New Zealand Women in the Design Industry: A Feminist Analysis.

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CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research project has been to interview women working in and around the design industry. From the transcribed material I have explored and analysed their experiences and perceptions, in order to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be a New Zealand woman in the design industry. Of particular interest to me in the analysis, is the notion of 'difference' or gender difference. I heard repeated statements that 'gender is irrelevant', yet nearly all the women I have spoken to have been able to identify aspects of the design process and of the design industry that they have experienced differently because they are female. In this thesis I have explored the nature of this 'gender-difference'; I have examined where it exists within discourses of design and how it affects women's public and private lives. Through a poststructuralist analysis I have considered how this notion of 'difference' is articulated by New Zealand women in design; and what it means to resist or affirm gender difference in relation to a feminist ontology or way of being in the world. Finally, I have considered what the design industry is like as a workplace for female employees. This is based on my understanding of gender difference in design as perceived and experienced by the women I talked to. I have discovered that there are gender differences in design, but there are differences within these differences. I believe women working in the design industry reject claims of gender difference yet articulate difference. For women in the design industry, their ontology, or 'way of being in the world' is complex and made up of a weave of differences, that is, in their articulations of the design industry they describe many differences between men and women, between women, and even within their own experiences.

Part I   The Research

Introduction

Difference by Design

This thesis is an exploration, with a feminist analysis, into the experiences and perceptions of New Zealand women in the design industry. The focus is on the notion of difference: the perceived differences between men and women in the design industry; women's experiences of that difference; and the understandings and meanings behind 'difference.' These differences may indicate the politics, identity and ontology of New Zealand women in the design industry in terms of feminist theory.

First of all, what is design? Design is a discipline, a craft and a profession. It is situated between art, technology and human interaction. Design is both form and function, aesthetic and practical. It reflects society and influences it; examples of design can be found in nearly every aspect of our daily lives.[1]

Research suggests that design has historically been male dominated (Buckley 1989: 251); women have been marginalised in the design industry, and the marginal areas have been defined as feminine. Within New Zealand, the design industry is innovative and exciting, producing a hybrid of styles and ideas. This thesis explores the experiences and perceptions of New Zealand women in the design industry, in which they consider the similarities and differences between men and women in design. From their words I have developed a discussion on the notion of 'difference', and a means of addressing how this may be understood. I believe 'difference' or gender-difference, as described by the women interviewed for this research project, reflects an ontological positioning in terms of the feminist equality / difference debate.

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[1] 'We interact directly [with design] through daily use with artefacts like clothes, cars, buildings, household appliances and furniture at a much more intimate level than the way we experience art. Because we encounter these things as familiar in our day-to-day existence, design tends to become invisibly absorbed into unself-conscious routines.' (Attfield & Kirkham 1995: 1)

Most contemporary feminist theory views gender as a social construction, an organising principle within society that places women in a less advantageous position than men. As Patti Lather writes, 'To do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the centre of one's enquiry' (Lather 1991: 71). This thesis is a feminist analysis of New Zealand women in the design industry in which I examine their experiences in terms of gender difference.

Because this is a feminist research project, it is assumed that my knowledge is always partial and contingent upon my feminist background. The formation of my knowledge is informed by my experience. For that reason I will outline my personal standpoint and rationale for this research. I have always been interested in design; in fact I have always wanted to be a designer. I studied design in school and aspired to fame and glamour in the design industry. From an early age I was aware of the polarisation of men and women and I understood the social construction of gender even before I studied for an undergraduate degree in feminist studies. Later, armed with a knowledge of gender theory and with an interest in design I headed into a job organising a national secondary school design competition. I was struck with the differences between male and female design submissions. There was a distinct contrast in the percentages of male and female entrants in the architectural design and fashion design sections. What was most interesting to me was the difference in the behaviour of the young designers at the Award ceremonies. The male students appeared ambitious, confident and very focused on tertiary training in their areas of design. The female designers tended to look uncomfortable, shy and nervous, and appeared to have less direction. This experience stimulated in me a growing interest and fascination with aspects of gender within design.

The catalyst was a discussion I had with the design competition organiser. We discussed the difficulties some female fashion designers have had in securing financial support. She said some female designers, when approaching a bank for bridging finance, had been asked about family commitments and their ability to meet deadlines, while their male contemporaries appeared not to have been asked the same questions or have had the same difficulties despite less working

experience. It struck me that there was a difference in design related to gender; how widespread or generally felt this was I did not know.

The aim of this research is to explore New Zealand women's experience of working within the design industry, what New Zealand women perceive and experience of the design industry in terms of gender difference, and what it is like to work in the industry. Is it male dominated? Do women feel free to design as women, do they feel they have a female identity and design style which is different from men? Do they wish to maintain a separate identity? I chose to interview a cross section of women from different design disciplines who are of different ages and with varying backgrounds in design.[2]. On this basis I hoped to develop an understanding of the design industry and what it is like to work within it as a female. Based on the information provided by New Zealand women in the design industry, I wished to explore how far gender is important in their working lives. Do these women that I have interviewed perceive their design to be essentially different from men? Do they feel as though they are still fighting over issues of equality? If they feel they work in an industry where they are treated equally, do they believe they still retain a distinctly female identity? How do New Zealand women in the design industry experience and perceive notions of difference, particularly in reference to equality between genders? Do women perceive there to be differences in the design industry and in design itself due to gender? In this thesis I explore the notion of difference through the analysis of the women's words, looking at connections and patterns in their recorded and transcribed experiences and perceptions.

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[2] It should be noted at this point, that the women could all be described as white, middle class and educated. Therefore this research project does not explore aspects of New Zealand design which are identifiable as Maori or Pacific Island design work. The literature I have used reflects the views of white middle class western designers; the publications are mostly from the United States of America and the United Kingdom. In terms of feminist responses to design, and literature pertaining specifically to women in design, there is very little material outside of western middle class white discourses.

1:1   Theoretical grounding in difference

'Difference' is a concept that reappears throughout the interviews, both through my suggestion and within free dialogue. My focus on difference has lead me to question whether I am constructing and providing the interviewees with the concept of difference by my questioning of it, and therefore am I designing difference. Am I providing the research participants with a binary structure with which to organise their thoughts and dialogue, or by shaping this research project out of the women's words, and frequently returning to this idea of difference, am I in fact discovering there is difference by design? I believe 'difference' exists both at an unimaginable non-tangible level which is recognisable in design work, and in a more complicated fashion in the relationships formed within the design industry: between designers, members of the industry and the clients. In researching New Zealand women in the design industry I am interested in their understanding of difference. When they discuss a female identity, do they reject difference between men and women, preferring sameness or equality? How far does this explain their ontology, or their way of being in the world?

Difference as a theme, as an idea and as a politic is explored throughout this thesis. Firstly, in my discussion on epistemology, 'difference' is presented in opposition to liberal feminist notions of equality and sameness between genders. Secondly, in the methodology section I question whether I am providing the interviewees with the notion of difference by asking them about it, or whether I am revealing understandings and experiences of difference. Here I ask if there is difference by design or whether I am designing difference? I have used the concept of 'difference' as a method in this research. This research is founded on the New Zealand women's experience of the design industry: their standpoint. Their perceptions are presumed to be different from men's and important in rectifying our patrilineal understanding of the design industry. Finally, I ask what gender difference means to these women, what is their understanding of it, and how far does this reflect their ontological positioning in terms of feminism? How far does their discussion on difference reflect their standpoint and relationship to the feminist debate of equality versus difference? Do women uphold, treasure and

maintain gender difference or denounce it in their desire for equality, thereby viewing equality and difference as mutually exclusive terms? If they incorporate both terms, equality and difference, the women's stance may well reflect their affinity/ empathy with post-modern or perhaps even post-feminist views.

1:2   Structure

This thesis is divided into three parts. In part one, I explore epistemological differences, particularly in regard to feminist theoretical understandings of 'difference.' I discuss equality versus difference in terms of standpoint feminism and in terms of poststructuralism. In this section I clarify my own epistemological grounding: I explore the idea that I wish to honour the perspectives of women; however, standpoint theory essentialises and universalises that 'experience.' Poststructuralism frames the embodied knowledges of my interviewees within a discourse and allows us to examine more closely their location within the design industry. Part One also looks at aspects of the research process and methodology, outlining the research focus and rationale. In effect, part one is the 'why' and 'how' of my research process.

Part Two, is all about 'what,': the context in which the research is situated, and the nature of design. I provide an overview of design definitions, women in design and the design industry in New Zealand.

Part Three, which I like to call 'the story,' consists of the data analysis of the interviews. In this part of the thesis I have presented the 'women's words.' New Zealand women's experiences and perceptions of the design industry. They are not in narrative form but rather organised thematically, with an analysis and conclusion.

Part Three consists of three areas of discussion which focus on the idea of 'difference.' In Section A, I analyse the perceptions of New Zealand women in the design industry in terms of differences that are perceived between men and women. These are differences within the design process and finished design. The

second area of discussion, Section B, focuses in more detail on women's experiences of gender-differences. Here I am looking for patterns and consistencies as well as differences in the women's experiences of 'difference'. Lastly, Section C, consists of a deconstructionist view of the women's comments. I consider the meanings behind the differences women identify and the patterns and inconsistencies, in particular the contradictions that come through in the interviews. I consider the patterns in reference to Derrida's notion of différance (Derrida 1982, Kamuf 1991, Grosz 1990), that difference as a relationship between two entities is constantly changing. This change and alteration in understandings of gender difference, as depicted by the voices of the women, may point to their understandings, standpoint, and experiences of feminism in relation to the equality / difference debate and may indicate their ontological positioning. The concept of ontology has been important in my analysis of the women's words as I have realised that what the women have said in the interviews is complex. I am interested in their daily lives, their personal politics and the way they negotiate a male dominated industry. The term 'ontology' encapsulates this, it has been described as a person's 'way of being' in the world.

The starting point of feminist theory is inevitably based on an epistemological questioning of difference. I have used the term 'difference' as an epistemological and methodological tool with which to gain understanding of the experiences and perceptions of New Zealand women in the design industry. This perspective has lead me to view 'difference,' and evolving understandings of it, as the fundamental basis of women's ways of being in the world (ontology). This articulation of difference varies between women due to age, experience and the areas of design they work in, but it also reflects the nature of the male dominated industry in which they work. Their success despite and resistance to male domination is reflected in their articulation of notions of 'difference.'

Research statement

My thesis is an investigation into the experiences and perceptions of New Zealand women working in the design industry. Using this material I explore the notion of gender-difference, in particular how women's experiences of this difference may point to an ontological positioning that reflects their everyday interpretation of feminism. My focus is on women in the design industry which necessitates an exploration into the subject of design. However, within the subject of design I am not attempting research into the areas of design theory or design history, except where it may be useful to the experience of New Zealand women in design. I am interested in how women understand design as a principle and how they perceive their understanding may be different from the understanding men have of design. I am interested in women's experiences of the industry, of design and of the industry in which design develops. I am interested in their perceptions of the designed product and of the design process. I am particularly interested in the way they understand design and experience the design industry, and how understandings and experiences may be different to that of men. I am not focusing simply on 'women *and* design,' which is too large an area as it would include clients and consumers of design, but rather those women who are heavily involved as workers *in* the industry. I am seeking to establish an understanding of what it is like to be a New Zealand woman *in* the design industry. I have deliberately not stated my focus as 'women *working within* the design industry' as I believe this would have restricted my focus to designers. I am also interested in the experiences of women concerned with the industry, although to varying degrees, such as teachers, administrators of design institutions and design journalists, especially as they may have interesting outside perspectives on those women working within the industry.

I have deliberately chosen women from a cross section of the design industry, from architecture, product design, graphic design, spatial design and fashion design. This thesis is a mere glimpse, or snapshot of New Zealand women in the design industry. But I have chosen to gather women from as many different areas of design as possible in order to portray the design industry as a whole, and to make

connections between the different design disciplines, and between women in these different areas.   I have deliberately decided not to focus on a single area of the industry, such as fashion design or architectural design, as complicated theoretical design issues would have distracted me from my overall focus, which is New Zealand women's experiences and perceptions of the design industry. For example if I had focused on women in architecture, I believe I would have had to research female use of space and non-traditional areas of living, which has been an area of work contributed to by feminist architects (Attfield 1994:90, Matrix 1984). Instead, I am looking for commonalties, similarities, themes, patterns, connections and contradictions between women's perceptions and experiences within different areas of design and in the design industry as a whole, particularly with a view to issues surrounding gender and the possible differences between men and women in design.

The thesis question is not simply whether women design differently from men: I am very interested in the possibility of gender differences within design, and I have recorded women's perspectives on this topic. However, I am not seeking to provide a comparison between women's experience of the design industry and that of men, or to prove inequalities between the sexes, as that would necessitate research into men's attitudes and experiences of design. as well as women's, and I believe the size of the research project would not allow this.

The title of this research is 'New Zealand Women in the Design Industry: A Feminist Analysis.' The words 'A Feminist Analysis' are deliberately chosen because in the initial title I wrote 'from a feminist perspective', and this appeared to be off-putting to interviewees, [1]. I felt the idea of a 'feminist perspective' could be perceived to be exclusionary and stereotypical. I had a very real sense that women in professional jobs such as design considered feminism an outdated and dirty word. I was fearful of my use of it and so suggested that it was *my* standpoint. I continue to use and reuse the word feminist, as I see it as a political

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[1] An example of this is outlined in Appendix A, Reflective Methodology. See A:1 Selection of interviewees.

and educative move to bring the 'dirty word' feminism back into the language and discourse of women in the 1990's. I now believe the politics of the women interviewed may be feminist but the women have been reluctant to use this label. This is primarily a piece of feminist research; I am interested in women's experiences and perceptions, and in examining the possibility of gender-difference and how it can be seen that New Zealand women in the design industry negotiate that notion of 'difference'. I am analysing the meanings and understandings surrounding this word, and how the women interviewed articulate their relationship to difference. I am examining difference as signifier of their relationship to and performance of feminism. I view the notion of 'difference' in three ways: firstly, within the liberal feminist model, I view it as a rejection of gender difference in order to embrace equality. Secondly, within a radical feminist model, I see 'difference' as the promotion and valuing of female difference. Thirdly I use Derrida's theoretical paradigm of différance to show the deferred meaning and space behind the linguistic tool known as 'difference.' I explore whether the use of the word difference and the discussions surrounding it reflect or signify these women's ontological positioning in terms of liberal and radical feminism or can their positioning be defined or described as postmodernist?

This is a feminist analysis of New Zealand women in the design industry. To this end I need to discuss what feminism is and address the question of a feminist epistemology, particularly feminist theoretical outlines of difference, as this is in essence the core of my work. I am researching women in the design industry, their experiences and perceptions; this research is for them, also by them, as it is based on their discourse. I hope it gives us a better understanding of the nature of the design industry as a workplace and of the possible differences between men and women in design, and of how women negotiate and understand that space called difference. A feminist analysis looks beyond the designed product, to the structure and institutions in which women who design are located. Feminist analysis looks at gender issues and notions of power and control that may or may not affect that final designed product. I am using the term différance, to describe the movement, the changing meanings, and the space in and around articulations of gender

difference. However, I am not designing difference: this thesis is difference by design.

Research rationale

Design can be a dynamic, exciting and creative force in our society, and it can be very influential: a particular style can define an epoch. Radical design ideas may reflect both the imagination and desire of society and encourage us to think differently. But design is historically a male dominated profession. Since the turn of the century women have become increasingly involved in the design industry; even so, most design literature focuses on internationally recognised male designers, and major design achievements have been largely attributed to men. I am interested in how women experience and perceive this space called the design industry, particularly as a site of negotiation and developing identity. As women have become more visible in the industry, it is apparent that they have a unique view of the world, and it is possible that they are able to offer design a special perspective. The argument has also been put forward that women are no different from men, and for that reason they should have equal opportunity in the design industry. This reflects an understanding of gender difference in design as incompatible with the politics of equality. Whether women are the same as/equal to or different from men is the first area of exploration. How is gender difference played out and experienced within design, what are the issues that arise in this industry? Women differ in their responses to equality and difference depending on their age. Feminist awareness and feminist politics are located in experience. Women who entered the design industry in the 1980's, when there was a drive for equal representation, have a different perspective on difference from those who have started their design careers more recently and have been afforded the luxury of being treated as equal. Although the women in the design industry have different backgrounds and approaches to design and work in different design disciplines, I am interested in exploring how far there may be similarities, patterns and possibly links in their experiences.

Some areas of design, such as architecture, are more male dominated than perhaps interior or spatial design. In fact interior and fashion design are often dominated by women, and men who are successful in this field are often thought to be effeminate

or gay. How do these factors affect women, influence their appropriations and understandings of difference? What does feminism mean in 1999, how do gender issues get addressed in an industry such as design?

What I am asking is how is gender-difference experienced and perceived by New Zealand women in the design industry? Are women in the design industry able to retain a female identity in their design work and relationships? Is this identity based on the inclusion and valuing of difference? Do they consider it an industry that promotes equality in the workplace? Or do they feel and get treated as different. If there is difference, is it bad or unequal to men or just different?

Are women comfortable with publicising their gender and their difference in the design industry, or do they feel that revealing or promoting their gender will discredit their success? Is difference, that is, being a woman in a man's world, a positive or a negative experience? Is the design industry in fact a level playing field, and if not, at what stages are there differences between men and women in the industry, the way they are treated and the way they treat each other? I am asking whether these differences are good and exciting, whether design is a positive industry to work in, or whether there are many issues surrounding discrimination and inequality still to be ironed out. For example: is the design industry a workplace environment that supports women taking time out for children and home commitments? Are women able to be mobile and transitory without compromising their careers? If there is a female design style, is this valued the same way as a man's? Are possible gender differences in the design process valued equally?

Is the design industry a place where gender difference is minimal and where work by women is truly valued and success can be achieved on an equal platform to men? Or if gender differences are more subtly played out, does this reflect a patriarchal workplace where oppression due to 'difference' is simply more sophisticated and complicated?

Feminism examines the lives of women and canvasses the areas of inequality and the differences between genders. While discussing the design industry with a select group of women and asking them to consider possible differences between men and women in the design industry, my focus unwittingly becomes one of 'difference.' I am asking, what is their understanding of gender-difference? This is important because Liberal Feminism is based on the desire for women's equality with men which rests on the premise that men and women are unequal and therefore treated differently. Radical feminism, although it is also based on difference, promotes women as positively different rather than seeking sameness with men. Radical feminism affirms essential differences and promotes them. By discussing the experiences and perceptions of women in the design industry, and reflecting on their understandings of gender-difference, I believe we will be able to consider their feminist politics. It may be possible to gauge how feminism is currently understood and how women act out their ontological belief in themselves as women. Furthermore we may reach a better understanding of their identity as New Zealand women in the design industry, based on their experiences and perceptions through an analysis of difference.

What is important in the context of feminist studies and in terms of this research project is not only to learn what it is like for New Zealand women in the design industry, but also what it means for feminism in the late 1990's to focus on difference, especially given that many of these women consider that gender is increasingly irrelevant in the space where they are working and living. Does gender difference represent oppression, and so, if women do not feel oppressed, do they reject gender-differences? Or are women tightly woven into battles to achieve equality with men and is this in itself oppression? I believe many successful women in male dominated industries such as design claim not to be feminist yet they articulate themselves in terms of liberal and radical feminist discourses. I am interested to learn if women in design feel that they are working in an industry where they are able to work, play, create and compete while acknowledging their gender is different from men's but of equal value. In essence the questions that I am asking in this thesis have been 'designed' in order to learn more about the design industry and about women's work within it. I am using design as a

landscape for exploring feminist ideas of difference, particularly of the way we act out politics of difference and equality.

Feminist Epistemology:
Deconstructing Difference

'Knowledge is not merely a 'perspective', a way of seeing; nor even this plus an
epistemology, a way of knowing. It is also an ontology, or a way of being in the world.'
(Stanley 1990:14)

Feminist theory is critical of the absence of women in the formation of knowledge.
This absence can be seen when looking at the design industry: women have been
almost absent from design history both as subjects and as authors. They are also
less visible than men within areas of design development and design promotion
(Buckley 1989:251). In this research project, I am interested firstly in 'balancing
the books;' writing about women in design in New Zealand and thereby giving
them better representation. However, I do not wish merely to fit women into the
history of design or to claim them a separate space. I am critical of the old
processes of gathering knowledge; I want to know more about women in the
design industry, but I do not want to merely place women as an extra chapter.[1]

Firstly, I wanted to learn about women in design from the women's perspective,
their standpoint. They have been marginalised within design history so I wanted to
collect and re-present their voices. Secondly, their stories are located across a
number of discourses; I am not merely interested in what they say, but the
meanings and power attached to what they say. Their subjectivity and identity is
understood by an analysis of their words, which are situated in their discourses of
the design industry. Thirdly, their words, statements, and their meanings, when
they are situated in a discourse, are often contradictory. Descriptions of men and
women within design are linguistically structured as binary oppositions, yet there
are also attempts to discuss gender difference outside of the binary, which leads to
contradictions and multiple understandings of 'difference.' I wish to explore the

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[1] The difference between a 'woman's perspective', and a 'feminist perspective' on women in
design history is addressed later in Chapter Eight: Women in Design.

use of the term 'difference' using Derrida's model of différance, in which the deconstruction of language is shown to illuminate spaces and multiplicity within the linguistic construction of a difference. I am interested in how an articulation of gender difference may reflect the speaker's ontology. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise have described ontology as a theory of being and reality, or a way of going about and making sense of the world (Stanley and Wise 1993: 11, 120). I am interested in how women's engagement with feminist discourses and the notion of 'difference' may reflect their ontology or their way of 'being' in the design industry.

Throughout this thesis I am exploring the notion of 'difference'. This theme has helped me navigate my way through epistemology as well as provide direction in the analysis of my data. I have come to view 'difference' as providing a pathway through both ontological and epistemological ideas. Gender-difference for me in ontological terms has marked the journey I have taken in feminist politics and theory. I steered away from gender differences when I argued for gender equality and when I located myself within liberal feminist politics. Then 'difference' became attractive as I re-evaluated my feminist politics and situated myself more towards radical feminism, promoting and affirming the 'difference' of women's experiences. Now as I continue to negotiate this idea of 'difference,' it has become a complicated and sophisticated dance; I want to be judged equally to men, I want to be the same. But I also wish to retain my identity as a female; I want to affirm my difference from men. Furthermore I now see 'difference' as more than a political or epistemological location: it is a tool with which to explore my ontological positioning. Within this thesis the notion of 'difference' has been used as a tool to measure the experiences and perceptions of women within the design industry. And this measurement of 'difference,' the articulation of gender differences, may point to the ontological positioning of the research participants.

The epistemological basis of this thesis is influenced by three areas of feminist epistemology, standpoint theory, poststructuralism and deconstructionism, and these epistemologies will be discussed in this chapter. In a brief overview, my own epistemological viewpoint has developed firstly from a critique of historic forms of

knowledge as phallocentric; from there I sought to establish a feminist standpoint epistemology, that is, research that aimed to promote the experience of women and validate that experience as a form of knowledge seemingly more legitimate than others (Janack 1997:126). However, many feminist theorists have criticised standpoint knowledge as essentialising the experience of women and overlooking issues of individual difference such as race and class. I believe there is great diversity amongst women even of the same culture and upbringing, which reveals that women's experiences vary according to where 'she' is located. While it is important to formulate new knowledges that promote women's experience, one is no more valid as a form of knowledge than another. If feminist theory is based on women's experiences and we accept that this area of experience is variable and changing, then there is no one unified woman's standpoint and it must follow that the platform from which this knowledge is developed is a contingent foundation. It is no more truthful or objective than traditional knowledges. To assert that women's standpoint epistemologies are more truthful is to fall prey to the very claims of power within knowledge of which that standpoint is critical. Poststructuralist epistemologies argue that all knowledge is contingent, Judith Butler writes:

> . . . foundations function as the unquestioned and the unquestionable within any theory . . . Even when we claim that there is some implied universal basis for a given foundation, that implication and that universality simply constitute a new dimension of unquestionability (Butler 1992:7).

Standpoint theory is built out of a critique of phallocentric knowledges, so it is contingent on them as well as contingent on the specific locale and or foundation of new knowledge. Poststructuralist epistemologies emphasise that there are no fixed truths or permanent absolute knowledges. They examine and critique these claims within their own structure, through a deconstruction of the knowledge produced, that is, by deconstructing the language and data produced by the research participants and also through a deconstruction of the research process. Poststructrualist theorists minimise claims of theoretical rigidity through an

acknowledgement of the power and influence the researcher has in the formation of new knowledge.

The analysis of gender inequalities is still the hermeneutic anchor of any feminist research inquiry. Feminist research aims to offer an alternative construct to the patriarchal model, but further to that it must 'work against itself' (Lather 1991:83), allowing for deconstruction, and thus revealing the contingent foundations upon which the study was done. In this way the researcher does not impose her ideologies onto other women, which is exactly what feminist research first intended to criticise.

Poststructuralist theory claims that most knowledges are conveyed through language which is open to many different meanings. Weedon writes: 'Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed' (Weedon 1987:21). Language is situated within discourse/s which may contain multiple meanings and understandings of the same topic. Any understandings or knowledges formed could be described as historically and culturally located. Contrasting meanings are expressed within a discourse, and can be structurally understood as existing as part of a binary opposition. Something has meaning only in reference to an other; one is present, the other absent. 'Difference' describes that relationship and 'différance'[2] is the space between the two terms. 'Différance is a term coined by Jacques Derrida, who was concerned with the idea that meanings within language shift and change over time. Chris Weedon writes:

> For Derrida there can be no fixed signifieds (concepts), and signifiers (sound or written images), which have identity only in their difference from one another, are subject to endless process of deferral. . . . Signifiers are always located in discursive context and the temporary fixing of meaning in a specific reading of a signifier depends on this discursive context (Weedon 1987:25).

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[2] A term coined by Derrida (1982) "Différance" In *Margins of Philosophy*.

Therefore the difference between terms and their meanings can be used as a deconstructive tool with which to understand the power dynamics at work in discourses. The term 'différance is used to describe the movement of difference, its constant change and deferral. Let us examine the epistemological basis of this thesis by way of an exploration into the three areas of standpoint epistemology, poststructuralism and deconstructionism.

4:1   Standpoint Epistemology

Feminist theory views gender as one of the main organising principles within society (Lather 1991:71). Feminist theory is critical of traditional forms of knowledges and ways of knowing as women have been largely excluded from these, thereby also disadvantaging them from positions of power within society based on these knowledges. Feminist theory has identified dominant forms of power as patriarchal, and holds that these patrilineal formations of knowledge claim objectivity in order to support and promote patriarchy at the cost of women:

> Feminism's most compelling epistemological insight lies in the connections it has made between knowledge and power. This, not simply in the obvious sense that access to knowledge enables empowerment; but more controversially through the recognition that legitimation of knowledge-claims is intimately tied to networks of domination and exclusion (Lennon and Whitford 1994:1).

Feminist theory is a constantly changing, growing and developing theory which is critical of patriarchal power structures. Lennon and Whitford (1994) have developed a good historical overview of how initially feminist theorising on epistemology was concerned to expose the masculinity of different areas of knowledge:

> The claims that what passed for knowledge was 'masculine' came in several forms: that the problems to be investigated /discussed reflected only male experience of the world; that the theoretical frameworks adopted reflected the structure of masculine gender identity in contemporary culture; that the narratives constructed served the

interests of men as a group, promoting their position and legitimating the subordination of women; that the whole symbolic order by means of which knowledge-claims were articulated privileged the male and conceptualised the female only as that which lacked masculinity (1994:2).

Sandra Harding (1987) claims that not only have feminist theorists identified historical forms of knowledge as patriarchal in their bias, but these forms of knowledge have excluded women, while being presented as neutral text:

> Sociologists of knowledge characterise epistemologies as strategies for justifying beliefs: appeals to the authority of God, of custom and tradition, of 'common sense,' of observation, of reason, and of masculine authority are examples of familiar justificatory strategies. Feminists have argued that traditional epistemologies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility that women could be 'knowers' or agents of knowledge; they claim that the voice of science is a masculine one; that history is written from only the point of view of men (of the dominant class and race); that the subject of traditional sociological sentence is always assumed to be a man (Harding 1987:3, also cited in Kemp & Squires1997:162).

Feminist theory has challenged the notion that knowledge is objective and distinct from the subject that produced it, arguing that knowledge does indeed 'bear the mark of its producer' and supports masculine interests when produced by men. As a reaction to this some feminist writers placed an emphasis on the experiences of women, or attention to women's perspectives or to the problematics generated by women's position in society. This led to the development of feminist standpoint theory, in which women's experiences are acknowledged as being an important source of knowledge. Differences between the sexes has been emphasised, in particular the different experiences of the world that women have had. These experiences have been seen as valid forms of knowledges as they portray not only the values and understandings of dominant voices of patriarchy but also the values and the experiences of the oppressed. Sandra Harding writes:

> To achieve a feminist standpoint one must engage in the intellectual and political struggle necessary to see natural and social life from the point of view of that disdained activity which produces women's social experiences instead of from the partial and perverse perspective

available from the 'ruling gender' experience of men (Harding 1987:185 cited in Stanley 1990:27).

From a woman's standpoint, her experience is spoken and recorded and from this, knowledge is derived of both the dominant and oppressed discourses. According to this theoretical perspective, the voice of the oppressed is more valid than the voice of the oppressor because oppressors will speak only in order to strengthen their position as dominant, without relinquishing power. The oppressed, by contrast, is already powerless, and so speaks as a victim but also of resistance. The oppressed have to know the way of the oppressors in order to survive, but the oppressors have no similar need, so their perspective is more limited:

> Members of oppressed groups, including all women, have a perspective on the world that is not just different form the perspective available to members of the ruling class, but is also epistemically advantageous. The conclusion usually drawn from this claim is that while theories developed by members of dominant groups will reflect only the interests and values of those groups, theories developed by the oppressed will encompass a broader array of interests and experiences (Jaggar 1983:371 Cited in Janack 1997:126).

Theories developed by members of the dominant classes will be shaped by dominant ideology, based only on the characteristic experiences of the dominant group, and will generally overlook the experiences or suffering of the underclasses. The experiences of the dominant group are not, however, lost on the oppressed. Their perspective allows them to see not only the lives of the ruling class but also the lives and experiences of the oppressed, and their world view will be shaped by the interests of the totality in a given historical period (Jaggar 1983:371). Thus members of oppressed groups will supposedly produce less-partial accounts of the world than will members of dominant groups (Janack 1997:126). Assister (1996), in her book *Enlightened Women*, argues that 'it is the standpoint of the community most committed to "emancipatory" values that has the greatest claim to epistemic validity.' (1996:6)

4:2   Poststructuralism

There have been two important criticisms of feminist standpoint theory. The first is that it assumes all women's experiences are the same, and in particular that all women are equally oppressed by gender. The second is that the assertion of standpoint theory as a 'better' form of knowledge leaves the binary structure of good and bad knowledges intact; in other words it merely shifts the old knowledge rather than disrupting it. Some of the strongest critiques of feminist standpoint theory come from feminists who claim that although gender is one of the strongest organising principles in society, and recording women's experience of oppression is important, not all women's oppression is the same. Women's experiences of patriarchy vary: there are many different types of oppression, and sometimes gender is not the most important oppressor, especially for women of colour. Standpoint theory was critiqued by many women within the feminist movement as universalising women's experience and women's oppression. For many women of colour, oppression suffered due to sexism was less than oppression suffered due to racism or class. Poststructural feminist theorists of the 1990's have also spoken out against standpoint epistemology. Rosemary Hennessy considers that 'feminist standpoint theory has made appeals to 'women's experience' and the experiences of other oppressed groups as if those were a   theoretical givens rather than constructions. Feminists, furthermore, have assumed more homogeneity among those experiences than is warranted' (Hennessy 1993, cited in Janack 1997). The main critique of standpoint theory is that its portrayal of one type of gender oppression, most often affecting women of white, middle class, and western socialisation, material circumstance and social status, constitutes all women's experience. Bat-Ami Bar On (1993) is critical of the assumption that one dominant oppression expresses the group's identity. 'Appeals to the experiences of the oppressed she [Bar On] claims, harbour tacit assumptions about which of those experiences more authentically express the group's identity' (Janack 1997:128). However, in spite of these reservations, it should be noted that Bar On is unwilling to give up epistemic privilege because of the authority it gives to the oppressed. Epistemic privilege secures the right to speak even though it may be with only one voice. I share a similar stance in relation to this research project. I

believe that women in design have different experiences, and I am unwilling to say that all women design differently or women design in a female style, but it is useful to be able to say that the voices of women in design need to be heard because they have until now been largely omitted from discourses of design.

If we return to poststructuralist theory, Judith Butler writes: 'If feminism presupposes that "women" designates an undesignatable field of difference, one that cannot be totalised by a descriptive identity category, then the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignificability' (Butler 1992:16). Butler writes about contingent foundations, arguing that we must call everything into question. To write from the standpoint of 'women's experience' is to write from a category or fixed space. Using Butler's idea of contingent foundations we can see that the category of woman does not have to be fixed or defined or uniformly experienced. The category of woman can include differences between women and allow for different experiences of oppression. If to acknowledge 'difference' is to enhance agency, we become able to theorise women's experience with greater importance placed on the individual. Furthermore, Butler directs us to a very important aspect of poststructuralist theory, its critique of universalisms. When she insists that feminist theorists question everything, she is referring to the very practice of research itself. She claims that researchers of women's experience must take into account the formation of their knowledge; as all research is equally open to bias from its researchers and researchees. To claim feminist knowledge is more truthful or valid is to make the same mistakes of phallocentric knowledges: 'When we claim that there is some implied universal basis for a given foundation, that implication and that universality simply constitute a new dimension of unquestionability' (Butler 1992:7). The assertion of a new foundation or construct, even if it has been realigned in terms of gender, is nevertheless a new form of foundationalism or universalism. It is still the assertion of a 'true' foundation, a presumption that there is in fact one universal base from which theory should emanate. A foundation by its nature precludes any other definitions; it is blind to its construction. According to Judith Butler (1992), all knowledge rests upon contingent foundations. All knowledges are contextual, that is, they are contingent/dependent on variables. They exist due to their environment, their

theoretical surroundings and historio-cultural context. If we understand foundations to be the ground, the solid matter on which our theoretical understandings of the world are built, then contingent foundations are those which are acknowledged to be shifting and moving. The platform from which we understand our world, is ungrounded ground; it is constantly changing and in a state of flux.

Patti Lather (1991) insists that feminist researchers, in order to reveal and acknowledge the temporality and bias inherent in their research, need to employ notions of deconstruction. She suggests that feminist theory should present itself in such a way that it can produce a theory yet work against it, deconstructing the very structure it set up. In this way feminism reveals the constructive tools and the contingent foundations upon which the theory has arisen, and does not merely replicate the structure of epistemology it sought to critique.

4:3   Deconstructionism

Poststructuralist thinking stresses the importance of the productive power of language, particularly within discursive fields. When listening to women's experiences we are listening to women's voices, narratives and the worlds they have constructed. The work of French theorists such as Saussure, Lacan and Derrida has made us aware of how we construct meaning in the words that we use and how power may be invested in our language. All experiences and knowledges and languages are situated within discourses. Chris Weedon writes, 'Discourses represent political interest and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power. . . . At the level of the individual, this theory (poststructuralism) is able to offer an explanation of where our experience comes from, why it is contradictory or incoherent and why and how it can change' (Weedon1987:40). Discourse carries meaning and we express ourselves through discourse. Gavey (1989) writes:

> Discourses are multiple, and they offer competing, potentially contradictory ways of giving meaning to the world. They offer "subject positions" for individuals to take up. These positions, or "possibilities"

for constituting subjectivity (identities, behaviours understandings of the world) vary in terms of the power they offer individuals. . . .Individuals are not passive however. Rather they are active and have "choice" when positioning themselves in relation to various discourses. For example, women can identify with and conform to traditional discursive constructions of femininity or they can resist, reject and challenge them (to a greater or larger extent) (Gavey 1989:464).

So by analysing women in the design industry we may understand both their experience of and resistance to specific discourses. In order to understand the discourse of women within the design industry we must employ the theory of deconstruction. Judith Butler writes:

> To take the construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject; to deconstruct the subject is not to negate or throw away the concept; on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that to which the term, 'the subject', refers, and that we consider the linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. To deconstruct is not to negate or dismiss, but to call into question (Butler 1992:15).

Jan Scott writes: 'Deconstruction is, then, an important exercise, for it allows us to be critical of the way in which ideas we want to use are ordinarily expressed, exhibited in patterns of meaning that may undercut the ends we seek to attain' (Scott 1992:257). Deconstruction is employed not only in a review of the research process but also as a tool by which to better understand the knowledge produced within language.

Jacque Derrida, among others, argues that the western philosophical tradition rests on binary oppositions: unity/diversity, identity/difference, presence/absence, and universality/specificity. These fixed oppositions are interdependent: 'They derive their meaning from a particularly established contrast rather than from some inherent pure antithesis' (Scott 1992:256). According to Derrida, this interdependence is hierarchical in that one term is dominant or prior and the opposite term is subordinate and secondary. Scott (1992) argues that: 'The leading terms are accorded primacy; their partners are represented as weaker or derivative. Yet the first terms depend on and derive their meaning from the second to such an

extent that the secondary terms can be seen as generative of the definition of the first terms.' (Scott 1992:256) For example, true/false, negative/positive, man/woman. Therefore we cannot take binary oppositions at face value, but must deconstruct them for the processes they embody and to discover more fully the power located within them.

Derrida deconstructs these binary terms using the idea of différance. Différance is the principle according to which meaning is both the product of differences and is also subject to deferral: 'Presence for example, is inevitably bound up with, but unable to accept its dependence on, absence. Rather than seeing absence as the deprivation of presence, Derrida shows that absence can be seen as the primary term and presence as its negative counterpart' (Grosz 1990:93). Différance is not only the difference between two terms, it also describes the movement and principle behind the construction of the two terms, and the possibility of new meaning through the inversion of the binary. Elizabeth Grosz (1990), summarises four ways in which Derrida uses the term différance: firstly as 'an active and passive movement that consists in deferring, delaying and substituting'. Secondly, différance is 'a movement at the basis of different things. In this sense, différance is the condition of difference and of the binary oppositional structure itself. Différance is thus the condition for both difference and sameness.' Thirdly, 'différance is the condition of linguistic difference, and thus, of signification.' Fourthly, différance is the 'activity designed to reveal difference. . . . The concept of différance, the movement of difference, the challenge to binary logic that these pose are gathered together under this one term' (Grosz 1990:96).
Deconstruction, therefore, is not merely the reversal of differences found in texts, for example, the differences between men and women in the design industry. It is also the displacement of these terms and the creation of new ones. Grosz (1990) writes, 'A deconstructive reading does not so much demonstrate the errors, flaws, and contradictions in texts, but tries to reveal the necessity with which what a text says is bound up in what it cannot say'(Grosz 1990:97).

During the research for this thesis, I have asked interviewees about the difference between men and women in the design industry. Their responses are mixed; some

women reject gender differences, other women identify them in certain aspects of the design process. I wish to map this discussion of gender difference onto a framework of feminist politics where, for example, a rejection of gender differences in the design industry may point to an identification with liberal feminist politics. I wish to do this using the notion of différance to encapsulate the changing area of gender difference referred to in the interviews. I wish to apply the notion of différance to the discourse of New Zealand women in the design industry using the two terms equal and different. I am interested in the possibility that différance may point to a feminist ontology shared by the women.

Within my research gender is the basic organising principle, it is the foundation and the starting point for my knowledge. I am examining gender differences within design, based on women's experience of the design industry. However, I want to theorise this with a view to the possible differences between the women's experiences. I am aware that we must retain lessons from a 'politics of difference' and include this in our epistemology. But I am concerned with what feminist theory may have arrived at: a post-modern feminism in which women as an entity are so diverse and disembodied that there is no political unity. Could there be so many different experiences that there is no cohesive political standard or movement? I want this research to remain based on women's experience. I believe feminist standpoint epistemology is of great political importance in highlighting women's oppression, although my epistemological grounding is in poststructuralism. I want to retain an analysis based on difference between the genders but including an awareness of difference and diversity and an understanding of the dynamics and effects of 'différance' which helps to encapsulate the notion of diversity.

I refer now to Kathi Weeks (1998), who supports standpoint theory because it promotes women's experience as the basis for development and gathering of knowledge, that is, based on women as an oppressed group in contrast to man as the oppressor. She wishes to retain standpoint theory which she describes as the reconstituting of the feminist subject. Weeks views standpoint theory as providing a sense of 'totality'. This, as she explains in the introduction to her book *Constituting Feminist Subjects*, is an important set of theoretical and practical

commitments, in other words, the goals and commitments of feminism - to critique and construct - [3] are not lost with standpoint theory. Weeks writes:

> I want to preserve and develop two central commitments of socialist feminist standpoint theory: a theoretical commitment to understand the relationships between social structures and subjectivities and a political commitment to social transformation[4] . . . .The project of totality thus involves a methodological mandate to relate and connect, to situate and contextualise, to conceive the social, systematically as a complex process of relationships (Weeks 1998:5).

I am concerned that postmodernism has left feminist theory fractured and with ebbing political impetus. Patriarchal society has simply not produced men and women but man as self and women as other. Gender construction has placed men at the centre and women at the periphery. There are assumptions about what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman, and these roles and identities are played out in the workplace and in areas of art and popular culture such as design. I do not want to lose focus on these issues by concentrating on language; I want to highlight them. It is for this reason that I draw on labour as a point of reference for feminist research. Weeks re-emphasises the importance of labour as a site for feminist analysis, seeing labour as a 'constitutive link between social structures and subjectivities' (Weeks 1998:5). I agree with Weeks on the importance of labour, and my thesis is an analysis of women's experience situated within a particular area of labouring, namely the design industry. However, my discussion of women's labour proceeds alongside a continued awareness that labour is a specific knowledge which is subject to particular discourses.

The issue of women's labour has historically been the site of strong feminist analysis of women in patriarchal society. It has been a highly visible site of oppression, reflecting the contested power between men and women. It is a very powerful reference point for feminist theory, bearing in mind the movement both to critique and construct. Historically women have been excluded from particular areas of 'men's' work. In the design industry, women have been stereotypically

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[3] Quoted from Elizabeth Grosz 1990.
[4] It should be noted although I agree in principle with the notion of social transformation from a patriarchal society to one in which women's experiences are valued, in my particular analysis of the design industry I was not to know whether the industry required transformation or not.

understood to participate in less 'professional' areas of design, and more in the area of craft, which has been undervalued within design history. This perception reflects the idea of women 'knowing how' rather than 'knowing that' (Callen 1989, cited in Attfield 1995:156-157). 'Weeks sees labour as 'not just an activity that is producing capital but an activity that produces society itself, including the networks of sociality and the subjects they sustain' (Weeks1998:6). For the above stated reasons, 'Theories of feminist subjectivities based on accounts of women's labour carry the potential to speak to broad audiences of women, and particularly women outside of the academy' (Weeks1998:6). Weeks argues that ' "Women's work" is not just an instance of women's oppression and exploitation, it is also a site where alternatives can be constructed; women's labouring practices are not only constraining but also potentially enabling' (1998:7).

This thesis looks at the positive aspects of women's labouring. As Weeks writes, 'this potential power, these alternatives, are located not in some natural or metaphysical essence, but in our practices; more specifically, these possibilities of feminist subjectivity, of feminist political agency, are grounded in an ontology of labouring practices' (Weeks 1998:7). Standpoint theory relates back to this: 'Standpoint is constitutive of and constituted by a collective subject, in this case a feminist subject grounded in women's labouring practices and situated within the larger field of social relations that I call totality' (Weeks 1998:7). Weeks concludes:

> What I find valuable in the tradition of standpoint theory, then, is its commitment to make connections among what we are, what we do, and the larger framework of social relations we call totality; its interest in the subversive possibilities of women's labouring practices; and its efforts to assemble a collective feminist subject that is based on and dedicated to pursuing some of these possibilities (Weeks 1998:10). [5]

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[5] I have risked generalising that the research reflects what all women in the design industry think. Poststructuralism highlights that these are thoughts and experiences articulated through particular discourses reflecting individual subject positions. This research highlights collective issues.

4:4   The epistemological basis of this thesis

My epistemology begins with standpoint theory because I believe women's experiences, as different from men's, are one site in which to understand gender oppression. I have a strong belief in the benefits of knowledge of women's experiences, particularly experiences of labour within male dominated industries. However, my epistemology is shaped by poststructuralism and deconstructionism in which I search for meanings of gender difference inclusive of notions of diversity among women, with an awareness of the power inherent in the production of knowledge. I am exploring difference within the discourses of New Zealand women in the design industry. I believe design is a labouring practice in which women are able to produce meaning and experience, explore and reflect meanings around them aesthetically and functionally, and often consciously and unconsciously draw on their gendered experience of the world. Therefore I wish to frame the experiences of these women within a discourse, their discourse, and analyse and deconstruct this with a view to contradictions and diversity of meanings .

I need to include a theorising principle that also incorporates the fact that I am not only examining difference between men and women in design based on their experiences and perceptions, but I am also examining differences and therefore similarities and commonalities between the narrative experiences of the women. This is not merely standpoint epistemology but also postructuralism and deconstructionism. Deconstruction is an analysis of discourse or the body of 'stuff' that incorporates all words meanings and experiences in relation to women in the design industry. It is this area of discourse that I wish to analyse in more detail, exploring the spaces and gaps between meanings of difference, and the possible reasons for the contradictions and commonalties in women's experience of difference in design.

My epistemology is poststructuralist, because I believe all knowledge is situated on ungrounded ground. Indeed, my knowledge of the design industry is historically and culturally located. However, as a feminist research student, I believe in the

political importance of standpoint theory; I want to provide a body of knowledge of women's experience in the design industry with a special focus on gender, but with a view to the contradictions and diversity of meanings between women in design. I believe this knowledge would be best understood and interpreted with poststructuralist ideologies through the notion of deconstruction, analysing the meaning of the words repeatedly used in the discourses which construct the women's experiences, and hopefully identifying the power and influence of certain discourses in these experiences. This knowledge may point to the women's ontological positioning in relation to feminist politics, and would help us to understand what the design industry is like as a workplace for women.

Methodology

This is a feminist thesis, and as such my subject position is one in which I am critical of traditional research methods where the researcher seeks empirical information from an interviewee in order to confirm or dispute an hypothesis. Feminist scholars have been interested in the relationship between the researcher and research participant, particularly in regards to issues of power and the hierarchy of interviewer over interviewee. Feminist theory seeks to find alternatives to this research model, advocating for a more equal relationship, and stronger lines of mutual communication. However, when it came to my own research these issues became ruptured. It sometimes felt as though I could really only make small concessions to this notion of feminist research, because ultimately I was still the researcher gaining information from the interviewees and then taking it away. How do you interview women, talk to them, take their words away, cut them up and then still be able to say it is their voices, when I as researcher have shaped the questions and had control over the presentation of the answers?

The critique of power within research is one of the strongest elements of feminist theory. Within feminist methodological theory of research the critique is used in an attempt to eradicate many of the structures that uphold and support the power the researcher has over the participant. Many feminist writers have suggested that one of the ways to make the interview process less one-sided is to hand some of the power and control back to the interviewees. Firstly, during the interview itself the dynamics can be altered slightly; this includes deliberately encouraging the interviewee to question and inquire and as a result more interaction and mutual engagement is fostered. A second method used during the feminist research process to break down power relations between the researcher and participant is through the 'negotiation of the text.' The negotiation of text is conducted after the conclusion of the interview; it is an opportunity for the research participant to review the transcript and enter into further dialogue with the researcher.

Patti Lather writes that 'to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry' (Lather1991:71). Indeed, 'the overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience'(Lather 1991:71), and that is exactly what I am attempting to do within this research project. I am recording the voices of a small group of women in the design industry, and I am making their experiences and perceptions visible as far as possible without distortion, without the power of the researcher. I am unveiling their words and lives, with their permission and awareness. Lather comments, 'The question becomes how to produce an analysis which goes beyond the experience of the researched while still granting them full subjectivity. How do we explain the lives of others without violating their reality?' (Lather1991:74). What does it mean when I write that I am expressing the experience and perceptions of New Zealand women in the design industry with a feminist analysis? It means that I am not searching for anything definitive; I will not receive definitive answers. I will hear narratives, the women's voices within discourses that are historically and culturally located. The voices of the interviewees are leading and guiding the research project. They have some power over the shaping and portrayal of their voices but no real control. I am still responsible for this research project, but I am not simply taking their words away and writing them for my own ends or to develop and substantiate my own 'truths' as has been the case historically for many social science research projects. It is the subjects' 'truths' as well, and the 'negotiation of text' is an opportunity for the interviewees to consider further material and issues raised in the interviews. They are able to see their own words and my intentions, and to consider further how they react to these intentions.

However, this notion of my giving them power within the research to review interview material is problematic. The very fact that I bestow power on the interviewees or distribute some to them still leaves myself as researcher in the dominant position. Although I am relinquishing some of that domination I am in control of what I surrender. The dilemma is how much power should or can an interviewee be allowed; in practical terms how much of the transcribed interview can he or she review, alter, or comment on further? In addition, how might

altering the data affect the research? How important is the space between what was originally said and what has been altered? Can that space, and can those previous comments be used in the research if the interviewee has requested that they be omitted? These have all been interesting questions that have been thrown into discussion during the duration of this research. The benefits of the 'negotiation of text' seem to me to be enormous, especially in view of feminist research aiming to offer something back to its researchees. To me the negotiation of text is an opportunity for further dialogue, fostering stronger lines of communication and giving busy women involved in the research further points of contact in which to consider issues of gender.

In my thesis I am examining 'difference:' through the questions explored in the interviews it can be seen that I am presenting interviewees with the notion of difference. I ask women how they think their perceptions and/or experiences of the design industry may be different from men. It is possible I am thereby creating difference and shaping the outcome of the research by suggesting there may be a difference between men and women. Is this unavoidable? Or could it be understood that by presenting the interviewees with the prospect of 'difference' I am using it as a tool to reveal information, as a linguistic prompt? In which case am I revealing difference, revealing layers of understanding of difference through my questions? I am not stating that difference exists; but rather, I am asking the research participants to consider how it might exist.

The aim of my research is to observe the patterns found in recorded experiences and perceptions, which may lead me to a more genuine and honest understanding of New Zealand women in the design industry; this is not 'truth', for there is no 'truth.' To say there is a truth is to say there is a non-truth or something that is false, and that is to assert an objective, unaffected point of view. Feminist epistemology and feminist methodologies attempt to break down the binary of true and false. To assert my research as the 'truth' would be to prove or disprove a previous 'truth.' Feminism has concluded that truth and knowledge are patriarchal terms that are subjective, that is to say that these terms negate the personal investment that may have been made. Saying research is objective is to say it is

distinct from personal opinion, that it is objective, that it is the truth beyond the personal experience of the individual. To assert a new truth or to oppose it is to set up a binary structure in which there is good and bad; the previous way of doing research and the new way. Promoting the new research as the truth or as the 'real' method of research is to fail to recognise and acknowledge that this 'new' research is built and developed out of a critique of the old structure of research and therefore rests on contingent foundations; it is no closer to the 'truth' as it is built on the 'old truth'. The original foundation is incorrect so a new foundation is built in opposition; even though it is different, its existence and construction is based on the first formulation. (Butler 1982:16)

Poststructuralist theory goes further than establishing alternative structures in research; it acknowledges the contingency of all foundations. Acknowledging the fluidity of the epistemological foundations of one's research is to do poststructuralist feminist research. Rather than asserting objectivity or subjectivity, poststructuralism states all knowledges are situated and contain bias. We are all individuals, we have different standpoints, different feminisms and we are situated within different discourses. When we look at patterns and connections between our different voices, we must review ourselves. So not only is the data from research participants openly subjective; I myself, the researcher, am openly not without bias and therefore the research is fluid and floating too. This deconstruction of our own research methods allows feminist researchers to develop fluid knowledge that is acknowledged as resting on contingent foundations, and in my own case, to produce information and research that reflects the experiences and perceptions of, New Zealand women in the design industry.

However, how then does one's research remain political? The nature of feminist research is to offer a critique; if the levels of subjectivity become so validated that everyone's experience is judged equally, how then can we maintain a view of what is right and wrong? Indeed, what is oppression and what is discrimination? Historically the feminist movement has been striving for equality between the sexes and a positive affirming identity for women; where is the standard, or the common ground on which the battle is fought? What is the purpose of research, and the

political impetus, remembering that feminist research is both a critique and construct, and that feminist academic work, by nature of its being feminist, always strives to be political? Somehow the focus must return towards the initial inquiry, that is, gender issues within the design industry recorded through the experience and perception of New Zealand women who work within the design industry. The focus returns by examining connectedness and patterns. I am looking for connections and patterns in women's voices. By matching the threads of the interviews I can form a sketch of the environment, working relations, and the past, present and future. I may then be able to draw conclusions that are openly admitted to be based upon contingent foundations. Lather (1991:84) encourages researchers then to ask:

1. Did I encourage ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity, or did I impose order and structure?

2. What is most densely invested? What has been muted, repressed, unheard?

3. Did I create a text that was multiple without being pluralistic, double without being paralysed?
   -who are my 'others'? What binaries structure my arguments?
   -what hierarchies are at play?

4. Did I make resistant discourses and subject positions more widely available? Did it [the research] go beyond critique to help in producing pluralised and diverse spaces for the emergence of subjugated knowledges and for the organisation of resistance?

A further question is whether the researcher should be solely responsible for the interpretation. I am interpreting the women's dialogue; however, I do not feel I have the ownership of their words. I believe the 'negotiation of text' is an extremely important opportunity to re-seek permission to use their words and text, and rather than taking control I show the interviewees the context in which I am using their words and allow them to comment further. It is my interpretation, but I acknowledge that and give interviewees the opportunity to engage with my interpretation. Having given the interviewees opportunities to continue discussion and to 'check' me, I am still ultimately wielding the power as I am the researcher. They have taken time out to talk to me, and although they are able to double check

my recording of their words and the context into which their dialogue is being placed, they submit these to my control. I have chosen the questions, carefully of course, but still within the boundaries of what I wish to seek and understand.

The idea of ownership is one of the dilemmas of my research, and this runs parallel to difficulties within the design process. It is the question of who owns the new information: in my case the research participants who provided me with the information, or the researcher who formulates solutions, possible answers and explores potential avenues of possibilities? In the design industry the question is who owns the design? The client who requested it or the designer who provided it? A product has been created, but that creativity would not have occurred but for the need. My dilemma is that I am not working for anyone else; I am ultimately in control of this research, yet it is a collaboration. The research would not exist without the research participants, as it is their material and their research, in effect, not mine. Therefore am I the creator, or is their text and their words which are creating the research? Is their difference by design or am I designing difference?

Method

My method of research was to interview a selection of women who were involved in the design industry, recording their experiences and perceptions. I then analysed their discourse with a view to ideas of difference. Thirdly I deconstructed the notion of difference and looked at the contradictions and patterns in its usage. The design industry as a whole is large and made up of many different design disciplines incorporating fashion design, spatial design, graphic design, product design and architectural design, among others. Because of the vastly different nature of the designed objects, one wonders if the design disciplines could have very much in common. For example, the areas of fashion design and architectural design seem extremely unrelated to each other, but it is well understood that the process and principles a designer uses in the development and production of an object, be that a house or an haute couture gown, are virtually identical. As such the issues arising out of the workplace or 'industry' are also similar. For this reason I decided to interview a cross section of women for this thesis from as many of the different design disciplines as possible. This way I felt I would be able to gain a good understanding of what it is like to be a New Zealand woman in the design industry, and because I would be asking them about professional and personal aspects of their careers, I endeavoured to gain a cross section of women in terms of age and family status as well. I decided that I could interview only ten women, presuming the majority of the interviews would be of around one and half hours' duration.[1] I was able to make this assumption about the length of time the interview would take based on the work I had done in a pilot study, in which one interview had produced 3-4000 words and had taken 90 minutes.

6:1   Selection of interviewees

The broad criterion for selection was 'Women in the design industry.' Although I wanted a cross section of women from the different design disciplines, I did not

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[1] I actually interviewed eleven women in total, and the data analysis refers to dialogue from all eleven interviews.

necessarily want just to speak to 'designers' as such, but also to those involved with or teaching for the industry. This approach enabled me to interview one woman who was not actually a New Zealander but was working in a New Zealand design consultancy as a designer. She provided a useful commentary and insight into New Zealand women and the design industry from an outsider's perspective. Another woman I interviewed was not a designer but worked in design journalism, and she was selected because of her extensive daily involvement and interaction with men and women in the industry, particularly designers themselves. I spoke to two women who were involved in the teaching of design; they had worked in the design industry and were now preparing students to work in the industry. They provided an important perspective on the preparation and training for women in the design industry.

The selection of interviewees was based on their prominence, influence on and experience in different parts of the design industry, therefore most of the women I interviewed I found through magazine articles which featured their work or awards they had won. They were women I deemed to be 'successful' and influential in their particular area; not necessarily wealthy, but well known and respected in their particular design discipline. Some of the interviewees I discovered through word of mouth, interviewees themselves recommended colleagues and women they deemed to be interesting and successful. I believe it is important to indicate that all of the women could be identified as white middle class educated women. It was not intentional to exclude women of colour or women who identify as Maori or Pacific Islanders, but as a result perspectives outside of white middle class discourses in design are absent from this research. Their absence is probably indicative of Maori and Pacific Island women's relative invisibility in the design industry.

As well as attempting to gain a cross-section of women across design disciplines and in different areas of the design industry, such as teaching, designing and reporting on design, I also attempted to obtain a cross-section of women in terms of age and professional progress. Some of the interviewees were recently out of design school although they had already reached a high level of visibility in the

industry. Some were senior designers five or six years into a consultancy, and others were self-employed and running their own design businesses after ten to fifteen years working in the industry. Details of family structures and the personal lives of the interviewees could not always be known at the time of selection, but it has been possible to obtain a good cross section in this respect also. Of the eleven women interviewed, six of the women had children. There is a fairly even mix of married and unmarried women, and the ages vary from the mid twenties to the mid fifties. The interviewees were scattered throughout New Zealand geographically; there were two from the South Island, and the rest were from the Upper and Lower North Island. My cross section of interviewees looked like this:

Architecture:	*Senior Lecturer
	*Lecturer
	*Architect, practising for twenty years
Product design:	*Senior designer in design consultancy, practising for 5-10 years
Industrial design	*Junior designer, working in consultancy for two years
Graphic Design:	*Design executive for design firm, working in industry for 12 years
	*Designer, own business, worked in industry for 15 years
	*Design journalist, involved with designers in all areas
Spatial design:	*Design consultant, worked in industry for 12 years
	*Interior designer, worked in the industry for over 15 years
Fashion designer:	* In the design industry for over 15 years

6:2 Communication with Interviewees

After selecting potential interviewees I then wrote to them personally asking them to participate in my research project and explaining what the research was about. I also explained that the research project had Human Ethics approval; as research participants they could withdraw at any time; the interviews would be recorded but their identity would be concealed. The Human Ethics application in itself was particularly time consuming; a large part of the time was taken up deciding whether the interviewees would be anonymous or not and whether their information and identity should remain confidential. The reason I hesitated was that initially I did not want to conceal their identity; a large part of the selection process was based on their success, their public visibility and 'fame.' In effect I would be beginning discussion based on their public discourse.

However, in considering the Human Ethics application, my views changed resulting in my assurance to interviewees of complete anonymity and confidentiality for the interviewees. My reasons were twofold. Firstly, I believed they would be more comfortable talking to me and feel free to disclose information and talk on many different levels with the knowledge that they were anonymous rather than if their name was in print. For example, if they were part of a well-known design consultancy and there were aspects of the job and of the work environment that were sometimes difficult due to gender, the women might be reluctant to discuss it if they knew their name and the consultancy's name would be cited. By encouraging the interviewees to remain anonymous there was the possibility that I might be able to talk on a more personal level with the interviewees once the public layers were removed. At the same time, I thought this anonynimity could mean that later, reading the transcripts, I could distance myself from the interviews and concentrate on the text. However, I found that this was not the case; the interviewee is always visible in the mind of the researcher while the transcript is being read. The interviewee zooms back into moments fraught with good humour and rapport or to moments of tension. Even though the researchees are treated anonymously, they are not anonymous to the researcher. The advantages of remembering the interviewees' backgrounds, contexts and

situations is that the women's subject position is known. This gives their words a locality and directs the meaning and understanding that the researcher may develop.

6:3   The interview process

The majority of the interviews were in Auckland and Wellington, and I travelled from Christchurch to interview the research participants. I saw some interviewees at their workplaces, offices or workshops; others I met in neutral places such as a café or school. It was particularly rewarding to meet them in their own professional environment as that was what I was talking to them about. I thought carefully about what I wore to the interviews, often wearing a completely black outfit, which I believed gave me legitimacy. I believed it situated me in the realm of 'design,' disguising my inferior status of student.[2] It was interesting that on the days when I did wear black it was discussed in the interview and often the topic was not raised by myself. Black is very important in the design industry, inciting an air of mystique, artfulness and professionalism. The interviews began quite formally but many of them often relaxed into mutual discussion.

6:4   Interview Questions

The interview questions were crafted during my application to the Human Ethics Committee, and are listed in the appendix. Firstly, I felt the need to clarify the nature of design, at least how was it perceived by the interviewees. This established the boundaries of the interviewee's interests and work and served to reinforce my belief in the specificity, distinctiveness and uniqueness of the design industry. The answer to the first question often revealed an understanding of design as a process, and the second question was therefore at the heart of the interview. I asked how perceptions and understandings of design, the experience of the design process and the industry, may be different for men and women. The subsequent questions

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[2] I have considered my feelings of inferiority in relation to the interviewees to be an interesting inversion of the dynamics discussed in the methodology chapter. I had gone to great lengths before the interviews to dissolve any notions of the researchee as powerless. But even though I was the one asking the questions, I had feelings of inferiority alongside these very successful women.

pursued the possibility of 'difference' between male and female designers. I asked the interviewees whether they, or others, highlight their gender and label them as different. I asked them how they felt about the term 'female designer' and if they felt they 'performed' gender. Within the interview I was asking the interviewees to consider how they felt about difference, and whether it existed in design. It was immediately obvious, while conducting the interviews, that the women had similar experiences and perceptions of gender within the design industry.

6:5   Negotiation of Text

Following the transcribing of the interview, I then prepared feedback for each interviewee; this included parts of the transcript that I had highlighted and particular comments that I wanted to use and that I was interested in. As part of my human ethics submission I agreed to give the interviewees an opportunity to check the transcripts for anonymity and confidentiality; this was extremely important but was not my only reason for presenting them with parts of the transcript. As I have already mentioned in the methodology section, I felt quite strongly that these words belonged to the interviewees and I wanted to show them what I was doing with them, rather than taking their conversation with me away, carving it up and reorganising it, analysing it and rewriting it as my own. Instead I was going to highlight the important bits, the interesting and alarming bits, rearrange them and explain why I had chosen them and give the interviewees an opportunity to comment on them further. I heard back from eight of the eleven interviewees; unfortunately my correspondence took place over the holiday period, but it was heart-warming to receive feedback from such a high percentage and to continue the dialogue.

6:6   The text

The next stage of my research method involved what to do with the text; the recorded voices of the women amounted to a sizeable discourse on New Zealand women in the design industry. My first task was to sort the transcripts thematically, firstly according to the women's perspectives on design and the design industry, and secondly, according to their perspectives on difference, that is

the **perceived** differences between men and women in the design industry. There were patterns, similarities and consistencies in the way the women addressed some of these issues. My second task involved looking deeper at the differences and similarities not only in the perspectives but in the individual **experiences** of women in the design industry. Here I analysed their discourse in relation to the idea of 'difference.' My third task was to **deconstruct** the terms of difference: the terms and the words used by the women when they related their experiences and perceptions. This I have done in order to explore to a deeper level their understanding of difference, perhaps gaining an insight into how their expressions of 'difference' may reflect their ontology within the design industry.

Part II   The Context

Design

We have to open our minds to the possibility of design in order to understand it, as design is simply everywhere and in nearly all aspects of our lives Nearly every object that we use during our daily lives has been designed: from the Parker pen to the Apple Macintosh computer, from the posturepaedic bed to the second-hand car; from the steam iron to the bedside lamp; even the new running shoes with torquezone, the flat screened television, the new packaging on the tub of icecream, the office chair, the house, and the new shirt. 'Design is all around us: it infuses every object in the material world and gives form to immaterial processes such as factory production and services. Design determines the shape and height of a shoe heel, the access to computer functions through software, the mood of an office interior, special effects in films, and the structure and elegance of bridges' (Margolin1989:3). The study of design is the study of objects, signs, messages, people, art, technology and industry. Design is both fashionable and timeless, technological and artistic; design is both a product and it is a process. Design consists of both form and function: we are aware of bad design; we rarely notice good design.

Consider the toothbrush: we use it every day and we never think about it. A good well-designed toothbrush we use, we value, it is essential and we incorporate it into our lives, we need it, we desire it. We get pleasure out of its shape, not only because we may find it attractive, we like its colour or the grippy surfaces, or perhaps the dual tone bristles; but also because it *works*, it does not slip out of our hands, it gets at those 'hard to reach places'! A not so well-designed toothbrush affects out daily lives in a different way: if it slips out of our hands, or it bangs against our gums, or the bristles are too long, or the handle is too short, or too wide, we are aware of bad design. If we do not find the colour, shape, or form of the toothbrush pleasurable or it just does not 'look right' then it becomes aggravating to us.

The toothbrush has evolved; only five years ago, there would have been very little 'flex' in toothbrush and we probably would not have considered the two tone colourings fashionable; in the even more distant past we would have used toothbrushes made out of wood or porcelain before plastic materials became available, and we definitely would not have purchased toothbrushes shaped like Walt Disney cartoon characters. The design of the toothbrush is therefore both form and function, it is informed by technology and research as well as fashion and popular culture, and furthermore it is an object created for human use, necessitating high levels of communication between potential users and the designers in its development. The creation of this object is achieved through the 'design process,' the people who designed the toothbrush I used this morning did not just come up with the idea and suddenly there was the toothbrush. First they developed the brief, taking particular note of the ideal size of the bristles, the angle of the head and the length of the handle, in short, the needs of the user. They made a few adaptions, developing the idea and hoping to improve on original designs. They thought hard about the colour and style, the form of the object, considering the epoch in which they live, the future of which the toothbrush might be part. They developed a model, discussed it with the client and then produced the toothbrush, thereby producing a design.

The toothbrush is the result of a design process; the designers are artists, but their artistry exists within the parameters of the brief. They have an understanding of the technology used in the production of this object and they are good communicators, fully understanding the brief and the needs of the person using the toothbrush. Ultimately a well designed toothbrush will be both fashionable and practical, and the consumer demand for this designed product will last a long time. The designers, by providing us with new designs, are shaping our world, but also reflecting it. The new design may influence our lives, but design also reflects our lives. We have demanded and needed the product, and accepted the design solution and by continuing to purchase the newly designed toothbrush we give meaning to that design. It becomes part of our epoch. From the analogy of the toothbrush we can understand the main principles of design: firstly, that the term 'design/ed'

refers not just to an object that may have been designed, such as the toothbrush, but 'design' also refers to the process in which that object was developed, and 'design' may also be a description of the object:

> Design causes ambiguities because it has more than one common meaning: it can refer to a process (the act or practice of designing); or to the result of that process (a design, sketch, plan or model); or to the products manufactured with the aid of a design (designed goods); or to the look or overall pattern of a product ("I like the design of that dress"),(Walker 1989:23).

Design encompasses many different skills and disciplines and is not easy to describe or define; as already mentioned, it is both a subject and an activity, and it has been said that 'Design is both a noun and a verb'(Clark, cited in *'Design'* May 1994). [1] Design lies at the intersection of artistry, technology and humanity. Firstly there is art, the creative and aesthetic value of the object, when the individual artist asserts his or her own style upon the design; Secondly, there is the engineering and the technological development of the product: this is solution lead and the result of the fulfilment of a brief. The practical and functional aspect of the design is met through a process involving a client and the designer, in which good communication skills are paramount. The third important aspect of design is the humanity or the wider context out of which the design has emerged or is going into; this is where the design receives impact and meaning as a result of the socio-political and cultural environment:

> It is pulled toward art and aesthetics because many designers are properly concerned with the form and appearance of products. It is pulled toward engineering and the natural sciences because many designers are properly concerned with making products that work. And it is pulled toward the human sciences because many designers are properly concerned with communication and the relations between products and people (Buchanan 1993: 85).

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[1] Quoted by Dr Hazel Clark from the Swire School of Design in Hong Kong. Her comment was cited in 'Over To You', an article in which readers of *Design* magazine were asked to contribute to the debate over definitions of design and the designer's role.

In attempting to define what design is, it is probably easiest to define what it is not. It is not just art, or engineering or media. As already mentioned, design is at the junction between technology, science, engineering, consumerism and art. It involves both the individual and others, both thought and practice; it involves both the solution to a practical problem, the fulfilment of criteria, and artistic and creative flair. Design is a process and a product. Design is both form and function. This last sentence, design is both form and function, is the centre of an ongoing and important debate for both design theorists and design historians, particularly since the modernist movement (Dormer 1990:19).[2] If we return to the toothbrush, some would argue that function is the most important aspect of its design. An object may look a certain way as a result of functional development, and therefore the form of the object or its decorative aspects may be superficial or accidental. It is argued that ongoing consumption of a designed artefact would not take place if the functional aspects were not correct. Even if an object looked attractive or fashionable, if it did not meet its functional criteria it would fail to appeal to consumers. For example, a chair that looks exciting and avant garde, but is uncomfortable to sit on, is not going to be considered good design, in the same way that a toothbrush has to be comfortable and effective to use. There is no doubt that functionalism is paramount to the 'success' of design, but those who argue for the importance of 'form' place more emphasis on the consumption of the artefact, and the 'form' of the object is what makes it attractive to the consumer. For example, a stereo system that was technologically advanced and met all the functional requirements, yet left all the componentry visible and roughly housed, might not be considered as well-designed or as attractive as a stereo system with the same componentry but that was stylish and fashionably presented. The debate is becoming more centralised around the varying degrees of importance placed on form. Some may say it is more important; for example, some people consider that while the functions of buildings change, the outward appearance or form remains constant, and is maintained as the important element of the building.

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[2] Dormer writes that the Modernist movement, particularly in Europe during the period 1914-1930, advocated that form followed function. That is the argument which held 'that an honest design did not attempt to disguise what it did, how it worked and even what it was made from and how it was constructed' (Dormer 1990:19).

Modernist approaches to this debate suggest that form is a direct result of the fulfilment of functional criteria, as in the case of the stereo. Function is the production of sound, and for safety the componentry needs to be wrapped in a casing. Form therefore follows as a result of function. The development of technology influences form. Function within this model is given the privileged position over form. Feminist design historians are critical of this structural analysis because within this model, women's design is traditionally categorised as craft, which emphasises form. Form is given lesser importance that function, and the dominant areas of female design are thus marginalised (Attfield in Walker 1989:201); (Boys in Palmer and Dodson 1996:234).

Although postmodern design theorists may accept that function plays an important role, they do not see form quite as superficially or as indirectly related to the function of the designed object. Postmodern design theorists attempt to disrupt the binary of form and function, where function is privileged, by understanding the existence of form within its cultural, social and economic locale (Palmer 1996:110). The importance of form is to entice the consumer, and although many chairs may be comfortable and functional, only certain ones appeal and look attractive in a certain style or fashion that suits our needs of the moment. It is the same with the stereo; I believe the consumer does not just want a box with all the technological wizardry, it also has to look good, in much the same way that the toothbrush has to appeal to our sense of fashion and aesthetics.

The role of the consumer and the impact of marketing should not be underestimated. Everything is designed, but some objects of design increase in value because the 'designer' is recognised, or because of the way they are marketed; 'design' becomes the selling point. Somehow the object is superior to others because of its design, or because it was 'designed' by a noted individual. For example we talk about 'Designer Jeans;' all jeans are designed, but the demand for ones designed by a certain person reflects the material importance and influence of consumerist ideals (Walker 1989:24). Millions of dollars are spent on advertising every year, and 'designed objects' are promoted as popular culture; as

a result of this advertising, consumer demand for good design increases. Adrian Forty (1986) in his book *Objects of Desire* goes some way to measure the impact of consumerism in relation to design over the twentieth century. He discusses both form and function, and he suggests both aspects of design are linked closely with the morals and ideals of the age. The demands of a population reflect the changing face of popular design as much as the development of design may change the structure of our society. It is important to consider the development of computer technologies and labour saving devices in the home, for increasing technologies have lead to a changing environment, and changing environments have impacted on the way design has developed. The important message is that design is not isolated from society: it is affected by progress and incites progress, and the role of the consumer is very important in both demanding new design and consuming it. Forty writes that 'design is a more significant activity than has usually been acknowledged.' (Forty 1986:6)

Peter Lloyd Jones 1991 in his book *Taste Today*, examines the role of the consumer in relation to 'taste' and fashion. Both authors responded to modernist 'functionalist' theories of design and insist that design is located within more complicated meanings in society of what is good and bad design, and this is influenced by what we consider reflects society at the time. Both authors stress the importance of the consumer in the success of design. This begs the question of how do formulate what is good or bad design:

> Criticism of good and bad design in any period cannot be approached from the basis of your own individual likes and dislikes, but must come from an understanding of the theories and philosophies prevailing at the time. . . . You need to ask why some have survived and others have not. You need to consider strength and durability as well as real and assumed values, and sentimental attachment, when attempting to assess the historical value of such evidence (Conway 1987:8).

Good design could be judged as innovative, challenging and notable. In terms of form, for example, design by Phillippe Starck, Ettore Sottsass, and le Corbusier has challenged us in terms of new shapes, colours and style, yet it has remained legendary for its form rather than remaining faddish. Good design could also be

judged in terms of technological advancement, or function. For example, the development of the CD-ROM, the Sony Walkman, and the dishwasher are outstanding in their design because they have allowed us to alter our lifestyles as a result of innovation. In all cases the design has been lasting, and good design could therefore be measured   in terms of consumption. Good design continues to be produced and purchased, and it continues to have consumer appeal. Interest in the design is sustained over time; Tupperware, for example, which was first launched in 1946, continues to be produced (Dormer, 1993:48). Design may be fashionable, and this may increase sales, especially if it is part of a popular trend; if it becomes no longer fashionable or dated then sales may drop. The outward form of a design may need to be adjusted in order to remain a popularly consumed product, and fashion, interior and graphic designers are particularly aware of this. However, good design is not necessarily fashionable, especially architecture; as   already mentioned, good architectural design lasts over time, and often the function of a building has changed but the appearance or   the aesthetics of the design have endured and that was the important factor in its success. The visual appeal or form is still important, but although this is linked with fashion, good design remains desirable to the public over long periods of time with little alteration.

7:1   Design and Semiotics

Design is increasingly understood to play an important and influential role in our society. Some design theorists perceive the value of design to be immeasurable, yet because it is such a fundamental part of our lives we take it for granted and underestimate its importance and its persuasiveness. Victor Margolin, editor of the magazine *Design Issues*, writes: 'Design is more than a practice that professionals engage in; it is a fundamental human activity that is conducted in many varied ways. Design is as much an expression of feeling as an articulation of reason; it is an art as well as a science, a process and a product, an assertion of disorder and a display of order' (Margolin 1989:28) It is said that design makes and creates meaning. It both reflects the world, our mood and the values in our society and it shapes them. It provides us with possibilities and encourages us to think about the future in challenging and alternative ways. This process can be understood in part

through the technology of design; in the computer age, for example, where there is a constant drive towards obtaining more efficiency and speed. It seems that the more high speed gadgetry we have, the more we need. Yet we can also challenge technology; design is foremost for human use, and so new technology is only useful and attractive if we need it. [3] Design shapes our future and our present; by allowing design to become part of our lives, not only does it arrive as an object of new meaning, but by our acceptance and use of it we give it meaning. It becomes valuable and significant (Sparke1986:xxii). As with the development of the electric shaver, the calculator, the automatic washing machine, the dishwasher and the personal computer. These 'designs' have altered our lives; however, when we were first presented with these concepts, they were almost meaningless. For some people the personal computer belonged in the realm of the imaginary, and once upon a time even the notion of a cellular phone would have been inconceivable to most of us. The designed object and the role the designer plays are significant in creating societal possibilities and realities. But the development of an object is not isolated from its surroundings. It is situated in a psychological, social and cultural context (Margolin 1995:xi); The designer expresses him or herself through design; they express and reflect their experiences of the world and through the exploration of ideas and the proposal of solutions are able to shape the world as well as reflect it. Design communicates to us what we are as a society and what we can be. In this way design can inscribe an epoch.

7:2   Design Process

Design is not art. Firstly, as already discussed, design is not art because design consists of both form and function, whereas 'art' could be understood as consisting only of form. The second reason that design is not art is that a designer does not

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[3] In *Urbis* magazine, No 3, Autumn 1999:94. An article about Bang and Olufsen's chief designer David Lewis, says that B&O wants people to control technology, not the other way round. Lewis comments: 'The problem with new technology is that it opens up so many opportunities. Instead of making life easier, it often makes it more complicated because people have more options than they need.' He says, ' No-one asks consumers whether they want all these options which they might not even need and which, in fact, often frustrate them'.

work independently; that is, a designer in general terms, creates for or in relation to someone else. A designer is limited in his or her artistic activity by the demands of a client. A client determines what the functional demands are and sets the boundaries of budget and time which may influence a designer's choice of materials and influence the creative possibilities. Because of the limitations imposed on the designer, communication becomes a very important aspect of the design process. The finished design, whether of a toothbrush, chair, stereo or house, must meet the needs of the client and be attractive. In order to ensure this, the designer often builds a close relationship with clients in order to understand them. Within the design process the designer establishes many relationships in order to bring about successful design.

Communication is a very important aspect of both the design process and the designed product. A designer does not work alone; although she or he may design individually, or even be self-employed, their work is created for use by others and is often produced by auxiliary bodies who have to understand what the designer's intentions are, hence the importance of good communication skills. It is said the designer is often the 'middle man:'[4]

> A figure mediating between manufacturers and the public. . . . Designing usually involves many compromises. It also means performing work upon determinate materials in relation to specific problems. Often, the task set is not the creation of something new but the redesign of an old product. Perhaps the unique ability of the designer is to synthesise. It is in this context that the qualities of imagination, inspiration, inventions and intuition play their part (Walker 1989:51).

Dormer also describes a designer as a 'middle man' but focuses on the designer's creative position. He emphasises that the designer is a stylist: 'A broker of ideas and values, a middle personage between the manufacturers, engineers and applied scientists on the one hand, and the consumer on the other' (Dormer 1990:10). As already mentioned, a designer must be able to communicate with the client in

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[4] 'Middle man' may be considered a sexist term; I am not using it myself but rather quoting John Walker.

order to understand the brief fully, to negotiate difficulties, to satisfy needs, to meet the criteria successfully and to problem solve. The designer must often also ensure that the design is understood in terms of mass production; for example, a graphic designer must make her or his needs known to printer and a fashion designer has to communicate concepts to the clothing manufacturer. 'The craftsperson does not have the problem of communicating his or her intentions to others for translation into objects. The designer must make his or her intentions explicit - communication is at the heart of . . . design' (Dormer 1993:9). This is perhaps the most important area within the design process; however, as already mentioned, the designed object itself is a form of communication with the outside world from the point of view of the designer.

7:3   The importance of design

Design is important because of the increasing and unknown affect it has on our world and on our lives:

> Design . . . operates culturally in a number of significant ways. First, products embody notions of identity that are socially recognised and thus become tokens in the symbolic exchange of meaning. Second, products become instruments for individual and collective action that ranges from the provision of essential needs to hobbies and pastimes. Third, products as tokens of economic exchange are central to the formation of global trade patterns and the accumulation of capital. Design policies are therefore integral to debates about national economic and social development, just as design philosophies and values on an individual and group level shape our reflections on how might live (Margolin 1995:xix).

Design is also important because of the possibilities for the future and the role design may have in this: 'The challenge is to gain a deeper understanding of design thinking so that more co-operation and mutual benefit is possible between those who apply design thinking to remarkably different problems and subject matters. This will help to make the practical exploration of design, particularly in the arts of production, more intelligent and meaningful' (Buchanan 1995:6).

Women in Design

I began the research for this thesis with a literature review of women in the design industry. It was very interesting to find that the majority of material written about female designers or women and design was from the late 1970's onwards. Of these resources, most publications that refer directly to contemporary women's experiences of the design industry were published during the 1980's. It is interesting to me that as a society we have seemingly stopped talking about women's experiences, particularly in relation to design. I do not believe it is because the feminist ideologies have been discarded, rather that they have been subsumed into other discourses, such as consumerism and the study of aesthetics. Why do feminist academic design theorists not focus on gender difference anymore? Are women in the design industry no longer interested in talking about gender inequalities, are they equal? Or is it too hard to keep talking about difference? Do women in the design industry fight for gender equality differently now? These were some of the questions I found myself asking as I researched the literature.

In this chapter I explore the main issues present in the literature and I outline my field of inquiry. Virtually all the material I refer to throughout this chapter is focused on white, middle-class, western women. New Zealand is a bicultural nation, but New Zealand material about women in design, mostly magazine articles, does not reflect this. Other literature used in my thesis, which is mostly sourced from Britain and the United States, serves to reinforce the notion that women who have succeeded in design are predominantly white, middle-class educated, western women.

Within design discourses, the term 'designer' is a non gender-specific term;' however, it is assumed to be male, and hence we use the term 'female designer' to qualify it (Attfield 1989:207); (Buckley 1989:258). The term 'female designer' then exists to compare and contrast with the assumed male subject; 'We never speak of the masculine art or man artist, we say simply art and artist. But the art of

men can only maintain its dominance and privilege on the pages of art history by having a negative to its positive, a feminine to its unacknowledged masculine' (Parker and Pollock 1981:80). Women are identified as outside of design; they are not assumed to be designers, rather the designers are assumed to be men. It has been assumed the designer is male and therefore we feel the need to recognise a woman working in this career as different or 'other' than the male norm, in much the same way as a doctor until recently was assumed to be a man and therefore we felt the need to say 'female doctor' or 'lady doctor.' We have rarely said 'male doctor' and it seems we never say male designer. What this may mean for women working in this profession is that the 'designer' or male designer is seen as the 'real one' and women find themselves in the position of having to prove themselves, measuring up as 'other' to the standard. It appears women have only recently entered the design industry; although women are now visible in areas such as architecture, we are only slowly building up a repertoire of well-known identities of female designers and well known names, internationally and within New Zealand.[1] Of the Kiwi 'female designers' whose names are well known in mainstream culture in New Zealand, many work in the area of fashion or interior design, for example, Karen Walker and Susie Paynter who both recently won international acclaim.[2]

Today we view design as encompassing many different areas such as makeup design, set design, textile design, ceramic design, and web site design, to name a few. However, within this thesis I have discussed design under the the main areas of architecture, product/industrial, spatial/interior, graphic and fashion design. The

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[1] An awareness of female designers in New Zealand has been encouraged by magazine articles such as 'Designing Women' written by Sandra Coney, and the article 'Women in Architecture' by Lynn Loates; which presented a group of female architects. There have also been small articles written on NZ architect Miriam White , and Pamela Bell, a snowboarding clothing designer (Dunbar 1997). At the time of writing this thesis, Grace magazine had written a small article on Barbara Lee and also featured Dorenda Britten. I have found no substantive literary engagement on New Zealand female designers beyond magazine articles. The majority of feature articles in NZ design related magazines still feature male designers.

[2] Karen Walker is fast becoming a household name as a NZ fashion designer. She received a lot of publicity with the successful showing of her garments in Australian Fashion week and in the 1999 London Fashion week, she also recently featured in an article in Harper's Bazaar 1999. Susie Paynter, is not so well known but featured in the Press, March 1998 after reaching the finals of an international interior design competition.

areas of design in which women received the most publicity, such as fashion and interior design, were historically thought of as arts and crafts, an area in which women were expected to be prolific. Women's creativity was marginalised to the realm of work done within the home, therefore it was not considered professional design work. As a result there has been an historical perception of the dichotomy of interior/exterior and the valuing of exterior and implicitly masculine design disciplines over female design disciplines. Jos Boys writes: 'Binary oppositions framing society as divided into (false) appearance and (true) essence, surface and depth, superstructure and base, were literally translated into architectural form as decoration (trivial, superficial, false, feminine) and structure/form (essential, honest, true, masculine) (Boys 1996:234). This binary overlaps with the binary of form and function; not only is most women's design work perceived to be in the area of fashion and interior; this has been considered craft or activity of the home rather than work, and craft has been considered decorative. Therefore women's design was placed within the area of 'form' rather than 'function which was privileged and given higher status within design history. Judy Attfield writes very succinctly:

> The dominant conception prioritises the machine (masculine) over the body (feminine). It assigns men to the determining, functional areas of design - science, technology, industrial production - and women to the private domestic realm and to the 'soft,' decorative fields of design. It places form in the feminine realm where its role is to reflect the imperatives of the 'real.' According to this kind of aesthetic theory then, form (female) follows function (male) (Attfield, in Walker 1989:201).

Furthermore, the argument in design theory for form over function omits and marginalises areas of design such as fashion (Attfield 1989). Buckley has noted: 'Fashion design is not included in any of the basic surveys of nineteenth and twentieth century design history, even though it is undoubtedly the product of social, technical, political and cultural developments which parallel other areas of design' (Buckley 1989:262). She continues: 'Fashion as an important area of design is trivialised because of its association with women. It is seen as a marginal

design activity because it caters to women's socially constructed needs and desires'
(Buckley :261).

In analysing the experiences and perceptions of women in the design industry, I
adopted a feminist viewpoint. Judy Attfield identifies two approaches to the idea
of women in design, the feminist approach and the 'women designers approach.'
She writes: 'The latter merely bolts on to an existing framework and does nothing
to dismantle the hierarchy which positions women in the domestic area normally
seen as subordinate' (Cited in Walker 1989:201). Linda Nochlin in 1971 wrote
about female artists from a feminist perspective. She asked, 'Why are there no
great female artists?' She argues that there have been no great women artists, not
only because they have not been recorded, but also because they have not been
able to reach such high levels of achievement in their work, and have never been
accorded the attention that would have made them great. The societal systems and
structures have not allowed for great women artists.

Until now, design historians have focused on the success of the individual design or
object study, from both of which women have in general been excluded, though
this explanation does not entirely account for women's absence from design.
Increasing awareness of women in design history, such as Eileen Grey, Susie
Cooper and Marianne Brandt, is very important,[3] and now their lives as designers
are documented with an awareness of the pressures placed on them due to their
gender. A good example of this is very recent redocumenting of Charles and Ray
Eames, as traditionally the focus has been on the individual successes of Charles
Eames. It is very interesting to see what happens to the woman when a
heterosexual design couple is discussed in the media, such as Sonia Delauney
(Buckley 1989:253) or Ray Eames (Kirkham 1995:374-375). Both women were
successful and extremely talented designers in their own right, but their work
became overshadowed and dominated by the success of their male partners.

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[3] Literature on women in design history such as Suzie Cooper and Sonia Delauney, and many
other notable female designers, is to be found in Attfield (1995), Anscombe (1984) and Seddon
and Worden (1994). Anscombe, in particular, features a chapter on women at the Bauhaus titled
'the Rational Woman' pp131-144.

Recent literature has served not only to reverse this imbalance but to illuminate the further tensions women in design have had and may experience. Pat Kirkham (1995) has recently written a book about the lives and work of Charles and Ray Eames, two extraordinary American designers, primarily in the areas of architecture, furniture and film. Kirkham has recounted their success and their failures; she has described aspects of a very successful partnership and some of the difficulties Ray experienced. Kirkham has portrayed the 'creative genius' of Charles, which is well known, but she has also delved more deeply into the work of Ray Eames and has provided a more accurate account of the importance of her role in the success of Eames Design without merely adding her to the account of Charles:

> I have put considerable emphasis on Ray's contribution to the partnership in the preceding chapters not to distract readers form the achievements of Charles (once characterised as a "one-man think tank, whose restless unconfined brain sheds ideas with dazzling brilliance") but to give Ray due credit and to indicate something of her many talents, including what Billy Wilder called her "absolutely perfect taste", what Esther McCoy referred to as her "rich and audacious imagery" and what former staff members spoke of as her brilliant and exceptional eye (Kirkham 1995:374-375).

Feminist scholars have now addressed gender issues in design history, highlighting female designers and promoting them. Raising visibility is very important in terms of providing role models and awareness of women's increasing role in design. There is still a need for this process to continue, as in contemporary situations women may still be invisible. [4] However, women are still left as 'other' in contrast to male designers - the standard. We need to analyse the structures inherent in this industry that perpetuate inequality between men and women, and allow for the promotion of 'exterior' design disciplines over 'interior' design disciplines: 'Historians must not lose sight of their central objective: to develop and expand the body of historical research which seeks to account for women's relationship to

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[4] For example, the British Design Museum was set up in 1989 and women are still very much absent from a huge number of the exhibits, and contemporary works. (Usherwood 1991"Form follows Funding' , p262)

design and then set this research firmly within a historical framework of feminist design' (Cheryl Buckley 1989: 262).

Attfield (1959) states that feminist design research need not see women as victims of design history as this would merely perpetuate ideas of powerlessness: 'A feminist analysis can address women as agent, player, partner, beneficiary or colluder rather than always cast as the stereotypical victim' (Attfield 1995:2). Buckley argues that we should 'analyse the material and ideological operation of patriarchy in relation to women and design, 'and that we should critically assess the 'rules of the game' (Buckley, cited in Margolin 1989:262). She also writes: 'Attempts to analyse women's involvement in design that do not take issue with gender, the sexual division of labour, assumptions about femininity, and the hierarchy that exists in design, are doomed to failure' (Buckley, in Margolin 1989:262). In researching women in the design industry, the questions must be asked: are women producing design that is different from men? Are they naturally inclined towards interior aspects of design such as detail, colour, and texture? Is there a feminine design style; or are women relegated to areas of design considered feminine? Is there actual gender difference? Or is there a perception of difference, a myth maintained by patriarchal structures of the design industry for the benefit of men? The definition of male and female design rests on assumptions of what it means to be either male or female, and these are social constructions. Those areas of design associated with women's socialisation, such as fashion design, interior design, and craft design are subsequently less valued. Do women design differently, or is their work prevalent in marginalised areas of the industry? Is the commitment needed to succeed in the design industry in conflict with the pressures many women may experience in the home. What are the issues surrounding the design industry as a workplace in terms of family? What makes women's contributions unique, what do they do that is different and is this subconsciously a result of gendered orientation or deliberate and to do with personal identity and politics?

The New Zealand design industry

New Zealand is a young country in comparison to other societies in the world. It is geographically diverse and home to a number of cultures as well as Maori and Pakeha. These elements of New Zealand's identity are reflected in its production of design and art. The professionalised images of the design industry, however, those that are seen in magazines like *Prodesign, Urbis, Architecture New Zealand, and New Zealand Home and Building,* are predominantly discourses of white middle class educated New Zealanders. In New Zealand the design industry has been historically male dominated, particularly in the areas of architecture, product design and graphic design. In 1998 and 1999, publications such as *Prodesign* and *Urbis* still predominantly feature more articles on male designers than female, which reflects this bias. However, there are increasing numbers of women training in design and women who have trained and are now working in the industry are becoming more visible.

The design industry as an overall identifiable body - inclusionary of all design disciplines - consists largely of small consultancies, particularly in New Zealand. Many consultancies or design business are owned and run by self-employed designers. Publicity, and public recognition of design centres around the larger but fewer design consultancies, who because of their greater resources and collective skills receive more prestigious clients and commissions bringing more publicity. The most interesting design innovation does not necessarily come from the large international design firms; in New Zealand many small business have developed important and innovative design solutions. Because most design firms in New Zealand are small, with fewer than five people employed, many designers work freelance or as consultants. Self-employment, particularly for women, has many rewards, such as the freedom to dictate one's hours of work and manage one's time around outside commitments. There are also many stresses, however, such as the pressure of finding clients and seeking new work. Although the public perception of the design industry is that it is glamorous, for the majority of designers and people working within the industry this is not the case, especially for

people working within small consultancies who may compete for work and struggle to meet deadlines.

Feeding into the industry are about twenty tertiary design educational institutes in New Zealand,[1] which across all design disciplines appear to have nearly equal numbers of male and female students. Although there are slightly more men graduating in architecture, fashion design students are still predominantly female.[2] Equality between the sexes at design school is not necessarily reflected in the appointment of partners in design firms, although it is expected that over time this will change; as more women are educated and skilled in the more 'masculine' of the design disciplines, this will be reflected in the industry. Graphic design, for example, now comprises 50% male and female students and that is probably in part due to the greater accessibility women have to computer technology in secondary education, which has allowed them to succeed at tertiary level in computer aided design. The design industry is a male dominated workplace, especially so in the more technical areas of design, such as architecture and industrial design. These disciplines offer more prestige and more money, and they are considered professions rather than crafts. Women tend to dominate, succeed, and are more visible in the more creative and artistic areas of design such as fashion and interior design. Unfortunately this dichotomy reinforces the stereotypical view of women designers in the peripheral craft like areas of design.

The design industry is made up of many smaller industries. We talk of design as a process and an industry, containing many specialised disciplines which are industries in their own right, and often independent of each other. For example, graphic design is a design discipline independent from architecture or fashion design. It has its own clients, its own specialist training and its own national awards (Design in Print Awards). However, design disciplines do overlap at times; for example, interior or spatial designers may work closely or in partnership with

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[1] The majority of these are departments within polytechnics, or private art and design schools. This information was sourced from 'Art and Design Education 1999' and the New Zealand Tertiary Students guide 1997'.
[2] New Zealand Education Statistics for 1998 show that 1337 male students graduated with a degree in Architecture or Town Planning, whereas only 927 females did.

architects, and product designers may at times do the work, or employ the services, of graphic and packaging designers. They all participate in the design process, which as already mentioned is where the designer must have a brief, be in close communication with the client, and work towards the development of a design solution. Designers from different disciplines may all encompass and reflect a particular style or epoch popular with the consumer and conveying the societal mood of the time. Both architects and fashion designers are designers, but although the type of work they do is vastly different, it could be understood as a continuum, whereby architecture is at one end of the spectrum, as the most technological and structural design discipline and the one most generally understood as a profession. Fashion, at the other end of the spectrum, is possibly the most creative in that the brief that the clothing designer has is the least constraining. Fashion design is perhaps seen as a glamorous job rather than as a profession. It can also be seen that whereas function may be the most important aspect of architecture, in fashion design, form becomes the dominant feature. Architecture is the most male dominated of the design disciplines and fashion has the highest percentage of females working within it: while only 13% of architects are women, 88% of fashion/clothing designers are female. It is interesting to consider this state of affairs in relation to the notion of architecture as the highest paid form of design and fashion as one of the least well paid of the design disciplines. Architecture, is at the top end of the scale, that is, the median income of New Zealand architects is $40,000 p.a., compared to $20,700 for a clothing designer. It is also very interesting to consider this situation in terms of the perception of 'form' as lesser than 'function.' It appears that there is a direct correlation between this continuum, the employment of men and women, and pay scales.

In the middle of this continuum with architecture at one end and fashion at the other lies a myriad of other forms of design: industrial interior, spatial and graphic design, not to mention makeup design, set design, and web site design amongst others. Graphic design, which comes under the umbrella of Commercial Design within the statistics provided in 1998, (Ministry of Cultural Affairs 1998:53-55) is an occupation almost equally represented by men and women, although 40% are

under the age of 35, and so this may account for a good representation of gender.[1] (Only 31% of all architects in New Zealand are under 35; 60%. of female architects were aged under 35, in contrast to 26% of men). It is also important when analysing incomes to note that the average income of a male architect in New Zealand is $43,800, compared to female architects' income which is $13,700 lower. Architecture is an industry where income and monetary success is dependent on experience and previous work. Architecture is performance based: in order to earn large amounts of money one is required to have got a job in a large firm or, if working independently, to have established a reputation over a long period of time.

In New Zealand the public awareness and promotion specifically of the design industry and individual designers is based around two major design publications that encompass nearly all design disciplines. *Prodesign* readership is aimed at members of the industry, And *Urbis*, which was launched in Spring 1998, is an attempt to engage members of the public with design and to target overseas readership and appreciation of Kiwi design. There are also specialist design magazines such as *Fashion Quarterly* and *Architecture New Zealand* which target specific design disciplines. In these magazines it is evident that articles on specific designers or design identities are not balanced equally between male and female. Is this because there are not enough 'good' female designers in New Zealand? I want to consider within this thesis whether or not women are disadvantaged in the design industry due to their gender.

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[1] Dave Clark in the article 'Graphic design salaries - where do you sit?' (*Prodesign* Dec/Jan 1998-1999) estimates that a 'junior' graphic designer ('Diploma or Degree Graduate, no experience') may earn $22-25,000 per year in New Zealand, and a 'senior' designer' (Diploma or Degree Graduate, 5+ years' experience) may earn $50-75,000 per year. These salaries appear to be higher than those of an architect. In the article there is no discussion on differences in graphic design salaries due to gender, but it is suggested that for a person working in the position of 'senior' designer, 'a typical week incorporates a minimum of 45 hours and in many cases exceeds a 55 hour week'. (*Prodesign* Dec/Jan 1998-1999: 42-43). Until women have worked long enough in the industry to reach senior level, this area of design will probably still remain male dominated; but the long hours required in a position such as that of senior designer, may also serve to exclude women with family commitments.

New Zealand women in the design industry:

Designing difference

In the following chapters I will be exploring the particular comments and dialogue made by the research participants throughout the interviews. This material is referred to as the data analysis. Initially I will be considering the women's words in terms of overall themes and patterns. Chapters 11 and 12 in particular contain a thematic analysis. Chapter 11 looks at overall perceptions of gender-differences in design, and Chapter 12 looks at women's experiences of gender-differences. Later in Chapter 13 I employ discourse analysis, where I look even more closely at words that are repeatedly used. I consider the discourses that are informing these words, and what the use of these words may indicate about women's ontological understanding of feminism.

The aim of my research has been to record the experiences and perceptions of New Zealand women within the design industry, and from there search for commonalities and similarities and patterns in their voices. If one really looks hard at the questions I posed, no matter how open they were, what I was actually asking the interviewees was: What about difference? Is there difference between men and women in design? Fearing that I had pre-empted these answers, I recall the deliberation in my choice of questions; I was prepared for any result. As such the interview material has truly lead my research, because it can be seen there has been a pattern forming throughout the interviews, one which can best be teased out and discussed within the term 'difference.'

I am analysing the words of my interviewees with a view to difference; that is, the possibility of difference between men and women in the design industry. Firstly **A: What do the women perceive, identify and describe as differences?** What do I identify as differences between men and women, according to the women's experiences and perceptions? This section is concerned mainly with the designed object and the design process. Secondly, **B: What are the women's experiences**

of difference? What do the women identify as specific experiences of difference? What do their experiences tell us about the nature of the design industry in which they work?   Consistencies are important; words and descriptive phrases repeated by many of the women may form a suggestive pattern. This section is mainly concerned with the working environment. **C: Meta-difference or différance.** Within the women's personal discourse, what are the women really saying? What do their words, terms and construction of gender difference mean; especially given that it is articulated within a specific discourse? What do their experiences and perceptions mean in terms of the politics of equality and difference? I am aware of contradictions in what the women are saying, and this was a consistent pattern (Grace 1998: 116) that   I identified. There was a reluctance to acknowledge difference and yet difference was identified. I am particularly interested in the comments made by interviewees that denied difference. Can their ontological positioning be understood through their articulation of difference? If so, how might their ontological positioning help us to understand design and the design industry in New Zealand?

The data, as already mentioned in Chapter Six on Method, is gathered from the transcripts of eleven interviews. The interviewees were all women, ranging in age from their mid twenties to their mid-fifties, and they were geographically distributed from the upper North Island to the mid South Island. The women work in the areas of architecture, product design, spatial design (previously known as interior design), graphic design and fashion design. The interviewees were chosen because of their prominence in their field of design. I will quite often refer to the interviewees by their first names during the course of the data analysis. These are not their real names, but are pseudonyms; the interviewees, as set out in the human ethics application, are completely anonymous. The basis of my research was to record and explore their experiences and perceptions of the design industry with a view to issues of gender and possible differences between men and women in the industry. Within the interviews we explored the possibility of gender differences in the design process, in the final design product and in relationships with other

people within the industry. The interviews all followed a particular format, in which the interviewees first defined their perceptions of design. This was necessary to understand the context of their experiences and perceptions. So as part of the first stage of analysis in which I explore the possibility of difference between men and women in the design industry; we shall first examine the subject of design. What is it?

10:1 Definitions of design

In this section I have highlighted comments made by the women that describe design. These are general descriptions that are thematically organised. They help portray the context in which the women's words are being produced, and also help reinforce understandings of design discussed in the earlier chapters.

Design is distinct from art in that it consists of both form and function, it is created within a process involving a client, a brief and the designer. A designer wants work to be accepted, and design is said to reflect society as well as encourage it to think in different ways. Here principles of design are discussed from the point of view of the research participants, and according to the interviewees, many of the aspects of design that they discuss are experienced by both sexes.

Let us examine what the interviewees said about design:

'Design's problem solving.' (1:43)

'Design is an idea.' (2:15)

'Design is different things to different people.'(3:16)

'Design is the application of creative thought to productive development.'(4:46)

'The making of the aesthetics of the object.' (6:12)

'It's something about making things and thinking about how to make them and thinking about the cultural development of human beings. It's really only about what human beings created or have done in their past and will do in their future . . . design for me . . .[is] finding a solution to how to make things . . . and beautiful things . . . . Design has to have substance, it has to have meaning and it has to have ideas behind it.' (8:116)

'A general attempt to define it would include issues of making, speculation.'(9:37)

'Design is fulfilling a visual need, to communicate something that is . . . in an effective way going to touch as many people as it possibly can.' (10:64)

'It's very much an expression of our times isn't it? Where we're living, the here and now, the where we are, It's quite a powerful profession isn't it?'(5:180)

'There's some people where it's a passion, it's their life, it's really their first love, and it's a kind, it's not an addiction but it's kind of an obsession. And you just can't get enough of it and when you stop or when it goes by the wayside you feel less, you feel like there's something lacking, like you don't have enough iron in your body.' (9:144)

These comments go some of the way to explaining the intensity of design, and its specificity and uniqueness.

10:2 Desire and consumption

Following on from definitions of design, it is obvious that design is not always simply art. Design is not produced in isolation or solely by an artist. Design is produced out of a need. Design is used, accepted and is a consumer product, unlike art which is merely ornamental or aesthetic.

'. . . design is not art. And I think there is a fundamental separation there. Because art is simply expressing creativity and it is raw creativity, whereas designers are all using creative thought to the application of something potentially useful and one would hope, beautiful as well. But the activity is directed at something which has a function whether it's building or clothing or graphic. Visuals or . . . a letter head or whatever . . . Industrial design, interior design, fashion design, graphic design, architectural design, that is all creative thought applied to something useful.'(4:48)

The difference between design and art was also expressed by the interviewees as the need for the public to desire their work.

'I think the dream of every designer is to actually make something that somebody else wants to own.'(2:182)

To be a really great designer is to produce an artefact that everyone wants.

'I think if I was a true artist of sculptor or a painter maybe I would think I just want to paint. I don't care if anybody ever buys it, but I want to make clothes and I want someone to be busting to wear it . . . ' (2:186)

Where an artist may work in isolation, a designer works for others. Successful design is design that is accepted and desired by others, and this is judged by the ongoing consumption of the product. In order that design continues to be 'wanted', some argue it must remain fashionable and a part of the dominant popular culture. Although design is said to be fashionable it is also beyond fashion. Good design may exist unchanged across many different fashions. It reflects society's taste of the moment, but it also pushes the boundaries of what is accepted, guiding and challenging people to think beyond what already exists. Fashion design is momentary and fleeting in contrast to architectural and industrial design which may last for many years; all design, however, strives to be long lasting and desirable to the public.

Fashion consists of style: good design is stylish, and designers tend to be people who are confident about expressing their style. They lead others towards certain styles; they lead others towards new trends in fashionable objects. In the interviews it was suggested that the public places considerable responsibility on designers to develop fashionable styles that can be adopted, and by purchasing 'fashionable' design these members of the public will then be 'fashionable.'

' There's an element there where the design industry provides a sense of safety and security to those who have no sense of their own style, or no ability to develop their own style. and so there are always fashionable designers and they cover the whole range of fashion, letterheads, interiors, architecture.' (4:73)

However, as it has already been mentioned, good design lasts across time and across fashions. As one interviewee said:

'Some fashionable design is good but not all good design is fashionable.' (4:77)

It is interesting to consider fashion in terms of Saussure and language. We could consider fashion to be a language of our time, providing us with meanings and discourses and messages on how to act and be at a certain point in history. Saussure (1983) insists that nothing exists outside of language, and therefore we give meaning to the world through language. If this is the case, and we consider fashion to be a language, then it is possible that we give meaning to fashion as much as we accept that it has meaning. What I mean by this is that we are given a new object of design and this is presented to us as 'fashionable', but until we accept it, use it , and continue to purchase it, it is not fashionable. We make something fashionable and can reject something as not fashionable.

10:3 Design as a process

As discussed in Chapter Seven, design is a process, one involving the need for the designed object by a client, who sets the boundaries for what is and is not acceptable. The client sets the brief, and the designer walks carefully between the possibility of creative expression and the restrictions placed on her by the client. The process involves the sharing of ideas and high levels of communication between the client who wants the design and the designer who must produce it. It is thought that to a large extent the success of the design rests upon that relationship, and this process, intrinsic to design, was described by the interviewees:

'The bottom line is that's who you're doing it for, you're not even doing it for yourself, you're doing it for your client . . . . I mean I'll bust a gut and everything, I will bust a gut for and no compromises for my design and for the consultancy

and everything but the bottom line is I'm doing it for the client because I want them to have 110% from me.'(3:131)

'It's really delving into what the client wants and really understanding it.'(5:39)
'I think for successful design and successful designers I think communication skills are essential and they need to be honed all the time. I think for young people coming through I think the ability to articulate what they're trying to achieve and to talk intelligently with a client and really get to the basis of what the client wants, I think they need to be good communicators.'(5:176)

The women when discussing the design process indicated that there might be a difference in approach between men and women. This will be discussed later in Section A.

10:4 The design industry as stressful

Working in the design industry can be extremely stressful, firstly because of the pressure to produce design that is considered 'fashionable' and that will remain in demand by consumers. Because it is affected by fashion and popular culture and is constantly changing and evolving, design has to be continually innovative and competitive. Secondly, the design industry is unrelenting in its demand to meet deadlines and for ideas to be developed and completed within a finite area of creativity.

'I might have been doing it for twenty years, but it's what I do tomorrow that's going to relate whether I'm any good or not.'(2:210)
'It'd be lovely to put your feet up and feel confident and wonderful but you always have that edge, and I think if you're a graphic designer or you're a whatever designer . . . that next job that they're presenting to the client or the customer is all that counts. It's not going to matter what you did yesterday it's only going to matter what you do the next day isn't it?'(2:214)
'I think that's the scary thing about being a designer, male or female, your last project is what people remember.'(8:64)

'That's what drives us I suppose . . . to continually think up something new and break new boundaries.'(8:67)

These comments reinforce the difference between art and design. Design is faced with outside pressures applied by the client and the design must work within a budget. There are often other factors that influence design. Architecture, for example, is restricted by site conditions and council and building regulations.

10:5 Design continuum

As explained in Chapter Nine on the design industry, there is a gradation in the degree of technological knowledge and training between architecture and fashion. These two design disciplines are seen to be positioned at opposite ends of the spectrum. Architecture is perceived to be a stable, professional and technical male industry. Fashion is seen as a fickle, creative, craft-like activity. These disciplines can be understood to be divided into areas of design that are about 'knowing what' and 'knowing how,' and this is a general understanding existing within and outside of the design industry; it is experienced both in New Zealand and overseas. The notion of a design continuum has been reinforced by the comments from the interviewees. Fashion design is perhaps the most well known form of design as it dominates popular culture, and is portrayed as glamorous and sophisticated. In this thesis only one of the research subjects was a fashion designer, and in the course of conversation she dispelled any notion of fashion design as a glamorous career. Some of the other interviewees contrasted fashion with their design disciplines, particularly architecture, which is seen as the male bastion of the design industry. Jackie, who is involved in design journalism, commented on fashion design as glamorous in contrast to the other design disciplines. She spoke of fashion designers:

'I think they are apart from other designers you know, they set themselves apart and it is seen as a glamour industry. But there's no glamour in the graphic design industry.'(5:90)

She did go on to say: . . . *'Architecture doesn't seem to have any glamour to it either.'(5:94)*

Architecture as a design discipline was spoken of as difficult, competitive and male dominated. Charlotte, who teaches architecture, made this comment about her design discipline:

'I think it's quite a hard world . . . I think it's probably one of the hardest design worlds because it's such a male orientated thing of getting a building built, it's very boysy.'(6:73)

The size of architectural artefacts contributes to the increased levels of difficulty in production. Charlotte pointed out that architecture, like other areas of design, is still concerned with an artefact, the crafting of an artefact, but:

'The artefact is huge and expensive so obviously when it comes to practice, being in practice it's very different.'(6:18)

Sandra, who is a practising architect, says: *'Architecture is the worst and most excruciating and difficult part of the design industry because it involves such big objects and it involves incredibly long time processes and it involves large amounts of money and it goes beyond design [into engineering].'(4:93)*

But in all of the design disciplines there are the issues of both form and function. These are two aspects of design that set it apart from art; this was discussed in Chapter Seven and will be explored later, but for now we can see that both aspects are integral to the success of design, and sometimes one is privileged over the other. It is an ongoing debate in design whether form or function is the more important element. The privileging of either form or function may depend on the particular design discipline one is located within, and it is possible that gender influences one's view of form and function as well. It was interesting talking to the interviewees, because even amongst such a small group of designers there are a

number of different opinions as to the importance of either form or function. Charlotte claims form is the most important element in design:

'they [designers] have to be concerned with the aesthetics of the thing they are dealing with and it's . . . that concern that I think would be persistent across design. How it looks.'(6:20)

Charlotte justifies her claim that form is more important than function, especially in architecture:

'With architecture you can't ever control how it works, people use buildings in wonderful ways that you never anticipated and buildings persist over time but their functions alter. You know you go to a building you know for years as a dentist and next time you see it it's a record shop and so on. Houses are used in a variety of ways also that doesn't, the function isn't as persistent as the spatial you know shaping that you do.'(6:22)

'The buildings people feel great affection for, it's not necessarily to do with the usability of the buildings . . . obviously you have to meet the functional requirements to a certain point but I don't think that substitutes for the act of you know the creative making of the piece.'(6:26)

Sandra has a slightly different view in that although she probably privileges form, she does not view it independently but as a by-product of function. I believe Sandra sees form as a result of the development of function within the design process. She explains it in terms of architecture:

'There are three simple elements in a building . . . there's a roof, a wall and a floor. Now how those three elements meet each other can be done in about a million different ways, and how they meet each other is an essential expression of the design of the building. Whether it's a big huge over-hanging roof and it's made out of tin . . . those things are absolutely crucial to what the building looks like and how it's expressed.'(4:105)

From these comments one can see that the women interviewed are located in a discourse of design that is similar to the literature discussed in earlier chapters. The interviewees reinforce many important points reviewed in the literature, such as the separation of design from art, and the importance of understanding design as a process as well as an end product. In these definitions and understandings of design the interviewees also stress the importance of both form and function and the arrangement of different design disciplines along a continuum.

A: Difference in Design

In this Chapter I explore perceptions of difference, especially the perceptions New Zealand women may have of the difference between men and women in design. While not all women confidently say there is a difference between men and women's finished design, they do suggest there is a difference in the design process (the relationship and development of design ideas between the design and the client). Many of the women, when discussing men in design, used similar words and statements. It appeared easier to formulate what men were like as designers than to describe women. Women's perceptions of themselves were full of contradictions as well as patterns and links. In this chapter we will explore the perceptions of difference between men and women in design through thematic discussion. Firstly let us look at the designed object, how it may be perceived to be different in terms of gender, how it may be identified as originating from a male or female designer, and whether there is then a female design style.

11:1 Style: Outward Appearances

The question put to the interviewees was: is there a female design style? I am interested in whether women produce aesthetic images and shapes and use colour differently from men. This has been a perception discussed in much of the literature on design. Historically, belief in a female design style was used to justify women's marginalisation to the less valued areas of design. Some women positively identified difference between men and women's design:

'I would like to say I approach things differently . . . my work . . . it's quite intellectual, I like words. I like there to be certain layers, I work very much with layers that aren't visible that no one knows about . . . a lot of my work happens with humour too.'(3:46)

Women's perceptions of difference varied, but most of the interviewees articulated positive differences, positive aspects of women's design style. Jocelyn said:

'Let's say they [women] get into the nitty gritty in very different ways.   The distinguishing of colours is different . . .   women allow far more memories to enter into their design work. Far more personal experiences. Far more sensual conditions of the world. Smells, tastes, visceral things come up as the stuff of the design.'(9:116) Men . . . They don't express it. I think they carry it, they don't hold it out on their sleeve.(9:118)

The production of more detailed work was an example of difference between men and women's design that was mentioned by a number of the interviewees:

'I think that I could generalise . . . it [difference] lies somewhere on the line of concern with structure and concern with detail. That there are varying sort of patterns . . . well sometimes that is played out in the design context . . . women students tend to be more comfortable concerning themselves with pieces of projects and then arriving at the whole rather than imagining the whole and getting down to the detail as a last thought, but it's a very big generalisation.'(6:33)

It was mentioned that male design students, in contrast to female design students, focused on detail not in terms of ornamentation or form, but in terms of technology or function.

'. . . they're interested in detail in a different way. There seems to be a solidness to the nature of detail done by male students and assurity. It does seem that detail is exposed more often in buildings that males design. There is a love of the technology, exposing the technology.'(9:118)

Jocelyn, who teaches design, commented on the differences between her male and female students. She observed that when they were both producing work involving technical detail, it was manifested differently:

'Where women seem more attentive to the spatial qualities . . . they aren't demonstrative about the standup stuff. It's [technical work] fuzzy . . . it doesn't look like it's really there . . . it's not sure, even though they've done the same technical lectures, the same technical exercises, they can do it in their design work. It doesn't show up the same way in general. (9:124)

I am interested in Jocelyn's use of descriptive words, as the terms used to describe men and women's design has formed a binary. The binary reinforces difference between men and women in design, and the words used to describe 'male design' could be seen to hold more value . The words that I have been drawn to in Jocelyn's comments are:

solidness, assurity / fuzzy, personal experiences

male / female

These dichotomies are closely related to the idea of form and function. And the suggestion is that perhaps male and female designers focus more on either technical or artistic elements of design depending on their gender. Suzy rejected this demarcation between male and female, technical and artistic, because although men and women may have tendencies to work more in the areas of form or function, to do so would compromise the overall design. She considers that successful design would encompass both aspects and these would be balanced:

'I observed some men that really, they were brilliant technicians but they put so much in their brilliant technical solutions and at the end something really terrible comes out you know . . . visually terrible . . . that was a tendency that really that used to happen. (7:64) On the other hand I must criticise some women . . . they don't approach it properly sometimes, they don't approach it from the technical side.(7:70) And so that weakens their design . . . that they haven't thought out how it functions properly.(7:71) [The design is]so much artistic that at the end it can't be realised . . . it doesn't make sense either . . . so complex.'(7:72)

The possibility of a distinctive 'women's style', that could be explained as an 'attention to detail', was discussed in graphic design as well as architecture. Kate, a graphic designer, describes how women may perceive design and appreciate it with a focus on detail:

'Say you're working with a letter, a character . . . a woman designer . . . you would find, would take much more care in how that swash wrapped in to what was in the background of that letter than perhaps men would. Where men would see it's a 'G' women would think oh that's just such a very pleasing aesthetic pattern. No, I don't even think they'd see it was a G immediately. I think women look at different things first.' (10:73)

It was very interesting how she then equated this view with women's role in a domestic situation. It was as if she saw difference on a social continuum, where attention to detail in her design work was symptomatic of the way she interacted with others. Kate said simply that women do more detailed work:

'Women in life do, they pick up all the little bits and pieces, women do, they do the cleanup stuff. Men are big picture people . . . they are more big picture and I think women do tend to walk around, run around behind them, putting the things back in the cupboard and smoothing down the eiderdown, or whatever it is men wouldn't see.' (10:71)

Here the relationship is made between difference in design and difference in gender socialisation. The design work is put into context; if there are differences it is because women are different in many other areas of social interaction. This notion is revisited in issues of the design process. In terms of difference in design it can be seen that the perception of women's design style is articulated as sensual, emotive, decorative and more ornamental. It is identified and valued positively as part of a binary.

However, some of the women were reluctant to identify a female design style. Some of the interviewees were skeptical as to whether women designed differently from men,

insisting that a 'female look,' or the possibility of a female design style, was a more complicated issue. Jane, an product designer, said:

'It's more a company look rather than a female or male look, so I couldn't say that there was a female design coming through.' (3:40)

Jackie, a design journalist, seems to indicate that many designers, particularly if they are working for large design firms, are chosen because of a style that emulates the company's. There is an overall look reflecting the style of a particular design firm rather than an individual designer. She believes there is a noticeable 'female style' only when individuals are truly allowed to express themselves, as with art:

'You see it[design style] more in the artistic side of design you know rather than the commercial side. You might see it where art nudges designer you know, and then you get more expression of individuals. Yes you get more individual expression on the art side so therefore you probably see more female characteristics coming thorough from female artists.' (5:115)

So perhaps fashion design, which is a design discipline that is more closely related to art than industrial design or architecture, is more feminine? Sandra, an architect, actually denied there was a female look. She said it was a feminine look, and that that was a gendered image constructed by society that any designer could emulate or manufacture. She clearly makes a distinction between feminine, a social construct, and female:

'Of course there is a feminine design style, and the men can do it just as well as women, and I would say that that is a kind of description of something kind of soft and fluffy . . . it's got nothing to do with gender. It's to do with what society's accepted definition of feminine.' (4:211)

Charlotte, a teacher of architecture, reiterated what Sandra had said, emphasising that a feminine style had to do with a socially constructed binary understanding of what was male and what was female:

'. . . sort of attention to bodily, certain colour use or concern with certain details, but I could be wrong at times, I mean there could be men doing that work too. The huge thing in architecture is the issue of interiority and exteriority, you know about the public and the private and the use and association that has with femininity and masculinity and all the usual sort of dichotomising and stuff.' (6:70)

I think it is very interesting to consider these comments in light of an article by Sue Best, 'The style which is not one' (Cited in Moore 1994). Here Best discusses the question of style, in particular the possibility of a 'female style,' in relation to Derrida. She believes our understandings of style are situated around a binary of male/female. What is accepted as a masculine style is modernist, essential, true, and 'universal.' Feminine style is deemed to be decorative and ornamental, frivolous; it is also in opposition to the masculine style, it is an imitator. Masculine style is positive; feminine style is negative (Best 1994:160). In perceiving a gender-difference in style or resisting gender-difference, women may be doing a number of things. **A:** If they assert difference and positively identify a female style, they may be doing so as a resistance to design within a 'masculine' model. **B:** If they reject gender difference, they may be doing so as a way of resisting the category of woman and its undervalued position in the binary. **C:** Or by resisting gender difference, the women may be rejecting being compartmentalised into either category, male or female.

11:2 Process: inward experiences

Perceptions of difference between men and women in design were discussed in two main areas: firstly the overall look or style of the designed object, and secondly, the design process. While some of the women I talked to were uncomfortable identifying difference in the finished design, all of them discussed difference positively in terms of the design process. The biggest element of difference within the design process was the importance placed on relationships, such as between the client and the designer. An overall pattern has emerged from the data in which the interviews suggest that women in design overall, within the process and the

finished product, tend to place more importance on human interaction. The comments made by the women suggest that men in design do not value this aspect of the design process to the same extent.

This discussion on the design process begins with a comment from Jane:

'I tend to find that it eases the whole process if you build up a client relationship in terms of trust and confidence . . . you know and constant communication. I probably, if I think back, I probably do foster that more than some of the other designers, male designers so to speak. I don't know if it's intentional I don't think, I think it's just probably a natural female thing.' (3:27)

In discussing the design process, I believe the women are illustrating the importance they place on the client /designer relationship. In explaining this they are distancing themselves and diluting the notion of themselves as 'creators' and positioning themselves more as 'mediums,' or collaborators in the development of design. What is apparent in their discourse is that they identify this attitude as being slightly different from that of male designers, which is one of an individual working to achieve his own creative goals. Margaret, an interior designer, says:

'Good design first of all, should fulfil the brief that was originally set . . . it should actually happen without being too obvious . . . It doesn't have to stand out and say ra-ra . . . I'm wonderful. It has to work and the people have to feel good with it and fulfil what they need from it. Not just created for the sake of being a piece of wonderful design and an ego trip for the designer.' (11:118)

The inference here is that men who design, work more to achieve their own individual goals. By contrast women in design may look more directly to the needs of the client. It could be argued that women understand the client as owning the design, whereas a male designer, with perhaps more ego, sees it as his work:

'I wouldn't put my gender or culture or whatever in front of the client necessarily. It's their thing that I'm creating and I'm just a medium whoever I am, to achieve it.' (11:160)

A designer, due to the nature of the design process in which he or she must work with a client in assessing the 'need' for design and requirements, logically establishes a relationship of sorts. It was felt that women valued the relationship between designer and client more than men and fostered it, encouraging a consultative process. Some of the interviewees felt that women encouraged the consultative process between designers as well as between designers and clients. It was mentioned that male designers tended to work with more ego, and their design process was not so collaborative. Some interviewees suggested that male designers were less aware of people and relationships than women were. Elizabeth said:

'Women are more concerned with people than the process and that defines me.' (1:46)

Charlotte said:

'When you're dealing with a client you have to be able to listen to what they're saying . . . I guess that's the sort of training women have isn't it? That sort of relational stuff, it is that business of listening and attending to what they want and hearing it and then working aesthetically with that material. I think that women are generally, as a gross generalisation, are better at dealing with clients in that way. (6:138)

Charlotte mentioned in her interview that women were not as assertive as men in some of their business dealings but would go to some lengths to foster a good relationship with a client. She compared this approach to a male architect who might not put so much energy into the client/designer relationship, yet would be respected because of his celebrity status. She refers to it as the 'creative genius,'

and other interviewees discuss it as well. There does not seem to be a female equivalent.

'Sometimes clients want, you know the mad artist architect, they're prepared to put up with appalling behaviour because you know, they've got this creative person. . . . So there's all that creative genius stuff that is male you know that influences architecture, you know how do women behave as the creative artist, it's much harder isn't it?' (6:138)

I believe the term 'The Creative Genius,' which Charlotte used, refers to the idea that men are unrestricted in their ability to create, succeed and remain ambitious: As a result they become revered by their peers and by clients and the public. A personal belief in the possibility of unimpeded success requires confidence, and Charlotte and Jocelyn suggested that women in design do not have such overt levels of confidence. They described how power imbalance is played out in tertiary design institutions, particularly in the exchanges between design students and the sharing of ideas. Social interactions, such as classroom discussions, can be loaded with instructions and rules associated with gender. Gendered behaviour, if it inhibits or enhances an individual's ability to create or perform, may affect design and design possibilities. Jocelyn describes a situation in the classroom where a student's work is critiqued. She considers the critiquing of a female design students work is different from the critique of a male.

'Undermining [a female design student's work] would be too blatant . . . there's a softness to it, there's a kind of like . . . saying well, that's O.K., that's all right, that will do, you're doing fine. Whereas, to really get up the gumption and ask the hard questions or to say the hard stuff is usually reserved for those that can take it. And of course the demeanour of male students is usually much more kind of strutting, so you sense that they might be able to take it [critique]. It might be equally devastating to either student but it usually occurs to male students. (9:164) . . . questions that come from female critics usually I would say, reflect the fact that they're female. When they are directed to males I do not find that they generate an on-going continuous discussion. When the critic is male there is often a challenge incited to the student

and if that student is the male, conversation seems to continue and build up a kind of momentum. When that student is female, there's a backing off. There's a kind of shrinking or shriveling going on, an enclosure is being formed. Unless its an exceptional student and then she'll go pow! But the conversation will not go on.'(9:166)

I thought these were fascinating comments, especially considering Jocelyn is describing the tertiary design education environment that confident, educated 18-25 year old women are growing up in today in New Zealand. This is the environment that is preparing both male and female students for the design industry, both through the development of skills and the development of knowledges. Gender differences at this level appear insidious and complicated and influences women's their roles in the design industry. Charlotte also commented on behaviour in the classroom:

'. . . if there are very few women they tend to be silenced by assertive men, that happens. If there are a lot of women they chat amongst themselves and support each other. I think women work together very well, you know I see them as being very supportive in a studio situation, not as competitive as the men students. It's a bit of a generalisation but I think it's reasonably accurate.'(6:136)

Anyone observing might consider the female students to be lacking a competitive edge or to be less ambitious. This issue is complicated because although many of the interviewees have said they themselves are not competitive, or do not design individually, or are not a 'creative genius', that does not make them any less ambitious, just ambitious in a different way.

'I think you could probably generalise and say that they are ambitious but their priorities are different, they rank things differently.' (9:53)

'When I ask them [female students] what they want to do after they graduate I think that they have fewer definite ideas about what they want to do. They are willing to let it come to them or they haven't thought about it, whereas if I, normally if I ask that question to a male, he wants to go and work in an office, he wants to go overseas,

abroad . . . the whole plan's worked out. It's very rare that I find a female student that's got it all figured out, and if they do . . . they have an idea but its not scheduled'.
(9:55)

Maybe women treat, value, and behave around design differently. Maybe they perceive design differently and that is reflected in a different approach to design. Kate says of women in design:

'They're much more aesthetically aware of their environment and of communication. The little nuances, I think are often picked up first by women, before even the big picture . . . just generally [men] they go for the bigger, bolder, brasher and I think that's the way it differs.'(10- 70)

She continues but this time identifies herself as part of the caring group of designers:

'Ours is like, oh craft it, be passionate about it, talk about it, love it, say darling to it a few times and then oh you've paid me! It's kind of more that's extreme, but that's, that's kind of one thing I've always noticed. We're much more tender and passionate about it. It's more lovingly crafted I think. Men it's a lot more ego wrapped into it.'
(10:75)

There are binaries formed in the way the interviewees are describing the design process, such as:

Hardness / Softness

Ego / Passion

Man / Woman

These are perceptions the women have of differences between men and women in design, and they perceive differences in the way men and women consider the design process. (These binaries are discussed in greater detail in Section C.) Men, it is

suggested, need to achieve and produce. Women want to care and create. They may both be ambitious but in different ways. Here difference is asserted. It is interesting to note that the commentary on men in design is not necessarily positively portrayed, and although I do not believe all men design with Ego and are 'harder' in their approach to the relationship with the client, there is a strong suggestion of this happening from within the women's discourse.

Perhaps a lot of the ego in design and the understandings of ambition are based on our understandings of success. Kate suggested that men's success was valued in terms of monetary gain:

'I think they're [men] more single minded, more direct, more and I think with men a lot of the driving force behind the design, this is a horrible thing to say, is money. Rich means you're good not your work. So, if you drive the car, wear the clothes and have the office and sit on a leather lounge suite you're doing bloody well, thank you very much! Nobody's going to question who your clients are or how you made that money.' (10:86)

Women's success and ambition was valued more in terms of 'creating'. This has strong maternal connotations, and could be understood as stereotypical female behavior. To affirm 'nurturing' would be a professional weakness if one valued design in terms of stereotypical masculine values, yet I believe these women are valuing 'nurturing' aspects within design. Kate says:

'I think women are incredibly ambitious. We all are. I think children has made me less so. If you design something you put your heart and soul, you put a little bit of yourself out on the street for everybody to ridicule and admire and so it's a very personal thing and it makes you care . . . quite passionately, about whether people like or dislike it. So that makes you ambitious.' (10:77)

'I think men want to be seen to be having big clients, big names, it's bigger, bolder, more in your face. Women go about it as this is a bit of me out there and I want

everybody to love it and it's really important to me that this is perceived well crafted and beautiful and whatever.' (10:83)

Some of the women I interviewed discussed differences between men and women's general approach to design in terms of an ability to focus. The suggestion was that men were not distracted by the client designer relationship, for example, and were able to focus solely on the role of the creative genius; they were also unimpeded by doubt, perhaps because of the element of ego. It was suggested that women needed more feedback, perhaps took things more personally. This may be related to the fact that women in the work place formed relationships and valued these as important, and this shaped their engagement with design. I believe the women in their articulation of this contrast, although envious of the way men were able to explore the role of 'creative genius', did not believe their being different was a negative difference, just a difference.

For some women, forming networks within the design industry and maintaining them is challenge enough. Developing strong and personal relationships with clients can at times be difficult, especially when business matters need to be discussed and there is the possibility of conflict and negotiation. Often negotiation focuses on payment for work done, and there is a tension between caring and creating for a client and charging them for that creativity. If one is seen as a 'genius', people are more willing to pay.

'I know this is a problem women have, they may not be perceived as being successful and they may be getting the work but they're very often not being compensated for that work as much as men because they just . . . It's not a softness, it's not a weakness, but it's a gullible area.'(1:55) 'Yeah it's a vulnerability, I think it's a vulnerability because they care about relationships and sometimes there's a very fuzzy area between preserving a relationship and demanding what's yours.' (1:57)

Sometimes the desire to shed distractions or become more competitive was called 'becoming harder'. I wondered if that meant becoming more like men. The women talked about male ambition or ego in terms of linear progression.

' Men will just concentrate on that singular point and go for it, and they just kind of cut a swathe through on the way.' (1:53)

Women by contrast are:

'... aiming to some point, but perhaps it's just not such a direct route. '(1:129)

So in terms of perceptions of difference, are women more interested in detail? Are women more involved in relationships surrounding the design process? The interviewees were reluctant to define these differences as better or worse than the way men do things, but many women observed that women were less likely/less able, because of this design process, to be recognised as a 'creative genius.'

'[Men are interested] in getting to the top that is and staying there and holding onto ideas. Whereas women are more interested in listening and absorbing and need more feedback from other people. They require more feedback, this can be a problem for women, requiring feedback in order to feel good about what they do.'(1:51)

Charlotte even suggested that the 'ego thing', the creative genius or the male experience of solely creating without distraction, was present within tertiary design education. If we consider the tension and difference in experience of classroom behaviours described by Jocelyn, it is easy to see that men believe they can just achieve, whereas women may look for less aggressive and competitive ways of achieving the same goals.

'The lovely thing that men students have is that they can be obsessive about their work, they can really focus on it to the exclusion of everything else and it makes very good designers. You see it and when I see it in women I encourage it because

it seems to me that women are not really given permission to be obsessive about their work in the same way. They have to balance their relationships with other people, and not being obsessive and upsetting you know friendships and that sort of thing, which probably makes it nicer, those kind of relational things probably makes very nice people but . . . '(6:132)

I considered this comment in relation to Virginia Woolf's essay 'A Room of One's Own'. It was as if women were not in possession of all the tools needed to go ahead and create. The messages I was receiving from the interviews was that women appear to have most of the tools, like education and experience, yet not the socialised confidence or the inbred belief for the role of creative genius. It may be that women are happy to design without the mantle of 'creative genius', particularly if we consider what some of them said about the design process: that they are there as a 'medium', working on behalf of the client. This approach is collaborative work that appears to contain less ego, unlike the role of the creative genius.

11:3 Relationships

Jackie discussed design as a creative profession that attracted creative communicative people, men and women. What was has been seen as a 'feminine' attribute, that is, good communication skills, is common in this industry in both sexes and has been respected as a necessary requirement for good design.

'I think males that are drawn to the creative professions are of a similar mindset and so I think a lot of men in our industry are sort of female thinkers, you know they tend to be more communicative because they're in a communications industry. So I think you probably get more sensitive males and more communicative males in the design industry than you might in the automotive industry or politics or accounting.'(5:41)

Having said that, she perceives women to be better at these aspects than men.

'I might get myself roasted here but I think by and large, I think women are probably better communicators. I think we talk a lot more and we express ourselves a lot more and we're much more, I think we reach out a lot more. Now that's my personal opinion.' (5:41)

Cathy talks about client relationships as well, but not with the same confidence and assurity that women are distinctly different:

'A lot of people would say . . . . Oh women are so much better at fostering relationships . . . well personally I don't think that's true. I think there are great women who are good with relationships with clients and there are great men. I don't think you can 'blanket' say stereotype women as being people who foster good relationships 'cause I don't think they always do. I mean often women take things incredibly personally and a man can sometimes be more objective in a relationship.' (8:56)

'I think personal relationships women are better but business relationships you know I think women can you know, sometimes their emotions can get in the way sometimes . . . but I don't think it's a stereotype. I think that you get emotional women and you get emotional men and you get . . . I don't think it's a male or a female thing. I don't buy into this male / female thing.' (8:56)

Cathy explained how within the company she works for there is a strong emphasis on team work and working collaboratively. She says women care about people and maintain relationships with clients and with other designers. This can be useful, in that by working closely with others one is able to share the responsibility for the final product.

'Having a team means that you know, not one person's here 'til 3 o'clock on their own in the morning worrying about a project, worrying about getting it done. It's much more about support and nurturing and feeling you know, like, your team is happy and

they feel good about what they're doing.   And just as I'm saying that I'm thinking maybe the women here have influenced that.'(8:126)

'And I think that desperation feeling doesn't happen anymore 'cause you know that you're responsible with her and with him and together you know you can create something, you're not left by yourself'.(8:132)

It can be seen from the interviews that women in the design industry care about people within their working environment. They place considerable importance on successful management of people's needs and emotions. Elizabeth said in a demonstration of the difference between her treatment of office relationships and a male colleague's:

'I'd say 'Oh it's so and so's birthday today',[He'd say] 'Who cares?' Or [I'd say] 'So and so's child's ill in hospital'. . . [response . . .] 'Well that's their problem'. He wasn't trying to be hard but that is the masculine view . . . .they're not interested in the people around them's private life. They're interested in the job at the moment and that is part of maintaining that pyramid.'(1:59)

The idea of a collaborative design team has permeated into the working environment. The interviewees suggest that women care about each other and about their working environment. This isn't to say men do not', but the women interviewed suggested that women place far more emphasis on relationships within the design process and within the working environment than men.

'I think women work with systems of affirmation you know that we tend to talk to each other, we affirm what we say and all that sort of stuff. And in a culture which isn't like that we tend to think it's very bad for your confidence. So I think those sort, those issues were not particularly supportive you know we tended to be relatively supportive to each other as students but it was difficult.'(6-44)

Throughout the interviews there were a number of comments that supported the notion of women working together, and this reinforced the contrasting model of

men in design working as individuals. This example is from Jocelyn's interview and it is a description of female group dynamics in a tertiary design classroom.

'Women group together, the strong women recognise each other and they group together. And there's tussles in that group but they are at moments during the curriculum. They are the strongest, you feel their energy, from their collective and individual efforts, because they're talking to each other, because they're using their togetherness, their groupness as a way of understanding what's going on around them, and bettering their work. You can feel that energy. Now, I've also felt that with men, but it's especially surprising with the women because they seem to gather strength when they become numbers. They gather their confidence that way.' (9:174)

Charlotte describes a similar supportive group situation when she was at architecture school:

'Some of us, of course within a group of women like that you get some who align themselves with men and you get some who align themselves with women and some who just seek their own path. So there was all that sort of world going on, but yes, no, I made friends and I think the friendships that were there were quite supportive and of course there were some very good staff even though they were all men there were some very supportive staff.' (6:46)

In terms of the design process, and approaches to this that were perceived to be different from men, another aspect that was widely discussed was multitasking. Multitasking is the idea that a person can work and think and plan many different things at once and has transferable skills. This was an ability many women identified as more frequently found in women. Jane perceived this within her area of product design:

'If there's one thing that I think about in terms of difference between myself and maybe the guys here is that I tend to be able to multitask better than they can, if you know what I mean. The phone will be on . . . I'll be rushing, I'll be doing that,

I'll be working on something else at the same time and I'll have all these things going. Whereas when I look at the way that they [male colleagues] work and things, they prefer things to be more one thing at a time you know? '(3:28) 'To be able to multitask in design is a huge asset. '(3-34)

Jackie, in her role as a design journalist, had an overall perception of women managing their time differently from men:

'I think there could be a difference in how females drive something through, they might be a bit better at just getting on and driving a project through to completion. It could be and I think they're a bit, I don't know maybe they're a bit more time orientated and time management orientated though once again that would probably be a sweeping statement. I just wonder. '(5:82)

Cathy, from her perspective as a graphic designer, definitely thought women were better at multitasking than men, and that was at home as well as at work.

'I think that women can be incredibly focused and . . . but women are multitask and the men are not, and I think that women can be incredibly organised. They can get a lot of things done. It's like, you go home, I mean, a woman's sort of running the bath, boiling the kettle, warming the oven, undressing the child just before she's even shut the front door . . . you know? '(8:34)
'And a man . . . you know, he's sort of . . . cutting up the vegetables and then he thinks about boiling the water, and you know, I think that helps a woman when she's holding down reasonable job. '(8:35)

Perhaps one reason women multitask more is that they are less able to delegate. The act of delegation is related to confidence though, and so women who feel their design work comes under closer scrutiny or may receive more criticism may be reluctant to hand work over to others, and therefore create more commitments of their own. Jane articulates this issue:

'They [men] tend to delegate more than what I would, but also I don't know if that's a woman thing or not I don't know. It's probably a personal thing in terms of I like to make sure I've done it because then I know it's been done well you know? But maybe that's a male thing. Maybe they don't care as much '(3:34)

This chapter has introduced some of the perceptions the interviewees had of the differences between men and women in design. There are some definitive observations of difference, particularly in reference to the design process, and the idea that women multitask better, nurture relationships and communicate better. And there were comments that male designers in contrast, work with more ego, work less collaboratively and may be more confident than women in design. However, the interviewees had more contingent responses to gender difference in terms of the finished object of design. Some women perceived differences and described them within a binary; other women did not want to classify or limit design by definitions, this was a more complicated approach to women's design that was less able to be considered in direct opposition or imitation of masculine design styles. Sandra said:

'We're human beings, and design is . . . is an emotional and a head thing . . . our brains respond not our penises and our vaginas I'm afraid. So design issues . . . it's our brains and our souls and our hearts and they're all the same damn shape underneath it all. I basically think people bring personality to design and yes, there is a socially constructed direction to it. You would probably find if somebody ever did an analysis that maybe more women than men did softer stuff, probably more men tend to be ego type designers than women, but you can always find someone who will . . . absolutely contradict.' (4:219)

B: The experience of difference

In the first section of the data analysis, I examined women's perceptions of gendered difference in design. This section is a more detailed exploration into how women, in particular the interviewees, experience those 'differences' in design and the design industry. The term 'difference' refers to the contrast and distinction between men and women in design. I would like to discuss in more detail the idea that women approach the design process differently. In the previous chapter it could be seen that a 'different' approach taken by women was related to the importance they placed on relationships. This is an issue explored in this chapter, particularly relationships between the designer and the client. Firstly, I explore the emphasis the interviewees placed on the relationship the client has with the designed object. The women I talked to, particularly those involved in architectural or spatial design, were concerned with creating human spaces.

The perceived differences between men and women's approaches to design appear to relate back to the importance of relationships and communication. Karen Franck, in ' A feminist approach to architecture'(cited in Berkeley 1989:201) draws on the work of psychoanalysists, psychologists and philosophers and suggests that there are seven qualities that characterise female ways of knowing. She says they are:

1. An underlying connectedness to others
2. A desire for inclusiveness and a desire to overcome opposing qualities
3. A responsibility to respond to the needs of others, represented by an 'ethics of care'
4. An acknowledgement of the value of everyday life and experience
5. An acceptance of subjectivity as a strategy for knowing, and of feelings as part of knowing.
6. An acceptance and desire for complexity
7. An acceptance of change and a desire for flexibility

I believe many of these qualities are demonstrated in the interviewees' comments, particularly in relation to experience with design. The women placed particular importance on people's engagement with designed products and in the feeling that people would have for the designed object. This approach shows a particular valuing of the consumer of design. It is an emotional and caring response to the client's needs and to the creation of design. It could be seen to have less to do with the individual ego and ambitions of the designer and more with the nurturing and passion for an object that is wanted and desired by a client. Elizabeth discussed the designing of a corporate meeting area, where she was particularly aware of the client's need for comfort:

'I'm much more concerned as a female of the process of walking into that room and therefore allowing relationships to occur in that room. There will be people who will have been there before who know the ropes, know how to act in that space. But there will always be people who have never been there before, who don't know how to act and why do we always want to make those people feel as miserable as possible?. . . In order to establish a pecking order, that's how males work. Why not think about the minute they enter that door and what is going to help them overcome that fear?[1] . . . I know what it's like to walk into a room where you don't know anyone . . . so it's about walking into a space and how people can feel comfortable. Now the guys are walking into a space . . . thinking about it differently.' (1:114)[2]

Margaret, who also specialises in interior design commented on the importance of how a person 'feels' in a space. Here she points to the importance placed on experience and how a good experience of a living or working area is indicative of the success of the design. To create a space in which there is a good 'feeling'

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[1] During the 'negotiation of text' Elizabeth added, 'This for me is a measure of successful design thinking'.

[2] Elizabeth added in the 'negotiation of text', 'This humanising of space is a very recent development and I think [it]comes about as a result of our less structured work habits, as much as any direct female influence. i.e. The barriers between domestic and commercial space, home and office have become blurred.'

requires particular knowledges and skills perhaps even technologies, but these aspects are continually judged by their ability to make the user of the space think or feel or experience the space in a positive way. Many of those 'knowledges' are formulated only through a close relationship with a client.

'It is important how people feel in a space and you can affect the outcome of their work environment, their work, by how they feel, and it's not necessarily a purely technical answer, I think. Yes, to create the space, it becomes technical in the sense that you're making a construction, but in doing that construction, the actual shape of it should be affected by the thought of the person who's going to be in there, if at all possible. Its not just a purely space planning square-footage environment. What are the surfaces, what are the textures, what is the proportions of the walls, it is important. Not that you have control of all that, but it does go on in your mind.' (1:122)

The second area in which women articulated a different experience from men related back to relationships between clients and designers. Sandra is an architect and talks about very blatant examples of 'gender difference'. Here she recalls how clients assumed her work would be inferior because she was female, and as a result treated her differently. She indicates this dynamic is highlighted in architecture because it is an industry heavily influenced by money, power, and engineering issues, which are areas of society dominated by men.

'The gender issue came into play at the interface with dealing with clients all, well 90% of whom were men, and corporate, large architectural practices, work in the commercial field. All commercial clients are property owners or property developers and those areas tend to be exclusively occupied by men of a relatively conservative dull boring . . . Definitely our company lost clients because of me being a woman. I knew we would and I just fronted up to it and sort of dealt with these guys and said, well you know are you going to keep us on as a client? Or I mean, I didn't actually say are you going to boot us because I'm a woman, it didn't work like that.'(4:32)

Sandra thought that gender issues were played out more overtly with clients, but her experiences could be related back to the fact that architecture is still so male dominated. Interestingly she stated at first that the client / designer relationship was not a gender issue at all.

Kate, a graphic designer, said that in her relationship with clients, the fact that she is a woman leads clients to believe she will automatically produce feminine design. She indicates, though, that this does not happen so much any more. She began her career in the early 1980's and was one of very few women in graphic design at that time. I wonder if now, because of increasing numbers of women working in this field, clients are less surprised to see women in this role and less frequently jump to conclusions about the particular style a female designer may have.

'I do think I have clients who probably would prefer I was a man, who feel more comfortable dealing with a man and I think that the other thing that I've tried very hard to break through is that a lot of men will turn around and say "Oh it's a very feminine design" only because they, you're sure that if you gave it to them and they didn't meet you and you didn't put a name on it, they'd never say that. But because they've met you they'll say "oh you don't think it's a bit soft?" but that was more in the 80's that happened.' (10: 53)

'And I think that made me probably be a little bit bolder with colour and staunch graphics than I naturally would be, almost as a sort of a lash back pushing the boundaries. Over the years things have happened to me, where I've known they would [never] have happened to me if I'd been a man. Things like, comments have been made or you just know you're not taken as seriously. It's changed now though. I think there's a lot of women designers now.'(10:55)

I think Kate has highlighted an important point here, that women in design no longer experience such overt forms of reactionary behaviour simply because they're 'different'. It could be argued that women in design are no longer 'different', and that is not only due to increasing numbers of New Zealand women working in the design

industry, but also due to the strength and perseverance of women who made headway into the industry earlier. Kate illustrates how she not only benefited herself from working with the prestigious male clients, they also benefited.

'I did a lot of work for corporates and that really helped my book, my client book. In terms of being able to say, 'look these big male institutions are taking me seriously and I've worked on this, this and this'. And that really helps you I think. It helps you to walk in and throw down work like that'(10:57) 'We're giving them feminine therapy.' (10:59)

This element of difference, that is, that women are treated differently from men by clients because they are not men is not experienced the same way across design disciplines. Jane, a product designer, found that she was treated 'differently' by people servicing the design industry.

'I don't think there's any advantages or disadvantages out there.[In the design industry] I don't see people being hired because they are men over women or anything like this, its just pure work.'(3:40) 'I don't think there is a gender pressure. I don't think I have to work harder because I'm a female in terms of design. I do find I have to work harder when it comes to dealing with printers and things like that because they don't like women.'(3:36)

Kate reiterated this point that most difficulties she encountered relating to her gender were when she was dealing with sub-contracting businesses.

'The only time I ever get annoyed is probably with sub-contracting people. The type of person you might go to and say 'Look, I've just done this image for somebody and they want to put vinyl graphics on their vehicle', or 'I've just done this visual identity for somebody and I want to get some banners made'. And you're walking into very very male [territory], [They] haven't yet been touched by many women designers sort of, and that would be, you just think, oh ! You know?'(10:88)

Kate says that over time she has developed her own network of people she relies on and trusts, and is obviously able to communicate with well. Even so, when the pressure is on and deadlines are looming or it is a busy time of the year, she often has to use sources other than her own familiar ones.

'And those people tend to be just awful, and I think they're very boysie boysie. They don't want to deal with a woman unless you're a secretary and they can call you 'love' really. Some of them do anyway. And they certainly don't like it when you question their price or have a bit of argy-bargy about something, or they don't do something perhaps to the standard that you expect. They really don't like women coming back to them and saying this is unacceptable, you'll have to do it again. Which I have no trouble doing at all, because my reputation's on the line to provide my client with something that I expect of a certain level.' (10:90)

Jane discussed a similar dynamic when she talked about dealing with printers:

'One printer had a lovely experience. I'd been with a consultancy for about a year and a half, I guess two years and this printer turned round to me and said 'You're the mouse that roared.' And the thing is it summed it up beautifully because they thought I was this cute little girl that was just nice and you know whatever, but one day I turned round and I did roar. I turned down a whole job because they'd done such a bad job . . . and they just didn't expect me to do it.' (3:36)

Suzy talks of positive aspects of difference with auxiliary bodies when being 'different' can work to a woman's advantage, but interestingly enough difference in this situation, even positive difference, still means difficult situations:

'If I go up the road to the paint shop, to the car panelbeater, the professional lacquerer, and ask them for a little sample of paint, they will I mean, they will give it to me immediately without paying . They're just more kind when the woman comes and asks them something. They're more kind than when a man asks them something . . . or if I don't know something . . . it's charming. And some of it

annoys me as well because I can't express myself like I want to, but on the other hand it's really a kind of protection.' (7:86)

12:1 Strategies

So what are some of the strategies women employ when dealing with difficult situations where gender-difference is a disadvantage? Margaret suggested that being female can be to one's advantage, but the key to dealing with the situation is to be aware of one's body language and behaviour. She suggests that men behave differently towards a woman and this can be a positive aspect of any relationship one forms. I think she is indicating that men are more respectful, less competitive and less demanding than if they were dealing with a male designer.

'Well it's just your mannerisms and things at times, I think he can cope with a situation that perhaps it's like saying woman to woman or man to man, or woman to man thing. It sometimes helps that there is sort of this go-between thing with man to woman conversation. Sort of there is some respect that has to go with it. The guys don't think they can actually say it quite the same way until you tell them the same thing and they think oh oh I've got the right one here!.'(11:58)

One strategy that was mentioned across the interviews was that women have to 'know their stuff' or prove themselves to men by talking sense. They seem to indicate this is a tool of resistance to the stereotypical perceptions placed on them. But maybe what this strategy suggests is that although women are equal in the design industry they have to prove themselves first and often work harder than men to earn the same element of respect. Sandra describes a meeting with a male client:

'There was initial thing, 'Oh she's a woman but, Oh well what's she got to say for herself,' and then I started talking and after 5 minutes I knew . . . my gender was totally irrelevant. I knew that he had bought the fact that I knew my job and I was competent and after that nothing else mattered.'(4:195)

Cathy said:

'Basically the only way I can really change the situation is by continuing to talk sense to that man, and some people you're just never going to win over and you just have to not care about it. As long as it's not happening 90% of your life. If it's only 5% then what does it really matter. I mean, you meet horrible people, you meet horrible women for God's sake.' (8:105)

Sandra reiterated that women have to 'know their stuff' in order to compete against men.

'The only way to survive in that situation is to be competent . . . I think that being a minority woman in an industry dominated by men, it certainly tests whether you are good at your job because if you ain't you don't survive. I mean, you can't do it on sex appeal, it's absolutely absurd to think you can, it's absolutely ridiculous and I occasionally come across women who do the eyelid batting routine and I'm sort of shocked and horrified. I suppose that the old thing about women having to be twice as good . . . to achieve half as much is true, but I mean it's kind of unprovable.' (4:159)

Cathy said:

'Initially it can be hard for a woman to gain respect, but I think things are changing and I think that if you talk sense to anybody then in the end it doesn't matter if you are male or female. I mean there's going to be instances where you've got a complete chauvinist that you're working with but it's very very rare. But I think that . . . if you talk sense and engage with the client, it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman. Personally I haven't found being a woman an impediment.' (8:40)

I thought this next excerpt from an interview was particularly interesting. Cathy talks about how women can arrive almost unseen and surprise people. At first I thought this approach was a little unusual because if I think of a woman arriving in

a situation where nearly everyone is male, I would consider her to be highly visible. But I think what Cathy is saying is that a woman may sit down at a board room table and it is assumed she is playing a minor role or observing, so it is a shock when she speaks out and is a knowledgeable party when, in the minds of the male observers, she was hidden from view.

'I think the thing with women is women have the ability to surprise and you know if a woman . . . if a man goes into a meeting and talks a lot of sense that's what they expect. But a woman can almost arrive without being seen. You know, she can . . . a woman can have the added advantage of surprise. I mean if a woman talks sense and if a woman can demonstrate a thorough understanding of a particular client's needs or, talk them into a particular thing, or talk them around a particular subject; then I think you know she can almost surprise with the ability to do that. Because a lot of women still are in the service area . . . you know, there's lots of . . . I mean how many male secretaries do you know?'(8:40)

So talking sense, and 'knowing your stuff' are instant ways to break down that barrier of difference. But Kate thought she probably employed more confrontational strategies:

' . . . I think I became a stroppy bitch from hell really! . . . I think you just have to. You have to put on a facade of . . . I'm not to be messed around with, I am going to be paid and I'm working to your budget, to your deadline and as efficiently as you can expect anyone to. You're getting a bargain basement price because I don't have huge overheads . . . and you had to sell that concept to them. And I think I still do it, to a certain extent.' (10:45)

Interestingly though, Kate is older than Cathy and worked during the liberal 80's, her age now benefits her, not only because of acquired life experience, but as she receives more respect from clients. Kate indicates that there is an assumption of knowledge with age:

'I'm 40 this year and I think most of my clients, I don't advertise or anything, they usually come by word of mouth. And I think age has a lot to do with that. People take

me much more seriously now than say they did when I was 26 or 27. I think it was much harder. It was a very male, it's very intimidating to go into a Board Room to present logo and designs to an entire male board all in suits when you're not in suit and you're a woman and they're looking at you as a woman first before they look at you as a designer. So you had to break through that.' (10:43)

I asked Kate if she dresses a certain way to influence clients.

'Oh no . . . bugger that no! If they don't like it they can go somewhere else. I mean, I literally think that you're as good as your work and as good as your reputation. If your reputation's for being overpriced and late, I mean people just don't refer you to other people.' (10:51)

Jane also denied dressing up as a strategy for breaking down difference.

'No definitely not, because as soon as you've started to do that then it's false. [The relationship with the client] This is a real job and it's real, the stresses are real, the pressures are real . . . . If I had to sort of falsify myself on top of that it would affect my design, who am I cheating you know? It's common-sense, if you've meetings then you just, I don't power dress. But I will, if I've got meetings on a day or something, I will make sure that I'm tidy . . . I'm not sort of sloppy joeing it sort of thing but men do that too. I mean I don't dress to impress . . . and also you can't. You can't, I mean if I dress to impress a client on the first meeting I've got to sustain that for three months you know? I mean nah!! The relationship becomes that close that we have clients just arriving anytime.' (3:61)

Cathy reiterates that what is important is how you communicate. And you win the favour of male clients by speaking knowledgeably and convincingly. You have to 'know your stuff', and prove your credibility.

'I think that what you have to convince people of is that you know what you're talking about. That's the main thing and yes of course I make an effort to look reasonable when I meet with clients I don't power-dress, I don't wear suits. I

mean sometimes I do but not necessarily for the reason of being credible. . . . We [her consultancy] get to know our clients pretty well and the more you demonstrate you know what you're talking about the more respect you get, it's as simple as that. That's what they want from you, they're coming to you for expertise, and my personal own passion and interest is a holistic approach to how we bore into their psyche, and then how does design show what it is they want to be. How does design assist them to be the sort of company they want to be, and that's my passion, that's what I'm most passionate about. That and creating original work. Those are the things that drive me and if they are the things that a client wants then I speak their language and that's how I want to build my credibility not by power-dressing or talking in jargon. I can only want to be what I am and hopefully that's credible, so, no I don't do anything that's false or I don't feel I have to be a particular way or do a particular thing to create that credibility, I just want to get the nitty gritty and get it sorted out.'(8:73)

Jocelyn says there are times when women have to think carefully about clothing, particularly when as an architect she has to look professional yet be able to clamber over a building site at short notice. She reinforces earlier comments by other interviewees, that the only way to traverse that difference is to prove that you know as much if not more. A lot of the technical knowledge is shrouded in jargon and if you are able to penetrate that and test others on it, you earn respect faster.

'What you see now [At the time of the interview she was wearing jeans , a shirt and colourful earrings] is a way of kind of advertising the end situation. I try to project to my students that I don't need to be wearing a dress to have femininity, but I do dress sensibly so that I can go down to the [work]shop and work for a couple of hours or I can ride my bike to the train station or I can go to a construction site at a moment's notice. So that's a sensible kind of negotiation, but there are other ways that I think . . . to negotiate that gap and part of it is really knowing your stuff or believing that you know your stuff. Because I actually think that a lot of the boysie attitude that you get in academia and professions is just a lot of talk'.(9:83)

So knowing your stuff is a way of negotiating the 'gap', or the 'difference' between the genders and combating the 'boysieness.' Margaret raised an interesting issue that women in their relationships with others tend to take things personally. This was discussed briefly in Section A: that because women place so much importance on forming and maintaining relationships they may be more emotionally affected by conflict than men who do not place so much investment in them.

'I've heard others talk differently but I sometimes feel they make the situation for themselves and to actually be obviously different or be so sensitive that they can be affected by some comments or some attitudes that they take it, people will take things personally, male and female do it. But as soon as you start taking comments as personal comments you've got a big problem I think. I mean, a lot of these things aren't personal. What it is, is that you have this problem and you must all deal with it . . . get on with the job, don't consider there's been a personal attack, its not. It's part of the development and one mightn't appreciate what's being done but just because he's male and has sort of said towards a female sometimes, I've seen this and they [women] sort of go ohh . . . didn't like it and took offence at that, and I'm thinking, well no, it's just part of the process. You've actually got to accept the way that they [men] say it as a comment and get on with it by giving your feelings back as well, that you're entitled to and they listen. Yeah, it doesn't matter whether you're male or female. It shouldn't do.'(11:192)

Jocelyn mentioned another strategy, one which at first appears disempowering. She says she acts 'humble' or ignorant. She plays the role of the 'dumb female', but in doing so she is more easily able to size up her opponent. She is able to ask more probing questions and receives more honest answers.

'I also find that's evidence of further feminine behaviour, to go to the grass roots level and eek out what's behind the symptoms, rather than to actually continue the kind of vagueness ambiguity of it all. And, examples of how I think I've tried to do that is to actually go work on a construction site, to build houses myself and trying to keep a sense of humbleness about when I don't know something. Just saying . . . I don't

know, and I must admit that sometimes that's a ploy, when I feel like I'm being patronized, to just assume the ignorant female participant. But the role becomes one of a probe because the probe exposes that no one really know what's going on, the bluff is bigger than the question, really the questioning just kind of exposes all that, in a slightly irritating way sometimes.' (9:85)

12:2 Families

Of the eleven women I interviewed, six commented on the fact that they were mothers and how that had affected their design career. The other women also discussed motherhood and family commitments in terms of gender difference. The main message I received was that men, even if they had families, were less likely to allow this to affect their work. They were more able to explore the role of 'creative genius' without the restrictions of family responsibilities. Charlotte commented:

'I think it's hard for women in architectural practice. I think it's a hard, I think the offices, the office environment may be supportive of them although it's incredibly competitive and I don't think it fits easily with child caring . . . and I think the competitive nature of it, the difficulty of getting work means that anything that makes you now not prepared to work HUGE [her emphasis] hours all night, all weekend works against you. I think the building industry is really difficult you know, it's a very tough world and you can negotiate it by being one of the boys but that has a huge personal cost and I think a lot of women end up sort of working for other people in order to negotiate a kind of place, a way of being an architect that's sort of comfortable. There are some women architects who do the job brilliantly too so you know, for some people they find their feet.'(6:73)

Cathy is involved with the graphic design industry, and she describes a contrasting situation where the work environment is supportive of both men and women having family commitments:

'Men have had children and come back, they've worked part time while the children are young . . . I think that the contribution that women have . . . is such that you know the [company] partners are prepared to give and take when it comes to things that women need to do.'(8:27) 'The drive and ambition to be a successful designer, that's the same for men and women . . . I think it's the same to a point but there is the phenomenon of children . . . of women having children and you just can't give, and you probably don't even want to give as much as your male counterpart.(8:30)

She has just contradicted herself here but it is interesting how this relates to the idea of the 'creative genius'. Cathy appears to be saying that women voluntarily choose not to put their career first. Cathy later discusses, from her observations, how men are able to commit themselves utterly to design, because there is support at home for maintaining family life.

'I was a senior designer, he was senior designer when we first started . . . he became a senior designer . . . and his wife subsequently had two more children . . . 3 children and now he's become a partner . . . and I guess his leap to more seniority . . . he's more senior that I am now, has been because he is prepared to devote his life to the company if you like. I mean his wife is at home looking after his children, therefore he has the luxury of being able to do that.'(8:32)

Cathy then reverts back, saying she prefers her lifestyle anyway as she has 'balance,' or is this justifying her status as lower than his?

'By the same token, I think if I had desperately wanted to be a partner then that is on the cards . . . I just don't want to be and it's as simple as that . . . and I feel that on the occasions when I don't have my daughter. . . 2-3 hours away from the office . . . on the occasions when I don't do that, I realise how much my life would be totally consumed by work if I didn't have that necessity to leave. And so I actually feel that personally . . . I can't speak for all the women here . . . but I feel that I have a great deal . . . I have the ability to have balance in my life . . . so I have a great job which has great challenges and people and stimulus and great

work but at the same time I also have a child and a family and a home life which I will not have if I didn't have a child and force myself to leave. And I wouldn't want that . . . I want a balanced life and I find that I'm quite lucky in my ability to have that.'(8:28)

Kate also talks about the tension between juggling motherhood and a career in graphic design. She has two children, whereas Cathy has one.

'Yeah it's quite a hard life it's quite a stressful life, because you work to deadline all the time and no one cares about your kids or whether you've done your supermarket shopping. . . .You juggle a lot, but it's quite good. So I have days when I wake up and think what do I think I'm doing . . . this is just too hard.'(10:25)

She describes her day in contrast to her husbands:

'I have to be home every night at 5.30, he doesn't. So he walks in at 7.30- 8 o'clock every night and sees the kids all powered, bathed and fed and reads them a gorgeous story and goes 'oh I love you so much' and then they go to bed you know. So he hasn't worried about whether there's any vegetables in the house or whether there's something to make the school lunches for the next day or whether the shirt's ironed None of that has even touched his life, it just is . . . there. He just says . . . pick up your lunch and put your shirt on . But he doesn't contemplate how it might have got washed, ironed and put there in the first place.' (10:33)

Kate's use of the word "juggling" is interesting. An American designer, in an article written in 1992, rejected the term 'juggling'. She said "Juggling implies that if something drops, everything falls apart, a better word is orchestrating. You're conducting your own life and you concentrate on those things that need attention.

Some part comes to a crescendo, then fades back and something else can be brought to a crescendo if necessary." [3] Kate says:

'I often think, my little girl's 4, and I often say [she's] gonna grow up and go 'God Mum, you're one of those really mad women who worked in the 90's that tried to parent. Who did you think you were? You're crazy!' And we think we're emancipated, we're fantastic, we're liberated and we're having a wonderful career and being Mum, but it's crazy because actually we're just doubling our work load and stretching ourselves out to the max. All for the sake of being able to say, what? I often question it. Why do I do it. ?'(10:33)

Kate perfectly articulates how dynamics in a design office may change as a result of children, particularly in relation to her interaction with clients.

'You go from being a woman designer to a mother designer. People see you pregnant, people see the baby dropped off to be fed in the office, or whatever, and I think that changes their attitude towards you and you have to work to get that back. And they kind of like it but at the same time they feel sort of a bit like you do. Should I really be doing this or should I stay home. Especially a lot of men that I work with are family men, have wives at home, they don't have wives that work. Some of them think . . . bloody hell, why doesn't my wife work, and some of them think hmm, I don't think she should be doing that it doesn't feel quite right to me.' (10:104)

Cathy admits that having a career in design and a young child does increase her stress load, and that sometimes she would reject the career to be a mother.

'I mean there's been lots of times when I could have just given up you know, this is too hard. When you've got comfy . . . you know you race home, you give a child dinner, you bath them you read to them, you play with them. Then you've got to come back here and work till 2'oclock in the morning to get something out

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[3] This quote was made by Caroline Hightower, quoted by Stephanie Steyer, in her article "Designer Moms."

and be back at 9.00 the next day and do it all over again. You know its hard . . . and on the holidays when you know I want to be with her and I can't always . . . I mean you have to get balance . . . I always take all of the summer holidays off.' (8:149)

Making special time to spend with her child is one way Cathy deals with the juggling. However, this is a luxury many women would not be able to afford.

So it can be seen from the interviews that there are definitely examples of women experiencing gender differences in the design industry. These are particularly noticeable in client/designer relationships and in the relationships with sub-contractors. Gender difference is also noticeable within the industry in terms of parenthood and the relatively small impact this may have on men's design careers.

12:3 'The Gap'

The women described a number of strategies to negotiate gender difference; Jocelyn believes that one way to handle the experience of gender-difference is to imagine there is no difference. However, she also rejects this approach saying instead that the difference, which she calls the 'gap', definitely exists; at times it is imposing and difficult to negotiate, and at other times it is almost nonexistent.

'Part of it is making yourself believe that there isn't [a split, or gender difference] . . . [but] there's always that gap. That was the first mistake I made, is that I could overcome that gap, actually kind of heroically educate the world that there is no gap but that's a mistake. The gap is there and it comes and it goes.' (9:60)

That gap, that difference, is at the heart of my thesis. Some of the women I have talked to have been able to identify it easily, and others have done so with hesitation. Some of the interviewees have indicated that design is beyond gender; if one focuses on gender then that is to the exclusion of one's design possibilities. It could be that women in design are reluctant to address this issue further for fear of the extra pressure placed upon themselves, not only to be equal but to be different as well. Jocelyn said:

'When I was in undergraduate school there were 5 women in 70 students in the class and there was one female professor. And she took it upon herself, for whatever reason, to bring us 5 together and say listen,' if you aren't better than best you will not make it.' And at that point I walked out, because I didn't need to be told that. I didn't need that extra pressure on me. I lived with that, as a daughter of a military officer, first born, I lived with that my entire life, I don't need to be told that every single day. But what it did to the others was that some, at that point, dropped out. So I actually think it was detrimental to some people who didn't have it in them, that it was the last straw to break them to say, "If I'm not the very very best I won't make it." But you don't say that to the male students. They get to be average, and make it, so it creates a very antagonistic environment between females . . . but also says that you have to learn the terms of reference for the environment of working in a place that's mostly males. You have to learn how to think and work like them, at the same time think and work the way you do on your own. Which ever form I mean, there is multiple forms of thinking and working. But there is a way of thinking that has been dubbed the male way of doing it, and that's the way that is the success model.'(9:80)

Jocelyn suggests that women have to be better than men. The interviewees appear to me to be suggesting that in the design industry one can have men of average design talent who will survive in the industry but not women. Cathy says:

'It's good to see women start to come up into more creative jobs and sort of holding down management positions and you know I think that the ability they have to be surprising is a strong one . . . but women have to be better than men . . . it's as simple as that. You know there is that area still that there is still that little you know, a male is tolerated even if he is not brilliant but a woman has to be much better to be considered good, you know.'(8: 41)

Sandra reiterated this:

'In my experience of different ways in which men and women work and I suspect this is a bit of a cultural thing, is that the men will tend to clump in the middle.

You'll always get a lot of mediocre men, the men won't be awfully bad or awfully good, though there will always be the ones that will. The women will either be fantastic or bloody awful, they've very rarely mediocre.'(4:220)

In Section A of the data analysis the role of 'creative genius' was discussed and how this seemed to be a role more easily attainable to male designers with confidence and with few distractions. According to comments by Jocelyn and Charlotte it appeared that many female design students do not have high levels of confidence, or at least this is not always obvious in the classroom. From the interviewees' experiences of the design industry, I believe it can be seen that confidence in the industry, confidence dealing with the 'gap', comes with age and experience and acceptance of difference. Earlier Kate talked about how clients were more accepting of her now she was forty.

'Yeah, you get to a certain age . . . I think and you, you sort of throw away. You don't really care what people think anyway. You're less affected by that sort of thing [gender-difference] I think. But its never affected me. I guess. It's [design] what I want to do and that's what I believe in . . . I've never actually seen it as a man's attitude. 'Oh it's a woman she's not going to do it'. If it didn't happen one way you try it another way and I didn't sort of take it on as an attack at me because I was a woman, it's just that they didn't want to do it that way.' (10:100)

Sandra also suggests that age and experience in the design industry, help to break down gender differences:

'So experience is important . . . the difference between men and women, I actually think the gender must diminish, it absolutely must, because at a certain point you've got to compare apples with apples. And what the hell is the difference between a 38 year old woman and a 38 year old man, or a 45 year old woman and a 45 year old man, except the experience they can produce?' (4:183)

Charlotte commented on her age:

'I've just sort of reached the point because of my age where I've decided what I want out of the job and what I enjoy about it and I tend to be more self affirming that I was . . . .So yes, of course there are difficulties . . . the difficulties occur in staff meetings and when we get together collectively and you know that it's a very unbalanced group. It's unbalanced in terms of gender and it's unbalanced in terms of cultural groups and that sort of thing.'(6:50)

'For years and years I was the only woman on the staff, those other . . . . And it was a really impossible situation because I had to speak for all women and I had to try and change the language because they always used terribly sexist language, and defend the role [of women]. You know defend certain types of work that I saw as being sort of associated with women so it was a pain. It was a complete pain. It was a battle and it wasn't very supportive particularly, it was difficult as anything, what were my strategies? I used to get very angry which wasn't particularly productive, stroppy you know sort of fight.'(6:53)

'I think in the end putting my position forcefully was useful you know . . . the culture's changed but it wasn't that I had changed it so much as the [design] students , the number of [design] students increased, women [design] students.'(6:55)

The women I interviewed when speaking of specific female experiences in relation to gender often spoke positively. They affirmed women's way of working, particularly collaborative methods and the valuing of relationships. It was interesting to hear whether they would prefer to work with men or women. Mary thought she would rather work with men. She is a fashion designer and she works in a female dominated industry, but is surrounded by men and prefers it that way. In saying this, though, she affirms women:

'I'd actually rather work with men I think men are easier to push around but I wonder if that'll fade away eventually? I think you can actually use your feminine

charms on a man and do your 'you're a hero, you're a brilliant bloke' act on a man. Women you can't, you can't fool women can you?'(2:137)

Kate says:

'I much prefer to work with women, to be honest I just find them easier to get on with and not as precious, and reliable I really enjoy working with women. I enjoy the laughs with women and I enjoy the team thing and there's a really healthy sense of camaraderie as opposed to competition, we're really supportive of each other.'(10:21)

She says of her workmate:

'If she got really stretched she would get me to help her out, and the same with me, if I got really stretched I mean I'd have no hesitation to give the work to (her) And I think two men working like that would inevitably have a clash.'(10:136) 'We're more supportive than anything . . . so, if something goes wrong or whatever you really feel for each other.'(10:138) 'From what I've seen of men sort of setting up together it just doesn't work unless they form a company and then employ slaves!'(10:140)

Margaret prefers working with men, because she is uncomfortable with the emotion that is present within women's relationships:

'Be it a male boss, be it a woman boss, I've basically worked for men I suppose most of my life. Doesn't make any difference. In fact I find it easier to converse with them [men] because you can just be . . . factual . . . you don't have to get too emotional about it. Although when you get frustrated, when you sort of try and show some emotion, it gets cut out . . . . I prefer to work with men in the sense that, yeah, you share what you want to and other times they leave you alone. I guess its helped me.'(11:46) 'I tend to work alone better, and also if you want to pull out my feelings towards women's things like that I find it a little more difficult because I have to be what I would term a little more polite to another woman than I would have to be to a group of guys, men, whatever. In that they will leave me as an individual and not interfere with my space. Whereas, I find

with a woman relationship I have to, I have a feeling of having to be a little more polite. Perhaps I could be to the men, but I don't. I can keep to myself while I'm feeling bad for the day, and they'll just sort of leave me alone, but, in a women's sense, people will sort of ask.' (11:44)

This assessment corresponds with other interviews, where it has been suggested that women are more interested in people, they need to 'get on', and enjoy working in a team. Even though Margaret does not necessarily enjoy working in that environment, I believe she has identified something that is different between women and men in the design industry.

I believe it can be seen from the interview material that New Zealand women in the design industry do perceive and experience aspects of gender difference in the development of their designs, in the interactions with clients and sub-contractors and in relationships with their colleagues. These differences that they experience are variable. The women interviewed experienced 'difference', or the 'gap' differently, and this was closely related to their location within different design disciplines and their different ages and family situations. And although the women identified gender-differences they repeated that they were not different, that gender was irrelevant and that it did not matter if they were men or women in design! In the third part of the data analysis, I delve deeper into this wonderful contradiction that there are gender differences, but gender is irrelevant.

C: Meta difference/Différance

In this third section of the data analysis, I am peeling back the last layer of this notion of gender difference. In the first section I looked at perceptions of gender-difference, and in the second I examined women's experiences of gender-difference. In this third section I am attempting to understand in more detail what these women might mean when they say there are or are not gender-differences in design. During the interviews the women's dialogue becomes contradictory; sometimes they are comfortable acknowledging difference, at other times they hesitate. It seems to me that for women in the design industry, notions of gender difference vary in time and space. That is, articulations of gender differences varied depending on the historio-social context the women were in, their particular design disciplines and the ages and stages of their careers.

In this chapter I have used the term meta-difference deliberately. Meta is a term signifying change or alteration, transcendence or exploration. In this analysis of data my aim has been to examine the women's voices using the concept of 'difference' as a deconstructive tool. The term 'Difference' is chosen to describe the contrast between two groups, that is, men and women. In this chapter I explore the possible hidden meanings behind the usage of the word 'difference'. I have called this meta difference, indicating a changing and complicating difference. Derrida has called it différance, to indicate its fluid nature, and the fact that it is subject to deferral and displacement and is a demarcation point that changes over time and space: 'Différance is the nonfull, nonsimple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name origin no longer suits it' (Derrida in Kamuf 1991:64).

The term 'difference,' as I have just mentioned, signifies the relationship between two entities which are distinct from each other. Using the theoretical work of Saussure, we can see that this distinction is not necessarily complementary (1986). Difference normally operates using a binary structure in which the two terms are opposed to each other: one becomes the primary term and the other repressed.

They each depend upon the other to form identity; indeed, they do not have meaning without each other. There can only be two choices within this binary model, the primary term or the not primary term. It could be seen, if we refer back briefly to the design chapter, that the binary model which exists within the larger discourse of design and the design industry is one in which man is assumed to be the primary model. 'Designer', a supposedly neutral term is on one side, and woman, 'female designer', or the 'other' is what is on the opposing side. The relationship is named as 'difference'. Using a feminist design historian's analysis we could see that a 'Designer' is male and a female is seen as the 'not real designer'. (Attfield 1989:207) In the interview process, as an interviewer, I have asked the women to describe their perceptions and experiences of the design industry. However, I have asked them with direct reference to gender-difference. Their conversation and discussion of difference rejects, resists and affirms difference between men and women, and this may point to their personal ontological location in relation to the binary. I call this chapter meta-difference because I am deconstructing their discussions on 'difference'; It is here that I borrow the deconstructive tools of Derrida. He talks about the wider context of the term 'difference' as 'différance,' difference meaning not only primary and repressive terms but also differences outside and in excess of the binary. This relationship he calls 'différance'. As quoted in Chapter Four, Grosz considers Derrida's différance to mean 'the condition of difference . . . the condition for both difference and sameness'(Grosz 1990:96). I am aware that Derrida's work, in particular the term différance, is subject to many different interpretations and usages. Différance is a complicated and intricate term, yet I believe it is useful in helping to describe the continual movement and contradiction found in articulations of gender differences, as described in the women's interviews. Not only do there appear to be differences between men and women in the design process, for example, but there are also differences between those differences, and these secondary differences are also subject to change.

So how can women's ontology or 'way of being in the world' (Stanley 1990:14)) be explained through an articulation of 'difference'? In particular, how can feminist ontology, or women's personal way of being, in relation to men, be understood

from a wider feminist perspective? It can be seen through the acceptance, resistance or affirmation of difference between men and women in the design industry. For example, Liberal Feminism is a rejection of gender-difference based on the knowledge that historically women have been disadvantaged through the belief that they were different, that is, the notion of woman as different or repressive to the primary term of man. If gender differences are mostly commented on when the woman is oppressed or negatively affected by difference, then women who think there are not gender differences may think this because they are in a climate in which their work and their interaction with others is treated the same as their male contemporaries. The comment made by Mary, ' gender is irrelevant' (2:302) may well signal this ontological interpretation of feminism. Mary may well be saying that it does not matter what gender she is, as she is recognised for the success of her design work and not the fact that it was done by a woman. In which case she is saying, I am treated as an equal within this industry. I am given the same respect and privileges as a man in this field.

An alignment with aspects of radical feminism may be interpreted through an affirmation of gender-difference, in which the interviewee affirms differences between the genders in design, and furthermore may value aspects of female specificity in design. Here the interviewee may use the binary of difference in which women are repressed, and place woman as the primary term. Jane did this in her interview, where she quite confidently stated that women are better at multitasking than men.

'If there's one thing that I think about in terms of difference between myself and maybe the guys here is that I tend to be able to multitask better than they can. . . . To be able to multitask in design is a huge asset(3:34). . . . I think women have that ability to be able to just do things like that' (3:117).

Jane is defining a difference between men and women, pointing out that there are female specific ways of doing design that are undervalued or rendered invisible and should be viewed as positive aspects of the design process. This is not to say that Jane, Mary or any of the other women interviewed are liberal or radical feminists,

particularly as some of them reject this label. Rather I wish to identify comments such as those made by Jane and Mary as examples of liberal and radical feminist discourses which appear in the dialogue. The use of these discourses may point to an ontology, or a feminist politic that the women have adopted; even if it is not necessarily named as 'feminist'.

In analysing the interview material, I believe the women were able to identify gender-differences but were hesitant to place values on them. I wonder if this hesitation suggests that they were most comfortable describing the role of women in design in a postructuralist feminist way, that is, describing women in relation to men outside of the binary, rather than placing men in the primary position and seeking equality with them, or simply reversing the binary and placing women in the primary position. Jocelyn said,

'Women think, make design differently than men, and it's differently that's important. It's not better, it's not worse, there are attributes to both'(9:47).

Maybe instead of understanding difference between the men and women as:

A / not A,

or seeking equality with this term:

A / A

or reversing this structure:

not A / A

Perhaps they understand difference as:

A - B

Equal but different. That is, difference as inclusive of multiple differences which are of equal value.

Talking about the contrasts between men and women in design in terms of complicated and contingent differences may indicate a complicated and contingent feminist ontology. This ontology is one which is liberal and radical at different times and changes depending on the people concerned, and the particular issue being addressed; it also depends on the age of the person and the design

environment the woman is situated.   Derrida calls the relationship between two contrasting points, that is subject to change and deferral, différance. Différance is the movement of difference between two points and the incorporation and possibility of other meanings of difference outside of the binary. I believe that the interviewees are deferring and displacing the relationship of gender difference. So, in this third area of analysis let us explore the women's articulation of 'difference' with a view to 'différance'. What might their articulations, understandings and positionings be in relation to the term 'difference', in particular between men and women in design, and what might this signal their ontological positioning to be?

13:1   Binaries

Throughout the interviews many women reinforced and constructed the binary of men and women as different in their discussion. Specific terms such as 'ego' and 'passion' occurred frequently and were repeated within interviews and across them. They were binary terms which served to reinforce difference between men and women. They were terms used in the discussion of both design and the design process.

A pattern of binary terms that were used in the interviews emerged:

hard / soft

linear / multitask

ego / passion

technical / creative

structure / detail

masculine / feminine

male designer / female designer

These binary terms were used in the description of men and women's finished design and their design processes. In the description of the differences between men and women these words were constructed in opposition to each other. They were words that were frequently used and conveyed a sense of distinctiveness between the nature of men and the nature of women.

HARD / SOFT were two words used in general descriptions and portrayals of gender differences: 'Hard' was a term that represented masculinity and 'softness represented femininity.

*'There's a **softness** to it'(9:164)*

*'Description of something kind of **soft and fluffy**'.(4:211)*

*'It's not a **softness**, it's not a **weakness**, but it's a gullible area.' (1:55)*

*'Oh you don't think it's a bit **soft**?'(10:53)*

This binary was used as an indication of female difference and it was sometimes rejected; women resisted being defined as feminine/soft because of the negative connotations.

*'The **hard** stuff is usually reserved for those who can take it' (9:164)*

*'He wasn't trying to be **hard** but that is the masculine view"(1:59)*

*'I think it's **hard** for women in architectural practice, I think it's a **hard**, I think the offices, the office environment . . .' (6:73)*

'Softness' is both positive and negative in contrast with 'hard', which is both a style and an environment. 'Hard' is a visual perception and an emotional experience of gender difference. To resist softness is to resist the 'feminine' in an effort to emulate 'hard' or the masculine; this approach appears like a liberal ideology. To reject 'hardness' is to reject the traditionally masculine, and affirm the supposed 'feminine', which sits more comfortably with radical feminist ideologies.

LINEAR / MULTITASK were two words used to describe the different ways in which men and women may approach design problems and work through the design process. It was also used to describe overall behaviour in daily life and career patterns.

*'Men will concentrate on that **singular point** and go for it.'*

Women . . . 'not such a direct route.' (1:129)

*'More single minded, more **direct**.'(10:86)*

*'the octopus method . . . there's a very clear **linear** method . . . . One seeks to go fast and furiously, one likes to skim, and cast a broad net'(9:110)*

Jocelyn made a correlation between linear and multitask and the universal symbols for men and women:

'It's been associated even with the sign for male and female, the phallic, the womb. You know, one's round and one's pointed.'(9:112)

*'I tend to be able to **multitask** . . . they prefer to be more one thing at a time.'(3:34)*

Out of this has arisen another dichotomy; **BIG / SMALL,** which relates more to the design process:

*'Women in life, they pick up all the **little** bits and pieces . . . men are **big** picture people.' (10:71)*

*'Men want to be seen to be having big clients, big names, it's **bigger, bolder**, more in your face.' (10:83)*

*'Somewhere on the line with [masculine] concern with **structure** and [feminine] concern with **detail**.' (6:33)*

Many of the dichotomies seemed to be related in an important way to the binary of **EGO / PASSION.** This was used to describe an overall perceived contrast in the approach men and women have to design. It reflected the competitive nature of the industry, the difference in relationships with clients and the possible differences in design style. To be passionate about something meant to get involved personally.

*'More men tend to be **ego** type designers ' (4:219)*

*'I think there's a lot of **ego** in it. . . .the **ego** thing is bigger.'(10:142)*

*'Yes, there's a certain amount of **ego** I guess that goes on in amongst males'*
(11:108)

*'We're much more tender and **passionate** about it' (10:75)*

*'It's a personal thing and it makes you care . . . quite **passionately***'

"It's a personal thing. . . You put your heart and soul, you put a little bit of yourself . . . it's a personal thing.' (10:77)

These dichotomies were discussed with an awareness of historical understandings of the masculine side of the binary as the primary term. Some interviewees inverted this, valuing and affirming the differences women have. But such inversion was mostly in the design process; most of the women were hesitant to identify difference in the designed object, because this was associated with the public perception of design. To affirm differences in the design object would be to reinforce historical notions of masculine design as the standard, and women's design as the repressed binary term. This itself was a binary constructed within their discourse.

<div align="center">

masculine-primary / feminine-repressed

public-historical perceptions / women's own perceptions

designed object / design process

no gender differences / okay to acknowledge differences.

</div>

In the following quotation Jackie places the binary terms in alignment with gender, but she explains that design encompasses both sides of the binary. She does not necessarily reject the binary, but accepts it.

'We're trying to say design exists at many levels, it is both male and female it's hard and soft, it is glamorous, it is worth indulging in you know, it's worth celebrating.'(5:98)

The wonderful contradiction, mentioned at the end of Section B, was that although the women described gender differences, the women did not think those differences were important or relevant, or that the women should even be considered

'different'. Many of the comments made by the interviewees inferred that design was 'unisex' and that good design rose above issues of gender. Many women made comments towards the end of their interviews, for example, Mary, Margaret and Cathy, that gender was not important.

'Doesn't matter who I was as long as I could do my job, doesn't matter what I was. And I could achieve what I said I do . . . that's what they expected of me. Doesn't matter whether I was male, female.' (11:7)

Margaret is probably in her early fifties, and this was her response to the suggestion of difference. Most of the women, when asked if there was a difference between design, or a female/feminine design style, denied it straight away. They intimated that there probably were subtle differences, but nearly all the women were hesitant to say anything definite about this, almost as if to identify difference would be to say women's design was inferior to any other kind of design. The reaction was then that there is no difference; women may design differently, but they are not different! Women are not different in a less valued way than men. Mary said:

'I think gender is irrelevant in design, I think it's totally irrelevant.'(2:302)

The following quotation from Jane's interview illustrates the idea that design is due to the abilities of the mind and therefore the genders are the same; but environmentally and culturally they may be located differently, which is related to the individual. This may be why women do the design process differently, such as multitasking, but any differences are not judged as better or worse in the industry. The interviewees' notions of gender difference therefore incorporate sameness and equality with men and advocates multiplicity; difference is not a definitive conrast or an inequality.

'It's the brain . . . and I guess if you took the brain out it's just a brain, okay its been brought up with different . . . but then maybe that swings back to that multitasking and things like that. Maybe we have got advantages as being females

as designers. . . maybe that's an issue but in terms of being actually rewarded for it or being . . . made difficult . . . I don't think it exists.'(3:78)

Cathy said:

'I think it comes down to how good you are, it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman. A woman can be fantastic and so can a man. And a woman can be crap and so can a man. I don't think it matters, I think its what's in the grey matter that matters . . . not . . . you know what's between your legs.'(8:75)

Cathy rejected male and female types of designers, referring more to her experience of collaborative designing. Although earlier in the interview she attributed the collaboration to women, in the quotes below she attributes it to a different approach to design that is unrelated to gender.

'I think designers fall into two categories, designers who are style driven and designers who are ideas driven. And I think that both men and women fit into those categories and it's really as simple as that and I think that the environment eventually creates the designer.'(8:116)

'I don't think it's to do with being male or a woman, I think it's how good you are. I think it's how you think . . . how much you care about creating original work, how much you care about being appropriate for your client and I don't know that that's owned by a man or a woman. I think it's owned by individuals who have vision and who have passion for doing something new and something different, but I don't think it's a male territory or a female territory. You'll find very very shallow male designers as you'll find very very shallow female designers.'(8:135)

Suzy reiterates that mostly gender is not important to her:

'You see something and you say yeah that's more feminine or this could be more from a woman or it's more man designer . . . the most important thing is that the

design is good, and then you can't tell if it was a man or a woman. I wouldn't like to have an expression for female design or male design or something like that. I think it's just good design or bad design.' (7:100)

'At the end it's just the difference of experience, knowledge, so one might decide to go this way or that way and then. . . . But I think it's the same, the same process.'(7:60)

Suzy believes difference is a social construction:

'There is no rule to say women can't find technical solutions. It's only a lot of things that just have to do with knowledge as they are fiddling around when you are a child and trying out things and I mean if you don't have a father or mother who will tell you come in let's repair our video recorder . . . you don't get the interest so . . . with the knowledge . . . to me it has nothing to do with man or woman it's just the tradition to bring up men more this direction and women more in the other direction.' (7:78)

I believe that what the women are saying in many parts of the interviews is that gender-difference, if it does exist, is secondary to the success of the design. Margaret said this in her interview:

'My commitment to it, is to give my expertise which should not be affected by necessarily any of those things [gender]or perhaps my expertise is because of my gender, my culture, whatever. But I don't actually see that first, in that I become the neutral being to actually achieve the end. '(11:162)

The fascinating thing that has occurred in nearly all of the interviews is that although differences between the genders are acknowledged, the label of female or 'woman' designer is not visible. To use such a label would promote difference (and inequality?) whereas I get the impression that women in the design industry perceive themselves - and are themselves perceived - as equal although they do things differently. Some of the interviewees' discussion on difference is

downplayed, even the more overt reactions from men in regards to difference which may be judged as discrimination. For example, Sandra tells of losing clients because she was a woman. Yet when she describes this it is just seen as a form of difference.

'Architects lose clients because they look a bit funny, because they've got strange ears, because they don't like their shoes. I mean human beings respond emotionally with other human beings, one element is gender. (4:34)

'I knew I would lose more clients, I don't know how many more. Maybe because I was a woman the firm probably did I don't know, 10%, 20% less well than it could of if I'd been a guy. I don't know . . . you can't quantify these things because you cant' run a controlled experiment . . . the fact was . . . I ran it well and it was a success . . . Being a woman makes it harder that's all. Beginning and end of story.'(4:36)

Margaret says:

'In this industry you have to do your job well. To be a designer your capabilities are the important . . . but I don't see, be it male or female would actually affect the success. And I've had no . . . sort of feelings of any difference. Not what I've been involved with anyway. (11: 188)

Although Sandra views women as potential victims of discrimination and she has experienced this, she downplays it. Margaret, in contrast, does not appear to have been treated unjustly manner because she was a woman. She said 'I've had no . . . sort of feelings of any difference'. Jackie says that the design industry is quite a liberal place to work:

'. . . It's quite a unisex industry and I suppose there are more professions which have been traditionally more male orientated and certainly maybe ten, fifteen years ago it was more of an issue but I think for instance females going through the school of architecture are equal to the number of males going through now so

that wasn't the case fifteen years ago. . . . unfortunately a lot of female architects, often they work part time and they're not actually seen on the big jobs, they're not on the big commercial jobs they tend to be more on house renovation and kitchen jobs and things like that and that's just how it's happened because they can't give full time to an architectural career and they tend not to work in some of the bigger practices. If they're working on their own they like to control what they do ad they like to do more accessible sort of work but I think that has changed a lot. I think there are much more females out there than there were fifteen years ago both in the graphic and architectural professions. And it is a unisex type of industry, it's not as male driven as some professions. See engineering might be different.'(5:52)

Jackie firstly acknowledges that women are sometimes disadvantaged in architectural design because the nature of the industry is not accommodating of family commitments. Architecture is very demanding, necessitating someone with the role of creative genius who is able to devote themselves to the work. As a result women are often relegated to the less demanding and less valued positions. Even so Jackie reiterates that she feels architecture is a unisex industry. I believe that although she can see gender differences that are disadvantageous to women, she indicates that overall women are judged equally to men and have equal opportunities to succeed in the industry.

' I don't see it as a threatening industry for females to enter into whereas if I was thinking about a career in accountancy or law or even business, trying to make it on the business ladder I'd be a bit more daunted I think as a female. Whereas I see the whole creative discipline s being very much more receptive to female. It would be an industry I feel I could enter into and even set up my own company and feel less daunted than I would in a lot of other professions and when I look at the males in our place which is essentially creative, publishing's creative, I think they have female, they're more female bent.'(5:168)

Charlotte talked about the creative genius: her comment that 'men have permission to be obsessive' portrays her understanding that although women accept that the

role of 'creative genius' exists and strive to attain it, for some the challenge and the cost is too high. Instead many women work within the boundaries of what is expected of a female in design, perhaps reinforcing the idea of women designing differently. I think she is suggesting that to highlight difference is to compound it; maybe we should think of both sexes as having the ability and the possibility of doing all kinds of design, so we do not pigeonhole designers into constructed expectations of what constitutes male and female design. If we do define male and female roles in design we may risk taking away the pleasure and success of those designers who have created something within the area of what is perceived to be their stereotypical role in design.

'I think it's part of the avoidance role for the woman, I don't have access to the creative genius therefore I will attend to the function. Its a trap just as much as the other position is a trap. You know they're both, that sort of polarising of what constitutes women's skill and what constitutes male skill. It seems to me they're both traps for people, they don't allow you to be as a man, as efficient and effective in terms of the place, and as women they don't allow you to be a bulk of the creative thing of shaping it aesthetically which is so important.'(6:143)

Throughout the interviews the women have clearly articulated differences between the genders, and in places the possibility of difference in design style was identified. There was a definitive affirmation of the unique approach women may take to the design process, particularly the emphasis women placed on communication and relationships. But these affirmations were couched within terms that rejected gender difference as important to the success of design.

'There is a subtle difference probably in my mind as I go to present the work be it to a man or to a woman, yes slightly. And I don't know that I define it specifically but I know that it will be a different meeting. I'm with architects in most cases in larger jobs and there's certain parts that they'll give me to present because it sort of feels like I can talk about that piece . . . but there are parts that we sort of share, that you sort of feel because of my expertise it's slightly different to theirs and my interests are slightly different. Because I've got more involved with colour

schemes and finishes than perhaps they have in the technical sense . . . But, you know, a true designer, it wouldn't make any difference either male or female, you've got to go and do all those things really.'(11:76)

I think the changing location of difference and the shifting ground between equality and the politics of difference indicates a complication in their feminist politics. They are not simply pro equality, or anti difference or affirming of gender difference. Difference is not better or worse, it is just different, and aspects of difference should be respected.

'They [women] need reassurance . . . and I'm not saying that's a weakness, that it's just women's way. They need, they like a consultative process.'(1:53)

Within a model of 'différance' in which there are moving and multiple differences that exist in relation to the binary of men and women in design, gender can be relevant and irrelevant. Gender differences were more important in the 1980's than in the 1990's, and more important in design disciplines such as architecture rather than areas like fashion design. Gender may be understood to be irrelevant in terms of the outward appearances and perceptions of design, and gender can be very relevant in terms of the inward process and experience of design, Kate says:

'It was very relevant [gender differences] . . . certainly [but in] 1998 it's not that relevant. It's a rare thing, I got introduced to a client . . . and he was . . . I think you always get that sort of 'Oh! You're a woman!' thing, you know? And I think, it was kind of like oh if it had been a boy, let's go and have lunch and talk about this, but . . . perfunctory little meeting, because you're actually a woman. And I feel not disappointed but slightly surprised, you've just got that feeling maybe I read too much into it . . . pick up on those things. . . . The only time gender is relevant is when people criticize something you do for the fact that it might be a feminine perspective on a certain issue. If you choose an illustrator or you choose, I did a big corporate document two years ago and I chose not to use photographs but to use illustrations, paintings, oil paintings all the way through. And that was mooted within the corporation that perhaps that was because . . . I was a woman designer.' (10:102)

However, incidents when women in design become strongly aware that they are being judged as less than male designers, do not normally occur with their colleagues and peer designers. Opinions of women as 'different' designers seem to come mainly from outside the design discourse. Margaret comments about working with other designers, where she senses that gender difference fades as an issue:

'I didn't actually think whether they were male or female, and as for what I was it didn't matter either. We had a job to fulfil or something to fulfil and that we did together, whoever we were, and to hell with the male or female. That's still the sense that I work with. It doesn't matter.' (11:192)

This view relates back to Mary's comment that:

'Designers don't design differently from other designers. I think gender is irrelevant in design. I think it's totally irrelevant.' (2:332)

13:2 Identity

I have suggested that the women have used liberal or radical feminist discourses in their discussions about 'difference'. It is important to note that this is my interpretation, I am identifying these discourses from the interview transcripts. Some women have embraced the label of feminist particularly having been involved with the feminist movement over the years, and I believe that their relationship with liberal and radical feminist discourses is ongoing. Sandra discusses an incident where she was learning about the design of a maternity ward; as a result she rejected feminist separatist politics as she realised that gender had nothing to do with the success of the design.

'The essence of her [the presenter's] argument was that for any architectural project the understanding of the brief is the most essential part of the process and if you are a really good architect then whoever or whatever you are, whether you

are a cripple in a wheelchair, whether you are an Eskimo, whether you are a man or a woman or you've got two arms or whatever; if you are able to comprehend and empathise with the brief then you will produce the right sort of buildings. There will be a lot of different right buildings. . . . And I always remember this as a fairly blinding flash of light, 'cause I was into sort of you know, separatism and all sorts of stuff at that stage, and I thought Oh yes she's absolutely right. And then she said "My class is full of 20 year olds. None of the girls had ever had babies before, any more than the men had, the girls are just as raw as the men." And of course what we were all doing was making this assumption that because women tend to be the 50% of this planet who give birth, then women will innately have a measure of understanding the needs of the birthing process.' (4:143)

I think what Sandra was saying is that gender is irrelevant sometimes, such as in the judgement of a designed object. The women do not want others to perceive their work or their role as different in terms of the man / woman binary. But they are also saying gender is relevant, particularly within the design process. The women affirm gender difference, acknowledging that women do things differently and that is positive. But this is a discourse that is formed by perceptions from inside the design industry.

Sandra's discussions on gender differences were closely related to her politics as a feminist. She said at the beginning of her interview:

'Any woman over the age of thirty who says she isn't a feminist is dreaming. . . . Well I don't see how you can be alive, functioning and working and not be a feminist frankly' (4:3).

In contrast, some of the interviewees flatly refused to identify themselves as feminist:

'I find that using the word feminist is at once creating a barrier just as being regarded as being female [is], and therefore I can't do this [call myself feminist].

. . .If I use the word feminist and I align myself with feminism then I'm alienating myself from the men who I enjoy being with.' (1:61)

I believe this last comment made by Elizabeth is an example of a simplistic understanding of feminism in terms of the radical feminist notions of the 1970's. I believe that she largely understands most of the outside world to perceive feminism as radical, and she herself appears to understand feminism in this way and rejects it. Yet her other comments reflect a more complex approach to feminist issues, and these are articulated using liberal and feminist discourses. This contradiction seems to indicate that although she rejects the label 'feminist', she upholds and acts out and articulates feminist politics.

Paula Scher is a prominent graphic designer in the United States, she has featured in a number of American publications about women in design; such as *Essays on Design 1, Ten Years. Women in Design, Chicago* and *International Women in Design.* Many of the comments she has made are similar to comments made by the interviewees, and Paula Scher also appears to weave in and out of feminist politics. Her relationship to feminist politics, the possibility of a feminist identity, and her articulations of gender difference have changed during the course of her career. In 1988 she said '. . . I don't walk around thinking, "I'm a feminist, I'm a feminist." I feel feministic when I sense discrimination' (Women in Design/Chicago 1988:81). In 1993, she said: 'Being a woman in business is like being in a very low security prison . . . . You think you're free, but you run into a blockade you didn't see or expect, and you must find your way around it . . . . It's important to acknowledge the barriers exist and to accept that. And then you must find your way around it' (Supon Design Group 1993:11). Also in 1993, she wrote this in response to the suggestion she was a role model for women in design:

> 'I envy my male partners who are invited to speak based in their achievements and prestige as opposed to their sex. I cannot separate my own achievements from being a woman . . . . On the other hand, the tokenism has had its advantages. I've been able to attain a visibility that might have been harder to come by if I were male. The visibility may be helpful professionally but it's always clouded in a veil of "women's issues" . . . . I set out as a designer, not thinking that being a

woman had much to do with anything. What mattered was the work . .
. [if] you are looking for some sort of *modus operandi* for surviving in
male dominated working situation. There isn't one. Men are different.
Situations are different. And women are different. The only thing that
is constant for me is my work. . . . There are more women who are
terrific designers, more women running their own businesses, more
women changing the scale of things . . . there are also more underpaid
women, more women juggling careers and motherhood, more women
who feel squeezed out in a bad economy, more women going to art
school and going nowhere afterwards, and more women who are
resentful of their lack of success "because they are women". . . I don't
want to be anyone's "role model". I dislike the term because it
diminishes my life by implying that I'm playing some kind of role for
other people's benefit' (Essays on Design 1997:54)

Following the interviews, I have been interested, when talking about gender
difference, how articulations of this may signify the women's identity, their politics
and their ontology as women in design. Do they assert difference, acknowledge it,
and identify and accept it as real and existing, not only historically but currently in
the design industry? If so, do they strive to dissolve difference, do they want
equality and the erasure of difference between sexes, or do they promote
femaleness? Do they resist difference, do they accept it or do they do both and is
this their ontology? Are women in design sometimes adopting both 'liberal' and
'radical' feminist politics therefore do they feel that they do not conform to the
label 'feminist'?

Some of the women did not want to identify a 'separate female design style', and
believed that gender was irrelevant. What was important was the success of the
design. They did not want a 'female identity' but rather an identity as a designer:
recognition as a designer first and their gender second.

*'If I had to write in what my occupation was I would never put female fashion
designer, I'd just put designer.'(2:119)*

Elizabeth said:

' I wish the work female would go away. I'm able to think through a process as clearly as any man but I am in a sense hampered by . . . my concern for other people and doing the right thing. . . .I enjoy being a woman, I enjoy what being a woman has offered me in life but I want to be also allowed to think like a man. And it has to do with an element of freedom that I claim, and the right to . . . determine my own future, and the right to travel alone and I mean that in the widest possible sense'(1:59)

Jocelyn said:

'It's nobody's business, its only my body's business about what my sex is. It doesn't need to qualify what kind of architect or designer I am. . . .I think it's a poor demarker because it allows stereotypes to be early forms of judgement. People might even assume that you carry feminist view points, and what is that anymore? I mean, there are so many forms of feminism that you can't even give a guess. No, I don't appreciate somebody calling me a female designer, or female architect.' (9:152)

Kate claimed that she did not feel the need to be known as a female designer:

'I would rather be called a designer. ' (10:124)

A short time later in the interview though, Kate said that the name of her company had a female name:

'[The company name] pretty much says female design anyway. . . . If I was hiding behind the fact that I wanted to be a-sexual I think I would call myself XZ Design or something. . . . I think that's [name of her company] loud and proud, so I guess I'm quite proud of the fact that I'm a female designer.' (10:128)

Kate was confident about displaying her gender alongside her career title. This may illustrate the different dynamics of the design disciplines the women are situated within. Jocelyn does not want to be signalled as an architect of difference; perhaps this is because she is still trying to be the 'same' or equal to men in architecture. However,

Kate is a graphic designer; maybe within her design discipline it is a less male dominated industry and there is less need to still obtain equality . She can therefore comfortably incorporate her gender into her identity without fear of being judged as less of a designer.

Many of the women I have spoken to have rejected the idea of identifying themselves as 'female designers' as an unnecessary focus. This view reinforces the notion that gender, although it may be a part of the design process, is not necessarily visible in the design object, and it is the overall success of the design/designer that is important first, not gender.

I return for a moment to Elizabeth's comment:

'I wish the word female would go away, I'm able to think through a process as clearly as any man but I am in sense hampered by . . . my concern for other people and doing the right thing. (1:59)

In the first sentence I believe she rejects an identity as female, as that would be different or judged as lesser than a man. She rejects difference then in favour of gender equality; however, the qualities she has talked about are identified as 'female' and are positive because they belong to the 'other' of the binary. They are not perceived to be the same way a man would think through a design process. If she chooses not to reject these qualities she is perceived by others to be lesser than a man, and she shows an awareness of this. Elizabeth describes the situation as a dichotomy, she enjoys the difference of experience due to her sex, yet she does not want to reject it in order to be equal to a man. She wants equality and difference and so her earlier comment, 'I don't regard myself as a feminist', may account for her rejecting the label of feminist if it is to mean a purely liberal or radical response to gender difference in design.

'I regard myself as a bit of a bloke really, but there's a big difference between the way you regard yourself and the way you're perceived by others, its a bit of a dichotomy. I mean I travel through my life really as a single person and I am

married with family but in my work day life and the way I perceive my self, is as a single person in the world. And that is a bloke way to think in a way.' (1:3)

'I enjoy being a woman, I enjoy what being a woman has offered me in life but I want to be also allowed to think like a man. and it has to do with an element of freedom that I claim and the right to my own, to determine my future, and the right to travel alone and I mean that in the widest possible sense . . . I don't regard myself as a feminist interestingly enough!'(1:61)

I am fascinated by the dichotomy that Elizabeth has illustrated: '**being** a woman' and '**thinking** like a man.' Stanley and Wise (1993) discuss traditional Cartesian systems of thought as separating the body and the mind:

> An 'ontology' is a theory of 'reality' or being; and within Cartesian systems of thought 'being' is seen to encompass the body and the mind, with body associated with women and mind with men. And there is a further dichotomizing here, of the rational aspects of mind seen as male and the irrational emotional aspects associated with women (Stanley and Wise 1993:194).

I believe Elizabeth positions herself outside of this binary by describing her ontology, or her 'way of being,' as inclusive of both male and female characteristics. Using the feminist ontological understanding of Stanley and Wise, one can place Elizabeth's comment within a feminist ontological discourse, although she does not identify herself as a feminist. 'Our feminist fractured foundationalism challenges the binary fundamentals of Cartesisan ontology, for it recognises differentiation but sees this as neither oppositional nor dualistic, and is also appreciative of, rather than antagonistic to, difference.' (Stanley and Wise 1993:194)

It appears that the women I interviewed have a good understanding of what would be termed 'feminist' issues, such as being treated differently or less than a man would in the same situation, yet they would not call them feminist issues. It is almost as if the women practice feminism, but they do not call themselves feminists. Charlotte explains this quite well in terms of her students:

'Even though in a curious way people are less overtly prepared to identify themselves as feminists, amongst the students . . . you know they behave as feminists and I think they're very insistent on their own rights and their own abilities in a way that the group before that wasn't, and they needed the support of the theorising in a way that the students seem not to so much now. But I may be being idealistic!' (6:57) 'They have the benefits of the battles . . . before, just like I had the benefits of the battles that were before me that enabled me to get the job in the first place.' (6:73)

Perhaps the ontology of the interviewees can best be described using the word différance: the changing and moving space between the signifier, that is, what the women perceive others think; and the signified, that is, the women themselves. This space in which they are existing and living their lives is a site of differences. There are differences between women and men, between women and women, and within the women's own narratives.

Kate illustrates the changing attitudes one person may have towards gender differences in a comment about whether gender is irrelevant in the design industry. It is clear that the ages of the women, especially those that began their careers in the 1980's, serves to influence feelings towards gender difference.

'If I'd come into this industry in say 1988 and I'd only been doing it for 10 years, I would say that's [the comment 'gender's irrelevant] true, but I guess that a lot of mine [experience] is tarred with the fact that I did that extra 5 years before that and it was very relevant.' (10:100)

A complicated mixture of feminist politics and discourses is found in an analysis of the women's interviews when the women discussed gender difference. The women say they do not want to be judged differently from male designers, and for that reason they prefer to be recognised as 'designers,' not women designers. They are equal not different. Yet some of the women say they are proud that they are women and affirm gender differences. They say they are not feminists, but they

acknowledge the work of feminism. Variations on perspectives of gender difference may be contingent on age and the design discipline that they are situated within, but there are aspects of this contradiction in all of the interviewees' transcripts. These contradictions form a negotiation of the area of difference, the shifting ground I call différance, or meta difference. Différance or meta-difference is understood as multiplicities rather than existing within a binary. I believe the women have rejected binary understandings of difference although they still presume that others perceive of them in that way. Within their discourse, they have constructed difference, but they resist it as well. They do not want to be called 'woman designer,' which places them on one half of the binary. They prefer to be known as 'designer', a term which, when the women use it, signifies the encompassing of all of both male and female, form and function. The women in fact say 'gender is irrelevant,' difference does not matter. Yet they identify and experience gender difference. They avoid locating themselves on either side of a binary and instead situate themselves in the deferred space called différance, which is constantly shifting and may at times include the binary. They are being and existing in this space, and I believe this is their ontology, their feminist way of being (even if it is not labelled as such). The women are no longer simply fighting for equality, or simply rejecting masculine norms and insisting on feminine knowledges, which they see as historically located feminisms. I believe their complicated discourse points to an ontological positioning in which they weave in and out of debates of equality and difference, and liberal and radical feminist politics. Let me explain in more detail what I mean about the interviewees ontological weaving through 'difference' in a summary of the interviews:

13:3 Weave of Differences

I believe the women's ontologies or ways of being in the design industry can be viewed in terms of a 'weave of differences'. My analysis of difference began with an examination of gender differences between men and women in design. It was described as existing between binaries like Ego / passion, hard/soft, linear and multitask. Some women said there were definitely differences and some said there

were not. Figure 1 represents the division between the binaries of male and female, and the gender difference in design.

Figure 1. **The first difference is between men and women, this is gender difference.**

Women who said there were no gender differences appeared to have liberal feminist politics. They seemed to resist being judged as different from men, perceiving 'different' to mean better or less than a man. They indicated a desire to be judged equally to men in design. Women who said there was a difference between the genders provided more of a radical analysis, affirming female difference. These articulations of difference were affected by the different design disciplines the women were situated within; the more male dominated, like architecture, the more likely the women were to assert difference. So the first difference was between men and women, and the second difference was between the women interviewed. Figure 2 represents the contrast between women's experiences of gender difference.
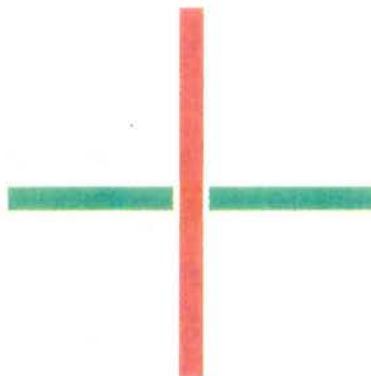
Figure 2 **The second difference is between the women's experiences of gender difference**

The third difference existed within each woman's own articulation of difference. They themselves had differences within their one location. They wove in and out of difference, in and out of liberal and radical ideologies, and in and out of discourses of equality and difference. Their descriptions of gender differences and their relationship to that difference changed depending on the particular aspect of the design industry or the design process that they were referring to in the interview. Their opinions were also variable according to time periods, such as between the 1980's and the 1990's, and between different stages in their careers. Difference was sometimes more visible but less important to women who were senior designers and experienced in the industry. Figure 3 represents the difference within women's own articulations.
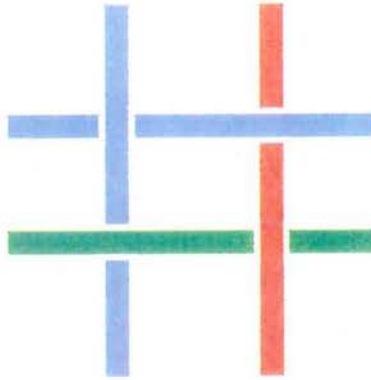

Figure 3 **The third difference is within women's own articulations of gender difference.**
The word différance has been used in this thesis to describe that movement of difference. Derrida writes of différance as 'the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted "historically" as a weave of differences'(Derrida, Cited in Kamuf 1991:64-65). Grosz claims that Derrida uses the term 'différance' to 'designate an active and passive movement that consists in deferring, delaying and substituting. . . . A movement at the basis of different things . . . différance is the condition of difference' (Grosz, Cited in Gunew 1990:96). This movement is represented in Figure 4.
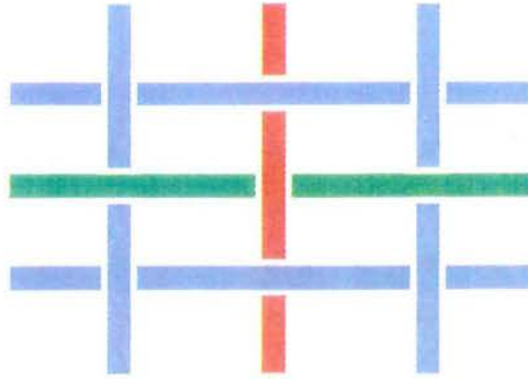
Figure 4 **The third difference traverses difference. The term 'différance describes the movement and changing politic.**

I believe the word 'différance' helps to describe the changing meanings of difference that the women use, and the changing relationship they have to the idea of gender difference. Within the interviews, the women's articulations of gender differences, and difference within that difference, are fluid and changing. They are interlocking and weaving. They form an identity and a politic that both rejects and affirms gender differences in the design industry. This politic both rejects and affirms equality or sameness with men and rejects and affirms difference: It is both liberal and radical, at different times and in different places.

Conclusion

The intention of this thesis was to record the perceptions and experiences of a small selection of women working within or associated with the design industry, with a focus on gender differences. After analysing the transcripts, looking for patterns and contradictions and deconstructing phrases, it became apparent that the most important theme was that of difference. In analysing the differences between men and women and in terms of the design industry, there were layers of differences, with differences upon and across differences. It was like a 'weave of differences' (Derrida 1982), an interlocking and overlapping framework onto which the women's experiences and perceptions of themselves, in contrast to men in the design industry, was woven. Derrida's term 'différance' became extraordinarily useful, offering a space in which to accept the contingency of difference.

'Difference' was contingent on understandings of what it meant to be a man or a woman in design. If 'man' was presumed to be a designer and 'woman' was presumed to be 'other than', or not a 'real designer', then the differences between men and women signified success or failure. The notion of sameness or equality of a woman to a man would indicate success; and difference, female difference, would indicate a design, or a way of doing design, that was less than the standard. Even if a woman did not believe this dichotomy to be true, she might believe that the general public perceived it to be the case, and would therefore reject difference on the grounds that she was perceived to be less of a designer.

The women also experienced the design industry beyond the limitations of the binary in which man has been seen as the designer and women as 'other than' or not 'real designer'. The women I interviewed, identified and perceived both positive and negative differences which they both rejected and affirmed. In the articulation of differences between men and women they constructed binaries, particularly that of ego and passion. But they also described experiences of difference which were more complicated than binary arrangements. They described

differences that were more pronounced at the interface with clients and in the design process; the interviewees suggested that women tended to work more collaboratively. Women said, many times, that female designers needed to 'know their stuff' to have credibility, but that in a male dominated industry, a talented female designer had the powerful tool of being able to provide an element of surprise. This issue served to reinforce that there were differences, but they were not simply good or bad. Women, it appears, may consciously have to act a certain way because of gender differences, and some women strove to be more like men. At the same time they also validated a particular female way of doing things, particularly the notion of working collaboratively and 'caring' for design rather than encouraging competitiveness and ego.

An overall summary of New Zealand women in the design industry, based on interviews with eleven women, would rest with the word difference. Feminist analysis has lead me to understand that women's experiences and perceptions of the design industry are variable. The women have said there are differences between men and women, and these differences are more pronounced in the design process than in finished design, but the women I interviewed did not consider themselves different, particularly if different meant being judged as less than a man. Where they positioned themselves in articulating that 'difference' was varied: it changed over the course of the interview, and it changed according to the different relationships women referred to, such as between herself and a client or between herself and a sub-contractor. Some of the women's relationships to gender difference and their feminist perceptions of this could been seen to change over the course of their career.

In the interviews I encouraged women to discuss their experiences and perceptions of gender difference, and they have revealed gender differences to be complex. Their feminist positioning is complex too. None of the women had a specific liberal or radical feminist stance, and their political viewpoints varied according to the issues. They used liberal and radical feminist ideologies and rejected them as well. The women I spoke to accepted traditional aspects of the design industry and

also rejected them. They colluded with and resisted the dominant discourses of design.

I believe the design industry to be a site of creative expansion and personal development, camaraderie and competition; it both influences the outside world and reflects it. New Zealand women in design present themselves as genderless entities yet it seems they also incorporate and acknowledge their gendered identity. As one interviewee commented:

'Women think, make design differently to men and it's differently that's important. It's not better, it's not worse: there are attributes to both.' (9:47)

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Appendix

Appendix A: Reflexive Methodology

I have found design to be a useful metaphor for the thesis writing process. At times I have felt like a designer; I have constructed my object - the thesis - within the boundaries set in the brief, and devised solutions to problems. I have created and imagined within the possibilities open to me. Most of the time I have felt like I am designing this thesis for my clients, the interviewees. They provided me with the challenging material, the interesting topic, and I have endeavored to allow this thesis to honour their original words. Yet, like a designer, I have questioned the ownership of design. Is this thesis mine, do I own the 'design'? Are the ideas in the thesis mine or the interviewees'?

Throughout the thesis I have said that the women talked about difference. This emerged as an overall theme and analysis after the interviews when I realised how complicated everything was. The women talked about gender differences yet said there were none; the women also made comments similar to each other, yet they all varied. Some women said they were not feminist, yet they spoke using liberal and radical feminist discourses. I believe they were actively constructing a discourse of their own in which they embraced multiple differences, and I wanted my 'design' to show that, through an analysis of difference. I kept seeing this picture in my mind, where all the differences were visible. This image would not go away, and eventually the 'weave of difference' emerged which helped clarify for me the layers of contradiction in the interviews.

A:1 Selection of Interviewees

I have been pleased with my choice of research participants, as the material they left me with was rich in information. My intention was to get a 'snapshot' of women in design, and this was achieved with my cross section of interviewees from different design disciplines. Two of the interviewees were teachers of architecture; in hindsight it may have been useful to have interviewed only one teacher of

design, but I do not regret the material I was provided with which was vital in depicting the preparation for the industry and offered an important perspective.

When I first returned to Christchurch after my field work, I wished I had been able to interview more women who worked full time as designers because I wanted to ensure that I had a strong sense of the industry. However, I found in a selection of eleven interviewees, all women working in and around the design industry, that I had reached a level of saturation. I felt I was repeatedly getting enough answers or comments that were the same or similar to suit the size of this research project. As a result I am comfortable with my cross section of women interviewed.

It has been mentioned in the method section how careful I had to be in my reference to the word feminist. Some of the women I interviewed just did not see their experiences or the issues they came across as feminist. Yet they discussed them and their relationships with men in the design industry in a feminist context. If I had labelled those comments as feminist they would have vehemently denied it. This is all beautifully illustrated in a fax from Jackie who agreed to an interview if it was about her as a woman in the design industry, not a feminist. She wrote:
'Thank you for faxing through details on your thesis. Somewhere in our telephone conversation I missed the operative word - feminist. While I am happy to contribute ideas about working in the design industry I don't think I would have anything of value to say from a feminist standpoint. The fact is, in the 20 years I have been working in design . . . I have never witnessed or experienced anything that could be classified as a feminist issue.'

A:2 The Interview Process

I believe the interviews went well, and most of the women commented afterward that they enjoyed them. Quite often the interviews were rushed because of the busy lives of the interviewees; they seemed to squeeze my interview in between meetings or deadlines, and the power dynamics became very interesting. The women I interviewed were extremely busy women; sometimes they were well known and successful figures in public life, so the power dynamics within a

research situation were inverted. Because of my feminist background I was concerned that I would be imposing my 'authority' on them or taking their words away under my control. Instead I felt they were in the powerful position, they were women whom I had to beg for time. I was aware of my inferior status as a mere student in contrast with their professional success, at least that was my impression at the beginning or prior to the interviews. For example, one particular woman who was extraordinarily busy changed the interview time twice. My travel arrangements had been organised around that particular interview and I felt very nervous as she had been short and sharp on the phone. I ended up carrying my luggage to the interview and I felt that seriously compromised my attempts to be 'professional'! However, despite my nervousness, trepidation and a very real sense of inferiority, it turned out to be the richest and most valuable interview.

I think the interview questions turned out to be well structured. Discussion about general understandings of design set the context and allowed me to clarify the women's particular roles in and around the industry. From this point it was generally quite easy to explore aspects of their role in the industry in relation to gender difference. I found that in the last few interviews I was probably more proactive in searching for information about gender difference, although I still tried to follow their thoughts and responses rather than impose my own.

The duration of most of the interviews was an hour and a half. I found I was immediately affected by the material; I was very excited, particularly when I could identify patterns and repeated statements. Sometimes I shared those thoughts with the interviewees, and their responses created dialogue between the interviews due to my prompting. Although I was extremely careful to respect anonymity and to be vague about ideas other research participants had provided, it was evident that I was able to influence interview answers and direct the conversation to suit my interests. In reviewing this process I was fascinated at how easily my bias as a researcher slipped into the research process.

A:3   Negotiation of Text

A few months after the interviews I sent the women their transcript, a selection of quotations from their interviews, the reasons I found them interesting, and a summary of my initial findings. Most women were surprised at how their verbal communication was so different from their written communication. I was glad I had given them my comments and initial findings rather than just the transcript, as I do not believe they would have given me so much feedback. I felt very strongly that I needed to show them how their words were being used, and the transcript by itself did not do that. I emphasised that as part of the negotiation of text, they could make a further comment in order to clarify a point, or words or statements could be removed for anonymity, but they could not alter the text. I received great feedback. No comments were made that differed substantially from points made in the interviews. In fact, one woman made a point of clarification that served to reinforce everything I had perceived to be her thoughts. It was valuable to read her comments as I realised I had interpreted her data correctly. She wrote: 'In so far as 'good design' is about 'good communication' (good communication between design and client and good communication between design and the intended market) then I believe women are well suited to the design professions, because they are typically better communicators. I <u>know</u> [her underlining] this is a sweeping generalisation, but women tend to be more verbal, more sensitive, possibly less ego-driven, think more abstractly, see issues less as being black and white but rather shades of grey, more able to multi-task.'

The 'negotiation of test' also reinforced the benefits of the interviewees remaining anonymous. Most changes or comments related to women's identity, and even the women who at the time of the interview did not mind whether they were anonymous or not, when on reflection they realised all they had said, were pleased to be anonymous and checked for it.

A:4   Analysis

My greatest concern throughout this thesis has been that in my role as researcher, I may have recreated or rewritten the women's words; pulling them out and

placing them in my context. Hopefully through the information sheet, informal conversation at the start of the interview and the negotiation of text, the interviewees have had enough opportunity to question if that is the case. By the time I had finished the data analysis and worked on the 'weave of difference' I was unsure of this, particularly since I had indicated many of the women had engaged in liberal and radical feminist discourses when they said they were not feminists. But as I reread the transcripts I feel confident that I have honoured their words and that the research reflects their perceptions and their experiences. Within this thesis I was not designing difference, but discovered there was difference by design.

Appendix B:

Introductory Letter

Naomi Wilde
Feminist Studies Department,
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch
Ph. 366-7001 extn. 5985

To whom it may concern,

My name is Naomi Wilde, I am a Canterbury University student and I am writing to invite you to participate in research towards my Masters Thesis.

My thesis is titled 'New Zealand women in the design industry: A feminist analysis.' As the title suggests, I am interested in how New Zealand women experience working within the design industry, and I will be analysing this with particular attention to gender issues.

I am interested in talking to you and hearing how you personally have experienced working within the design industry.

Should you agree to participate in this research project, your anonymity will be protected and all information you provide will be kept confidential. Enclosed is information pertaining to the interview process. If you would like to participate, a consent form is also included.

Please contact me if you have any further queries regarding the project, I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Naomi Wilde

Appendix C:

Information Sheet

University of Canterbury
Feminist Studies Department
INFORMATION

You are invited to participate as a subject in a research project by Naomi Wilde which is to be marked as her Masters Thesis.

The aim of this project is to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be a New Zealand woman working within the design industry.

Your involvement in this project will involve an interview with myself the researcher. It is estimated the interview will take approximately one hour although this may vary.

As a follow-up to the interview you will be asked to meet for a second time to 'negotiate the text'. This is an opportunity for you to register any disagreements you may have with material mentioned in the transcript as well as to check for complete anonymity.

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures there are risks to you as an interviewee that a) you might be misinterpreted in the transcribing of your interview, and b) that your anonymity may be lost through mention of your professional affiliations or colleagues. These risks should be eliminated through the above mentioned 'negotiation of text' process. You may at any time withdraw from the research and remove all information you have provided.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants such as yourself will not be made public without your consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality all references to and citations of the interviewee and material pertaining to you will be removed from the research, or, if it unavoidable to mention them, names and references will be replaced with pseudonyms.

The project is being carried out by Naomi Sarah Wilde, who can be contacted at 366-7001 extn 5985. I would be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in this research. My supervisor for this project is Dr Julie Wuthnow, who can be reached by phoning 364-2702.

The project has been reviewed by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Appendix D:

Consent Form

Masters Degree Thesis.
New Zealand women in the design industry: A feminist analysis.

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate as a subject in the project; I consent to being interviewed with the full knowledge that the interview will be recorded and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that my anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed... Date......................................

Appendix E:

Interview Questions

How would you explain what design is?

Based on your experience, how might this be different for men and women?

Are there areas of the design process / the design industry that you find difficult to work? Why is this?

How do you feel about being called a 'female designer'? Do you want to or need to acknowledge your gender?

Do you have role models within the design industry?

How much connection do you have with other female designers? How might they be different to work with than male designers?

How supportive is the design industry to the commitments some female designers may have outside of work, e.g. to families and children? Is this any different from men?

Do you believe female designers get the same amount of publicity as men?

Do you feel the pressure to look or act a certain way in order to be legitimised as a designer? How might this be different for men and women?

How does your background, culture and gender affect your design?

Do you think there is such a thing as 'feminine design', or a female design style?

What are the really positive aspects of working in the design industry? What do you love about design?

Appendix F:

Naomi Wilde
Feminist Studies Dpt.
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch
Ph. 366-7001 extn 5985

Dear.......

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you very much for making the time to meet and talk with me earlier this year. I had a lot of fun, and it has been great reading back over the interviews.
Enclosed is a copy of the complete transcript, a summary of many of my findings so far and a written piece in which I have extracted parts of your interview and placed them within an explanation and exploration of my ideas.

I would be grateful if you could read over the material and write back to me with your responses to the 'Highlighted comments', this does not need to be formalised, feel free to make your comments on the paper itself. You may delete bits that you feel may breach confidentiality or break your anonymity; you may also make additional comments, particularly if you wish to clarify certain aspects. However, I ask that you do not alter the text as such, as I believe many of your initial comments and responses are crucial. Even hesitations and contradictions in speech are important indicators of one's perceptions of the design industry and I would like to retain these as much as possible. If you would like to respond to the summary piece you are most welcome.

I am aware that this is arriving to you very close to the holiday period, and it would be great to receive your response before the Christmas break, however I appreciate that you are probably very busy at this time of the year so as long as I have feedback by the 5th of January this should allow me enough time to reach my deadline. I apologise for the length of time it has taken to return the transcripts; I hope you enjoy reading them. The copy of the full transcript is yours to keep if you wish.

I hope you have a pleasant holiday break, and thank you once again for you enthusiasm and support in participating in my research.

Yours sincerely,

Naomi Wilde

Appendix G:

'Summary' sent to interviewees.

Examining the interview transcripts has been an exciting and fascinating experience. The interviews themselves were thrilling enough; listening to every word and mentally seeing patterns emerge was a further thrill. It was equally exciting to read over the interviews later and to see words and sentences repeat themselves again and again. I started this investigation hoping to learn about the experiences and perceptions of New Zealand women in the design industry. I was probing into conceptions and understandings of what design is, of what the design industry is like, and of how this may be different for men and for women. I endeavoured to retain neutrality, and I tried to listen to each interview without expectation of what the reaction or response might be, particularly in terms of the idea of differences between men and women and of spoken and unspoken understandings of feminism and gender issues. Maybe there would be no perceived difference, maybe there was no need for a feminist analysis or inquiry into issues relating to gender in the design industry, and as one interviewee told me 'the battle's been won.' Was this the case? Or maybe within the design industry, traditionally dominated by men, there were still 'traces' of the battle, played out and experienced in subtle and complicated ways. The first two interviews particularly helped in this respect, as they both contained the wonderful contradiction that one's sex was irrelevant in the design industry but that as women their gender played an important role. This contradiction has been one of the main issues throughout all of the interviews; women in the design industry are performing as individuals, are competing equally with men and succeeding; as such their sex is not important. They are designers rather than 'female designers'. However, as women they experience things differently, and admit to 'doing' things differently.

One of the first areas that we explored in the interviews was design itself and the possible differences between male and female design. When we were talking about the possibility of a female design style, interviewees differentiated between female design and feminine design, feminine design could be produced by men and women. Most of the women I talked to were reluctant to identify a difference between design produced by men and women, as if acknowledging difference restricts the possibilities of design. I was told that good design is beyond gender, in other words the gender or sexual identity of the designer is invisible and possibly irrelevant, what is important is whether the design 'works' or not. However, although interviewees were reluctant to identify design as female or male, there were aspects of design that could be identified as feminine in style, and sometimes interviewees thought they would be able to guess at whether a male or a female was responsible for the design.

It appears from the interviews that understandings of the possible differences between male and female design are situated within the debate over form and function. One key element of design is that it consists of both these factors, form

and function; it is not only the production of an object with aesthetic value, but the object is both functional and practical. The form or aesthetic value of design has traditionally been seen as a feminine attribute secondary to the functional aspects of the object. Form is creative and intuitive; function by contrast consists of the technological and practical requirements of the design: the problem solving aspect, which may require specialised training, knowledge and experience. (I have found it quite interesting to consider this pairing of form and function as mirroring the privileging of mind over body.)

The design industry is perceived as a continuum in which architecture is seen as the most technologically demanding of the design disciplines; here the success of architectural design is directly related to the function of the object, and interestingly women are most underrepresented in this area of the industry. Fashion design is seen at the opposing end of the spectrum and is viewed as the most creative of the design disciplines; it has the least restrictions on it in terms of a practical brief, fashion designers are more able to explore aspects of form, and this particular area of the design industry is dominated by women. It could be seen therefore that the privileging of architecture over fashion reflects and reinforces this notion of 'form following function.'

However, it is interesting that throughout the interviews this idea of form following function was often inverted, particularly in regards to architecture, which appears to require a strong sense of ego, self-confidence and creativity in order to promote the aspect of form as important. Some interviewees, although they were aware that form was perceived as a feminine aspect of design, saw men as more involved and more visible in the promotion of form. Some of the women I talked to viewed women as being more involved with issues of function, with detail, and with specific aspects of design, later arriving at the overall design shape or form.

The design process was discussed in the interviews and 'Ego' was a word used consistently; one of the apparent perceptions of the difference between men and women is the presence or absence of ego. Men, it was perceived, think and design using their ego, they compete with each other and appear to be able to focus without distraction on their work, and they are more inclined to work as individuals. It was suggested that women design less with their egos, and work more collaboratively; they work together more in design teams and possibly develop closer relationships with their clients. Some of the women I interviewed were envious of the way men are able to work with a strong focus. They suggested that women may need more affirmation and consider their design work as more of a personal extension of themselves. This sometimes lead to complications because these relationships, while more personal and often very rewarding, are strained and difficult if the woman has to assert authority or negotiate monetary issues. It is interesting to note that any difficulties with relationships within the industry discussed by interviewees were not often with fellow designers but with clients or peripheral bodies such as building site workers, builders, printers and manufacturers.

It was apparent throughout the interviews that although men were seen as having a strong sense of ego, this did not necessarily mean that the interviewees thought

women were less ambitious, just ambitious in a 'different way.' Women were seen to be able to multi task more, this was not necessarily a less focused way of working rather it was a way of organising and compartmentalising one's time. The word passion or 'passionate' was a word used by many of the interviewees I talked to, and two words that came up repeatedly were 'soft' and 'hard.' Women's design, women in design, women's approach to design, and women's communication in design was described as 'soft ' or softer'. In contrast, men's approach to design, and in particular the design process, was described as 'hard.' I would like to explore this binary further and question what it may mean, particularly given that some women indicated that they wished they could be 'harder'; I wondered if this meant more assertive or aggressive.

I have gained a strong sense of the design industry as a place in which men and women are potentially equal. It is a creative space, where success is based on performance and many women expressed a strong belief and fondness for the industry, saying that it is not a threatening environment; although it may be competitive and stressful, the women are able to compete as individuals, and they are not proving their worth as women but as designers. One's sex therefore is overlooked; however, there is this fascinating story being told simultaneously, that while gender does not matter, women do things differently! This understanding of New Zealand women in the design industry has positive aspects to it, many of the women spoke of their gender as providing a 'space' for them, with their 'difference' provoking a powerful element of surprise. However, many of the women I spoke to also felt they have had to be better than men to be considered equal, this was a comment made frequently throughout the interviews and often by experienced and successful designers and confident women; within the interviews they stressed that women have to 'know their stuff.' This is important: women who succeed and prove themselves within the design industry have had to work harder in some situations than their male colleagues, and their work is under more intense scrutiny, I was told women can't 'bluff' as easily as men. Many women discussed notions of difference with an awareness of their working lives and themselves as part of a minority; there was an understanding of difference in the areas of design itself, the design process and within the design industry, but even so nearly all the women I spoke to displayed a reluctance to highlight this difference. It is interesting also to note that many of the women I talked to were reluctant to identify as feminist or to use that label although the level of understanding of gender issues that they displayed and their success in the design industry, reflected an alliance with many feminist politics and theoretical structures. In conclusion, I believe the design industry is a positive place to work within. It is increasingly an environment equal to both sexes, but there are many layers to this discourse, full of contradictions and complications, that point to an understanding that women are different from men, they do things differently and are treated differently within the design industry. I am particularly curious as to the reasons why women in the design industry appear reluctant to highlight these differences.