Making Sense of Graphic Design: A Narrative Analysis

By

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Abstract

This study is about the transformation of graphic design practice and why in a field struggling to define its borders and come to terms with the commodification of its methods and tools, design as a means of sense making remains relevant. Digital technology is reshaping the graphic designer's work and the design field, creating new opportunities for designers, adding seats at tables, and making room for new conceptions of what constitutes graphic design.

Technological disruption threatens the traditional design business model, both practically and philosophically. Digital applications and platforms continue to commodify the designer's traditional technical skillset by democratizing the methods of production and facilitating widespread access to design tools. Cost-effective, sophisticated tools empower non-designers to create communications products, and intuitive website builders, e-commerce platforms, and logo generators are beginning to do the designer's work. Digital technologies and social platforms have changed the underlying business model of the design industry, where quantity, quality and cost are no longer relative functions of one another.

The impact of digital transformation in design practice has created concerns around authorship, quality, creative control and professionalism. As communication mediums change, the methods and nature of communication change, and so too does graphic design. Parallel to these changes, the occupations, roles and titles associated with the graphic designer are evolving and shifting what it means to be a designer.

Keywords: graphic design, communication design, digital design, information design, interdisciplinary design, design history, new media, visual communication, innovation design, design thinking, design for social good, design practice, design transformation.

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Introduction

Making Sense of Graphic Design: A Narrative Analysis; investigates how graphic designers are responding to digital transformation in their work and how they contextualize these changes within their practice and profession. The study uses a grounded, narrative approach and seeks to reveal meaning through storytelling and lived experience. This research contributes to the evolving conversation about the role of contemporary graphic design by examining what it means to be a graphic designer in a changing field. This research describes how graphic designers are responding to digital disruption within their work. Identifying how graphic designers respond to changes within their field has implications for the training they receive, their occupational status, the clients they work with, and the scope of their work.

Graphic design is a dynamic and evolving discipline that shapes information and technology and impacts society and the environment. Reciprocally, technology, culture, and the economy shape graphic design practice. The graphic design occupation, like many occupations, is in a state of transition; the roles and expectations placed on graphic designers have become fluid—shifting from project to project. The democratization of information, together with technology and readily accessible, sophisticated and cost-effective tools, has commodified graphic design products. Within design discourse, a growing concern for the environment, sustainability and moral agency, coupled with social and economic changes, is leading to new conceptions of what graphic design practice encompasses. Together, these transitions impact what it means to be a graphic designer and how designers define their occupation.

Digital tools and the knowledge economy continue to shape society and disrupt traditional organizations and models. Graphic designers, like many professionals, are becoming ever more aware their field is changing. Although graphic design has been repeatedly affected by

technological changes and advancement throughout history, the scale and intensity of digital

impact are unlike any development the field has experienced since the industrial revolution. As a

result of technological disruption and a growing concern for sustainability, both economic and

environmental, the theoretical boundaries and scope of traditional design practice are changing.

At one time, graphic design was concerned explicitly with the look, feel, and form of graphic and

communications artifacts. Now, the industry appears to be refocusing itself, trying to come to

terms with the new media of digital design and readily accessible "craft" of design. As digital

design moves to the forefront of current practice, graphic design work is more experiential,

social and service-oriented than product-oriented.

The International Council of Graphic Design (Icograda) was founded in 1963 to advance

"meaningful international dialogue around the future trajectory of Graphic Design (International

Council of Graphic Design; History, 2019)." In 2011 the International Council of Graphic

Design was retitled to The International Council of Design (ico-D) to reflect the changes taking

place within the field, primarily the blurring of boundaries and the inclusion of new media within

the field (International Council of Design, 2015). In October of 2013, the ico-D ratified a

professional definition for the field and the practitioner:

> "Design is a constantly evolving and dynamic discipline. The professionally trained
>
> designer applies intent to create the visual, material, spatial and digital environment,
>
> cognizant of the experiential, employing interdisciplinary and hybrid approaches to
>
> design theory and practice. They understand the cultural, ethical, social, economic and
>
> ecological impact of their endeavours and their ultimate responsibility towards people
>
> and the planet across commercial and non-commercial spheres. A designer respects the

ethics of the design profession (International Council of Design, Defining the profession,

2015)."

This study uses the term "designer" to describe the work of the traditional graphic

designer or communication designer in a contemporary context and defines the designation in

accordance with the definition set out by the International Council of Design. In this definition,

the designer is someone who works with intent to create the "visual, material, spatial and digital

environment" and does so with an understanding of the "cultural, ethical, social, economic and

ecological impact of their endeavours (International Council of Design, Defining the profession,

2015)." During the 2017 world design summit in Montreal, designers from all over Canada and

the world signed the Montréal Design Declaration. The declaration highlighted the designer as an

agent of innovation and sustainability and outlines that "all people deserve to live in a well-

designed world" (Montreal Design Declaration, 2018, para. 2).

These definitional changes signal a transformation in graphic design practice.

Representative bodies like the Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC), the Association of

Registered Graphic Designers (RGD), the International Council of Design (ico-D), and the

Design Council have formalized new territory for design practice. The formalization of new

design territory provides the graphic designer opportunities to apply their skills to new problems.

Gaining insight into how graphic designers are making sense of changes in their field has

implications for design practise, education, accreditation and, ultimately, the impact of design on

the economy.

As the capability of technology increases and products and people become more

connected, the role of the designer will undoubtedly continue to change. To sustain these

changes, and even more so adapt to new opportunities, the field of graphic design needs to adapt

alongside evolving definitions of design practice. This study analyzes the way designers are

responding to changes within the field of design.

>   **RQ 1**: What is the role of the contemporary graphic designer?
>
>   **RQ 2**: Is the 'Graphic Design' designation still relevant?
>
>   **RQ 3**: What transformations are taking place in contemporary design practice?

To answer my primary research questions, "what is the role of the contemporary graphic

designer?" I identify the types of projects designers are engaged in and the approaches they are

applying in their work. The secondary question my research answers is whether practitioners

consider the Graphic Design designation to be relevant and aptly describe their role? The final

question my research answers is "what transformations are taking place in contemporary graphic

design practice?" This questions This final question is complex and within the boundaries of this

study does not yield results that could be generalized beyond the participants in this study.

However, the question is of value because it provides a window into the everyday life of the

meaningful context which I believe would further inform the other questions.

Literature Review

Literature Review Methodology

A systematic review of the literature began with an analysis of several design council

websites, including The International Council for Design (ico-D); Graphic Designers of Canada

(GDC); Registered Graphic Designers of Ontario (RGD); and Design Council, a non-profit,

interdisciplinary design council based in the United Kingdom. The mandate of these member-

based organizations is to raise the level of professionalism of the occupation and accountability

amongst designers and advocate for the economic and societal value of design. These

organizations conduct research studies and provide industry reports on various topics and

projects relating to their mandates, which are made available via the resources section on their

respective websites. After reviewing the available resources, a range of concerns emerged,

specifically; professionalism, certification, definitions of design practice, ethics of practice,

interdisciplinary design and transdisciplinary design. From this initial analysis, it was clear that

in addition to employing interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches in their work, that

practitioners and industry used multiple terms interchangeably (communication design, visual

communication, information design) to describe graphic design.

Next, I conducted a search using the terms graphic design, communication design and

visual communications. The search was made using the *Design and Applied Arts Index (DAAI)*,

via the University of Alberta Libraries' *Art and Design subject guide*. I narrowed this first search

by focusing on peer-reviewed journals published between 2000 and 2019 (Appendix A). This

search provided a list of journals currently publishing articles focussed on these keywords and

others Using a Google search of the journal websites I was able to read through their

descriptions to identify academic journals of relevance to the field, particularly; *Design Issues*,

Visible Language and *Design Principles and Practice: An International Journal* were identified

as particularly relevant to the field of graphic design. Using the search term *visual*

communication design, I conducted a new search limited to "Articles & More" through the

University of Alberta's Libraries' online catalogue. I once again limited the results to peer-

reviewed journals. This search yielded two "pearl" articles; "Visual Communication a Form of

Public Pedagogy" from *Design Issues* and "The Role of Visible Language in Building and

Critiquing a Canon of Graphic Design History" from *Visible Language*. These two peer-reviewed journals contained numerous articles written on the topics of visual communication and design.

Once an initial sample of literature was identified, I used the reference pages of the articles to determine further sources. Using the reference pages as a means of extending my search and uncovering related material became the primary method for conducting my library search. After working through these resources, themes began emerging particularly around design criticism, the history of design, emerging practices and education. Using Google Scholar, the searches *graphic design, visual communication, design* and *graphic design research* was made. The purpose of which was to identify the central texts, articles, and practitioners previously cited by other scholars, the results of which I then cross-referenced against my results from the University of Alberta's Libraries' online catalogue. Additional keywords were identified in the literature and were added to my list of search terms. These included *design history, Bauhaus, new media, media studies, digital design, innovation design, design thinking, design for social good, design education* and *design studies*.

At this point, I began looking for ways to group the literature; thematic grouping made the most sense. Four areas of discussion (themes) were identifiable; design history, design practice, emerging models of design practice, and developments in design education. After review, a fifth area was added–theoretical perspectives. Media studies, one of the sub-areas and keywords identified in the literature search, draws upon philosophy and sociology which fit within the theme of theoretical perspectives and provide vital context to the other four areas discussed. Once these five themes had been identified, journals and periodicals were searched independently via the Mass Media Complete database. Once I had collected a substantial number

of articles on a theme, I began my search over again several times; each time using slight variations of my search terms. I did this to ensure the literature collected was representative of a broad range of views.

Eligibility criteria.

Design exists at the intersection of communication, technology, and art. Capturing these alternate aspects within the field is central to uncovering the economic and societal contribution of design and the way in which the field is changing. This literature review draws on a range of perspectives and topics; foundational communications theory, movements in history, education and current practices. The majority of the literature in this review is published between 2000 and 2019 making it representative of the current state of design practice and thinking. To provide context for the current and emerging practices in design, it is important to look back at the history of design and include material which discusses theoretical perspectives, which results in the inclusion of foundational communication theory written as early as 1948. As such the eligibility criteria needed to be specific. The core eligibility criteria were:

- Peer-reviewed scholarly journals

- Articles published between 2000 and 2019

- Covering the themes of theoretical perspectives on communication, perspectives on design history, design practice, emerging models of design practice and developments in design education.

Additional criteria which led to the inclusion of *grey* literature and articles predating 2000 were:

- If a source is cited repeatedly within an article meeting the first set of criteria, and/or;

- If the source is well regarded in their field

- If the source provides an opposing opinion

• If the source provides context for past or current shifts

Data management and analysis.

Using a spreadsheet, sources were indexed into a matrix organized by the following categories; author, affiliations, publication and database or url, title, keywords and citation. This order was initially helpful because I was searching for sources that had been cited by other sources; making author, affiliations, and publication the primary categories of interest. Once themes started developing, the logical step was to arrange the literature by theme in chronological order. A table was created to organize all the sources into ten categories. Categories one through to five represented the thematic areas I had identified through my literature search (theory, history, practice, emerging practice and educational developments). Using a thematic and chronological arrangement in combination provided a means of grounding events in the context of history. Categories six through to ten consisted of links to council websites, grey literature, industry reports, projects and others. These categories were populated with sources that were of relevance, but either did not fit my eligibility criteria or did not clearly fit within my five identified themes. At this point, an annotated bibliography was undertaken in preparation for conducting a literature review. During the editing process, I chose to merge the topics covered under "Current and Emerging Design Practices" into a single section, resulting in a richer analysis of changing trends shown in context.

Discussion

This systematic review of the literature aims to provide a comprehensive survey of the theoretical underpinnings of graphic design within the broader field of communication and provides a historical perspective on design and an overview of design practice, and developments in design education. At first, these four categories might appear disparate. However, as this

review will demonstrate they are deeply intertwined, and provide details that are essential to understanding the field; past, present and future.

Design and communications theory.

A theoretical perspective on communication grounds graphic design within the professional field of communication. Graphic design education and practice often focus on the practical craft of making and the expression of specific messages; particularly for the purposes of advertising and sales. Contrastingly, less attention is paid to the meaning embedded in graphic design products. Using communication theory to evaluate graphic design, for example; how meaning is made and translated through objects, words and actions provides a deeper look at the way the products of graphic design impact society. Design is connected to social wellbeing because its products impact commerce and culture. Traditionally graphic design practice is concerned with delivering a defined message to a defined audience. The inclusion of theoretical perspectives provides context for the developments which have taken place within the field of graphic design. The positions expressed in the *Theoretical Perspectives* portion of the literature review

In an essay entitled "A Cultural Approach to Communication" James Carey (1989) wrote about two alternate views on communication; the ritual and the transmission views. He describes the ritual view of communication as primarily concerned with actions and environments. The ritual view encompasses terms like "community," "sharing," and "participation" and views communication as intrinsically connected to culture and identity–"a constructive process that produces and reproduces shared meaning (Carey, 1987 as cited in Craig, 2009, p. 67)." Ritualized communication is connected to the preservation of a society or group through ceremony or repeated "ritualized" actions. The transmission view is concerned with

communicative meaning as an artifact, one which can be shaped, encoded and decoded. The transmission view of communication is a tool for delivering information. Carey draws inspiration from the work of John Dewey, pointing out that the two views are not alternate definitions of communication but rather describe alternate perspectives on communication. Carl DiSalvo (2009) also draws on the work of Dewey; exposing the use of artifacts (products, services and ideas) as a means of organizing individuals into publics which he argues can be used to both mobilize action or fragment society. Dewey defines the public as broad and plural and both constituted and thwarted by its concerns.

Carl Hovland (1948) conceptualized communication from a structural standpoint, as the transfer of information with the intention of modifying behaviour. He identifies four components involved in communication; a communicator, a message (stimulus), a communicatee and a response. In his analysis, Hovland posits that the content of the message and the visual and rhetorical devices used are important, nevertheless, the environment and conditions under which communication takes place is central to shaping the message.

Jodi Forlizzi and Cherie Lebbon (2002) analyze communication through the rhetorical view. They employ a user-centred approach to communication, focusing on empathy and engaging in dialogue with their audience. Forlizzi and Lebbon describe communication as "instilling a belief in an audience about the past, present or future (p. 3)." The meaning we assign to words shape our ideas and beliefs. The symbols and codes embedded within language inform the meaning and impact of communication (Hovland, 1948). Jürgen Habermas (2001) was deeply concerned with the condition of society, stating that knowledge is created and through this created knowledge, reality is constructed. For Habermas, this reality rests on the "facticity" of the knowledge used to construct reality. Habermas states that for a truth to be established,

there needs to be dialogue and through dialogue, claims can be questioned. For a claim to be established as factual it needs to be valid. Importantly Habermas adds that facts which claim validity "conceal as much as they express (p.447)."

RQ1 asks "what is the role of the contemporary graphic designer?" If communication is a human problem and design can be grounded within communications practice then it follows that designers may legitimately involve themselves in wider conversations about issues impacting business, society, the environment and the economy. The assertion that design is a tool to address challenges that exist beyond the printed page or digital application raise questions about the role of the contemporary designer. An inquiry about the role of the designer requires both practical and philosophical consideration because the role of the designer encompasses both the work the designer does; which is the practical component and the broader purpose of design; which addresses the philosophical and theoretical component.

Design history.

Graphic design history provides a lens for contemplating the boundaries and value of graphic design; both commercially and beyond commercial practices. Graphic design as an occupation houses many specializations (Harland, 2011). Graphic design is sometimes referred to as communication design or visual communication and traditionally includes typography, illustration, photography and various print-based mediums. In more recent years' digital technology has dramatically altered the mediums, applications and production processes of design (Davies Cooper & Cooper, 1984). Introducing a historical perspective on graphic design places current and emerging industry trends in the context of design history. In comparison with disciplines like architecture, industrial design and fashion design; graphic design does not have a history that belongs uniquely to the domain of graphic design. Triggs (2011) asserts that graphic

design history as a discipline remains "less established (p3)" and postulates that a deeper

understanding of the history of graphic design may provide new insights that would further

inform the principles of design as practitioner's transition from print to digital media and

beyond.

Triggs (2011) describes two alternative views, firstly, that of Steven Heller, Andrew

Blauvelt, and Victor Margolin who call for 'a design history distinct from art history (p4, para

2).' They identify a need to discuss the history of design in relation to sociology, anthropology,

aesthetics, politics and economics as a means of establishing design's contribution to society and

legitimizing design as a professional occupation. Contrastingly, others such as Ralph Caplan call

for design history to be viewed as a "history of ideas (p4, para 2)" as a means of expanding the

borders and definition of design. Triggs notes that although there is consensus among designers

that design needs a history of its own; the building of such a history remains largely unachieved.

Peer-reviewed journals such as *Visible Language* have contributed greatly to a critical

history of graphic design; evaluating design objects, methods of practice and designers. *Visible

Language* continues to play a pivotal role in constructing and critiquing a history of design. In

working to establish a history belonging discretely to design practice designers are afforded the

opportunity to pause to reconsider the "Eurocentric, male-dominated, artifact-focused, and

professionally oriented perspective (Griffin, 2016, p. 13)" which dominate the history of art and

design. Carey (2011) argues for the inclusion of indigenous systems of communication into

mainstream design education. His argument is that contemporary design is largely Eurocentric

and often ignores the local and historical approaches to communication of a particular place or

community. Which as Carey describes "wittingly or not, colludes in the process of

marginalization (Carey, 2011, p55, para 4)." Meggs' History of Graphic Design (Meggs &

Purvis, 2006) which is considered one of the definitive contemporary design history texts, points

to the invention of writing as the distant beginnings of design activity. The use of graphic

systems to communicate, and the invention of tools like the printing press have shaped design

practice and society reciprocally. Other practitioners and academics contend that design history

began in 1919 with the opening of the Bauhaus (Bonsiepe, 1999; Siebenbrodt & Schöbe, 2012).

For the first time the whole human environment was considered an object to be designed

(Bonsiepe, 1999). The Bauhaus and other similar schools; Breslau, Dusseldorf Arts & Crafts

School, Obrist-Debschitz School used design as a means of humanizing the new technological

and industrial environment of the time.

The Bauhaus (1919–1933) brought together the fields of art, design, technical production,

architecture, the manual trades and construction. The purpose was to re-establish unity between

the areas of artistic and technical production for the betterment of society (Siebenbrodt &

Schöbe, 2012). The Bauhaus was a reaction against the rise of low quality, cheap production, and

facilitated the first interdisciplinary association between architecture, business, applied crafts and

experts (Gauntlett, 2011; Siebenbrodt & Schöbe, 2012). John Ruskin (1819–1900) and William

Morris (1834–1896) were heavily concerned about the impact of the industrial revolution on

society and creativity (Gauntlett, 2018). For Ruskin and Morris industrialization represented

societal decay through the removal of craft, quality and individuality from production. Industrial

processes from the perspectives of Ruskin and Morris created isolation and a separation of craft

from the craftsperson. The industrial revolution separated craft from the craftsperson,

contrastingly the digital revolution has reconnected people with the process of making

(Gauntlett, 2011). Drawing on the critical writings of Ruskin and Morris, sociologist and media

theorist David Gauntlett (2011; 2018) associates the act of making with connecting and describes

the internet as a means of reviving craft and community through the making and sharing of ideas, knowledge and digital artifacts.

The internet democratizes information and digital technology facilitates accessible production means, and social applications lower media-related costs. Anyone who can access the internet can make and share artifacts. In 1967, Peter Drucker wrote, "during the last 20 years the free world has experienced the greatest, most sustained economic advancement in history (p. 42)." At this time, IBM was shipping roughly one thousand computers a month. Drucker identified knowledge as the capital resource of the future. Just as the industrial revolution increased the speed at which communication could occur, the digital revolution has shaped not only the speed at which communication occurs but also how information is stored, accessed and shared and as a result the way knowledge is created. This is reflected in the transition from heavy production processes of designing objects to lighter digital products that focus on elements like user-experience design, social design and service design (Kathman, 2002; Morelli, 2002; Calabretta & Kleinsmann, 2017). Physical artifacts are still produced, in a post-industrial, post-recession economy, however, there is a heightened concern for cost-reduction and value creation. The impact of production on the environment is also leading to an increased concern for fitness-for-purpose and value-creation. Calabretta and Kleinsmann (2017) divide the period between the industrial revolution and present day into three distinct phases; the industrial era, the service era and the digital era. Particularly they evaluate the use of design principals and their application during these era's. Calabretta and Kleinsmann define design as a human-centered approach to problem solving applied within current technological and commercial frameworks. The key finding of this article is a movement from an industry focused on products and production to an

industry focussed on experiences and processes. A secondary finding is the transition from innovation as a tool to innovation as a strategy.

Over the last twenty-five years' design has been in a state of disruption, characterized by technological, social and economic developments in place of design movements. Professional dislocation is reflected through alternating views on design practice. Meggs and Purvis (2006) describe the design occupation as largely unchanged. Likening current changes with those experienced before, and concurrently asserting that "electronic circuitry, microprocessors, and computer-generated imagery threaten to alter our culture's images, communication processes, and the very nature of work itself (p. 531)." This view is indicative of the current state of design from a definitional perspective. On the one hand, design principals remain intact even as mediums shift. However, digital transformations do more than shift the mediums designers are working with; digital technologies and their communications platforms are reshaping approaches to communication and, therefore, design as well. RQ2 asks, "Is the Graphic Design designation still relevant?" RQ2 seeks to understand how designers negotiate and use occupational titles and designations within the field. An evaluation of design history supports a fuller understanding of changes within the field over time and how those changes impact the work of the designer.

Design education and accreditation.

The changing dimensions of design work present educators with the challenge of teaching designers for a profession that has yet to be defined. The design field has reacted to technological disruption and digital culture by moving away from traditional notions of graphic design toward interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches under the umbrella of design. According to the literature this movement is in reaction to a new economy that extends beyond products and challenges the traditional role of the designer. Designers are working in the realm of experiences

and processes, which are applied to brands and products. Design has become more strategic and less decorative (Mushtare, 2015). However, design education, training and certification has yet to catch up to these described industry transitions.

Professionalism is determined on an individual basis, usually contingent upon the practitioner's ability to demonstrate their training and professional achievement (Shapiro, 1997; Bierut, 1994; Scher 1994). Equally post-secondary courses and instruction vary between institutions–both across Canada and the world. Approaches to teaching design are evolving from a single disciplinary approach to interdisciplinary and more recently transdisciplinary approaches to design (Burns et al., 2006; Visocky O'Grady & Visocky O'Grady, 2013). Although certification bodies are working toward a unified definition, design remains fragmented, composed of specialized domains and a multiplicity of interdisciplinary approaches. Burns et al (2006) The changing landscape of graphic design is attributed to the inclusion of new media, technology-based innovation, the rise of socialist values applied in an organizational context, the movement of designers into traditionally non-design roles and the use of design methodologies to address social and economic problems (Burns et al, 2006; Dauppe, 2011). Graphic design as a discipline remains underdeveloped in comparison to architecture, industrial design, fine arts, cultural studies and media studies. Design exists at the intersection of these fields, rather than as a discrete field itself and has increasingly preoccupied itself with design history and criticism as a means of creating a critical discourse which traverses' theory and practice (Dauppe, 2011). The utility of graphic design as a descriptor has been called into question because it is closely associated to print design, although design defuses all aspects of visual culture (Dauppe, 2011).

Programs and courses are largely directed by the focus of their course content with little connection to the broader discipline of design (Littlejohn, 2017; Giloi & Belluigi, 2017). This

lack of grounding results in epistemological gaps and varying pedogeological interpretations of

what constitutes an education and qualification in design (Harland, 2017). Recently a focus on

co-design and the building of capacity by designers for non-designers has become a topic of

discussion (Kelly, 2015; Manzini, 2016). This approach requires adaptability, humanity,

empathy and an appreciation for the social structure of a community. A focus on community

engagement and the formation of effective partnerships are critical to facilitating participatory

design and mutual exchange between stakeholders (Baeverford, 2011). The inclusion of research

collection and analysis methodologies in design education would further equip students with the

tools to ask questions (Donnelly, 2015; Turner & Pope, 2015) and in turn prepare designers for

the reality of community-based projects and collaboration in the field. Students taught to craft

design products and solutions without real-world constraints are ill-prepared for the realities of

collaboration, co-design and engagement (Sless, 2012; Turner & Pope 2015; Littlejohn, 2017).

Design occurs within fixed parameters like time and budget and even user-centred design which

employs evidence-based approaches such as usability testing often yields imperfect results and

unintended consequences (Sless, 2012; Turner & Pope 2015).

   Advocates for design education call for a philosophy of visual design that would make

strides toward a renewed commitment to the field and work toward building a unified design

discipline (Bonsiepe, 1999). This section of the literature applies to both research questions one

and two. RQ1 asks, "what is the role of the contemporary graphic designer?" RQ2 asks, "is the

Graphic Design designation still relevant?" The intention of RQ1 is to find out whether designers

conceptualize their role as the same or changing. The intention of RQ2 is to gain insight into

whether the "Graphic Design" designation appropriately describes the role and work of the

designer now. Design education and accreditation are interconnected topics. There is an interplay

between what students learn and how they practice. Reciprocally, developments in practice

influence curriculum and certification, which in turn has implications for design as a discipline

and the professional status of the occupation.

Design practice.

Branding and identity development continue to be the mainstay work of designers in

addition to advertising. Digital technology has led to the rise of new marketplaces and has

changed the way consumers purchase and interact with brands. Jerry Kathman, the President and

Chief Executive Officer of one the world's largest independent branding consultancies; Libby,

Perszyk, Kathman Inc. describes branding today as a dramatic production, akin to theatre.

Kathman suggests that contemporary brands are not tied to a logo or colour scheme but rather to

the experience of a product or service. An example of the changing dimensions of design is the

evolution from a product-focus to an experience-focus, which has resulted in designers shifting

from a product-based practice preoccupied with craft to an intellectual skills-based practice

(Cabianca, 2016). This evolution is reinforced by practitioners like Victor and Silvia Margolin

(2002) and Nicola Morelli (2002). Margolin and Margolin conceptualize design practice on a

spectrum ranging from the market (traditional) model to the social (emergent) model and Morelli

applies product design methodologies to user experiences as a way of crafting service systems.

Contemporary design can be roughly divided into two models–the traditional model and the

contemporary model (Harland, 2011). Harland (2011) describes the traditional model as one

primarily concerned with the products of graphic design and points to the domains of

typography, illustration, photography, and print as the core practices of the traditionalist. The

contemporary model describes graphic design as "idea generation" realized through image

creation, word interpretation, and media realization, all of which take place within the spheres of

communication, commerce, industry, culture, and society. The outcomes of the traditional model

differ from that of the emergent model, however, they are joined together by a similar process of

research, inspiration, drawing, narrative, abstraction, development and collaboration (Skolos &

Wedell, 2012).

Burns, Cottam, Vanstone and Winhall (2006) in their paper The RED Report 02 also

point out this paradigmatic split within the field. Burns et al. identify these two groups as

"transformers and traditionalists." Transformers and traditionalists are divided over who is a

designer and what type of problems the tools of design ought to be applied. The divide is fueled

by a concern for professionalism–particularly who is and who is not a professional. Transformers

are less concerned with credentials, focusing on abilities and outcomes. In comparison,

traditionalists are described as being worried about losing control of their profession. For

transformers, this shift is not an assault on their profession but the reality of a necessary

paradigmatic change. The transformer conceptualizes design as a cyclic process, they

acknowledge diversity as valuable and are open to working with amateurs and non-designers.

Burns et al (2006) define good design as "desirable, aspirational, compelling and delightful

(p.9)." The industrial revolution saw the ushering in of uniform processes and a focus on product

differentiation in the marketplace, leading to a concern for "product design (p.10)" and

ergonomics which could be said to be the original birth of an empathetic approach to design.

Socialist agendas gave way to participatory approaches to organizational thinking, and software

applications began focusing on "user requirements (p.10)." Traditional approaches to

communication tend to focus on the organization, product or service instead of the user or world

context in which the product or service would be used, or the organization would exist. Burns et

al. point out that an industrialized approach to contemporary problems is ill-adapted. As a means

of design criticism DiSalvo (2009) articulates an opportunity for designers to "disambiguate" the discovery process from traditional tactical activity. DiSalvo proposes that designers should not define problems in terms of prescriptive design solutions but rather as opportunities for discovery and learning. In this model, not all problems have design solutions.

Stephanie Wilson and Lisa Zamberlan (2015) discuss the "new shapes and structures" for design practice. The emergence of organizational design, service design, interaction design and design for social innovation have been supported and "propelled by design thinking and practice as a driver for social innovation (p 3)." Wilson and Zamberlan draw a connection between the rise of concerns for sustainability and ethical practice and the changing role of the designer. Tim Brown and Roger Martin (2015), in their article *Design for Action* discuss the use of design thinking as a tool for crafting solutions to complex challenges. Design thinking as a framework for brainstorming, discovery, experimentation and ultimately problem-solving has been behind the creation of many innovative products, which has spurred the use of these principles outside of the realm of design. The design profession itself continues to expand, with a focus on specialization in areas such as user experiential and user interface design. Both Brown and Martin agree that the use of design thinking has promise as a method for working through the barriers to implementation and acceptance that innovative products, services, and systems often face.

In the article, *Design Thinking Comes of Age*, Jon Kilko (2015) discusses the use of design principles as a means of facilitating changes to corporate culture. Kilko attributes increased organizational complexity in large part to rapid advancements in technology and the subsequent impact those changes have on organizations both internally and externally. Kilko focuses on five core design thinking competencies that he asserts lead to the development of responsive

organizational cultures. These are user-empathy, brainstorming, prototyping, a tolerance for

failure and thoughtful restraint. User-empathy involves understanding the desires, aspirations and

user experience of the customer. An empathetic design approach strives to create artifacts and

experiences that go beyond utility; they should appeal to customers on an emotional level. The

design researcher Marc Steen (2016) discusses Design for Well-being (DFW) and describes the

potential for design methodologies to be applied to culture and innovation. Design in this context

is socially responsive and culturally sensitive. Steen highlights the increased use of design not

only to create products and services but also to promote wellbeing, articulating a shift from a

focus on material goods to a focus on experiences which "enable people to engage in meaningful

and fulfilling activities. (p5)."

     Issues of sustainability and social well-being provides the opportunity for design to shape

and improve experiences. As sustainability and social well-being become issues of increasing

concern, experience design provides an opportunity for designers to provide value beyond

material products (Morelli, 2002). RQ3 asks, "what transformations are taking place in

contemporary design practice?" Technological transformation has brought with it a new digital

reality within design practice. The impact of digital communication on design, evidenced by the

application of design principals and methods to challenges beyond the traditional scope. The

effect of this impact, like many media effects, can be challenging to measure (Gauntlett, 2018, p.

18) and thus research question three seeks to understand how the organization of projects and

design work is changing, and how designers are responding to, and making sense of these

transformations.

Summary

The problems to which graphic design is applied are changing. These changes reflect the rise of digital and social design, and the rejection of an industrialized, linear approach to problem-solving. As a result, the skillset of the designer and the scope of design work is transforming. Initially the impact of digital technologies extended only to the production of communication artifacts. But it did not take long before the effects of the internet and digital media began to impact design work; shifting projects from print to digital and outcomes from product-based to engagement and experience-based. In turn increasing the need for empathic approaches, collaboration and co-creation within design work. These transitions have led to the inclusion of new designations, evolving practitioner definitions and changing interpretations of the designer's occupation and role. Unlike architects and industrial designers, graphic designers are not considered professionals in the same sense as that of their fellow designers. Certification and professional status are a grey area within the field, largely due to a lack of standardized curriculum, accreditation and certification. There is a disconnect between training and education, and occupational outcomes, and designations.

Design-thinking as a methodology has led to the separation of design as a method from design as a practice causing further fragmentation within the field. For as much notoriety as design-thinking has provided the design discipline it has concurrently colluded to water-down the process and methodologies of the designer. Building the occupational status of design would validate the professionalism of design practice and further develop its processes and methodologies beyond a singular, popularized design-thinking approach. Representative bodies like the GDC, RGD, ico-D and Design Council work diligently to build a unified design field and elevate the designer's status. However, standardization on all fronts poses many challenges

and creates internal tensions within the field. From issues of practice, and sustainability and

ethics to practical matters such as billing, spec-work, responding to requests for proposals, taking

part in design competitions and choosing clients designers do not share a singular perspective.

Furthermore, differences in post-secondary curriculum, occupational outcomes and designations

create additional complications which make unifying the design discipline and occupation

challenging.

The literature is full of references to the transformation of graphic design into a method

for responding to broader social and organizational issues and its emergence as a mechanism to

identify opportunities and better understand human needs. On the surface this new design

practice creates opportunities for the future of the design discipline. Beneath the surface internal

fragmentation creates a sense of dislocation within design practice. Ongoing debates regarding

professionalism and the extent to which digital technology is changing the design discipline and

what that means for the designer fuels lively debate. These gaps create challenges, however, they

also present opportunities. The lack of consensus about the work of the designer allows for

flexibility in interpretation of design practice and facilitates inquiry and experimentation into

new modes of thinking and making. Design practitioners, academics, educators and critics have

in front of them the task of making sense of the integration and contextualization of these

transformations within the field. The intention of the research questions resulting from this

literature review is to construct a narrative about design practice now for the purposes of

contributing toward a unified design discipline.

Research Design & Methodology

Introduction

This study investigates how graphic designers are responding to digital transformation in their

work and how they contextualize these changes within their practice and profession. The aim is

to contribute to the evolving conversation about the role of the graphic designer through an

examination of what constitutes design practice in a changing field.

> **RQ 1**: What is the role of the contemporary graphic designer?
>
> **RQ 2**: Is the Graphic Design designation still relevant?
>
> **RQ 3**: What transformations are taking place in contemporary design practice?

The graphic design profession is in a state of transition. Postmodern reflexivity and the rejection

of traditional ideas have contributed to shifting perspectives about graphic design coupled with

technological changes; the roles and expectations placed on visual communicators have become

fluid—shifting from project to project (Barnard, 2013). The democratization of knowledge

together with readily accessible, sophisticated and cost-effective tools, has commodified the

products of graphic design. A growing concern about sustainability and moral agency within

design discourse, and social and economic changes are leading to new conceptions of graphic

design work, impacting what it means to be a graphic designer. Together these transitions are

exposing gaps within design practice and theory.

The study uses a grounded, narrative approach and seeks to reveal meaning through

storytelling and lived experience. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that seeks to

understand the human experience through conversation (Josselson as cited Salkind, 2010, pg.

873). In a narrative inquiry study, conversation is the data that ultimately yields the narrative: narrative analysis exchanges statistics and transferable findings for rich, contextual descriptions. Participants become narrators, and the researcher, the interpreter (Josselson as cited in Salkind, 2010). Narrative research aims to build an understanding of phenomena (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, pg. 148) and does not seek to be broadly generalizable (Josselson as cited in Salkind, 2010, pg. 873). Within the narrative tradition, gaining understanding through learning does not require agreement (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, pg. 146). " Narrative inquiry focuses on epistemological and ontological orientation because narrative researchers can use various research and interpretive approaches to inform their inquiry (Josselson as cited in Salkind, 2010, pg. 869). As such, researchers should make clear how they are grounding their approach and disclose their paradigmatic and theoretical leanings and professional views (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, pg. 149).

Design

The theoretical framework of this study is held together by a combination of my professional experiences and perspectives and relevant theoretical underpinnings which support this study's research methodology. This study draws on Luhmann's interpretation of communication (1992 as cited in Craig & Muller, 2007) and on constructivism, post-structuralism, grounded theory and sensemaking. The primary research method this study uses is Narrative Inquiry. Narrative inquiry has several intersections with design practice. Both are approaches to sensemaking and seek out plausible narratives. Interpretation is provisional, and in both cases the researcher and the designer's experience play a role in their ability to do their work well (Josselson as cited in Salkind, 2010). The stories that result from both narrative inquiry and graphic design are active productions rooted in the epistemological, ideological and ontological

perspectives (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). This study uses narrative inquiry as a method for investigating what it means to be a graphic designer. Identity and lived experiences are deeply connected. Narrative inquiry has been selected as a research method because it facilitates the telling of personal stories.

According to Merrigan, Huston and Johnston (2012) researches working in the interpretive paradigm must acknowledge their own values and the impact these values will have on their perceptions (p. 37, para. 1). Constructivist grounded theory embraces subjectivity, and the researcher becomes "an active participant." Equally the researcher acknowledges "multiple standpoints" and "takes a reflexive stance toward actions, situations, and participants (Charmaz as cited in Morse, 2009, pg. 129)." As the researcher and a designer, I will share my personal perspectives on the role of the designer as well as a sample of the theory that informed my research design.

Professional perspective.

As a graphic designer, I work inductively, building my approach on observations and then working to ground those observations in the wider subject matter with which I am working. Professionally, I see my role as that of a translator and facilitator. The focus of much of my professional career has been to identify the story and interpret the data to construct a narrative about a product or organization. My creative process is a sensemaking journey articulated through visual representation. The result of this approach is an intuitive weaving together of subjective interpretation and the available information about the product or organization with which I am working. Meaning is a co-construction between the designer, the artifact, the client and the audience or public.

With this definition in mind, constructivism which "assumes a relativist epistemology, and sees knowledge as socially produced (Charmaz as cited in Morse, 2009, pg. 129)," and grounded theory which is "inductive, iterative, interactive, and comparative (Lapan, Quartaroli & Reimer, 2012, p. 41)" are a natural fit with my professional views. Based on this view a grounded constructivist approach to narrative inquiry has been selected for this study.

    Theoretical underpinnings. Working from the perspective of translator and drawing on Luhmann's view of communication as always existing; designers do not make communication but rather they try to enhance the selectivity of specific groups to comprehend information (Luhmann, 1992 as cited in Craig & Muller, 2007). Information needs to be selected before it can be comprehended. Selectivity could be said to be a requirement of comprehension. Designers work to identify the organizational, product or service story and organize information to enhance the selectivity. From the designer's perspective comprehension depends on the arrangement and presentation of information. However, communication also depends on the designer's ability to select and identify information.

    Graphical representations are constructions of meaning imparted through symbols and signs. Post structuralism posits that speech, or words are central to visual communication. Visual communication works to express ideas through images. Through the sensemaking process labels and categories are established for "functional deployment (Chia, 2000 as cited in Weick, Sutcliffe & Obtsfeld, 2005, p. 411)." Designers are highly process driven; working to take ideas and through the process of sensemaking define concepts which are then communicated in an appropriate form. Similarly, the appropriate forms of communication to which a concept is applied are highly adaptable and "have plasticity (Weick et al, 2005, p. 411)." The connection

between words, process and visual communication make a strong case for the inclusion of

sensemaking theory.

Viewing design as a construction through the constructivist lens means that knowing—or

comprehending by interpretation "assumes that no one reality exists separate from our

perceptions (Merrigan et al, 2012, p. 37)." Sensemaking acknowledges the deeply contextual

nature of the lived experience. Likewise, sensemaking prioritizes rich descriptions over thin data

(Madsbjerg, 2017; Bird, 2007). In this view reality is contextual—an agreed-upon construction

woven together by time and place. Over time, contexts change and reshape our realities. The

language we use to describe our surroundings assigns meaning and reciprocally meaning is

assigned through language (Charmaz, 2006, p. 7). As such, this study uses grounded literary

analysis as the interpretive unit of analysis, and investigates "individual and collective actions

(Lapan, Quartaroli & Reimer, 2012)" of designers.

The interpretive paradigm. Constructivists as a group subscribe to the belief that "society,

reality, and self are constructed through interaction and thus rely on language and

communication (Charmaz, 2006, p. 7)." Interpretive theory "articulate theoretical claims

pertaining to scope, depth, power and relevance (Charmaz, 2006, pg. 127)." The interpretive

paradigm relies on rich description, for Merrigan et al. (2012) rich description means that the

researcher draws on a broad range of data sources demonstrating "how communication occurs

and what it means to participate in that context (p. 37, para. 1)." Sensemaking, according to

Madsberg (2017), can support the selection of "an appropriate context for data collection (p.

58)." Sensemaking uses context as a discriminating factor for interpretation and interpretates

whole entities and collective actions by experiencing the real environment, culture, and the by-

products of the culture (Madsberg, 2017; Bird 2007).

An interpretive commonality between narrative inquiry, sensemaking and grounded theory is the use of detailed stories of lived experience, collected from a range of sources and contextualized within an overarching narrative. Within the interpretative paradigm determining which interpretations are "more accurate" is not the objective, rather the concern is to consider all points-of-view and uncover how they were constructed (p. 38, para 2). The interpretive paradigm seeks to "understand the meaning imparted to conversations, texts, and behaviours (pg. 38, para. 4). According to Charmaz (2006) the purpose of constructivist theorizing is to "specify conditions, show conceptual relationships and forecast consequences (pg.148)" and ultimately build a meaningful narrative.

Participants

Narrative research is particularly well-suited to the study of identity, practices and beliefs. Conversation; the way narrators talk about their experiences—their word choice and relationship to "the act of conversation" informs how narrators construct their identity (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl as cited in Clandinin, 2007, pg. 159). Inquiry into the professions has drawn on narrative research as well. Narrative Inquiry "allow us entry into the lives, practices, and knowledge of the professions studied and provide models for those wishing to understand other professions and the lives, experience, and knowledge of those who live the narrative of those professions (Morgan-Fleming as cited in Clandinin, 2007, pg. 355)." Typically, narrative analysis is used to investigate specific cases. However, there are examples of collective narrative research. "Just as personal narratives create personal identity, group narratives serve to bond community and distinguish it from other collectives (Salkind, 2010, pg. 873)."

The focus of the study is the experience of graphic designers. The initial participants selected for recruitment are representatives of the Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC). Graphic

designers come from diverse backgrounds; some have formal training and certification, and

others are self-taught. The Association of Graphic Designers of Canada is Canada's national

certification body for graphic designers and visual communicators. They are a member-based

organization with nine chapters across Canada. Members include "design professionals,

educators, administrators, students and affiliates in communications, marketing, media and

design-related fields. The mandate of the GDC is to "advocate for the advancement of the design

profession (GDC, About section, para. 2)." The GDC website makes the email addresses of their

chapter representatives publicly available. Not all representatives are practising designers.

Participants in this study hold a certified graphic designer (CGD) accreditation. Contact with

participants is through email invitation. Chapter representatives who hold a certified graphic

designer credential are purposely selected because they are currently working as a graphic

designer and they have demonstrated their professionalism through practical experience and a

commitment to ethical practice. The combination of these criteria together makes them

information-rich sources. Snowball and theoretical sampling may identify further participants.

     Selection considerations**.**

   By selecting only certified graphic designers as the initial sample group, there is the

potential to underrepresent the population because not all professional practising designers are

members of the Association of Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC) and members may hold

similar beliefs, values and characteristics which other professionals may not share. By selecting

participants who are certified graphic designers and members of the GDC this study privileges

their experiences, values and beliefs and provides them with a voice to speak on behalf of other

designers and imposes a hierarchy on the notion of professionalism. On the one hand, this is a

limitation of my proposed study. However, these participants have demonstrated an active

interest in furthering design discourse and a commitment to their practice. It is, therefore, reasonable to infer they are both information-rich and potentially willing to participate in such as study.

Sampling strategy.

This study employs a combination of purposeful, snowball and theoretical sampling. The selection criteria used in this study provided access to 38 information-rich potential participants across Canada. An initial sample of seven potential participants were contacted. Four participants responded and agreed to be interviewed for this study. A fifth participant was identified through snowball sampling. Preliminary data analysis confirmed that adequacy of evidence had been reached. Grounded theory requires data to be representative of the emerging topics and themes from the narratives collected rather than of population (Charmaz, 2006, pg. 114). Because this study uses a small sample size, an information-oriented selection approach allowing for the maximization of information utility was selected (Brinkmann, 2013 p. 57).

Data Collection

This study drew on primary and secondary source data. Primary source data was collected in the form of in-depth, open-ended, qualitative interviews. Unstructured interviews provided a flexible format allowing the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee to unfold naturally. These interviews facilitated the collection of stories (narratives) from practising graphic designers. Interview questions focused on the topics of experiences, values, feelings, knowledge, demographic details and background. In all cases location was a limiting factor and interviews were held via Google Hangouts (3) and phone (2). For transcription and analysis purposes interviews are recorded. Post-interview memos summarise my thoughts and impressions made during the interview. Throughout the research, data collection and analysis

process I have engaged in reflexive memo writing which has aided in the refinement of research

questions, the development of my personal research perspective. Secondary source data was

collected from eight accredited design programs in western Canada. Each program description

and stated occupational outcome was coded for word frequency to identify the prevalence of the

use of the term graphic design. Data taken from Statistics Canada and the Canadian National

Occupational Classification website is refenced in the findings of this research. Although

statistical data is not considered relevant to narrative analysis because the focus of analysis is on

the experience of the narrator (Josselson as cited in Salkind, 2012, pg. 873). I included statistical

data about the graphic design job market in Canada to be able to contrast the constructed

narrative with that of the institutional occupational narrative. The purpose of this approach is to

better understand the external environment that participants are working within.

Procedural considerations for interviews.

During this study, initial contact with prospective participants was made through email

(Appendix B). Email information for the initial participants is publicly available on the

Association of Graphic Designers of Canada's (GDC) website. All prospective participants

received a maximum of two invitation emails. The invitation clearly stated how and from where

or whom I received their information and why they were selected to participate. Moreover, if

they did not wish to participate, they could disregard the email without explanation, and no

follow-up actions took place. The email invitation to join the study covers the necessary ethical

topics outlined by the Research Ethics Office guidelines. Initially, each participant is interviewed

once for sixty to ninety minutes at a time that is convenient for participants. Additional interview

requests for clarification purposes were not requested.

Participation was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any time without explanation or penalty. Once a participant had agreed to an interview, they received an information letter via email (Appendix C). The document reintroduced outlined the study in detail and contained additional information on the purpose and use of the data collected and the risks and benefits associated with participation. Participants were required to complete and sign a consent form (Appendix D) ahead of the interview. A copy of the interview guide was also included (Appendix E). This exchange provided participants with the opportunity to ask questions, schedule their interview at a convenient time and discuss their options of voice or video calling (Skype, FaceTime or Google Hangouts or phone call). Technical assistance was offered, and it was reiterated that the interview would be recorded.

Narrative inquiry exchanges the researcher-participant relationship for one of orator and listener; where the researcher becomes the listener and the participant the storyteller, or orator. Integrity and caring are critical aspects of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. Setting expectations through clear communication are one method for developing rapport and building trust. The disclosure and justification for my research and procedures and the integration of ongoing informed consent further demonstrate honesty through transparency.

Confidentiality & anonymity.

All participants identity is confidential. Although anonymity cannot be guaranteed, steps to maintain anonymity and protect participant confidentiality included the removal of identifying information from transcripts; such as names of participants, the organizations for which they work and the names of clients with whom they work. Demographic information such as gender and contextual details about participants (designation, title, roles and responsibilities) and their work (the type of organization; e.g. advertising agency or design firm and, types of projects

worked on; e.g. print or digital) form part of the transcript and remain intact. Collected data is held on a password-protected external hard drive accessible only to myself. Memos and other written notes or printed documents are kept in a locked cabinet. The use of a random name chosen specifically for each participant protects anonymity. Pseudonyms are attached to all resulting interview documents. Direct quotations are used to situate claims and findings within context of the broader narrative. In these cases, the participant's chosen pseudonym appears alongside their quote. Discussion regarding my intention to publish, exhibit and present findings resulting from this study were disclosed to participants before they consented to interviews. Study data, including the aforementioned identifying participant details, are never made publicly available.

Data Analysis

This study uses literary analysis with elements of grounded content analysis and discourse analysis. These interpretive strategies are used in combination with sensemaking. The outcome of this study is an overarching narrative describing how certified graphic designers (CGD's), in Canada are responding to digital transformation in their work and how they contextualize these changes within their practice and profession.

Analysis began during the interview and continued during post-interview memos and transcription. Post-interview memos were completed following the conclusion each interview. Interviews were transcribed, and a more structured interpretive analysis began.

Working from the transcript and audio recordings, I conducted multiple close readings to analyze the stories for narrative plot, characterization, metaphor and use of voice(s) (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl as cited in Clandinin, 2007). This approach included initial coding and the development of provisional themes and categories (Charmaz, 2006)."

Initial coding looked specifically at the plot structure, settings, actions, turning points and resolution points within each story (Daiute, 2014). Tables were used to compare and contrast stories between participants. Constant comparison allowed for the identification of unifying and diverging themes. I considered the meaning of each participants story in relation to the narrative whole by combining the stories into a personal experience narrative.

Using Gee's Seven Building Tasks (2010), as a discourse analysis method, I resituated the themes identified in each story into an overarching narrative-based significance, practices (activities), identities, relationships, politics, connections and sign systems and knowledge.

Interpretation strategies.

This study employed two-phases of interpretation; initial coding and focussed coding (Charmaz, 2006). Codes created the underlying structure for interpreting plots, settings, actions, turning points and resolutions. Coding is central to grounded theory analysis: "theorists create their codes by defining what the data are about (Lapan, Quartaroli & Reimer, 2012, p. 44)." According to Charmaz (2006), qualitative coding aims to derive meaning. Using constant comparison as the method of analysis, line-by-line coding, categorizing, memos and theoretical sampling were used during the analysis phase (Mayan, 2009, p. 47). Coding was the first step toward making "analytic interpretations (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43)." Coded passages were taken out of their individual transcripts and collated into named categories. The categories describe the storied "frames" which expressed similarities and differences in meaning.

Phase I coding. According to Charmaz (2006), initial coding should "remain open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities we discern in the data (p. 47)." Initial coding leads to the development of "core conceptual categories" Through constant comparison, "comparing data

with data" for similarities and differences. Participant views were problematized using

Charmaz's suggested questions:

1. What is this data a study of? (Glaser, 1987; Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

2. What does the data suggest? Pronounce?

3. From whose point of view?

4. What theoretical category does this specific datum indicate? (Glaser, 1978)

Additionally, Charmaz (2006) states that "initial coding should stick closely to the data (p. 47)."

Approaches to initial coding included; word-by-word coding, line-by-line coding and In

vivo coding. In vivo coding focussed on identifying phrases and terminology used by insiders of

the design community. In vivo coding was an important consideration because this study looked

at a group of designers from the same association (RGD), all with the same professional

designation (CGD). In vivo codes were used to connect individual stories to collective identity.

Phase II coding. During this phase of analysis theory was integrated in combination with

coded data facilitating grounded interpretation (Charmaz, 2006, p. 45). During this phase codes

became standardized (Glaser, 1978 as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). The aim of focussed

coding is to uncover "experience, actions and interpretations (Charmaz, 2006, p. 59)." Initial

coding organized the data, focussed coding lead to narrative interpretations about what the data

means (p. 57)."

Phase III additional steps. Additional methods of analysis included axial coding. Axial

coding as discussed in Constructing Grounded Theory by Charmaz (2006) "relates categories to

subcategories, and, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category (p. 60)" Axial coding

developed by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, "brings data back together" and "answers

questions such as 'when, where, why, who, and with what consequences' (p.60)."

Interpretations. Interpretations were made based on the stories collected during interviews and secondary source data collected from Canadian government websites and post-secondary institutions delivering graphic design training in western Canada. The links between the data (stories) analyzed and the findings in this study were derived by organizing data into themes and looking for patterns, points of similarity and difference. (Miles & Huberman, 1994, in Merrigan et al., Coherence, p. 92, para 2)." Crystallization was used as a method for constructing the narrative. Crystallization is described as combining "multiple terms of analysis and genres of representation" and "building on a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon (Ellingson, 2009, p4)." In order to crystalize the narrative, the study drew on secondary data sources and shared interpretations with design insiders for review. Together these steps supported the building of a plausible narrative (Lindlof, 1995 in Merrigan et al., p. 93, para 2). The words of participants were privileged throughout this study and excerpts are presented in raw text to substantiate interpretations. As the researcher and a practicing designer I acknowledge myself as a narrator as well and the influence of my beliefs and values on the overarching narrative. This analysis also acknowledges the shaping function of language that "organizes both thought and experience (Josselson as cited Salkind, 2010)." As narrators tell their story they construct meaning by bringing together events and plotting them along a timeline, correlating past events and future outcomes. They make their meaning through their descriptions. Moreover, the structure of descriptions are as relevant as the words used to describe events (Josselson as cited Salkind, 2010).

Limitations. This study is exploratory in nature and points to a need for further research into current design practices, education and accreditation. There were deficiencies in the research process. The primary deficiency being a lack of consideration for the interview setting and the

act of conversation as it relates to narrative analysis. Another deficiency of this study is a lack of

sustained time with participants. Single conversations are not sufficient time to build trust or

investigate cultural meanings. Interviews were conducted via video and phone call and may have

thinned-out the quality of stories collected.

Although narrative analysis acknowledges inherent biases the range of participants

included in this study and their location reflect the opinions of designers in western Canada and

all participants are members of the GDC. Participant experiences and opinions should not be

generalized beyond the scope of certified graphic designers practicing in western Canada. More

research is needed to be able to make board generalizations about the future outlook of the

design profession.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

This project provides a sample of conversations about design practice by five Canadian

graphic designers. The study describes how graphic designers are responding to digital

transformation in their work and how they contextualize these changes within their practice and

profession.

RQ 1: What is the role of the contemporary graphic designer?

RQ 2: Is the Graphic Design designation still relevant?

RQ 3: What transformations are taking place in contemporary design practice?

These questions aim to make sense of how graphic designers implement digital

technologies into their work and how they are adapting to change. Conversations were

investigated through literary analysis. Individual stories were combined into a personal

experience narrative and analyzed using the provisional categories of narrative plot and

characterization. From these provisional categories, initial themes were identified. Plot structure,

settings, actions, turning points and resolution points were identified and coded. Themes

emerged from each participant's story shared about their roles and projects. Participant stories

were compared and contrasted for thematic commonality and difference. Gee's Seven Building

Tasks (2010) were used to place themes into an overarching narrative about design practice.

These themes are significance, practices (activities), identities, relationships and politics,

connections, sign systems and knowledge.

The overarching narrative themes identified are legitimacy, adaptability, duality and

change. These themes are simultaneously interconnected and separate. They exist on a

continuum rather than in hierarchical order. Some of these themes work together to form a

cohesive point-of-view and others in opposition, revealing a sharp dichotomy in both the

individual stories and the overarching narrative about design practice. A review of the Canadian

National Occupational Classification (NOC) for graphic designers was conducted and a

comparative analysis and word frequency analysis of 8 four-year Canadian programs where

graphic design was stated as an occupational outcome. These additional sources of information

ground the research findings and provided additional insight into graphic design work status.

Conversations were held with five Canadian graphic designers. Participants live and work

in cities in western Canada. All participants completed post-secondary programs at accredited

universities and colleges. In all cases, graphic design was a stated outcome of their programs.

Program lengths varied from 2 to 4 years and from diploma to degree programs. All participants

have been certified by the Association of Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC).

Table 1: Participant titles, designations and qualifications

Participant	Title	Designation	Qualification	Duration
Natalie	Independent Consultant	CGD	Diploma, Graphic Design	2 years
Anna	Studio Owner, Art Director	CGD	Diploma, Graphic Design & Illustration	2 years
Karen	Studio Owner, Graphic Designer	CGD	Diploma, Visual Communication & Design	2 years
David	Designer	CGD	Bachelor of Design, Visual Communications	4 years
Laura	Creative Director	CGD	Bachelor of Design, Visual Communications	4 years

My personal outlook.

In Narrative research acknowledging the researchers' lens, personal story, and inherent biases is a critical component. To uphold this tradition, I will share a brief background of my professional life and my questions and opinions on graphic design practice. I am a trained graphic designer who has worked in advertising and marketing for ten years. In my second year of visual communications, during my practicum, I read Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the way we make things by Michael Braungart and William McDonough (2002) and I become increasingly obsessed with the effect design choices have on the environment, health, well-being, behaviour and stewardship. I become concerned about the adverse effects of poor decisions that fail to consider the design product's broader context.

During my time as a practising designer, I have found navigating the profession and process of graphic design and its related specializations confusing and full of contradictions. I often ask myself, what is it that I do? What is graphic design? Furthermore, and perhaps the most critical question, what is the purpose of this work? I have observed reoccurring themes throughout my career. The archetype of the emotional, creative requiring "managing." The on-demand treatment of creativity and artistic talent and its commodification. The infantilizing of designers, treating them as though they could not possibly understand how the 'business world'

works, yet entrusting them with the task of shaping the organization's outward-facing identity. Trying to understand where graphic designers fit into the landscape as digital technology, particularly digital communications technology, infuses every aspect of our lives, and further fuels, the ongoing debate; who is and who is not a designer? The traditional products of design have become so readily accessible, and the ease of acquiring digital tools makes it is possible to imitate trained designers' work. I believe that if designers wish to remain relevant and hope to shape the world both now and, in the future, they have to become active participants in the conversation about their profession. In my opinion, the central topic of this conversation should revolve around understanding design at a theoretical level; only then can we ask the question of how we adapt to future-facing issues.

Setting and characterization.

Conversations were held with five Canadian graphic designers. Participants live and work in cities in western Canada. All participants completed post-secondary programs at accredited universities and colleges. In all cases graphic design was a stated outcome of their programs. Program lengths varied from 2 to 4 years and from diploma to degree programs. All participants have been certified by the Association of Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC).

Natalie. Natalie was the first participant to be interviewed. She is an independent freelance graphic designer from Edmonton, Alberta. She has been working as a freelancer for seven years. Natalie is a certified graphic designer and active member of the GDC. She began her career in print design for an in-house advertising and marketing department. Natalie describes herself as a graphic designer; "that's always been my title. I've never needed to go above that or below. I'm just a graphic designer (personal communication, June 7, 2019)." Natalie describes her work as focusing on corporate design, with the majority of the work being

digital advertising. Natalie and I spoke over video chat. Our conversation took about 90 minutes. Natalie is easy going, but lively. She was sitting at her dining room table in her apartment when we spoke. Natalie works from her home and maintains a mobile approach to her work. She is incredibly passionate about design culture. At the end of our conversation she noted that she could "talk about this for hours (Natalie, personal communication, June 7, 2019."

We discussed Natalie's designation and how she identifies herself professionally as a Graphic Designer (CGD). We talked about how she chose graphic design and where she studied. Starting in art class and having a love for mathematics, we talked about the transition from art to design and how she found it a natural progression. Natalie shared her love of structure and design parameters, but also highlighted the freedom in the process and the opportunity for expression. "I really love the technical aspect of it and creating things (Natalie personal communication, June 7, 2019)."

We discussed at length the complexities of working independently. Natalie described a sense of anxiety about the future and the pace of the work. We talked about the potential for clients leaving and, in the future, the perception of no longer being in tune with the broader trends of the time. We spoke about the designer's role as part of a broader conversation about business, products, and culture. The idea that designers should not be order takers. That in many ways, their role is to ask questions.

We discussed the profound and personal importance of being a member of her design community through the GDC and advocating for design practice and the designer's value, and the important role mentorship plays in the career of young designers. "It's so important for older designers, and I'll throw myself in that category now, to be able to give back to younger designers (Natalie, personal communication, June 7, 2019)."

We talked about fragmentation in the design profession and the use of different titles other than "graphic designer." We spoke about the ico-D's move to drop the word "graphic" from their definition of design and the shift to their new name "International Council of Design." We talked about the generational divide between older members and younger members of the GDC leadership. We talked about GDC's "soul searching" to understand better and actualize their mission.

Natalie spoke about the role of ethics and ethical practice. She said, "I think in regard to your values, you can choose to work with whom you want, and you can choose to do the projects that you want." You spoke about the importance of efficiency and minimizing environmental impact in terms of printing choices and resources generally; "why are we doing this? Why are we even working on a project that is not for the end-user? So, why even start something if it does not make sense for the corporate brand or what they are doing? And not just to say that printing is not environmentally friendly, but also working digitally is not environmentally friendly. So, it is always just questioning why we are wasting any resources or anything (Natalie, personal communication, June 7, 2019."

Anna. Anna was the next participant to be interviewed. Anna is also from Edmonton, Alberta. She's an active member of the GDC, a certified graphic designer and the owner of a studio. Anna has been a practicing graphic designer for 20 years. Her studio is known for branding, visual identities and illustration. They also work on animation and digital projects. Print media are still part of the work the studio does, however, Anna concedes there has been an increase in web design, digital advertising animation and content creation for social media.

Our conversation began with a discussion about how Anna defines herself professionally. Anna identifies as a graphic designer, although she is also a studio owner. Anna changes her job title based on her audience, even though most of her day, she describes as doing "graphic design work (Anna, personal communication, June 7, 2019)." We spoke about how Anna chose graphic design. She spoke about her interest in art as a child and how her high school art teacher encouraged her to attend design school. Anna notes that at the time, she did not know what design school was about. She also mentions her parents feeling a sense of relief when she chose design over art.

Anna described how she continues to love design despite the "long list of complaints that carry through the work." Anna describes the challenges of "dealing with clients, and managing deadlines, and working in a creative industry where you are monetizing it." Anna says that she has a "tougher skin now" and "does not get too emotionally involved" in corporate work. Anna spoke about the types of projects her studio work on and highlighted a shift to motion and animation.

We spoke about the evolution of design. Anna described feeling anxious about the design industry's pace and changes and the difficulty of "keeping up." Anna describes how she has noticed that graphic designers are increasingly "expected to have a very versatile set of skills." She describes how designers need to be comfortable learning and picking up new skills; "when I started in the industry, I was trained in design and illustration. And illustrators were their own people, and they only did illustration, and they were hired as illustrators, and that was it."

Anna believes strongly in the need for the designer to work directly with the client. "I'm a firm believer in working directly with the client produces better work."
In the last two years, one thing that we're really getting into is animation too.

Anna is also actively engaged in ongoing research of her own about the work of the graphic designer. Although Anna has a studio location and is a successful entrepreneur, she is calling me from her home office. Anna's studio has been recognized nationally for their design work. Her focus is on the work and she doesn't put too much emphasis on titles. For Anna the designer and client need to work directly together. In her view that allows for the best possible outcomes.

Karen. Karen is participant three. She has over twenty years of design experience. She has always worked independently. Her studio is based in Calgary, Alberta. Karen is also a certified graphic designer and an active member of the GDC. She has won numerous awards for her branding and editorial design work and is an adjunct instructor for an accredited design program in Calgary. Karen defines herself as a graphic designer "lots of people choose a title, my designation is CGD—I am a graphic designer (personal communication, July 3, 2019). Our conversation took place over the phone. Karen only had an hour before clients are arriving to meet with her. In the background I can hear shuffling of papers and tapping on a keyboard in between questions. Karen was specific about understanding the intent of each question during our interview. She would ask clarifying questions throughout "Good question. Are you asking the way I act or who I am as a person? How I conduct myself? (personal communication, July 3, 2019)."

Our conversation began with a discussion about Karen's designation and how she identifies herself professionally. Karen described how graphic design has become a broad term. We then discussed why Karen chose graphic design. Karen goes onto to describe how her brother was taking a visual communications program at the time and she decided she would take

the same course "All I knew at the time was that I could draw (Karen, personal communication, July 3, 2019)." Karen describes this decision as naïve and explains how she did not fully grasp what design is until her final year in the program.

Karen's overriding focus is on appropriate solutions, intent and strategy. She believes that design is strategic—it is creative, but not artistic.

If you're not strategic, you're not going to be productive. Artistic ability is a nice bonus, for sure. But, again, if you base all of your problem solving on strategy, that did not require you to be able to draw or to paint, or to illustrate because you can hire those things (Karen, personal communication, July 3, 2019)."

Although Karen characterizes artistic ability as a bonus, she herself has that ability. It is notable that Karen is known for her strategic problem-solving, however, her design work has been recognized nationally and internationally, and is beautifully crafted. Karen describes graphic design as nuanced "You're talking not just product design, you're talking user experiences, you're talking user interface design. You're talking a whole set of complexities that could even include artificial intelligence (Karen, personal communication, July 3, 2019)."

We spoke about how graphic design is changing and how Karen's work has changed over the course of her career "what I did five years ago, ten years ago, fifteen years ago is not what I am doing today (Karen, personal communication, July 3, 2019)." Karen expressed the need for designers to be fluid. She described how fundamental principals have remained the same, however, the "vehicles" used to realize strategy have "changed drastically." She described how design touches all areas of communication and designers have now have "an incredible

opportunity" to shape conversations and improve human experiences. Karen describes design as user-driven and highlights that design doesn't need to be for business, that it can be for culture and society. Karen goes on to describe how design is in a "really exciting phase" because of changes and innovations in communication. "The idea of bringing multiple sectors or industries or business or whatever, creators, anything together and solving problems of different vantage points is what's fascinating." Karen describes how digital technology is creating opportunities to integrate channels and have better conversations and has broken down some of the traditional silos (Karen, personal communication, July 3, 2019).

David. The fourth participant interviewed was David. David lives in Calgary, Alberta. At the time of this interview, David is working for a university in the United States. Our conversation took place over a video call. David was at work during our call, sitting in his office on campus. David is relaxed and informal. When talking about his experiences David provides contextual details about his projects and provides two sides to each scenario. For David understanding the user experience and determining the informational pathways are key to successful digital projects. David is also a certified graphic designer and an active member of the GDC. David describes himself as a designer. Most of David's recent work focuses on digital design, particularly user interface and experience design.

Our conversation starts in the same way as the other conversations. David describes his current role and the title he uses to describe himself professionally. We then shift the conversation to how David chose graphic design. David describes moving between majors in computer science to then to theatre. After graduating David then went on to complete a degree in visual communication. David describes wanting to 'punch up his hard skills (David, personal communication, July 12, 2019)."

We spoke about the timing of when David attended design school. David described being

a student during an in-between time, just a digital design began gaining traction:

> I was maybe, oh, you know, one or two years removed from some of the more traditional,
>
> uh, paste-up work that used to happen. You know, I, I've never seen a waxier I've only
>
> heard about it. Um, and um, you know, the, the Macintosh computer was really, you
>
> know, at least in terms of graphic design in my eyes really exploding at that time (David,
>
> personal communication, July 12, 2019).

After graduating David worked in both print and digital design. Initially he describes digital

design as an "add-on" to the overall slate of work. Now he describes digital as central to the

design project. Particularly when designing ecommerce platforms where the whole customer

journey becomes an object to be considered. David adds that designers cannot afford to have a

split focus when it comes to user-interface design and digital strategy.

Laura. The fifth participant interviewed was Laura. Laura was suggested as a candidate

for this research by David. They attended design school together and have kept in touch

professionally over the years. Laura works for a prominent advertising agency in Regina

Saskatchewan. Our conversation took place over the phone. Laura was at work during our call.

She is a creative director, certified graphic designer and active member of the GDC. Prior to

becoming a creative director, Laura was an art director. Our conversation also began with roles

and professional titles and designations. For Laura the term graphic design describes a

qualification but does not clearly articulate professional status. Laura describes professional

practice as niche and differentiates between roles and qualification.

As for the title of graphic designer, um, I think of as a sort of mid-level, um, professional designer. However, there is so many other titles that go along with design. Like there's art director, creative director, obviously interior design and all that kind of stuff all comes together to represent that same profession (Laura, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

We then spoke about why Laura chose graphic design; she describes being good at math and science but also loving art. For Laura her career choices where "art school or engineering (Laura, personal communication, August 9, 2019)." In the end graphic design was a middle ground between art and engineering. Laura's early career focussed on print design, particularly editorial design. Laura identifies change as a constant part of design practice "everything is always changing in this industry." For Laura the impact of these changes is limited to the tools and business models.

Just the tools that do that have changed. And so, I'm always a firm believer that, you know, design principles are cross industry across technology. Like, it doesn't really matter how you're disseminating that information still need to be grounded in good design (Laura, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

Turning points and resolution points.

The reasons participants gave for choosing a visual communication or graphic design related program were unique to each of them. However, there are consistencies between motives for their choices. Beliefs about having a career that is dependable and a need to gain employable

skills and ultimately become employed are shared: "it seemed like I could apply my artistic interest to some legitimate type of profession—like get paid doing something artistic (Anna, personal communication, August 9, 2019)," "drawing is not much of a career (Karen, personal communication, July 3, 2019)," "I wanted to punch up my skills—like hard skills—employable skills (David, personal communication, July 12, 2019)."

Art and design. In all cases, an initial passion for art and natural artistic ability existed: "I really liked art class (Natalie, personal communication, June 7, 2019)," "I was really into the arts (Anna, personal communication, June 7, 2019)," "I could draw (Karen, personal communication, July 3, 2019)," "I fell into a really good place (David, personal communication, July 12, 2019)," "I was really good at art and drawing (Laura, personal communication, August 9, 2019)." All participants differentiated between art and design, describing design as a creative pursuit more than an artistic one. "I think designers are more of an analytical breed, and some embrace the art and then some prefer not to align themselves with artists (Anna, personal communication, June 7, 2019)."

Relationships and politics.

Ideas about "legitimacy" and legitimizing influences like teachers, parents, siblings and friends appear to influence the decision to choose design as a career path. There is a concern for making the right choice. The idea that when choosing whether or not to pursue an artistically creative field of study there was a right choice and a wrong choice. "So, when it came to choose a career for me, it was either art school or engineering; what sort of swayed the decision for me, in the end, was going to school for design. (Laura, personal communication, August 9, 2019)."

There is present the notion that the arts; specifically, the fine and performing arts are not reliably employable professions, they are passions. Working as an artist is not perceived as a

dependable career. For artistically creative expression to be deemed employable and thereby

dependable it must be in an "applied," commercial form. When choosing graphic design, it is

evident that participants employed an intuitive approach. The duality of the designer is

represented by a love of structure on the one hand and on the other a love of freedom and

creative expression. Duality is a persistent theme in the professional lives of participants. All

participants share a love of drawing and an interest in art. They have a passion for problem-

solving and creative expression. This contrast between structure and freedom enhances the

designer's capacity for adaptability.

Table 2: Reasons for choosing the graphic design field

Participant	Reasons for choosing graphic design
Natalie	I remember all my friends saying "Let's all go. We'll live in Vancouver together. It'll be so much fun."
Anna	It seemed like I could apply my artistic interest, to some legitimate type of profession, like get paid doing something artistic. For my parents, it was like a bit of a relief because I think that they didn't really want to see me going into post-secondary just to do fine art. This was a happy medium.
Karen	When I was looking for a career all I knew was that I could draw. Which is not much of a career. So, I went to design school. That's the direction I went in naively. Very naively.
David	I bounced around a lot; I had a lot of different majors I was trying to find something I can do. I eventually actually finished, my University degree in a theatre. When I left university, I wanted to really punch up my skills I ended up doing a visual communications degree.
Laura	When it came to choose a career for me, it was either art school or engineering; design school swayed the decision for me in the end.

Table 3: Influencers

Participant	Influence
Natalie	A representative came in and they were talking about graphic design. I remember all my friends saying "Let's all go. We'll live in Vancouver together. It'll be so much fun."
Anna	My high school art teacher showed me a brochure for a university that offered a design program. For my parents, it was like a bit of a relief because I think that they didn't really want to see me going into post-secondary just to do fine art.
Karen	My brother had gone to the program.

David	I wanted to really punch up my skills. I ended up doing a visual communications degree.
Laura	When it came to choose a career for me what sort of swayed the decision for me, in the end, was going to school for design

Table 4: Approach to decision making

Participant	An intuitive approach to decision making
Natalie	…not even knowing what graphic design was. I had never even seen a Mac computer before. I didn't know what they actually did
Anna	… I didn't really know what that [graphic design] was
Karen	I didn't really fully figure it out until my final year
David	… I bounced around a lot … a bit of gradual development, a lot of evolution, a lot of sort of building upon what I've learned and trying to put it together
Laura	So, when it came to choose a career for me, it was either art school or engineering; what sort of swayed the decision for me, in the end, was going to school for design

Table 5: Structure and expression

Participant	Structure	Creative and artistic expression	Combination of structure and expression
Natalie	I loved math. I really loved the technical aspect. Structure of a creative briefs. Client brand standards. Form my ideas to fit within their constraints. I love to pull out what are my restrictions.	I liked art class because it was so informal and there weren't any tests. I liked the freedom.	The melding of two worlds. It's a great mix.
Anna	I can communicate, I can deal with clients, I can pitch work.	Really into the arts as a child and in high school.	This was a happy medium, like okay, this is a commercial field, but it's still artistic.
Karen	You have to know how to do proper research.	All I knew was I could draw.	To be a good designer you have to be strategic.
David	I was a computer science major first.	I ended up in theatre, majoring in set design.	I had a lot of different majors (computer science and set design during university).
Laura	Very good at like the math and the sciences.	Acing my art classes.	I was acing my art classes and in the advanced calculus and math classes. It was either art school or engineering.

Data Presentation

RQ1 What is the role of the contemporary graphic designer?

This question is about understanding how the designer works; and if and how their work

has changed. Moreover, the question aims to understand more about the nature of their projects.

The interviews were organized into tables for comparative analysis which facilitated the building

of a combined narrative. Key statements from each participant have been grouped into

categories. One of the questions each participant was asked is "How has your work changed over

the course of your career?" This question prompted a response which took on a natural narrative

progression; starting in the past, moving to the present and ending in the participant

contextualizing the changes they have experienced. The Career Overview table (pp. 48-50) is

categorized by Past Work, Current Work and Participant Perspective. The narrative analysis for

RQ1 uses these points in time as a means of constructing a timeline. The most obvious change

between the work designers did at the start of their careers as compared to now is the transition

from print-based media to digital media. The career overview table (page 57) contrasts the work

participants are doing now with their perspective on the changes in their work.

Past work. The participants interviewed have between eight and thirty years of

experience in their fields. The work discussed in this section took place between 1990 and as

recently as 2012. Across all interviews print design was identified as the primary output medium

of past design work. Logo design, branding, visual identity design, editorial design, illustration

and print advertising were identified as the primary scope of work of the designer. Projects

ranged from trade show kiosks and collateral to billboards and brochures. Two participants

identified digital design as a component of their work in addition to print based media. Both

described the digital medium as rapidly evolving in terms of programming languages and

applications available. At this time; 2000 to 2006 social networks and e-commerce were

emerging concepts, followed later by mobile design and mobile advertising. David describes

digital design at this point in time as an "add-on" and "part of the slate of work" but not the focus

of the project or a major strategic component (David, personal correspondence, July 12, 2019).

Research, ideation, concept development and strategy are also described as being a central focus

by all participants.

   Present work. Present work includes projects which participants have been working on

within the last five years. Participants identified the primary focus of their current work to be

digital in nature; identifying digital advertising, interactive design and social media design,

animation, digital production, coding, user-experience design and user-interface design. Karen

described the current options available to designers as "massive" and "changing (Karen, personal

correspondence, July 3, 2019)." David described the work as "an amalgam of things (David,

personal correspondence, July 12, 2019)." All participants acknowledged the visual aspect of

their work remains important, however, as digital design grows a strategic approach becomes

fundamental, "the sheer number of options—or "portals that you can design through" (Karen,

personal correspondence, July 3, 2019) means that strategy needs to dictate all actions and

designers cannot "afford to have a split focus (David, personal correspondence, July 12, 2019)."

Natalie and Laura highlighted the rise of user-generated content and an increase in the

engagement of non-designers in the work and role of the designer. Int-5 describes social media

design as "much more prevalent" (personal correspondence, August 9, 2019) and time and

budget attached to projects as decreasing.

   Past and present in context. Movement, pace and change were words used by

participants to contextualize the transformations taking place in design. Natalie describes design

as "friendlier to the non-designer (personal correspondence, June 7, 2019)." Anna describes the

transition from illustration to animation as "opening up a whole new industry (personal

correspondence, June 7, 2019)." Karen describes the need for designers to remain "fluid" and the

importance of "proper research" and "measurable goals (personal correspondence, July 3,

2019)." Fluidity is expressed as the designer's ability to apply their skill set in different and

changing contexts depending on the strategic needs of the client or project. David spoke about

the sophistication of digital experiences now and the transformation of design from the "visual

aspect" to experience and engagement (personal correspondence, July 12, 2019). Contrastingly,

Laura describes a decrease in the emphasis on design-process and craft (personal

correspondence, August 9, 2019).

All participants emphasized the importance of the designer having direct involvement in

the strategic conversations. Highlighting that their role is not to "be an order taker" or "make

things look pretty" but rather to inform the research process, ask questions and participate in

strategic conversations. "It's my belief that the designer belongs with a proper seat at the table

working directly with decision makers, because I think that's where there's the best chance of

amazing outcomes to happen. (Anna, personal correspondence, June 7, 2019).

Table 6: Career overview

Participant	Past Work	Present Work	Participant Perspective
Natalie	…working in-house on print design. At school, we learned to build a Flash site, and a few years later Flash is non-existent.	…it is very much corporate design with a majority being digital advertising.	I feel like the internet passed me by, the web design world was just flying. The web industry is changing so quickly. Design now is so much friendlier to the non-designer.
Anna	…branding and visual identity and the subsequent materials that we attach to a brand. …print design: brochures, print collateral, advertising campaigns.	…digital mediums are a huge thing now; web design, some digital campaigns. A lot of social media work now.	We're getting into more movement-based illustration, which is a natural progression; opening up a whole new industry for us. I'm at a stage in my career where I'm beginning to feel

	…a lot of illustrations.	And then in the last two years, we're really getting into animation.	like slightly anxious about the pace and the changes in which the design industry.
Karen	The work that I do has always been highly conceptual. Editorial design, branding, identity design and promotional materials.	I'm tackling a project right now where I am bringing in a production house and I'm bringing in animators. …the massive number of offerings and portals that you can design through; it changes design because those portals move it and craft it and influence it.	If you're going to be a professional designer in this market you need to be fluid. You can still be specialized, but you need to be fluid. ...look at all of the portals…That changes with every single project. A good designer needs to be very strategic in their thinking and they need to understand how to do proper research and develop a strong strategy and a set of measurable goals. And then to conceptualize the path based on those measurable goals.
David	In those early days, it was a lot more like a brochure; let's take some really high-level information and just have a couple of pages on the Internet so can call us and figure out when we're open. Websites used to be one of those things that was a bit more of an add-on. We would do all this brand work for example, and be like, oh yeah, and now we'll do a website on the side or as part of the slate of work.	It's an amalgam of things. There's the visual aspect for sure. There's definitely a user aspect and sequencing of information. And coding. …as my career has gone on the web work has become more dominant, more sophisticated, and trying to have really purposeful goals behind a website that's really measurable—something that you can't afford to have a split focus on.	…websites from the late nineties are very basic, compared to what you experience now. By the time, 2003, 2004 rolls around it, was evolving at a pretty intense pace. I think initially there was a lot of people who had a website just to have a presence, you know, to have some brand awareness. But definitely the depth of websites has evolved.
Laura	…when I began, everything was very traditional, basically print based and so lots of outdoor boards, lots of trade shows, lots of print ads. Building ads, typical advertising work, logos that kind of thing. Back then there was a shift; changing computer programs and tools.	Digital design and social media design are much more prevalent than any traditional print pieces. …there is less time available because the needs are more instant and the usage is, and the media that we are using are just super quick. And, there isn't the budget to put time into. For example, like a social post or something that you might be doing versus a two-week long trade show display that we used to do back in the day.	Everything is always changing in this industry. There was also a lot more emphasis put into the process of design. The digital evolution is of course changing the social landscape—which has changed everything. I'm a firm believer that design principals are cross industry and technology. No matter how you're disseminating information it still needs to be grounded in good design.

RQ2 Is the graphic design designation still relevant?

This question was answered using multiple information sources. Deciding whether the

term, or designation *Graphic Designer* is relevant requires looking at the issues at play from the

perspective of practicing designers, but also in terms of education and training and in terms of

the occupational classification and definition of graphic design. In the design field, a

qualification does not equate directly to an occupation—or designation. To understand more

specifically the relationship between design training, the *Graphic Design* designation and the

title graphic designer an analysis of 8 accredited Canadian programs was undertaken where

graphic design was stated as a program outcome. These programs were identified through the

Graphic Designers of Canada (2019) website (Accredited Graphic Design Programs in Canada).

They are four-year programs spanning Alberta and British Columbia. The universities and

colleges selected are competing institutions and the comparison of their offerings provides

further insight into the outcomes of design programs.

Practitioner perspectives. Participants expressed a range of opinions when asked about the

relevance of the graphic design title. One of the confounding aspects to this question is that the

designation Certified Graphic Designer (CGD) and the title graphic designer are not necessarily

the same as evidenced by the range of titles and positions held by CGD's and the differences in

expertise and skills between graphic designers. Participants expressed an awareness of the

tensions at play between those who identify as graphic designers and those who do not by the

language participants used when describing their opinion on the topic.

Table 7: Titles and designations

Participant	Title	Designation	Alternative Titles
Natalie	Graphic Designer, Independent Consultant	CGD	I would say graphic designer that's always been my job title. I've never needed to go above or below. I'm just a graphic designer. Although, I identify with more digital design; UI and UX.
Anna	Studio Owner, Creative Director	CGD	I change my job title depending on who I'm talking to. So, if I'm talking to a business professional, I say Art Director. If I'm talking to people in the arts, I say Graphic Designer/Illustrator. On LinkedIn or Twitter, I identify number one as an Illustrator; an illustrator who works as a Creative Director, my label is Creative Director.
Karen	Studio Owner, Graphic Designer	CGD	I always go by the title graphic designer. Although, that's a much broader thing nowadays.
David	Digital Designer	CGD	I'd probably just say designer. I think the lines are a bit blurry; it's like web designer, interaction designer, product designer, user experience designer. It's almost a list of skills more than a title.
Laura	Creative Director	CGD	There are so many titles that go along with design. I don't think there's something that would encompass all of those under one. A graphic designer I think of as a mid-level, professional designer.

Three out of five of participants use the title graphic designer, and all use the designation

CGD. However, not all participants identify as graphic designers. According to Natalie, a recent

survey conducted by the GDC revealed that a number of digital designers do not identify with

the term *graphic design* (personal correspondence, June 7, 2019). Anna described the GDC as

having an "identity crisis" where leadership are starting to question whether the certified graphic

design designation is closing doors to membership (Anna, personal correspondence, June 7,

2019).

Participants are not in agreement about the use of the title graphic designer, they agree

that the "lines are blurry (David, personal correspondence, July 12, 2019)" and the role is "much

broader now (Karen, July 3, 2019)." Natalie describes "When I graduated the term was

'communication designer' I call myself a graphic designer because my clients understand what

that means and from a business point-of-view you have to speak to what your audience

understands (Natalie, personal correspondence, June 7, 2019)." Anna also uses the term graphic

designer, she concedes that "graphic design is becoming more of an "old-fashioned term" for

what we do (Anna, personal correspondence, June 7, 2019)."

Qualifications, education and training. Post-secondary education and training offer a

range of options to aspiring designers. University qualifications include Bachelor of Fine Arts

(BFA) and Bachelor of Design (BDes) degrees. In both cases, there tends to be a specialization.

In BDes programs the specialization could be in visual communication or advertising. If you

hold a BFA and intend to work in a visual and applied arts occupation you might specialize in

New Media for example. Although the degree is designated Fine Arts; the program concentration

in the case of New Media is web and graphic design, animation and gaming, and cinema

production. College degrees and diplomas tend toward being more specialized however the

graduating qualification is then either an applied degree or a diploma. To better understand the

curriculum and stated occupational outcomes a comparative analysis of 8 accredited Canadian

design programs was undertaken (Appendix F). In all two-year and four-year programs, graphic

design is identified as a primary career outcome. Graphic design, web design, information design

and advertising are the primary occupational outcomes for students entering the Bachelor of

Design, Bachelor of Applied Arts (Visual Communications), Bachelor of Fine Arts (New Media)

and Bachelor of Communication (Information Design) programs. Graphic design and web design

are the primary subject foci of all programs surveyed, followed closely by publication (editorial)

design, branding, advertising, information design and print design. This analysis is based on

information available in the general course descriptions of the program.

Occupational classification. According to the Government of Canada's National Occupational Classification (2016) graphic designers are part of the technical occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport (Hierarchy and structure section). Graphic designers and illustrators are classified together although they are differentiated within the category itself; each having their own occupational definition. Their category is assigned 97 possible job titles under their classification. The only occupational group in the category of art, culture and recreation with more possible job titles are artists and crafts persons; having 107 possible titles (Government of Canada National Occupational Classification, 2016., Index of titles section).

Occupational classification is relevant for two reasons. Firstly, because with 97 possible job titles the classification provides further evidence of the broad change of titles and roles within the graphic design occupation. And, secondly, because there is a connection between occupational status and the classification system. For example, graphic design is part of the arts, culture and sport category. Contrastingly, industrial design for example is part of the natural and applied science category. The classification also looks at skill level and the typical education or training required. Even within the NOC system there are discrepancies. For example, in their general search matrix graphic design is noted as "occupations usually require a college education, specialized training or apprenticeship training (Government of Canada National Occupational Classification, 2016., Graphic Design Search Results). However, on the unit group page the employment requirement for graphic design is noted as requiring a university degree or college diploma (Government of Canada Job Bank, 2019., Trend Analysis, Requirements)." The occupation definition of graphic design in the NOC system is markedly different from that of the International Council of Design (ico-D). According to NOC:

Graphic designers conceptualize and produce graphic art and visual materials to

effectively communicate information for publications, advertising, films, packaging,

posters, signs and interactive media such as Web sites and CDs. They are employed by

advertising and graphic design firms, by establishments with advertising or

communications departments and by multimedia production companies, or they may be

self-employed (Government of Canada National Occupational Classification, 2016.,

Trend Analysis section, Occupations Description).

This definition is in stark contrast to that provided at the start of this report by the ico-D.

According to the NOC graphic designers work almost exclusively in advertising. According to

this definition the designer—who is labeled the graphic designer works entirely in the

commercial sphere. Although this definition describes the graphic designer as someone who

works to "communicate effectively" there is no provision for strategic thinking, problem solving

or innovation. There is also a strong emphasis on the graphic designer as a producer of products.

RQ3 What transformations are taking place in contemporary design practice?

The aim of this question is to understand how designers are responding to the

transformations described by the literature. Building on the work of Burns, Cottam, Vanstone

and Winhall (2006) I used the philosophical challenges facing designers they outlined in their

RED Paper 02: Transformation Design, as a method for categorizing participant responses. The

participant responses to this question varied greatly. Answers centred around the topics of client

work, ethics, mentorship, sustainability and social well-being.

Table 8: Opportunities and challenges

Philosophical challenges outlined in RED Paper 02	The loss of personal creative authorship	Shaping behaviour rather than form	Transformation design is never done	Creativity happens in run-time, not just in design-time	Diversity over quality	Design becomes a Pro-Am community
Definition	The designer becomes the facilitator rather than the author and ideas take on their own life beyond the designer.	The designer lets go of traditional definitions concerned with shaping form and craft.	The designer no longer delivers a final "product" but rather works to build/create systems.	Design is iterative taking place in real contexts, outside of the studio and the user is the design-filter rather than the designers personal experience.	Inclusion and equality are the value-system by which success is measured. Working collaboratively is more important than a high production value (beautiful object).	Designers build the capacity of non-designers so that anyone can use, edit or adapt the system or process.
Selected quotes from participants	"There's a shift to user generated content (Laura)".	"We have an incredible opportunity nowadays to morph and change those conversations continually and create better human experiences (Karen)."	"In digital you can iterate. You can always have new releases and you can update (David)."	"A move from campaigns to this always on, always present, not necessarily limited window of communication. So that has changed the way we think about projects (Laura)."	"The idea of bringing multiple sectors or industries or business or whatever—creators, anything together and solving problems from different vantage points is what's fascinating (Karen)."	"You can take over these small details. I don't care, because it frees me up to be part of the bigger conversation about the overall brand (Natalie)."

Traditionalists and transformers. Burns et al (2006) identify two emerging groups

within design practice; transformers and traditionalists. Transformers tend to use

transdisciplinary methods and approaches in their work. They are open to collaboration and

willing to share or even relinquish control of their work; without interpreting that as a failure.

Indeed, in many cases they are creating frameworks to empower their clients to replicate or

continue the project without the input of the designer. Traditionalists tend toward having a strong

concern for craft and quality. Sharing or giving-up creative control threatens the overall standard

of the work because the designer is no longer in control of the strategy and production quality. It is important not to assume that traditionalists employ an industrialized approach whereas transformers employ a post-industrialist approach to problem solving. Equally traditionalists views are not representative of age. Traditionists and transformers hold contrasting beliefs about the application of design. They also tend toward working in different sectors and for different purposes. All participants agreed that designers should be given an equal stake in the project planning phase because their expertise are as much strategic as they are technical.

When asking participants about the nature of the work they're doing now they described an increase in digital media use. Natalie, Anna and Karen described how the characteristics of digital media impact the creative and strategic opportunities available to the designer. Anna noted that with new opportunities comes new practical and technical challenges to remaining current. Laura and David both highlight how the fundamentals of design practice have remained the same even though the media are changing. The characteristic properties of the media; print versus digital, affect not only the choice of medium used (brochure, poster, video, social post, blog, website), but also the way graphic designers are relating to the medium.

Table 9: Digital transitions

Participant	Digital Focus	Contextualization
Natalie	The majority of the work I do is digital advertising.	It's less expensive and the message can be changed a lot faster.
Anna	We are getting into more digital mediums too; it's a huge thing now, so we do some web design, some digital campaigns. A lot of social media work.	We're getting into doing more movement-based illustration, which is opening up a whole new industry for us. I'm at a stage in my career where I'm beginning to feel slightly anxious about the pace and the changes in the design industry. Just from a technical standpoint where it's hard to keep up— but there's all of these things happening.
Karen	That changes with every single project. It might be a website, or completely experience focussed or strictly production or animation. It's incredibly fluid.	There's a lot more opportunity to engage. That absolutely changes the way you think, and the deliverables have changed.
David	80% digital and 20% print based.	At a high level I don't actually see a difference. The general design stages remain remarkably very similar. The difference between print and digital is that with print once it's out there in prints, it's out there. In digital you can iterate. You can always have new releases and you can update.
Laura	Digital design and social media design are much more prevalent than any traditional print pieces.	Digital designers have all these principals about how it needs to be user friendly and this and that. And it's interesting that all of those discussions are exactly what professionally trained graphic designers have always done. With the digital revolution people came in and started talking like the old school design wasn't relevant, but really it was just the media that was changing.

Discussion

This study looked at three connected topics; design practice, design education and design classification. The objective of the study is to describe how graphic designers are responding to digital transformation in their work and how they contextualize these changes within their practice and profession.

RQ 1: What is the role of the contemporary graphic designer?

RQ 2: Is the Graphic Design designation still relevant?

RQ 3: What transformations are taking place in contemporary design practice?

The design literature asserts that changes are taking place; shifting and morphing design practice. The economy and production are tied to technology and communication and thereby to design both philosophically and practically (Poutanen & Kovalainen, 2017, pp. 47-48). Therefore, it follows that as the economy has shifted from industrialized to post-industrialized so too has the nature of design practice. Both education and practice are moving away from discrete disciplines toward transdisciplinary approaches, and although conceptually sound, this transition has several practical deficiencies that have yet to be addressed.

Summary

Practice, education and employability are affected by one another, although, not explicitly connected. Education and training strive to equip future practitioners in their field. Nevertheless, the purpose of contemporary education is not the supply and demand of a labour force (Tomlinson, 2013, p. 86). Curriculum moves at its own pace and so too does the economy and technology, which directly affects the job market and employability of designers.

Differences in the practical applications of design create tensions within the field. Contemporary design has been described as being roughly divided into two models: the traditional model and the contemporary model (Harland, 2011). Traditionalists and transformers are part of the same continuum. Their perspectives falling on opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum, however, still connected.

The economy and technology move quickly compared to occupational classifications, and curriculum, which are slower to change. Misalignment between representative bodies like the GDC, RGD, the ico-D and the National Occupational Classification result in confusion about the design occupation. Internal tensions within and between representative bodies reflect innovation and change within the field but also disagreement. The GDC and RGD use the term

graphic designer whereas the ico-D has opted to use the term designer. These differences in meaning create a sense of professional dislocation.

Changes to business models and the proliferation of social networks have completely changed the production and distribution of information. These changes are physical, but they have implications beyond their physical properties. Communications systems have moved from defined segments of communication and campaigns to an "always on, always present (Laura, personal communication, August 9, 2019)" model. The relative, industrialized model of time, cost, quantity and quality no longer hold up in every scenario (Baratta, 2006). Robert Harland (2010) in his article "The Dimensions of Graphic Design and its Spheres of Influence" questions the choice of words used to describe graphic design and the impact these words have on the definition of design. Design is both a practical and conceptual activity. The role of the designer and the boundaries of design practice are the topic of much debate within the design community. Harland (2010) acknowledges the role of language and lexicon as a defining force in this discussion. "Design" which means "to mark," describes the "formation of something to be executed, from a starting point, origin or process that are often uncertain (Terzidis, 2007, p. 69)." The terms design, interdisciplinary design, human-centred design, user-experience design, user-interface design and digital design—among others have been used to describe the work of the traditional graphic designer in a contemporary context.

The foundational elements and principles of graphic design, line, shape, composition, colour, typography, balance and others are as relevant today as they were in 1919 and before (Botha-Ebbbers, 1993, pp.69-89). The foundational design practice is relatively uncontested and provides trained designers with the tools for composing forms. Graphic design work is commerce and user-context centric in the sense that commercial activity and the dominant modes

of communication dictate the media and medium of practice. Moreover, just as each media; print, web, motion and others bring their own set of media-specific concerns, opportunities, and challenges to the design task's forefront, communication mediums use have an overriding effect on the designer's work and, ultimately, the extent to which the designer can manipulate the media. Traditional mediums like print and broadcast are relatively stable and bound by their medium; newspaper ads, billboards, radio and TV commercials etc. They are consumed under relatively controlled conditions and have a defined narrative pathway; a beginning, middle and end. Once the media has been produced there's little opportunity for iteration and the user may have some interaction with the media but typically cannot engage directly. Digital media by contrast are less stable because they are device dependent and the user has more direct influence on how they move through the communication and in many cases the user has the option of engaging with the communication through social integrations, and digital media almost always allows for iteration.

Early on websites were approached a lot like a brochure; which is where the term "brochure website" first surfaced. Websites were often an "add-on" seen as something extra created so that the client would have an online presence (David, personal communication, July 12, 2019). Branding, visual identity design, editorial design and advertising certainly had a strategic focus in the past, however, the strategy itself was developed for print-based outputs such as billboards and newspapers. The shift from industrial to post-industrial, or digital has effects beyond the media itself. Print and digital require fundamentally different considerations and strategic approaches.

Conclusion

Introduction

This research study began with the question; "what is the role of the contemporary graphic designer?" The secondary question "Is the graphic design designation still relevant?" although different from the first question is related. Understanding what graphic designers do informs how they work and the way their work is described. Furthermore, the questioning of whether the graphic design title is still relevant within design practice itself is a signal that something fundamental about the nature of design work is changing.

Summary of Findings

The way graphic designers think about themselves and conceive of their professional identity informs the way they practice design and vice-versa. Graphic design is a significant cultural, and economic contributor. Graphic design is a dynamic and evolving discipline that shapes technology, society and the environment. At the heart of this project lies the question "what is the purpose of design?" The intent of this question is not to limit the possible applications for which design may be used or applied but simply to ask what is the objective of the designer? The point of this project is to highlight that the applications of design are different from the purpose of design. While the products of design may in some cases be business cards and websites this is not the purpose of design. Which begs the question; what is the purpose of design and who gets to all themselves a designer?

A catch-all classification.

Graphic design is a catch-all classification for the work of actualizing visual communications. The primary focus in contemporary discourse is on design as a method and process. Both from within the field of design practice and externally; an obsession with process

exists. This obsession has shifted the conversation about practice away from the "visual" and focussed expressly on the strategic component of the work. This shift has revealed tensions within the design community about the purpose of the profession. Design as a tool for problem solving is embraced in contemporary discourse and practice and has been validated as an approach to sensemaking; which is evidenced by its diffusion into business, education and society generally. "Design" is a grounded approach; it's based on research, strategy, experimentation and irritation with the ultimate goal of the process being a logical, definable and preferably measurable outcome. The process is flexible because it is a non-discriminatory and can be applied and configured to fit the problem at hand. However, this flexibility has led to many different applications of design; advertising, corporate communication, service design, information design, visual communication, social design and design for social well-being to name but a few.

       The role of the designer.

       The role of the designer is to navigate the problem of selection and comprehension. The value of design is the ability of the designer to translate the problems that cannot be solved by standardization and templates; these are problems in which the environment cannot be controlled only navigated. Furthermore, these kinds of problems do not have fixed solutions; these are problems of organization, process and material. They are contextual and subject to change, evolution and revision. These moving solutions require innovation and experimentation from the perspective of human beings for other human beings. The medium really is the message, because digital media has to be navigated in real time under changing conditions, it is different from print whose conditions remain unchanged and static. In the case of print media, the designer gets to

control the environment. Whereas, with digital media the environment can at best can be

managed or curated; it cannot be controlled.

Structure and form.

Designers who identify as traditionalists believe their role is to manipulate forms for

communication, and transformers believe their role is to create structures for communication.

One system is formal, and the other is structural. Differentiating between these two systems of

practice can be difficult because they emerge from the same foundational set of practices and

principals. However, their approach, application and value systems are vastly different. These

differing approaches to design may have predated digital media, however, the nature of digital

media has highlighted the differences in approach. Digital media has blurred authorship, and

refocussed design to consider behavior and experience. Digital design is iterative and so

continuous improvement, testing and adjusting becomes possible and central to the design

process. For transformers concepts such as empathy, diversity and capacity-building of non-

designers become critical to project success. Comparatively traditionalists are concerned

foremostly with form and so they value control and ownership of their work. The product of their

work is usually to be consumed rather than to interact or engage with and they value craft and

high production value.

Nothing is neutral.

Design thinking has infused contemporary design culture as a formula for answering

questions through an iterative process of research, prototyping and testing. Design thinking has

become popularized specifically because it is an intellectual, rational and intuitive approach to

sensemaking; logical, traceable and verifiable steps make up its internal structure. Logic and

rationality are tied to material forms in art, architecture and product design. These ideas extend

to the design of information and visual representation. Writing; one of the first forms of visual representation; conforms to rules of structure and form to facilitate the clear expression of meaning imparted through language. As a way of transferring meaning, the physical containers; letters that make up the words in written language are treated as neutral elements. Their configuration is what defines their meaning. This process allows for rational claims because the supposition is that the container—that is the letters, are themselves neutral. The same notion of neutrality exists in design thinking. The containers within the process start out neural and as they become populated with information, they acquire meaning.

This notion of neutrality in both cases is flawed when viewed through a post-structuralist, constructivist lens. If "the medium is the message (Crowley & Heyer, 2007)" then the container is never truly neural because it is inherently defined by its structure. All visual forms of representation are constructions. They exist as an idea, a design and a product. Graphic design as a practice is mobilized by the idea that communication cannot be controlled, only shaped. The internal tension of the process is that designers are constantly trying to hold together meaning by melding together selected ideas within representative structures.

Pace and change.

The pace of changing software and coding languages needed to navigate the digital environment present new challenges which require alternative approaches to craft and a willingness to evaluate quality using measures like adaptability and engagement rather than production quality (Kotamraju, 2002). Questions like "should design be concerned with material form or could and indeed should it be applied to social contexts? What is the potential for the visual organization of information to impact behaviour and beliefs (Hamlyn, 2016)? What constitutes visual communication; is it typography or all forms of representation? Is it colour, or

the full spectrum of emotion? Is it the composition of images or of experiences? Where does design begin and end? Added to the practical differences, there are technical implications. What is or should be the skill set of the designer? And how do contemporary practitioners remain true to their craft and current with technology? Craft implies experience and a level of quality and a relationship between the craftsperson and their tools (Chandler, 2016, p. 34). As digital disruption continues to grow these questions will become ever more pertinent.

Epilogue

Navigating the occupation and process of graphic design and its related specializations is confusing and full of contradictions. The ease of acquiring effective digital tools has made it possible to imitate the formal qualities of design through the use of templates and intelligent applications. In specific cases negating the need for designers to apply their expertise to problems for which appropriate, standardized and templated solutions exist. In the face of this unfolding capacity-building of non-designers, studios and agencies are left asking; what do we do to compete? This frame of control is problematic because the answer is perpetually that we need to do more, faster, cheaper and better. The question is not one of competition, adaptation or even relevance—it is one of design. The purpose of design is not to solve problems of communication because communication exists and persists beyond the control of any person or profession.

Designers cannot solve communication; only navigate it. designers are translators. Visual languages can be used to build capacity for non-designers, which can be automated and even co-opted but communication still requires navigating and that's why we need designers to aid in the translation—and humanization of information by human beings for human beings. Design is changing rapidly, although change itself, is not novel. Economies and technologies are

constantly moving entities and so too are the occupations that exist within their structures. The rate and scale of change certainly has implications for the profession both technically and practically. Unifying definitions and clarifying occupational roles and titles would support the building of professional status for the design occupation. The challenge ahead of design is multifaceted. An all-encompassing definition of design practice and by extension what it means to be a designer would unify practice. However, this definition would need to be specific enough to unify practice and simultaneously broad enough to permit alternating approaches to practice so to preserve creative expression, innovation and inquiry.

Future Research

This study is exploratory in nature. Design is an evolving field and digital disruption will continue to highlight gaps and divides in practice and education. This study has highlighted two areas of interest for future research. More research into graphic design curriculum is needed. After reviewing data on programs available, the course offerings and stated outcomes, initial patterns immerged that illustrate thematic differences is subject area focus and contrasting approaches to design practice. Furthermore, research into teaching and learning in graphic design would be timely. As collaboration becomes an ever more needed skill and design becomes increasingly participatory; approaches to teaching graphic design will evolve, and this evolution should be considered from a critical perspective. Finally, from this study it is evident that studying graphic designers in their practice would provide a fuller and informative picture of contemporary design culture and the internal and external forces shaping this culture.

This study highlights several gaps and calls attention to the divide between traditionalists and transformers, however, theoretically and practically these definitional gaps still remain. Ultimately, the purpose of continued study of graphic design practice would not be to solve these

issues but rather to problematize them further and continue to investigate the work of the graphic designer. The goal of such research would be to support continued innovation in graphic design and to support the evolution of professionalism in graphic design practice for the purpose of understanding how graphic designers can continue to contribute to society and the economy in relevant and meaningful ways.

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Appendix A: Journals Surveyed

Journals

1. Information Design Journal

2. Design Issues

3. International Journal of the Image

4. Visible Language

5. Design Principles and Practice: An International Journal

6. International Journal of Art and Design Education

7. Design and Culture

8. Communication Design Journal

9. Visual Communication Journal

10. International Journal of Design

11. Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education

12. Graphic Design Journal

Based on a content analysis of 12 journals research in the design field focusses on the following topics:

- Gaps between research and practice

- Design history, theory and criticism

- Human–computer interface

- Service design

- Organization design

- Design for development

- Product design methodology

- Imagery construction, meaning and deconstruction

- Human patterns of use

- Technology with humanity

- Role of design in society

- Disciplinary divides

- Power-differentiated communications

- Exclusion and privilege

- Material culture

- Craft

- Critical practice

- Pedagogy and curriculum development

- Typography

- Publishing

- Information visualization

- Digital space

- Sustainability

- Social design

- Politics

- Popular culture

- Still and moving imagery

- Graphic design

- Sounds and action

- Impact of cultural factors on design

Interrelated Disciplines (Disciplines covered by the journals surveyed)

Information design, Typography, Print Design, Digital design, Website design, Visual

communications, Fashion, Built Environment, Landscape environment, Animation

Game design.

Interrelated Fields (As outlined by the journals surveyed)

Architecture, Art, Cognitive Science, Communications, Computer Science, Cultural Studies,

Education, Film Studies, History, Linguistics, Management, Marketing, Media Studies, Museum

Studies, Philosophy, Photography, Psychology, Religious studies, Semiotics, Social Justice,

Cultural geography, Ethnography, Sociology, Anthropology, Media and Cultural Studies,

Discourse Studies, Semiotics, Communications Studies, Industrial Design, Urban Design.

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear _____

Would you consider participating in a research study? The study; **Making Sense of Graphic Design: A Narrative Analysis** investigates what it means to be a graphic designer in a dynamic and evolving discipline. I obtained your contact information from the GDC website. As a representative of the GDC and certified graphic designer, you are in an ideal position to share valuable information and insights about your experience as a designer.

The interview is informal and takes about 60 minutes. Most interviews take place via video conference (FaceTime, Skype or Google Hangouts) or over the phone. Interviews are kept confidential and a pseudonym can be attached to published material to maintain your anonymity if you so choose. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the nature of work undertaken by contemporary graphic designers and ultimately aims to inform professional and educational practices in the field of visual communications.

To give you some context for this research; I work as a sessional instructor in the Visual Communications program at Medicine Hat College and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta in the Master of Arts in Communication and Technology program. This research forms part of the graduating requirements of my program. And, your participation will contribute to professional and educational visual communications practice by deepening our understanding of the role and contribution of the graphic designer.

If you are interested in participating please respond to this email. Participants will receive more

information about the study and interview process. For further details please contact me

at ldupless@ualberta.ca or call me at (587) 253-XXXX. My supervisor Dr Katy Campbell

(katy.campbell@ualberta.ca) is also available should you wish to contact her about this study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Galecki (du Plessis)

BAA, MACT Student, Cohort 2015

ldupless@ualberta.ca | 587-253-XXXX

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by the Research

Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical

conduct of research, contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Study reference: Pro00080767.

Appendix C: Information Letter

Study Title: Making Sense of Graphic Design: A Narrative Analysis

Principal Investigator: Lisa Galecki (du Plessis)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how graphic designers construct their

professional identity. This study investigates what graphic designers think about themselves and

their work. The study asks questions about what being a graphic designer means and how their

professional identity influences design choices and practices. The purpose of this study is to

contribute to an evolving conversation about the role of the contemporary graphic designer

within a dynamic discipline changing alongside technological, social and economic shifts. This

study aims to inform professional and educational practices in the field of visual

communications. Data collection takes place through a series of unstructured interviews with

practising graphic designers who are asked to share stories about their work. I am the principal

investigator for this project which is in partial completion of my graduate degree. The findings

from this study will appear in a capstone report to be read by my research supervisor Dr Katy

Campbell and are published on the University of Alberta's ERA database. They may appear in

academic and trade journals and be presented at conferences. Findings may also be interpreted

using an arts-based approach and exhibited in public and gallery spaces.

Procedures & Confidentiality

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how graphic designers construct their

professional identity; if you agree to participate, you are asked to share your experiences in the

design field and reflections about your work as a graphic designer. You are interviewed at least

once for 60 to 90 minutes, and if needed for clarification purposes additional interviews may be

scheduled at your convenience. When possible, interviews take place in person, however, they

are likely to take place over video chat or the phone at a time that is convenient to you and will

be recorded (video and voice). All your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Any

identifying information, such as your name and the organisation for which you work, will be

removed from the transcript resulting from our interview and will not be included in any

publication that may come from this study. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed, nevertheless, steps

will be taken to maintain anonymity and protect your confidentiality. These steps include the

removal of identifying information from transcripts; such as your name, the organisations for

which you work and the names of clients with whom you work. Demographic information such

as gender and contextual details about yourself (designation, title, roles and responsibilities etc.)

and work (the type of organisation; advertising agency, design firm etc. and, types of projects

worked on; print, digital etc.) will form part of the transcript and remain intact. Please be aware

that direct quotations may appear in the report. A pseudonym chosen in consultation with you is

attached to any documents resulting from our interview and used to credit quotations. Interview

recordings and transcripts are stored on a password protected external hard drive accessible only

to myself. Memos and other written notes and printed documents are kept in a locked cabinet

assessable only to myself. The University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board may request to

review the data resulting from this study.

Risks & Benefits

The risks of participating in this study are no more than the risks of everyday life. You do not

need to talk about anything that makes you uncomfortable. You might not experience direct

benefits from participating in this project; however, as the aim of this research is to provide

insight into what it means to be a graphic designer, your participation in this study will

contribute to deepening the understanding of the role and contribution of the graphic designer.

There is no reimbursement of expenses incurred during your participation in this study.

Freedom to Withdraw

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study up to one week

following our interview without penalty or explanation. During the interviews you may refuse to

answer a question, request the recording device be stopped, and the interview terminated. If you

choose to withdraw, all collected data is destroyed, and your participation in the study remains

confidential.

If you have any questions, would like further details, or would like to schedule a time to speak,

please contact me at ldupless@ualberta.ca or (587) 253-XXXX My supervisor Dr Katy

Campbell (katy.campbell@ualberta.ca) is also available should you wish to contact her about

this study.

Please retain a copy of this letter as a part of your records.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Lisa du Plessis BAA, MACT (Student)

Master of Arts in Communication & Technology

University of Alberta

Email: ldupless@ualberta.ca

Phone: (587) 253-XXXX

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by the Research

Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical

conduct of research, contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Study reference: Pro00080767.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

Study Title: Making Sense of Graphic Design: A Narrative Analysis

Two copies of this consent form are provided. Please sign both copies and retain one copy for your records.

I, _____ consent to participate in this study.

1. I have the right to withdraw from the study up to one week after the interview. If I choose to do so, the information I provide will be returned to me and not used in the study.

2. I agree to be interviewed and consent to the recording of the interview.

3. I agree that the researcher may contact me for a follow-up interview for clarification regarding my initial interview responses.

4. I understand that the interview is transcribed and used only for the purposes outlined in this research study.

5. I understand my identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym used in all publicly shared documents.

6. I understand the researcher will endeavour to ensure no harm comes to me through my participation in this study.

7. I understand that the researcher holds all data gathered during the interview in a secure location and after five years the data is destroyed as required by the University of Alberta.

As a participant in this study:

- I have read the information letter.

- I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

- I understand the risks and benefits of participating in the study.

- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study.

- I understand that I can refuse to answer interview questions and stop the interview at any time without explanation or penalty.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615. Study reference: Pro00080767.

I consent to be interviewed. I understand that the interview will be recorded and that the information collected during this interview will be used for educational and research purposes.

Both the researcher and participant possess one signed copy of this information and consent form. The participant is to retain one copy for their records.

Participant's Signature: _____   Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____   Date: _____

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Introduction

This is an open-ended interview, which means it follows an unstructured format and should flow like a conversation. Topics are explored as they naturally come about through regular conversation. The central topic I would like to talk about is the identity of the contemporary graphic designer. Investigating what graphic designers think about themselves and their work is central to uncovering how graphic designers construct their professional identity.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Before our interview I will contact you to confirm our interview date and time, and how the interview will be conducted (in person or via video chat or phone). I will also provide technical assistance if required.

Here is an overview of the interview process:

Pre-Interview Procedures

- Start recording interview.

- Introduce the project.

- Outline procedures (structure of the interview, length of time, reiterate that the interview is being recorded).

- Review ethical considerations.

- Ask participant if there are questions or objections about the proposed procedures and/or ethical considerations.

- Confirm informed consent form has been signed and both myself and they have a copy of the signed document.

Interview Topics

The interview covers the following topics:

- Your experiences in the field.

- Your opinions, values and feelings about graphic design practice.

- Your background, knowledge and education

- Demographic details.

Post-Interview Procedures

- Stop recording after interview has concluded.

- Write-up post interview summary.

- Note any questions or topics requiring clarification.

- Note initial impressions.

- Conduct member check

This interview guide serves as an outline only. Interview questions may extend beyond the scope of the topics mentioned above.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical

conduct of research, contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Study reference: Pro00080767.

Appendix F: Program Matrix

These programs were identified through the Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC, 2019) website.

They are accredited four-year programs from institutions across Alberta and British Colombia.

Program Matrix

Institution	Program	Occupational Outcomes	Course Focus	Purpose	Perspective	Industry Outlook	Other
University of Alberta	Bachelor of Design (BDes)	Not specifically stated.	Electronic and printed magazines and books, branding/visual identity packages, signage, apps, websites, maps and museum displays.	To communicate and create products that engage, inform, educate, entertain and inspire people.	The imagination and creativity of designers touches almost every object in our lives— from the poster in the street to the software on our phones.	Gain specific critical skills and knowledge that meet particular demands of the current economy. -- Think critically and how to visualize your ideas and bring them to life. -- You'll discover the relationship between design and the ethical responsibilities associated with being a design professional.	Each BDes. student also chooses one of our 6 "routes," a system which is unique to the University of Alberta's Department of Art & Design. General Design Business and Marketing Computing Science Engineering Printmaking Social Sciences
Alberta University of the Arts	School of Visual Communication Design Bachelor of Design (BDes)	Entertainment, advertising, new media, publication, editorial, corporate, television, film, fashion, gaming and environmental design industries.	Typography, branding, editorial, book projects, digital media, and information design.	Students learn to see graphic design as a powerful strategic business tool and a positive and tangible contribution to industry and society.	Design graduates have the skills to become successful practicing professionals and design industry leaders – locally, nationally and internationally. They are capable of authorship, critical and creative thinking, and generate original content with an individual voice and an entrepreneurial understanding.	Prepares students to be clear and creative visual communicators who provide powerful strategic solutions for business and society. -- Students learn to see graphic design as a powerful strategic business tool and a positive and tangible contribution to industry and society.	SCD students have a choice of four streams: Graphic Design, Character Design, Illustration, and Advertising.
University of Lethbridge	Bachelor of Fine Arts – New Media (BFA New Media)	Web and graphic design, animation and gaming, cinema production. Students have taken internships at web and graphic design houses, television production studios, video game studios, educational and religious institutions, animation and special effects studios, and 3D modeling/architecture studios	Graphic design, Web design and development, Interaction design, 3D-modelling, animation and gaming, narrative screenwriting, cinema production and studies, historical and contemporary new media theory.	To meet the present and future need for content creators capable of applying both linear and non-linear strategies to problem-solving situations. By combining traditional art, music, drama practices, theory, and criticism with digital and interactive media.	Traditional and non-traditional fields where media design and development are important. Graduates pursue careers in animation, graphic design, video/film production, television, web design, game design, media authoring, education, and others too numerous to list.	As the industry shifts its focus from a primarily technical workforce to a more intellectually developed, technically diverse talent pool, graduates of the BFA-New Media program will be ready to take on complex professional duties requiring high levels of maturity, intellect and technical proficiency.	Alternative offerings include BFA – New Media/Bachelor of Computer Science. BFA – New Media/Bachelor of Management Internship Program
Medicine Hat College	Bachelor of Applied Art - Visual Communications (BAA - Visual Communications)	Not specifically stated.	Studio arts to digital media, and advertising design to corporate identity development.	Visual communications professionals are often required to be involved in the entire creative and technical process, from concept through production.	This program helps prepare you to enter this dynamic and ever-changing career field. Visual communications professionals create and organize the information that we see every day. The skills and knowledge you develop may be applied in just about every	Today's media and art forms are no longer just two-dimensional, static, and print-based, but now include virtual space, digital media, and interactivity. -- Combination of fine art, design and technology.	Practicum/Work-term course component. Post-Degree Visual Communications Certificate. Post-Diploma Visual Communications Certificate

Institution	Program	Occupational Outcome	Course Focus	Purpose	Perspective	Industry Outlook	Other
					industry or location.		
Grant MacEwan	Bachelor of Design (BDes)	Agencies, studios or communications departments.	Graphic design, branding, advertising, publication design, Information design, Illustration, photography, website and app design, user experience design, user interface design, motion graphics, packaging design, environmental graphic design.	They have the creativity and artistry to produce beautiful, eye-catching work. But they also possess the analytical skills to think critically about design problems, and propose solutions that are functional, rational and business-savvy	Today's designers are as fluent in digital design as they are in traditional print media.		Innovative human-centred curriculum well-rounded degree with more than 40 design-specific courses study with industry-leading faculty in our brand new, state-of-the-art facility largest UXD/digital design program in the prairies
LaSalle College	Bachelor of Design (BDes)	Web design, freelancing, designing for film and TV, and working for large corporations and small companies. Magazines, newspapers, advertising agencies, publishing houses, engineering companies, real estate developers, packaging, and web development companies all require graphic designers.			The curriculum explores the increasingly vital relationship between design and sustainable principles. As environmental demands escalate and take centre focus in educational and political discourse, there is a growing need for designers who can provide solutions while creating sustainable, eco-conscious designs.		
Mount Royal University	Bachelor of Communication - Information Design (BD - Information Design)	graphic designers, digital designers, instructional designers, information architects, web designers, content specialists, technical writers, and UX specialists. They work for not-for-profit organizations, large and small business, oil and gas, healthcare, transportation, and government agencies.	Branding, data visualization, experience design, graphics, human centered design, information architecture, instructional design, photography, systems design, typography, usability, UX/UI, wayfinding, web and writing.	Information design is the defining, planning, and shaping of content and its environments with the intention of achieving particular objectives in relation to human needs.	We are not driven by technology: its promises and limitations; but we do have the skills and knowledge to leverage whatever output is most appropriate to address individual and community needs.	The information designer is a problem solver and storyteller. All of the work they do asks the questions: Who is the audience for my work? What is its content? What are the most effective ways to convey information? Data is central to the work of the information designer. The form it takes (both written and aesthetic) must be in the service of honest, responsible, and intentional depiction.	Practicum/Work-term component.
Emily Carr University of Art and Design	Bachelor of Design (BDes)	Communication Design Officer, Principal Designer, Social Media Strategist, Interface Designer, Graphic Designer, Creative Director, Global Head, Employee Communications, Visual Designer, Creative Strategist	Mix of core studio and critical studies courses, flexible: print design, interactivity, and motion graphics. Within these areas of specialization, choose to focus on illustration, typography, wayfinding, information design and other opportunities. The program emphasizes 2D design - in print or on screen - plus opportunities to investigate overlapping areas in 3D design.	Studies combine theory and practice, exploring cultural, historical, technical, ecological, and theoretical issues.	In our complex world, effective, clear communication through visual design is always in demand. Learn to design strong solutions and solve communication challenges.	The design degree has evolved into a human-centred practice focusing on the social, technological, and experiential needs of contemporary society. Our design majors encourage you to be leading 'Citizen Designers' in the new creative- and knowledge-based economies, mindful of the power and consequences of design across a range of fields.	Three majors; Communication Design, Industrial Design and Interaction Design.

Descriptions from program and course information made available online (compiled in 2019).

Occupational Outcomes as Stated in Program Descriptions

Graphic design, web design, information design and advertising are the primary occupational

outcomes for students entering Bachelor of Design, Bachelor of Applied Arts (Visual

Communications), Bachelor of Fine Arts (New Media) and Bachelor of Communication

(Information Design) programs. In every case Graphic design was stated as an occupational

outcome.

Code	Frequency
Not Specifically Stated	2
Advertising	4
Web Design	5
Character Design	1
Illustration	3
Graphic Design	6
Editorial Design	1
Publishing House	1
Film Production	3
Television Production	3
Environmental Design	3
Animation	1
Gaming	2
Special Effects	1
3D Modeling	2
Corporate Communication	3
Packaging Design	3
Freelance	1
In-house Communications	3
Magazines Design	2
Newspapers Design	1
Instructional Design	1
Information Design	5
Content Specialist	1
Technical Writer	1
User Experience Designer	2
Communication Design	3
Principal/Studio Owner	1
Social Media Designer/Strategist	1
Interface Designer	3

Creative Director/Strategist	1
Interaction Design	2
Book Design	2

Subject Area Focus

Graphic design and web design are the primary focus overall. Followed closely by publication

design, branding, advertising, information design and print design. This analysis is based on

information available in the general program description of the course. Interpretations of subject

labels may differ between institution.

Code	Frequency
Publication Design	4
Editorial Design	1
Branding	4
Visual Identity Design	2
Packaging Design	3
Signage	1
App Design	2
Web Design	5
Displays	1
Book Design	2
Digital Media	2
Graphic Design	5
Advertising	4
Illustration	3
Photography	2
User Experience Design	2
User Interface Design	2
Motion Graphics	2
Environmental Graphic Design	3
Data Visualization	1
Human Centered Design	2
Information Design	4
Instructional Design	1
Systems Design	1
Typography	3
Usability	1
Print Design	4

Interactive Design	2
3D Design	2
Wayfinding	2