environment is shown to play a part in personal interests, as he made clear in this account.

There were definitely things in the way of interests that we had but I think the home that we were brought up in had a huge effect on the fact that I became interested in design, because we lived in a house that was well designed. The architecture was special. We felt special, being able to live in what was a special house. It wasn’t an expensive house. It was built on a very limited budget. But it was special in that it had been designed. And the fact that it had been designed by a very prominent architect, as opposed to all our neighbours who lived in seemingly ‘spec’-type homes which looked much more ‘State’-like. We felt that we were different and we liked being different. We always felt that our house was special. That’s the first time I can remember thinking, “I want to be an architect!” We were always drawing. Me and my younger brother . . . always drawing houses and cars, because we didn’t have TV until I was twelve or thirteen.

While the internal influences of home life engendered an awareness of design and in particular, drawing, outside the influences of the physical family environment he was able to develop values about his external world. His preference for the ‘rougher-edged’ Rolling Stones in his teenage years distinguished his music preferences from that of his contemporaries, as did his growing awareness of a developing cynicism that they did not share.

I had a close group of friends who were heavily into music. I was never a musician myself, but I have always loved music and I always like alternative music not necessarily what everyone else liked. It wasn’t until the mid 60s that I was buying music or getting into it. My first long-playing record I ever bought was Rolling Stones ‘*Beggars Banquet*’ and that was 1967, I suppose. To me the Beatles weren’t naughty enough. I liked the slightly rougher edge of the Rolling Stones, it probably carries through now that I love all kinds of music, but I particularly like more the groups that

are pushing to the edge than the normal range. I took it for granted that my contemporaries would all have similar values to my own and it was a bit of a shock to realise that they didn't, and I don't think that I really came to terms with the fact that society didn't all have similar values until quite late in my teens – that we didn't all want the same things . . . as time has gone on. I don't know what it is. I don't know whether in those days, we as a society were less cynical. I was certainly less cynical.

Gary had a sense that social values were changing. This cynicism was sufficiently important for him to offer a critique of contemporary issues, even though the discussion was centred on his teenage years. He expressed concern that the reliability of media reporting was becoming increasingly questionable.

Now I certainly don't believe what I read in the papers or certainly what I see on TV. Whereas twenty years ago . . . thirty years ago, I believed what I saw written, I believed what I heard on the radio and saw on TV and almost believed it unquestioningly, but these days when I hear what is happening with Iraq and Blair, and Bush, my automatic reaction is not to believe as opposed to belief. I actually think that there has been so much spin put on you just don't believe what is being said.

### **Social structures and education**

Gary's design education involved a search for recognition through his creative work. He referred to the importance of originality in his work compared with the work of others in his course but his heavy reliance on the images and layout conventions available through the design annuals like *Graphis* and *Modern Publicity*, that were his principal printed reference source, came through in the interview. The design methods of Bruce Archer (1965) had already been applied to product design, but graphic design of the period tended to the eclectic and derivative. In his design school education, there was little emphasis on building the resources that could have been used in dealing with the difficult area of developing ideas for concepts, other than through the broadening influence of his peer group who had what he described as "a wide range of interests". If we accept Wenger's view that individuals learn through involvement in their community of practice (1998, p. 269), then these interests may have influenced his creative work. He had difficulty, however, in discussing how he was able to relate them to his coursework in graphic design.

To be a graphic designer it's critical to have a wide range of interests and so at the same time as studying at design school, I was interested in what was happening in the fashion school. I was interested in the music scene and architecture. I was interested in all of the other wider side of the design disciplines. Product design was an interest of mine. Our design school was alongside the product design school. We had a close relationship with what they were doing, and I think that to be a well

rounded designer you actually have to have an interest . . . which drags you through those things, through your friendships.

This was the period immediately before a move away from a reliance on the values of the modernist international style in typography, an approach practised by his lecturer and still relevant to the professional design practice of the day. It required knowledge of the modernist principles expressed most visibly in the ‘Swiss School’ and learned through awareness of published examples in design annuals. There was an inevitable eclecticism in depending on this approach. Gary was quite clear about the absence of any theoretical problem solving or conceptual thinking base to the graphic design teaching of the time, instead relying heavily on his interests, his life experience and his background, as a basis to his formal work.

My recollection when I think back thirty odd years is that as a student I was trying to do design work that impressed my peers and teachers and I largely did that in private way from the school, basically because I was trying as much as possible to do something in an original way and I think this is the wrong way of going about it but it was the ego-driven way that I went about it. I think that in those days, there were huge influences of what other design work was being done in England and America so the design annuals were something that we looked at and we would have been influenced by, although we were very fierce of not copying - but certainly they were influential.

### **Early professional experience – habitus and capital**

The education system is significant in the process of building up cultural capital, tending to cultivate a certain familiarity with legitimate culture and inculcate a certain attitude to creative work (Bourdieu, 1993). The habitus of the design school and the interests of the lifestyle surrounding it, afforded cultural capital that Gary could draw on in his early professional years. However, it is difficult to establish clear links between these sources of cultural capital and his graphic design practice, in the absence of responses that could have revealed knowledge of these through the methodologies, attitudes or even reference to interests in his practice of graphic design in his early employment, other than in the examples he gave in music and in typography.

I think, starting out, what was a huge influence on me was what was actually what was happening in music. At the time album covers were a huge influence on design and they kind of led fashion, the whole marketing of music to teenagers and the pop culture which went with it was a huge influence which, with the downsizing to CDs, had largely been lost, and increasingly so where with the Internet these days, where students these days are mixing their own music and they don’t go out and buy these, whereas in my day, going out and getting an album . . . and what was

happening on album design was actually quite an influence. When it came down to ways of problem solving that didn't rear its head in a formalised way in my career until I joined [names design company] where the original principals worked in the UK and brought back some of that [names design company] way of thinking because in [names design company] I think that there the agency way of doing things was something which influenced them.

The formal aspects of typography learnt at design school were carried through to his work when Gary became employed as a graphic designer. These skills assisted him in his initial work in book design, which depended heavily on typography. In keeping with the high importance given to formal values by many graphic designers, he regarded typography as indivisible from problem solving in graphic design and the examples of typography published in design annuals were an essential reference, even if the related criteria was largely visual.

His first design employment offered opportunities to acquire technical knowledge and an increasing awareness of commercial realities, both of which served to build on his design school education. Subsequent employment offered experience in designing with an approach more akin to the advertising agencies where more 'marketing style' conceptual thinking is applied to practice.

I really see that we are marketing through graphics and that communication is the critical thing and essentially, we are selling. In the '80s I used to get quite a lot of letters from Iran with people wanting to emigrate, and they needed to emigrate – they needed to get a job in New Zealand. And of course that was impossible for us to offer them and their job description was always 'propagandist'. In the direct translation they are probably not far off what we actually do. That was the explanation of getting a message across and marketing. In their culture it was called propaganda. Whilst there are the people who might come from the pure design side of things, there are still designers out there that have more of that focus. I talk about [names designer] who's a typographer who is still a great problem solver but she does it through typographic means – very energetically. It's almost a fine art form. It's graphic design, not what we're doing where we're solving problems on a daily basis in graphic ways, but *it's* less of a marketing approach.

### **Adjusting to change in the field**

Gary's working methods had to change for him to be able to respond to changes in the graphic field in the period that followed. The approach to the largely manual visualisation of typographical design required in his first job held little resemblance to the digitally based operation of the firm he later established. With this change had come the need to reassess what relevant knowledge had been needed, how it could be found and who could furnish it.

In the following account he describes the impacts of a move to identity and later 'branding' work and of the specialisation as he moved into a larger design company with greater marketing focus in their concept work. Change was reflected in the advent of team participation and in the reconfigured working methods to accommodate and exploit the opportunities it provided. The most visible change was seen in the impacts of the computer on production, in the new approaches to visualisation and in the obligation to either learn or stand aside from the technical learning curve relative to these new methods.

In the period from his early work experience in the 1970s until the present period, awareness of graphic design by business (Glaser, 1997) had increased significantly. With this change had come a divergent range of client companies in terms of their scale of operations and types of business. The adequacy of concentrating on layout and visual skills at the start of his career had given way to the demands for better understanding of business issues as they affected design practice, particularly in knowledge of marketing, management and brand development. Even survival in a constantly changing profession indicated Gary's facility to adjust his working methods and related knowledge base to cope with these developments. The awards and professional standing that Gary had achieved both personally and through the contribution of those within his firm were testimony to his ability to cope and excel in situations of constant change in the graphic design field. Through these years and the changing roles he has played, Gary has been able to follow a successive path from 'fledgling designer' to creative director of his own graphic design firm. In the following account he traces his trajectory and makes reference to the demands on him to change his approach to graphic design practice.

Over the last 30 years, my way of working has changed, to do with the environment that I have been working from. So from the first eight years when I was primarily in publication design, and designing books, everything from cover to the internals of books – that was the majority of my work. Then in 1983 when I changed jobs, I moved to a larger design company. At that time the majority of its work was in the publication area, but the industry started to change locally and what was beginning to happen was that the focus that had been on publication design started to move to branding. So whether that was corporate identity (which a lot of it was) originally, then in later years it started to move into product packaging and branding in a wider sense. In those early years at the design company, the majority of our work was still publication work. Then after ten years at that firm, I split off to set up my own design company and really my focus changed from working with the largest "corporates" in the country to working with anyone basically who needed design. It's one of those situations where in the previous design company I had the luxury of having a large team around me who helped source work and brought work into the company. I think my role there changed



from the early years when I was designing and doing finished art preparing everything and sending it off to the printer, to the latter years where the computer age really started to impact on that job and I was doing less and less finished artwork. I no longer retained the skills to do every part of the job. That was the biggest change for me.

However, in the early 90s, that was no longer possible. I lost the skills to keep up with the finished art side of things, which was good for me. The majority of my work in the latter years of my time at the design company, was working with teams of designers and whilst I may have still been doing some of the 'brainwork', solving problems, and still a certain amount of design, I was also probably spending a large amount of my work in managerial things and managing clients and staff. So less and less of my time was doing design.

### **Habitus of the firm**

Gary had built up cultural capital for graphic design practice through his design school education, from the 'apprentice-master' early working relationship in his first design employment, through the period of employment in the marketing-led design agency and more recently in his own firm. Through his discussion about the practice issues in his firm, we are given insights into how the organization functioned, how individual designers fitted within the habitus of this firm, how the group habitus might have been reflected in how those in the design firm worked and the values that they shared. The key question relative to habitus of the firm is the nature of the knowledge that staff drew upon and how had it been generated. In considering group rather than individual practice, attention needs to be given to how each designer could carry through values that had come out of experience, to contribute to the habitus of the firm. Gary was ready to acknowledge the knowledge and experience brought into the firm by recent graduates and the intermediate-level graphic designers he employed.

Generally, I will hand the jobs over to one of the designers. And then I will keep a watching brief, looking over their shoulder, once they've been briefed on the job, and my influence might be quite minimal in the perfect scenario. I'll be pleased with the work that they are doing, I'll comment on it. We'll do a little bit of brainstorming . . . you know. "Maybe if you tried this, maybe if you tried that . . ." and it's very much an overseeing role. There are other jobs where, it's happened a few times, but not very often, a staff member will be struggling with a job and I will take a more dominant role in solving that design or it might be decided that because of timing and things, I will just do the job totally myself. Certainly there are a few jobs over the last few years where because of my experience in an area or interest in an area, or because of work load in the studio, I'll do the total job myself. I can't do everything. My staff are much more computer savvy. They run the programmes. I have to ask them for their help on a continuing basis because I don't do that all day.

When staff were recruited, personal values were seen to be as important as the applicant's visual work and capabilities. The experience Gary had built up through practice was different from that of the people he had working around him. He was conscious of the need to convey values that he held essential and important for the reputation and survival of his company, to other designers and supporting staff. He needed to be aware of the backgrounds and the sensibilities of people who were going to take over the delegated work and how their differing backgrounds could contribute to resolving each design problem.

These days to be a good designer I don't think it's anywhere near as important to be great at drawing – as it was. I think it's much more important to be a good communicator to be a good designer. What I am looking for when I interview prospective staff are people who are prepared to listen and aren't moving from a point where they think they know everything. What I need is to be able to work with them – a team. I am looking less from a creative end product that they might show in a portfolio, which will have all kinds of influences in it. I am looking more for people I can communicate with and I feel actually understand a problem and have shown the ability to have actually solved a problem in a smart way. But often, staff will end up with a job because they've arrived at the right time.

### **Communication of values**

Besides using a design brief to frame each problem (Schön, 1983), Gary used the brief to communicate values that needed to be conveyed. It was important to recognise aspects of design methodology, awareness of visual values, and the required staff backgrounds, that might be needed to accomplish the work capably. He also realised that he had to consider going beyond merely giving a brief to individual staff and critiquing what they had each done to answer it. In addition, he needed to ensure that the contribution to creative work arising from each individual's background could be exploited in the resolution of work and working as a group seemed to achieve this. A recurring theme in Gary's responses was the importance he placed on team participation and contribution in the problem solving process, which was demonstrated clearly in the following account of his own firm's identity re-design.

One of the trickiest projects for me to manage over the last few years has been designing our own identity. I wanted the process to be an inclusive process to staff, which made it extremely difficult. In the end and rightly or wrongly, what I decided to do was to open it up to everyone. It gave everyone an opportunity to contribute and we set times that we would meet and talk where a particular designer's ideas would take them, including myself. It was extremely hard. One of the designers who's a more pragmatic person went off on his own. He was convinced that what he was doing was brilliant and what ended up happening was that one guy worked

alone largely and didn't want input from the others and other three of us ended up hooking on to two different ideas from two different people and actually creating something that was, in the end, what was successful, and we were all agreed that it was successful but it ended up being very much a team effort. In the end even the person who had worked largely on his own actually agreed that it was the way forward and it ended up being very much a team effort, but it was a very hard one to manage. It was very good for the team to have to go through that but it was difficult for me because my natural inclination as a person is to try to keep everybody happy and feeling empowered and part of the process.

### **The significance of a broad knowledge base for practice**

Gary had concerns that graphic designers increasingly needed to be knowledgeable about broader issues separate from the visual decision-making processes that he saw occupying much of designers' working time. He readily expressed an awareness of the need to be better informed about the world, to be able to solve design problems and he was critical of designers who did not share this concern.

I think that to be a good designer you need to have very good social knowledge. You have to understand the society you are living in and certainly the economic and social aspects of that society and what is driving it, and I think that it's critical to doing your job well and I suspect that if we step back we would actually say good designers are people who can be and are in a position to be social influences. I have been frustrated in the past, working with other designers, who have no interest in society or have little interest in what other people are doing. They show no obvious interest in fashion, no interest in music, and I am thinking "How can you do your job properly if you have so little interest in what large chunks of our society are doing?"

Looking at this position more closely it is clear that Gary's interest was in learning about society through contextual enquiry at the level of magazines and news media reports. Like many designers, he had, even with modest computer skills, made the Internet a prime source of news.

Graphic designers are always gathering and are always interested in things that are visual, so I've always looked at and read magazines. They haven't always seemed the most obvious magazines for graphic designers to read, I don't read many international design journals for instance. Whilst I would find them interesting, I don't make enough time in my day to read them. I certainly read bits of the local design literature that comes across my desk. But the most obvious change that has happened in the last decade has been the fact that you've got a computer sitting on your desk in front of you all of the time and with the Internet there, that communication is always open. So when I am eating my sandwich, I am more

likely to be reading Russell Brown's *Hard News*,<sup>50</sup> than actually reading a magazine. Because it's daily. Its instant, it's given me links to other links which handle the news. It is a local site, which puts you into what's happening globally on a political and social scale. So it's news. Hard news.

Gary was aware of the importance of the media, but offered no clear examples of how this media knowledge could be traced to concept development. He saw on one hand, importance in having knowledge about lifestyle and social issues but in his response there was little consciousness of anything that related to the need to have this knowledge to be able to design for clients, beyond thinking about visual things and thinking of design process. Even though, in the following example, implicit knowledge was used to make value judgements about colour suitability, he stopped at recognising how he may actually have another resource of social knowledge that he needed to draw on in conceptual processes underlying the decisions about formal aspects of his work. There was a visual or design element which he understood, but he did not discuss or identify a social element in anything but a media context. He did not take it further and discuss aspects of society that affected peoples' attitudes, and relate this back to the communication tasks in graphic design practice, and yet in the following example he was very clear about the suitability of the colour he had chosen. The choice of pink went beyond a liking for any particular colour. The reason for his decision to select pink was not mentioned, only the emphatic position that he had made the right colour decision. What really happened was that through asserting his own taste, understanding the connotations of the colour for its intended audience and understanding the perceptions they may have about the colour, pink was seen to be the right choice. This decision was not the result of formal experimentation as much as the calling up of past histories of experience of colour in the social setting of fashion. The expression of taste, it is argued by Bourdieu (1984), reveals links between habitus and the cultural capital built up through it. Taste is central to designers' discourse. Gary's application of taste relative to colour selection and the connotations inferred by it were clearly at variance with those of his client who did not share the same cultural capital or, it appears, the same discourse.

Early in my career in the early eighties, I designed a book cover for a book [about Fragrances] and I used the strongest pink you could possibly use on this cover, alongside an illustration that I did and I thought "this is a lovely strong piece of design" and the editorial team at work loved it, and the marketing manager of the company bawled me out and said "this cover is disgusting! You've made my job

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<sup>50</sup> Russell Brown is a media commentator whose *Hard News* is a web version of commercial radio station news started in 2002. "Hard News", is itself, language from the news media and refers to stories with some substance (Houghton-Mifflin, 2000).

impossible! We'll never be able to shift this book" Anyway, a year later he apologised and it really took that long because it was really the bloke, he found it difficult to sell a book with a pink cover. The reality was the book sold itself. The work that we had done meant that that book was extremely successful and reprinted on a number of occasions.

This example illustrates how Gary failed to make reference to the way in which he drew on knowledge of the social world to explain his decision to use a particular colour in the design he described. Rather as Bourdieu would have it, these decisions appear to be an instinctive "playing the rules of the game" (1998, p. 25), bringing decision-making back to habitus related to practice. Habitus is clearly linked to taste<sup>51</sup>. When the total output of his firm was considered it could be seen that the cultural base to the work of the firm also arose from the dispositions of the designers he employed as well as from his own dispositions and unique experience.

### **Cultural capital for practice in the field of graphic design**

Through his accounts of various graphic design projects, Gary could provide examples of the way in which having particular knowledge enabled him and those involved in his firm to understand aspects of the work designed by them. He distinguished himself and his firm from other designers and design companies through the firm's work and his position in the professional discourse surrounding the Designers Institute of New Zealand (DINZ). In his critique of the field of cultural production, Bourdieu (1993) refers to a process of assimilation of cultural capital, necessary to practice in a particular field. Cultural capital like other forms of capital<sup>52</sup>, follows unequal patterns of accumulation (Johnson, 1993, p. 7). The accomplishment of the work of Gary's firm demonstrated the expertise that served to preserve or consolidate his position in the field. There are two important aspects related to Gary's position in the graphic design field. Firstly, the team nature of production meant that he was associated with the production of creative work because his surname was duplicated in the firm's name, whether his role was one of control and direction only, or whether the concepts were his own. Secondly, unless clients worked directly with other designers in the firm the authorship and knowledge relative to problem resolution could easily be clouded by the team contribution within the firm.

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<sup>51</sup> Refer to Luke's Case study (p. 167) for a discussion of taste.

<sup>52</sup> Forms of capital are discussed in Angie's Case study (p. 119).

## Conclusions

Whether or not it is sufficient for designers to be able to work with high levels of expertise, through their ‘feel for the game’<sup>53</sup> as Bourdieu suggests, there are nevertheless implicit knowledge sources implicated in Bourdieu’s concept. Even though Gary has been able to draw on the cultural capital of his staff, his position as creative director of his firm called for a level of understanding sufficient to make judgements about the efficacy of the work produced by those he employed. The work of the firm reflected a much wider knowledge base and the diversity of work owed much to the cultural capital of those he employed and also to the group habitus in which that capital was shared and became implicit in the practice of staff within the group. The habitus of the firm could be linked to practice issues revealing insights into how the organisation functioned and how individual designers fitted within it. More important, however, was the nature of the knowledge that staff drew on and how had it been generated through the cultural capital that stemmed not only from personal habitus but also from education at various levels, and from work and life experience. Gary’s family influences and the social structure surrounding them come through in the social structure relative to his acquired habitus that enabled him to carry through values that came out of his personal habitus and the habitus of the firm.

The changing strategies and trajectory observed in Gary’s practice show the changing positions taken within the graphic design field. He had constructed his professional path through his own interpretations of practice and experience, but increasingly the cultural capital essential to practice had come from others as well as himself, through the culture of the firm made accessible through group projects approached as ‘teamwork’. Through generative aspects of personal habitus or the habitus of the firm, as well as by his objective position within the field, he had been enabled to deal with questions like style and taste, yet he was unable to be explicit about what he knew that would assist him trace the information and understanding that led him to develop the criteria expressed through his work relative to these questions. The design sensibilities related to his work revealed a much deeper understanding than the daily checking of websites like Russell Brown’s *Hard News*, showing not only the limitation of media news or through reflection and professional experience, but also that there must be varied sources of cultural capital essential to his creative work and the work of his firm.

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<sup>53</sup> Refer p.70

## **Maria:**

### **Individualism and social interaction in sole-practice**

The independent style of practice elected by the designer is a recurring theme in this case study. On first impressions it may seem logical that a self-employed designer would draw on her own experience in her creative work. However, the accounts offered by Maria in response to questions about her practice, cast doubts about the primacy of the autonomous individual, where agency is viewed as a determinant to action. There are a number of references in the case study, to ways in which social structures from earliest experiences up until her recent move to self-employment, had provided for the development of mental processes of subjective representation implicit in practice.

Bourdieu's ideas about social space provide a means of considering the way in which relationships exist between objective structures and the subjective representations of individuals. As Bourdieu states, social space may be viewed as "a system of relations comprising relative positions and relationships between these positions" (1989, p. 126). Aspects of social space were never very far from the responses Maria made in reflecting on the way that she worked. The inevitable self-sufficiency of her independent graphic design practice raised questions about whether the cultural capital for practice had been inculcated from other social settings and to what degree her practice involved drawing on other knowledge sources.

#### **Individualism in sole practice**

There is a tradition of sole-practice in the graphic design profession in New Zealand that can be traced back to the 1960s<sup>54</sup> when New Zealand commercial artists and former advertising agency art directors set up on their own, to join the fledgling profession of graphic design, often working from home. More recently with advances in technology and the growing sophistication of graphic design practice, self-employed graphic designers have been able to establish their own sole practices but have had to amass much more knowledge and expertise.

Maria was a graphic designer working in publication design and brand identity work for a range of small to medium sized companies. She was in her forties and had spent most of her career prior to setting up on her own, in publication design for magazine publishers. The solitary working style that Maria adopted opened up important questions about how self-reliant a designer could be in their design practice, whilst at the same time maintaining their

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<sup>54</sup> Refer to Designscape biographies as in King (1977) for example.

position in the graphic design field. The responses she made to questions about whether she was sufficiently informed in her practice tended to make reference to social contexts of lifestyles and Maria's earlier employment in publishers' design departments at various stages in her career. There was also a balance between these social contexts and the cultural capital generated previously but carried forward to be still relevant to her present practice.

Maria's sole practice brought up differences in working styles and the related positions that designers assume within the field of graphic design. To consider this more closely, attention will be turned to questions of the social space in which designers operate. There are two aspects of social space that need to be considered. Firstly, the field of graphic design like other fields, exists as a social space (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 32). Secondly, the concept of social space can be seen to apply at an internal level, and this was seen in the relationships of the graphic designers in the respective publishing companies in which Maria worked before setting up in sole practice. These internal relationships contributed much to the accumulation of cultural capital essential for her to maintain her position in the field. Bourdieu's concepts of social space are particularly useful as a means of explaining the relationship between her position in the graphic design field and the related cultural capital.

### **Social space: Bourdieu's relational approach**

In Bourdieu's relational approach, the individual's position in social space can be explained firstly by relating it to respective social structures, fields or groups (1999, p. 124) and secondly by considering the individual's thought and action as it resides in their habitus (Bourdieu, 1989 p.130). This approach provides a way to consider Maria's independent position in the social space of the graphic design field. Bourdieu's concept of social space relies on the idea that those within the social space of their field are endowed with different properties that link them objectively as a symbolic system. This system becomes organised on the basis of the differences in the distance, lifestyles and status groups of those within the social space in which it operates (*ibid*). Commonality of properties predisposes towards closer groupings and working relationships within the social space in which those within these groupings operate. These commonalities may lead towards spatial segregation, where those who share similar properties in a social space may work together in physical space and those that cannot enjoy possible advantages of nearness have to look to the advantages of distance and independence (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 127). In her decision to work independently Maria had opted out of the possible advantages of sharing common properties arising from being part of a close grouping in which colleagues may share similar resources. As she observed:

My past desire about being an individual still continues in my life I suppose, these days, and I feel quite okay about doing my own thing. Going about my own business. I used



to like confirming that what I had done actually, was on the same lines as someone else in the same way later on, but now I don't bother as much as I used to. Of course I still read and look at things in design magazines but I guess the way I look at things is more as a leisure interest – more for leisure, you know. Just sort of browsing and not really thinking hard about what I am seeing. So I suppose I do tend to work. . . as I work by myself now, it seems to suit me well. Perhaps I am just at a stage where things have been okay working by myself. Things have been pretty busy, and a lot of the projects I have worked on . . . haven't necessitated me being aware of what is going on. For example retail promotion. Just by going to the shops, just being there. Just by seeing what's near to and around you, being in the environment. What's there, but also what's missing. I suppose that's the important part. What isn't there. The colour and the excitement. . . I suppose as time goes by I might find that being by myself is a bit limited, but at this stage I am going through a phase where things just happen, and I'm happy with that.

### **The significance of place**

Maria's independent position in social space was expressed in her physical location. The low-key home office reflected an unconcern to seek benefits of location available to those who work in other social space namely, the income to be gained from the benefits of prestigious address, the closeness to people in positions of power, or the benefits of closeness to resources (Bourdieu, 1999, p.127). By contrast larger New Zealand design firms working with national or multinational clients often place importance on an external corporate image and city location. Most graphic designers prefer to set up their firms within reasonable travelling distances from many of the businesses that will supply them with design work, but are not necessarily in close proximity to others in their field. However, there is a growing number of individual designers who through the facilitation of electronic media and high technology capability are enabled to work from distant or home locations. Through the limitations of her moderate technology skills, Maria did not fall into this group. Maria's decision to work on her own was based on the convenience of working from her flat and she was enabled to do this because of the cultural capital she had gained in previous employment, from her education, family and other social settings.

Maria worked on her own without any support staff, and her studio was a room in her flat. The office she had set up for meetings, had an image that supported the values that distinguished her design sensibilities from others and suggested her position in the social space of the design field. The colour scheme and furnishing reflected a minimalist approach with pale neutral wall colours and carefully selected artwork and designerly objects. Ambience was further created by the quiet techno-jazz recordings that she played. These were largely popular music 'standards' given a distinctive contemporary treatment, although

she was just as happy to work in quietness. Increasingly she had moved away from going to meetings at her clients' offices and she explained that clients enjoyed getting out of their 'corporate space' to meet her in her studio.

### **Spatial segregation and independence**

Maria did not find socialising with other designers to be necessarily relevant to her work in graphic design, nor did she feel the need to develop networks with other designers, in any way. This was demonstrated by her preference for not belonging to DINZ, the professional organization for graphic designers in New Zealand, that might have provided opportunities for her to keep up with the current design discourse. In the absence of the interactions that might exist in a studio where there are other designers with whom to share knowledge, she had a strong reliance on experience and the capital arising from others in those firms for which she had worked and the knowledge related to practice that she had previously inculcated from others.

Her position of independence had not made her immune from the forces of the field of graphic design, where she was reliant on the attributes related to practice that enabled her to be differentiated from others with differing capability, as manifest in relevant capital in its various forms. This professional position reflected the authority she could exercise in using these attributes to her advantage. In her choice to work in suburbia she had not sought the dominance in the field open to larger design companies possessing high levels of capital in its various forms. Maria had more modest expectations both in the breadth of developed expertise and the scope of work she could offer to her clients. Her sole practice denied opportunities for sharing cultural capital with others on a daily basis. Instead, she drew on the cultural capital that she had previously acquired.

Whilst physical distance can generate advantages of independence, not having the advantages of closeness in social space (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 127) makes it even more important to have the attributes essential to maintaining a strong position in the field. These attributes exist in the different kinds of capital and the power arising from that capital, currently important in respective fields (*ibid*). It was through the capital that Maria had accumulated from various sources that she could be differentiated from other graphic designers with less capital or less relevant capital in the field. Capital<sup>55</sup> can be seen tangibly in designers' practice through the visual and conceptual aspects of the design they produce. Cultural capital in design is expressed through relevant knowledge in various forms essential to practice and indicative of a designer's position in their field. The capital occurring through dispositions of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) relative to various social

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<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of forms of capital and their related to designers in these case studies refer to Angie, p.119.

settings, provided a way of seeing how implicit thought and action seen in practice, had arisen. These social settings included her lifestyle, the firms in which she was previously employed, her university and education, and her family setting.

### **Early years**

Maria's account of her early years, shows how the habitus of her family setting and the related perceptions, evaluative structures and dispositions were already apparent. In her earliest childhood recollections, she could see parallels between the way she was taught to see things, and the way that her career eventuated. Her mother was seen as an influence and Maria demonstrated this by referring to the importance her mother placed on 'having things perfect and just so'. It is not a big jump to see how this habitual way of thinking could guide Maria's sensibilities in her later professional work as a graphic designer.

I can remember playing with things, and you had to make sure that they were all aligned and things. Judging spaces and looking at things like that and I did that throughout my whole early life and education. I guess I was known as an artistic person, but not only in that way. It was like a subsidiary thing to being encouraged to excel in all areas. I guess my parents kind of expected it, but I expected it of myself, just in the way that they . . . It was partly through my upbringing, because as I said, my mother used to sew clothes and make them quite special, even my school uniform at primary school was like a variation on a school uniform or it had little additions, little bits of embroidery. They still looked good, but they were not quite regulation and that might be with us for a long time. Yeah, and always being concerned about keeping things neat and tidy. My childhood started on the end of that era when you had little gloves and what have you and that was the fare for the outdoor lifestyle that people have nowadays, so it was prim and proper and I suppose I've always thought about having things matching and that's a natural progression into what you wear I guess. Having to keep things just so. Got to go together. That awareness of the way things - whether they're toys or clothes - how they go together. How they match and fit has always been with me as long as I can remember.

In her primary school years, she expressed her independence by the way that she placed little importance on having a group of friends or on being influenced by them. She gave little indication of whether there were connections between her home life and her solitary behaviour that might have encouraged her to develop this self-reliance. What others may have learned through conversation or the media, Maria learnt through an early interest in reading. Reading interests led to music interests and, in her teenage years, to a new interest in counter culture.

I was a very individualistic as a person – it's classic! My school reports always were saying "Maria is a very good student, very studious, excels at whatever she does, but

she is aloof”, and I always was quite a loner. I guess I always saw myself as individual and quite proud of the fact that I wouldn’t let peer pressure affect me, you know. And so I was kind of an outsider, but not in a kind of nerdy way that was open to bullying or anything. I was a bit of a boss of the playground but not part of the gang . . . I guess I was always a huge reader. Obsessed by reading, all my life, since a young child. Even to the extent of being eight or nine or ten years old, going to family barbecues on the beach where I would sit in the car and read a book, rather than playing with a Frisbee. I guess reading did keep my mind quite active and feed me a lot of ideas on wide ranging topics. Always interested in history at school. I had a part-time job at the end of my school days, in a bookshop and a record shop and I used to read all the music press and stuff on Britain. I guess that was about the time of punk and NME<sup>56</sup> was a huge thing and I guess, that must have influenced me. So that was kind of like a slightly counter culture type of thing that I was interested in which eventually became quite mainstream I guess.

### **Move to University and tertiary education**

By the end of her school years, Maria had developed a desire to know more about art and culture that overtook the backgrounds of her parents, and may well have built on the sense of enquiry that had come from her strong interest in reading and an emerging interest in culture.

My mother used to nag at me to leave school as soon as I turned 15, but in fact I rebelled by going to university. It was kind of reverse psychology, perhaps. But no, they thought it was a waste of time, but their careers and just everyday life were quite creative in their own way so I was used to seeing people do things and make things and invent things for me in my everyday life, but I didn’t know anything about art or other things that you may consider high culture I guess.

Her move to fine art school in her university opened up opportunities to discuss and think about the interests in literature, philosophy and culture introduced by the ‘university crowd’ she associated with. Her new enthusiasm for the film media was closely tied to her interest in the social and visual aspects of lifestyle. At another level, the social structure of the university lifestyle created a context in which these interests were brought together through informal discussion.

I used to spend a lot of time with a group of people that would drink wine and discuss all of that, ad nauseum perhaps, so I guess you couldn’t help but absorb some of what was going on. Think about art, because yes, they were an interesting bunch of people. My crowd at university was very into the philosophy, English side and also interested in art. And film and a lot of film analysis and doing film studies, which I guess - that’s

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<sup>56</sup> NME refers to *New Music Express*, a magazine that ran articles on Punk music in the 1980s.

almost like an intermediary between visual design and philosophy and filmmaking of certain types. So that was a big interest as well.

There were links between the cultural capital derived from her social group in the university and the lifestyle awareness needed for her first graphic design employment. Her lifestyle interest played an important part in being accepted for the position of graphic designer, with a magazine publisher.

She could see that her lifestyle experience moulded her opinions and offered a context to design decisions.

I was lucky with my first job after leaving university and dithering around, not really knowing what I should be doing. Just looking at the jobs that were advertised, I was caught by an advert for a designer for (names) magazine. I thought 'That sounds like me', because I was interested in magazines and popular culture and a bit more involved in that young artist scene as well, which was – the café culture was just starting out. I was always sort of 'out there', and got the job. At that time, I was very interested in architecture, in fine arts. Used to go to all the gallery openings, and very wide ranging . . . and in fact I was very into books and movies. Went to huge numbers of movies, plays, café culture, food, was an obsession (still is!) wine, really just everything. Trying to find the best of life's inspiration I suppose.

Lifestyle interests were expressed in the form of counter culture and fashion. Her fashion interests could be traced back to her early interest in dressmaking. Aspects of style and discernment could be easily related to the family influences discussed earlier, and they continued to be important to her as her career developed. Lifestyle interests appeared to be more important to her than keeping up with the current design discourse promoted through the design press. Her interest in design was more at the level of skimming images and leisure reading than any serious study of the work being done.

Fashion, I guess, is part of that counter culture thing where you wear punk, and in those days there wasn't much you could buy in the shops, so you used to go to second-hand shops and make your own sort of creations and then I guess that was encouraged by the fact that I got into my first job for a lifestyle magazine but that still makes you aware of current trends and things, and then of course I moved to another magazine and that was probably even more fashion oriented, so whether it was accidental. It sort of fitted and gave a justification for my interest. I think I get a lot of the continuing education if you like, by reading and things about design, I let that slide quite easily, once I had left that academic environment.

In her design processes she placed high importance on maintaining individuality as well as expressing the current culture promoted through media. There was a guardedness about

studying popular culture seen in the lifestyle magazines she read, too deeply on one hand and on the other, a desire to be herself and to develop her own individual way of expressing her concepts, in the two magazines she worked on in the period from 1988 to 1995.

I learnt to just trust myself and quite often would be intrigued to – you know, still reading magazines, but not so much the research behind the design development. Quite keen on a lot of the British stuff, at that time. Face magazine and Neville Brody, of course very famous, so you couldn't help avoid that, but I guess it was a little bit of a game in some ways to come up with ideas that were just from your brain, I suppose, and then find that someone was doing something similar somewhere else, later and to know that you weren't totally being influenced by copying them. You must have been influenced by the world around you, if they had come up with something similar. So that was kinda quite exciting. Quite often it ended up echoing what was happening around, but I used to be quite concerned, I guess in maintaining that whole individual thing, that I had always seen myself as being. I used to be quite concerned to be not, exposing myself to much to other people's work. Not isolate myself, you know in researching and reading, and finding out exactly what was going on, and doing it myself. I used to be quite keen to avoid that and just do what I thought, and see how that worked. I guess I was quite confident in myself which is I guess an attribute that I have always had to some degree. And the more experience you get and the more you realise that what you do is just as valid as what other people do, the more comfortable you are with it.

### **The internal social space of publishing firms**

Besides the cultural capital that Maria brought into the publishing firms in which she worked, there was another important source of cultural capital available through the social space of those in each firm. These relationships contributed much to the accumulation of cultural capital essential for her to maintain her position in the field, when she later set up in sole practice. The social space of the firm was a site for those who were subject to similar conditions and influences that were likely to engender similar dispositions and related practices (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 128). It is important to consider questions of similarity and difference in the background of those in a firm and how both of these qualities contributed to the habitus of the firm. As Maria observed:

I guess most of the people I have worked with have had a similar . . . have been able to chat together about certain things, whether it be TV or whatever, is happening to people in the office and what they do. So you have a bit of camaraderie in that way. Some people are extroverts and some people are introverts, but still talk about things and understand one another. So maybe there's an attitude. I suppose I have been judging the world through my own experience. Some things are a bit surprising I guess. A lot of people with different lifestyles, or what appear to be different values for their own

environment but then being able to communicate and chat. I guess I have always got on really well with everyone I have worked with. Don't know whether that's a fluke or just . . . do you just have things in common that are more fundamental than your taste?

When she moved from the first publisher, where she worked in a support role, to the next position with another publisher, as art director, she had the opportunity to draw on the very diverse backgrounds of her studio staff. She was clearer about the flow of ideas related to process and technology, than about how she might have implicitly absorbed the practice of others.

Everyone was totally different. We had an 'alternative lifestyle' type person working in a design team. Came up with some great ideas. We had a sort of Christian person who was very conservative. And we had another person who was quite a class nerd, if you like. It's hard to describe, but in a way. Because I see it in myself, I tend to imagine other people are similar and don't have a style. It's more that the things that come to mind are more the technical things I guess. You see that someone has done something new, tints or screens or something and they're using them in a certain way and that sort of inspires you to look at your own work. It is in a way, because I don't think you can look so much at the intellect of a particular process.

The backgrounds of some of the staff in her department in this second publishing firm were intriguing. The question of how people with diverse backgrounds could, while retaining their individuality, also have enough commonality that they could work together had to be considered. There was room for the varying viewpoints and backgrounds of staff in a creative field, without compromising the coherence of her staff.

No, I think I've worked with . . . I don't think that there's a type of person who makes a good designer, if you like. Maybe there are people who are more visible, the flamboyant fashion types or whatever, but, no the industry's full of diverse people. What you might imagine would be entirely different outlooks on life, but maybe it's just because the fundamental principles of design are so common or basic. People from all round the world, but you still see things that are good and agree on them. I guess from my own experience I would say that my life is my work and my work is my life kinda thing and you can't separate them as such, but other people through the evidence I've seen, must have entirely different approaches because I worked with one particular person who was, like, the antithesis of fashionable and not avant garde at all and very ordinary appearance but then he was a really great designer. Came up with cool ideas and spacing things in . . . You just wonder . . . I sort of know where my stuff came from, but where did their's come from? I'm not quite sure. I guess it's a matter of appreciating people Just because they choose to express themselves in certain ways in which they live . . .

Maria had gained much from the abilities of the people that she worked with in the years before deciding to work on her own. She stressed the value of the ‘working methods’ she learnt in her first job in publishing. She stressed the significance of having an implicit sense of rules and values, but stopped short of being specific about theoretical rules that might guide her decisions and be important to understanding how to resolve design problems. Instead she suggested that in the way that she did things, the decisions that she made were guided by a sense of underlying rules. The apparent sense of structure in her approach to design, was not undermined in the following account, where she described the way in which she was able to draw on the approaches of other creative people, enabling her to free-up her own work but the approaches adopted were seen through her own background.

I feel entirely grateful to my first boss, because of his strict methods of working. I think that set me up to be disciplined enough to feel free. Know what I mean? Rather than, a lot of people want to start at the top and kind of, be free and have got no underlying structure to the way they work. I think I have, a fundamental strictness in the way that I do things, but a surface ‘decoration’ that can look a certain way, that can look quite free, but then there’s got to be, you know, rules that you follow, or the reasons that you are doing things.

### **Work cultures**

There were differing work cultures in the design sections of two magazine firms in which Maria had been employed. This was expressed in the different backgrounds and actions of the people working there. In the first, the art director created a hierarchical “master-apprentice” working relationship with studio staff, which was evident in the way in which he controlled the concepts and visual values expressed in the design of the firm’s magazine. This approach offered opportunities to learn from the accomplished designer and to access cultural capital inherent in his practice. Maria was able to share the values of her background in contributing conceptually to the design of each issue of the magazine, especially when her art director was involved in other projects. In the times when she had the creative freedom she wanted, she could make a much greater contribution.

It’s a lot to do with personalities and I guess that’s part of putting people with matching tasks. [The art director] was quite an autocrat type, I suppose, where things had to go his way. He was totally open, but that was the basic structure of the place. Quite often had my own projects and often in charge when (he) was doing something else. So yeah, I did have the opportunity. I think I – it sounds so corny, but I think somewhere in my CV is talking about working in a team and having lots of ideas, and a lot of ideas is actually quite inspiring, rather than just being stuck in your own rut and demanding everyone do it your way. So I’ve been quite flexible, in the way I work, especially with other people. If it’s not happening, then I’m quite capable of ordering people around,



but I find – I can go either way – but if someone else has got an idea, that’s the only way you learn, really. Otherwise you stagnate a bit. Become a tyrant. So I try – well I’m glad, to avoid that and I’m glad to learn to look at other people’s visions and build on it. So it’s kind of like a structure that comes about that’s entirely different from something you imagine in the first place because people have brought different coloured building blocks or whatever. Later on in my career I tended to get less hierarchical, where you have a team that you can trust, and I mean hopefully you do. If you don’t, then you’ve got to do something about it. But if you do then as a leader your job is to allocate people with the things you think they can do the best work on. I have got less and less hierarchical as I’ve gone along. So that people are quite autonomous, when I am working in a design team. I have a sort of initial brief and discussion and then people go off and do it and you sort of talk to them and help them a bit, but you let them come up with their own solutions. It makes for a happier design team. But of course, especially when you’re in a magazine, there are underlying rules that you’ve got to work to and I suppose I set those rules. As long as people understood what they were, then they could virtually do what they liked.

Opportunities to learn from others were not restricted to those within the firm. Like many graphic designers, Maria gained understandings of visual and conceptual values by working with other specialists outside the firm. By taking notice of these influences she continued to develop her own work.

One thing I can definitely remember being influenced by, was a photographer who used to be very, very abstract in his approach to work, and just pointing a camera anywhere, it seemed . . . taking photographs and being quite free and that did have an influence on me . . . freeing up my own approach, because I was quite structured. But I always take – I guess I am always viewing things, through my own lenses if you like, so I take certain aspects, and I would have discounted some as being . . . going a bit far or being ridiculous, but at the same time you are taking notice of them and reinterpreting them in your own way.

### **Resources for viable sole practice**

By the time that Maria had set up on her own, she had assumed a position of independence and had built up the necessary resources for viable sole practice. The cultural capital needed to achieve this having been generated through the dispositions arising from social settings. The necessary levels of dedicated knowledge acquisition had arisen through practice and for practice, particularly in specialised areas related to design and design technology. Apart from these specialised areas of knowledge, much of the knowledge that Maria drew on as a resource for graphic design practice came back to implicit knowledge sources. Even her design school education seemed to be implicit to her practice. Even though she was in no doubt about the value of this education, it seemed that she found it very hard to be explicit

about possible connections between what she had learnt at design school and what she needed to know for graphic design practice.

I'm totally grateful for every second I spent at university, and I believe in the sort of absorption of learning in a way. You just sort of are a sponge soaking up whatever's around you and eventually it comes out somehow. Perhaps not totally directly though, although all of the theory and the art history, just adds to your general knowledge banks and of course it must help you at certain stages. I haven't had a moment where I've gone "Oh yes, that reminds me of y'know the occasion semester two, year three." I wouldn't deny that everything I've done has made me what I am today.

Similarly the ongoing interest in reading that could be traced back to her teenage years continued to be for background interest rather than being purposeful or directed. There was an absence of books critiquing design and she expressed no interest in reading as an objective means of reflection on her practice or for comparing the work other designers with her own. Her office bookshelf also contained surprisingly few reference books related to computers and software that might be expected in a graphic design studio, but there were magazines that reflected the specialised interests in lifestyle. These influences were approaches notable in her work.

I guess it's true that a lot of my reading of design and design journals is not directed at anything as such, so I won't say "Oh I've got this project to do so I'll go and do some research and find out all about it. I tend to look at it more as a daily absorption, and I don't know whether it's relevant yet to something I am working on. It's something I just file away and perhaps will come up at a later date, but not to a conscious degree. Whether it's design or any other kind of reading, it tends to be very eclectic. One minute I might be reading about philosophy and religion and the next you might be reading *Women's Day* or something mundane or domestic. It doesn't matter. It's all interesting, I guess my research in inverted commas, is not structured or directed as such, but it's just part of life. The rest I usually set up goals for usually. Maybe it's just grown with age from being a student, when you really had to do that sort of thing.

She could be much more positive about the capital arising out of her on-going lifestyle interests. Culture and lifestyle were interwoven in her response. Under it all was a surefooted sense that through her lifestyle interests, she had a good understanding of the significance and value of designed objects.

Well my lifestyle is totally imbued with – well maybe not so much popular culture, but culture or what are held up to be the epitome of certain eras and design for example. Like ever since I left university or even when I was still there, I collected a certain type of furniture which is modern Scandinavian based, mainly, but whatever I consider . . . Perhaps I've got mainstream tastes in that way, to be classics of its era. So things that

you still see today, some of them in production, others are sought after in that backgrounds of fashion mags or *Architectural Digest*, or whatever and they've been upgraded as you go along, but I've still got pieces I've had for twenty years. So it's interesting that I haven't – I guess I've always had quite a strong vision of what I thought was good, and what not, and I sort of don't look back and say 'What was I thinking'. I still accept that my taste was okay. The same with books . . . I guess my work has never been work, it's just part of your life. Design and making decisions is just a natural thing for me. Switching into design mode isn't any different from day to day life. Lining up the toaster on the bench for breakfast!

The high importance placed on her lifestyle interests suggested that often what she needed to know in her work came out of these interests providing her with information, however indirect, that had informed her thinking in graphic design practice.

I guess I have always had my interests. They have evolved, but they have remained basically the same, and they still are. So I can remember always going to film society and cinema as often as I could, not just mainstream stuff, but everything and the same with food, not just cooking amazing things, but going to restaurants, but also taking an interest in basic food, so it was an appreciation of good things of their kind. So you can have the perfect Big Mac or you can have the great gourmet meal.

In emphasising the importance she placed on being observant and aware of her environment, she showed how she applied her own self-critique to her observations and importantly how she revealed values of taste built up through her own dispositions and cultural capital.

You need to be aware. I guess I'm a lot more observant than your average person. Just walking down the street, I'll be looking at everything. Can't help it. I guess I was reminded of that fact by a recent – well it was a couple of years ago now. A couple of years ago I went to Tokyo for the first time and I guess it's a culture that's renowned for its interest in design and aesthetics, and it was quite an amazing experience, even just observing everything and thinking about it perhaps in a deeper way than your average tourist. You know, looking at posters and signs and even the extent of looking at homeless people there. They lived in quite a structured way that seemed to have an appreciation for design. They lived in these plastic shacks that were all the same colour and their implements all lined up in a row and it was all quite structured. Quite a cool feeling to be surrounded by that kind of culture. So, yes, everyday, using my critical faculties, to take in everything around me . . . I think it's just maintaining that interest in everything that's happening and analysing how it looks, or why it looks that way. Looking at the ad campaigns and things, whether it's for a fashion chain or department store or whatever. Yes, totally keep aware of what's going on.

In Maria's professional working life she seemed content or even preferred, her own individual approach and control of the work and roles she assumed. Whereas graphic

designers frequently build up visual reference files, Maria expressed reluctance to build collections of objects of interest or to use photographic recording of visual references.

I have a small collection of things that interest me, but not to the extent that I know some people do. They keep everything recorded and filed. In a way I've done it on purpose, in that I know that if I started taking an interest in that way, I would – to do a good job – it would be really hard work.

The reticence she expressed indicated not only a conscious decision not to build files, but also the disposition to rely on implicit knowledge built up from various sources and at various stages in her life that enabled her to rely on her own resources.

I guess I was a lot more methodical in my early career, but now I'm just trusting my instincts. Once I analyse what I have done I can analyse why. There seems to be logic behind it, but it's not something that you sit down and tick off as you go along. I'm pretty sure that a lot of the good aspects or the successful aspects of popular culture in a visual sense are based on old principles that people are maybe not so aware of. Really basic aspects like composition, proportion and things. There are things that work and things that don't, and most people couldn't tell you why and I think if you sat down and figured it out, there would be some basic rules to be made.

Using these resources Maria believed that she had enough professional expertise in graphic design to be able to confidently tackle a diverse range of projects and could say:

I feel quite happy working on any type of project. I don't prefer one over another. You know I don't prefer a free fashion-inspired project to a corporate thing. I like them both and approach them in different ways, I think . . . come up with entirely different results. Looking through my portfolio recently it was almost like a bunch of work done by someone entirely different. I guess you could find similarities. I think a lot of stuff was established really early on and it might get pushed and pulled a bit, from it's track, but still in the same basic track.

### **A distinctive approach to practice**

In Maria's work on small-scale projects, as a sole practitioner, she was able to take on projects that in larger companies would be taken on by specialists working as part of a group or team of people. Her motivation to work this way was founded on two significant factors. Firstly, she had the confidence that she had accumulated the necessary understanding and experience to be able manage these projects. Secondly, she preferred the independence from relying on others and the satisfaction of controlling a project.

I am aware of what I know and I am lucky with my background in both graphic design and the business aspect, that side of things. Working with an [advertising] agency on photography has been a bit annoying because if you relinquish some control of some

aspects of the project . . . like they have their own printer . . . it's great having control of the whole project . . . balance the budget. You've only got yourself to blame if things aren't right . . . Sometimes it can be a lot quicker when you know people with experience. There's no waiting time or downtime at all, just get something done instantly overnight, with lots of contributions from different people. You have got to pay for it . . . it's obviously deadlines. There's more shepherding . . . to-ing and fro-ing and checking. So that's one of the advantages of doing it yourself, but I guess the deadlines are a factor. But the way that design technology has evolved, with all of the technology available to us to make the job easier, now the client just assumes that things can be produced instantly. It's definitely down to the project. Sometimes I am working with photographers, other times I do the photography myself. You work in a set of circumstances I suppose. They [clients] need this end product and in a way they don't care how it is achieved, whether you are doing everything or whether it is sub-contracted out. As long as it is delivered and they don't have questions they have to ask. I suppose having tight control is important so that you eliminate potential problems in terms of what might have gone wrong.

The abilities that enabled Maria to confidently design and manage a project were demonstrated in her reference to her work on a company profile design.

There were a lot of balls in the air, technically. It was devised by people in-house and the [advertising] agency had some input, but I am not shy about writing text. I guess from my writing background . . . I am not a control freak, but I am prepared to put a bit of work into how the project is structured, but it is quite nice to be able to do everything yourself. I guess it depends on the project and the particular circumstances.

Whereas much has been written about the value of research to inform design decisions, Maria's approach revealed strong belief in her own resources and a reticence to rely on of the research information supplied from marketing departments.

A lot of analysis that I come across seems to be more . . . it's almost irrelevant to a certain degree. It can be . . . well I don't know from maybe marketing departments, not that I've worked with them. But marketing people talk in facts and figures and theory, but then I guess your job as the designer is try and translate these things. Usually they don't have a structured vision which is a good start for designers, but I do like to say that if someone has a particular thing that they want . . . if a client wants his favourite colour or something - a favourite shade of pink, then you will go with the pink but you will convince them what is the best pink possible, probably do something with it. I guess it's looking at limitations of briefs as not being limitations, things that are critical. Still achieve something within or around the brief. The brief is what it's really all about at the time. I think I've realised that constraints and briefs aren't necessarily a bad thing.

## **Conclusions**

There was little doubt in Maria's responses that she had confidence in her capability to run a viable sole practice, in graphic design. The implications of her changing positions in the social space of the graphic design field contributed much to an understanding of how she could both draw from the advantages of the capital of those with whom she worked when she was employed in publishing and yet more recently have the resources to run her viable sole practice in which she preserved a position of relative independence whilst being subject to the dynamics of the graphic design field. Underlying her ability to make this shift was the heavy reliance on the implicit knowledge from various social settings that were significant to her. The constant references she made to the interrelationships between design and lifestyle indicated the importance of this resource to her practice. When wider questions of her position in the field of graphic design are considered, it is clear that her account was set in the present with little consideration of other factors affecting a designer's position in the social space of their field. I refer to a marginal level of technology skill in an age when the field of graphic design is requiring increasingly more expertise as a basic requirement for survival in the face of increasing competition for places in the field. Nevertheless her knowledge of social contexts arising from the often implicit knowledge of lifestyle had put her in a stronger position than that held by designers who are limited to a practice founded predominantly on visual style.

## **Angie:**

### **Working at the level of eclecticism and short of cultural capital**

Much has been written in the field of design about the limitations of design practice confined to a preoccupation with visual style<sup>57</sup>. This case study explores the way in which Angie needed more cultural capital than she could access in adopting a frame of reference bounded by visual concerns. Even though visual aspects are important, she had also overlooked both the social contexts and also the cultural capital related to the field of business that could have informed her practice. She had failed to build up a strong position for herself in the field of graphic design, a situation that had led to a decision to go back to further full-time education to specialise in computer technology related to graphic design. Her trajectory had taken a turn towards technology, especially pertinent as she had failed to succeed in graphic design consultancy, even though she had not recognised that her resources for practice relative to graphic design conceptualisation were inadequate for practice. In this case, Bourdieu's constructs of capital in various forms provide a way of understanding how it was that Angie, a hardworking and promising student, had lacked important cultural capital implicated in her inability to establish a position for herself in the graphic design field. While it might be argued that Angie's position in the graphic design field was reliant on what she could do with what she had and that individuals need to recognise the possibilities that exist for translating knowledge into cultural capital, (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247), success and failure are effects of this position in the field.

#### **Forms of capital**

Capital in Bourdieu's terminology is modelled on the idea that resources, and therefore power, are expressed in a number of forms that exceed the confined use the term capital as a measure of economic value. Besides economic capital, that may be directly translated into money and property, Bourdieu also uses the terms 'social capital' and 'cultural capital'. In these definitions, social capital arises from valued social obligations and relationships and cultural capital, in embodied and objectified forms (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Cultural capital in Bourdieu's terms, occurs in an embodied state as a product of the dispositions of the habitus, in an objectified state through cultural goods and in an institutional state in education (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). These terms are particularly useful in understanding relative achievement, both regarding the value of education in graphic design and also in the

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<sup>57</sup> For example, Durling and Griffiths (2000) make a case for creating greater emphasis on contextual studies in design education and also Walsh (2005) cautions against designers limiting themselves to visual aspects of graphic design.

contextual knowledge related to it. In Angie's case, they show the relevance of a lack of capital to her limited success in making her way in the graphic design field<sup>58</sup>.

### **Embodied cultural capital**

Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital is linked to the long lasting dispositions of mind and body (1986, p. 243) related to social structure. Being the product of assimilation, its distinctive value is "marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245). In Angie's account of her early years we are provided with insights into the social structure of the Philippines and the way in which this was reflected in the elementary education system through which Angie passed in her early life. In the formality of the structured society there, life was hard, with a lack of freedom, in the absence of the empowerment that may have otherwise arisen from having greater economic capital. Angie's time in the Philippines had made her a survivor, needing to cope with a quietly competitive society to get on, and to progress. It is not surprising that in her account of her early years, support in developing her abilities was also needed from immediate and extended family.

Well we had to actually follow a lot of rules . . . I think that because Philippines are, I mean we have to follow this sort of . . . it's like tradition, a custom and if you don't do them you're kind of cast out as like you're 'a bad' and her 'not good'. You just have to follow what the elder people would say. Yeah, you just have to go with what they tell you to do and follow the rules. Everybody's kind of . . . it's a very hard life back there, and it's not what you think . . . that you have a lot of freedom to do what you want but it's really hard to go out there and do what you want. As in first of all when you have no money you can't do anything and back home we're in this kind of . . . we're not poor, we're not rich, we're kind of like in the middle. But when it comes to schools and that, that's where they asked of us "make sure you have good grades for school". This is what they wanted. My grandparents said OK if you have an A we'll give you like a US dollar or something. It's hard. If they see an A in your grade book its like "yep, you're getting the dollar". And a dollar goes a long way. I was actually pushed to those kind of arty things like drawing and painting by my mom and she is the first person who actually told me "just go out there and be creative". . . my mom, my sisters, me and in our family, aunties, uncles were actually there for me to help me and teach me things. When I was in elementary back home in the Philippines I wasn't very into that kind of art design you know, it's not a big thing for us. It's more like maths. Yeah maths, languages, especially science and like I think cooking but nothing to do with design, nothing to do with art, so I wasn't really pushed into that subject.

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<sup>58</sup> The concept of field is discussed in Chapter Three, p. 71.



She encountered a more liberal society when she came to New Zealand, finding a significant difference between the formality in the Philippines and the kind of openness of New Zealand society. Her time was taken up with school and she had little chance to interact with others who might have had different values from her own. She was locked into a society in which the inadequacies of her cultural capital were beginning to be apparent to her and where her response was to work at competing with others. The change from her life in the Philippines to the New Zealand social setting called for sudden adaptations that she had difficulty in making, causing her to both embrace and reject aspects of the new social structure and lifestyle. Her own family upbringing with its rules and restrictions owed much to the social structure of the Philippines lifestyle and indicated what she had taken from it. In her account she revealed an absence of the necessary cultural capital related to language and with it sparse social capital as well.

I came to New Zealand in 1991 when I was thirteen. Straight to third form and that was a big shock for me. And that's how it started. I actually did choose art as a subject and then Maths and Science, English, and through every year I had like painting or design or photography and it led me to tertiary things to do with the same subject as well. And yeah I just kind of . . . I like creative things and I like design. They were totally different people. It kind of made me like "I want to compete with them" because I see them as someone who's better than me and so. . . Better as in more intelligent and kind of like "teacher's pet". And it made me kind of push myself to, you know, study harder and you know, make, I don't know, more effort. They have what they want. Their parents are rich and their parents actually, you know . . . whatever they want they pay for it. But with me I kind of like . . . have to work hard. Yeah, because back in elementary all of us are kind of at the same level. Third form was a horrible, horrible year for me because I didn't really speak proper English back then. We studied English in the Philippines but that's American English. But, I find it hard like, to actually communicate with them. It's just the fact that I wouldn't know how to communicate. It's a different way of communicating back home, to New Zealand. Yeah, I just have to work twice as hard I think. All I can remember was like it's . . . I was quite scared . . . I mean to be honest, because it's a total different lifestyle that I was to relate to as soon as possible. I couldn't adapt to it sooner. I had to take my time slowly and observe people and get to know what type of person they are. Mainly I'm kind of quiet and kind of sitting and observing people . . . The people that I'd met . . . I thought they were kind of rough and rude.

The pressures to meet family obligations and to compete in her high school years restricted Angie's interests in her teenage years. Her school and those interests related to it were about as much as she could cope with in a very insular family lifestyle.

No, back in high school I wasn't even allowed to go out because "you're not going anywhere you're staying home and cleaning up." Kinda like . . . I didn't have enough freedom as now, you know, when I went to tertiary. I was part of the hockey team and I had to do design . . . art . . . photography. I had to come after school to do my printing and things. But no, I wasn't even aware of what's happening around. To be honest I am very quiet . . . I wasn't like now talking and no, I think there is a stage in my life where I just observed. Don't say anything. But that changed when I went to [names design school] my first year to do certificate in art and design because I did badly in high school with maths and science and I did well with my photography design and painting, I thought yeah, let's pursue that kind of path and that's when I went to [names design school] to do my Art and Design course.

### **Design school education**

Angie referred to an absence of a strong visual culture there to be inculcated from Philippine art or available for her to later bring into design school work.

. . . you know how Japanese are very disciplined and they have to be like, have a strict rule about it. I think Philipinos are just all over the place, they just try everything. They have no kind of strict rule to say "this is how you should see a flat plane" or whatever. "This is how you should draw and this is how you should sculpt or create things". No, we didn't have that because . . . Really they just have no passion about design. And that's the thing back home, I wasn't even aware of this word 'design'. I wasn't aware of that but when I came here I was like "oh wow! There's art, design, photography" and I'm like "yeah I think I'm going to try that".

In her first design school year she encountered a huge learning curve. The design school year exposed her to aspects of design that she hadn't encountered before, but that enabled her to develop socially at the expense of her progress on the course.

From high school it wasn't such a big deal. But then straight to [names design school] I thought "oh my gosh, this is a whole new ball game". Everybody is just so 'full on' and there's about . . . there's two classes there's forty of us so that's a full class and not enough tutors. So what happened was I was in a group where everybody's so competitive. You can have friends . . . I had a few friends, probably just two girls, that I can really relate to. It is very competitive and I thought, you know I don't know if I can do this. I was kind of . . . I wasn't sure of myself. I wasn't believing in myself so I didn't go well another year. And it showed in my marks and I kind of thought "maybe this is not me . . . maybe I shouldn't be doing art . . . maybe I should be doing maths, but it's too late!" It's just a different teaching, a different environment and you really have to push yourself and you really have to time manage yourself and if you don't, well you're behind. I didn't do well. You really have to go and just do it yourself, you know. You can't have help from tutors this is what they say to you. You just have to do

it and come up with something great you know. If you don't get a good mark, you don't get anywhere . . . a total different lifestyle and there's a lot of distraction as well like friends and people. You thought, "yeah OK I'll go to parties you know, and have a few laughs and drink and whatever else" and that kind of got in the way as well. I didn't take it seriously. You know (names the school). I thought oh no! I did learn a few things and they made me kind of . . . but when I learnt it was like, too late, and that's why I didn't get into the Bachelor [course] and it was too late to turn back.

Her approach to developing concepts for assignments was largely at the level of photocopying books without a commitment to acquiring books for her own reference or reading to the depth that could equip her to answer assignments. Her design school assignments involved phases of topic introduction, exploring a design brief and doing the necessary research to be able to devise original concepts to answer them. There is an absence of the inquiry or related cultural capital reaching beyond the assumed sufficiency of strongly visual concerns in her work. The marketing and business topics in her design school programmes were not mentioned in relationship to the designs that were developed in coursework.

I had to go to [names city library]. I had to a lot of just sitting down and write things down and photocopy them I wasn't allowed to borrow books because I lived in [names suburb]. Mainly I went down there researching. I wasn't really into that Internet part yet that some use. It wasn't a big deal for me. And I think I had to kind of ask my classmates, as well, what they think is needed in this assignment.

### **Working situation**

Unable to find employment with a graphic design firm or in a graphic design department of a company Angie opted to work on a freelance basis, for a franchise firm. In this arrangement she was offered a work space and paid on an hourly rate, for work supplied by them, but not given any retainer for services or even a guarantee of work. She worked 'on call' as a free-lancer with purely verbal arrangements about work flow. She also had other clients of her own.

Yeah, the first job was two and a half years ago. And that's okay . . . what they say is contract but basically its on and off. It's part-time, full-time, part-time, full-time . . . but it's . . . there will be a time, where one client . . . okay one brand that I have to do and there's documentation that I have to do for them and that takes a month, a full month to actually finish off the whole documentation. Yeah, it's quite a few jobs and it's all different though . . . when I'm not working for [the franchising firm] I was it. And everyone around me, it's all about business. It had nothing to do with design, nothing to do with creative input. It's all business so it was very hard for me. It was a challenge. When I was working in that company I had to . . . I didn't have to work with a client I

mean had a manager who actually spoke to the client about what they want, what brand they want, what they want it to look like. And she comes back in the office and then she relayed the information to me. Which I think is not good because there is a communication breakdown. And it's just a waste of time really. But I didn't want to say anything because I don't think it's my decision. And so the client wanted a brand for a café and it has to be done quick because money . . . time is money. And I was just given just like two days to make it. But I had an extension because it's quite a big thing. It's about a Café that sells beer and you know . . . coffee, I don't know if they know how to make it. But I did my research, I went to the library and looked in the kind of Belgian costume and there culture and tradition about beers and stuff and the images they have. So that was quite exciting. And um I went back to office and I did a few sketches. They didn't like it because it has to have a man like a monk that's got a big belly. So I had to go back and research about a monk and a big belly. So I did a few sketches and then. They sent it off to the client. I did quite a few renditions of it with different colours and different lines and fonts and that and the client said no he didn't like it. The monk had to be holding a beer. And the colours have to be green. And I had to go back and start again. So it was quite difficult when not actually communicating with the client. It's like a triangle thing.

She had developed some client relationships and had on-going work for some clients, where she took on small budget work.

I have to actually get of out there and see what . . . you know . . . I have a few clients where I sit down with them. And they tell me what they want and so I kind of just write things down and then the next day that I see them I have this list in front of me of what we'll be achieving or the design concepts we bring in.

### **Assessment of the value of design school education**

To Angie, the most valuable subjects in the two New Zealand design schools she attended were computer technology and history theory classes. This point of view bears closer scrutiny. Firstly, the technology classes involved minimal levels of additional reading and research, a factor that made progress straightforward for Angie who was eager to learn the relevant technology for graphic design practice. Secondly, the art and design theory learning could be accomplished by attending lectures and studying selected references without the need for self-directed research.

I think computers, learning about programmes . . . that's kind of very exciting for me because back in high school we didn't have computers back then. That was the early stage of . . . no computers just hand drawn. No, it's just amazing how that's the thing for me, you know . . . computers, learning about programmes and there must have been a way of actually manipulating photographs or drawing with computers and I just thought that was very . . . that's a highlight. And also a lot of history, that we had to

study, you know, like theory . . . modern historical facts about art design that was quite good as well. And the studio work I think. It's getting back to over five years ago. I think it's similar to what I had at (names school) because its like a brief of what you need to do and just have to go out there and do it.

Despite her enthusiasm about the value of the art or design theory studied during her design degree course, once away from the school these studies had slipped into the background. The information needed for her work seemed quite removed from the topics in the theory classes of her design school education.

This is what I have straight from school . . . I went and got that job in the franchise business. It doesn't link at all. It's a total different environment and it's just hard when you're stuck in an office and you are being paid to do what they want. And then you can't go outside and actually do your research because you need to be in the office. And it's very kind of, like, narrow. It's one narrow thing that I look at things and I have no way of branching out. I think it's removed from what I'm doing. But that's me. It could be different for other people. But for me it didn't really help me. And when I do freelance work and I have a client I don't go back in the notes that I learnt from school I actually have to start again and do my own research in the library or [names bookshop] and get books out and go from there.

Her personal research interests relative to design seemed to be more at the level of tapping into the professional design discourse, rather than dealing with deeper theoretical or conceptual issues.

I think it still carries on for me, but its just a little part. I look at a few of the websites that are very useful to me and that's *Communication Arts* and there's AGI<sup>59</sup> and there's AGDA in Australia. I like AGDA because they have this kind of dialogue thing happening where you know the editor kind of like . . . "OK look this is what's happening in the design world". And you know printing people is doing this and cutting jobs for designers because they have in-house people doing the job of designers and you know just the dialogue happening and people actually writing all these things of what they think about that subject.

### **Inability to draw on the cultural capital from design school**

Just as the links between her theory subjects and her practice had seemed tenuous now that she was working as a designer, recourse to the typographic experimentation and learning in design school courses seemed to be implicit, rather than a live resource consciously drawn on. In her work as a graphic designer she had difficulty in relating past work to how she went about using type or imagery. She had found the typefaces used in her design, by

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<sup>59</sup> AGI is the Alliance Graphique Internationale, a European Graphic design organization.

recourse to magazines rather than through consciously applying typographic principles learnt from her design education and then searching for typefaces that fitted that specification.

There was this client that I had and it was to do with contact lenses and he wanted something modern. He didn't want old fashioned, because people don't . . . you know, buying contact lenses, you need to be attracting young kind of . . . with money. And so I just used a typeface, I had *Myriad* or *Meta Plus*. It just depends on the style of version how clear it looks. I flick through a few magazines and I had a look "which one looks good"? What's the trend now? And that's honest. It's true. And I just kind of went back home and see what fonts I have in my computer. And I only had *Myriad*, *Meta plus* and *Arial*. So that's what I showed them. And I said "look at this. I think it's modern and clean and so what do you think of the typeface?" And he was like "yeah I like this one", because you know he thought that it's got that character in it.

Similarly, she had difficulty identifying any design influences or aspects of design history from her design school education that were carried through to her professional working life.

It's more the adventure that doesn't add too much. I love researching about deconstruction you know Neville Brody. I love his design and I thought "yeah that's out there and very fresh and rough". But in the real world, no. They wouldn't in the real world. You just have to stick to what the client wants and that's it. That's what makes money.

From working in the franchising firm and in her work for her own clients, Angie had gained experience in working relationships. However, she had not had any training in an employment situation by other designers or mentors who could have influenced her views on design that may have flowed through to her work and improved client relationships.

### **Resources for design practice**

In the four-year graphic design degree course Angie had completed, varied resources had been offered. Apart from advanced tuition in a number of industry preferred software programmes for graphic design, Angie had completed a course comprising design theory and practical studio classes, often with professional designers as part-time staff, studio topics involving a year of independent research, fine art theory, and cultural studies. The practical studio assignments involved personal inquiry and research that built on both the design history and design critique classes of her second and third years as well as the professional expertise available in the tuition offered by practising professional graphic designers.

Her assignments followed the format of other New Zealand design courses in which a foundation art and design year was followed by a year in which acquiring design skills and design background was important. In the next year practical assignments took the form of

those typical of a graphic design firm. In her final year Angie was able to pursue a research topic in graphic design, which combined theoretical secondary research and a studio portfolio presentation drawing on the research information. However, there was little evidence that the potential of the resources arising from these opportunities was adequately used or recognised, in forms that could lend distinction, in Angie's accounts of her professional work. As Bourdieu concludes, cultural capital can only be objectified "insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production." (1986, p. 247). Similarly, in Angie's accounts of her reading and use of other media like television and the Internet to locate information for her design problem solving, she failed to contribute very much to her practice beyond aspects of visual style. It was the visual presentations in magazines and features on design companies that were regarded as important reference resources in terms of fashion, and style. They were a favoured source of inspiration.

I think mainly magazines because magazines change; it's a trend thing. I see a lot of what's new and what's out there and I get excited if I see something I like in a magazine. It's like "oh yeah this is what I like". And I kind of like books that say about more specific design studios or agencies or other type of agency which for me is the design that I like and when I flick through it . . . it's like it's quite fast you know because I don't want to read the actual thing I just look visually, the visuals is for me. I know it's a bad thing to say but . . . visuals are what get me! And I have a certain style I think that I look at in magazines and books.

In relation to reading for problem solving for a specific brief, Angie described how research tended to involve getting the information either supplied by a client, or found in books and design magazines. Consequently, her use of reading had not changed from the approach of her design school years.

Might be to go to a place like [names bookshop]. They have a lot of visual things I can look at like branding, logos, colours and all those things. And then magazines to see what's out there, what's the trend. I don't think I've actually asked other people. I don't think . . . I think because I look at books that are . . . that relates to what I'm doing. For me I have a specific . . . that I look at. When I borrow or when I buy books it depends on the style that I like in design. And I use the visual more of a visual reference, more than reading information.

Her own interests in reading and current affairs extended to reading the newspaper and entrepreneurship publications which featured stories about successful companies presented at the level of business journalism. Her *ProDesign* reading did not include the dialogue section, which comprised in-depth commentaries about design and marketing issues related to design. She had also intentionally ignored the multidisciplinary articles that would have

broadened her knowledge of the field of design. Reading often entailed looking at the work rather than reading the text and the articles.

They have things about design as well like up and coming designers or design agencies that's kind of making its way. I like reading those. Also *ESPY* the entrepreneur bible. I'm really into that kind of business thing. Also *ProDesign*. That's also something that I read. I just wish they had a specific design magazine, because it's like interior design things about lights and I'm like "oh no I'm not into that". They want more design they want more. . . I just wish there was a specific graphic design magazine. If it's something that really kind of that I really like that what I see is it's very amazing I do read the text below it. But most of the time I flick through things. It's . . . what do you call it skim reading? . . . I can't go any day without a *New Zealand Herald*. I read it every day and flick through it. But I'm not someone who's just going to sit down and read a whole lot of like *Listener* or *Metro* and there's the TV and Internet. That's another thing. And I think that's what I . . . yeah Internet, TV and the *New Zealand Herald* that's just the three things that I do.

This level of reading and viewing did not take in the discourses of the writers and the design companies with any serious attempt to acquire a vocabulary related to how designers think about their work. Angie distilled that further by saying that, within television documentaries about consumers, there was a link to her design work, but stopped at being able to demonstrate how it revealed the motivations of the consumers, or how she saw content that she could have applied to her work in any way, other than in imparting visual values.

TV's a big influence for me. Because that's the way for me to actually see, you know, what's happening out there. For fashion style, current affairs and music videos and also documentaries about consumers. I mean, from one point of view there's a lot of, you know that consumer thing I can actually see what goes well from one point of view especially in a women's kind of, you know, with fashion and the jewellery and also the styling of it. And that's influential in my work, in my design work as well. Yeah. When I see things that will work for me I definitely . . . it's like you slice things in the visual way and you take out that part that you think will do well.

In this Angie suggested that to respond to their audience, designers needed to be able to understand consumer values and that this came largely from understanding the market. However, the publications that she cited were hardly adequate sources to provide that information. *Unlimited* is a magazine featuring brief articles on companies demonstrating entrepreneurship. *Lovemarks* is a promotional publication from the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi in which they show how they have been able to promote brands to consumers, but the publication is scarcely a model of how to go about understanding audience values. Angie felt that there was a basic level of marketing knowledge that



designers needed to be able to work with clients, but in the absence of any serious focus on learning about marketing Angie relied heavily on survey marketing knowledge provided by people that she had worked with as an example or from her own research at an anecdotal level.

Absolutely basic knowledge. I ask a lot of questions, I guess, to the right people. People who knows about marketing. But, I wouldn't go back to school and study marketing. I wouldn't. It's just easier to get it from someone's who's already acquired that knowledge and ask them an interview question and then . . . but I wouldn't go back to school and study. I have read about the Saatchi book, which is out at the moment. It's called *Lovemarks*. I like that book. I was just flicking through it but yeah, that's centred around consumers. Branding. Relationships.

As a graphic designer with limited client budgets, Angie could not provide the thorough marketing knowledge that brand design agencies could often contribute to a client. Without reading about consumer values and marketing to enable her to move beyond the limitations of concentrating visual style, she had had to accept a position in the graphic design field where she was obliged to work within these limitations.

Well the clients have, like with [names the franchising company she worked for] we have someone who specialises in marketing and I would kind of get just my part of it which is to do with the visual identity branding part but, not really marketing, just . . . The client just groups them together and pick our brains and see what ideas come out. I need to know what the client's product is or I need to find out what type of company they are or what type of person they are or . . . and I do that by asking them a few questions and writing it down . . . yeah I think so. I think I need to do a lot of research. If I'm doing . . . if I have to create something for a client to do with the product, I need to do a lot of research about what they wanted, what the company's about, what the product is not just design style . . .

To Angie, discussions about style essentially focussed on an interest in visual trends. She chose to follow published work styles in the absence of deeper conceptual thinking. Those examples demonstrated largely a concern for the visual rather than for questions of sensibility and appropriateness. She had difficulty in explaining how the two might be balanced or offer an understanding of the designer's dilemma in recognising style as something that has to be dealt with.

Style for me I think is what's now; what's the trend; what's out there at the moment. Style is, I think for me . . . because every year has different styles . . . change, like you know 60's retro, vintage and then you have like pop music. I think I get influenced by what's out there. There's a lot of imitating . . . it's very hard to find original . . .

originality is very hard now. Because a lot of people have done it and you're kind of recycling that.

In Angie's design process<sup>60</sup> she lacked the luxury of time to be able to develop work, depending heavily on emulating current style found from examples of published work accessible via the Internet or in the design press. In the description of her research she showed that she stopped short of finding out about deeper issues concerning what people believe and the patterns of people's behaviour that could have strengthened the conceptual base to her work.

Research, as in you know, going on the Internet . . . see what else is out there. Go to [names bookshop] because they have books that are a good reference for branding and yeah, I just want to come up with something that's successful not just something that would last for a month and that's it . . . I find it hard to find my own identity. There's just too much out there that it's hard to pinpoint some thing that you think is your identity. . . If I'm doing a café brand I have to look at other Internet websites about, you know a particular brand of café restaurant.

Even with a heavy reliance on style precedents located in her research, Angie relied on her managers' response to her work to assess it, rather than being able to be more authoritative by reading and building up her own concepts and applying self critique to her work.

That's why I have the managers actually say "Oh yeah they'll like it". Or my boss: "No it's not going to work". It's hard to critique your own work. It's very hard because you made it. You created it. You're the one who went through all the research and, you know, came up with this. You know it's very hard. You just feel so . . . of course I made it. I love it, it's mine. But you can't do that.

### **Need for social capital**

Much has been written about the importance of learning through communities of practice<sup>61</sup>. Within design discourses, Ashton (2001, p. 331) refers to relationships amongst designers as social capital, a term proposed by Bourdieu to mean "a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership of a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital" (1986, p. 248). Angie had not developed social networks to helped her to build up this expertise. She was conscious of her isolation, readily agreeing

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<sup>60</sup> In considering that she did not have any particular design process, Angie had inadvertently recognised that some sort of process occurs in practice to achieve a developed design. Here she actually described a process.

<sup>61</sup> The work of Wenger (1998), on communities of practice and Lave & Wenger (1995) on participation in social practice, build on the constructivist ideas of Vygotsky. They reflect a growing interest in the communal aspect of learning.

that she needed to develop networks and learn from others who may contribute to her knowledge she had about design,

The thing is, most of the people from my year they've all kind of dispersed, disappeared and now I don't know where they are. Except [names student] and she is so busy its so hard to get hold of her and when I ask her something she's not very good at explaining it. I want to join DINZ, because I think that's one thing I missed when I was at [design school] I didn't bother with, and I think I need to go. It comes with experience as well. I really have to think seriously about what I'm doing, where I 'm going, and you know be serious about the business the design part of it and yeah. I think I need to network and just talk to as much designers as I can and see what they say about what's happening and how they go about things and . . .

In conversations with friends about controversial subjects, she reflected on her ability to discuss the issues in question, a response that shows her sense of problems in interacting with others.

When I do I get really emotional - I get so heated talking to them - and I'm like: "oh no we're not talking about this again." But yeah I do, but I don't . . . Yeah, it's what you've heard or seen on TV or you've read that's kind of upsetting and you know you talk about it between you and your friends and they have a different view about it as well. It's all kind of personal. I mean, what has happened to you and kind of . . . it gets very personal. Yeah, my personal experience. Affects what you know, what happens. I think well . . . we were discussing about racism in the workplace and that's I think . . . that's very true. It's so true. And I mean for me that is a personal thing and I can relate to that. But to my other friends who's kind of like born here and you know they can't see it because it's totally different from them. Yeah but I think with friends you really have to be careful because you don't want to lose a friend. So you just kind of . . . you know once you've said what your opinion is, just let it go and they know what you think . . . your thoughts about it. Yeah . . . and the people that you talk to. If it's someone that you don't know quite well, that's one thing that can get . . .

### **Communication problems**

Angie had a mixture of clients, many of whom did not develop ongoing working relationships. It was questionable whether she had really thought about the kind of working relationships she had with the people who did return compared with the ones that did not.

You know things happen differently and there's conflict there and next thing you know you don't want to work with them anymore. It started from bad to worse actually. It didn't go bad to better. That's why I'm going back to school because I think I need to have a break. I've had, you know, first of all [Franchising firm]. Its all verbal, you know, no written contracts, nothing. There's no proof. It was partly my fault because I should have done it with a signature. And then I had the freelance work from other

clients and other people I'd known. They didn't treat it seriously I think that's the problem. And they thought, oh yeah, someone they know who can do this job, design it and get on with it. But they didn't think about the ethical part of design. You can't just go and give it away to another creative person and work on it. And also this Mac operator thing that I did for six months to do ads in a magazine. That didn't work well because there was a communication problem between me and the manager.

She had not found it any easier, over the period that she had been working, to expect that clients would see the design values in her work. Angie described the background of one client she regarded as being more visually literate than others. That the client, according to Angie, had the ability to distinguish good work and that sort of understanding had come out of the client's familiarity with a range of printed material in the area that he was looking at.

A good example is my boss from [names firm]. I mean, he knows about design although he's more of a business person than, you know, a creative person. But he knows what's out there he knows the trends. He knows what colours to use . . . that would go with the brand and the type of look so . . . yeah it's good to actually communicate with someone like that who knows about the visual thing in design. He goes to a lot of conferences and overseas as well. He reads books and magazines and he knows a lot of people. He knows advertising agencies as well. So I think it's the influence of what people have told him and . . . What is the . . . good and bad . . . as a trend.

### **Reflection on design process**

The thinking about the approach to her work is not described as a source of change or a source of recognition of what Angie did. It was questionable whether her work practice moved from the implicit experience, to a recognition of her process and reflection on her work, through regularly focussing on thinking about what she drew on in her design and the products of her design process. She had not seen the value of a de-briefing process, either personally or as a group, on a project basis. She tended to move from one design task to another without very much reflection on how she worked. Her understanding of reflection was at the level of recalling past projects rather than evaluating why some of her work could be more successful than other projects she had undertaken.

My approach to design would be . . . It's more like there isn't one . . . There is no . . . I did have time management . . . When it's the design process, I think about what I am going to do in . . . how I am going to go about it. You know, reading books and all that, to keep really informed, but . . . It does happen especially when I am looking at someone's work, and I've thought "I could have done better" you know that type of digesting someone's work and thinking "that person wasn't really . . . didn't execute it well or maybe as I could have done. I will give you an example. Like at the moment, I

am actually doing a job for [souvenir manufacturer], so we are focussing on souvenir stuff, like kiwi icons and he briefed me on that. We had a meeting, and there was no written brief. It was all verbal, so I was just taking notes. He showed me samples of what other designers have done and I wasn't very impressed because that's what you do . . . you think you could have done better but, I was kinda like, you know, when there's a new job, I kind of stand back a bit and just treat it as formal, a business thing and would that company benefit from the work I'll be doing for them?

### **New directions**

Angie was motivated as much by her frustration at failing to make her way as a graphic designer working in the conventional print sector of graphic design, as in her desire to train in interactive design. It seemed likely that she had decided to enrol on an interactive design course as the result of reflecting on where she was in her career, but not on evaluating her design process and resources for design thinking versus technology expertise where she could rely on specialised knowledge without necessarily needing to be able to engage in looser conceptual approaches prevalent in other areas of graphic design. She had specific expectations of what it might provide, and what it might get her, leading to a more technical approach to her work and a changing position in the graphic design field. The design process and portfolios referred to digital design, from her interactive design course, rather than print based graphic design, suggesting a shift towards more technically oriented work in her position in the field.

I think to be honest, doing print design. There's too many people out there, y'know. I need to be able to kinda of move to the next level and that's to learn interactive design. It's more technology, it's kind of like, advanced because everyone's going to 3D animation and motion graphics and I thought, because I was working in a place where it's all kinda print and layout it just doesn't have that spark anymore. I just wanted to try other things to up-skill myself. And see if there is anything better out there for me, opportunities, anyway. It's hands on . . . yes. It's not a theory class. I don't do history or anything to do with theory studies about design, but we have guest speakers that would come to the school and tell us how they go about things with their design process and probably show us portfolios of their work.

### **Conclusions**

Angie's account of her trajectory in the graphic design field provides clear evidence that she became disadvantaged in a number of ways. She had lacked the opportunity to take advantage of the capital arising from the habitus of a design firm that would otherwise have been available if she had found employment with a design firm. Angie also lacked opportunities to accumulate expertise in the freelance working relationship she had.

This must be seen as a structure of the graphic design field. The exclusion from entry to design firms is one aspect, control of access to clients, rather than working through brokers is another. She was so positioned by brokers that she was denied the opportunity to meet the clients she designed for, and in these situations powerless, in that their views were mediated through someone else. Her reaction took the form of frustration but stopped short of recognition of the necessary cultural capital for the position she needed to be in to respond to the demands of the work she was briefed to do. Her resources for design practice were restricted by the limited cultural capital that she brought either from her design school education or from her family background, to apply to the studio work she undertook. This was demonstrated by the limitations of concentrating on the passing fashion aspect of visual style that inevitably led to eclecticism. Her own accounts indicate that on one hand she felt the non-acceptance of her work was more on account of the clients' decisions than her own and yet she had a constant trail of less than satisfactory working relationships, whether employed as staff or as a design consultant. Even though she professed to appreciate the value of business knowledge, her situation was made worse by her reticence to learn more about the field of business and how business requirements impinged on the conceptual work she was asked to do. There was also unrecognised social capital that could have otherwise been available through forming designer networks where she could have been assisted to make the transition from student to graphic designer. We could be forgiven for attributing aspects of Angie's inability to make her way as a graphic designer to inadequacies of the design school programme she undertook. However, in the following case study, Warren a student on the same course, was able to respond to the opportunities offered, and to demonstrate the importance of acquiring requisite resources and developing social networks.

## **Warren:**

### **Professional knowledge and social capital**

Both Warren and Angie were graduates of the same degree programme. He was twenty-three and had been working for two years since graduating. Besides having established his own clients, he had worked in a part-time capacity, for a well-known graphic design company. Unlike Angie, who had struggled to make her way from tertiary education to employment in the graphic design field, Warren had established a network that made the transition almost imperceptible. This case shows how Warren drew on various forms of capital to accomplish this. His family habitus and the related dispositions were conducive to developing artistic and creative values. However, the importance he placed on building up and drawing on social capital, even before graduating, provided opportunities to amass resources relative to practice and facilitate the transition into the graphic design field. The resources acquired during his design school education contributed cultural capital that he came to recognise once he was out of his course and fully ensconced in graphic design practice. Much of the discussion in the case study relates to the working opportunities arising from the social capital he accumulated with clients and design companies whilst still at design school, on one hand, and the cultural capital offered by his design school education, on the other. Fundamental to this discussion is the question of how Warren could become part of a network that would effectively enable him to set up work sources and gain the graphic design experience that this situation could provide. To understand the way in which this occurred attention needs to be turned firstly, to the importance of embodied capital and the resources built up through the family setting and secondly, to the way in which he developed social awareness out of these influences.

Warren revealed how embodied capital<sup>62</sup> may have been significant both in his dispositions towards creative practice and in his implicit sense of the value of social networks. These values were evident in the family environment through his parents. In his account, Warren refers to the influence of his father's work as an architect and of his mother's artistic interests. These had a bearing on his creative development.

I think the fact that my dad is an architect is probably somewhat influential. Not directly, because I know I never wanted to be an architect. I didn't want to follow in those footsteps, but I think just the fact that I was in an environment where I grew up . . . where dad was . . . you know, just creating, I suppose, and would look at buildings

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<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of embodied capital refer to p. 120 in Angie's case study.

and I'd look at his work and . . . We never really had deep discussions about why he did stuff, on the sort of theoretical level, but definitely at a visual level I understood how plans worked. I didn't know the technical aspects of it but that isn't what I'm interested in. It didn't become evident till I was in seventh form and I did photography and I was like "Hey I quite like this whole creative thing".

Warren also recognised the way that his mother had contributed to his interest. She had creative interests that were to influence him, and he appeared to be intrigued to reflect on the different ways that her work had been an example to him.

She'd done drawing way back and she'd shown me some really objective . . . not expressive whatsoever, and so they were very . . . like I remember . . . like table and chairs and stuff like that. And she'd also done watercolour painting and I suppose she'd . . . now that I think about it, she'd done, like flower arrangement and stuff. Just sort of on the side because she's a bookkeeper and she did some teaching as well. I think it was probably her . . . I don't know, somehow influencing me, that she was always trying to be creative you know.

### **Home influence on social awareness**

Whilst the values he held about society, were strongly influenced by his family, Warren was also able to express views independently of his parents. He could recognise a time in his life when he started to think deeply about society and become aware of underlying social issues. By the time he was at design school, interests in the social sciences had become an important part of the programme and the habits of reading and discussing social issues built up in the preceding years enabled him to respond confidently to the requirements of social science studies.

I suppose I've always spoken candidly or whatever, about politics and that kind of thing but it's never been like "let's sit down and talk about politics" or "let's sit down and talk about what's happening in this crazy world we live in". I'd have to say the underlying thing is definitely my parents' influences because that's sort of like the bedrock on which I've built, I think. And I guess that means that through everything I probably see, I can't help but see the world through the glasses I've been given, anyway. Well we were definitely a household that would watch the news instead of *Shortland Street* at 6 o'clock. I never thought of watching the news as being purely passive. I found it more explorative or information gathering. I guess it can be quite tiring. I've never been feeling 'not confident' in bringing my own opinion to the conversation. Definitely, my parents are very comfortable with me having whatever opinion I personally come up with and not having *their* opinion.



### **Cultural interests encouraged**

Having the creative influence of his family, it was not surprising that Warren developed musical and cultural interests, even though he found that, compared with music, participation in art and ‘visual things’ was more instinctive.

Yeah I did music I studied music from third and fourth form and then sixth form. It was good. I like music. I don’t think I’m quite as good as I could be. I find with design and visual things I just sort of do it from feel a lot more. I’ve like got three guitars and I play the drums and I learnt the piano. I wish I kept learning it, but I gave it up because it wasn’t cool, probably. And the bass . . . played in an orchestra that kind of music. I went to a few concerts and stuff like that and...yeah, cultural . . . I remember going to . . . in sixth or seventh form I went to Shakespeare University outdoor production of Shakespeare.

### **Early group awareness**

Warren had a diverse circle of friends who played in his soccer team. Many of these friendships continued, indicating that he had not moved away from these friendships as he came to know others through design school or design internships. Outdoor interests in sport extended to orienteering. This, in turn, prepared him for an *Outward Bound*<sup>63</sup> course later. He was able to observe positive values from his Outward Bound Experience.

You got together with different people from all different parts of, you know, socio-economic geographical areas and stuff like that. It did happen that the one that I went on, it was between schools so a lot of them were University students who were about to go to, or had graduated from, university. But some also were there sponsored by the dole and Inland Revenue to go to it. They were all, like, if you do something, do what you don’t normally do, so I tried to just be supportive of them, so everything would come out sort of naturally. And I think it was good. Like everyone seemed to have a chance to lead at different times. I always see that leading is all about serving. There’s no glory in it, so it is hard work. I think it was really good.

### **Design school education**

Drawing on the embodied cultural capital of his family environment, Warren was able to distinguish himself by the standard of his work and the aptitude he had for the challenges of the course at design school. However, unlike other students in his programme, he also saw the value of locating design firms that could provide him work experience, which he regarded as being distinguishable from the coursework in his design school programme. He had departed from the typical student path of obligatory unpaid internship later in the course and their choice of paid holiday jobs outside design. Instead, Warren had set out to build up

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<sup>63</sup> *Outward Bound* is a New Zealand non-profit organization offering young people outdoor experience in both teamwork and self reliance.

a network to clients and design firms that could provide professional experience, providing social capital for practice. The significance of his family habitus cannot be underestimated in this situation. A number of factors contributed to his decision to seek professional design practice knowledge, but they all, in some way or other, come back to the implicit values expressed as dispositions traceable back to his family setting. In his responses, these values were never far from the surface. While his parents had provided and encouraged independence, the background of that independence was couched in their encouragement of creative interests, socialisation and self-development. His father's architectural practice provided a model of professional practice that included internships.

I think I just recognised . . . probably, like dad occasionally gets people in on work experience, but it's not like it's a big thing he has been doing. I think I just figured well, like, you know, I worked the years between college and design school. I worked a half a year at a signage place, so I think like, yeah, that's probably something . . .

Warren asked his lecturer at the design school for a recommendation of a design firm to approach. The referral came out of the lecturer's own long-established professional network of design colleagues. Warren had both sensed the value of professional contact and been able to make that contact through the social capital offered by his design school lecturer. In his first self elected internship with Alpha Design<sup>64</sup> Warren learnt about the studio work environment and became conscious of the way that graphic designers worked in a team capacity. In his account, he identifies an ongoing challenge for design educators, the difficulty in providing opportunities and incentives for personal achievement, but at the same time the experience of working as a team where individualism is directed towards contributing to a group result within design constraints (Jackson, 2000, p. 41)

Just to see the work environment and just to see how people work together and don't have to be on the sly, looking over your shoulder to see who's looking at your work and eventually copy it for an assignment and that. Whereas there, there would be little of that and you're both working towards . . . all working towards the same goal. I suppose I saw it in my dad's office. But I never really hung out and saw them working together. I knew that people worked together but that was my first personal experience of graphic designers working together. It was pretty cool.

Even though he thought that he saw this practice knowledge outside the parameters of student assignments at the time, he was now able to make a connection in this response. This experience would affect how he approached problem solving and his resources used in his student work and later in his own work. This was an opportunity to make comparisons

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<sup>64</sup> The term 'Alpha' is a pseudonym for this design company. The next two design companies he worked in for internship experience are similarly identified by the pseudonyms 'Omega Design' and 'Beta' Design.

between a lecturer giving him a brief and the way that graphic designers actually worked in design firm. He was surprised by new ways of working, particularly in the way graphic designers responded to a brief and developed concept presentations. In his description, Warren refers to the detail of graphic design work, touching on technical aspects often already pursued within the limitations of a design school course, but brought to life in the realities of design practice in the firm. The language that he uses demonstrates as Schön (1983, p. 80) suggests, that drawing and talking are two parallel ways of designing<sup>65</sup>

I remember asking a specific question like something, like you know, “what’s a logotype?” and then “what do you do with it?” and that kind of thing and then learnt about setting up x-height and setting up brand directory, you know, like guidelines. That kind of thing. I didn’t know anything about that before that. Back in year two, I mean you didn’t need to know that, but I always wanted to know. We were working on the [names project] branding and that allowed me to see . . . you know, not just design, like a timetable cover, but design of a whole way-finding system and the look of the vehicles and the planner and make them all feel the same. They’re a lot more, just on the level there. I mean I was just a junior, I didn’t know anything technically, but they still said “Hey Warren, here’s all your tasks but try to design this thing”. And then I would do a bunch of options and come back and they’d be like “Yeah well how about this and this. Oh yeah you’ve got to do that crummy job too but then this and this” and then I’d go and work at night on that kind of thing.

Warren’s experience was unusual in the sense that most students undertook professional work after their design school time and to some degree, during the design school years, whereas it had been a significant part of his life while he was still at design school. He formed values and learnt about design by taking advantage of the resources that Alpha had at their disposal. The library, their case ideas from previous jobs and their own experience were accessible resources. He was able to reflect on what they had done, access information and tap into their fund of experience. All this was presented to him in the feedback that he was offered from other designers at Alpha.

Well yeah, that’s the thing I would ask them . . . these questions and they would be happy to answer them. They had all these resources there that I spent lots of time looking through, and I still have photocopies of things that I thought were really useful.

Compared with the self-elected internships at Alpha, and Beta (to be discussed next), Warren’s internship at Omega, directed by the design school, was disappointing. Even though he was able to experience the culture of a multidisciplinary design firm<sup>66</sup> and have

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<sup>65</sup> Refer also to the reference to genres and language in discourse in Chapter three p. 67.

<sup>66</sup> Omega worked in product, interior and graphic design.

contact with a leading New Zealand designer, it demonstrated the limitations of a one-week internship where the opportunities for learning were affected by the short time period spent there.

I just kinda came in. He gave stuff to me, whereas at Alpha . . . at first it was like that, but then the next time I went back, I was there for a purpose, for three weeks and I had a project we were working on and so I got involved in it. I'd get along and do stuff and have targets to meet that were really cool. I'd get to do all the stuff, that isn't this cool. I can design this or that. The same with Beta . . .

### **Beta Design**

Warren had one or two days a week part-time employment with Beta, a large design company, in the last year of design school. The creative director from Beta, had come to speak to final-year students. Warren identified with the philosophy and immediately requested an internship. At Beta, he was happy to be a 'gopher' to get valued experience.

At places like that I just see myself as someone that helps them work better and quicker and easier. Well at Beta there's Des<sup>67</sup>, he's the overseeing creative director. Then they have one of the head designers who would be the job owner. They'll do something and take it to Des and go away and do something more and then work with production. And then there's the guy who does copywriting so they'll work with them. Then there's the client liaison person who'll work with the designer to say okay this is actually what the client wants. And in that part of the process I'm seriously just the guy that comes in and helps probably mainly the designers to do their work. Like if they need anything. There's no sort of 'Beta way' or anything other than that it's got to be at a particular standard I think, which it is. And they do really nice work.

### **Work culture and participatory learning**

Warren had found particular cultures in the design firms he worked with which provided opportunities for peripheral learning (Wenger, 1998, p. 100). Wenger makes reference to the difficulties for students to enter communities of practice that can provide opportunities for 'learning on the floor' and most importantly, the difficulty of building relationships with, as Wenger (1998) describes it "old-timers" (p. 92). In the graphic design field, those able to provide the most valuable learning experiences are not necessarily senior designers, but they are practitioners who are accomplished in the field. Lave and Wenger, (1991, p. 14) use the term 'legitimate peripheral participation' to "gain an approximation of full participation that gives exposure to actual practice". In the self-directed internships that Warren had set up he had often been able to exceed approximation of practice to take part in actual projects and be

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<sup>67</sup> Pseudonym for the creative director.

privity to the practice knowledge implicit to them. He was able to describe, in particular, the value arising from learning about brand development, teamwork and networking.

### **Brand development**

In an approach where the idea is a significant part of the success of design<sup>68</sup> it is a necessary for a graphic designer to understand not only visual concerns and but also the ideas that form the concept of the work. Warren recounted how this had been important both to Alpha and Beta design companies and how he had followed their philosophy.

There was a thing . . . when they were talking about design with ‘heart’ at Alpha Design. It’s like design with a story, there’s sort of, an underlying something or other that’s a veneer, more than how it looks, but there’s actually some meat to the work. I definitely got that. I mean, the thing is that with Beta, they don’t do work that doesn’t have a story . . . that whole thing is it’s “What’s the brand here?”. I’ve always tried to do a story behind the visual now I feel that I’ve got to where . . . yeah . . . the visuals are more you. The visual language is more of a given and the thing that really makes it special is it’s concept, it’s idea, “What’s it embodying? What’s it’s seed? What’s its story?” That kind of thing. So you can make it look pretty and for no reason at all but I think if you really want to affect somebody you need to be saying something. That’s what I am saying. I knew it was there, but you just don’t know. And so actually being there and talking to the brand manager and just seeing how it’s actually got quite a lot of structure to it. My research from [design school] last year, that helped . . . walked hand in hand with what I was learning from Beta.

Having explained how he had learnt about the concept of a brand story Warren was able to describe how he could apply this thinking to his work and how he had had a sense of the relevance of this approach even before seeing it in the work of Alpha and Beta.

I definitely . . . it’s good to do mood boards, or look and feel boards or whatever and writing and you can do as much as you need. You can do it forever on a particular brand. But I do find that sometimes I can’t, then directly take a sentence and create necessarily a visual from that. So it’s kind of like it has to work on the visuals and then on the story and then somehow they reconcile together. I definitely work . . . I would always put a story behind . . . before I knew about branding or whatever, I’d make myself a little story about who this person was and who this firm was and what they did and what they liked and what they looked at and stuff like that.

### **Group values and teamwork**

Ideas about teamwork were hardly new to Warren, who had seen the value of teamwork in

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<sup>68</sup> This approach, increasingly accepted as graphic designers talk and think in a language of ‘brand’, is probably no better expressed than by Christopher Liechty, President of AIGA Centre for Cross Cultural Design who stated that “Design without content is going nowhere” (Liechty, 2006).

the social values of his Outward Bound experience. He valued co-operation with people and the goal setting involved in Outward Bound.

I love working in a team I feel that I know that everyone's got their strengths and weaknesses and each will complement the other. And so it was like that at Outward Bound.

He could be positive about what he felt he brought to the team and about working with a team where different people each made contributions. In his first internship with Alpha he had shown the ability to function well in a team. Alpha were keen to have him come back to work in their team for a large design project bid and Warren was able to negotiate work experience leave from the design school programme because of the value the school placed on his opportunity to work on this submission.

### **Networking**

Graphic designers, like others in the business sector, are often exposed to articles published in their respective professional press about the value of networking.<sup>69</sup> Warren's priority on building a network of contact with graphic design firms was evidence in itself of the value he placed on professional networks. However, like many graphic designers in New Zealand he was less concerned about forming a wider network through DINZ. The opportunities to learn from others were a priority in Warren's network.

Networking is amazing. It really is all about who you know. But then at the same time I don't just speak to them because they might be able to give me a job or might be able to hook me up with some other contact sometime. I really try to take each person on their own or each company on their own merit, in what they can do. I don't really hang out with other designers . . . just new ways of seeing things, new ways of doing things. Not necessarily new, just other ways that I hadn't seen around in my magazine or other research that I've been doing. Just talking to people is interesting. Just getting in their heads is interesting. Because everyone thinks a little differently, I think, and I like just being able to talk to someone and go "Hey I like that part of what they're saying, I like that part of what they're doing."

### **Client work**

Through the opportunities for peripheral learning in these two internships Warren had been able to see how aspects of brand, teamwork and networking could contribute to graphic design practice. He was able to apply these approaches to his own practice. From as early as his second year at design school he had established working relationships that he was able to

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<sup>69</sup> The New Zealand design Magazine *ProDesign* and New Zealand business magazines like *Marketing* have run articles on networking.

maintain as current clients. His comments about these working relationships reflect the progress that he had made over the time that he had worked for these firms in particular.

### **Gamma Fashions<sup>70</sup>**

In describing how he came to work for Gamma we are given an example of the way in which Warren saw the value of actual client work experience, even though he was heavily committed to coursework at design school. This client connection came out of a desire to bring some real life experience into his coursework.

I knew them already, through people I had met . . . Like Nigel who runs the label . . . in my seventh form photography. He was a very good skater and so I already knew him and then . . . we were looking through . . . [names his lecturer]. And so we were just looking through [names fashion magazine] generally and I noticed in news and notes an article about Gamma. And I was thinking . . . “Man I know that”. I looked him up and said “can we do this project?” We had a kind of magazine feature or spread . . . “and can we use you guys as the subject” and [names another student] and I worked together and we took photos that came out really well and we thought we must . . . and Gamma liked what I did and they rang me on Wednesday afternoon and they said “we need an ad”. I said like “yeah, that’s awesome”. They said “like tomorrow morning!” And I was like . . . “I can do that!”

Warren’s work with Gamma Fashions had an impact on his learning at design school. From that experience he saw the professionalism gained from experience at Gamma Fashions flowing back into design school assignments, even though he viewed these assignments to lack the authenticity of professional work. Over the period between his time at the design school and the years following, Warren had been able to develop his own distinctive approach to work for Gamma. He had managed to build on the knowledge base from design school and his brand development work reflected the experience gained in Alpha and Beta.

No it was definitely real world experience. At design school you don’t have parameters like print runs and stuff like that. At design school I would be aware because I work in the industry that there were these parameters but I’d try not to be ruled by them. But I think to be honest I was just trying to learn the industry and get work experience and apply that work experience to design school life. I think I always go based fundamentally on one feel that it gives me. “How does that look? Has that got it? Has that got that something special? If it has, do I try to change it?” I think that I always sort of had my way of doing it and I’ve definitely just developed that. I can go to Delta Music now, which is another place that I work, and obviously it can’t look like Gamma because it’s a different thing. And if they look the same then it would be trouble. And I’m able to cope with that and do it, but there’s still things that I like to do, like line

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<sup>70</sup> ‘Gamma Fashions’, ‘Sigma Gift Store’ and ‘Delta Music’ are pseudonyms for the actual companies.

stuff up. But now I'm thinking, "Does it have to be perfectly lined up anymore?" With Gamma it's all about just showing the clothes. And I'm like, "Yeah, but can you just show a picture of the clothes?" You can say so much more in how it's presented and how it's photographed. I'm going to go on the next photo shoot, but so far, I've just got the photos given to me. And I'm like, "OK what do I do with these now?"

I definitely need to take a lot more responsibility at Gamma.

In working with Beta, Warren had been able to see dedicated staff supplying marketing expertise. He doubted that Gamma drew sufficiently on marketing knowledge relative to design. Marketing decisions were the prerogative of the owner, herself a design school fashion graduate, who was reticent to allow Warren the degree of control of design he wanted. Eventually, he had moved from seeing the work experience with these clients as a valuable source of practice knowledge, to the present situation where his knowledge was not fully utilised because of the control the client exercised over design decisions.

I think at the initial stage and the way that I tried to sell it to them is that it's just interesting. For me how does that fit into my design? I don't know because at one point you design to your perceived customer. You're going to level it here. You're going to get people all around . . . "what are they buying it for? That's weird, they're not the demographic". And it's interesting to know that other people are buying it, that you don't think would or that you haven't aimed at. But I don't think that's going to make me include them necessarily. Because you always aim, I've found . . . I've always thought this from way back, that companies will aim a little higher than the age group that they want to capture so they can get some of their "demographic". But you know young people want to live up to older people. Like what they're doing, it's cool and stuff. I'm definitely finding with Gamma, at the moment . . . the main designer is very particular, you know. She started her label that's very successful and has been going for a few years now, and she's willing to let the production side of things go into other people's hands and distribution side of things go into other people's hands, you know, other employees, so she gets to just design the garment and they make it and then they take the order. Well she'll probably show it but they'll take the orders on the fax machine and pack them and send them out. That just happens when your business gets bigger. She's less willing to relinquish control of design now.

In addition to Gamma Fashions, Warren established two further clients, Sigma Gift Store and Delta Music. Sigma came out of a competition for branding in his third year of the design school programme. There was a signage project and the design of other implementation items. It provided opportunities to learn about retail design and how to work with clients in the retail sector. Delta Music was a Christian music promotions organization he had encountered through his church. Warren had been able to set up work with Delta immediately after graduating. The experience he had gained with other firms was significant



in enabling him to establish capital in the graphic design field, putting him much further ahead in practice knowledge than others on his course, enabling him to lead the client even though he had just completed his design school degree.

I was working at Delta quite a lot straight out of school. I started . . . I graduated on Friday and started there on the Monday, it was pretty intense, and worked there through until January. They're a music company, a music label. But I work in a little design team with a creative director and a designer. So that's cool but they're not quite as experienced as Beta by a long shot. At Delta Music they've got marketing . . . I almost told them what to tell me. Like I gave them a list of things that I'd like them to answer. I was just working on this big project. It had like supporters who'd just donate money because it's really quite expensive to run that festival. And they've had the same visual identity for about five or six or seven even, years or something crazy like that and we were just going to overhaul it and that was going to be my job. Turned out to be too expensive unfortunately at this point in time. But in the process work before we kind of got the stop put on it, we got through first look stages. And it was just interesting like they would come to us and tell us about what they wanted. And then we'd have to sort of interpret it and we'd come back with this idea and it would be like "whoa that's . . . !" And we'd have to explain to them "No, its OK. Its achievable it's this and this and this", and break it down a little bit more for them. Because we just think - big pressure. Boom. And I think as a designer you know that there's steps to get there. But other people don't.

### **Social capital**

The three internships, each with well-established design companies<sup>71</sup> and the client network developed, provided Warren with a source of social capital through which to build cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248)<sup>72</sup> provides a useful way of understanding Warren's intentions and actions, in building up his network of clients and design companies. The material exchanges in these relationships were variable. Opportunities to observe practice and to acquire the related cultural capital were of more importance than remuneration to Warren, in his quest for internships in different design companies on an unpaid basis during his design school years. When he built up his own client base while still at design school, remuneration was an additional benefit to the opportunities for experience in producing graphic design. Even such a small network can be regarded as a source of social capital. In Bourdieu's terms, the volume of social capital possessed is dependent on the size of the network of connections and the volume of capital possessed by each participant to whom the individual is connected (1986, p. 250). For Warren, it was sufficient for his network to be

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<sup>71</sup> Alpha, Beta and Sigma have all had work recognised by DINZ *Best Awards* and are profiled in *Better by Design*, the New Zealand Government Department of Trade and Enterprise design advisory body.

<sup>72</sup> Refer p. 130.

small so long as the opportunities and experience offered by each company were of value in his quest to generate cultural capital relative to graphic design practice.

### **Cultural capital from design education**

External work had become a very significant to Warren, who was faced with balancing his interest in professional experience with his design school course work. His assessment of the opportunities the school could provide in learning about practice aspects of graphic design were coloured by his involvement in external client work. Where he saw design school tuition to be inadequate to enable him to accomplish aspects of his client work involving more advanced software knowledge, he taught himself the programmes, and in the process put himself ahead of others on the course. While the levels of computer software tuition in the design school course may have lagged behind his needs for real world design practice, he could be more positive about what he had brought from tertiary education in the wider sense of theory drawn from cultural studies modules, and from studio practice. Predominantly, it was studio information that was carried across to practice but he could see the relationship of cultural theory to it, in dealing with aspects of consumer values related to brand identity work for example.

Yeah, I generally feel like I taught myself a lot of things along the way rather than learnt from the lecturers. You know like we had lots of lessons in Photoshop<sup>®</sup> and Illustrator<sup>®</sup> and such, but I was better at it than other people because I just worked on it and taught myself and had jobs to do it with, and just got better at it . . . I think that having a tertiary education just sort of helped me to think around a problem a bit better . . . Like, I'll have something to do and then I'll have, you know, what we did in classes, in theory classes and what we did as assignments, to draw upon to help me answer that particular project I'm working on. I see the work I'm doing now as, like practical work, so its just like I've done it for the last five years and that's sort of what I do. And I guess each assignment was just a building block on the next to now. Whereas I can see theory running in parallel and me taking from it, rather than it being . . . That's why I'm able to put out variants like this kind of thing. Whereas my [design school studio] education . . . it was sort of what happened in the practical side of things. I just did it and got better I suppose.

### **The value of theoretical knowledge**

Knowledge about studio practice and processes seemed to have been built up progressively from basic learning at year two at design school, to the ongoing knowledge related to professional practice. Knowledge related to art practices, which he loosely terms 'visual theory' dealing with popular culture and media studies, on the other hand, was viewed as providing a resource for broader thinking related to practice.

I would definitely say that visual theory . . . all the theoretical side . . . you can't get that from work experience. That was very important. Yeah, that was great. But with design sensibility, I find, like, say . . . I got it back in year two. Where it's four years on I want to get something else. I'm trying to challenge the way that I've always done my design. I think really more than anything it taught me to learn. It's probably the best thing about that so now . . . OK I want to find out that . . . well I'll go and research it or go and look at five different news articles and find out my own opinion of it, media and stuff. But direct influence . . . yeah, articles can help but . . . put ideas into . . . I can't say it ever was like "I'm going to do a design to represent the sublime you know the unknown, and so I'm going to do a design to do that". But now I guess I'm trying to go "OK, I've always done work for clients. Now can I do design for design's sake, or art for art's sake". And I think even though I probably don't directly reference my theoretical study it can't help but be useful. I really liked the fact that our theory classes were with artists and photographers because it meant that I saw that work and then that work and those ideas were . . . we didn't see as much design and so I'd be getting that input and so I'd be like "OK how do I answer that in design language?" Because stylistically, yeah I'd see, you know other things and they're like, "Yeah, that's cool. I like that".

There were links between design school theory topics and professional practice. Warren's design school background had involved research approaches that were to be valued in his work with design companies and clients. His design school education had provided opportunities for the development of writing skills that had enabled him to improve his skills in organising ideas and expressing concepts. He also goes on to refer to the learning of transferable knowledge through the habitus of the firm.

I definitely think the design school theoretical research side of things . . . not even just research . . . yeah, at design school, you know, I had to go away and source essays and source visuals and stuff like that to put into my work. So I think in learning that at design school I am able just to do it better where I work. I'm definitely all about writing so I'll try to visualise . . . because when you go to make a presentation to a client, you've got to be able to say why you do stuff and have some rationale, justification and so on. And school's taught me to do that. To be able to articulate what I'm trying to show. And then, like there's what I'm trying to show, just trying to develop in school and writing and stuff, and [names design firm] their core values and stuff like that, try to develop my own sort of sense of how I attack a problem.

The confidence and independence that he gained in his working relationships with his own clients and in design firms served to make the limitations of his design school course more obvious. Having started to consolidate his own ways of working from the time of his second year at design school, he was aware of the professional knowledge that was hard for the school to replicate. The transition to the workplace involved much more knowledge about

production aspects of professional practice, although Warren had come some way to acquiring this knowledge through his own work as well as working with the Beta Design, in particular, in the period before completing his design school degree. Discussing the changes he made between school and professional employment he observed.

The biggest one would be the production process of my work. Twenty percent is kind of design and the rest of it just getting it made. So you've got to go up and check it and on a time kind of basis and you know, you can have a little concentrated bit of design and then develop that until you've got it sort of to its finished part. But then you've got to go and talk to the printer and make sure that they're pre-pressing it right. You just don't do that at school. So learning about that process and just what's possible.

### **Resources for practice**

The theoretical and practical resources from design school education, the experience of problem solving within the constraints of client design briefs, the peripheral learning from internships and, more recently, part-time employment with Beta had all enabled Warren to build up various resources for graphic design practice. He showed how his conceptual work was developed from an awareness of cultural influences. Rather than relying on replicating work from design magazines<sup>73</sup>, he could use this knowledge as a base from which to react.

Well from design, purely, not theoretical . . . I would just go and look at magazines and watch films and listen to music . . . I always try to never do any thing I saw though . . . which actually made it quite hard on me. I know . . . I find that everyone would take something or other and then they'd take a tiny little piece of it and then go with that, whereas I would try to see all the stuff and then do the opposite. It's quite hard. It's good though. I talked to dad, because definitely, he worked and he's always trying to challenge me and I would try to talk to him. But it was kind of weird because as soon as he said it, I wouldn't . . . I was like "don't tell me what to do because then I can't do it". Then I'd just come up with it by myself. Obviously by looking at all of these magazines and movies and such, I can't help but be influenced, but I'd never try to take a specific thing and just copy it and turn it into my own thing. Because like in the music industry . . . like a friend of mine, he studied marketing but then he did a little one-year music course and like techno and music. And actually creating the music there's a lot of techno kind of music that is just remixes of other people's creations. And there's this whole thing about like just remixing other people's music, isn't the same as creating original stuff. And taking samples from other people and changing it, it's still that other person's beat. And so I think there's definitely something to, even in music, to creating something completely new and that's why I would not try to take one thing and copy and expand on it. I would try to just be like . . . "OK, well here's everything I'm

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<sup>73</sup> Refer to p. 126 in Angie's case study as an example of this approach.

looking at and the conversations I'm having and movies and everything I'm seeing. I can't block it out, but I know it's there. Here's my brief, what am I going to do?"

As well as the reference sources used in the course of solving design problems, Warren had an ongoing interest in collecting anything that would enable him to develop his own interests.

It's sort of like I always try to just keep clippings of things like I build up a little box of all these things that I like and that was like, visual prompts. There are some theoretical articles in there. And I usually remember it if it's a theoretical thing in there. It's usually like the best one that I know and I can sort of remember when it comes time to need it, that I can go "Oh yeah I've got that in my resources". But it's probably predominantly visual. And that's what it's there for.

### **Reading**

According to Kalman, Abbot-Miller and Jacobs (1994), this heavy reliance on the visual is hardly surprising. They make a case for an often poor level of literacy amongst graphic designers. Warren's description of his reading habits demonstrated the way in which he read selectively, often skimming and rarely reading anything in its entirety. Nevertheless, he was able to show the breadth of his interest and the time spent building up resources through selective reading.

I definitely look at . . . magazines and even like I've just this last week again been reading some more of *Design Dialogues* which I brought back in second or third year. And so that's a theoretical process, but really, there's no pictures in it, but I thought that was part of my process. Yeah, so magazines and just what's around me. I know that it will influence my jobs that I don't have yet. That will eventually come. You know when you read what people have to say who are really creative it's quite exciting. I don't necessarily do it for a specific assignment or project. It's just part of my life, It's what I do. I don't make specific time for it but there seems to be . . . like I try. Even though television's quite good and like right now I'm just working on bits of video projects, I try to not watch too much TV. Therefore if I'm sitting around then I'll be hopefully reading a book or doing some work. I like fiction but I really probably don't read enough of it. So I'd say I'd probably be like . . . I don't like in-depth read, I kind of skim around, so you know I'll be probably reading a book or so a week but skimming through a book or so because I can't read that fast. You know just gleaning what I can out of it and that kind of thing. And then I kind of lose interest in it and I'll pick up a new book and . . . It's usually like non-fiction, trying to be around, like creativity or something that can help influence my thinking.

Warren's level of business knowledge was anecdotal, although he had not ignored the marketing and business knowledge that was implicit to the cultures of the design firm he

worked in and in the working relationships he had with his clients. There was very little evidence of dedicated reading about marketing or business.

No, I definitely like to try I think, if I have at least a very simple understanding of marketing and psychology and sociology and all these things, that I can just pick up from talking to people who do marketing or whatever or read a book, it can't help but help my communication and how I answer a question. If I don't understand something that a marketing person's telling me, I'll ask them why they're doing what they're doing and why . . . just be interested in what they're doing and from that I get to learn more about them . . .

### **Conclusions**

This case provides an example of the way in which professional relationships can be built up through the designer's acquisition of relevant social capital. It also shows the value of these relationships in providing the opportunities to access aspects of cultural capital related to graphic design practice that may be difficult for tertiary design schools to replicate. Warren was able to benefit from these opportunities in a number of ways. The knowledge and expertise he acquired put him in an advantaged position relative to others on his course. The professional experience he had gained gave relevance to both studio assignments and theoretical studies in his coursework. He had already started on a professional design trajectory by the time he had graduated and this made the transition from tertiary studies to full-time employment, easier for him. He was offered full-time employment by Beta very soon after completing his studies. The social capital involved in gaining early professional design experience is clear, but implicated in this was his motivation to establish such a network. Importantly this motivation can be understood by considering the dispositions of the family habitus, the influence of his family and the related dispositions in conjunction with the functions of the field.

## **Alan:**

### **Web knowledge as a means of entry to the field of graphic design**

Alan worked in the web sector of graphic design. Web design involves a knowledge of technology and the related skill to construct a website. It requires as Mok, (1996, p. 110) observes, design expertise and understanding at a number of levels. Graphic designers who have previously worked in two-dimensional organization of information in a flat published page, need to also understand in web design, the dimensions of time and space.

Programmers versed in the requirements of web structure and navigation do not necessarily have an understanding of graphic design to be able to handle visual or brand development aspects of a website design (Bell, 1999). In this case study Alan refers to the way in which the term web-designer may sometimes be used to describe the work of these programmers and technologists whose main area of expertise is usually in the technology aspects of web design. However the visual aspects of web design that graphic designers can bring to web design are important. These two aspects of web design necessitate for some design firms, bringing in the services of technology specialists to construct the ‘architecture’ of the websites that they design.

Alan offered technical as well as visual and brand-development design expertise to his clients. He had had no formal design training and the case shows how his knowledge sources varied from others in the graphic design field. Apart from the acquired knowledge available through those in his firm, with a greater design background than himself, he had a strong dependence on knowledge from the web community where objectified cultural capital<sup>74</sup> could be accessed. Alan had come to depend heavily on knowledge gained from the web community in addition to the cultural capital he could gain from others in the firm. In this account, consideration is given to various ways that knowledge, beyond the necessary technical knowledge, can be seen in his practice or be seen to underlie it.

#### **Background**

Alan who was in his late thirties, entered the design field through a circuitous route after having initially established credentials in business studies. His trajectory between his early education in business studies and his ultimate position as a web-designer was characterised by a readiness to acquire knowledge through self-education in order to move from one position to the next. His own personal drive comes through in his account of his divergent

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<sup>74</sup> Bourdieu’s concept of objectified cultural capital refers to knowledge that is made available in published or in an openly accessible form. Refer to Angie case study (p. 119) for an explanation of forms of capital.

career path and is visible in his description of his early family life. Alan's family background revealed strong parental influence that directed him to make his own way in the world, and to develop a strong work ethic. Of his parents he observed:

Generally they were pretty firm but fair and we didn't really have a privileged upbringing because we weren't wealthy. So there was a strong work ethic instilled which basically said "work for what you get. Not that you're on your own". They supported us with anything really, that we did when we were growing up. But there was a big portion of "get out there and do it yourself". I was fairly social . . . a small group of friends . . . also quite transient, so things came and went.

This group was not influential in the formation of Alan's values or ideas, neither did he see that he was very influenced by friends in those early years, because in his early childhood he moved around and lost ties with them. His family influence was evident through their art activities. Alan was introduced to painting and drawing through the interests of his grandmother and also his father, although there was no direct encouragement from them to develop his artistic interests.

My grandmother was an artist. And right from as far back as I can remember all the kids were in the personalised paintings that she'd do and she'd always said that my father was the artist out of her children as well. So there was always a bit of "maybe I can do this" type thinking going on. There was no real encouragement from my parents to pursue creative arts. It was a more practical type of push in terms of schooling and things like that. It was always to earn the money to 'do this, go this way'. There was just the odd occasion when we were talking about Grandma's work and then occasionally Dad would do some sketching.

Alan recalled that in his high school years, he failed to take advantage of the art opportunities offered. He observed that rather than taking art, which might have presented him with greater satisfaction, he had chosen to select the subjects his parents expected him to take.

I went to an all boys school so there was a lot less focus on the opposite sex and more on what you were doing with your life, I guess. Saying that, the boy's school that I went to was quite a conservative school. So when I was in high school, art was not a priority for the school . . . as well as [for] most of the kids there. There was an art department, which was basically in the corner of the grounds. I did one year in art in the fourth form and then after that it was on with practical subjects, to be honest. I was still quite into sport. So I played football and . . . but socially . . . to be honest, I got in with a pretty bad crowd . . . well not a bad crowd, but a very unmotivated crowd at high school who actually, one by one, dropped out of high school while I stayed on. So there was just a lot of lazing around after, socially and not much in terms of proactive activities. What I



do recall was, because of the subjects I was doing at high school and thinking about tertiary [education] and what was going to happen, there was still that pressure that I couldn't go after the arts. I would be disappointing people if I did. So there was always that . . . you know . . . torn between what you want to do and what you should do. In our last year in seventh form at high school we all had to go through this kind of evaluation process and the careers advisor, before we went on to wherever we went and there was always a bent to career-minded subjects and English was probably the most 'artiest' subject that I did in my seventh form year and that was definitely not given priority.

There was no reference in the interviews to Alan developing any technical interests or leanings in his teenage years that might have led him to select a career in a computer related field. His first employment was as a management trainee for a hotel. After being made redundant from this he completed a Diploma in Business and it was at that time that he started to learn about computing.

I worked for a couple of years before I went to the College of Education, to do a Business Diploma<sup>75</sup>. So I kind of . . . like . . . hooked right back to high school to get where I worked, straight back into business and that kind of subject matter. I had a position in a hotel run by a couple of guys who owned two hotels and they eventually became a general manager of both of them and in that position I was asked to start forming my own thinking in terms of promoting the hotel and its benefits. So I started getting into trying to build business and learning how to go about that through promotional material. And I'd always had a keen interest in computers so the two kind of merged and I started doing a lot of the design and so I started designing back then. The Diploma in Business - now it's the New Zealand Diploma in Business or something - was quite new and they were just trialing computing papers in with the normal accounting and management papers and I just happened to put myself into the advanced computing paper. And from there it was computers were where I'm based.

His career trajectory involved a move to the web design work, which came out of his computer interests. He had managed to build on to his IT<sup>76</sup> knowledge and move into web-design. In his description, the distinction between the graphic and technical aspects of web design had become blurred, and once productive in web design, he was able to offer work in other areas of graphic design, to his clients.

Before I came in here as a part owner of my team, I had my own business since about 1996 as a sole trader with strategic partners that would do the heavy IT things. I'd do the light and funky coding bit with all the user interface design and stuff like that and as

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<sup>75</sup> This was a part-time course outside the College's fulltime curriculum.

<sup>76</sup> Abbreviation for information technology.

time passed I just became, I guess more proficient at the design side of things and had clients that were then more open to the web design that I come up with going back into print and other media. I actually do quite a bit of logo and brand work.

Alan was unable to explain how he had gained proficiency as a graphic designer, other than through loosely described experience. He was dependent on a self-taught approach. The experience in marketing and his computing knowledge may well have offset the limited knowledge he had gathered to this point in his trajectory in the graphic design field. His position in the web design field could be distinguished from those who had set themselves up as web designers, with technical backgrounds and with computer skills, but who were unable to satisfy clients' needs in a way that may reflect adequate levels of graphic design knowledge and expertise. Nevertheless, having had no had formal design training of any description, he had had to learn through experience. There had been mentors in his workplace and others who had influenced him, including colleagues he had had discussions with. He had, on one hand, been working in a quite insular way, but on the other hand, he felt that he had been quite successful in picking up necessary understanding of graphic design.

### **Present employment**

Compared with his early graphic design experience, Alan's present situation in the company he owned enabled him to build on and to learn from the experienced creative directors working within the same office open plan office space. His physical work-space comprising computer, screen and printer revealed little evidence of any collection of design items of personal interest or any documentation of design conceptualisation other than progressive print-outs of work in progress. However, the larger office space in which he worked provided integration with those around him. He had access to the same design reference material as the designers there and was privy to the discussions about various design projects at a vicarious level through his proximity to other creative people in the social space of the office. He was also able to extend his knowledge of graphic design through collaboration in the team-structures used on some projects. Alan was able to openly acknowledge the contribution others had made to his on-going acquisition of cultural capital relative to practice.

I've picked up lots from those around me, really. The fellow over there with the cap on is Andy and he's Creative Director here and we met five years ago and he's been a big influence throwing ideas back and forth, but not just that, looking and seeing things.

He did not see any inadequacy in building up his design knowledge in the way that he had, neither did he have an unrequited desire for education in graphic design. Alan relied instead,

on slowly accumulating design experience or accepting the level of knowledge and experience he could acquire on the job, to be adequate for his needs.

It's probably a slow way to learn because there's not the structure in place that covers the elements of design and the conceptual design. But I kind of think of design as a personality thing. It's been utilised a lot and by the length of time that's taken me to get where I am and that probably could have been cut in half with a structured course. But I still got there so . . .

Initially, Alan had been reliant on computer knowledge in web design to enable him to enter the field of graphic design. His understanding of visual aspects of graphic design and the approaches to concept development involved in the work he produced, had been acquired both through his own autodidacticism and through learning from those in the open plan office he shared. He had been enabled to increasingly move from an early reliance on technology to assume greater cultural capital and with it, an increasing credibility as a graphic designer able to produce brand identity work and other graphic design.

### **Web communities**

Alan did not join in the professional discourse that might have been accessible by belonging to professional design groups like the Designers Institute of New Zealand (DINZ), or form any other external social networks apart from the associations he had with those in companies he worked with. In keeping with others in the web-design community he tended to be more insular, observing that "Web designers usually sit in dark rooms by themselves".

Kind of one way kind of interactivity, as I said before, with the US web design community, and their pod-casts, their forums, and I kind of absorb a lot, one way, and locally, I have a couple of designers that I do bounce ideas off, but they are generally designers that work with the companies that I work with.

Being outside the design discourses at an academic or professional level, Alan had not had the opportunity to hear of the software experimentation in the wider computer field, offered in live presentations at conferences at an international level. He had, however, been able to learn of aspects of this through the web version of *Wired* magazine, from their website. The information offered on these sites had been presented to suit the web media and the interests of the web audience.

I do know of . . . not people, but I have seen quite a bit through . . . there's a website called Wired.com, and then there's an experimental section in which Flash<sup>®</sup> developers/designers use technology that I use quite a bit in my work called Macromedia<sup>®</sup> Flash<sup>®</sup>. Which is vector animation software, which produces very small file sizes. And you see some quite eclectic stuff that these guys are just experimenting

with vectors, shapes and maths and design. There's a lot of that kind of stuff that they do in Flash Media<sup>®</sup>. Which is interesting, but as yet there's no application for it.

Although Alan was unable to draw on the cultural capital available to those designers who had had the opportunity to study at a design school, or benefit from the ongoing knowledge sharing that may have come out of contact with other designers in the field, he was able to draw on objectified knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) in the form of published media and the information and ideas transmitted through the web via online communities in the Internet sites that he visited regularly. He accessed two key web design information sources; the online web technical community and the Open Source web design community<sup>77</sup>. By accessing the online web technical community, he could learn of the ongoing technical changes in the web field and, through this knowledge, help to preserve his position as a technical expert.

Often with the web, some of the user effects and some of the things that we do, require that technology knowledge. It's not simply a matter of placement on a page and how things look. Graphic design on the web is about how things move and how things work as well as how they look.

Having come into web design, via a technology path, and gradually working more and more in graphic design, Alan had the need to draw on the templates available free on the web from Open Source Web Design (oswd.com), which has as its objective to "provide the open source web community with quality web design which is both organised and good-looking" (Skettino, 2006). Nevertheless, it was not enough for Alan to have access to these templates. He had to have, as for any forms of cultural capital, the expertise to be able to use them for his own purposes, to be able to derive benefit from them (Johnson, 1993). The strong reliance on self-learning in Alan's graphic design practice could also be seen in the way he acquired an understanding of technology, because of the changing knowledge base, fundamental to the ongoing development of technical aspects of web-design.

Especially in the IT field where design crosses over into technology and the use of software quite a bit, there is always going to be a large amount of self learning involved because technology is shifting all the time but you have to . . . To be honest I think the academic sector has been quite . . . they seem to be quite slow to pick up new technologies and qualifications of new technologies.

### **Knowledge of social worlds**

The computer interests that Alan had started during his tertiary training years had enabled him to be involved in a field in which an understanding of media and culture industries was

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<sup>77</sup> For a definition of Open Source refer to p. 31.

important. Media was reflected not just in the web, but in magazines and other graphic communication. In Alan's responses, it is hard to see importance being placed on a need to acquire lifestyle knowledge relative to his web design and graphic design work. His reading was more closely related to the technology side of his web work. There was little recognition of the need to look, in his own time outside his working day, at other knowledge that may inform his work as a designer. Alan gave no cues that he had sought information about human factors as they affected consumers, or made any dedicated attempts to keep up to date with any other social influences that may impact on how companies function. He expressed no opinions about the potential for a web designer to be extending his or her knowledge base in ways that would give them a broader field of knowledge to enable them to make more informed decisions about aspects of their day-to-day work.

### **Lifestyle**

In discussing his lifestyle, Alan showed an interest in music, but indicated that he confined reading to computer technology. His preference was for interests that did contribute directly to knowledge related to his work rather than to any broader social knowledge.

I think that I am pretty conservative in my lifestyle. But then in certain areas like with my wife, there's a lifestyle there, but then there's also my work lifestyle, which is a lot younger, a lot of the time. So . . . and that would be reflected in a wide range of music tastes. They range from rock, right through to electronic stuff. And often it's the electro, electronic music that gets the design juices flowing. It's interesting. To be honest the web stuff was that other interest and so I'm actually doing something that I really love and enjoy doing. So I don't feel the need that I have to, or that I've never felt the need to find any other kind of creative outlet to complement it. I just seem to always be working on it. Not necessarily for clients but for my own learning just my own enjoyment, just experimenting with. I don't read novels at all. My spare time is usually taken up trying to learn programming language as well.

Working in the web area, Alan drew heavily, as could be expected, on the web for technical information that he could not get from his work experience. He also maintained the practices of his years in education by still referring to books for programming data.

It's kind of interesting because there are actually a lot of online learning resources for programming as well, and it would be quite natural to use something online which is basically inside the medium that you're working on. But with that kind of learning I always prefer to go back to a text book just like I learnt at school or university just have it on the desk and work through.

Outside of technical enquiry, Alan showed little interest in reading, depending instead on a visual response to his environment. In the web examples he discussed there was little explicit reference made to his social world, as in his account of visual influences on his work

I think a lot of it travelling to work through downtown, looking around. Looking in windows, looking at window layouts, store layouts, a lot of physical things in the design. What's inside a store. Nice pieces of furniture, things like that.

Even though there has been considerable interest and discussion in graphic design circles about design and business and the need for designers to be more business savvy (Design Taskforce, 2003), Alan made no dedicated time to read the business press relying instead on knowledge of business matters as part of designer-client working relationships. He did not recall making any reference to the business press as a means of keeping informed about the field of business.

For this business knowledge, he depended on a number of other sources including his early diploma course, his experience in hotel management and from running his own company. From the responses he made, he had gained a knowledge of business from client contact and from discussions arising from the working environment of the advertising agency. In each case his understanding of the field of business arose from information inculcated in these situations often outside conscious learning. In the following description the emphasis is on what was done, rather than how a knowledge of the field of business enabled him to do it.

It kind of depends which hat I've got on. If I've got a branding or logo concept then that means taking a client's wishes and their business and forming a logo and brand that conceptually is synergistic with those two things; the client's wishes and their business. And I guess I'd say that concepts . . . when I discuss concepts with the client, it's usually my reasons for wanting to go in a set direction and why anything that I've created or coded is reasonable. Trying to, I guess, summarise what I've done.

Alan's business background came through in this reflection about how he coped with the unfolding developments in the web-design world, and where he placed importance on watching the industry through his clients rather than searching for answers in the business press.

The bottom line, how we steer our course here is by making more money for ourselves and how to go about that and not necessarily watching future trends too much because often our future, my future is almost out of my hands given all the technology and where that's going. And I guess there is a certain portion of watching the industry and seeing what clients are starting to ask for more and more.

Keeping abreast of developments also involved reading about technology rather than design. Alan could see his clients, becoming increasingly 'tech savvy'. Design did not seem to involve the same degree of change. Building technology resources had more urgency.

I think there is that constant reassessment going on, but I think it's more in terms of . . . really it's the technology. There's always going to be good design there's always going to be nice visual aspects to the web in my field. But as time marches on and clients are becoming more and more tech savvy themselves and expecting a lot more sitting behind the design rather than simply good design. I just say that I do resource myself a lot in terms of technology when I'm using technology . . . the technology that I'm applying to the design, not the design itself.

### **Practice issues**

Alan worked very much on his own apart from sessions where he sought feedback on his ideas from people in the office. These office discussions were particularly important in brand identity and logo design where he placed value on seeking feedback on his ideas from those around him and where the technical aspect was not as much an issue as in web design work. He also tended to work on his own versus working in a team capacity in the development of web graphics.

Generally together at a stage talking about logos and brands and once the look and feel's established I'm off on my own. And I take it to a certain stage and then I work with another team in [names city] to do the technical aspects of the implementation. So I'm more into the skip between the creative and the technical . . . It's usually after the fact . . . I do a design, chuck it out to the guys, and see what they think. I always take on other people's feedback but generally I pretty much fly solo on most of these things.

Alan had gained knowledge of advertising and graphic design through the habitus of the advertising agency he worked in rather than through a conscious study of either of these two fields. In the process, he had been able to build on the marketing knowledge he had acquired through his diploma of business studies and through practical experience in his own company.

There are two companies, there's [names company] advertising and there's [names company] IT, which I own. The advertising agency owns half of my company and prior to that when I was working by myself in a web capacity I was actually . . . I spent a good deal of time sharing space with an agency. So there's a lot of exposure to an agency and how they work.

### **Work examples**

In the following examples, Alan reveals ways in which he dealt with the graphic design aspects of web design work. He makes reference to design decisions in response to questions

of colour use, typography and brand identity and these responses go some way to showing his graphic design approaches. He gives a clear indication of the nature of the expertise needed to respond to each brief for the work for the three clients involved. In his discussion about the process of designing the work he drew on a number of different sources to access the design knowledge he needed and this comes through in his accounts. While he is able to describe his decisions about typography or the use of any existing material that came from clients, little is said about the levels or kinds of research he needed to do in resolving each client brief.

In the case of *Easy Finance*<sup>78</sup> Alan described how he had had an open brief from the client to design a website that provided for the communication needs of their customer base and to develop their brand identity. Much of the identity work had been done by another designer in the office, leaving Alan little more to develop, to be able to apply the brand in the website he designed. He had been supplied research information about the finance ‘product’ audience, which helped to narrow down his range of available conceptual approaches.

With *Easy Finance* there wasn’t actually a huge brief and one of the other designers here developed the corporate ID. Basically, the brief was to take the corporate ID and to create a simple website based around it and have some core deliverables in terms of sections on the site. The rest was pretty much left pretty loose and was just “create a concept and present to client and take it from there”. There was consultation at the start about their audience, plus we do know a bit about the company as well. The parent company is [names company] and we knew that they were looking into online finance.

His response was to develop web graphics showing a young woman, representative of a younger age group and consistent with the market that his client was concentrating on. Alan’s computer imagining skills enabled him to retouch the colour scheme of a royalty-free photograph<sup>79</sup>, rather than setting up photography specially for the web-page. This use of technology enabled him to avoid the time and cost of studio photography and model fees, made possible through his high level of software imaging knowledge. In the retouching process Alan introduced a limited colour palette of greens and greys.

The decision to do this had come out of his sense that it needed that kind of treatment to distinguish it from mainstream web work. Alan was unable to explain how he had come to that conclusion, and by implication gave a sense that it came out of a feeling that it was an appropriate concept. He was unaware that this preference had come out of anything that he

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<sup>78</sup> *Easy Finance* is a pseudonym for this finance company.

<sup>79</sup> A number of photo libraries, often based in the United States offer collections of professional quality photography as digital files, free of the royalties formerly required for the use of individual library photographs for commercial purposes, as in the case of graphic design work.



might have picked up through his design reading or from other sources. Questions of colour contrast and visual values were offered as a determinant for this colour choice rather than any reference to genres with which he may have been familiar.

That was a personal choice pretty much based on client, based on their business, and the type of . . . an initial discussion that did actually include some background on where they were heading with their objectives. What they wanted to achieve. I just got their logo. And basically . . . given a free rein. As well as a personal decision to look at their type of business. Look at the type of company, look at their target market and design from that perspective. It came out of a thought that I had, that the logo was nice crisp and clean and it was a very simple logo. And I felt that the colour in that logo was quite a vibrant green that . . . a lime green. That should be the thing that stands out and to go two-tone and to go greyscale with any imaging just helps to push the colour to the front of the page . . .

What had started as work that used existing identity design, and visual values apparently stemming from implicit knowledge relative to work within his technical area of expertise, became extended to other brand applications outside the web-design field, by his client and others building on his work.

. . . presented it and now it's quite interesting that it worked out quite well with the client and now this look here is dictating the offline material. So that they are taking that greyscale effect into Powerpoint® presentations and some print medium as well.

Alan could describe his approach to work for *Martins*<sup>80</sup>, a national chain of retail menswear clothing stores, as being based on his experience working with them and understanding their market. No reference was made to how the *Martins* brand was positioned in relationship to other retailers. Alan could argue that through his knowledge of their demographic, *Web 2.0*<sup>81</sup> style graphics presented simple clear typography that could be appropriate to his design concept.

*Martins*. . . they are a pre-existing client and I've done previous art and this is a concept that has just been signed off to go live. So I have a lot of experience with them and their target, so in designing this, I know the demographic and I know their business quite well, so the design is actually a progression from their current site using the greys and silvers and not a significant change, but just a slow evolution in designing that site so the current site at the moment. It's a lot more cut down and using the same style of colour and logo basically, just moving it further on into . . . I should probably . . . I guess you have heard the web term 'sphere of Internet site development'? *Web 2.0* is a

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<sup>80</sup> *Martins* is a pseudonym for a national menswear chain of stores.

<sup>81</sup> Refer to p. 62 for a definition of *Web 2.0*.

bit of a movement into this look of a wider screen layout . . . larger fonts for headers and generally simpler design.

In his use of the *Web 2.0* style web graphics, Alan showed how the web design work posted by the online web community was an important source of visual reference, as well as providing technical resources as he explained:

Generally the online communities, mainly . . . I subscribe to a lot of web development news centres and communities mainly based out of the States. Mostly, all of these designs come from . . . don't come specifically from a graphical viewpoint. There is always some technical governance on how a lot of this design comes up.

Alan's design drew on the precedent of an established global jeans brand design. He could not locate the typeface by reference to any repertoire built up from institutional capital<sup>82</sup>, relying instead on his own experience. To this simple readily available existing typeform, he was able to apply his technical knowledge of Photoshop<sup>®</sup> effects. Alan's use of a restricted monochrome grey plus another colour was based on functional requirements as much as for the connotations of the monochrome colours themselves.

The treatment over the top was made up. The typeface behind, I think was just something simple like *Impact*. And then just treated over the top with texture brush and then some overlay on top of the direction of . . . based on the direction and shape that was presented by [names global brand]. The name of the product, basically governed the treatment of that . . . how it looked. They carry a lot of sub-brands through the stores. So the idea of the design here is that the website itself is pretty much container for all of the sub-brands and as they want to promote them . . . everything else around this directional spot, muted and toned back means that we have got the freedom to really push the graphic in here and push the impact in that spot, which is what they want. It also gives you the ability, being greyscale monotone, whatever, that you can put any colour in there. Any brand in there, so you can . . . this one currently is going in as [names global brand], but the one going in after that needs to be flexible enough to take any kind of artwork inside that spot.

The design of a *Martins* site called more for the flexibility to take different brands stocked by Martins, than to design a corporate Martins website. The process of designing a website for *WebTechnology*<sup>83</sup> was a different from *Martins* being a more mainstream web genre, graphically speaking and using in Alan's terms "traditional portal layout"<sup>84</sup>.

This was . . . *WebTechnology* is now owned by [names holding company], so quite a large company with a lot of structure in the company. And basically this is the result of

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<sup>82</sup> Institutional capital is described in Angie's case study on p. 119.

<sup>83</sup> *WebTechnology* is a pseudonym for this company.

<sup>84</sup> A portal layout refers to the navigation and content of a web page.

a very long brief with about eight different people from the holding company in the room just bashing out ideas for where they wanted to take the site. More of a general picture of how they see *WebTechnology* now and how they see their audience and how they would like to move their website from where it is now. And from there it was “Go away, come back with a concept, and base the concept on that brief and the existing content on the site, because that needs to be retained and it was a process of design by committee after that, so . . .

Functional aspects of the brief made this website design almost a logistical design exercise. Alan viewed the design task to be akin to magazine design where a magazine could be read by a broad cross-section of people, becoming in the process, less personal than designing for specialised audiences. This approach was in contrast to *Martins*, for example, where he could visualise the customer-base more clearly because of the market-segmentation involved. Alan was able to explain the functional aspects of website, particularly regarding communicating information with the intended audience. He was less able to describe the graphic design expertise involved in his execution of the design problem. He had little comment about the graphic design of the site other than to describe the way in which he decided to make the panel corners rounded to conform to his impression of prevailing design conventions of the moment. He stopped short of saying how he knew that rounded corners were a current visual design idiom.

The . . . y’know, the rounded corners look and y’know, it’s very popular at the moment. That was my design decision to do that. But this one here is really audience targeted and also a revenue target, so there has to be a return on investment in this site, so there’s a lot of buy-in from management on advert placements. The number of ads that must be displayed . . . There is actually three groups that I had to satisfy in this. There was basically Management, that were doing the investment, the *WebTechnology* staff whose editors . . . who wanted to grow the magazine through the website, and then the audience, because there would be no success to this site if the audience can’t get around the site easily . . . don’t enjoy the site. So there’s a . . . out of all three [refers to the three web jobs discussed], this is the most difficult to produce designwise because you have to put yourself into the shoes of a tech guy, a silver surfer (older generation), you have to be . . . you basically have to be every man really, to design a site like this.

### **Client relations**

Alan’s background was different from people in the web field who had had a design training before they moved into web work. Clients tended not to enquire very much about his design background. When he went into meetings, clients had less concern about his graphic design background focussing more on the job to do, as well as a sense that he could do it. It was usually the product at the end rather than any immediate concerns about his expertise that

clients were really seeing as important. Alan's accomplishment as a graphic designer was incorporated in his role a producer.

Some clients are very "What have you done, owing to your qualifications?", although usually the work is the qualification . . . the work that you've done. But there's not many like that. Most clients, as I said, have got something to do and they usually don't have a lot of time. Web is usually the last thing that a marketing manager will think about and they will have a very short time phase.

He felt that he had a competitive advantage over graphic designers who take on web work and who do not have the technical background that he had. Sometimes he was getting work because people saw him to have considerable technical ability as well as graphic design capability. They usually saw him as a technical person who could also do the graphics.

Initially it's a technical thing. They want to know that a website can be built and then once they see a concept, then they feel comfortable in the ability of the design, so they actually think that . . . The first concept that you show, even if it's not a finished concept, just to be able to have that proof of ability, can smash down any kind of barrier that a client may feel about your design capabilities. But initially it does come down to a technical standpoint. They need to know that the website is going to work in a certain way, and "can do you do it, and yes we can".

Alan sometimes saw himself either guiding clients through the requirements of his work for them or even explaining the way that they could use the work he created. He was able to work this way because he worked with clients directly rather than working through any intermediary.

Some clients are very focused on what they want and require and if it does impact in a major way in where I want to go I'll have a go. Then I'll either be told, "Don't, you don't want to do it this way" or "it's fine". But then there's also a good deal of clients that are quite happy to be guided. Generally at the beginning of a project there's a lot of discovery, particularly with the client, a lot of discussion about their needs in terms of technology that goes on at the start as well. Generally maintenance through a project is the one account manager. Daily or and weekly updates. At certain stages, at certain critical stages of the project, there will be another large face-to-face with them. But for the important parts, yeah, there's face-to-face.

Alan saw himself as an advisor on marketing and brand application questions. He worked with a mixture of management and marketing people. In this position he was able to describe how marketing people could have ideas about marketing and brand and how the brand information would flow from them, although they also looked to him to lead the discussion about the way that client brand identities were applied to website design.

Depending on the client, some clients have very strong branding and very strong brand history, so they have brand guidelines, but often they can be swayed a little when it comes to the web. They see the web as a bit of an opportunity to develop without committing to redeveloping a brand, so if somebody sees something on the web that they like that's cool. If they don't like it, they can rip it down and stay with their existing brand in a matter of seconds.

### **Conclusions**

Alan had been able to draw on knowledge from several sources to distinguish his expertise and cultural capital from those in the field of technology who were limited by a dependence on technical knowledge. He did not draw on the professional discourse surrounding graphic design available through professional design networks or in literature sources. Alan had derived cultural capital relative to graphic design from a number of sources. Firstly, he had been able to benefit from the knowledge of those in his work place with greater expertise than himself and the from the knowledge arising out of the habitus of the firm and the peripheral learning (Wenger, 1998, p. 100) it provided. Secondly, he had recognised the value of the web design knowledge available free online, and the information presented as templates and in how-to-do-it formats, from several sources. Alan also used online sources and literature to keep up-to-date with technological change relative to web design and he made reference to the primacy of this knowledge in his practice.

Finally, Alan had been enabled, to some extent, to build up sufficient cultural capital for practice through a receptiveness to self-learning and the dispositions towards perseverance, traceable to his family habitus through the values inculcated from his parents. With these resources he was able to successfully establish himself as a web designer and to offer high levels of technical expertise in web design and from the examples he gave, achieve credibility as a graphic designer. He was able to provide both web work and the graphic design that followed as an outcome his web work. His claim to have become more proficient in graphic design for the web and then taking the leap to brand identity work needs to be considered against the cultural capital needed to be able to offer expertise in these aspects of graphic design that stand alongside web technology, his other area of expertise. The question exists, whether the frequent emphasis on technical expertise in his web design practice for clients indicates an acceptance of a similar high level of graphic design accomplishment and whether his work could stand the test of comparison with other graphic design work for the web by designers in a position in the graphic design field that reflects more institutional and cultural capital than himself.

In addition, Alan's understanding of marketing and business requirements acquired through his business diploma, through the practical experience of running his own business and

through the habitus of the advertising agency may also have lent credibility to the work he produced. Alan's accomplishment in gradually building up cultural capital in graphic design enabled him to enter the graphic design field and establish a position relative to others already established in that field. His technical knowledge offered advantages over those graphic designers attempting to offer web design expertise but lacking his levels of technical ability. In the absence of an interest in consciously acquiring knowledge of lifestyle and popular culture the question remains whether, for his needs he had the necessary cultural capital for the work he produced for his clients or whether insights into these social contexts could have been a valuable contribution to his practice.

## **Luke:**

### **Lifestyle knowledge as a prerequisite for practice**

The importance of being able to draw on appropriate cultural capital is a particularly important aspect of this case study. Luke, who was in his forties, was the creative director of a 'street' magazine. Apart from early work with an animator, he had spent his entire career in publication design. His working style showed how he understood the culture of the audience of the magazine. He expressed an alternative position to mainstream magazines through his affinity for the popular culture his magazine promoted. The case shows how Luke accumulated his own resources and had also been able to access the contributions of others who were firmly within the social structure<sup>85</sup> of his magazine's audience. Luke explains how he had come to be able to direct those around him through his acquired understanding of lifestyle and popular culture. Frequent references are made to the importance of promoting and understanding aspects of taste and style in the responses Luke makes about the creative direction of his publishing firm. He expresses a need to constantly entertain his readership with viewpoints assuming challenging and alternative positions through the content presented as a form of 'counter-culture' under the mantle of the descriptors 'popular culture', 'lifestyle' and 'fashion' which were used to classify the content of this publication. In Roszak, (1995 p. xii) counter culture is described, as having come out of the dissent of youth in resistance to the affluence of society, particularly from the post-war period. In this view, it contested the status quo both in terms of social mores and in various aspects of a changing visual culture expressed through articles and images in fashion, music, illustration and style. It was, as Featherstone (1991, p. 45) states, "an attack on emotional constraints and favoured a relaxation of formal standards of dress, presentation, and demeanour". Luke, and the staff he employed were able to tap into the counterculture or were so actively involved that they had authority within it as 'new cultural intermediaries' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 352).

#### **Cultural mediation**

As well as having an affinity for counter-culture, via the medium of his magazine Luke was in a position to promote the lifestyle and culture he had come to understand. In Luke's interactions with his staff, he shows a readiness to draw on the sources of capital relevant to his purposes, that those he employed presented. He assumes the role of a new cultural intermediary as do the 'creatives' employed in the production of his firm's 'street'

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<sup>85</sup> Refer to Chapter Three, p. 69, for an explanation of Bourdieu's use of this term.

magazine. In Bourdieu's use of the term 'new cultural intermediaries' he refers to the journalist-writers of the mass media "assigning themselves the impossible, and therefore unassailable, role of divulging legitimate culture—in which they *resemble* the legitimate popularisers" (1984, p. 325). However, unlike Bourdieu's new cultural intermediaries who may not "possess the specific competence of legitimate simplifiers" Luke and his creative staff have the benefit of being immersed in the culture that they promote *as* "legitimate popularisers". In the mediation process, those with the responsibility for the content of the magazine were able to create hierarchies of taste by "co-opting and re-ordering the popular culture produced by ordinary people and repackaging it as mass culture delivered to them" (Miller & McHoul, 1998, p. 14). They were able to make distinctions about style and taste relative to their subculture because they had the requisite cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984 ; Julier, 2000). They did this outside the legitimising activities of DINZ.

### **Designers as mediators**

Luke describes how both designers and journalists also made a significant contribution to the content of *Street*<sup>86</sup> as catalysts rather than as fashion or music experts openly defining taste. He saw *Street* performing a social role, pointing to the sense of social responsibility he felt towards his readership, reflected in the editorial content of *Street* as well as in the open forum where readers could take up their own viewpoints.

We're a catalyst for capturing our snapshot of pop culture. That's it, that's all we are. We don't pretend to be anything else. We don't pretend to be one of those magazines that tell you that "you should be cool because you wore this". They're for other magazines, to be honest. It's not what we do. We're a catalyst for creative people, for the creative environment that's probably not well . . . it hasn't got a huge profile, hasn't got a huge outlet in New Zealand . . . and celebrating those and also the diversity of our individuals and the quirkiness of our individuals. There is kind of a social role I suppose. You're part of the media. We see ourselves as the alternate media I suppose, and getting viewpoints and objectives to outside the mainstream. So there is a voice for people who want to be individualistic and not be the sheep that follow what's on TV or mainstream. You know, magazines and things like that. So there is a . . . celebrating a diverse culture. So we are part of it, pushing that diverseness. That's part of who we are . . . so there's social aspects. We've got to be very careful of what we do put in the magazine. And what we do touch on.

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<sup>86</sup> *Street* is a pseudonym for a street culture magazine.



### **Mediation through advertising**

Luke saw the advertisements in *Street* forming a vital part of the magazine, not just for revenue, but also for the content and style they contributed. He could see a relationship between the changes imposed by global companies on one hand and the media on the other. They were seen as balancing factors in the field of fashion.

We're an advertising type of magazine, because we are quite heavy in terms of the amount of advertising that we do have in the magazine. The creative advertising agencies and designers out there do good ads. So that's fantastic, so if it's editorial it's not jeopardising the design of the magazine . . . what makes the magazine is . . . yeah the ads is a big part of it . . . forty percent of our magazine is advertising. And I think the understanding and the freedom of what advertising agencies can do . . . what they can supply for their for the clients, you know . . . a market that just gets away. It adds that zest I suppose to a magazine . . . The perpetuation of fashion is driven not only by the media, but inside by those in the industry. But in some ways we, with the media, sure we're setting trends, and we have directions within it . . . we try and . . . yeah, it's hard, because you hype things up and say that these are the good products. A certain advertiser wants to be ahead for what they've just launched so it's very much so.

Advertisers placed advertisements in *Street*, because of the culture it promoted. This resulted in a spread of products including global brands as well as the local products. The products that Luke chose to promote needed to fit the 'look' of *Street*.

We try to keep an even mix of what's going on. So we try and give a true real reflection of what's happening out there in terms of products being launched or fashion labels that are around or fashion labels that are relevant to our market. We have just employed a fashion director who looks at where the core range, the style – within street fashion as such is. So it's kinda like there's a style through fashion so therefore we have a fashion director that makes sure we keep within that style. But we have some high end stuff and some 'newbies'. It keeps us all within a certain *Street* look and we are obviously projecting that out there. We are obviously projecting our looks. We've got to. Design is part of that look, as much as the fashion. To a point, fashion is quite important.

### **Relevance of contributors**

The graphic designers and writers Luke directed were only a small number of the total contributors to each issue. Advertisers promoted the cultural values of *Street*, through the visual values of the material they provided for insertion in *Street*. There was a range of creative contributions to each issue.

You have assistants, you have this, you have that . . . make-up artists etc . . . all that, that are not mentioned. Yeah, in a big issue it would have a lot and they are all in their different arenas. And I sort of see advertising as part of the contribution to the magazine

as well. We have at least sixty ads, so I include that because each of the people designing the ad is creative, you know, even if they're global or if they're not. I'd say about ninety percent of the ads are done here in New Zealand. So that's obviously a snapshot of the advertising culture and the advertising 'creatives', or graphic designers, art directors in New Zealand.

External overseas illustrators and photographers contributed to each issue. Illustration in particular was frequently sourced from overseas, lending an internationalism to the style of the magazine. This was demonstrated in Luke's description of the latest issue where he had made the decision to source the illustration from overseas.

Well, the illustration was done by some guy in New York, so it's been done overseas. So it's been pitched by my editor who uses a lot of the illustrators around the world. I mean it's the case these days. My editor would have briefed him on roughly what we're doing . . . probably a bit of a synopsis of what we're doing in terms of the idea the cover story and he would've come back with illustration.

### **Designer's own contribution**

Besides the contributions from within the firm and from international contributors, Luke drew on both his experience with the magazine and his own interests in life that extended beyond the office, to determine the creative direction of *Street*. He saw these experiences as a value-set that could be applied to the decision-making and selection processes required in the exercise of the creative direction of *Street*.

I think a lot of the stuff . . . decisions are made on a fairly subconscious level . . . design decisions and on a conscious level there's rational reasons for it. You have "I just like it, I like the visual aspect of it". The whole thing around why you make decisions and everyone will probably make different decisions especially in design. Being such a subjective media, like art, it's kind of like people like it or they don't and they have their reasons and rationale for it. That might come from a conscious force at a conscious level . . . just a feeling that they had, that's . . . "No, its not you" and you know, I think actually listening to your gut feeling which is the opening of the subconscious. And that comes in from experiences that have happened throughout your life . . . what you've seen, what you've done, what you've been, the whole works.

The varied sources of capital ultimately contributing to Luke's ability to perform the creative direction role can be seen arising out of habitus in many social settings (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 71). These dispositions, demonstrating a growing awareness of creative cultures on one hand and an alternative position regarding culture and authority on the other, can be traced back to the formation of a family habitus from his childhood years and then the gradual accumulation of cultural capital in education and other social settings. From his early childhood, he saw his mother's influence as an important factor in the development of his

creativity. He was surrounded by her creative work. He was also influenced by his primary school art teacher.

Mum was a big influence. Being an artist, she was like, an oil painter part-time from her work, so I suppose I was always there, around that and had my own little canvas and stuff like that and dabbles, and bits and pieces. So I didn't know I would be a designer, but from as far as I can remember, I remember a creative sort of side of things, being inspired by art teachers. One of them, in my primary school, was really huge you know, on what I did. Not so much her values as the art side of things, but also her encouragement and getting the most out of you, as opposed to the rigid maths and English side of things.

Luke was able to describe how he had had to adapt from a primary school environment to a city boarding school. In that time both his response to the peer group and also the different kind of education had a significant impact on him. He had been pushed in a different direction, once he went from his area school to this college. In adapting to a city group, he saw in his background the values of his early upbringing in the country, where he had become self-reliant.

From there at twelve I was plucked from primary school and put into a boarding school, in (names city). I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing if I hadn't. So that was chosen, partly to do with academia, partly to do with art, partly to do with sport. So it was quite a big transition and amazing going to boarding school and meeting your peer space at twelve years old. A lot of growing up . . . being around guys who were obviously in a boarding situation . . . so quite a lot of lessons learnt, quite early on. We did teenage stuff. We did growing up. All the crazy stuff as you do. Pushed the boundaries. All sort of stuff, you know what I mean. It's kind like that's . . . I'd say that's normal. I was at a Catholic boys' school and it was quite liberal as well. It was quite forward thinking in terms of the masters, with their values and I suppose, you know . . . what we could do and couldn't do and stuff like that. It was all based around trust. It was always hard not being from the city. There was a lot of things in terms of communication and I suppose the dealings of people you see around all the time, whereas in the country a lot of it is up to you, style of thing. You go off and do stuff yourself, you know, and create your own time I suppose. There was a transition there. I mean, I think a lot of where I am is obviously my background. I'm from the country.

There was quite a jump in his life, in going from the closed community of a boarding school to the social setting of the university. Luke was able to discuss some of the changes in his values. He started to form cultural interests in design and fashion that were to become fundamental to the work that he was doing at *Street*.

A lot of my political views were more from university and outside that, after school. I was sheltered being a boarder at least five years. I was wanting to experience more and that's, I suppose when you are sixteen or seventeen, your last years of high school, that's what you are always doing and university is just an extension of that, so it was just a natural progression.

I suppose I was always interested in how to design and music. I'm not a big music fan. I know people who had major followings. I didn't enjoy the grunge era, freedom of expression. But some people are – have albums and albums and can name . . . I mean it was never me. I did a sort of an intermediate year of architecture, and during that I was obviously at university. A lot of stuff applied that was out of university. Did a lot of things. Was quite free and liberal and you know, opened your eyes in certain ways. But it was, like I sort of didn't know what I wanted to do. You know . . . the question every young kid is faced with. "What'll I do for the rest of my life? What'll I do for the next five years?" . . . could have easily continued and gone to architecture school, but it really wasn't what I wanted. I sort of developed quite a . . . it wasn't then, it was when I was overseas . . . and travelled overseas and realised and got exposed to the graphic scene where I . . . yeah the communication side of things.

### **Social capital.**

Luke was exposed to graphic design through working in a fashion store overseas and through the people that he knew through the lifestyle there. He was on an entry-level learning curve about graphic design, learning about it informally through people he knew, and becoming increasingly interested in graphic designers' explorations in typography and the combination of image and typography.

Getting exposed to it . . . know what I mean? Seeing that subculture of what's around you all the time, but until you actually acknowledge it, until you know what is really graphic design, or what's good photography . . . I mean you can be surrounded by it the whole time and never really know - "Oh, okay, that was graphic design" "That's advertising. Those billboards are advertising sort of thing". And it was just that we never had design courses back in . . . I mean it's probably different these days. There was no mention of graphic design. I saw it as the more holistic your education could get, the better you're gonna be, you know. Rather than do art all the way through and doing art meant you had to do tech drawing and you couldn't do other subjects, so it was kinda very limited and narrow focussed you know. I felt that those people that knew they wanted to be a doctor or dentist or architect from when they were fifteen years old . . . you know, it's all a bit crazy. You gotta experience the world and see what you really want to do.

## **Move to America**

Luke had to submit work and write an essay to apply for acceptance at an American university. Having to describe visual ideas in written form reminded him of the relationship between word and image, and important concept for a graphic designer.

I think that was one of the defining moments . . . to write this essay on what did I want to do. Why did I want to do design? Why did I want to leave New Zealand? From my education . . . I did English all the way from seventh form, and I failed miserably. It was something that I had never had when I was younger, was the English skills that were probably what other people would have in the city, and I knew that I had to do English for my future I suppose and spelling as much as possible, and it's kinda like that was one of my weaknesses. So it was kinda like the communication on a visual level, which involved not only visuals, but also the written word, the copywriting . . . that sort of stuff. So that was important, for me. It was making someone stop and think and reflect what was of more importance than visual communication for me. Getting messages through or that sort of thing, was kind of where I was at, at the time. It was quite 'full-on' for a nineteen year old, you know . . . But that was one of the finer points of . . . really spelt out what I wanted to do as a designer.

Once accepted in the American university Luke had the opportunity to take part-time classes at another institution, a design school where the course emphasis was oriented more to professional goals rather than towards theoretical thinking.

The level of professionalism . . . it blew my mind you know. It was just, you know, like nothing I'd seen here. I was at [names university] for a year, and then my second year was doing night classes six to eight months during the night time at the [names design school]. It was just a phenomenal course. They had to be good. They had to be some of the best tutors that were leaders of their fields at the time, while they were lecturing. The professionalism of that school was . . . phew! The thing though was the way they approached it. They didn't take anyone straight out of school, so it was a grad school. The average age was probably 26. The work there was intense. You were either there because it was your life, or you wouldn't survive. The [design school] was finding the point back to professionalism, you know. The [design school] was the clean professional, structured . . . where everything was broken down into a process. It was very clean and defined there, which graphic design is and I think that that's where I learnt a lot. The way they approached their graphic design was a mixture of European and American.

Luke's university studies complemented this highly professional tuition with open thinking and experimentation, but he recognised the opportunities to learn much about professional and practice related aspects to graphic design from the design school course.

That was just the flip side. It was very non-practical. It was all theoretical. So it was all based on history and, you know, exploring it. I would say that would be the art of being lateral. That was being at [names university]. What you'd expect at a university. That was the art of creativity.

This was at the time of the birth of the digital age and there was a surge of experimentation with new software and the Macintosh computer. The university offered access to leading design studios and in the process, opportunities to discover how new technology was being used in design.

Yeah we went out and to [names designer's studio]. She was a leading Mac person at that time. She was 'the Mac'. That was definitely an eye opener. A lot of it was process and influences and that sort of thing. It's fourteen years ago so it's kinda like . . . phew! What stands out from it was just the studio and the whole working environment, production, Macintoshes and what they were doing, and the type of work created an interest in what she did. Having that as an influence . . . sort of my style, because I had been there and experienced it first hand. But then on the flip side of that we also went to an animation studio, and they were doing 3D work on *Terminator II*. So it was the same sort of thing . . . very much showing you the work flow and not so much concept based and that sort of thing, but I do remember visually what stood out and what I'd seen in influences in totally different environments.

### **Tertiary education on returning to New Zealand**

Back in New Zealand Luke had been accepted for a graphic design degree course in a New Zealand design school. His work was different from other students at the school, because of the institutional capital he had built up in America and through part-time work. He had been in a position to influence other students, because he was bringing some experience that they did not have, although equally there were others who were able to influence him because of their different backgrounds.

The work that I did would have been an influence on the students if they liked it, sort of a different view on things, whereas other students were reared on screen printing and painting because they'd done it all the way through to seventh form. In terms of the graphic things and typography, those were the ones that I really excelled at. That's the thing about design school. It was so broad. You know, what I'd done, I'd actually specialised because I'd been at the [names American design school] and it was so specific in terms of 'how to design a logo'. The processes to do it, compared to what design school was, which was like "here's a brief, go and do it". There was no instruction as such. There was no process to follow in terms of 'go laterally' and that sort of thing. I am sure that I was influenced by some of their stuff as much.

His experience of the digital progress observed in America enabled him to bring that Macintosh® technology back to the New Zealand school of design, even though computer facilities were very basic there. This software knowledge could be translated into compositional aspects of graphic design like layering using Photoshop®, and in the process, distinguishing his work from that of other students. He brought the cultural capital acquired from both of these American institutions to his work in the New Zealand design school.

At [names American university] they had the leading Macs of the time. Development of the computer was already there for me, working at [names American university]. Coming back to [names New Zealand design school] it was at a real basic level. In terms of development on the computer side of things, I brought a lot of knowledge back from overseas. The courses at [names New Zealand design school] were very broad. I transferred into the second year and the third year I was never there. I had a fulltime job and I was there when I needed to be. I was freelance, but I was pretty much fulltime. I got that job on work experience and that was my first real application. I did the bare minimum to get through. I learnt what I needed to learn from it in the one year I was there. There was no need, because it was all self-development projects anyway. I was breaking the era between design and that professionalism. Needing to know that you needed to be out in the workforce and breaking out on my own – and really I didn't actually do the second year. I got the degree, up there, but it doesn't really mean much. It does to complete something. After years doing a design course I do have a piece of paper, but for me the benefits were to be to get out in the industry as well as studying if you know what I mean. Once I finished design school, I started my own business.

Reflecting on his education at the American university and design school, and later at the New Zealand polytechnic design school, two aspects emerge. Firstly there was the emphasis on design process, which he allied to lateral thinking and professionalism. For Luke this also encompassed the 'craft' aspect of design.

It was really different, but obviously there are things that you always relate back to. You know it was about the process, the lateral . . . I mean the two things that I learnt from (American university and design School) was kinda the lateral thought, being able to develop and at (New Zealand design School) in some way as well, and say "Okay here's concepts. How do we get to it?" The right concept, breaking them down, approaching them. . . it's all a matter of concepts. So that was one side of things and on the other was the actual professional nature of doing. The craft. A lot of which is lost today. I think a lot of people take on design and think . . . a designer is a craftsperson who actually crafts the work and has the realisation. It's not a matter of jumping on the computer and putting some type here and an image there and saying "this looks cool!" as some people do. But it's actually a craftsperson that's required like carving wood or doing fashion or whatever. Perfecting your craft.

### **Transition to his own graphic design firm**

In three different institutions, Luke had acquired the “cultural unconscious” which Bourdieu describes as “The whole system of categories of perception and thought acquired by the systematic apprenticeship which the school organises” (Bourdieu, 1971, p. 182). However, Luke recognised that in going from design school education to setting on his own, he needed more graphic design expertise than he had acquired in the institutional capital acquired from his design education. Luke’s part-time work had provided access to the professional design and production knowledge that prepared him for taking on publication design in *Outdoor Pursuits* an outdoor alpine sports magazine catering for snowboarders in particular and later *Street*. He had set up on his own, without any experience in working in a publication design firm, making a direct transition from design school education to working on his own.

I learnt a lot more in terms of lateral thought and ideas, through years in part-time work. Being laborious about doing stuff and doing it right first time. A lot of processes as well like . . . design’s about . . . I think it’s as much process as it is creative. And it’s about the processes you go through to get to the end product. The more fine tuned and honed and double checking and looking at simplicity. Going back to all the areas of you know, design and the relation of the process to design to the end user to the concept, idea, the whole process and I suppose a magazine has a different process to a business card, which has a different process to . . . so every job you do has a different way of approaching it, and obviously, a different outcome, but if you do business cards there’s a certain element that you do if you want to get really . . . there’s a formula that can equal an equation. So, you know, I really respect a process and respecting that and being tight. Not being too tight but, there needs to be a very specific rigid plan. I think that’s being part of being a designer. That’s part of what I do. And it probably reflects in the designs that I do. They are probably clean and a little minimalistic.

He described the stages from starting off his own business to working on ‘*Street*’. While he gained some professional design experience in graphic design during his design school years, he was unable to describe how anyone had given him any kind of support in knowing how to put a magazine together.

To make it a short brief history of the last four years, during my last year at design school, I was working on *Outdoor Pursuits* magazine. So that was really my first client. That was ‘all the way’. So actually between my part-time work and *Outdoor Pursuits*, it was kinda like, I did that. When I worked in the design company it was quite good, because there were four different companies and the three other companies were design, in the same open plan space. So I learnt a lot off being around them in terms of production. I mean I knew all about production anyway, the whole era was changing in terms of computers and you know, the way things were done and lots of stuff. So the transition just happened when I started *Outdoor Pursuits* magazine. I only had one



client which was '*Outdoor Pursuits*' magazine, but actually being in a creative environment and developing from there, and sort of progressively built my clients from contacts from '*Outdoor Pursuits*' magazine, through agencies and did a lot of freelance work for agencies. Did five years with *Outdoor Pursuits* magazine, had built up a real good scene of client, had employed two people, and after five years had, and then basically, years six and seven were sort of a transition between having a design company and buying into '*Street*' magazine and been there from when it started up and becoming a financial involvement into it and then I suppose development and then the rationale of being a designer six, seven years, you know. So it's kinda like the magazine sort of side of things in terms of development and creativity, from a design perspective, really drew me in and that's kinda developed from the creative side to really designing for '*Street*' magazine for twelve and a half years.

The influences and cultural capital acquired in the period from family life, through school, university and design school years had offered Luke a rich resource of lifestyle knowledge and design understanding. The related habitus in each of these situations had contributed to a philosophy about design, which in his terms lay at the core of his practice.

I've built a philosophy about what I personally want out of design you know, and I'm stuck with that. I think every designer has that. Every designer has a style, idea, direction, whether they want to admit it or not. It's there and that'll be part of the reflection of where they're at in their life. It's kind of like a reflection of who they are, and their buddies and everything gets back to that. Some people might change as they get older, but I think the core philosophy of what they are doing in design and what they are striving for remains the same.

### **The culture of the firm**

Luke explained how he saw the culture of the firm developing through the influence of the lifestyle values and varied cultural capital of all contributing to the creative work in the firm. He emphasised the diverse backgrounds of his staff, but the expression of these values was not limited to those he employed. Luke recognised the important contribution external contributors made to the culture of *Street*. Under it all is Luke's sense that he had on one hand, an overseeing and structuring role as creative director and on the other, a presumption that the culture of *Street* filtered through from one contributor to another.

I very much instil people's own self-belief. Their guidance – they control their own destiny. They're the set of the rules, the boundaries. Their influence is their friends, the culture they live in, is all part of . . . what I do is . . . big picture. That's how it works, down to beyond them. They're doing the same thing to their contributors. So whether it be design or fashion or design or illustrators, editorial or advertisers, they're all passing it down. So starting from the top, some photographers doing one shoot or even one stylist on a photographers shoot, the link in the chain is there. That stylist has their own

perceptions and values. That stylist has their friends, their world, their influences and that sort of thing and that stems up to what they do on a shoot. That photographer has their own values, their own concepts, their own ideas of what they want to do and their direction and lots of reasons for doing it. So that's how it is and it's a huge sum, y'know. And that all comes together, and I mean that's why I suppose I go back to that, because it's a reflection of our pop culture. There's a hundred and fifty contributors or people that work on each magazine, and each of those a hundred and fifty people – you know, advertisers or whatever, designers, advertising agencies that contribute you know, ads, that can't be looked past. That's part of our culture, you know . . . the advertising industry, the advertising that's around us. So we've got sixty ads, all pretty much coming from different agencies, different creative scenes. We've got like, probably at least thirty to fifty contributors of editorial. We've got at least six people that work on a team in the fashion. We've got illustrators and whatever, so that's outside the inner circle within '*Street*' so, and that's what I encourage. That's what I realise is who we are, what we are. That's what the magazine is all about, and it's a matter of celebrating those individual characters, whether it be punk or gothic or some straight person or whatever. Across all kinda sexes, races, religions, you know. There are no defined values. It is what it is because of the people that are involved in it.

Staff applied to work on *Street* because they had an affinity for the culture of the magazine. Even the staff vacancy advertisements were written in language that reflected the culture of the firm. There was a presumption that prospective staff would have a lifestyle background consistent with the culture of the firm. Underlying this fashion and youth culture was the necessary 'learnt' taste acquired in social situations of the lifestyle it reflects. Bourdieu's view that taste is socially constructed (Bourdieu, 1984, p.175) and not innate is borne out in lifestyle of Luke's staff. In their culture it could be seen how "taste is the basis of all that one has – people and things – all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.56). Taste is also evident in Bourdieu's term 'bodily hexis', which he describes as being unconsciously expressed through clothing and fashion, language and bodily deportment (Bourdieu, 1984). As Featherstone observes, "culture is incorporated, and it is not just a question of what clothes are worn, but how they are worn" (Featherstone, 1991, p.29) and it is these values that characterised the lifestyles of those contributing to *Street*. Whilst Luke recognised the rich resource of lifestyle interests that staff brought to their work he could be less specific about how staff continued to extend their knowledge other than through these lifestyle interests. Throughout the interviews, little was said about staff recognition of the way that they understood aspects of popular culture promoted by *Street* and those producing it. These understandings constituted "a common meaning already established" in Bourdieu's descriptor "cultural unconscious" (1971, p. 183). Luke identifies the motivation and sense of purpose he observed in his staff.

They gotta be into fashion and youth culture, whether it's kinda like music, pop culture, movies, the lifestyle. That comes down to purpose . . . the reason why they are doing it. The purpose is that they're wanting to do something for the magazine, to showcase their skills, to do their work, to fulfil themselves to fulfil their dreams or to fulfil their ideas. There is a purpose for it. That's the purpose. It's like it's a commercial necessity. The purpose is for them to show off their abilities, or editorial to write, in terms of that question of purpose. So they don't just do it . . . because there's passion in there as well, passion applied to what they are doing, you know, but the purpose is there to write for the magazine. They'll do the job . . . just adding their point of view of their life. The culture, the Chinese or whatever . . . their view of what's reflecting all around them. They're striving. They've got goals, they've got purpose to what they've got.

### **Creative direction**

In his role as a coordinator and creative director Luke supervised writing as well design. Much of the responsibility for design was delegated to others and in the process there were opportunities for the expression of individual cultural capital revealing the respective designer and writing backgrounds in the creative work in the magazine. In making decisions about content and themes, in his role as creative director, Luke was also advised by staff who had specialised expertise. He accepted that he could not possibly be expert in all aspects of the magazine, having to trust his editors, although he did have a good sense, through his own background, about whether their viewpoints were right.

Yeah. It's kinda like I trust my editors, I trust my department heads in terms of feedback from them and there's a kind of understanding of the key things for themes is loosely based editorial off that. While we don't have every article written about a cover story or cover theme, it's just a loose idea that's developed and it's kind of like . . . the key thing from that starting point is to know that there's always the good angles . . . different perspectives, ideas, kinda like different viewpoints as well. Personal opinions can be expressed about different viewpoints. It's actually all these different viewpoints are sitting around in a big boardroom table. I have a pretty good understanding and I have obviously an idea of what I'm trying to create in the magazine as a whole and that's filtered down to my departments, so they have an idea about what they're creating for the magazine and it does come back down to trust and obviously just picking up what's important, feedback. Because sometimes is just gossip and talking. But important feedback. . . what's going to make the difference or add value to it or enhance it.

### **Maintaining values**

Despite the inclusive team approach to the creative direction of *Street*, in which staff were encouraged to offer their own individual contribution, Luke conceded that there needed to be overall control of creativity within guidelines he had established.

Sometimes there's . . . everyone has a different way of thinking relayed through a different way of producing stuff. In some ways we are in a flux of having to stipulate a certain production flow. Certain rules and guidelines you've got to follow. Creativity is for design. It's not just to create new systems. So everyone has an individual system, but supported for them to develop it. But develop it as one and that's the key. So you've got a production flow, you've got to develop one system as a team, utilising everyone's individuality, quirks, but our job as admin is to ensure there's one system and everyone follows that system . . . as simple and as efficient as possible. There's a certain overall direction a magazine has to take and as the creative director you're looking at the big picture. Your staff, in terms of their department, you're looking at sales, design or editorial (they) are all sort of creative in their own right. You know, they have their own direction, working in their world, in their department. I have this sort of holistic picture. So I am always like, trying to look at the interactions between departments, not go over the top . . . a 'control freak' . . . give them their creative freedom.

Luke had become increasingly aware of the need to manage the design content of the magazine. As the publication had developed an increasing number of 'creatives' had contributed to it. He accepted that he could not be in total control of design decisions and to allow staff to have ownership of their areas of responsibility, benefiting from a level of commitment that Csikszentmihalyi (1990) refers to as optimal experience.

I have my own views of what I seek. My biggest thing, my key thing is to make sure that all avenues are open and that's for me not to have my personal point of view in this. There are certain directives when it comes down to design that I like or don't like. If it's major I'll make a decision. If it's minor I'll let designers . . . so I try not to get involved too much. It's hard to pull back, but not direct too much of the editorial. It's hard from design, being a designer. It's quite easy from editorial . . . "Okay I'll just leave it like it is". It's easy to let the editorial team do their stuff. Advertising people do their stuff. Design is a little bit hard, because being a creative director you can always see things that can be improved.

Luke was not prescriptive about the selection of illustration or illustrators. The editors had this role. The decision of where to source images may have been dependent at times on how the designers were able to commission images, rather than on arguing that the design concept requires particular images to answer the requirements of the design.

That's the editor's department, his schedule of the page . . . is to know what the illustrator knows what they're wanting . . . the concepts, the overview or the intro paragraph of the article . . . get it to the illustrator so they know exactly what they are going to illustrate so it ties in and flows together and works as a whole unit and then its kind of like his job to brief the designer, make sure that it has an editorial piece . . . that the illustration needs to be 'this big' or whatever . . . you know. Its those sort of . . .

that's kind of driven by the editor because it's about what's on the written page . . . That's his job, you know . . . what's written and visually in terms of editorial. Where the art director looks after all the fashion shoots and stuff like that you know. So anything that's shot by a photographer in terms of . . . he chooses. That's the prerogative of the art director and fashion director as well. I just oversee this you know and make sure the illustrations are in line with what your doing you know, the type styles and on an issue article by article basis. I might trust people.

### **Audience response**

There was always a lag between publishing an issue and gauging the results from the work done, because of the difficulty in obtaining recent audience research results. Audience response was important as a means of moderating the direction of editorial and design values. It could help to determine editorial and creative direction approach.

You see a lot of restraints and that sort of thing but it's a time-by-time progression you work at it and work at it and chip away at it and there's so many factors as well. Seasonal, where you have celebrity on the cover, all those sort of things affect sales you know. It can be attitudes it can be consumption. It can be just the cover. Attraction to the cover can be content . . . can be whatever, you know, it's such a . . . I think the hardest thing is that because our market is probably not loyal like an older market. Because it is such a young . . . The younger youth aren't really loyal to anything, even to brands. They're not you know. They're out there trying different stuff. They think they know everything but they don't know 'jack'.

The audience research undertaken by external consultants indicated that the weighting of the readership was predominantly younger teenage. Luke had also learnt that for this readership, magazine articles need to be limited to shorter articles of typically two or so pages (Albers, 2002) consistent with Drenttel's (2000, p. 167) view that other media are competing with the written word and this readership group tended to lack the attention span for longer articles, an observation that Luke could see applying to the readership of *Street*.

We recognise that the use of probably a little bit less of stories - not four page - you get that in more mature magazines. Our maximum is like two, three on a cover story like religion. Potentially up to four. It could be still the same amount of text. There's very much, kinda like what we get through is kinda short and snappy. Their attention span is short. That's just the culture, the nature of our readership. Which is . . . two thirds of our readers are under the age of twenty. You know, in their teens. So its a big portion of it y'know, so that's who where the market is and we've got to adapt our magazine around that. And also there's people who are like twenty or thirty years old, who are wanting to read a more mature magazine. We're not the magazine to go there.

## Conclusions

Luke had been responsible for the creative direction of a successful street culture magazine, and he had been able to do this through his position in the culture it promoted as well as through cultural capital he has amassed in family, institutional and social settings. In addition, his independence and individualism in early childhood and the related dispositions go some way to explaining a receptiveness to aspects of alternative lifestyle he described in institutional and social settings, and the counter-culture expressed in the content of both *Outdoor Pursuits* and *Street* magazine. The case presents an interesting cross-over between the fields of popular culture and graphic design. Whilst Luke was able to describe the way in which he had followed a trajectory from graphic designer to creative director and describe the way in which ideas about process taken from his experiences in America, were applied to his present role, he could be less specific about how he tapped into the counter-culture expressed in his magazine. The mediation role of *Street* called for a complex web of contributors orchestrated by Luke as creative director. These contributors had in turn, expressed the habitus of their lifestyles through the medium of *Street*. In each case there was an expression of style and taste which itself owed much to their lifestyles and the influences of the social structure in which they existed. Their acquisition of relevant cultural capital can be summed up in Bourdieu's assertion that the combination of the conditions of existence and position in social settings produce the generative schemes of the habitus as a "system of schemes of perception and appreciation" which between them produce "a lifestyle, a system of classified and classifying practices, i.e. distinctive signs" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 171). Luke had become increasingly reliant on these contributions as he developed the visual and editorial content of the magazine. The importance of understanding and being able to draw on knowledge of relevant social contexts is fundamental both to the case and to Luke's practice.

## **Karl:**

### **A marketing approach to design concepts in the field of business**

Bare concrete floors, contemporary furniture, current designer colours, and a pastiche of patterns, all contributed to a strong design statement about the décor of the large design firm in which Karl worked. The firm had spent a decade gradually establishing its position in the field of graphic design and distinguishing itself from others in the field. The taste<sup>87</sup> projected in the environment was a carefully considered facet of their own brand identity, asserting the way that they wished to be seen by their clients and also others in the field of graphic design. Karl's office was removed from the open plan studio space occupied by a dozen employees working in small teams. Now in his forties, he had reached the position of creative director for a highly regarded New Zealand graphic design company<sup>88</sup>. While Karl's predecessors had already established the firm's position in the graphic design field, he was able to continue a legacy that contributed to this position. He had reached a position in the company where he could determine values in a developed design process that had set his company aside from many others and in turn placed them in an established position within the field of graphic design. Karl had made conscious decisions about the position his firm should take relative to others in the graphic design field. This case study considers how he arrived at this position in the graphic design field and in particular, the values that became important in his practice to make this possible. The resourcefulness and perseverance important in his professional trajectory can be traced back to his family habitus.

#### **Family influences**

To understand the habitus of Karl's family in his early years, it is important to recognise two apparently opposing forces. On one hand there were the male-dominated Croatian close-knit family relationships, with restrictive values. On the other hand his mother's values were less traditional and reflected a move away from these traditional values.

I grew up in a strongly Croatian family . . . My father was a farmer and I grew up in [names the town]. My father worked hard and my family were very much blue-collar workers, builders and farmers and all shop owners and stuff like that. So I grew up probably a little differently from most of my friends, because you know, within sort of Croatian culture it's very, very tight. Any spare-time you would spend with the family.

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<sup>87</sup> 'Taste' refers to Bourdieu's assertion that "taste classifies the classifier" (1984, p. 352). Here the firm was expressing values about décor, which were a reflection of their own values about design. They were consequently classifying themselves by their choices.

<sup>88</sup> 'Success' here is measured by recognition by the design field in terms of peer performance in articles in the design press, DINZ Best Awards for creative work and achievement in brand identity design programmes for national companies as recognised by the field of business.

Or when I grew up, going to the Croatian Society . . . and the family would live there you know, so if you're not at home you're at the club. It was a struggle for my Mum. In the end she trained to become a nurse . . . went back and studied, did her "School C"<sup>89</sup> as an adult student and did her UE<sup>90</sup> in [names the city] and [then] went to university. My mother was more about modern life and less traditional, yet she had sort of values of stepping outside of the square and then you have the rest of the family that were quite traditionalist. It was very much for the family. Sharing, support, emotional support, you know. Parents and then your aunties and uncles are almost like extended parents. And work hard, you know . . . work hard. So I would sort of say that's where my work ethic generally comes from.

His family had liked to talk endlessly at mealtimes about the external world. The Croatian community were quite tight knit. In this family situation he heard intense discussions about the outside world and about politics, in a biased manner that reflected working-class values with strong socialist leanings. Karl resisted revealing the content of these discussions to his friends.

You would . . . a typical evening when the family were together was to have a meal. And then there'd be discussion around the table. So the meal would be quite ridiculous . . . say at the weekend. Five-thirty meals are, and then you'd be even sitting at the table nine-thirty to ten o'clock and they'd just be talking . . . talking and drinking a bit of vino. And what they'd talk about mostly . . . it was politics. Incredibly stubborn people, so in other words if one has moderated a view on something there's no way he would shift it, even though his view was based on dubious study you know. There'd be lots of talking about government politics. I picked that up back then but I would never talk about that outside of the family, especially when most of my friends who were Kiwi or New Zealanders just wouldn't understand.

Their reading consisted of the newspaper and Croatian material. The discussions about it were more an expression of viewpoints rather than discussion that might have changed people's minds. Karl was bewildered by some of the discussions in the early stages of his life, before he actually knew enough to form his own opinions.

A lot of Croatian material . . . so they'd be magazines, newspapers that would be sent over. There would be a lot of talk . . . a lot of people coming back from the homeland and vice versa. You'd certainly get arguments about pretty hot topics. There were American principles versus Russian principles. And so you'd get a debate like between my two uncles and one was probably more traditionally Croatian and one's slightly less

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<sup>89</sup> 'School C' refers to School Certificate, the first level of national education examination that secondary school students sat at that time.

<sup>90</sup> 'UE' refers to the national education University Entrance examination, a qualification that students sat in the year following School Certificate.



so. I was listening to more stuff. I was getting exposed to a heck of a lot more stuff than my friends were.

Increasingly, Karl had turned to others outside the tight family structure. He also felt that he moved away from this rigid social environment through the revelations in his education, where he found more open thinking and a basis for self-determination.

I would be able to count on one hand English friends of my whole family. It would have been minimal. So you know when you've got a world that's all about the same thing, you don't get any diversity and I suppose I had more diversity. I had Maori friends, I had European friends, I had wealthy, I had poor, I had working class, I had academic. As I grew up I experimented more. So I think a mixture of education and going to a Catholic college being taught by priests . . . trying different things and going to different places which is often what they encouraged us to do is why it opened my eyes up and I could get past this . . . I could see what they were doing, but I'd see it for what it was. I had the ability to go "yeah, I'll do that because I'd quite enjoy that today, this weekend but then I'll do something different next week."

While Karl had showed ability in art, there was not the same level of ability in his other school work. He recalled how participation in visual arts subjects came much more naturally to him, arising out of interest rather than through any particular social interaction, while academic subjects like English were more difficult.

It was more visual. I was never confident with English and writing stories. I still don't feel very good at it, so it was more, sort of, your visual arts and tech drawing. And I could do that blindfolded . . . so a sense of perspective and three-dimensionality to objects. My eye can draw things up. At a young age drawing very well without formal training. It wasn't really that serious, it was just a bit of a folly. I used enjoy it though. I used to do stuff at home. I used to draw.

### **Lifestyle and social knowledge**

Friendships made in his teenage years, outside the solitary activity of drawing and painting, involved sharing practical farming activities in his rural community rather than any interests that might have challenged him socially. Living in a rural setting, Karl had managed to escape the importance of music and fashion and other cultural aspects that may be more important in a city lifestyle in teenage years. That was to change when he moved to the city.

I had a good circle of friends. And I used to stay at people's places and of course out there. It's rural so I used to stay on farms and work with people. We'd have to go and clear the back paddock you know, at twelve. You know, we'd ride on the tractor. It was . . . quite honest it . . . wasn't carried away with politics. It was quite refreshing when I think back to it. When we moved into [names city] what I had was . . . I had both . . . I had the city stuff . . . fashion. You know . . . go stay at my friends in the country and

we'd be . . . I remember once I'd saved up and bought this Ocean Pacific t-shirt, "OP", and it was like a really, really sort of a good brand you know. First time, I think, I could ever conjure up a brand, a fashion brand. I thought I was the 'bees knees' with this thing on. And then I went out on the farm and it had lost its complete relevance. You know . . . I felt stupid in it, because first of all we had to hay-make so I was getting crap all over it. I thought my mate would go "wow that's a cool t-shirt" but he didn't give a toss. And I do remember that, I felt completely "hang on you're supposed to go to me, 'Geez that looks cool! What's that brand?' ", and he didn't. And then after that, I initially sort of . . . I dumped that back in the bag and stuck on an old t-shirt and that was the end of that and I had a good 'rest of the weekend'. And also in the Croatian community, fashion is not a thing to lean on. It's not really.

### **Acquisition of cultural capital**

Karl had had only brief tertiary art education, and that was centred on fine arts with little design tuition. There was hardly a large transition in moving from art school to his first employer, a magazine publisher. There he worked without wages, to gain work experience.

The first year all I did was Fine Arts, which had a little bit of graphics in it. So a little bit of . . . I did painting, I did drawing, I did sculpture. I did a little bit of everything really. I suppose you could consider it then design theory. It was more "tiddling around" really. And then I just did one year in graphic design the year after, which was practically naive.

My first job was [names publisher]. He had one job, he was just one guy on his own, one job and he had a few little things, but he used to do a magazine [names magazine], which was a teenage girls magazine, so my first job was paste up and he couldn't afford to pay me so I went on the dole and worked for him for free. So I did that for about a year, and then he started to afford to pay me and so it was a big step I suppose. When I was working for free I had some latitude on my side. It wasn't like he was paying me for every dollar and he couldn't be intolerant. He was appreciative of the help.

Karl soon realised that he needed to extend his knowledge if he was to improve his position. The background that he took from art school was largely about visual judgements relating to composition, colour, basic design and materials. To move from that point to being confident as a designer required considerable personal exploration and the need to access relevant information outside these basic formal values. Karl showed, even in an age when graphic design called for less specialised knowledge, the resourcefulness to seek the opportunity for self-advancement. He read design magazines because there was not much else written at that time. With experience came the ability to be more purposeful in finding information related to creative work. He emphasised that he needed to make opportunities and be resourceful in solving design problems.

Even when I first started to work at that guy's place, I started to do freelance jobs. So I was . . . it was more "give anything a go", so I looked at design annuals and I read what magazines were around and there weren't very many and no websites and it was really just reading books and I did a few little courses back then but they were just local. And it was just when I got a little bit older and started to know where to look for things that I could start to access more information. And I suppose my attitude still is, I can see an opportunity . . . so I'm probably an opportunist in respect of 'no client's a bad client' or 'I can produce something really interesting from this client'. Whereas a lot of . . . some designers will come in here and they'll cull work 'from the word go'.

Early family values were reflected in Karl's disposition to make the most out of available resources. He had also recognised the importance of hard work to achieve goals, demonstrated visibly in his mother's struggle to improve her life.

You know I sort of think maybe it's learning to make a lot happen with something little. I used to make boats and make guns. I used to make lots and lots of different things and so I used to make a lot with a couple of bits of wood. I think that has definitely travelled with me. So it's about making the best of the situation. That's what made me strong. and the other one was just working hard until you sort of . . . so for me. It's like 'work hard - slow build'. You know things didn't come to me overnight. I worked pretty hard for them so its not that glamorous but you sort of trudge, trudge, trudge, trudge and you'll get there and you'll slowly build over a period of time.

### **Trajectory within the design firm**

There were opportunities for ongoing acquisition of cultural capital through the habitus of the next firm Karl was employed by. This was a significant move, taking him from a production style publisher to a leading design firm. Early employment with them came as a result of Karl's demonstrated ability to visualise concepts as seen in the work in his portfolio.

So I did eighteen months of [names small publisher] and then I went to work for [the designers]. They hired me as visualiser/designer. My job was to visualise and a little bit of design. And I have stayed a number of years. I didn't dilly dally around, probably too fast some times. So speed and reliability basically . . .

Making a transition from visualiser to designer and being more involved with concept development involved more than a progression from one role to another. Karl's tenacity and response to criticism were required to enable him to be offered better positions in the firm.

It was relatively structured back then, you know. There I was . . . visualiser, designer and there was . . . senior designers and design directors and so some steps. In terms of my progression, I don't know . . . it seemed it was gradual. I mean at times I considered ending my career, seeing them sitting me down and saying they're concerned that I

don't have the abilities to be a designer, which made me more bloody-minded about being a designer. I talked to other designers to get their different points of view. I got tips on how I could improve what I had to do. I'd look at design books and read more. I'd spend a bit more time in the office after hours.

In his approach to reading, Karl recalled a point when the inadequacy of looking at reproductions of other people's work gave way to more thinking, reading and interest in wider aspects. As well as building visual awareness of the changing graphic design field, he had discovered value in reading about design experience and the social significance of work.

I do remember, I don't know, maybe five or six years ago, there I was, looking at annuals and then I lost interest in looking at annuals. And then I started to read more about . . . more behind what's going on compared with just what the design was. And that was quite hard to sort of get that sort of information and so I'd read more books and some more pictorial type things and so I started to become interested in the way things had happened as well as what ended up being in them and then I started to become conscious of what difference does it make . . . I like stuff that I like to do. Work now is work that people are going to engage with and build an experience [from] and so designing multi dimensional experiential things, not "here's a nice brochure about it" because it would mean I'd go "well how did you know what that brochure is giving out. What's that brochure doing?" "What's the job of the brochure?" And much of my interest is in the wider context of graphic design, design, architecture and that really kicked in about five years ago, you know the whole brand experience reading an article from Harvard. *Design experiences are an experience in design*, I think that's what it was called. And it was just the different levels of experiential design immersion and so that had an influence, I think.

### **Position-taking**

After ten years in the firm, Karl had become the creative director. He was able to draw on the design process established by the directors that had preceded him. He could make his own decisions about the resources that were required to be able to follow a design process, resources that were fundamental to the position of both himself and the firm, in the field of graphic design. Karl had adopted a strategy<sup>91</sup> that reflected the position he had taken in the field of graphic design and which established his position relative to others. This strategy owed much to the dispositions arising from the histories of practice (Bourdieu 1993, p. 61) in his habitus expressed in his trajectory and in the habitus of the firm.

Karl had taken a position in which there was more emphasis on spending budget on early research than many other graphic design companies had. He was clear about the importance

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<sup>91</sup> The term strategy is used here in the sociological sense in Bourdieu's approach where the positions in the field determine relationships with other producers (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 131).

of linking his approach in design to the market-strategy of his clients and in the process, of moving towards reliance on market knowledge available to those in his firm.

When you look at large organizations design is centred around strategy, business strategy<sup>92</sup> and in that respect design should be touching every aspect of that organization and every customer or consumer it touches upon if you think of that organization . . . What design does, is forms the product, so in respect of where we find ourselves, is right in the centre of all of that . . . all of those customer touch points. We help create and develop some thinking that is going to shape the experience of everything internal and external. If you don't have benefits in the product features of something, then they've got nothing to sell. We find ourselves a lot closer to understanding the business strategy . . . how to express that using design as our tool. We've got [names business partner] he is a brand consultant, brand strategist and often I'll pull him in for certain things if I need to. Originally he would have been involved all the time but he just can't. He just doesn't have the time, so you've got to get on and do it yourself. The key is, I know it's not my strength. My strength is creative direction so I'll always use him as a benchmark, in respect to any strategic thinking or he will input into that process.

## Resources

Besides the knowledge available through the brand strategist, other diverse resources had been built up to enable the firm to offer the necessary expertise for resolving and answering design problems. These resources were available through the cultural capital from reading and through drawing on the habitus of the firm in the backgrounds of staff. Karl could explain how he gained information related to the fields of design and business from reading, but, like others in the firm, he had difficulty in sustaining interest in reading books versus magazines and found making time to read difficult.

It's a bit of a challenge isn't it, really, because I wear two hats, so I've got this consistent tension between learning about how business runs in this industry and learning as a designer what a designer needs to do. So I find it quite hard because some of that is a harder read . . . and an enjoyable read. So I'll . . . we get the *Harvard Business Review* here so I do a little bit of reading through there. I'll be reading through from one extreme back to the other extreme you know. *Brand Channel, dotcom* . . . do a bit of a read in there. Read *Communication Arts, Graphis* articles, books that come through *Design Week* . . . gives you a bit of balance. *Design Week* sort of has little snippets of information. I find that ten times easier to read you know. It's reading a magazine versus book and I try and read magazines more than books. I pick up books like *Good to Great* and I'll get three-quarters through them and I'm . . . you know . . .

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<sup>92</sup> In using the term 'business strategy' Karl was referring to management and marketing aspects related to the desired positioning of the company and its products within the marketplace.

they're interesting but they're not *that* interesting. It's more of an obligatory read than a enjoyable one. Yes, so a mixture of magazines, I read the newspapers, I'm online in terms of e-zines<sup>93</sup> and things like that, like *Brand Channel*. I don't find a lot of time to do it, I must admit. I struggle. Reading does offer . . . like insights into what other organisations have done . . . why they did it, how they did it, what is missing for the client and what's not working . . . understanding that. Something off the straight and narrow, then doing it.

Magazines dealing with both design and lifestyle were an important resource to the firm. Karl placed high reliance on the firm's own internal magazine library as a means of keeping aware of current work. The magazines held by the firm's library provided a means for designers to increase their understanding of visual appropriateness and conceptual aspects of design and lifestyle.

I can only speak for this team here. We probably have about a dozen magazines, each one from Europe or from the States. Some arrive here on a weekly basis, regular. They all read them. Whether its *Eye* magazine, *Design Week*, *Creative Review*, *Graphis*, *Brain* magazine, they read them and I get a mixture of magazines for lifestyle through to design, to graphics, to product. But they're like wolves when they come in, they snap them up and paw over them . . . so having that regular input. We've always had a attitude of encouraging finest working staff, a percentage have a big influence on design in terms of their understanding of trend, understanding of a bit of European influence in something.

Content from reading filtered through to discussions in the office. One limiting factor was the reluctance of some designers to read rather than being satisfied with scanning the literature available. This was as much the case with articles centred in the professional discourse as with articles on individual designer's work. Karl could recognise the value of this reading in contributing to ideas developed in client work.

To individuals generally . . . you'll find like there might be for arguments sake, Vince Frost coming down to work for Emery Vincent. Vince is from the UK. So that's . . . somebody picks that up and that sparks a bit of discussion and then you find out that a couple of designers think he's their hero. So . . . and that sparks debate. There's a bit of reading material around that . . . I'll stumble across an article on him so I'll give it to the guys to have a bit of a read. So it is pretty much driven by the individuals. I've tried in the past to encourage people to read here. But I've stopped that, short of making them read and you know a number of people don't read. They will look at pictures . . . they'll read pictures and captions. And you know it's cool as long as it's pictures and captions about something that will help them in their work not just pictures and

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<sup>93</sup> e-zines are on-line magazines.

captions of work. So yes, it's pretty much a self-driven thing. And some have more time than others and you know, because I run the business and I'm trying to do creative direction and then I'm kind of 'keep the family happy at home' I find it challenging to find as much time as I would want.

Besides learning from published articles, staff had also been encouraged to attend conferences and to build networks with others overseas. Karl could see both the benefits in international exchange of design ideas and information and the absence of conferences that might have offered these exchanges locally.

We go to conferences once a year, somebody does. . . the Melbourne *AGIdeas* conference. So that was an influence and that person comes back and "claims everything". Designers generally go and look at other designer's websites . . . not New Zealand designers', but English and American. We have a network, which is always really good so we have ex-staff in Europe and the States and they forward work back and forth. We don't really look locally.

### **Shared cultural capital out of the habitus of the firm**

Karl could recognise the cultural capital of his staff as well as the value that he had gained from reading case studies and learning from clients. In each of these ways there were opportunities to create a "learning organization" (Senge et al, 1994, p. 17)

Employees, people who've worked for us, who've worked in the UK and come over from *Landors* and the *Interbrands* . . . they bring process knowledge and intellectual property with them . . . you learn off people. Yeah, you read . . . you read case studies, you learn off those. You deal with clients who have their own way of doing things . . . you learn off them. You think "well that's quite a good way of doing that", instead of the way that we thought. Yeah, definitely trawling the intellectual property you have in your staff, the latent knowledge they have in experience, client, reading and reading case studies and articles. We make sure that we do all of that.

In addition to the knowledge that staff brought to the firm, connection to an external consumer world was needed, to ensure that the work of Karl's firm had communication values that reflected the lifestyles of the consumer cultures in which it would be received.

In the case of brand projects this could be achieved either through studies 'in the field', or by employing young emerging designers, in touch with youth culture where relevant.

We spend quite a bit of time out there in the investigation process. Part of that is actually immersing yourself in what is being done, for a particular project. There's a mixture of people there in the studio too, so you have young designers coming out of school, every year. They're really, really necessary to ensure that you are in touch with youth. You are in touch with your culture because you can sort of be a thirty year old or

thirty year old plus and think you've got an idea of what a twenty-two year old's into.  
You're kidding yourself. So we test off each other.

The rich resources that came out of both enquiry through reading and also from the diverse backgrounds of individual staff, as they contributed to the habitus of the firm, served to inform conceptualisation within the firm's established design process.

### **Design process**

In the developed design process that Karl's company had established for each project, value was placed on developing a brief, which was consolidated only after initially gaining a better idea of the issues involved. Up to that stage it was a "working brief". He demonstrated the process by describing the initial process leading up to brief formation, and the way in which his firm carried out audience research<sup>94</sup> to develop a brand. The focus was on the consumer and on making a case for valuing clients' market information.

Most clients don't come with a brief in terms of identity. It'll be "we're having to reorganise ourselves", or it's "we used to be market leader one and now we've dropped to three". Or it might be "we've just acquired three new businesses and we're not too sure how to manage the brand" or "three of us in this organisation just merged together and we want to create a common culture". So that would be as far as the brief would go. When you're starting off, like an identity project, there's generally . . . the brief. There isn't one. There is a set of issues and working around solutions. So you're probably finding the brief a little hard when you've got the parameters and the identity strategy resolved and I guess projects just fall out of that, such as a signage requirement or stationery design requirement, or staff newsletter, then typed briefs will come because you've established a platform from which the brief can be created. Now more often than not the client will start the brief, get a few points down, give it to us and then we'll reverse-brief it . . . flesh it out into a proper format and then we'll send that back and get them to sign off on it. We'll also supply back the budget for the working brief. FMCG<sup>95</sup> companies, packaging based companies, they will be far tighter on their briefing process. They will give you things such as marketing analysis, segmentation of their consumers, volume, the targets that they are wanting to achieve, competitive sets. They'll give you probably a two page brief. And then in the same process we'll reverse brief. So we'll sit in a session with them, probably take us through their thinking, we'll ask them lots of questions and provoke them and ask why and why and why and then we'll respond in a written brief ourselves which is showing them our understanding of that discussion and our understanding of issues and if they're off base we're going to be off base there.

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<sup>94</sup> Audience research is a term that refers to a growing interest by designers to ensure that they understand relevant communication values for specific design audiences (McCoy, 2003).

<sup>95</sup> FMCG is an abbreviation of 'fast moving consumer goods'.



To progress from a working brief to arrive at a final brief involved research at a number of levels to gain an understanding of the scope of the client's design project. Research could involve both audits and focus groups to gain a better understanding of an organisation.

There's generally a similar process that goes on with any project we start work on. It's just the way in which we undertake the process [that] generally differs from client to client. It's as much about us getting to *understand* the brand<sup>96</sup> and understand the use of the brand as it is understanding why the business feels like it needs to change . . . why it feels like it needs to evolve . . . what issues it feels it needs to resolve. Because quite often the issues that a business feels like it needs to resolve are not *all* the issues and it's only when you work through the design process you know, that they start to appreciate why there are issues. So it's a process of exploration really. We have to actually thoroughly understand the structure of the organisation, the divisions, the sectors . . . how they report. Do they report on a financial basis . . . do they report on an operational basis? We have to understand what they were named. We have to understand their history, because businesses have, in some cases, years of history. We need to understand their products and their product brands and how they group them what they do what they are. So there is a heck of a lot of collating . . . a process of collation in terms of the research process.

In order to gain an understanding of diverse aspects of a company's history, products and identity, a design audit would be conducted by Karl's firm. The approach to the initial stage of conducting an audit for one of Karl's clients, is described in the following account:

We thought up having a whopping big room in the office filled with everything from brochures to signage visuals to uniforms on big long racks. We did that by compiling an audit kit that touched signage, forms, stationery, uniforms and collateral advertising. What we did then is we gathered all the relative people in that organization in a room looking through the audit kit, through what we actually needed to go and get and they dispersed . . . gave them five weeks and they came back and we filled up two rooms in our office full of stuff and then it was a matter of going through all the stuff and putting order to it and actually grouping it and understanding how it all fitted together. Then what we did is we had to then understand so we had a picture of the organization as it was.

Time was set aside for research in the early stages of projects, to establish what each design problem involved as well as for bringing in outside information that informed design processes. This provided a knowledge base from which the firm could work.

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<sup>96</sup> 'Brand' here is taken to mean the way in which organizations both identify themselves and persuade customers to buy products or services (Olins, 2003, p. 8).

It's very much bringing in material to inform you, to give you enough information to base a sound solution on, before any design work happens. So there is a fair bit of time engaged in that process and that might be conducting interviews, focus groups with customers, consumers or staff. It might be reading through the case studies on other organizations in the industry. There might be brand case studies or business case studies. Going out and doing market audits. Depends on the project really but if it's identity based it goes through a rigour, probably a greater rigour than any other type of project. But if it's a piece of packaging then you sort of narrow it down to going to the store checking out, analysing how effectively it works on the shelf and consumer segments. But when it's identity it's far broader and it's talking about culture as well as it's talking about service experience. Then you really do your homework before you come to any conclusions. Whether it be on what would they believe a brand driver or single organising idea should be, what the experience should be to then what the name of the product should be to each identity . . . expression of it. This is where we extract the values. It's a process . . . because they are always, you know . . . there. It's a matter of just digging, digging, digging until they surface and then sort of putting them up in lights and celebrating them. So defining the values and defining what we call the core value that the brand's going to, or the products going to, deliver. This is sort of a research, investigation, exploration, discovery phase. It's quite significant how you do it depending on the discipline but the process is as rigorous whether it's a large identity project designing signage for cafes and bars, designing products for beverages to designing an exhibition. We get nervous when we get pushed into a project with no time to go through this process. Because I feel like the point of our difference is this process and feeling reassured that our conclusions are based on reality and truth.

Out of the research Karl was gradually able to construct a strategy from his understanding of the company and the brief that could serve to guide the project team who had to be able to build on the initial research and work within strategy he defined. Research was typically closely linked to the design process as Karl worked through supporting focus groups in the research, which was followed by strategy development and having a 'watching brief' as the senior designer took over the conceptual design and the client worked collaboratively on the project.

We have a core team, an account manager and a lead designer then we get a team. They're always there on a project, but then we'll get a strategic capability rolled into that that generally starts it off. I'll start the process off. I won't always involve those guys right from the word go. . . . there'll be a sort of formalised research process that then I will involve them in. Might be the marketing that's going on, then taking some more focus groups participating or listening to them or reading up. So from that point, try and carry it as early as I can, being supportive otherwise I'm taking information too far before

widening it out, but then I'll continue right the way to the point where we start to implement it. So strategy . . . that's 'insights talked about'. I'll start to work up some models, some strategies, potential approaches and core thinking. I'll be involved in that. The senior designer will spend time. See what's going on. And then when it gets to point where that strategy and that thinking is developed, the client is on board with us, then leads to its expression.

### **Research into consumer culture**

Brand identity pervaded the work of the studio, whether in specific applications as in the positioning of a client's products through packaging and merchandising or through broad applications throughout a company. Whatever the degree of his firm's involvement, Karl placed importance on seeking out ethnographic information<sup>97</sup> related to the design project that could reveal the cultural setting in which products were marketed. While questions of marketing and related business strategy could be answered by their in-house marketing manager, questions of lifestyle and culture surrounding products and the consumer or public perceptions of companies that produced them were left to other staff to explore. To this end, staff would need to immerse themselves in these cultural contexts, either vicariously, by enquiry, or by actually joining the lifestyle where appropriate.

The way that we go through our processes generally, is quite a thorough investigation of issues of the landscape that the product or the service lives in. And then we'll come to a conclusion as to what these problems are and we'll work out what we think the solutions should be and we'll revolve that around a single core piece of thinking. When it comes to the expression of it, whether it's a name, whether it's the visual identity, that is when we will make a decision on what cultural context we going to immerse ourselves in. So if it's an industrial product, well we're not going to look at obviously street culture or fashion, we'll look in that world. If we're working with [names a beverage account] and we're doing some work for [names brand] which is sixteen up to twenty-five or whether we do work for a twelve to nineteen year old segment, that is when the designer or design team will immerse themselves in the culture that surrounds that consumer and that's when you start to . . . you know, have to have look and feel boards and mood boards and tonal boards and they'll have images of fashion ads and clothing and posters and street y'know and that's appropriate.

For the design team to be immersed in a culture related to brand development for a youth market, they needed to follow a research path that would reveal facets of lifestyle and taste of this particular consumer group.

Like for argument's sake if we design a new bottle for [names brand] . . . we ran focus groups with eighteen, nineteen year olds and found out actually what are the turn ons

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<sup>97</sup> Design ethnography is a well documented aspect of design practice. Refer Wasson, (2003).

for them and then we, as part of that research . . . we had other brands within their set, within their wardrobe, so defined a wardrobe, and it could be a shoe brand, to cars, to the bands they listen to, to music they buy, to the drinks they have, the cigarettes they smoke, to the clothing they buy, where they shop, and where they have coffee . . . So that's what we we're trying to paint . . . a picture of their world and depending on what the project is and the client, that picture will always change. So fashion is really important to understand, but where it's appropriate and right but not applied to places it shouldn't be. What's easy for designers, like young ones to do is to apply . . . there is a style now. There is very much a club, a house style that's . . . you know . . . seen on DJ posters and whatever. Some designers can click into that . . . just recreate it very easily. I don't discourage that. I encourage that when it's appropriate, when it's a youth brand you are designing for. We do a lot of products like the . . . [refers to beverage bottle on his desk] and the actual research is [actually] a matter of designing a bottle that felt beautiful in the hand. So we actually had the focus groups off those, so that people could hold and play with them. And we had mood boards but they were much more emotive and sensorial so there was no fashion label at all it was just tone and texture.

In all of these instances, the understanding the cultures of audiences to whom these brand identities were directed, involved questions of social context and the expression of values arising from these contexts in what Karl described as a “differentiated customer experience”.

I think the design has got that ability to transgress more than just graphics, it's about designing a story, and designing a sensory experience. Now part of that would involve anybody from an architect to a product designer to somebody who understands human behaviour. What we'd ideally like to do is be the conductor in respect of what does that experience . . . how do you sum it up and describe it? And once we do that how do you deliver it which it would involve different competencies? But it's about designing a distinctive differentiated customer experience. That's what's going to create a price premium and that's what going to make you think about one product company and not another. So brand is about differentiation. Physically, yes, it's going to stand there on the shelf. But once you're actually engaged with it, it has to be differentiated with what you feel towards it and about it. Which is delivered with things like form and touch, product performance, how you feel about using it, how you feel about being seen holding it. All those sorts of qualities - which is an experience. And so we're pretty passionate about understanding how you get involved in that.

## **Conclusions**

The strong position in the field of graphic design established by Karl's firm reflected a distinctive approach to practice which differed from many others in the field. Just as Bourdieu (1993) points to the personal strategies which enable agents to maintain specific and objective positions in their field, Karl had shown an understanding of “the rules of the

game” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 17) which was essential to refine his practice and establish his position. Taking strategy “as a specific orientation of practice” provides a way of seeing how the design process gradually built up by Karl could involve, on one hand the establishment of a position that was shaped by the habitus, at the levels of family background and also by the graphic design firms with which he been employed, and on the other an understanding of the cultural capital in various forms needed to maintain this position in the graphic design field. Karl shows in the case how his position in the graphic design field was reliant on knowledge of the field of business by working with clients immersed in that field, As well as having visual sensibilities and associated cultural capital, he realised that everyone in the firm needed to be able to express the culture related to the product through the brands they developed. The strong emphasis on using consumer research ensured that in addition to the cultural capital that they brought into the firm, both Karl and his staff could amass the resources to understand the needs of a client and their project.

## Chapter Six - Discussion

The use of Bourdieu's concepts to both understand and analyse the conversations of each designer presented in the previous chapter has provided a rich resource to draw from to discuss the significance that graphic designers in the study placed on knowing about social contexts. Their accounts enable me to discuss the central research question; what is the significance a cross-section of New Zealand graphic designers placed on using knowledge of social contexts to inform their practice?

In this chapter, the data obtained through employing Bourdieu's concepts and methodological framework is brought together in the key themes from the case studies. These themes show the significance that the graphic designers in the study placed on knowing about wider social contexts. The case study data is interpreted at another level, by locating the main themes of the data and presenting them as a means of showing how knowledge of social contexts was significant to the graphic designers in the study. Because of the richness of the data from the case studies, the criteria used in the diagrams presented in this chapter do not directly correspond to the issues identified in Chapter Four<sup>98</sup>. In the following discussion the themes arising from the case studies are viewed in terms of implicit and explicit sources of knowledge of social contexts. Having discussed these themes I will consider the ways that graphic designers expressed the knowledge of social contexts, significant to their practice.

Knowledge of social contexts was revealed in the cases in various ways. The Figures that have been used to map the sources of knowledge of social contexts provide a taxonomy to make clearer the varied responses made by the designers in the research. Although the first two Figures show implicit and then explicit knowledge, the data is not mutually exclusive. The implicit and explicit sources of knowledge of social contexts are often interrelated. Figures 1 and 2, distinguish between these sources. In each, the data is grouped using three general criteria - 'insignificant', 'significant' and 'very significant'. Despite the limitation of using these broad criteria, the figures serve to show patterns and individuality in the case studies as viewed through the issues under consideration<sup>99</sup>.

Bourdieu's concept of field, and the cultural capital and position taking within it is used to relate the issues to the relevant cultural capital for the graphic design field. These concepts

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<sup>98</sup> Refer p. 79.

<sup>99</sup> These figures were presented and discussed in a paper presentation at the Paris DMI Education conference. (Refer Mauger, 2008).

add clarity to the discussion, grounding the discussion in issues of practice. Having discussed the issues arising out of the case data, the way will then be cleared to consider the implications and action to be taken for graphic design education, and the graphic design profession and the potential for the ideas coming out of this discussion to be taken up. These aspects will be discussed further in the conclusions in Chapter Seven.

### **The value of the cases**

Locating the variable recognition of the significance of knowledge of social contexts to designers' practice, offered in these accounts, was made all the more possible by the reflexive position that I took as the interviewer. The nuances of understanding obtained through my own empathy with those in the field have provided accounts that can be subjected to further analysis under the rubrics of the themes presented in this discussion. The responses tell a story of life histories as much as professional histories. The designers' reflection involved in the interviews has brought into focus their understanding of the significance of knowing about social contexts, the origins of which designers were often hard pressed to explain. For some designers, a reliance on acquiring knowledge of social contexts, beyond the implicit knowledge that they carried through from their own backgrounds, had to be augmented either by employing research at various levels, or by their own active participation in the cultures that could bring about greater understanding of the cultural capital and social structures of these social contexts. For others, there was an assumed sufficiency of this knowledge implicit in their own lives and in their professional experience.

Whatever their response, it was evident that designers' knowledge of the social contexts that could inform their work was reflected in the differing positions taken in the graphic design field, reflecting how much they had come to realise that knowledge of social contexts is included in the cultural capital brought into practice. Distinctions could also be made between the discourses related to practice and the more theoretical discourses of design academia. These will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

## **Case study themes**

While interaction within social settings characterised the practice of most of the designers, many had difficulty in being explicit about how they knew about social contexts that could inform their practice and how this knowledge was located and built up within the culture of the firm. In some instances, however, they were able to provide good examples of how a growing knowledge base outside formal aspects of problem solving could enhance their practice, enabling them to make more valid contributions to client communication to

consumers, through graphic design. There are themes arising from the case studies related to both implicit and explicit knowledge of social contexts that are relevant to the research question.

## Implicit knowledge of social contexts

Figure 1 compares sources of implicit knowledge for each graphic designer in the research, showing the significance of this form of knowledge to each designer. The responses in the cases in this section of the chapter are viewed through considering the influence of family, design education, communities of practice and experience within practice and lifestyle, as sources of implicit knowledge of social contexts. The interviews show that, throughout the research, designers have had difficulty in expressing themselves. This may suggest they are unintelligent, but it is actually because they think more implicitly as the following discussion of the issues in their accounts suggests.

### **Family settings as sources of cultural capital**

In all of the cases, family values and the social structures related to them, influenced designers' attitudes and thinking. For some, the process of self-realisation was assisted by the peer groups and interests that those outside the family setting could bring. For others, self-reliance and self-development were important. In either case, the dispositions inculcated from family settings were influential in designers' values and actions. It was within these dispositions and the social structures related to them, that the implicit values related to wider social contexts were seen to be generated, showing how the significance that designers placed on knowing about social contexts was minimal or under-valued because of the implicit form it took. The cases showed how the dispositions arising from these understandings are related to the graphic design field and the cultural capital required to assume a position within the field. Dispositions provided cultural capital and the inclination to "play the game" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 88).

The designers' accounts were particularly relevant to the research question, because they demonstrated how, as Panofsky<sup>100</sup> (1957) has argued, dispositions, otherwise described by him as mental formations, can be taken into an occupation and serve to structure attitudes and thinking related to it. In the case studies, designers were able to show how family settings could be a source of cultural capital and the accounts of discussions in these settings revealed their early awareness of social issues, processes and values.

### **Social contexts understood through cultural capital built up in education**

The significance of design education is shown in Figure 1 to be highly variable across the

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<sup>100</sup> Refer to p. 69.



designers in the research. For those who had design school education there were opportunities to access the established legitimate culture of their school.

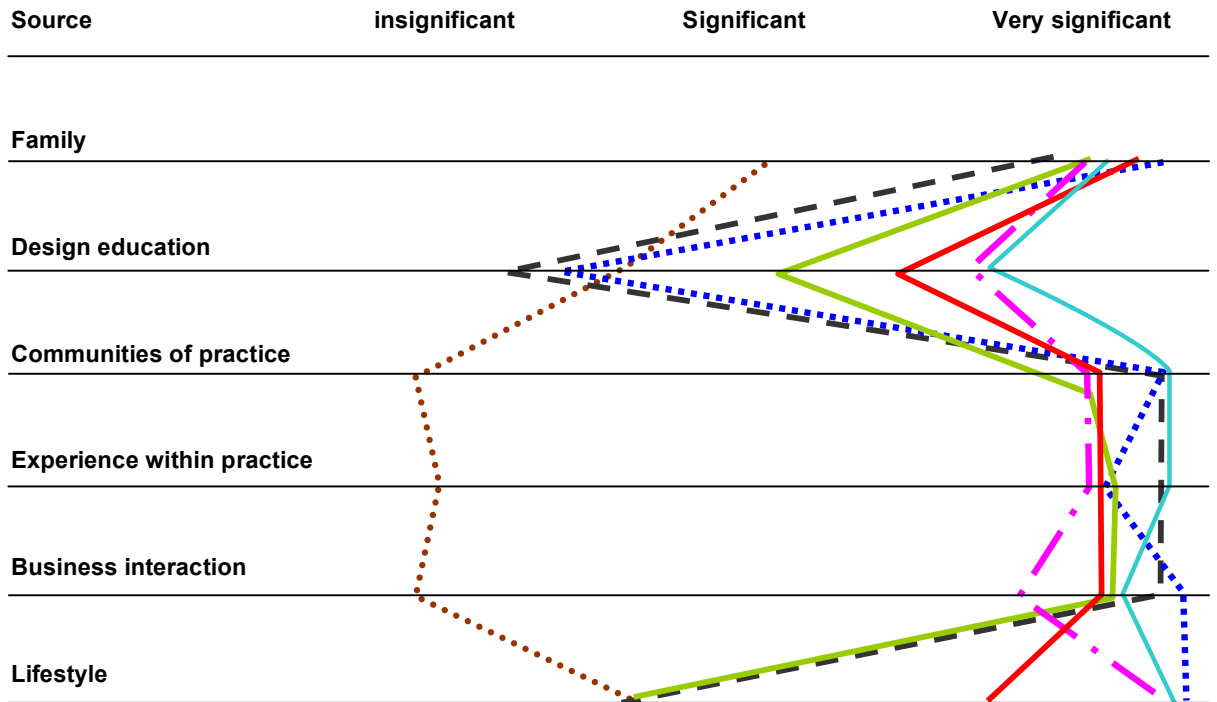
The recognised and established principles of differentiation (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 117) that serve to determine the culture of institutions, embodied not only dispositions towards design knowledge, but also attitudes about issues in cultural studies open to interpretation within the legitimate culture of schools. The research showed that because of the developments in design education over a number of decades, designers with a design school education dating back to the 1970s could have a limited recognition of terminologies used in contemporary cultural studies. Gary, for example, was unaware of the theoretical background relevant to understanding consumer culture but could identify aspects of branding that reflected the issues that were discussed in Warren's cultural studies.

These two designers provide examples of the varying design education and in particular the cultures of the institutions in which their education was offered. This illustrates how design education provides cultural legitimation (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 124) where evaluation and programme content contribute to the inculcation or objectification of cultural capital that can be linked to the discretionary nature of the selection of course content that distinguished one school from another in the accounts of the designers in the study, and in so doing, showed differing cultures of education. The variable importance placed on cultural studies that included an understanding of wider social contexts, was expressed in the differing programmes in the design schools of those educated in them. The studies within the cultures of design schools offered not only dedicated studies, but also the dispositions to belief and action that could be expressed in practice. Where schools had offered cultural studies that included the understanding of cultures of consumption and popular culture, this knowledge was available to be applied, often implicitly, to practice.

### **Implicit knowledge of social contexts through communities of practice**

The importance of acquiring cultural capital from the firms in which designers worked, is shown in Figure 1. All but Angie, who had had no opportunities to work in a design firm, reflected on the value of learning from others in the firm. They showed that graphic designers' values and beliefs contributed to the knowledge shared within the firm. There was an ongoing acquisition of cultural capital through the culture of the firm, supporting the concept that knowledge was inculcated and shared through the habitus of their firms. In addition to these internal sources of knowledge, building international networks with other designers, fashion producers, journalists, photographers and web communities also contributed to the graphic designers' cultural capital.

**Figure 1: Sources of implicit knowledge about social contexts**



**Designers in the study**

**Code for Figure 1**

- Gary:** A graphic designer with thirty years experience
- Maria:** A graphic designer in sole practice consultancy
- Angie:** A recent graphic design graduate
- Warren:** A recent graphic design graduate
- Alan:** A graphic designer in a web design company
- Luke:** A creative director from a publishing company
- Karl:** A creative director of a large graphic design practice

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The knowledge shared was not only discipline-specific but also included an understanding of the social structures and personal histories that had brought about the attitudes staff expressed towards issues of culture and society. A minority of the designers in the study chose to draw on the professional design discourse of Designers Institute of New Zealand. However, social capital was also to be found in informal social networks.

Within graphic design communities of practice there were opportunities to draw on case ideas from previous work and cultures in design firms that offered opportunities for peripheral learning (Wenger, 1998). Mentorship from senior designers offered learning that could go beyond aspects of technology and visual judgements, to reflect values of consumer societies and markets. Valued knowledge of social contexts was available where, with the growth of consumer cultures, younger people in the design office could, as Julier (2000, p. 62) has suggested, know more about certain fields than those who had more design experience.

### **Knowledge of social contexts from experience within practice**

Nearly all of the graphic designers in the research, with the exception of Angie who had been denied the experience of other designers by the restricted nature of her work and freelance employment, reflected on how they had built up a store of experience that provided resources to draw on. Their responses showed how they had an implicit sense of how to make judgements and develop concepts, outside objective thinking, bearing out Bourdieu's concept of 'a feel for the game' (1989, p. 60) expressed in appropriateness, alternative thinking or in reinterpretation of the repertoires implicit to concept development.

These implicit sources, encompassing cultural references (Eckert & Stacey, 2000), that had been inculcated from a number of sources, were viewed by designers as 'their experience'. Knowledge related to earlier design work had also come from external sources through marketing and research information. While initially codified information, this resource contributed to experience and was often drawn on implicitly in developing design ideas.

### **Business interaction as a resource**

For a number of the designers in the research, business knowledge arose implicitly out of practice and experience, with little time reported on learning about business through reading business magazines or attending business conferences. Even where business knowledge was sufficiently important to warrant dedicated reading and research, this did not displace the implicit knowledge built up through working relationships with clients. Maria, for example did not read business articles but, through experience working at the level of marketing staff in client companies, had built up an implicit knowledge base that provided a resource for her understanding of consumer aspects of her work. In a similar way, Alan, could draw on the

experience he had gained in management and business studies, but he had not attempted to continue this level of research or inquiry. His prior knowledge, the knowledge of the marketing people he worked with and the research information supplied by clients, sufficed as a resource for knowledge of the social contexts that could inform his work.

### **Lifestyle interests as a source of knowledge of social contexts**

Variable importance was placed on understanding how lifestyle and taste could be an informant to conceptual values in graphic design<sup>101</sup>. Knowledge and beliefs arising from lifestyle interests were expressed indirectly in designers' accounts and through their graphic design practice, but some designers had difficulty in linking lifestyle knowledge arising out of personal experience, to concept development. There was often recognition of the importance of looking beyond the visual to find relevant knowledge for practice, but designers often found difficulty in explaining how this occurred. Designers' taste in their office environments was a more tangible expression of their own identity to clients and other designers. Staff lifestyle interests reflected varying degrees of awareness of the consumer cultures and the communication values involved. Lifestyle experience moulded opinions and offered a context to design decisions. Perhaps the most obvious example, was Maria's account in which she made constant reference to connections between design and lifestyle and how this knowledge had put her in a stronger position in the field than those predominantly reliant on visual style. For the graphic designers who worked on fashion or consumer related products and promotion, lifestyle interests were of prime importance. These designers showed how drawing on appropriate cultural capital was important. For some this meant drawing from their immersion in consumerism to understand audience values. Designers' accounts also showed how cultural change was promoted by global companies and by the mass media. This response supports a relationship between cultures of consumption and global markets (du Gay, 1997; Giddens, 2001; Slater, 1997).

The importance of both understanding relevant social contexts and being able to draw on knowledge of them was significant in brand related work. Graphic designers saw the importance of understanding relevant taste and style, learning that taste could be acquired in the social situations of the lifestyle that they reflected. In this sense taste was socially constructed. Where they had overlooked the social contexts that could inform practice and not adequately used the media related to lifestyle and cultures of consumption to inform thinking for design, graphic designers were obliged to work within the limitations of visual style or technology<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> Refer to Chapter Three, p. 50 for a discussion of lifestyle related to taste and style.

<sup>102</sup> While technology can be used to express ideas as a mode of persuasion, as Buchanan (1989), suggests, I make reference here to the digital knowledge centred more on software and presentation knowledge.

## Explicit knowledge of social contexts

Figure 2 compares the significance that each graphic designer placed on bringing explicit knowledge of social contexts into their work. In this section of the chapter, the responses in the cases are viewed through considering design education, reading, communities of practice, lifestyle, business articles and marketing knowledge to show how explicit knowledge of social contexts had been acquired as cultural capital.

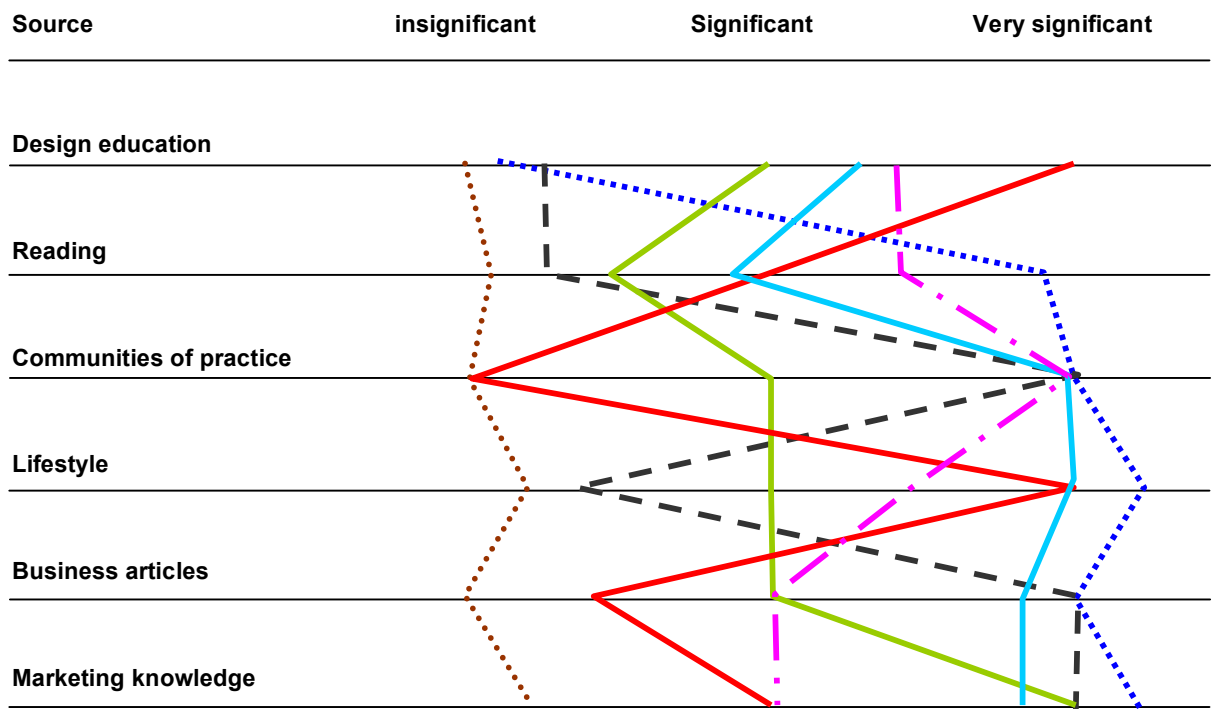
Besides the knowledge of social contexts that was an outcome of dispositions that could be regarded as implicit to practice and experience, or visible through evidence of research, there was conscious action taken by designers, to know more about the social worlds that could inform practice. In their accounts, they gave highly variable responses to all of the aspects of explicit knowledge of social contexts set out in Figure 2.

### **Design education**

The significance of design education as a source of knowledge of social contexts, usually through contextualising subjects like cultural studies, reflected designers' readiness to acknowledge its value, but not to elaborate on why this knowledge was significant to practice. Knowledge of cultures of consumption and of wider social issues coming out of contextual studies took the form of taught and therefore explicit knowledge. On the other hand, where this knowledge remained as embodied knowledge within graphic designers' design education, affecting personal values but not stimulating the interest to learn more or to become an ongoing interest, this knowledge can best be regarded as implicit knowledge, there to be drawn on as cultural capital of relevance to participation in the graphic design field.

There was no correlation between having a design education that included contextualising subjects, and placing any importance on ongoing dedicated research on consumer cultures or wider social issues, that may inform graphic designers' work. Even though Maria, for example, had a university graphic design education, she found such sufficiency in her experience, her previous communities of practice, the social and cultural capital offered and through lifestyles, that dedicated study of social issues that may inform her work, apart from the reading of lifestyle publications, seemed unnecessary to her. Where graphic designers did extend their own knowledge of consumer values, they typically drew on reference publications providing marketing case studies, the Internet and other dedicated research. Having design education did not necessarily translate into using that knowledge as Angie's account suggests.

**Figure 2: Sources of Explicit knowledge about social contexts**



**Designers in the study**

**Code for Figure 2**

**Gary:** A graphic designer thirty years experience



**Maria:** A graphic designer in sole practice consultancy



**Angie:** A recent graphic design graduate



**Warren:** A recent graphic design graduate



**Alan:** A graphic designer in a web design company



**Luke:** A creative director from a publishing company



**Karl:** A creative director of a large graphic design practice



### **The importance of reading and enquiry**

Lifestyle information accessed through magazines and media was an important resource for all designers, except Angie and Alan, who for entirely different reasons, professed that this had little significance to their work. Angie saw little opportunity to apply this knowledge, while Alan preferred reading about technology subjects. Reluctant readers were unable to access the deeper reading that could have provided a broader knowledge of social contexts. Some firms offered an internal library that served as a useful resource for knowledge of visual appropriateness, style and consumer culture. It was hard to assess how much dedicated use was made of this information. There were varying views about the value of learning about popular culture through lifestyle magazines. For some designers, interest in reading as a resource for design, was more at the level of skimming images and leisure reading than any serious study to understand the social contexts of the work being done. In these instances, visual style could be absorbed from magazines rather than from reflecting on the insights gained by dedicated reading of literature on sociology or consumer cultures. Open Source websites offered formal<sup>103</sup> design information and technical knowledge, a priority for web design. There were also opportunities to access reports on interaction design where audience reactions to human computer interface design had been assessed.

### **Communities of practice**

The significance of knowledge of social contexts acknowledged to be available through others in the firm was expressed in two ways. Firstly, through knowledge of consumer culture and marketing knowledge and secondly, from lifestyles and backgrounds. Maria<sup>104</sup> and Angie both worked on their own, having little opportunity to benefit from a community of practice. Maria, however, had previously worked in a number of design departments and had benefited from the knowledge generated within them.

### **Lifestyle**

Both Alan and Angie expressed little interest in acquiring lifestyle knowledge that could inform their work. Other designers saw importance in learning about consumers, whether through dedicated reading of case studies, as in Karl's case, or by skim-reading, reading and Internet searches in the case of other designers. To Luke, knowledge of consumer cultures and lifestyles was indivisible from his creative work. Some distinctions can be made between the use of AIOs<sup>105</sup> on one hand, and the media of lifestyle expressed through consumer culture in the form of print, broadcast media, the Internet and consumed objects, on the other. The use of lifestyle information resulting from AIO styled surveys was

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<sup>103</sup> Formal knowledge here relates to visual form.

<sup>104</sup> Note that the insignificance of communities of practice as a source of knowledge of social contexts is based on Maria's sole practice at the time of the interviews.

<sup>105</sup> Refer to page 49

accessible to Gary in the marketing organizations with which he worked. Karl used formal research information supplied by marketing consultants in conjunction with clients, in developing brand identities. Luke used reader responses abstracted on AIO style criteria by research organizations to reveal lifestyle interests of readers. However, for all of the designers in the research, the understanding of lifestyle through familiarity with the media and products of consumer culture assumed varying importance as shown in Figure 2.

### **Business articles**

A pervasive theme in the research was the significance placed on knowledge of business. As well as highlighting the sources of graphic designers' cultural capital for participation in the graphic design field, the cases have indicated that designers were predominantly more concerned about keeping up with developments in the field of business than on reflecting on the knowledge inculcated through family, lifestyle and practice. While some designers relied heavily on implicit knowledge of social contexts acquired through previous working relationships, others viewed their firms as learning organisations, building on business partnerships and research knowledge from clients. Where designers placed sufficient importance on relationships with business to see their practice linked to the field of business, their concepts could not be isolated from company brand objectives. The requirements of the field of business and the social world both impinged on graphic designers' requisite cultural capital. Work on company brands was shown to call for greater understanding of both consumer audiences and business strategy. With the exception of the designers who took a keen interest in political and economic affairs, there was little verification of this knowledge in the accounts of designers in the study. Most relied on media news or external marketing information to varying degrees, to keep up with the political economy, posing questions about the sufficiency of the knowledge coming out of their practice, to understand the wider social contexts impinging on cultures of production<sup>106</sup> (du Gay, 1997).

### **Active approaches to knowing more about social contexts**

Some graphic designers in the research showed the need to know more about social contexts and in particular to understand consumer cultures. Their own research came out of the necessity to have an informed brief. They sought the external knowledge from client marketing departments, and drew to varying degrees, on the internal knowledge exchanged in the firm, their library resources and the Internet. Others, as in the case of the web designer, whose practice knowledge centred on technology, showed how an active search for knowledge about consumer cultures, lifestyle and social contexts outside information

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<sup>106</sup> There was an absence of discussion about sustainability and ecology, but since the interviews both DINZ and the graphic design community have actively recognised these issues.



supplied by a client and distinct from implicit knowledge, could be unimportant for his needs.

Sherry's (2002) contention that because designers are involved in creating audience experiences, they should have an interest in undertaking research in consumer behaviour, to be informed about the audience to which their work is directed, was acknowledged by most designers to varying degrees. Some designers could access the contributions of those within the social structure of their intended audience because they were already in it through their own lifestyles. For other graphic designers, audience-centred design demonstrated the value of information about consumers and society as an integral facet of brand development. Understanding cultures of audiences to whom brand identities were directed, involved understanding social contexts and expressing the values of these, to create differentiated customer experience, was demonstrated most noticeably in the brand development discussed by Karl. Information about audience response was important as a means of moderating editorial design and brand values. Where designers could not draw on their own resources for research on consumer cultures, there was a need to rely on accessing this data from client marketing departments or by working in a team capacity with other consultants who could provide these resources. Despite the shift to recognising the importance of this information to their design processes, designers in the study still relied heavily on implicit sources of information in their concept development.

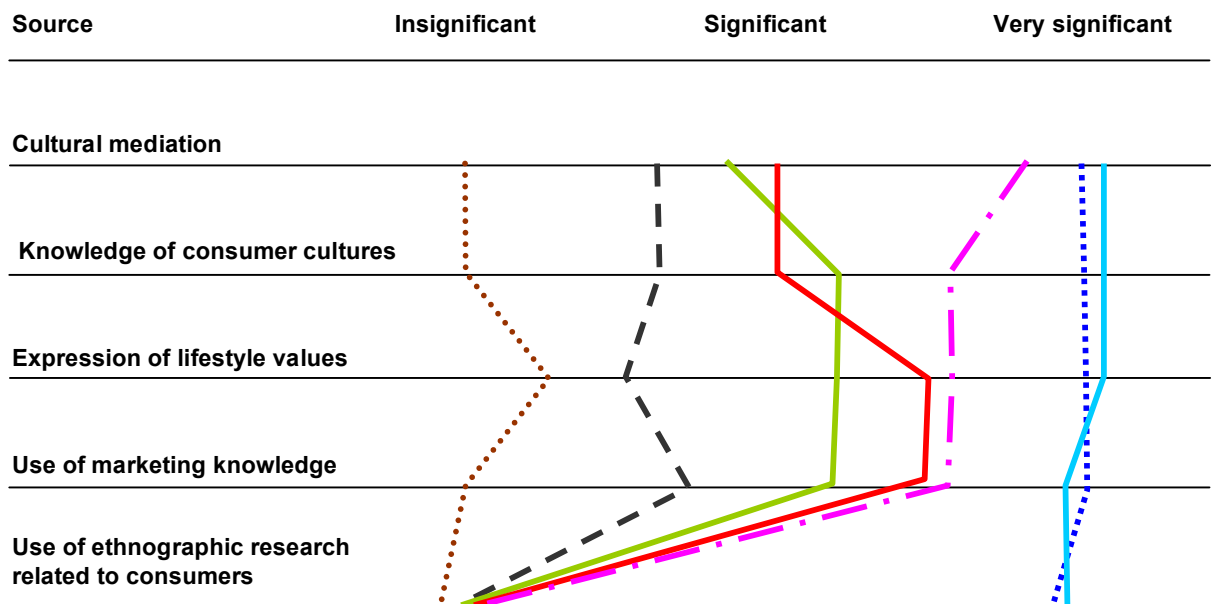
## Expression of knowledge of social contexts in practice

Figure 3 compares the significance that each graphic designer in the research, placed on bringing acquired knowledge of social contexts into their work. In this section of the chapter, the responses in the cases are viewed through considering the relevance of cultural mediation, the use of knowledge of consumer cultures, the expression of lifestyle values, the use of marketing knowledge and the use of research, to assess how knowledge of social contexts was expressed in practice.

### **Cultural mediation**

Knowledge of social contexts was shown in the research to be fundamental for designers who assumed a position in the field as cultural intermediaries because they worked within a culture that they themselves help to generate, bearing out Bourdieu's contention that dispositions within practice are both a product of the field but also serve to structure it (Bourdieu, 1993).

**Figure 3: Expression of knowledge of social contexts in practice**



**Designers in the study**

**Code for Figure 3**

**Gary:** A graphic designer thirty years experience



**Maria:** A graphic designer in sole practice consultancy



**Angie:** A recent graphic design graduate



**Warren:** A recent graphic design graduate



**Alan:** A graphic designer in a web design company



**Luke:** A creative director from a publishing company



**Karl:** A creative director of a large graphic design practice



This was demonstrated by the way in which Luke, as an art director of a street-culture publication reflecting popular culture, lifestyle and fashion, required the cultural capital to be able to contest existing social mores while also making a contribution to visual culture. The authority of his staff, immersed in popular culture through their lifestyles, enabled them also, to be cultural intermediaries.

In Luke's mediating role he was able to present alternative approaches to depicting social issues that contested social values outside mainstream culture and society, in the guise of popular culture, lifestyle and fashion. He believed that his magazine's presentation of these topics made a contribution to visual culture.

His staff, as both designers and writers, were immersed in the counterculture, and able to be cultural intermediaries. There was a cross-over between consumer culture and the graphic design field at the level of both resembling legitimate culture and being legitimate popularisers. A distinction can be seen here between Barnard's view that "graphic design is one of the ways that values and attitudes are constructed, reproduced and changed" (2005, p. 57) and the way in which graphic design mediates these values, suggesting that content and concepts are interpreted, not in a vacuum and not on their own, but through the cultural capital that graphic designers bring to an existing problem of communication.

Luke could demonstrate that in this mediating role, graphic designers could create hierarchies of taste created by co-opting and reordering aspects of existing popular culture. Mediation was also achieved through interpreting style and content of advertising, by designers able to do this by their position in the social space of the related cultures. Graphic designers in the research could show that below the professional design mythology of style there were social contexts that informed it. They could be aware of the contextual issues and beliefs within the profession that include knowledge of formal aspects of design and the shared knowledge designers have about these. They could also, to varying degrees, and with varying understanding of the cultures of consumption and related social contexts, be interpreters<sup>107</sup> of society and lifestyle. Knowledge of social contexts was implicated in designers' need both to know about the field they practiced within and to have a responsibility towards the consumer cultures with which they interacted.

Where graphic designers like Karl placed importance on understanding audiences, they were able to mediate the consumer experience, with an awareness of the way in which, as Sherry (2002, p.viii) expresses it "consumption is co-created by marketers and consumers". This underlines the importance understanding relevant taste and style because taste is acquired in social situations of the lifestyle it reflects.

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<sup>107</sup> McCarthy, (1960, p. 189) refers to the importance of designers recognising their role as interpreters.

### **Knowledge of consumer cultures**

The importance that Karl and Luke, in particular, placed on understanding cultures of consumption by either using audience focussed studies (Karl) or being immersed in the culture (Luke) reflect Howard's (1997) concern that designers need to be informed by the social contexts that surround them rather than seeing graphic design as primarily a visual pursuit located in manipulating formal elements. The importance Karl and Luke placed on understanding their audiences makes their recognition of the significance of social contexts, very clear. Others in the research found it more difficult to be explicit about how they brought knowledge of consumer culture into their work. Gary had difficulty in saying how he drew on knowledge of the social world in his creative work. Explanations could be seen in the work itself, which depended to some extent on implicit knowledge or the knowledge of others in the firm who had empathy with consumer culture through cultural studies in design education or through their own lifestyles. Maria worked on consumer literature that showed an understanding of consumer values and yet she was at a loss to say how she kept up with changes in consumer culture other than through her lifestyle. She had built up a broad understanding of style and culture from her early years that provided implicit knowledge to draw on, in addition to any audience research available from clients. Alan was heavily dependent on the peripheral knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within the social capital of the firm, whereas others, with marketing knowledge needed for advertising accounts, provided a discourse that he could use to support his work.

### **Expression of lifestyle values**

Both Luke and Karl brought lifestyle values into their work. Luke's lifestyle interests were reflected in creative direction of the magazine, and Karl brought consumer audience knowledge into brand development and the niches involved. In each case, drawing on appropriate cultural capital achieved through understanding lifestyle values of audiences was significant. The cultural change promoted by global companies and mass media influenced each designer's work in brand identity. Luke also recognised the way that advertisers of specific brands aligned to the culture of his magazine could contribute to the expression of lifestyle values through his publication. Luke saw the importance of accessing the contributions of those within the social structure of his intended audience to express the lifestyle values his publication promoted.

Karl understood the importance of looking beyond the visual in finding relevant knowledge for practice. His staff were aware of the consumer cultures and lifestyle information related to audiences for graphic design and the communication values involved. Gary had expressed

lifestyle values at an implicit level through a background of reading Internet news and lifestyle magazine articles as diverse as motoring pages and art news rather than through dedicated reading to provide consumer information related to client work<sup>108</sup>. There was a disjuncture between reading and his own research for concept development. Reading contributed to background knowledge rather than being dedicated to specific problem solving, or understanding market niches. He was reliant on the lifestyle knowledge of other designers to be able to bring these values into his work.

Maria's lifestyle experience moulded opinions and offered a context to design decisions. For Alan, consumer knowledge acquired from earlier management studies and the peripheral knowledge offered through those more in touch with lifestyle culture from work on advertising accounts were brought together in his brand identity work that had come out of earlier web design for clients. Warren and Angie showed different recognition of the relevance of lifestyle knowledge to their work. Warren could see the relationship of cultural theory from design school contextual lectures, to dealing with aspects of consumer values related to brand identity work for his own clients and for work by others in the design firm in which he was employed. Angie lacked knowledge of consumer cultures by overlooking the social contexts that could inform practice and not adequately using media, television, newspaper and the Internet to inform thinking for design. Instead, she worked within the limitations of style, having neither the advantage of being immersed in consumer culture through lifestyle or the advantage of experience through age that could have taken her on a trajectory of practice in which knowledge of these concepts was expressed.

#### **Use of marketing knowledge**

Unlike Karl, Gary had not dedicated any part of client design budgets to research related to graphic design. Instead he relied on implicit knowledge arising from his experience in numerous earlier design projects or from marketing knowledge supplied by clients. Karl by contrast, had built the firm he directed<sup>109</sup>, into a learning organisation (Senge, et al. 1994), where business partnerships and research knowledge from clients were fundamental to his strategy. He valued the client-supplied market information that linked his design concept resolution to information from the field of business.

Maria was able to bring her lifestyle experience to the fashion brand identity work she undertook, especially in the case of work for retail clients. She was relying on marketing knowledge through experience rather than actively acquiring business knowledge. Alan

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<sup>108</sup> It should be noted that since the research, Gary's firm has gone into partnership with a marketing company able to supply consumer information relevant to graphic design work in the new partnership.

<sup>109</sup> Karl was a director and creative director of the firm he was employed by, at the time of the interviews.

could apply the knowledge from management experience and management diploma studies as well as the marketing knowledge supplied by clients.

The contrasts between the two graduates in Figure 3, show graphically, the different strategies for using and valuing knowledge of social contexts in their practice. The firm in which Warren worked used consumer studies for brand development. He had also used marketing knowledge about consumers in work on his own client accounts before joining the design firm in which he worked. Angie had either been unable to obtain useful research information or lacked the background knowledge to bring this thinking to her work.

#### **Use of research related to consumer cultures**

Gary had not commissioned any research about consumer groups related to his work. Any research used came from client marketing departments. Karl, on the other hand, had placed importance on seeking out ethnographic information to reveal cultural setting in which products were marketed. This could be at a simple level by staff in the firm or from external research agencies. He had recognised that understanding cultures of the consumers to whom brand identities were directed, involved understanding social contexts and expressing the values of these through the creation of differentiated customer experience.

Maria had a strong belief in her own resources and a reticence to rely on the research information supplied from marketing departments, while Luke depended on research of audience response as a means of moderating editorial and design values. He understood that design for a young readership was different from that for older groups. Karl and Luke had alliances with market research organizations to test the audience values expressed in their work. Karl regularly read *Design Management Journal* case studies that carried accounts of brand development research from the field of business as well as from design organizations that had used ethnographers and other research consultants.

In the discussion about how graphic designers in the study recognised the significance of social contexts to their practice, I have needed to compare the differences between the practice of individual designers, to show the variable importance that knowledge of the market and the social contexts which moderate them, or are moderated by them, have on designers' practice. The case made by many in the literature (Howard, 1997; Poyner, 1998; Barnard, 2005) suggests that graphic designers need to use research to know more about relating knowledge of social contexts to their practice and some in the study were ready to acknowledge this. Others placed great importance on their own lifetime experience and the implicit knowledge within it, relying on their age rather than on conscious enquiry about the values of consumer culture that could be brought into their work.

## Participation in the graphic design field

### **Position-taking**

It was evident that the positions that graphic designers took in the graphic design field, reflected the cultural capital that they had acquired and the relative value of the knowledge they held. This affected the competitive position that they could take as well as the dynamics of the field. It has shown the importance of knowing about social contexts and how this is implicit in the way that designers both needed to know about the field they practiced within and how at the same time, they had responsibility to determine the practice and the structure of the field. The knowledge held to be significant to practice in each case, needed to continuously reflect the needs of designers to retain their position in the field as the needs of the field change. Experienced graphic designers had earlier made a transition from forms of production using manual methods to a move to digital production. This had called for the ability to distinguish their expertise from that of ‘non-designers’,<sup>110</sup> moving graphic designers’ practice away from a heavy reliance on visual style to greater recognition of conceptual aspects. Graphic designers needed an understanding of cultures of consumption and production to enable them to hold their position in the field.

From the research, the two determining factors for holding a strong position in the field were noted in firstly, the knowledge requirements for retaining a particular position in the field and secondly, the related cultural capital. This bears out Bourdieu’s premise that the strategies and trajectories of those in the field reflected not only their cultural capital, but also the usefulness of that knowledge to respond to the external pressures that impinged on practice.

The strategies taken by the designers in the research were determined by position taking and also by the orientation of practice in the competition in the field (Johnson 1993, p. 18). The positions that the designers assumed in the field and the trajectories that they followed were useful concepts to see how the knowledge that they had gained, whether through habitus and experience or through a priority on research knowledge as well, enabled them to have sufficient cultural capital to be in a particular position in the field.

### **Cultural capital for participation in the graphic design field**

Cultural capital from various social settings contributed a rich resource of lifestyle knowledge for design practice. Where graphic designers had recognised the importance of understanding cultures of consumption related to brand development, the need to know about related social contexts became clear. For some, the ability to direct other staff came

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<sup>110</sup> ‘Non-designers’ here follows Williams’ definition as people “who have no background or formal training in design” (1994, p. 11).

out of an understanding of lifestyle and popular culture. The research has shown that cultural capital tends to be unequally accumulated (Johnson, 1993). In the cases, different positions in the field were expressed both by the cultural capital held and how this knowledge distinguished one designer from another. The variable importance of design education was significant in this process in that it tended to cultivate differing understanding of the significance of generating cultural capital for design practice.

Despite how the use of acquired cultural capital for design practice became natural to designers, reflecting an implicit approach to some facets of practice, increasing demands were being made on graphic designers to enhance their knowledge of the consumer cultures related to product development and brand identity. The development of the team basis to practice, previously well established in business, has become a necessity, to provide the often sophisticated knowledge required for graphic designers to understand markets and audiences for products and brands.

The cases have suggested that the rationale behind aspects of the designers' creative work could be derived from the underlying implicit knowledge that while often unrecognised nevertheless formed a significant part of their practice. Some designers expressed surprise that personal aspects of their lives and lifestyles could be relevant to their creative work. This suggests that this implicit knowledge could be made explicit through reflection not only in the research process itself, but also through greater "reflection on action" and "reflection in action" as Schön (1983) advocates. The social nature of this cultural capital, made explicit can be recognised as valued knowledge in processes of innovation as Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) suggest. However, the accounts in the research made reference to the way that graphic designers' work also drew on what could be found from website databases and from knowledge of consumerism and branding from associations with those in the field of business.

This presents potential differences in thinking between approaches to knowledge in the graphic design field and in the field of business, as Rylander (2008) suggests. The management thinking that deals with research data and analysis is distinct from embodied-thinking that has characterised much of the evidence from the research, yet both approaches to knowledge are increasingly relevant to graphic design. This has implications for graphic designers, in the ways in which they are able both to assimilate knowledge of social contexts that are relevant to their work and use the more analytical knowledge from knowledge intensive firms. While there are opportunities for graphic designers to draw on the knowledge available from the business discourses prevalent in these knowledge intensive firms, to build up better understanding of the consumer cultures for whom their work is



intended, there are potential problems arising from using these different knowledge bases, (Rylander, 2008), where graphic designers may not “speak the same language as their clients” (p.11).

## Reflection on Bourdieu’s concepts

Bourdieu’s framework has provided a means to look at the thematic issues discussed in this chapter, and to understand the relevance of the designers’ accounts, revealing their histories and practice and ultimately what positions they have taken in the field. It has enabled me to be reflexive in two ways. Firstly, by engaging with designers in the interviews to seek out aspects of practice through understanding habitus at various levels and the associated social structures within and outside the field that are relevant to the respondents. Secondly, his concepts of cultural capital, field and position-taking have assisted in making sense of the designers accounts and being able to see the implications for action, as taken up in the following chapter. In these ways, I have avoided using theoretical concepts to apply, as Nash puts it<sup>111</sup> some “theoretical icing over the cake” where the cake is the data. Theory is not used ‘after the event’ as a justification, but as a methodological approach that gives rigour both to data collection and to answering the research question.

### **The usefulness of Bourdieu’s framework**

Bourdieu’s ideas related to design, have often been used in relationship to taste and class to establish high and low taste and the related cultural capital, as presented in Bourdieu’s best-known work *Distinction* (Featherstone 1991; Sparke 2004; Julier 2000; for example). I have taken an original approach that makes a contribution to filling that gap, by using Bourdieu’s ideas to understand both the significance of social contexts to graphic designers and their recognition of the importance of understanding knowledge beyond the formal values in design practice. This has been achieved by taking the discussion away from a limitation of dealing mainly with matters of taste and style.

There are aspects of Bourdieu’s framework that were particularly useful in understanding the data of the cases, providing a guide for others wanting to use Bourdieu’s ideas. The concept of cultural capital for practice in the field has been used in this discussion to offer insights into how forms of capital have been accumulated by the designers studied in the research. The use of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework has made possible an explanation of the ways in which knowledge of social contexts is built up.

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<sup>111</sup> Personal correspondence 8-5-05.

Bourdieu's insistence on the essential aspect of field studies as empirical data for finding explanations of the theoretical basis to practice has been a guiding principle for my use of ethnographic research methods in the research I have presented. His framework has also provided a means of understanding the significance that designers have given to the acquisition of knowledge of social contexts, to assume various positions in the field.

### **Limitations of Bourdieu's concepts**

#### *The question of talent*

The study has enabled me to find limits to Bourdieu's work. His concept of habitus as the 'feel for the game' provides insights into the way that dispositions can be inculcated, cultivated and linked to the body (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). However, Bourdieu, using academic accomplishment as an example, attributes talent to "a product of investment in time and cultural capital" (ibid). In making this claim, he opposes the idea that talent may be in any way innate. This is in contrast to Simonton (1999, p. 435), who argues that talent cannot be attributed to either 'nature' or 'nurture'. Rather, talent is seen to be to a lesser or greater degree innate, but reliant on nurturing. Bourdieu (1986) uses the term cultural capital to include inculcated dispositions as well as objectified knowledge, from personal histories, through the influence of family, and through communities inside and external to a field of practice. Bourdieu fails to adequately take into account the inherent facility that creative people have that relates to a natural facility to deal with visual or spatial perception that is unrelated to social contexts and not attributable to hexis, which is Bourdieu's explanation for this kind of facility. Distinctions need to be made between what can be achieved through aptitude versus implicit knowledge or codified learning. The 'feel for the game' comes out of habitus as Bourdieu suggests, but aspects of practice may also be a manifestation of innate ability that others may have difficulty replicating. It may even be a combination of both, underlining questions of talent versus, or complementary to, cultural capital.

#### *Recognition of aspects of consumer culture*

I have found that Bourdieu work on lifestyle dealing with relationships between high and low culture and related class structures overlooks aspects of consumption that deal with day to day lifestyle and the mass culture arising out of it (Rocamora, 2002). The frequent references to class and related economic capital do not take into account the impacts of cultures of consumption and the social diversity (Turner & Edmunds, 2002) that has arisen since early Bourdieu's research.

#### *Objectified capital for practice*

There is also an absence of theorisation of the place of objectified capital for practice. This is discussed in *Forms of capital* (1986), but Bourdieu does not provide theoretical ideas about

how it is acquired and used, other than through his concepts of institutional and legitimate capital.

These factors have shown gaps in his work, but despite these criticisms, there is validity in Bourdieu's concepts as a means of understanding issues of knowledge of social contexts and practice in the graphic design field. None of these limitations presents a critique that may diminish the value of Bourdieu's concepts, to understand the significance that graphic designers in the study placed on knowing about the graphic design contexts that may inform their practice.

## **Conclusions**

Although I have critiqued Bourdieu, there has been great value in using his concepts to both carry out and analyse the cases considered this research. The use of Bourdieu's concepts has provided a means to extend the methodology used to understand contextual aspects of knowledge related to practice. The methodology has provided an explanation of the data to express how this information could be located in designers' practice. Bourdieu's concept of habitus was particularly useful as a means of identifying how designers had gained the often unconsciously acquired dispositions for practice in various social settings that carried implicit understanding of these values.

In this chapter it has been shown that the research contributes to understanding the significance of knowledge of social contexts to graphic design practice. Through the fund of design knowledge that the case studies have offered, I have been able to show the variable significance that graphic designers have placed on recognising relevance of knowing about social contexts into practice. The research has also highlighted the difficulty that designers encountered, to varying degrees, in identifying how knowledge of social contexts came into their practice or even how they might have acquired this knowledge. Nevertheless, it is clear that contextual knowledge for graphic design practice arises from four sources. Firstly, out of the designer's own social structure and the durable dispositions and practice relative to their background. Secondly, as the habitus, related to the internal culture of the designer's firm. Thirdly, from within the wider field of practice and the changing dispositions arising from it and finally, from graphic designers' external social worlds.

Graphic designers have shown that the importance that they placed on knowing about social contexts had a relationship to their position in the graphic design field. Those who placed little significance on knowing about social contexts could expect to have different cultural capital from those who saw this knowledge as being of primary importance to their practice. It has been possible to summarise these aspects diagrammatically in the figures on pages 196, 201, and 205. The increasing importance of understanding consumer cultures in

conjunction with work on branding, in a team capacity with those in the field of business, has brought about a dedicated interest in knowing more about social contexts through objective research that ultimately contributes to cultural capital and to graphic designers' positions in the field. The cases have both highlighted designers' cultural capital for participation in the field and indicated the contextual information that is revealed through cultural capital. Distinctions that have arisen out of the research, between design thinking with a more implicit basis and knowledge-based thinking promoted by the concept of the knowledge economy prevalent in the field of business, have also been brought to light from the analysis of the cases

Graphic designers took a range of positions about whether knowledge of social contexts could be assimilated through their own lifestyles, or whether they were better served by bringing in ethnologists and sociologists and others versed in the social sciences to provide this knowledge.

I have achieved the aims of the research set out in Chapter One by establishing the importance that graphic designers in the study placed on building up knowledge about the social worlds and relating this knowledge to their work. The research has shown both the adequacy of knowledge of social contexts for the graphic designers in the case studies, from the degree of knowledge coming out of graphic designers' day-to-day experience and their need to acquire information of social worlds through wider enquiry outside the studio. For each designer this knowledge has been both reliant on the positions they have taken within the field of graphic design and their ability to assume each respective position in the field. The research has also explained how knowledge of social contexts exists at the level of broader personal backgrounds in implicit understanding as well as being consciously acquired. However, there is scope to apply and action the findings. These implications are presented in the more philosophical discussion in the following chapter.

## Chapter Seven – Implications of the research

As a designer and educator, I am able to discuss implications in the research from these two different points of view. The case studies have indicated distinctions to be made about what can be concluded and compared in New Zealand graphic design practice, design education and academic design studies. There are implications in the research regarding problems and issues that relate to New Zealand graphic design and propositions that can be made for action or change that apply to the profession. There are also implications in the findings of the research, of interest to academic design studies, in considering both relationships between theory and practice and also the relevance of knowledge of social contexts to design practice. This is a personal approach in which I make links between knowledge of social contexts and the interests of each of these fields. In the following discussion I will suggest responses that need to be made to the research findings presented in the discussion in Chapter Six.

### The graphic design profession

#### **Knowledge of social contexts for graphic design practice**

##### **Roles for cultural intermediaries**

My research has shown that graphic designers need to know more about the social contexts that inform their practice to be able to assume their roles as cultural intermediaries. For graphic designers, cultural mediation involves, firstly, understanding the cultures in which they are involved and, secondly, understanding the means available to mediate these values. The need to understand cultures of consumption within the wider social contexts discussed in Chapter Three is well understood by commentators in the design press, but many of the graphic designers in the research found their own implicit, lifestyle or practice community sources sufficient for their needs. This shows a gap between proponents in the discourse of the design press and many of the graphic designers themselves.

This might be of little concern if the high achievers, those developing their firms and drawing in significant client accounts, were also at variance with the commentators from the design press, but they were not. The design firms in the strongest position in the field placed high importance on knowing about social contexts and specifically, the cultures of the consumers of the products with which they were involved.

The means to convey values through mediation is also changing. The changes arising from developing digital technology discussed in Chapter Two have placed greater demands on graphic designers to understand how these technologies are used and understood by consumers, by understanding lifestyles and the related social contexts. In this way, graphic designers will be able to exploit the opportunities offered by technology as well using it as a means of expressing values. They are conveyers of style whether at the level of the use of formal means of typography and image to convey a look, or to express deeper values that reflect ideas and genres that are linked to cultures, lifestyle and the social contexts that reflect or surround them. In this they assume an interpretive role, calling on references to the genres within the graphic design discourses of the field. Graphic design relies heavily on the creation of metaphors and at the base of metaphors are the concepts often implicitly held, that can be traced back to graphic designers personal histories, lifestyle interests or influences in the habitus of firms in which they work or have worked.

However, graphic designers operate at two levels, firstly, through the knowledge of the social world that feeds into developing appropriate genres and, secondly, from their personal backgrounds through the generative habitus involving the ideas coming out of the impacts of habitus on practice and practice on social structure. Importantly, to be able to be cultural intermediaries, graphic designers need to be able to draw on the cultures that enable them to have the cultural capital to mediate values, through their position between client and consumer. The role of mediation has, by necessity, a proximity to the fields that may inform it, in particular marketing and social research.

In building up individual background knowledge to form ideas, metaphors and associations, graphic design genres are developed and extended. This knowledge is a resource for framing graphic design problems (Schön, 1983, p. 40) where recognition of the importance that cultural knowledge plays within the parameters of each graphic design problem, is needed.

### **Communities of practice as a source of knowledge of social contexts**

It is important for graphic designers to understand the opportunities for generation of knowledge through the communities of practice at the level of the design firm, in the field and through other related creative and technical fields that interact with it. There are opportunities to share knowledge of social contexts that individual designers bring into the firm through their personal backgrounds. There is also value in mentorship where knowledge of social contexts implicit in experts' experience can be passed on to others in the firm.

This is available through reflecting on previous case studies within the company, but this does not supplant the social knowledge base and interests of the individual designer who

may have specialised lifestyle knowledge. Both experienced graphic designers and the younger staff have knowledge to contribute.

Communities of practice in the field of graphic design should also be viewed to extend outside design discipline, to include marketers and researchers that understand or have researched consumer cultures, and have much to contribute to graphic designers working on projects that require this knowledge. Other forms of objectified capital through research case studies or accessible in publications and the Internet also contribute to designers' knowledge of social contexts needed for practice.

### **Recognition of cultural capital**

There is a need for clients to be able to recognise design practice that takes into account the social contexts that are essential knowledge for brand development, web design and other aspects of graphic design. The development of symbolic capital through accreditation and professional recognition through DINZ is one way that this could be achieved. Graphic designers' knowledge of lifestyle, as well as their specialised professional knowledge gained through other professionals in networks needs to be both recognised by clients and promoted by designers. Institutional capital held by recent graduates with a good background in cultural studies and other aspects of humanities can make a valuable contribution to the knowledge of the firm.

### **Limitations of cultural capital acquired implicitly**

The research has shown that implicit knowledge through personal backgrounds and experience, while deeply significant as a resource for graphic design practice, is usually not sufficient to enable graphic designers to adapt to changes in the cultures of consumption for which they design. Graphic designers need to find ways to enhance their knowledge of these wider social contexts through dedicated research.

### **Wider knowledge bases to keep up with the needs of clients**

Graphic designers need to be able to interact with the Internet because clients expect more knowledge from them, as evidenced in knowledge intensive firms reported in New Zealand and international business journals. There are implications for greater knowledge outside the confines of the formal values of graphic design. This aspect of practice knowledge became clear in the case studies where designers were producing brand identities that involved having an understanding of consumer cultures and audiences for brand design. As the information age has brought about the development of information technology, graphic designers, like other designers, are challenged to understand interaction design related to

product use, particularly for digital electronic products and processes at a number of levels. This calls for levels of knowledge that exceed the practice-based knowledge gained from solving successive problems, unless that experience takes in external research. This has implications for graphic designers' own knowledge of the wider social contexts that affect their practice.

### **The limitations of reflection on practice**

The limitations of relying on practice based knowledge casts doubt on the adequacy of Schön's assessment that professional knowledge out of reflecting on practice may have primacy over objectified professional knowledge (1983, p. 49). Reflection is limited to experience. The imperative for graphic designers to understand more about society suggests that they need to broaden their interests ahead of problem solving as well as in relationship to it. Schön's concept of 'reflection-on-practice' is important in enabling graphic designers to recognise formerly implicit knowledge out of experience, from personal backgrounds and lifestyle. The high achieving graphic designers in the research had recognised that they needed to either immerse themselves in the cultures for whom they were designing or to build up alliances with marketing and research organizations that could provide information about the audiences for designers' work.

### **Limitations of relying on implicit knowledge in designing for clients**

Most of the graphic designers in the cases were trying to position themselves as professionals within a creative business context. There is a case for closer working relationships and exchange of marketing and research knowledge between graphic designers and the field of business. Within the field of marketing, business strategy and consumption are interrelated. This knowledge is essential to graphic designers intent on contribution to the creative economy, where ideas and by inference, knowledge, is required for designers to be participants in generating intellectual property for client projects. New Zealand has attempted to position itself as a nation placing importance on innovation in design, expressed visibly through the Design Taskforce and their document *Success by Design*. To be truly innovative designers need to be able to draw on research knowledge that encompasses knowledge of social contexts.



## **Rethinking appropriate knowledge for graphic design practice**

### **Ethnography and marketing**

Increasingly graphic designers need to be part of a consultant group so that they can be supported by ethnographers coming in and assisting them to find out about patterns of consumption. The accomplished graphic designers in the research showed how graphic design is maturing to the point where that kind of input is now becoming much more appropriate for day-to-day practice, than could be envisaged a decade ago.

Some graphic designers are also employing their own staff to do basic exploratory research about consumer preferences related to brand and product development. Graphic designers are faced with the challenge of deciding how to extend their knowledge and also of recognising where their core expertise resides. The unwillingness of graphic designers to do this can be attributed to the costs that clients may be unwilling to pay (Sharma, Rees & Wilson, 2007). Nevertheless, graphic designers need to recognise that they often have inadequate knowledge to understand consumer cultures. For many graphic designers there are potential opportunities for collaboration with social scientists able to contribute essential knowledge of social contexts that is becoming increasingly relevant to graphic design as the field expands both overseas (Sherry, 2002) and as indicated by the research, in New Zealand as well. This would serve to extend the knowledge base of designers and be significant to designers' understanding of consumer cultures and wider social contexts.

### **Recognition of the value of contextual knowledge in position-taking**

The importance of seeing graphic designers' cultural capital through the concept of position-taking in the field has been brought out in the research, showing the value of having the necessary cultural capital for their place in the field and being able to adjust to the changing requirements of the field. The research has shown how the dispositions of practice have a generative aspect to them, in that cultural capital is built up through practice and social structures both within the firm and in external worlds. In this sense, practice is generated out of ongoing changes in requisite knowledge rather than from a reliance on reproduction of existing knowledge expressed as cultural capital. Practice involves both the implicit values of personal histories and experience as well as the objectified capital that provides a context to practice and is drawn from publications, web information, research cases and information from external consultants. The experience of using these sources contributes to cultural capital for position-taking in the field.

### **Strategies**

The diversity in practice suggests that there are various routes to establishing a strong position in the field. The respective positions reflect priorities for visual and conceptual

knowledge. Knowledge requirements are also bound up with the strategies and change that is inherent in practice in the field. There are relationships between the knowledge acquired in cultural capital and designers' position in the field. The move away from a reliance on implicit forms of knowledge to tapping into research provides essential knowledge for working within consumer cultures. The research has shown, in the most obvious examples, how knowledge of consumer cultures has enabled graphic designers to consolidate their positions in the field, reflecting a strategy that places high value on this knowledge. Their success validates an imperative for graphic designers to know more about consumers and the wider social contexts of consumption.

### **The place of DINZ in generating professional knowledge**

There is also a potential function for New Zealand designers' own professional body DINZ. At a professional level, there needs to be recognition of the importance of understanding social contexts of consumption, within the professional discourse. The effectiveness of DINZ as a source of cultural capital outside professional discourse can be questioned, as much of the activity of this organisation relates to reflection on practice and codes of practice. In its defence, it has recently assumed an educative function in promoting awareness of both sustainability issues and creative partnerships with the field of business. DINZ has yet to set up continuing development programmes that are more specific to designers knowledge needs beyond design and business seminars. However, the insular nature of graphic design, for many in the profession who do not support professional activities or take part in seminars, is a disincentive to this being offered. The absence of discussion about on-going learning, characteristic of the research interests for many of the designers interviewed, will need to change if it is recognised that implicit and experience-based knowledge is inadequate for the needs of graphic designers working in close partnerships with clients in the field of business.

## **Academic design theory**

### **A theory-practice divide**

A theory-practice divide between the academic design community and professional designers is visible through the research, in the distinction that can be made between the responses in the cases and the academic critiques about design knowledge in the literature. Theories of consumer culture (Zukin & Maguire, 2004; Featherston, 1991; Slater, 1997; du Gay, 1997 for example) provide explanations of aspects of social contexts that directly affect graphic designers interacting with consumer cultures. However, where graphic designers in

the research saw the significance of cultures of consumption, it was at the level of either marketing and basic levels of ethnographic research or available via the commentators writing within the design discourse of design publishing, notably Rick Poyner, Steven Heller, and Ellen Lupton, for example, who could provide a link between design theorists and professional designers. The gap between the academy and the designer may not be able to be bridged. From the academic design discourse, there are those who have assumed a position in their theoretical thinking that is directed at providing standpoints about design as well as ideas for practice intended to be taken up by the professional designers (Cross, 2001; Lawson, 2001 for example). However, in the research, graphic designers were more likely to empathise with discourses of the design press or the business field. This is not to question the relevance of the academic discourse for providing explanations about design, rather, my concern is more for the way in which this work is seen by the graphic design profession to be remote from their interests.

### **Knowledge for design as a discipline**

Within the academic design community there have been frequent references to the need to embrace social values in design. Friedman's (2000) model for integrative design draws social cultural knowledge into design, suggesting that it is an essential part of design knowledge. Cross (2001), in making a case for the discipline of design, acknowledges the importance of knowledge of social values to design, but cautions that it is important to be clear that humanities areas like sociology should not be confused with design. There are also many references in the work of Featherstone (1991) and also Zukin and Maguire (2004), for example, that contextualise the social aspects of consumption, lifestyle and taste but cease to move their discussions into questions of design. It has been my objective in this research to make those links and also to show the suitability of Bourdieu's framework to do this.

### **The value of Bourdieu's analytical framework for design research**

In the research I have been able to show the value of Bourdieu's analytical framework for understanding consumer cultures, providing a means of extending methodologies of design research, in contributing to knowledge about design through the case studies. There is a meta-level of discussion over the validity of methodology of design research. The use of Bourdieu's framework makes a contribution to this, by showing how his concepts can be used to bring social research data into questions relating to design practice. It shows the value of Bourdieu's concepts for carrying out ethnographic research, by providing findings that avoid, as Bourdieu (1999, p. 607) expresses it, any tendency just to "gloss one another" by critiquing other's work without empirical research to support it.

Bourdieu's framework relies on grounding research in fieldwork<sup>112</sup> that combines questions of practice and agency while avoiding an exclusively subjective or objective approach to understanding data. The research is a contribution to design research methods as well as contributing to an understanding of New Zealand graphic design practice. The methodology used has applications for design research at an academic level, where empirical data can be viewed in a social setting. Bourdieu's concepts are also useful to extend the ideas on reflection and in particular Schön's concept of reflection on practice that has often been cited or used in academic research. The recognition of forms of capital, important in Bourdieu's concepts, helps to extend reflection to offer explanations for the limitations of focussing on implicit knowledge without recognising the importance of objective capital external to experience that serves to extend cultural capital for practice.

## Conclusion

This research makes a contribution to understanding the design profession in a broader global context recognising shifts in relevant cultural capital for graphic design practice. As shown in the summary for Chapter Six (p. 214), the research has demonstrated the variable significance given to drawing on knowledge of social contexts to inform conceptual processes in practice. It has provided an original contribution to understanding distinctions between practice drawing on knowledge of relevant social contexts, and more pragmatic practice centred on studio experience, in the developing discourse of the field of graphic design. By using Bourdieu's concepts in a design context, I have gone further than regarding social context as merely a background to design practice. I have focussed on understanding the conceptualising process that graphic designers undertake in mediating the relationship between aspects of the social contexts and the visual domains of style based on formal or technology concerns. The study has explored the extent to which graphic designers considered implicit knowledge to be sufficient, and to what extent they recognised that issues within social context were important, in their practice.

Although this is a study that concentrates on New Zealand examples, the findings will be of international interest and relevant to both academic and professional design communities, and especially to those seeking to ensure that their graduate graphic design programmes reflect the knowledge needed to enable graduates to enter and assume strong positions in the graphic design field.

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<sup>112</sup> His major theoretical work is based on field studies including Parisian lifestyles (*Distinction*, 1984), Kabyles (*The logic of practice*, 1990) and inner city life in France and the United States (*Weight of the world*, 1999).

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