Strangely familiar: revisiting graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Strangely familiar: revisiting graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders revisiting relationships with perceptions of their graphic designers

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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This thesis discusses the interdisciplinary methods and findings from a speculative and experimental project. It argues that graphic designers’ perceptions about their everyday professional relationships with stakeholders can be illuminated and re-evaluated using defamiliarising methods. The research draws on experimental methods and employs dedicated actors as proxies to address perceptions which are obfuscated within the designers’ everyday professional experiences. Combining the creative practice of making strange, with the reflective practice of ethnography, and the pedagogical tools of process drama and design thinking, the research repurposes the experiences of a group of graphic designers into a series of theatrical scenarios. These scenarios are used to motivate a team of dedicated actors, who re-perform the experiences of the designers over three workshops. Such an approach enables the actors to interact with the graphic designers’ perceptions of their practice as third party interpreters. In doing so, the actors are able to shed new perspectives on graphic design practice which otherwise remain hidden under normative professional practice conditions. This research reveals transformed modes of design capital, which challenges notions of hierarchy and power within creative and cultural practices and illustrates the ways in which professional design practice remains a constant and problematic negotiation between stakeholders and design practitioners.
It is 10 pm in the design studio of a creative consultancy. A busy design team are putting the finishing touches to a print advert for an ongoing product campaign. The files are due at the printer by morning or they will miss the publication’s deadline and, as ever it seems, final amendments are still being made.

The art director curses to himself, thinking about the last-minute changes from the sales department which caused the backlog. He reflects that designs will be compromised, corners will be cut and the creative team will have to work through the night.

The designers don't mind the late nights so much. They usually order a take-away, drink endless cups of coffee and stream dance music around the studio. Some of the local media companies are even known to have beds for their creative staff to get a few hours' sleep in while working all-nighters.

It is not the hard work that the designers resent. It is the intrusion into their carefully honed working practices that annoys them. The perceived lack of respect for their skill set, their creativity, the fact that, whenever it comes to the crunch, it is the design part of the creative process that is inevitably compromised. Photography that has been thoughtfully selected and airbrushed is dispensed with "to make space" and images and headlines that have been carefully laid out so as to appear balanced on the page have to be hastily redesigned.

The sales team often appear dismissive of the designers, one referring to them as "the colouring-in department". But the salespeople are the revenue generators – how the designers loathe that term – and so their requirements must be accommodated, even when those requirements are … problematic. “You can't have a seven-page section”, the production manager patiently explained to the sales manager. He was right. Magazine sections come in blocks of eight pages and even then they have to comprise even numbers, otherwise you end up with a blank page.

“Does he expect a page to only have one side?”, snipes a junior designer while turning up the music. “If we're going to be here all night, we may as well live it up”, she continues, as music rumbles from the speakers. The rest of the design team barely acknowledge the change in tempo and continue working.

The copywriters also seem to have different motivations to the designers. They care about sentence structure, concise headings and functional photography. They also seem to prefer working in silence. The designers believe that the writers are overly precious about their text
and also feel that they are treated with more respect by 'the suits'. The copywriters, on the other hand, often call the designers obstructive and see them as only being concerned with visual aesthetics and having little interest in the subject matter of the designs.

Nevertheless, professional relations between designers and stakeholders are usually cordial. For instance, outside of office hours raucous late-night (and sometimes midday) drinking sessions are egalitarian cross-departmental events.

A senior copywriter walks into the design studio, engrossed in a printed design layout. He grimaces and leans over, holding his hands over his ears and screwing up his eyes, trying to focus on the text. Suddenly he reaches out and turns the music off. This was going to get messy.
Introduction

The prologue on the preceding pages offers a fictional vignette portraying an anonymised composite scenario informed by my own professional practice experience, its allegorical significance representing a thematic framework for the research in this project. The vignette signifies that the research is informed by and located within everyday professional graphic design practice. It constructs a normative portrayal of organisational relations between graphic designers and stakeholders within professional creative practice, and also hints at potentially conflictual overtones to those interactions, with stakeholders perceived as intrusive and lacking understanding of the design process. In locating itself in the everyday, the narrative also signifies the familiar, automated and assumed normativities of those relations, and telegraphs that the research is embedded in a subjective graphic designer’s perception of these creative relationships. The experiential, immersive and everyday narrative of the vignette also alludes to the everyday performative, ethnographic and professional design practice framework of the research. It is into this context that the central theme of this research inserts itself and intervenes. It does so by using a bricolage of experimental research methods which draw upon methodologies from dramaturgy, ethnography and design research, so as to enable the creative practice known as making the familiar strange.

This is a combination of methodologies which inform a series of generative creative methods to uncover subtle, obfuscated and even hidden themes within graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders in everyday professional practice. Emerging from and located within a professional graphic design context, the research uses a series of methodological interrogations to engage with the experiential perceptions of graphic designers about their relationships with stakeholders. Drawing on a series of interdisciplinary methodologies, including design research, dramaturgy and ethnography, the research develops a bricolage of unique experimental methods, with the aim of showing how graphic designers’ perceptions about their everyday relationships with stakeholders can be illuminated and challenged by rendering their everyday professional practice strange. As the research will show, these methods, including an experimental interview format and a series of Performance Workshops, have been used to enable making strange, the manifestation of which is used to help bring to the fore perceptions and assumptions which remain hidden in plain sight during the types of professional
graphic design practices depicted in the prologue. In the process of doing so, the research argues that the creative practice of making the familiar strange can challenge professional graphic designers’ perceptions of their everyday relationships with stakeholders, paradoxically rendering them familiar within a new, yet strange, framework. Reflecting this, the title for the research project is: *Strangeley familiar: revisiting graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders*.

This research is an investigation emerging from professional graphic design practice into a surprisingly elusive aspect of that professional practice: graphic designers’ perceptions of their everyday relationships with stakeholders. However, it is also an investigation into the use of a method of creative practice which has come to be known as making the familiar strange. It is a method which, while originally emerging in creative practice at the beginning of the 20th century within Russian formalism (Bell, Blythe et al. 2005; Forrest 2007; Lvov 2015), has been loosely adopted by a number of creative practices in the visual arts (Gooding 1991; Samberger 2004), reflective research methods such as ethnography (Eisner 2003) and experimental theatre (Meisiek & Barry 2007; Eriksson 2011; Radosavljević 2013). At its most basic level, the idea of making something strange is to simulate the experiencing of it for the first time (Lemon & Reis 1965). As a result of the rise of experimental and research design practices, the concept of making strange has also increasingly been used in wider design research and design thinking practices such as human–computer interaction (HCI) (Bell, Blythe et al. 2005) and experimental design (Seago & Dunne 1999). This research makes extensive use of the concept of making strange; however, it focuses in particular on the original creative practice definition of the term by Victor Shklovsky in 1914, in which he described the manifestation of making strange as the result of the use of numerous methods or, more specifically, devices (Lemon and Reis 1965; Sher 1990; Berlina 2015).

While located in creative practice, my research does not sit neatly as an example of practice-led or practice-based research. The research does not rest on the creative development of a physical creative artefact as a basis for contribution to knowledge (Candy 2006; Mäkelä 2007), nor does it function specifically as a vehicle for creating knowledge via the physical reflective practice of making or doing design (Schön 1983). Acknowledging that definitions are often hazy (Skains 2018), the dissertation explores a series of experimental methodologies and outcomes which have contributed to understanding graphic designers’ perceptions of relationships with stakeholders within the ‘everyday’ of professional graphic design practice. In exploring these graphic designer perceptions within a professional practice in which I (as a graphic designer) have been
embedded for much of my career, my engagement with the research methods for making strange applies also to familiarity with my own professional graphic design practice. Moreover, this research occurs in an overlapping space, in between my positions as a design researcher and as a practising professional graphic designer. As will be expanded upon in later chapters, the research draws upon existing design research methodologies; however, it ultimately supports the case for treating graphic design as an emerging yet distinct scholarly topic (Bennett 2015; Walker 2017; Gillieson & Garneau 2018). In the course of this, the thesis discusses the journey of my research as it comes up against limitations in existing design research methods and how it adapts to these challenges using design practices comprising an experimental bricolage of often improvised methods (Büscher, Gill et al. 2001; Gerber 2007; 2009; Bredies, Chow et al. 2010).

Background

That graphic designers are often perceived to have problematic relationships with stakeholders is neither a new nor unique observation. It is unlikely to surprise anyone who has worked professionally as, or with, graphic designers in contemporary practice:

“We’ve heard the complaint before – “Our engineers can’t communicate with our designers, and vice versa”… One side envisions; the other side builds. Usually the side that builds doesn’t particularly respect the other side’s professed superior imagination. And the group whose duty it is to invent usually looks down on the manual labour of its compatriots. (Maeda 2000)

It is into this overt familiarity with the topic that this research attempts to excavate. Other, often binary narratives about interactions between designers and stakeholders also appear in vernacular online narratives. Contemporary examples include websites such as ‘Clients from Hell’ (http://clientsfromhell.net) and ‘The Oatmeal’ (http://theoatmeal.com/comics/design_hell), as well as numerous online memes and websites devoted to lists of graphic designer complaints (Kliever 2015; Brown 2016; Amit 2018). Most of these sources contribute to reinforcing stereotypical narratives, in particular those of ‘misunderstood’ graphic designers dealing with ‘ignorant’ stakeholders, often personified simply as ‘clients’. Yet the topic is scarcely acknowledged within academia and, as will be shown in Chapter 2, many online sources appear resigned to such
relationships continuing. As will be shown below, existing professional literature often appears to assume an inevitability to the process, either by bypassing the topic or by focussing on practical techniques for managing stakeholder interaction.

Within professional practice, interactions between designers and stakeholders are sometimes acknowledged within industry publications (Martin 2006; Shaughnessy 2009; Spencer 2017) and professional design bodies (FitzGerald 2007; Donley 2009) as critical and problematic, sometimes to the degree that they might need to be addressed with professional development (Epstein 2012) or courses promising to help practitioners to “become a better design facilitator” (AIGA 2015). Some literature offers generalised advice to graphic designers on how to interact with stakeholders for the optimum results. For example, Tom Greever devotes a chapter of his book to the topic of ‘When Designers and Stakeholders Collide’ and urges designers to communicate and build trust with stakeholders (2015), while Cathy Fishel advises designers to promote their expertise and explain their processes to stakeholders (2008). However, professional sources such as these have scarce research to draw on to inform their advice, with few moving beyond acknowledging more acute and overt aspects of designer–stakeholder relations. The apparent absence of academic research on the topic means that the underlying causes remain unidentified, replicating over the years from print design, to online, to interactive environments. In recognition of entering this topic at the ground level, this research focuses on graphic designers themselves. By doing so, it argues that graphic designers’ perceptions of stakeholders are far more nuanced and multifaceted than the above narratives presume. In particular, my research findings uncover perceptions among professional graphic designers of a series of organisational, communication and demarcation issues within the creative industry which result in them believing that they lack access to what has been encompassed under the term design capital.

I use the term ‘design capital’ throughout this research because it allows me to encompass a series of findings about graphic designers’ industry-specific perceptions of their creative value. These include graphic designers’ perceptions relating to creative authority, organisational gravitas, professional practice demarcation boundaries and creative negotiative abilities. The term ‘design capital’, in reference to organisational value or worth, appears to be rarely used in design or even in wider literature. Where the term occurs, its use is unclear. Woodard, Ramasubbu et al. (2013), for example, define design capital as the “cumulative stock of designs owned or controlled by a firm” (p. 539). Sunley, Pinch et al. (2011) draw from theories of social capital (Coleman 1988) in analysing modes of knowledge sharing between designers and their clients. In a project looking at a group of
design educators (albeit one that excluded graphic designers) Strickfaden and Heylighen (2010) identified what they describe as “design-specific capital” (p. 125), assigning it largely to how the educators taught cultural capital within design education. Because of these indistinct usages, the term design capital is defined within this research as the perceived organisational competence, creative value and design legitimacy of graphic designers within the professional creative process. In that sense, it can be viewed as a loose professional graphic design adaptation of Bourdieu’s embodied and institutionalised cultural capital (1986). It is a definition which becomes more defined in use, as it is contextualised throughout the research in relation to graphic designers’ perceptions of their everyday interactions with stakeholders and of their struggles for organisational acceptance.

**Experiential motivation**

Motivated by my own experiences over a 20-year period in professional graphic design, it is informative to reflect on how the freshness of first entering the industry allowed me, initially, to observe the practice from an unfamiliar perspective. This perspective was largely lost once I settled into the industry, to be regained several years later when re-entering the profession ‘afresh’ and, once again, experiencing it from an unfamiliar perspective.

I started in the creative industry in the UK as a self-taught junior designer, predominantly using electronic publishing software to create design layouts. The stakeholders that I interacted with were marketing staff, salespeople, commercial writers, production and editorial staff. It was at this early stage of my career that I was able to observe how stakeholders behaved when interacting with graphic designers. Without being consciously aware of it, it was everyday behaviour which, much as Erving Goffman (1973) and Iain Mangham (2005) describe, can be viewed organisationally; as a dramaturgically metaphorical way of understanding and describing everyday interactions between graphic designers and stakeholders. Over time, these interactions, dialogues, apparent power plays, methods of attaining cooperation and leverage, sometimes even sleight of hand, appeared to me to be theatrical. The following fictional vignette illustrates how an account handler at an advertising agency, Carolyn, leverages the use of a dramaturgic trope to gain the upper hand when interacting with one of the graphic designers, Donna:
Donna is meticulous in her layouts, often ensuring that design elements such as headings and images are positioned to within micro-measurements of each other, and is very protective of her designs. Knowing that adherence to brand guidelines, for example, needs to be preserved, Donna is reluctant to make changes and often asks for justifications for amendments. Mindful of time constraints, Carolyn often bypasses the designers to deal directly with the artworkers1 because “they just get it done”. Carolyn has been described by Donna as a “frustrated designer” as she often feels that Carolyn has overstepped a boundary and that her change requests are informed by these frustrations, rather than as a result of good design practices. On one occasion, Carolyn walked into the design studio and declared, “I’ve just been screamed at by the client. They really need those changes made as discussed”.

The reference to an unseen but angry client is something that I have observed on numerous occasions in professional practice. It is known in theatre as the unseen character, usually referring to a fearsome ‘off-stage’ personality who needs to be obeyed and whose power defaults to the actor invoking them (Byrd 2000; Mahfouz 2012). In the above vignette, Carolyn exploits her account handlers’ exclusive organisational access to the client to present an unarguable case that a particular design change needs to be implemented; by invoking the authority of the client, as unseen character, she supersedes that of the designers.

As my professional experience grew and diversified, I became less conscious of these interactions; the increasing familiarity of everyday practice become assumptive (Schutz 1970; Schuetz 1944). It is a concept which is expanded on in Chapter 1, when discussing ‘making the familiar strange’. Like many graphic designers, I moved from design for print to online and interactive design, and later into management, creative direction and design facilitation roles. However, after moving to Australia from the UK I was unsure whether I wanted to remain in the industry and so worked for about 12 months as a casual designer. During that period, I worked in over 30 different design companies, working on short-term projects. These positions were sometimes just for a day or two, rarely for more than two weeks. The combination of the routine and transitory nature of the work meant that I experienced the industry anew – enjoying the feeling of ‘starting again’, with the added novelty of observing numerous creative roles (including graphic design) with the benefit of hindsight. It was during one of these positions that an account handler walked into the design studio and announced to the room:

“I’ve just been screamed at by the client”. Turning to one of the designers, he grimaced and said, “I’m really sorry, mate, but we’re just going to have to go with a different design”.

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1 A term approximating to ‘finished artist’ in Australia and ‘graphic artist’ in the US. Artworkers are skilled with design software, but their roles are less (if at all) creative. Often their job is to technically implement designers’ creations and to ensure that digital files are ready for commercial printing. (designinc 2009, Bosler, I 2016, Recruiters, C n.d).
In conjuring memories of events several years earlier and bringing them to the fore, this interaction invoked the concept of making strange, presenting the interaction as if for the first time (Lemon & Reis 1965) and enabling a conscious awareness of everyday professional interactions which, due to a familiarity with the graphic design industry, had become hidden to me over time (Erickson 1985). In initially making strange, it resulted in the unfamiliar becoming familiar once again (Gurevitch 1988).

A changing industry

It is worth contextualising the topic of the research as occurring within a graphic design industry that, since the advent of electronic publishing during the 1980s, has become an increasingly evolving and complex professional practice. In the process, so have interactions between graphic designers and stakeholders. For example, as well as traditional design for print, graphic designers now inhabit domains including web design, mobile application design and social media, with some also taking tentative steps into 3D printing, virtual and augmented reality (Hastreiter 2017). Moreover, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, the increasing challenge to professional graphic design practice from technology (Helfand 2002; Drucker & McVarish 2013) and the growth of in-house design positions (Geredts, Verlinden et al. 2012; Duggan 2013; Silk & Stiglin 2016) present challenges to graphic designers’ professionalism (Fishel 2008). These industry-wide changes increasingly bring design practitioners into contact with ever more varieties of stakeholders and increase the potential for overlap of responsibilities and fresh challenges to professional practitioners’ design capital. As will be discussed, this signifies an increasing urgency for graphic designers to improve their professional communication skills to manage these organisational interactions, as well as for creative organisations to find ways to better manage these relationships. While recognising and referencing these wider historical and technological contexts throughout the research, the nascent aspect of the topic suggests that it is most beneficial for the primary focus of this research project to be on the everyday manifestations of graphic designers’ relationships with stakeholders.

Research process diagram

Rendering graphic designers' professional practice strange, so as to unravel their everyday perceptions of stakeholders, has involved a process designed to incrementally increase the degree of strangeness. An outline of this progression is illustrated in the research process diagram on the following page (Fig. 1). This will be updated in the opening section of each chapter as this dissertation progresses.
Introduction

Figure 1 | Research process diagram 1

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Conclusion
The process

In order to prepare the background and inform the methods, a review of the discourses which inform the research was carried out and contextualised within the research. This is discussed in Chapter 1. Drawing on themes from my own professional practice, as well as reflection on online debates among graphic designers from sources such as forums and blog comments, a questionnaire (an example of which is in Appendix 1) was created which formed the narrative for a series of semi-structured interviews with graphic designers. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, these interviews engaged with the graphic designers by rendering strange topics which the respondents might normally find familiar. This was done by using a dramaturgic format for the interviews, thereby encouraging discussion of themes which might otherwise have remained obscured in more orthodox interview formats. In comparing the outcomes from the interviews alongside the online forum discussions, three key discoveries emerged. Firstly, a series of ambiguities around the roles of graphic designers, and the terminology used, have negatively impacted on practitioners’ perceptions of their position within professional creative practice. In particular, this has impacted on graphic designers’ perceptions of their negotiative power with stakeholders on issues relating to their creative practice. Secondly, in contrast to the often vociferous opinions expressed by graphic designers in online mediums (and some of the aforementioned sources), the dramaturgic interviews uncovered a more nuanced series of opinions from the graphic designers about their perceptions of relationships with stakeholders. In particular, they revealed that the graphic designers objected to specific forms of behaviour from stakeholders and organisational outcomes as a result of that perceived behaviour. Thirdly, it was the interwoven combination of issues which informed these two findings that appeared to have the greatest impact on graphic designers’ perceptions of their lack of design capital.
Chapter 3 interrogates these themes further, by using a Performative Design Briefing process as a metaphorical theatrical script. It seeks to make strange the findings from Chapter 2 and to motivate the Performance Workshops, which are then discussed in Chapter 4. Discoveries from the dramaturgic interviews were turned into performative scenarios and personas, to be used as theatrical literary devices to further make strange graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders. Chapter 3 also contextualises the Performative Design Brief in relation to the design briefs used in professional graphic design. Using the findings from Chapter 2 which indicate the criticality of effective design briefs for graphic designers, Chapter 3 identifies a literary gap regarding the role of the brief within professional practice and especially within academia. In the process, this chapter adds weight to arguments for graphic design to be considered a specific research discipline, apart from the wider field of design research.

Chapter 4 brings the research theoretically full circle, back to what I argue is closest to Shklovsky’s original concept of using devices to make strange in creative practice (Lemon & Reis 1965; Sher 1990; Berlina 2015). This manifests metaphorically within a series of three Performance Workshops comprising a theatre director and a team of dedicated actors who theatrically re-perform themes from the Performative Design Brief. As I will argue, by intentionally removing the subjects of the research (the graphic designers) the actors function as proxy designers, becoming refractive devices that enable the re-interpreting and re-telling of the graphic designers’ perceptions of stakeholders through this strange manifestation. The Performance Workshops also experiment with and evaluate different degrees of making strange, in the process identifying methodological limitations but also contextually defined opportunities for further research and future professional development repurposing. Video recordings and photographs from the three Performance Workshops are curated on the project website at designingstrangeness.com and, when discussing specific examples, individual videos are cited and linked to directly in the relevant text.

The reinterpretation of making strange within a specifically professional graphic design framework has a wider significance in adding to the fledgling discourse of graphic design research, as does the use of ethno-dramaturgic methods for making strange. The outcomes also inform my own professional graphic design practice. Beginning to identify themes and nuances to graphic designers’ perceptions of stakeholders allows me to reflect on my own professional perceptions, as well as to evaluate and organise ways in which I might plan and approach interactions with stakeholders in future professional projects.
In designing and applying a variety of methods for incrementally making professional graphic design practice strange, the research validates a method for illuminating graphic designers’ perceptions of their everyday relationships with stakeholders. In turn, by making visible assumptions which were previously hidden in plain sight, the research prototypes a method for challenging these everyday assumptions. Therefore, through a combination of the interdisciplinary theoretical framework of the research and the professional graphic design practice location of the research, this thesis argues that, by using performative methods, the creative practice of making the familiar strange can be used to challenge professional graphic designers’ perceptions of their everyday relationships with stakeholders.
What we seek are new ways with which to perceive and interpret the world, ways that make vivid realities that would otherwise go unknown. It's a matter, as the anthropologists say, of making the familiar strange and making the strange familiar. (Eisner 2008)

This chapter discusses how the perceptions by graphic designers of their relationships with stakeholders has required an approach that enabled the topic to be reflected on and analysed outside of normative frameworks, leading to the adoption of a bricolage of interdisciplinary methodologies to render familiar professional design practice narratives strange.

Also functioning as a literary and methodological positioning of the research, the chapter discusses the methodologies which inform the overriding phenomenon of making the familiar strange that underpins this research, and it indicates how the methodologies permeate the research and inform the methods. In particular, the chapter brings together the overlapping bricolage of methodologies which combine to inform the research objective: that graphic designers' perceptions about their relationships with stakeholders can be illuminated and challenged by defamiliarising their professional practice using experimental dramaturgic design methods.

The chapter begins by contextualising this research alongside the academic framework of design research, as well as its professional practice implementation in design research. The chapter indicates how the research draws from and contributes to this wider field of design research, but also telegraphs its limitations. In doing so, the chapter identifies graphic design research as a distinct discourse, providing an overview of emerging research and locating this enquiry within graphic design research. At the same time, in acknowledging that graphic design as an academic practice is an emerging discipline, the chapter argues that an interdisciplinary approach is not only necessary but is a fundamental component of graphic design research.
The interdisciplinary topics which inform the research are then identified, reviewed and applied to the research methodology, starting with dramaturgy. Dramaturgy is discussed as an overriding theme which permeates the research, emerging from a base in organisational theory and manifesting within educational research as process drama and within design as experimental methodologies which inform the practice of making strange, as well as being entrenched within broader professional and research design practices. The chapter discusses how dramaturgic practices of making strange have been used to tackle the everyday perceptions, assumptions and motivations within professional design practice, before indicating how they have been used to inform the methods used in this research. The reflective practice of ethnography is introduced as an emergent and informant of design research and professional practice, overlapping with dramaturgy as a form of narrative enquiry and also having the qualities to inform the central manifestation of this research: making the familiar strange.

The phenomenon of making strange is introduced by charting its historical background alongside its theoretical underpinnings, as well as its adoption, formal and vernacular, within a number of creative and research practices including visual arts, design, ethnography and graphic design itself. In doing so, the chapter lays the methodological foundation for the investigative methods that have been used in the research and which are contextually discussed in later chapters.
Figure 2 | Research process diagram 2

Introduction

Chapter 1

Professional industry hypotheses

Reflection and methodology development

Academic literature

Vernacular sources – forums, websites, blogs

Interview questionnaire

Chapter 2

Interviews with graphic designers

Performative Design Briefing process

Chapter 3

Performative Workshops

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Conclusion
Methodology

Design research, design practice, design thinking and professional practice

Situated this project within commercial graphic design practice requires clarification of terminology and definitions of practice, as well as reconciling the discourse in relation to what has come to be called design research. There is little consensus on the relationship between design and research (Stappers 2007). Within academic scholarship, design often refers to the practice as a discursive pedagogy. Nigel Cross, for example, has argued that design should be harnessed to help develop a third pillar of educational discourse, separate from the existing disciplines of art and science (Cross 2006). Theorists such as Peter Downton, Donald Schön and Bryan Lawson tend to frame design practice as a mode of activity or a generative thought process from which knowledge can be produced, the aim being to channel that knowledge back into the discourse of academic design research (Schön 1983; Downton 2003; Lawson 2004, 2006).

Cross’s core contribution to design research is in trying to identify and establish design as a discipline, in its own right, within educational discourse. Due to designers possessing unique “designerly ways of knowing”, Cross argues that design should be included within education, as a culture of discourse or, indeed, thinking in itself (2006). Design, Cross argues, as a third culture of educational thinking (alongside art and science) is not as easily recognised as the two established discourses, because it has remained unidentified for so long and, as a result, has been inadequately articulated (2006). Moreover, Cross argues that it is this difficulty in articulating design which is holding back its acceptance as an equal, alongside yet distinct from, science and art. Like Schön (1992), Cross argues that what designers know is largely tacit, that knowing being automated in the form of a repeated skill (2006). Again like Schön (1983), Cross argues that designers “find it difficult to externalise their knowledge” (2006, p. 9). This is something which appears to extend to graphic designers, according to Brumberger (2007), who illustrated that, in contrast to other disciplines, graphic design students not only struggled to explain their design decisions but were seemingly unable to even “understand the question” (2007, p. 388). Procedurally, this is something which Richard Buchanan alludes to when discussing professional designers in systems of human interaction within the fourth order of design
Design research remains an emerging methodology, still establishing itself apart from other disciplines (Kilbourne 2015). The methodology can inform professional graphic design practice when identifying and analysing ways in which designers think and act while in the process of designing. It can be used to identify and intervene in what is described as the automated and tacit unknown knowledge among design practitioners (Schön 1992; Cross 2006). Design research is an approach that constructs design as a broad philosophical method, allowing academic researchers to apply reflective methodologies and processes across a wide spectrum of (non-design) professional practices (Gruber, de Leon et al. 2015). Within industry, it is has often been interlinked with the term ‘design thinking’ (Beverland, Gemser et al. 2017) and popularised as a method for transforming business practices (Brown 2008; Brown & Katz 2009). This is a debated practice, with some arguing that repurposing design methods into external professions may be a culturally flawed objective (Kimbell 2012), hyped by unrealistic expectations (Barry 2017), lacking input from design researchers (Badke-Schau, Roozenburg et al. 2010) and ignoring the diversity of design practices (Kimbell 2011), and has even been dismissed as a myth (Norman 2010). Others point out that much design research is largely located outside of professional design practice (Grocott 2010) and, in the case of graphic design, largely overlooked (Walker 2017).

Towards a graphic design research discipline

Professional graphic design has been described as long having had “an aversion to theory” (Poynor 2003, p. 10) and lacking research discourse (Laurel 2003). Reflecting its erratic professional development (Julier & Narotzky 1998), graphic design as a specific educational discipline is lacking within academia and Jorge Frascara’s description of graphic design having developed with little theoretical reflection (Frascara 1988) still applies (Soar 2002; Logan 2006; Harland 2011). Instead, graphic design has generally been treated as a supplementary discipline or as a predominantly aesthetic practice (Heller 2015; Jacobs 2017; Walker 2017), with its history and even its contemporary cultural status subsumed within the wider visual arts (Poynor 2011a, 2011b; Triggs 2011).
Nevertheless, in recent years there have been diverse attempts at describing and contextualising graphic design research. Russell Bestley and Ian Noble’s book *Visual Research: An Introduction to Research Methods in Graphic Design* (Noble & Bestley 2016) largely repurposes Christopher Frayling’s classic re-reading of three models of art and design (Frayling 1993), applying it to the reflective processes of graphic designers. Robert Harland’s (2011) diagrammatic portrayal of graphic design discourse, Karel van der Waarde and Maurits Vroombout’s (2012) attempt to visualise the educational components of graphic design and Ellen Lupton’s (2011) book *Graphic Design Thinking: Beyond Brainstorming* all endeavour to apply specifically graphic design contexts within research. Discursive excursions into graphic design research raise issues when trying to bridge the gap between professional graphic design practice and a research discourse for graphic design. It is something which Meredith Davis, in arguing for a more research-based approach, suggests is part of “the growing pains of a profession in transition from a trade” (2016, p. 130). David Cablanca also acknowledges that the industry-embedded, outcome-driven focus of graphic design has held back its academic acceptance, suggesting that it should look to architecture’s success as a model for establishing a long-term critical practice, drawing on graphic design cultural practices, as opposed to the engineering-based “functionalist and instrumentalist” approaches adopted by some educational institutions (2016, p. 107). While acknowledging these debates over graphic design’s ability to function as a unique discipline and contribute to existing academic discourse, Rebecca Ross (2018) also questions whether limiting graphic design to formal modes of “academic-ness” is the only approach for promoting its educational development, suggesting that some aspects of graphic design are enhanced by maintaining more critical and experimental approaches: “For graphic design, the production of new knowledge is necessarily highly integrated with experimentation in both its form and circulation” (2018, p. 15). However, Ross acknowledges that it may be this aspect of graphic design practice which has allowed it to be largely bypassed by academia.

Audrey Bennett (2006), in *Design Studies: Theory and Research in Graphic Design*, points out that much of what passes for research in graphic design has traditionally focused on visual or intuitive creative outputs and rarely on graphic designers’ actual research, social and cultural output. It is a direction she encourages and argues that some practitioners are already pursuing (Bennett 2015). Indeed, Helen Armstrong (2009) argues that some graphic design practitioners have begun to produce their own authorial work for critical research and even entrepreneurial purposes and, in doing so, are leaving behind outdated, client-centred...
perceptions of neutrality and objectivity. More recently, Katherine Gillieson and Stephan Garneau (2018) have argued for a specifically graphic design thinking approach embedded in a historically unique, epistemological visual communication practice.

Regardless of the focus, a specific discourse of graphic design research remains elusive. In the UK for example, the Higher Education Funding Council reports that “the intellectual and theoretical underpinning of graphic and communication design was thought to be generically weak” (HEFCE 2014, p. 85). In response to this, a progress report from a project by Loughborough University to the Design Research Society 2018 conference appears to broadly concur, stating that “only very recently has there been any recognition that there might be such a thing as graphic design research” (Harland, Corazzo et al. 2018, p. 9). Suggested reasons include the neglect of the discipline by the broader design research community, as well as a lack of overt engagement by graphic design researchers themselves (Harland, Corazzo et al. 2018). Indeed, several sources have proposed that graphic design is an inherently interdisciplinary, yet still evolving, discourse (Bennett & Bennett 2006; Davis 2012; Harland 2015), a complex evolution which is reflected in its professional practice (Dziobczenski & Person 2017) and educative (Littlejohn 2017) formats. It is indicative of this that my research contributes to an emerging and distinct, if still somewhat nebulous, discourse of graphic design research. Nevertheless, it is an emerging interdisciplinary discourse which is, as will be argued throughout, necessarily distinct from the wider field of design research.

An interdisciplinary bricolage of methodologies

In recognition of the discursive gaps in design research and the underdeveloped nature of graphic design research, the methodology for this research necessarily draws theoretically from across several disciplines. In doing so, and while acknowledging the terminological debates, it is not necessary for this research to enter the widely contested distinctions between, for example, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary research methodologies, focused as they are on degrees of discipline interaction such as complementariness, boundary overlap and holisticity (Nicolescu 1997; Ramadier 2004; Klein 2013).

In addition to professional graphic design practice and existing design research theory, the research draws heavily from two other disciplines – dramaturgy and ethnography. Dramaturgy is adopted for its tradition of using, and being used for, making strange. Ethnography is adopted for its reflective methodology, but also because of a long tradition
of collaboration with drama as a research method. As will be discussed, both disciplines also have established usage within broader professional design and design research practices. In this research, these methodologies are generatively and intentionally combined to inform the experimental methodological approach, aimed at rendering graphic design practice strange so as to illuminate and challenge graphic designers’ perceptions of their professional relationships with stakeholders.

Dramaturgy

The focus on making the familiar strange indicated that the research had to draw on methodologies which inform the practice of making strange. Dramaturgy has an established tradition of using methods of making strange within theatre, as well as having its methods used as devices for making strange in other disciplines including design and ethnography. While later chapters contextualise these dramaturgic methods as tools for making strange, my aim here is to review dramaturgy as a research tool within professional practice and to demonstrate its influence on the research framework.

Drama as research

Dramaturgic methods have long been used outside of formalised theatrical environments within academic enquiry, as well as within industry. The modern roots for this lie in sociological and organisational discourse (Oswick, Keenoy et al. 2001), in particular Kenneth Burke’s (1945) *A Grammar of Motives* and Erving Goffman’s (1973) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. As identified in the Introduction, Goffman’s work informs this research directly, as I locate the topic within graphic designers’ everyday perceptions of their interactions with stakeholders. In establishing the research within professional practice, this research also draws on Mangham’s work on dramaturgy and theatrical metaphor within organisational culture, where he interviewed managers about how they saw themselves and their relationships with their colleagues, and dramaturgically contextualised their responses (Mangham 2005). Mangham, also drawing on Goffman’s work, described theatre as a “metaphor for understanding and describing our everyday activity as citizens and employees” (Mangham 2005, p. 941), extending
dramaturgy into organisational practice. The groundwork laid by Goffman, Mangham and others led to dramaturgy eventually becoming mainstream in both organisational studies and industry (Nissley, Taylor et al. 2004).

Within educational practices, dramaturgy has most commonly been expressed in the form of process drama, where it has been repurposed as more than simply an art medium dealing with imagined scenarios (Edmiston 2003). Process drama involves participants using drama as an experiential research tool (O’Neill 1995) to gain an understanding about aspects of their life (Edmiston 2003) or relevant subjects (Heathcote 1984). Building on the accepted practice of improvisation within design (Büscher, Gill et al. 2001; Gerber 2007; Gerber 2009; Bredies, Chow et al. 2010), the similarly improvised emphasis of process drama (Schneider & Jackson 2000) focuses on process and learning, rather than simply being a theatrical technique (O’Neill 1995), and enables a fluid, responsive and experimental approach which has informed my research. This is especially evident in Chapter 4, where adaptive improvised performances are used for reflective practice and educational purposes, rather than as entertaining performances. Julie Dunn (2016) addresses what she believes are myths attributed to process drama, for example that it is limited to younger children, doesn’t enhance participants’ understanding of drama and cannot be properly assessed. In doing so, she attempts to cement it as a pedagogical creative practice for all ages of students, across a range of curriculum areas. Indeed, as a pedagogical tool, process drama has been used across a range of disciplines, for example in a metaphorical role for teaching science concepts (Corrigan, Finlayson et al. 2018), to aid literacy (Wells & Sandretto 2017) and for critically engaging democracy (Greenwood 2015).

Considering the potential for the research outcomes to inform future design professional development methods, it is relevant to note that dramaturgy has also been utilised as an interventionist tool. Practitioners such as Augusto Boal (Boal 2000) have used it to break down barriers between performers and the audience, and theorists such as Guy Debord, among others, have similarly used it as a deconstructive tool (Puchner 2004). The deconstructive and interventionist methods of Debord and other situationists have to be considered forerunners of the later practices of experimental designers such as Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, as well as projects developed by William Gaver such as the use of cultural probes (Gaver, Dunne et al. 1999; Gaver, Boucher et al. 2004) and in such diverse design fields as experiential futures (Candy & Dunagan 2017). Some of these approaches will be engaged with shortly, for their function of making strange, by using devices (real or metaphorical) to stimulate ideas and discussions. These approaches leverage the unfamiliar
– or make strange – as a method of intervening in the normative with the intention of gathering information that might otherwise remain hidden. They intervene in the assumed normativity of interactions in everyday life, as Goffman identified (1973).

**Design is and as drama**

In the introduction, I framed the graphic design profession as a dramaturgic practice and located the everyday interactions between designers and stakeholders, and this research, within the framework of Goffman’s descriptions of dramaturgic everyday human interactions (Goffman 1973). Gillieson and Garneau’s argument for a separate and specific discourse of graphic design research methodologically categorises the practice of graphic design as consisting of historical and cultural narratives which, unlike in other design practices, are specifically and distinctively communicative, with graphic designers planning, creating and producing outputs (real and metaphorical) purely with the intention of visually presenting and communicating to an audience (Gillieson & Garneau 2018). This further frames both the graphic design process itself, and its outcomes, as performative; like theatre, it creates verbal and visual narratives, and then performs them as finished communication outcomes, to an audience. Like theatre, these performances can be consumed statically in print format or, like forum theatre, interacted with in an online environment.

It is a dramaturgic narrative within which graphic design discourse builds on broader themes, such as arguments for designers to be considered dramaturges (Meany & Clark 2012) and metaphorical comparisons with other dramaturgic roles such as film producers (Dorst 2009). Research in this area, distinctly within graphic design, is in its infancy compared to wider design research practices such as human–computer interaction (HCI); for example, the use of personas and scenarios in usability studies (Eriksson, Artman et al. 2013) and testing (Penin & Tonkinwise 2009), project communication (Blomquist & Arvola 2002), interactive devices (Iacucci & Kuutti 2002), awareness-raising among designers about the needs of specific user groups (Newell, Morgan et al. 2011) and visualising future societal design needs (Blythe & Dearden 2009). Nevertheless, where applicable the research will draw comparison with and leverage analyses from the wider field of design research; for example, when discussing performative personas and scenarios during Chapter 3, and alongside performance ethnographic methods in Chapter 4.
Ethnography

Ethnography is a critical theoretical element which underpins the methods used for extending the process of making strange from interviews to performance. A hybrid mode of enquiry (Atkinson 2001) emerging from anthropology (Atkinson, Delamont et al. 2001), ethnographic approaches are perfectly suited for research into cultural and organisational environments (Brewer 2000; Ybema, Yanow et al. 2009; Ejimabo 2015) and to interpret and understand the meanings and behaviours of participants within those environments (Brewer 2000; Ejimabo 2015). Ethnographic methods have been used in some design consultancies and HCI, as well as in interactive and usability design, since the latter part of the twentieth century (Blomberg, Burrell et al. 2003; Frankel & Racine 2010). During the 21st century ethnography has gradually been adopted as a tool for design research into social and workplace organisational topics and for informing professional design practice (Crabtree, Rouncefield et al. 2012). Within graphic design, Dianne Murray’s 1993 study (1993) and the more recent work of AnneMarie Dorland (2016, 2017b) have used ethnographic immersion and interviews to look at the organisational practices of graphic designers.

Ethnography of my own professional practice

The ethnographic experiential observations from my own practice which formed the initial motivation for this research also emerge as professional and cultural reflections on my own professional practice (Ellis 2004; Reed-Danahay 2006; Ellis, Adams et al. 2011; Edwards & Holland 2013). This included experiential reflections from across my own professional practice and interrogating areas from the inside (Hackley & Hackley 2016) which might otherwise have been missed as a result of not having reflected on my own practice (Douglas & Carless 2013) and, indeed, acknowledging the subjectivities of doing so where other methods do not (Deitering 2017), allowing reflection with the hindsight of time and distance (Ellis, Adams et al. 2011) into everyday professional practice (Edwards & Holland 2013). Similarly, the fictional story in the prologue to this research takes the form of an imagined dramatised composite inspired by compressed narratives from across a period of professional practice (Tullis Owen, McRae et al. 2009), with the names and descriptions of organisations, characters, events, contexts and locations having been invented, altered and otherwise obfuscated and recontextualised (Fine 1993; Ellis, Adams et al. 2011). This, like the narratives used elsewhere and in the Performative Design Brief, takes the form of ethnographically informed fictional vignettes (Humphreys & Watson
2009; Berry 2017), literary devices (Freeman 2004) to reconstruct (Bruner 1995) and present insights from the research (Jacobsen 2014) by casting a “wider lens” (Ellis, Adams et al. 2011, p. 2) so as to engage with and communicate narratives from within my own professional practice (Plummer 2001; Adams 2008).

**Ethnography informing the dramaturgic narratives**

The combination of dramaturgic and ethnographic methodologies is critical for reflecting on and repurposing narratives from the online interactive environments where graphic designers discussed their perceptions of relationships with stakeholders, as well as the graphic designer interviews. The methods draw on what will be discussed in Chapter 2 as the variously titled methodologies of verbatim theatre, ethnodrama and performance ethnography (Paget 1987; Mienczakowski 2001; Barone 2002; Anderson 2007). Similarly, the use of the graphic designer interviews as subjective generative devices (Denzin 1998) for repurposing narratives into performative simulacra of their original (via the Performative Design Brief and then the Performance Workshops), as opposed to just for gathering data, positions the approach as ethnographic (Denzin 2001). The semi-structured nature of the interviews with graphic designers brought my own immersive experiences as a practising graphic designer (Brewer 2004; Sangasubana 2011; Watson 2011; McGranahan 2014) into contact with those of other graphic designers (Angrosin 2007), allowing the focus to contextually (Whitehead 2005) privilege the areas of most importance to the designer interviewees and the research topic, drawing on the ethnographic influence of the interview method (Green 2003). As will be shown, in using dramaturgic narratives as metaphorical devices to begin the process of making strange, the interviews have provided an ethnographic design context (Whitehead 2005) to help unpack (Angrosin 2007) wicked and obfuscated areas of graphic designers’ perceptions about their relationships with stakeholders (Ortiz 2003; Hobbs 2006).

**Repurposing the narratives**

Ethnographic practices, in particular performative variations of the methodology, will also be engaged with in Chapter 3, where the Performative Design Brief is contextualised as an artefactual narrative outcome of the graphic designer interactions (Geertz 1988, Maanen 1995, Spradley 2016). Indeed, ethnography often uses literary devices (Freeman 2004) as forms of enquiry to re-create narratives (Bruner 1995) and vignettes from the
research enquiry (Humphreys & Watson 2009; Berry 2017), including repurposing interview narratives (Jacobsen 2014). In that sense, Anna Deveare Smith’s use of participants as informal collaborators to create scripts (Denzin 2001) informs the research, as do Johnny Saldaña’s performative re-creations of informants’ narratives (1998, 2003, 2011). Re-performing of informant graphic designer narratives is discussed further in Chapter 4, where performative ethnographic methodologies render drama as a form of research, rather than theatre (Luckhurst 2008). Once again, Smith’s influence is felt (1997, 2005), as the performance is used to examine the intricate cultural issues related to graphic designers’ perceptions of stakeholders, performatively preserving, reproducing and mirroring those issues (Denzin 2001; Meisiek & Barry 2007) via performance, allowing them to be externally critiqued through a dramatic perspective (Barone 2002; Ackroyd & O’Toole 2010; Saldaña 2011). However, the Performance Workshops in this research extend the depth of this process by increasingly rendering the research topic strange, refracting (rather than mirroring) it through a metaphorical prism. As a result, the concept of making strange is at the core of this research.

Emerging from an experiential professional graphic design background, informed by design research, within a dramaturgic framework, the reflective and investigative methodology of the project draws benefit from ethnography’s broad qualitative approach and is used throughout the research. This is especially true of Chapter 3, when an ethnographic approach allows my immersion, as a graphic design researcher, when evaluating the interviews with other graphic designers which informed the creation of the Performative Design Brief. Combined with dramaturgy in the form of performative ethnography (or ethnodrama), ethnography has also informed the process of developing the theatrical narratives in the Performative Design Brief, which were then reproduced by actors in the Performance Workshops.

Making the familiar strange

Ultimately, the combination of dramaturgic and ethnographic methodologies is used to inform the methods which contribute to making strange graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders. Before discussing this, the centrality of making strange to this research requires contextualising in relation to creative practice, design, graphic design and how the phenomenon has been utilised within this research. This begins as an exploration of making strange: its historical development, theoretical background and framework.
That humans construct familiar and comforting assumptions of their relationships with others has been addressed for some time. For example, during the Introduction I discuss how the familiarity of my own professional practice increased as my industry experience grew. Alfred Schutz, for example, describes this phenomenon as “of course” assumptions (1970, p. 81). Moreover, even when a newcomer engages with a new, strange and unfamiliar group, their process of adaptation, or enquiry, only goes as far as adapting to that group’s notion of familiarity (all things being equal) (Schuetz 1944). To this Z. D. Gurevitch adds that the unfamiliar simply becomes the familiar (Gurevitch 1988). Similarly, Frederick Erickson notes that “We do not realize the patterns in our actions as we perform them” (1985, p. 121), while John Berger explains that the way that we see things is affected by what we already believe (1972). Going further, Schutz suggests that, in order to research aspects of the everyday or the usual, it is necessary to make them problematic. For Schutz, this is a theoretically observational process (Garfinkel 1963; 1964; Schutz 1970). Likewise, graphic designers in everyday professional practice are influenced by a set of tacit beliefs from within which they perceive stakeholders. As a result, this research is an exploration into one way in which researchers can tackle these preconceptions by problematising aspects of them, passing them through a refractive prism and making them strange.

By making the familiar strange, it is possible to unearth what has previously been obscured and make it systematically documentable (Erickson 1985). Therefore, if embedded within a group or environment, as I am within graphic design, it is beneficial to find a method for metaphorically stepping out of that group to challenge familiar assumptions; in doing so, this allows new learnings to emerge. In this regard, Dawn Mannay’s (2010) research is informative, as it examines the challenges when one’s own experience is the same as that of those being researched. Mannay’s investigation is ethnographic and, as part of studying working class mothers and daughters on the same UK housing estate that she was from and whom she had known personally for many years, she found that visual defamiliarisation exercises were critical to suspending preconceptions of a familiar environment, thereby providing analytical distance between her and the subjects of the research (Mannay 2010). Similarly, when planning to interview the graphic designers for my research, I was aware of the familiarity which lay in their design practices. All were, like myself, specifically graphic designers and the use of dramaturgic metaphor during the interview process was used to create an unfamiliar context for the designers to discuss normally familiar design practices: to make a
professional practice which I and the other designers share strange, so as to create a new framework within which to observe and analyse it. Within creative practice, making the familiar strange is such a method.

Why making strange?

Erickson argues that asking “what is happening?” (1985, p. 121) is unlikely to result in a useful answer to the subtext of the “largely invisible” aspects of everyday life, because they are masked by its familiarity and also by participants’ and researchers’ reluctance to engage with the contradictions of the hidden subtext (Erickson 1985). In this research, the invisibility manifests in graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders, which, as the Introduction chapter argues, have become familiarly entrenched. Indeed, Dorland’s research into the organisational culture of graphic designers notes that asking a graphic designer to describe what they do is unlikely to result in a productive response; indeed, responses are “accompanied almost always with an eye roll” (2017b). Similarly, research by Lucienne Roberts and Rebecca Wright (2015) observed that graphic designers appear especially resistant to research, often resulting in flippant and sarcastic responses. Add to this Lawson’s observations that designers tend to over-stress rational foundations for their beliefs (Lawson 2004) and the advantage of a methodology that approaches graphic designers’ perceptions from an unfamiliar perspective becomes clear.

Making strange as creative practice

Making strange as creative practice originated within Russian formalism (Lvov 2015). The term ‘defamiliarisation’ (as estrangement or ostranenie) was coined by Shklovsky in 1914 (Bell, Blythe et al. 2005; Forrest 2007) and later elaborated on in a 1917 essay entitled ‘Art as Technique’ (Lvov 2015), in which Shklovsky uses the term in relation to the avoidance of what he describes as automatisation (Crawford 1984). For Shklovsky (1965), the aim of making strange is to overcome this automatisation. The overcoming of this automatised ‘habitual recognition’, or the familiar, can be achieved by describing it as if it were happening for the first time (Lemon & Reis 1965). More specifically, for Shklovsky strangeness is a result achieved by generatively “using any number of devices” (Lemon & Reis 1965, p. 4). Researchers in a number of creative practices have used defamiliarising
techniques to disrupt habitual patterns; for example, the use of literary devices such as uneven rhythms or wordplay to make linguistic communication strange and, at the same time, enhance awareness of language in a more vivid way than usual (Kaomea 2003).

This research makes use of a series of concepts used interchangeably as ‘making the familiar strange’, ‘making strange’ or ‘defamiliarisation’. It has even been suggested that Shklovsky’s original spelling of the term as enstrangement (with an extra ‘n’) was either intentional (Sher 1990) or, regardless of this, that the neologism itself was intended as a form of making strange (Berlina 2015). Scholarly literature invariably uses these terms interchangeably and, where this is unavoidable, I have defaulted to the authors’ usage. For consistency, when discussing my own research, I have chosen to standardise around the term ‘making strange’, apart from where clarity of expression suggests otherwise. Partially this is for purposes of consistency and partially it is because this appears to be the dominant phrase used within contemporary creative practice, as opposed to its historical philosophical origins. But also, I have chosen the term ‘making strange’ because it more effectively reflects the practice-immersed generative process of designing strangeness, the generation of strangeness as an actively designed phenomenon. Where Shklovsky uses poetic intervention within language (Crawford 1984) to defamiliarise, making strange within this research similarly uses a number of ‘devices’, in the form of metaphorical methods, to generatively design a metaphorical space of strangeness. My professional design experience is initially made strange by framing it as a dramaturgic practice. This is experimented with in Chapter 2, where the format of the graphic designer interviews is rendered strange using dramaturgic tropes, extended to Chapter 3, where theatrical scenarios are used to render the themes from Chapter 2 strange, and in Chapter 4 becoming stranger still, where the scenarios depicting graphic designer perceptions of stakeholders are re-performed by third party dedicated actors.

Influence of the visual arts

Graphic design’s lineage from many visual arts (for example, its ongoing interaction with photography and other graphic arts) legitimises a brief contextualisation of making strange within those discourses. Techniques for intervening in the familiar have also long been used within the visual arts. The quote attributed to Edgar Degas that “art is not what you see, but what you make others see” (Reads 2016) is symbolic of this. Mel Gooding’s (1991) assertion that artists such as the Surrealists used games and surprises to subvert established methods of enquiry also captures the essence of making strange within arts
practice. The Cubists went even further, making objects strange by fragmenting and “simultaneously showing several perspectives” of them (Samberger 2004, p. 132). Elliot Eisner asserts that, “the artist recontextualises the familiar so that it takes on a new significance” (1995, p. 2), describing defamiliarisation as being central to both visual arts and ethnographic practice (2003), which use techniques extending into qualitative research for “making the familiar strange and making the strange familiar” (2008, p. 11) to reveal previously hidden “aspects of the world” (2003, p. 53). Making strange also makes an appearance in other visual arts such as photography. Burgin argues that many of the photographic aesthetics – the relationships between “seeing, representing and knowing” (Watney 1982, p. 155) of the 1920s and 1930s – were influenced by Shklovsky’s concept of making strange (Watney 1982).

Making strange and dramaturgy

Many of the aforementioned uses of dramaturgy utilise making strange in their practices. A classic example is Augusto Boal’s forum theatre (1998), which breaks the normativity of performance by inviting audience intervention (Boal & Jackson 2002; Meisiek & Barry 2007). Similarly, Berthold Brecht’s Epic theatre borrows from Shklovsky’s estrangement for the concept of Verfremdungseffekt (Radosavljević 2013) or alienation (Brecht 2014). Brecht uses defamiliarisation techniques, often involving technological interventions into performances (Dickson 2017), with the intention of discouraging audience empathy with the onstage performances so as to encourage engagement with wider issues, a practice which Per Ehn also cites as influencing design using technological artefacts (1988). Similarly, in an example from process drama, Stig A. Eriksson (2011) describes a classic repurposing of Shklovsky’s poetic ‘device’ in a study of theatrical educationalist Dorothy Heathcote, who used parables from real life to introduce problems into performances in order to raise social consciousness. Some areas of design have also drawn on dramaturgic methodologies as tools for making strange, such as Daniel Dunne’s suggestion that the dramaturgic aspects of Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt may be useful in using video games to “push their own audience to analyse more than just what their avatar is doing on the screen” (2014, p 95).

Another inspiration to this research is the work of three sets of dramaturgic research that utilise making strange. Hope (2011) uses what she defines as performative interviews as part of her research into artists’ contracts with art commissioners. Hope repurposes interviews as performative interventions using the defamiliarising technique of distancing the interviewees themselves from the filmed onscreen character who narrates their
responses. The narrator is either the interviewee themselves or an actor who represents the interviewee to speak extracts from their interview transcripts. Hope’s method allows the interviewees to vocalise their stories, while at the same time allowing the participants and other parties to “critically reflect on the construction of these stories, their complicity in these processes and the implications of these common dilemmas that we often restrain ourselves from talking about publicly” (2010, p. 4).

Similarly, Howard, Carroll et al. embarked on what they describe as a “use-centred” and “scenario-based design” project (2002, p. 176). Although located within HCI rather than graphic design, they decided to use professional actors to investigate contextual scenarios, rather than what they describe as the traditional approach of using “surrogate users as actors” (2002, p. 178), arguing that trained actors are more equipped than the more normative use of surrogate users to explore contextual scenarios (2002).

Smith’s (2005) work in documentary theatre, sometimes also referred to as verbatim theatre (Paget 1987), is developed around reproducing the words and contexts of the researched participants (Luckhurst 2008). Smith’s implementation of documentary theatre involves interviewing a series of characters, scripting their words and then performing the interviews at a later time (2005). In carrying out these practices, Denzin describes how Smith’s work mirrors and criticises aspects of society (2001). This is a mirroring which has parallels with Meisiek and Barry’s analysis of organisational drama as a looking glass (2007). Denzin also describes how Smith makes use of non-actors as dramaturges to assist in the preparation of the scripts and to provide an outside perspective to the performers (2001). However, Smith’s work makes strange not only by mirroring, but also by intentionally creating a gap between her character and her re-performance of that character. As she is quoted as saying:

I don’t believe that when I play someone in my work, that I ‘am’ the character. I want the audience to experience the gap, because I know if they experience the gap, they will appreciate my reach for the other. This reach is what moves them, not a mush of me and the other, not a presumption that I can play everything and everybody, but more a desire to reach for something that is very clearly not me. (Radosavljević 2013)

While taking different approaches, all three methods intentionally take a step away from the normative investigative models of their respective practices. The use of dramaturgic defamiliarising techniques allows these researchers to uncover perceptions, activities and behaviours that were not previously or overtly evident. As will be discussed, each of these researchers has influenced the methodology and, in turn, the methods of this research.
Smith’s interview and performance methodologies are discussed in relation to the metaphorical structuring of the Performance Workshops during Chapter 3; Hope’s work is discussed further in Chapter 2 and especially Chapter 4, where artists’ responses to her methods are contrasted with graphic designers’ perceptions; and Howard, Carroll et al.’s methods of using dedicated actors are discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to the use of ‘proxy designers’ for the Performance Workshops.

Making strange in design practice

As this research draws from and informs wider design discourse, an overview of the use of making strange within design research is necessary. Making strange is also evident in methodologies within the broader field of design research, often within technologically focused design practices. For example, Bell, Blythe and Sengers (2005) utilise it in an attempt to make strange the familiarity of the home. In their discussion of the design of domestic technologies, they argue that, in order to open the home, as a design space, to scrutiny, it is necessary to make its everyday domestic technologies strange in order create a lens through which to scrutinise its technologies of domesticity. As with its use in other creative practices, for Bell, Blythe and Sengers making strange is a method for “creating space for critical reflection” (2005, p. 150), providing designers with opportunities to actively reflect on the familiarity of existing home culture and politics, rather than simply passively reproducing, so as to more effectively develop alternative designs. Similar approaches have been used to decontextualise everyday technological interactions, for example by intervening in the expected behaviour of familiar everyday technologies such as user interface designs (Carlson & Schiphorst 2013; Khovanskaya, Baumer et al. 2013).

The application of personas and scenarios within design utilises a more formalised series of applications of making strange. One variation of this is explored by Mark Blythe and Peter Wright (2006) in their discussion of pastiche scenarios, located in particular within popular fiction, in which they argue that these mediums can be used, especially by HCI designers, to explore familiar concepts of human experience using a framework of alternate realities. Blythe and Wright argue that designers can use fictionalised scenarios and other literary techniques to make strange, and so allow themselves to view familiar technologies in unfamiliar ways.
In another experimental use of making strange in design, Lian Loke and Toni Robertson (2007) experimented with the falling body as a method of disrupting habitual preconceptions of the moving body, in an attempt to inform a methodology of making strange for use in the design of motion-sensing technologies. Even everyday design objects such as doorhandles have been rendered strange and reimagined by design authors such as Donald Norman (1988).

The experimental design work of Dunne, Raby and other collaborators is also informed by making the familiar strange. For example, Dunne’s research refers to “poeticising the distance” as a descriptor of his form of making strange (Seago & Dunne 1999, p. 14). In their Placebo Project, Dunne and Raby’s prototype “vaguely familiar” objects were placed into people’s homes. They describe the approach as being “open-ended enough to prompt stories but not so open as to bewilder” (Dunne & Raby 2001, p. 75). This “slight strangeness” is an approach that I have used for my interviews with graphic designers, described in Chapter 2. Dramaturgy was used to make the interview process strange enough to create distance between the designer interviewees and their practice, yet still familiar enough for the interviewees to create narratives relevant to their perceived relationships with stakeholders. Nevertheless, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, that concept of balancing different degrees of strangeness was experimented with and intentionally extended during the Performance Workshops in the hope of unravelling the graphic designer assumptions, as well as those embedded within my own design practice, followed by analysis of the resultant mixed outcomes.

**Making strange as an everyday design activity**

The experientially driven professional practice nature of this research means that it is helpful to look at manifestations of making strange within everyday graphic design practices. Acknowledging the underdeveloped aspects of graphic design theory, techniques for making strange within graphic design practice have to be drawn from the vernacular everyday activities of professional practice. For example, when kerning fonts graphic designers may render the meaning of a word strange by turning it upside-down or squinting at a block of text to render the text as a blurred shade of grey rather than individual letters or words. This allows designers to bring to the fore visual problems of letter spacing which are otherwise difficult to see when they are distracted by the normative contextual meaning of words and sentences. For example, Figure 3 indicates how the undesirable gaps between ‘problem letters’ can often be more easily addressed
defamiliarisation

defamiliarisation

Fig. 3 | Making kerning strange

Fig. 4 | Making rivers familiar
when the word is turned upside-down. Inverting the word (making it strange) dissuades the designer from the familiar act of trying to read the word and allows their attention to focus on the problem at hand. As discussed in the introduction, this follows the pattern described by (Gurevitch 1988), whereby making strange has the paradoxical effect of also making familiar.

Similarly, as simulated in Figure 4, unsightly areas of white space within blocks of text, known as rivers, can adversely affect readability (Ambrose & Harris 2010). A graphic designer, by squinting their eyes at a block of text, renders the letters and paragraphs into an illegible grey blur, this time bringing to the fore undesirable word spacing (centre image), thus allowing it to be adjusted using design layout software (right image). By intentionally obfuscating the design obstacle, the above two techniques help graphic designers to make strange the normative activity of reading text and, in doing so, allow them to observe what might otherwise by hidden, thereby allowing intervention to generate more pleasing and effective design solutions (Deer 2006).

This everyday professional manifestation of making strange is a self-motivated approach which has been metaphorically re-envisioned by critical design and other researchers by, for example, using ludic objects such as cultural probes (Gaver, Dunne et al. 1999; Gaver, Boucher et al. 2004; Sengers, Boehner et al. 2005; Celikoglu, Ogut et al. 2017) or in wider creative practice by tools such as Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt’s Oblique Strategies cards (1980), all of which simulate the principle of Shklovsky’s defamiliarising ‘devices’ to enable strangeness (Lemon & Reis 1965; Bell, Blythe et al. 2005). A further use of creative artefacts as devices utilises design mock-ups as tools to encourage cross-discipline stakeholder communication (Sadowska & Laffy 2018). Using the mock-ups as generative conduits, participants engage with the unfamiliar, and collaborate to create a “new familiar” (2018, p. 263); an educational environment, which is then perceived by participants as the normative default.

The everydayness of making strange in professional graphic design practice can go beyond simply improving the functional readability of design layouts, extending to the reflective reading of visual elements such as photographic use. For example, graphic design can provoke critical engagement with notions of photographic truth and representation when photography can be digitally altered, cropped, positioned in a layout and otherwise made strange, to portray alternate, hyperreal or re-presented narratives (Berger 1982, Newton 2012). Indeed, recontextualising the familiarity of photographic imagery is part of graphic designers’ creative practice (Eisner 1995) and helps to overcome the “stupor of the
familiar” (Eisner 2003, p. 53). What unites these approaches, within graphic design, is their inherent simulacral function (Baudrillard 1994): taking an original concept and reproducing it as an intentionally altered copy. This renders graphic design practice as intrinsically defamiliarising, altering the way in which the creator, participants or intended audience view a design outcome.

From methodology to method: a performing squid

In *Design Thinking*, Cross (2011) discusses a study by Lloyd and Snelders (2003) in which they deconstruct the creative process that Philippe Starck undertook to design his famous lemon squeezer (Alessi 2016). Lloyd and Snelders (and Cross himself) describe how design thinking and creative concepts do not appear as inexplicable flashes (Cross 2011), but instead manifest as the result of applying an analogy to a problem; that is, by using design skills and metaphorical tools to actively create or generatively design the frameworks for design thinking and, thereafter, design solutions.

In Starck’s case, he marshalled his design thinking skills to move from visualising a squid-like metaphor (physically drawing a squid on a napkin) through to application, before emerging with a design solution. This solution took the form of a lemon squeezer with a ‘squid-like’ resemblance. An analogous process has been applied to my research – recruiting a dramaturgic methodology as my ‘squid’ functions as a metaphoric representation of my professional design practice, allowing design experimentation, creation and reflection. Lloyd and Snelders suggest that designers draw upon remembered images and recollections (Cross 2011) – essentially precedents from previous design projects and learnings. Likewise, drawing on my own professional design practice and experience with stakeholders, I gathered similar ‘images and recollections’ to my research, applying these metaphors within a dramaturgic format. Where Starck used diagrams on a napkin, I used dramaturgic experiments as my sketchpad. Some were pre-planned, but many were largely speculative. As Bucciarelli suggests, design is an “adventure into the unknown” (2001, p. 301). Starck’s and my methods are differently executed, but their reflective location within a generative design process is the same. Starck’s lemon squeezer was allegedly designed to “start conversations” as much as it was intended to be used to juice lemons (Watson-Smyth 2010), in essence functioning as a design probe and defamiliarising device. Similarly, the methodology in this research, and in turn the methods of enquiry which were generated, have been intentionally designed to be an investigative journey which contributes to an academic conversation involving creation,
reflection, analysis and discovery. The resultant graphic design enquiry uses dramaturgy and ethnography to generate and reflect upon the manifestation of strangeness as an investigative framework.

An intentionally experimental interdisciplinary bricolage of methodologies

The methodologies which inform this research have been drawn together partially because some aspects of them appear to manifest intrinsically within professional graphic design practice. Having discussed how the more generalised practices of design research were only partially suited to this study, we can see that an interdisciplinary methodological approach has been critical to the reinforcement of a fledgling and evolving graphic design research discipline which, by default, flourishes through being informed by multiple practices (Bennett & Bennett 2006; Davis 2012; Harland 2015). In addition, it has been established how professional graphic design practice, and in particular the professionally embedded and obfuscated nature of graphic designers’ relationships with stakeholders, required a series of tools to unravel. In doing so, this has also reinforced the choice of a creative practice methodological approach which defaults to embracing interdisciplinarity (Finley 2003; Barrett & Bolt 2007; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny 2014). As a result, when designing the methods for making professional graphic design practice strange, the research has drawn as much on the ethnodrama of Smith (2005), the performative interviews of Hope (2011) and the scenario-based design of Howard, Carroll et al. (2002) as it has on the immersive and reflective practices of ethnography.

As we shall see in the following chapter, this interdisciplinary methodological background is practically applied using a series of dramaturgic and ethnographic methods during the design of a questionnaire and in conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with professional graphic designers. In the process, methodological debates which have been discussed in this chapter are contextualised and reflected upon, alongside the methods used and the findings that emerge.
Chapter 2 | Interviews with graphic designers

This chapter centres on the series of interviews conducted with the graphic designers. It aims to highlight how ambiguities around professional graphic designers’ job titles and practitioner frustrations about relationships with stakeholders, which were present in my own professional experience, are also evident in the interview respondents. In addition to the interviews, the chapter will show how the same themes are also present in a series of interactive online graphic design environments, such as forums and blogs. The key themes that emerge from the interviews are interrogated and validated alongside historical and online debates amongst graphic designers, and with reference back to my own professional experience. Findings from the interviews are then compared with a view to identifying any gaps, inconsistencies and variations within existing academic and professional discourse, and, in turn, to suggest ways to build on them.

The chapter begins by discussing the interview methods used, engaging with the choice of qualitative methods and introducing the experiential motivation for the narrative enquiry approach, as well as the format and scope of the interviews and the choice of respondents. The influence of dramaturgic metaphor on the interview methods as a form of making strange is discussed with reference to key texts which inform the practice. The findings from the interviews themselves are then discussed before being contrasted with narratives that appear in online comments by graphic designers, from the literature, as well as from reflection on my own professional experience. While the aim is to identify common themes within this broader discourse, the chapter will also highlight differences in practitioners’ perceptions about practice. Such perceptions will inform the following discussion of the impact of these professional ambiguities of practice on graphic designers’ gravitas, authority and design capital. It will also consider the ways that the dramaturgic format of questioning is used to render the interview questions strange in order to encourage the respondents to reflect on their perception of their design capital within professional design practice. Finally, the chapter discusses how the combination of ambiguities around job titles and roles, along with the perception of a lack of design capital, informs the way in which graphic designers perceive stakeholders in everyday professional practice. This is approached by contrasting graphic designers’ views about two
stakeholder groups – salespeople and writers. Upon discovering a disparity in perceptions of stakeholders between vernacular online graphic designer narratives and the graphic design interviewees, the chapter discusses the reasons for this and suggests that a series of nuanced factors are at play.

By examining graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders using examples from across my own practice, the designer interviews, and online discussions, this chapter begins to address the gap in academic literature and dearth in professional sources (indicated in Chapter 1) dealing with the nuances and ambiguities of graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders. In uncovering the previously obfuscated nuances to perceptions of stakeholders by the graphic designers, the chapter will argue for the validity of the dramaturgic interview method as an investigative device for making strange. The chapter will also argue that these graphic designer perceptions are indicative of a belief, by design practitioners, that they lack of design capital within the creative industry. In addition, the chapter will propose that graphic designers’ perceptions and (often unproductive) responses to a perceived lack of design capital indicates a lack of opportunity within the creative industry for recognition of these frustrations. Finally, the chapter indicates how the findings from this stage of the project are utilised as dramaturgic and thematic informants for the Performative Design Brief, which is discussed in Chapter 3.

**Interviews and methods**

Creative practice borrows research methods from other disciplines (Finley 2003; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny 2014). In keeping with this practice, the interviews followed a qualitative approach, allowing the reflections from my own practice and supplementary literary and online research to be evaluated alongside the experiences and perceptions of other graphic designers as further informants (Edwards & Holland 2013). The interview methods have been informed by a broad range of qualitative interview formats, with an emphasis on methods that frame interview respondents as narrators and interpretive devices (Erickson 1985; Sandelowski 1991; Denzin 2001; Smith 2005). The shared professions of the graphic design respondents and myself as interviewer inevitably involved a degree of affinity resulting from similar experiences; what Eileen Porter (2000) describes as a sharing of sameness. Similarly, Norman Denzin’s assertion that “the Other who is presented in the text is always a version of the researcher’s self” (1998, p. 319) pays homage to the ethnographic subjectivity of the interview structure.
In interrogating the stories and experiences of graphic designers’ everyday relationships with stakeholders, the interviews also take the form of narrative enquiry, for which qualitative interviews are an accepted method (Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Flick 2014), as is the emphasis on the everyday organisational experiences of the participants (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995; Gubrium 2012). The interviews followed a semi-structured format using a pre-set pool of questions as a guide. Not all questions were asked and they sometimes varied between interviews depending on factors including the individual designer’s responses, their specific roles, or their seniority and experience. This allowed interview discussions to flow freely, while ensuring that topics remained within a structure that allowed analysis later on – a process elaborated upon in Chapter 3. The questionnaire was used as a framework within which the designers’ responses were noted, interacted with and followed up on, all within the format of an open-ended discussion (Hill, Knox et al. 2005; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006; Knox & Burkard 2009).

The interview component of the research comprised a series of individual interviews with 11 graphic designers. There is little consensus on sample sizes for qualitative interviews, with most sources citing relevance and specificity (Edwards & Holland 2013). Some have argued that smaller sample sizes are appropriate for more targeted groups (Hill, Knox et al. 2005). Julia Brannen (2012) argues that the critical issue is the suitability of the sample rather than the quantity, suggesting that even a sample of one participant can be crucial to the research analysis. Indeed, as discussed later, the graphic designers in the interview group were specifically selected for the similarity of their professional practice. Some researchers acknowledge the limitations on resources for doctoral projects (Baker & Edwards 2012). However, even in a professional context the appropriate use of resources is relevant. For example, web design usability expert, Jacob Nielsen, argues that there is little commercial incentive for using 15 respondents over 5 (2000) and that design research should be aimed at “collecting insights”, rather than “numbers to impress” commercial clients (2012).

For my research, the sample size was also prompted by a conscious acknowledgment of the experimental and prototypical format of the interview methodology (Baker & Edwards 2012). This approach serves as both a data source in itself and also as part of a narrative-building device for the Performative Design Brief, which in turn informs the Performance Workshops within a larger experimental research framework and that also evaluates the methodology itself.
Dramaturgic metaphor, as method

Chapter 1 introduced the methodological use of dramaturgy within this research. In the graphic designer interviews, dramaturgy was used to frame the questions. This served two purposes. Firstly, it acted as a defamiliarising device (Shklovsky 1965; Sher 1990) or metaphorical probe (Gaver, Dunne et al. 1999; Gaver, Boucher et al. 2004) to make strange the industry framework of the discussions and allow the graphic designers to discuss their professional practices outside of familiar frames of reference (Dunne & Raby 2001; Celikoglu, Ogut et al. 2017). This was utilised to discourage the tendency for graphic designers to provide assumed ‘common answers’, which Dorland noticed with her respondents (2017b) and Lawson observed with designers overemphasising logical foundations for their beliefs (2004). Additionally, as with Hope’s use of performative interviews (2011), dramaturgy was used to create a critical distance for the participants from their everyday practices.

Secondly, the dramaturgic framework allowed the development of a lexicon of theatrical tropes, personas and scenarios, based on the designers’ perceptions of stakeholders from their professional design practices. As a result, the interview outcomes have provided a narrative to inform the creation of the Performative Design Brief and, by extension, the Performance Workshops (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively). In doing so, the interviews build on Denzin’s assertions about the historical role of interviews as being simulacral devices for repurposing scenarios and events into a performative ethnographic form of their originals, rather than functioning simply as data-gathering exercises (2001). Notions of trust, historic cooperation, affinity with and understanding of the practice of graphic design and even social friendship have been cited as key factors in successful relationships between graphic designers and stakeholders that can impact on the functioning of creative and commercial outcomes (Murray 1993; Mark, David et al. 2002; Jacobs 2017). In this regard, many of the dramaturgic metaphors used during the interviews utilised prompts which focus on these themes, and some of these are discussed in this chapter.
The Cast: graphic designers

In accordance with ethics requirements, participants have been de-identified and given pseudonyms. This anonymity is critical in allowing free discussion around the designers’ perceptions of stakeholder relationships in a professional capacity without fear of identification. Similarly, demographic data is necessarily general.

The graphic designers are introduced below and discussed contextually later in the chapter. While remaining mindful of this research topic’s struggle with terminology and job functions, for the sake of definition, the criterion for choosing the designers was based on their professional role involving a design function within visual and graphic communication formats. Some respondents’ roles were more hands-on, while others’ were more facilitatory. However, the key criterion was that the professional communication medium of their labours involved designing all, or some, of the following artefactual outcomes: printed materials, websites, branding and corporate identity projects. The interview participants come from a variety of industry backgrounds and were chosen so as to provide a range of professional experiences. Because the research studies embedded graphic designer perceptions, all the participants have at least three years professional experience. Two are very experienced and situated organisationally at company director level, whilst the others range from comparatively junior, through to senior designers with team management responsibility. Their industry backgrounds include publishing, branding, in-house design for the private and public sector, as well as within education. Five participants were female and six were male, ranging from mid-twenties to retirement age. As such, the participants cover a broad range of professional seniority, demographics, industry sectors and have a wide breadth of experience across diverse graphic design projects.

- **Gary** works with musicians, museum curators and artists.
- **Andrew** designs books, magazines and journals.
- **Marcus** works for himself, designing materials predominantly for the private sector.
- **Karen** works with government and the voluntary sector.
- **Bruce** is a practicing designer, who also works as a lecturer in design.
- **Stanley** runs his own design business.
- **Patricia** works on books, brochures, identity and logo design.
- **Shirley** is a self-employed designer who also has a background in pre-press.
- **Cedric** is a retired designer who used to own a design company.
- **Margo** used to work for design agencies and now freelances.
- **Maureen** is a senior designer who manages a team of other creatives.
Findings from interviews

Ambiguities of practice

In my own creative practice, I use the term ‘graphic designer’ when discussing the creation of printed material, such as simple brochures. I avoid the term ‘web designer’, because stakeholders often misinterpret that as a software development role. However, when I work on websites, stakeholders still often refer to me by that term. At one time, despite attempts to coin the (arguably more expansive) term ‘communication designer’, many of the stakeholders I dealt with still referred to me as a graphic designer. My current practice is largely consultative; advising and facilitating creative projects; in contrast to previously having predominantly created physical design artefacts. As a result, several years ago, my approach to defining my professional practice was to list numerous different artefactual outcomes on my business cards. Conversely, my most recent business cards do not mention a job title at all. For this research, I have chosen to try and reclaim the term graphic design, rather than contribute to further confusion. When I use the term graphic designer, it allows for a familiar basis of exchange that can then be built upon. So although graphic design is an imperfect and undervalued term for a description of what many profession practitioners actually do, I have chosen to try and reclaim the term, rather than contribute to further confusion.

Casting aside the artisanal and pre-digital histories (Cramsie 2010; Meggs & Purvis 2012), which this research is not concerned with, contemporary discourse can become mired by definitions for the terminology of graphic design. Frascara (2004) for example, prefers communication design, as do many university departments in Australia and the UK. Other sources use the terms interchangeably (Barnard 2005). Moreover, there appears to be little agreed consistency and within professional practice the everyday issues of job titles emerging from this research are nuanced, disparate and contested.

During the graphic designer interviews, every respondent declared a different job title. Only three designers concurred that their actual role could be accurately described using the term ‘graphic designer’. Indeed, many of the interviewees felt the need to explain, or dispute, their formal job titles and most revealed a consistent ambivalence towards the term. As a result, those who were able – such as self-employed designers – often chose alternative titles.
Shirley, for example, had became a graphic designer after working in pre-press. However, she eschews a job title altogether. Indeed, she questioned what the term ‘graphic designer’ meant in relation to her practice and disputed the accuracy of the term in general: “A graphic designer can do anything. What does graphic design mean? I’ve designed carpets, signage, exhibition stands and branding for corporates”. Shirley was equally disparaging of the term ‘communication design’, stating that few people knew what either of the terms meant; “I can’t be bothered explaining”, she revealed.

Several interviewees conceded that they would grudgingly adopt the term ‘graphic designer’ in certain professional situations. For example, Karen, who works with government and the voluntary sector, stated that she altered her job title depending on the stakeholder that she was dealing with, reserving the term ‘graphic designer’ for her “older clients”. Andrew, who designs books, magazines and journals, also preferred to “steer away from job titles”. He described himself as a book designer, mirroring his preferred design medium, and which he believed avoids confusion with other forms of design such as web design. Andrew admitted that, “if pushed”, he would use the term ‘graphic designer’ (marginally in preference to ‘communication designer’). Similarly, Gary, who works with musicians, museum curators and artists, explained that “doing printed things with paper” most accurately described his practice and that he reverted to the term ‘graphic designer’ when all other explanations failed.

The ambiguity around, and ambivalence towards, graphic design as a job title are mirrored in online discourse from a range of graphic design sources. They also appear to have remained constant over a period of around 15 years. For example, a discussion thread which ran from 2004 to 2005 on the forum Design Talkboard, contains a series of comments from graphic designers debating job titles (Various 2004). Mirroring the designer respondents, many of the participants (‘posters’) in the discussion were ambivalent towards the term ‘graphic design’. Like the interviewees, they often used alternative titles. For example, one poster, ‘LogoMotives’, described themselves as an “Engineer of Creative Identity” (2004), while another, named ‘Bug’, described the use of a series of job titles including “artist” and “asociate [sic] designer” (2004). The forum discussion thread also evidences the diversity of roles that these graphic designers are expected to fulfil, often in apparent contrast to their job title. For example, the poster ‘pheirser’ described their role as including:
getting the print quotes, putting [sic] through purchase orders, taking the high res photos, clipping masks, setting up packaging design, intial concept, holding the branding reigns, being the image library, web site design, copy writing, a bit of html, web administration with php, laying up magazine ads, rebranding our product packaging for other companies and following their brand guidelines from concept to completion, broomstand design, scanning, media releases. (pheirser 2004)

The above examples come from a historical juncture when graphic design for print had reached a critical evolutionary point, overlapping with the early stages of a period when disruptive technologies (Bower & Christensen 1995; Christensen & Overdorf 2000; Ashburner, Bell et al. 2016) were allowing graphic designers to become professionally involved in web and other interactive design mediums (Engholm 2002; Girard & Stark 2002). This period of design and technological hybridisation heightened professional practice ambiguity (Kotamraju 2002; Baer 2010) and brought new creative challenges, which were not always welcomed by graphic designers, such as James Smith, a senior interactive graphic designer:

You see all these advertisements for web ‘designers’ requiring skills in Java this and Flash that. I’d like to see an advertisement that says ‘web designer required – must have ideas.’ Designers are having to become more technical but they need to be careful about balancing technical knowledge with creative time. (Meron 2000)

This is an issue that continues to be voiced in contemporary online debates. For example ‘SanitybyDesign’ complained that “Graphic Designer does not mean Web Designer, these are 2 separate careers”. The same poster went on to claim that it is a condition that would not arise in other, more established professions: “Would you try to hire a Doctor/Dentist? No, you wouldn’t! So stop it! Graphic Designers aren’t CSS experts, Java geniuses or XHML pros” (2015).

In 2018, online graphic designer discourse continued to struggle with job titles and roles. Contributers to Graphic Design Forums, recently conducted a familiarly cyclical debate about whether graphic designers can also be proofreaders (Various 2018). ‘Buda’, suggested that this is something a “senior designer” would deal with (2018), whereas ‘PrintDriver’ suggested that it was an editor’s responsibility, adding that “Proofreading is an add-on service and design is the job of the designer” (2018). Another poster, ‘schweta’, argued that “a proofreader does not have the expertise to comment on design” (2018), while ‘poquitopoquito’ suggested that proofing graphic design work requires a dedicated role (2018).
As these examples indicate, many graphic designers are conflicted about their job titles. Moreover, even the act of explaining their professional practice appears problematic for many, a phenomenon described by Dorland when she observes graphic designers seem unwilling to engage seriously with the topic (Dorland 2017b). What also emerges are indications that the broader transitory and evolving graphic design industry, particularly as it has intersected with emerging digital technologies, is contributing to these ambiguities. It is a process that persists in the contemporary post-digital job market, where a plethora of new roles and requirements present challenges not only for professional designers, but also for educators (Davis 2008; Dziobczenski & Person 2017; Dziobczenski, Person et al. 2018). Without getting sidetracked by debates around disruptive technologies (Bower & Christensen 1995; Christensen & Overdorf 2000; Ashburner, Bell et al. 2016), it is evident from the above examples that increased usability, crowdsourcing (Massanari 2012) and availability of interactive design software have all contributed to the ambiguity of the roles that graphic designers are expected to be able to perform (Girard & Stark 2002). Indeed, in interactive design, even at a senior level, traditional creative roles that designers are used to carrying out continue to come under threat from technology (Penston 2016) and potentially even from artificial intelligence (Micallef 2016).

Over and above the ambiguity of the term, in many cases the desire for professional practitioners to distance themselves from the graphic design label appeared intertwined with perceptions about its status and even its effect on their actual roles and contested responsibilities within the creative process itself. Additionally, from self-employed designers choosing their own job titles or, as discussed shortly, designers wanting alternative job titles, there is an indication that the practices associated with the term ‘graphic design’ are perceived, by graphic designers, as contributing to a lack of design capital.

### Gravitas, authority and design capital

Several designers with whom I worked over the years disparaged the term ‘graphic designer’. Some complained that they preferred the terms ‘art director’, ‘creative consultant’ or similar titles on their business cards. One designer bemoaned that when he used ‘graphic designer’ he would be mocked for being “just a typesetter”, a term which he felt devalued his professional status. This perceived lack of gravitas is further illustrated in the following anecdote. A graphic designer I once worked alongside had spent several weeks researching and creating concepts for a new logo. One day, one of the sales managers brought in several of his own variations on the logo which he had ‘designed’ at
home “using some clip-art I found on the web” and was genuinely confused about why his input was rebuffed. The perception that graphic designers are uniquely lacking in design capital emerged throughout the interviews. During her interview, Margo stated that:

You get told that you are ‘the creative one’, but then they say that their relative did some art in year 12 and so they are going to run the design past them first. You wouldn’t get that in any other profession. (Margo 2013)

It is a stakeholder attitude to graphic design value which Fishel ascribes to the nebulous nature of graphic design: “Everyone’s a designer … it’s a job that looks fun, so how hard could it be?” (2008, p. 58). Other sources document stakeholder dismissal of graphic designers’ value as being limited to producing “whizzy graphics” (Banks, Calvey et al. 2002, p. 260).

Many of the interviewees attributed this lack of gravitas and understanding by stakeholders, at least partially, to their job titles. As a result, the reinvention of job titles and even a refocusing of their actual practices were common among most of the interview respondents. Marcus, for example, is self-employed. He uses the title ‘creative director’ and describes his work as “a means to an end for companies to produce creative materials and further their creative direction in the world”. As the interview progressed, Marcus acknowledged that he had assumed this more prestigious-sounding job title after becoming self-employed and alongside becoming “less scared” of senior stakeholders. Indeed, after doing so and despite describing salespeople as movie “villains”, he felt he had actually gained respect for “good salespeople” (2013).

Another self-employed designer, Karen, describes herself as a “service designer’, a term she feels is more applicable to her current role, as opposed to the “traditional graphic design” which she used to perform. Service design is a comparatively new practice (Karpen, Gemser et al. 2017), with the term itself being contested in both professional as well as academic practice (Nisula 2012; Partnership 2012). The significance of Karen’s insistence on the use of the title ‘service designer’ lies in its capacity to distance herself from what she perceives as the more “menial tasks” of graphic designers (2013).

The graphic designer’s perceptions of their own status within the design process was specifically explored during the interviews. One of the ways in which this was probed was to ask the interviewees to visualise themselves, in relation to stakeholders, within an exaggerated and stereotypical hierarchical scenario. This is a conceptual method repurposed in various formats within, for example, usability and interactive design (Mattelmäki & Keinonen 2001; Blythe & Wright 2006). During the interviews, I
deployed this method to ask the graphic designers where they visualised themselves within an army. While most of the designers positioned themselves centrally in important positions, most also qualified their importance by downgrading their authority. For example, Gary described his army role as being “on the ground, but in charge of a smaller group. Not too high up. On the field – slightly in charge” (2013). Similarly, Bruce suggested that he would be something “Off to the side. Really important, but no authority” (2013). Moreover, most interviewees also chose peripheral or supporting roles in this metaphorical army. For example, Bruce suggested that he would be a store manager, Patricia (2013) chose a “nurse” and Maureen (2013) wanted to be a “cook”. Indeed, despite the nature of the question only one designer, Cedric, actually chose a military title – that of “General” (2013) – suggesting a tacit identification from most of the graphic designers of their organisational status.

The online discussions which engaged with themes of design capital also reflected the perception of graphic designers as being central yet lacking in authority in the creative process. Often this manifested in the form of designers perceiving themselves as caught in between the client brief, the stakeholders and the design output itself. During a discussion on Graphic Design Forums, ‘Just-B’ suggested that this is because stakeholders “are out on the front lines dealing with the clients and making promises to make the sale. They end up thinking the accounts belong to them and everyone else is just there to help” (2018). This is a perception which several other posters acknowledged, with ‘cornfed’ stating that “I deal with this scenario daily. It drives me clinically insane” (2018), while ‘Steve_O’ simply reflected that “Everyone is an art director” (2018).

These design interview examples show how changing job titles has been at least a partial response by graphic designers wishing to increase their design capital. In Marcus’s case it functioned to increase self-confidence when dealing with stakeholders and in Karen’s case it served to elevate her practice over and above the perceived lowly status of ‘mere’ graphic design. Indeed, one of the motivations for Marcus’s and Karen’s desires to become self-employed was to avoid the obvious ‘designer-in-the-middle’ frustrations, which the posters on Graphic Design Forums were also discontented about.
Differing perceptions of stakeholders

Stakeholder roles and definitions, with regard to when and how they interact with graphic designers, can be nebulous. For this research, the term stakeholder applies to job roles that professionally interact with graphic designers and have creative investment in the design process and its outcome. As listed in the interview questionnaire itself (Appendix 1, page 150) writing and editorial positions are common, as are sales and marketing, print production, software development, as well as numerous project management and client liaison roles. However, stakeholder roles are fluid, differ between organisations and can overlap. In addition, the organisational positioning of designer–stakeholder relationships is not a constant. Stakeholders might interact with the designer as a client, at other times as a colleague, at other times as a service provider, and sometimes as an external collaborator or contractor. In maintaining the research’s focus on graphic designers’ perceptions of their interactions with stakeholders, absolute terminological specifications are unnecessary. These roles were introduced in the interviews as a baseline, but it was overtly signposted to the respondents that they need not stick to the stakeholder terms listed. Similarly, as will be shown in Chapter 3, the interview analysis methods allowed for this fluidity.

A scarcity of academic literature on relationships between graphic designers and stakeholders necessitates drawing from a wider design discourse. Some research focuses on issues around managerially imposed design constraints, such as balancing designers’ creativity alongside budgets and client requirements (Jacobs 2017), while others suggest that creative conflict can arise when stakeholders lack experience of designers or design itself (Mark, David et al. 2002; Holzmann & Golan 2016). It has also been suggested that the close proximity and interdependence, yet differing perceptions, of graphic designers and stakeholders (Wall & Callister 1995), or even an overfamiliarity with each other’s creative practices (Ephross & Vassil 1993), can result in conflict between designers and stakeholders.

Some design sources suggest that the requirement to compromise, within the design process, could be contributing to graphic designers’ overall malaise. For example, while graphic designers may initially be inspired by the promise of a dream career (Wood 2015), challenges, excitement and rewards (Leonard 2016) or even a love of design (Oldham 2017), the reality is that the graphic design process itself is usually one of compromise (Arias, Eden et al. 2000; Dorst 2009; Ambrose & Aono–Billson 2011; Arntson 2012). Moreover, there is evidence that these compromises are not always equal or easily achievable, a complex and uneven playing field that graphic designers are sensitive to, as they seek solutions (Lawson 2006; Benson & Dresdow 2014). That these compromises are
integrally influenced by the involvement of stakeholders (Crawford 2008; Greever 2015) and subject to regulation, measurement, rigid hierarchies and audit often results in a professional practice reality which, as Dorland notes, is even at odds with the design industry’s own marketing portrayal of itself (2009).

Some broader design discourses have been informative when interrogating everyday relations between graphic designers and stakeholders. While many outcomes from the graphic designer interviews echoed similar themes, the interviews provided additional and more refined outcomes not found in the wider academic or online discourse, or in my own experience. These findings emerged when the graphic designer interviewees’ perceptions of specific stakeholders were compared. To illustrate this, the next sections focus on two specific stakeholder groups: salespeople and writers.

**Stakeholders who sell**

A branding agency that I once worked with had a sign on the design studio door which stated “No Sales People Allowed”. I was surprised to learn that this policy was enforced and also supported by senior management. It was an unusually explicit manifestation of what will be shown to be an industry malaise: graphic designers’ concerns about sales stakeholders overstepping boundaries and intruding on their practice.

During the interviews, sales stakeholders were the group which most of the graphic designers expressed the most hostility towards. In particular, salespeople were the least likely to be socialised with, or trusted. One interviewee, Bruce, described salespeople as “flash Harrys” who “just try and tell you what you want to hear”; Patricia suggested that sales stakeholders “don’t really understand the process”; while Margo went even further, stating that she hated salespeople, describing them as “cockroaches” who were “full of bullshit”, very “behind the trends” in graphic design and “getting worse”. These examples indicate a correlation with some of the above suggestions that a lack of affinity or understanding of the design process can lead to creative conflict (Mark, David et al. 2002; Holzmann & Golan 2016; Jacobs 2017).

Some of the most pervasive conflictive narratives with stakeholders were perceived by the graphic designers to have occurred within the aforementioned hierarchies of access and lack of compromise. Indeed, several of the graphic designer interviewees offered explanations for what they perceived as the intrusive behaviour of sales stakeholders into their everyday practice. Shirley suggested that sales stakeholders had misguided creative
aspirations of their own but didn’t trust graphic designers to implement them: “they have ideas and want to articulate them, but they don’t want to have to rely on designers”. Marcus believed that salespeople were wilfully dismissive of graphic designers: “They have a sense of false confidence and bravado”, and even of design itself: “they just want the final product, it’s very one-sided. They want to be involved in the process, but are not interested in the design”. Cedric, a former graphic design business owner, believed that having a salesperson organisationally positioned between the client and the designer indicated “top-down communication”, which he suggested was organisationally problematic. Instead, Cedric believed that graphic designers need to have direct access to clients as a primary source of the design brief, stating that separating designers from the client “doesn’t work in a culture where design plays a role as a bridge between what you buy”.

Online debates among graphic designers appear to mirror the antipathy shown by the interviewees towards sales stakeholders. For example, a discussion thread from 2018, entitled “One of my biggest pet peeves” (Various 2018), opens with ‘Kristin’ criticising how “sales people overstep their boundaries and try to dictate the designs” (2018). This complaint was supported by ‘designzombie’, who stated that “This happens at every company I’ve worked for”, adding: “sales and marketing have no boundaries when it comes to graphic design” (2018). Mirroring Cedric’s views about direct access to clients, ‘Neverman’ stated that “Often the reason they [salespeople] think they should tell you what to do as an artist, is because they believe they understand what their client wants as they’ve spoken with them – and you haven’t” (2018).

This antipathy towards the sales function is intriguing when one considers that the contemporary graphic design industry is an inherently commercial practice and, as such, the sales function is an integral part of it (Meggs & Purvis 2012). For example, graphically designed advertising is intended to sell products and services (Frascara 1988, Arntson 2012); branding and corporate identity development are created to sell ideas (Knapp 2001); as are websites, mobile applications and the plethora of other online and offline interactive commercial design-driven products (Landa 2011). At the same time, these tensions between graphic designers and sales stakeholders are perhaps symbolic of designers’ more overt role within traditional commercial communication areas such as branding (Crisp, Arthur et al. 2010).
Matthew Soar’s suggestion (2002) that graphic designers, uniquely, only have a limited degree of control over their creative work may hold a clue to some of the frustrations about their creative role versus the compromises of commercial practice, mirroring earlier suggestions in Vivien Walsh’s (1996) research about compromises between commercial and creative aspects of graphic design. However, this antipathy appears to stem from designers’ perceptions of lacking equality of access to these design compromises. In summary, what has emerged from the interviews and online sources alike are two key areas of potential conflict between graphic designers and stakeholders. Firstly, there is a perception by graphic designers that sales stakeholders are unknowledgeable and dismissive of the professional importance of design and, secondly, there is a perception that the sales stakeholders act as barriers to the primary source of creative requirements, by positioning themselves organisationally between the designers and the clients.

**Stakeholders who write**

The prologue at the beginning of this research, which indicates a demarcation in boundaries and practices between copywriters and graphic designers, has been used to figuratively anchor the topic of the research. It is a binary, discordant portrayal, leaving little room for nuance. Indeed, a discord-centred narrative is even acknowledged by some writers, (Portent 2011) stating that writers are “hated” by designers, because writers don’t understand what designers do, encroach into designers’ practice and neglect to provide them with adequate briefs. Another writer, in acknowledging that they do not understand graphic designers’ “magic powers”, advocates for building bridges with designers by explaining writers’ roles and claiming shared affinities (Leclaire 2015). As will be shown, while sometimes expressing similarly overtly conflictual narratives, graphic designers’ actual perceptions of their relationships with writers is found to be complex and organisationally contextual.

In stark contrast to their negative views about salespeople, the graphic designer interviewees almost overwhelmingly regarded writers in a favourable light. Indeed, writers were especially praised on issues relating to trust and reliability. For example, when questioned nearly all the interviewees responded that they would nominate writers, over any other stakeholder, to “look after their pet and water their plants whilst they were on holiday”. Moreover, writers were considered to be organisationally essential and competent,
with Stanley (2013) describing them as “worldly and reliable” and Patricia (2013) believing them to be “assertive and critical within the design process”. Margo, the designer who had earlier described salespeople as “cockroaches”, lauded writers as “heroes” (2013).

There are also indications that the graphic designer interviewees felt a personal affinity with writers. Writers were the stakeholder group which the interviewees were most likely to socialise with, Marcus (2013) suggesting that they were “more social” and probably “watch films and drink red wine”, and both Cedric (2013) and Patricia (2013) perceiving writers as having “creative hobbies”. Writers’ physical personas were also perceived in relaxed terms, with Margo (2013) and Gary (2013) envisioning them as working at home in their pyjamas, while Bruce described them as looking casual “as if they don’t care about fashion”.

These findings indicate that, while many of the graphic designers where overtly vehement in their views about different stakeholder group, they are largely reflective of the perceived behaviour of stakeholder personas, combined with designers’ sense of lacking design capital. When under the conditions of the dramaturgic interviews, the one dimensional views become more nuanced.

**Designer interviews offer nuance over online narratives**

Interactive online discourses often seemed at odds with the interviewees’ perceptions, with examples even of writers themselves believe that designers “hate” them (Portent 2011). Extending the antipathy towards salespeople into relations with writers, one graphic designer’s response to the aforementioned article by Leclaire (2015) was blunt:

> Well, then shut up, writers and don't suggest colors or placement of elements. We don't tell you where to put a comma, do we? Tell me to try orange type on a blue background once more and you'll get a dangling participle right up your semi-colon. Period! (Schneider 2015)

The commenter ‘Schneider’ continued that, in relationships between designers and writers: “I have seldom seen the two work well together, but that's the nature of the beast.”

These online responses appear strongly at odds with the positive perceptions of writers by the graphic designer interviewees and suggests that the communication mediums themselves are a factor. The online negativity towards all stakeholders can perhaps be explained by online culture providing a convenient format for complaining (Striteský & Stránská 2015). It is also plausible that, as Lawson suggests (2006), interviews in general
are a format that are a preferred medium of communication for designers, as an outlet to
discuss their practices outside of the normative context of their professional practice,
thereby allowing a more comprehensive and comprehensive set of opinions to emerge.
However, it may also indicate that the defamiliarising methodology of the dramaturgic
interviews has been successful in nuancing the graphic designers’ responses. Conducting
the interviews within a strange dramaturgic framework further enabled the designers to
reflect on phenomena which would normally be hidden within their everyday professional
practice, and so allowed more congenial and nuanced reflections about their relations with
stakeholders to emerge. Indeed, a suggested further research direction might involve setting
up a series of ‘controlled’ online discussions for graphic designers to discuss the exact same
themes as would be asked during face-to-face interviews, before comparing the outcomes.

Reflecting on my own industry experience, I realised that my initial assumptions had been
paradoxical. I had entered into the research with an expectation of discovering the same
narrative which emerged from the online forums, blog posts and opinion pieces, despite
the fact that my perceptions of my own professional experiences with writers are broadly
similar to those of the graphic designer interviewees. This suggests that my preconceived
ideas about the interviewees’ relationships with stakeholders had been overly influenced by
external and vernacular narratives. My initial experiential assumptions about graphic
designers’ relationships with writers has been unpacked by the research and resulted in a
more three-dimensional outcome. At the same time, while the interviews indicate that
graphic designers and writers appear to have good social and professional relations, other
sources of discourse suggest that this may not be the case if writers stray into areas of
practice that graphic designers consider their own or, as with the sales stakeholders,
assume the ‘gatekeeper’ role and become perceived as creative barriers by designers.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter indicates that professional ambiguity around graphic designers’ job titles and
roles is evident in the graphic designer interviews, is represented in online vernacular
narratives and supports the overall experiences from my own professional design practice.
The ambivalent, and often conflictual, relationship that most of the graphic designer interviewees and online posters had with the term ‘graphic design’ appears to have manifested for two main reasons. Firstly is its lack of clarity in describing their actual professional practices and secondly is the belief that this term lacks the professional gravitas which designers believe they need in order to unlock design capital. As a result, both reasons have been cited as contributing to conflictual relationships with stakeholders.

As shown by the circularity of many of the discussions in online mediums, there is little evidence of this narrative having progressed over time. With a few notable exceptions, there is also scant evidence of professional or academic recognition of the phenomenon, or engagement with these apparently ingrained professional graphic designer frustrations. It is perhaps the banal familiarity of these issues within professional creative practice which has allowed these frustrations to remain stagnant, despite the rapid technological and cultural progression of the broader graphic design industry itself. It was into this familiarity that the dramaturgic design interviews intervened, by using dramaturgic metaphors as devices to begin to uncover and interpret elements of these debates which appear to have lain hidden in plain view, obscured by the surface noise of what the interviewee Stanley described as “a culture of designers complaining” about stakeholders. By contrasting outcomes from the graphic designer interviews with debates from professional sources and online discussions, it has become possible to nuance the discussion to move beyond what Stanley described as “familiar designers’ frustrations”.

The graphic designer interviews also reveal that everyday relationships between graphic designers and stakeholders aren’t as binary as many of the online narratives, professional sources and, indeed, my own assumptions suggested. The interviews have allowed the discussion to move beyond simplistic discourses about the often interchangeably used concepts of generic stakeholders or ‘clients’. For example, while relationships between writers and graphic designers may superficially appear to be as fractious as those with sales and other stakeholders, the interviews have revealed that most graphic designer respondents actually held collegial, professional and even personally positive feelings towards writers.

Nevertheless, in comparing the outcomes from the designer interviews with wider discourses, it appears that graphic designers’ frustrations have less to do with the specificity of relations with different stakeholder groups and more to do with procedural aspects of the creative process. Indeed, their frustrations manifested when any stakeholders were perceived to be acting as barriers between them and direct access to
primary sources of creative inspiration and information, whether this was the client or another source (such as the design briefing process). The result of this perceived lack of access and gravitas is a loss of design capital for the graphic designers which, in turn, can manifest in frustration towards stakeholders.

Some researchers have touched upon the disempowerment of designers as a result of being distanced from end users (Carstens 2015), having their involvement in the briefing process limited (Phillips 2014) or having their role treated as purely aesthetic (Paton & Dorst 2011). However, research which does address designer–stakeholder relations often assumes a normativity of sales or writing stakeholders as managers or gatekeepers between designers and clients (Murray 1993; Jacobs 2017). This chapter’s identification that graphic designers see these gatekeeping roles as obstructions between them and primary creative information, rather than as normative organisational conduits, challenges some of these creative industry normative hierarchies and suggests topics for further academic and creative industry research.

A further outcome discussed in this chapter is the reactive attempt by some graphic designers to increase their design capital by challenging and, where possible, upgrading their job titles. For self-employed designers, the enhancement of job titles is often accompanied by downplaying some of what these practitioners perceived to be the less authoritative practices of graphic design and by emphasising more ‘influential’ practices.

Combined with the broader circular discussions about titles and roles, the interview outcomes support the wider discourse, that the graphic design profession is still in a state of transient limbo, educationally and professionally. The attempt by graphic designers to increase their design capital by continually reinventing their job titles appears to be a desperate option. However, it indicates that more productive approaches do not widely exist for graphic designers within the broader creative industry, especially for those graphic designers who are not self-employed.

Finally, and most importantly for this project, the outcomes from the dramaturgic interviews have allowed a refinement of broader discourses about graphic designers’ relations with stakeholders. In doing so, it allows the Performative Design Brief to be informed by these findings and, as a result, to provide a more detailed set of theatrical motivations, tropes, personas and scenarios for the theatre director to interpret and for the actors to perform in the following stage of the research. This process will be discussed in the following chapter.
This chapter focuses on how the creation of a design artefact based on interviews, a design brief entitled the Performative Design Brief, continues the experimental practice of rendering professional graphic design strange. As will be shown, this chapter discusses a process, as much as it does a physical artefact. As a result the Performative Design Brief represents a metaphorical artefact and procedure, as much as a physical tool and outcome. The chapter discusses how the generation of a design brief, an otherwise normative everyday design process and artefact, has been used to reframe the core themes from the graphic design interviews into a series of performative narratives and motivations for use by a theatre director. As part of this discussion, the chapter will highlight how existing design practices, such as scenario and persona development, are used in conjunction with repurposed performative ethnographic methods to further render the graphic design process strange. The chapter will show how this has enabled increased reflection on graphic designers’ perceived relationships with stakeholders within the everyday graphic design process, as well as facilitating an investigation into the role of the design brief within the wider practice of professional graphic design and within research discourse itself.

The chapter uses narratives gleaned from Chapter 2 to inform the briefing process and to focus on the graphic designers’ perceived lack of design capital. The chapter discusses the continued channeling of these narratives using performative scenarios, personas and dramaturgic tropes. In doing so, it indicates how the Performative Design Brief process functions as a critical creative and generative research conduit which drove the thematic narratives upon which the Performance Workshops were motivated. Similarly, from a creative practice perspective, the Performative Design Brief will be shown as a generative metaphorical artefact (Inns 2002). By utilising this design briefing process as a format of academic enquiry, the chapter expands on the use of design and ethnographic research as methods for repurposing the graphic designer interviews into dramaturgic personas and scenarios. In turn, it interrogates the creation of new methods of making strange for
critical reflection on original ethnographic sources, as well as expanding performative ethnographic and design research discourse. The chapter continues by further evidencing the ambiguities of practice within professional graphic design, with particular reference to the widely neglected area of the design brief and graphic designers’ perceptions of its role. This identifies a gap extending into wider creative disciplines. As a result, the chapter engages with aligned professional design practices to bring several specificities about the largely overlooked area of design briefs into the academic discourses of professional creative practice. In discussing how the Performative Design Brief process intersects with the wider doctoral research, the chapter identifies an unacknowledged lack of consistency of briefing processes within professional practice, as well as an academic gap in the study of the graphic design briefing process itself. Moreover, the chapter identifies how discourses around graphic design briefing processes are complex, often poorly defined and, as a result, become problematic within both professional and academic practices.

Having established the importance of the design brief within professional practice, the discussion will move on to contextualise the briefing process within professional graphic design practice in relation to existing design research. It will acknowledge the wider influence of scholarly design research and its relevance in problematising design practice, research methodologies, attempts to understand how professional designers think and act and, in particular, its contribution to the practices of making the familiar strange. However, the chapter also highlights the limitations of these discourses with regards to applying the methods to the specificities and processes of professional graphic design practice, notably the gap in identifying graphic design as a distinct practice with its own processes. Having engaged with the weaknesses of existing design research discourse, the chapter then interrogates the co-option of key discourses which inform the methods of the research, in particular performative ethnography, as well as the influence of persona and scenario development from aligned design practices.

To accompany this research, written parts from the briefing process have been re-compiled into an artefactual design outcome and documentation, as well as an aid for reflecting on and communicating the briefing process. This physical outcome is referred to as the ‘artefactual’ Performative Design Brief and its contents are examined and contextualised towards the end of this chapter. The diagram on page 61 (Fig. 6) visualises where in the research this discussion sits and indicates how the different elements of the research fed into the creation of the Performative Design Brief. It shows how the

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2 The Performative Design Brief is located as a separately supplied document.
Performative Design Brief process produced two distinct design outcomes: the design brief itself and, as a result of the briefing process, theatrical thematic motivations for the Performance Workshops, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Having contextualised the briefing process, the chapter will focus on the generation of the Brief itself. The chapter will indicate how the thematic outcomes of Chapter 2 were amalgamated and distilled into practical theatrical tropes, fictional scenarios and personas for use within the briefing process. It will also discuss the methods, including a repurposed tabular approach, which were used to inform the creation of scenarios, personas and motivations for the actors in the Performance Workshops. The chapter also introduces the theatre director as a stakeholder within the briefing process. In contextualising the Performative Design Brief process as a further procedural step towards making professional graphic design practice strange, the chapter problematises the briefing process and reflects on the discoveries. It is an approach which the design theorist Alain Findeli refers to when using a brief to look for the ‘dark side’ of a design issue: looking at the human context, rather than treating the brief as merely an artefactual description (2001). From a practical perspective, the chapter highlights how using the performative briefing method functioned as a motivational and thematic tool for the theatre director to take into the Performance Workshops. Furthermore, it suggests that the methods used offer insights which may be repurposed beyond academic research, acting as metaphorical prototypes for future use within professional design practice.
Figure 6 | Research process diagram 4

- **Chapter 1**: Introduction
- **Chapter 2**: Reflection and methodology development
- **Chapter 3**: Academic literature
- **Chapter 4**: Written briefing documents
- **Conclusion**: Performative workshops

- **Chapter 1**: Professional industry hypotheses
- **Chapter 2**: Vernacular sources – forums, websites, blogs
- **Chapter 3**: Interviews with graphic designers
- **Chapter 4**: Discussions and emails with theatre director

- **Dramaturgic metaphor**
- **Design Brief**
- **Theatrical Direction**
- **Performative Workshop**
Professional graphic design practice and design research

The centrality of the briefing process to professional graphic design practice and its influence on graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders bring the everyday practices of professional graphic design acutely into contact with academic design research discourse. As a result, it becomes necessary to engage with this discourse.

The introduction to this dissertation positioned graphic design, in its professional form, as a comparatively recent emergence – a historically evolving and transient practice. The wider field of design, as an academic discipline, is similarly nascent (Vaughan 2017), consisting of “imperfect methods” (Lawson 2004, p. 5). But it is also a discipline which has staked a claim to being a specific discourse in itself, comparable to the two established discourses of the sciences and the arts. Key theorists whose research informs this overview include Cross, who argues that design is a specific methodological academic discipline, partially due to designers’ unique ways of knowing (2006). For Cross, design’s contribution has long remained unidentified, resulting in it being inadequately articulated. This has consequently stalled or prevented its acceptance as an equal alongside science and art (2006). Donald Schön (1983, 1987) builds on this approach by informing the broader framework of reflecting-in and reflecting-on design practice and Bryan Lawson’s (2004, 2006) work is informative, predominantly for his experiments into what it is that designers know and think as they carry out the activities of ‘doing’ design.

Lawson, comparing architecture and science students, argues for a specific category of activity to describe designers’ behaviour, which is different to that of scientists. The differences, for Lawson, are that designers are more likely to propose solutions to problems until a solution is found (synthesis), whereas scientists focus on the problem itself in an attempt to discover the rules (analysis) (1979, 2006). Drawing on this, Cross suggests that designers learn their solution-focused approach as part of their education process (2006). However, he also suggests professional practice reasons for this design approach: that key features of designers’ activities rely on the fast-paced generation of “satisfactory” solutions, rather than on “prolonged analysis of the problem” (2006, p. 7). Cross suggests that the reason for designers’ adoption of these methods is that they are constrained by their professional requirements of time and practicality, resulting in the problems they face being ill defined, unstructured or what Buchanan described as “wicked” (1992), in contrast to the requirements for scientists and scholars, who can place their judgements and decisions on hold, and where even leaving their results open-ended is professionally legitimate. It is because of these constraints, Cross argues, that designers...
have learned to define the limits of the problems they are presented with and to apply solutions within these limited frameworks (2006). This is a continuation of the argument for an academisation of design and serves its purpose as such. However, as will be discussed shortly, these broad definitions become problematic when brought into contact with the procedural aspects of professional design practice.

Both Schön and Cross argue that what designers know is largely tacit and automated in the form of a repeated skill (Cross 2006), like a typist whose familiarity with a keyboard’s layout is instinctive (Schön 1992), resulting in designers finding it “difficult to externalise their knowledge” (Cross 2006, p. 9) despite usually knowing more than they are able to articulate (Schön 1983). Indeed, Schön (1992) argues that this predominantly tacit aspect of their knowledge leads designers into providing inaccurate portrayals of their knowledge. It is a knowledge that, Schön argues, can be revealed by the process of actually ‘doing’ design as a generative research activity, allowing design practitioners to transcend established theories and techniques to construct new theories of unique cases (1983). It is a process whereby designers build up a collection of (for example) notions, case studies and activities which can serve as prototypes drawn from previous familiar design activities, used to reflect on new, unfamiliar activities: “The familiar situation functions as a precedent, or a metaphor, or … an exemplar for the unfamiliar one” (1983, p. 138). It is a form of making strange, which manifests in this chapter via the generation of ethnographic narratives as I repurposed outcomes from the design interviews as part of the process of creating a design brief.

It is in acknowledgment of these wider design discourses that my research intervenes, using methods to make professional design practice strange to interrogate how professional graphic designers perceive their relations with stakeholders; in the previous chapter this has been done by invoking dramatic metaphors during interviews with graphic designers, in this chapter by repurposing those interviews using ethnographic methods and, as investigated in Chapter 4, when discussing the Performative Workshops. However, as will be discussed now, these broader informants of academic design research have limitations when investigating organisational and cultural aspects of professional design practice and, critically, fail to acknowledge the significance of graphic design as a distinct professional discipline.
Design thinking in relation to professional graphic design

Some scholars, such as Jorge Frascara, have acknowledged the specific role of graphic design in relation to design research within an industry setting (Frascara 1988). However, it is challenging to reconcile many of the broad-based assertions about professional design practice, by many design researchers, with the realities of designer–stakeholder interaction in commercial graphic design practice. This is a phenomenon which Dorland (2017a) notes when referring to the rhetoric of design thinking bearing little resemblance to the actual work of professional designers and which has also been identified by practising designers such as Pentagram partner Natasha Jen (Jen 2017, Dawood 2018). Even in wider professional practice, the identification of graphic design has, at times, been elusive. For example, a major project commissioned by the British Design Council identified most professional design practices, with the exception of the interlinked graphic design and branding design (Simon & Dixon 2001).

In researching graphic designers’ perceptions of stakeholders within professional practice, a critical weakness within most design research discourse is the failure to address graphic design as a distinct research discipline. For example, Cross (2011) asserts that the same aspects of design thinking are equally valid across all domains of design, at the same time acknowledging that design research is heavily weighted towards specific disciplines (such as architecture and product design) and that other fields, including graphic design, remain under-researched. This telegraphs the limitations of such broad-based hypotheses for tackling the industry specificities within professional graphic design practice. Similarly, Lawson’s (2006) assumption that an ability to draw is critical to graphic design and hence integral to design research lacks evidence, jarring with my professional experience and rarely appearing as a requirement in graphic design job descriptions (Abramson 2017; Dziobczenski & Person 2017; Laort 2018). As evidenced in the online examples from Chapter 2, even Schön’s attribution of technical expertise as a signifier of design professionalism (1983) seems distant to the experience of professional graphic design practice, where many designers are keen to differentiate themselves from technically focused professionals. These generalisations are understandable, partially due to the limitations of drawing from a still evolving set of what Lawson accepts are “imperfect methods” (2004, p. 5) which have emerged from a series of design disciplines often only tenuously connected to professional graphic design practice.
This assumption of alikeness of professional design practices may be an unintentional
default of design research, reflecting its historical location as a broader educational
discourse. As Lisa Grocott notes, the paradox of design research is that it is largely located
outside of professional design practice (2010). Nevertheless, treating design as a broad
discursive theory limits the effectiveness of design research discourse, in isolation, for
properly interrogating professional graphic designers’ perceptions of stakeholders.
Contrastingly, my research intentionally brings the procedural aspects of my professional
practice into academic discourse and, while acknowledging where appropriate the
contribution of design research discourse, leans towards the often neglected “speculative,
discursive and open-ended nature of design practice” (Grocott 2010, p. 28). Therefore, as
will be shown, while drawing upon and informing the wider discourse of design research,
it is largely for these reasons that experimental dramaturgically inspired methods such as
performance ethnography have also been drawn upon as generators of the Performative
Design Brief process. Before engaging with these methods, it is necessary to contextualise
the design brief within professional graphic design practice.

Contextualising the design brief

To further cement the specificity of the brief within this graphic design-focused research,
it is necessary to contextualise the briefing process. This requires a discussion about the
broader composition and role of professional design briefs, along with an understanding
of how this wider framework informs the Performative Design Brief as it is used in this
research. Owing to the discrepancies in the graphic designer narratives which emerged
during Chapter 2, the discussion also engages with theoretical discourses of the briefing
process, alongside the experiential perceptions of those practising graphic designers.

Firstly, it is important to differentiate the graphic design brief from the operational briefs
of architectural design (Khan 2009, Blyth and Worthington 2010) and those used in
technical practices such as software development or IT systems design, which have
extensive industry-formalised briefing practices and models such as the waterfall system
(Petersen, Wohlin et al. 2009) or more modern processes such as Agile (Martin 2003).
Software development, architectural and other technical briefs are necessarily more
formulaically structured. Their requirements are generally empirically and mechanistically
located, and often mission critical. In contrast, the conceptual nature of creative briefs in advertising and graphic design briefs creates the potential for them to be arbitrarily interpreted. It is partially within that context that this discussion sits.

With insufficient attention cast on the graphic design profession as a whole (Soar 2002; Logan 2006; Heller 2015; Jacobs 2017; Walker 2017), there is even less focus on the briefing process within the graphic design profession. Even in wider design discourse, there is surprisingly little research on the briefing process (Paton & Dorst 2011; Jones & Askland 2012). There also appears to be little consistency about the form that a brief takes. Some sources suggest that a brief only requires one page (Nov & Jones 2006; Elebute 2016) or even a single line of text (Jones & Askland 2012), while at other times the brief is described as a complex, high-level document embedded within a design process which designers respond to with the aim of producing an end product to satisfy clients’ requirements (Patterson & Saville 2012; Ambrose 2015). Ashby and Johnson refer to the design brief as a “solution neutral” statement, the aim being to avoid preconceptions or the narrowing the creative possibilities of a project (2010, p. 40). Others describe a consultative (Walsh 1996), collaborative and stakeholder-inclusive process (Phillips 2014).

Within academic design discourse, briefs inevitably manifest as an assumed artefact or process, customised for the specific research purposes; but the reason for their use or the antecedent for the chosen format are rarely addressed. For example, in one of Dorst and Cross's studies (2001) the elements of the design brief are described. They also describe at what stage of the investigation the brief is introduced and present a partial example of the brief. However, there is no explanation of the form of the brief or the reasons behind it. They simply describe it as being typical for the design medium and add that its use was considered a critical part of addressing the design problem. In a different study from advertising, the researchers admit that the omission of crucial elements from the creative brief which would normally be present in professional practice had a detrimental effect on their results (Johar, Holbrook et al. 2001). One exception comes from a study of the design brief as a pedagogical tool amongst business students and indicates that interaction with, and changes to, elements of a design brief impacts the overall learning process of participants, with the brief functioning as a trigger of that process (Sadowska & Laffy 2017). This acknowledgement of the agency of a design brief emphasises its importance for professional designers (Koslow, Sasser et al. 2003; Phillips 2014), and its use as a scholarly device informs the role of the Performative Design Brief as a reflective and motivational conduit.
The academic gap in the study of the creative and design brief, combined with the inconsistencies within professional practice, requires further investigation within, and between, both spheres. Until this further research is done, one can only hypothesise about influences, such as cultural and historical factors. Nevertheless, it is in an acknowledgment of these gaps that this chapter engages so closely with professional design briefing processes. However, the Performatively Design Brief process also informs the research methodology itself, as a way of making strange and unpacking graphic designers’ assumptions about their relationships with stakeholders. In that regard, it is worth reflecting on why the briefing process has been so neglected within creative academic disciplines and why, within professional creative practices, there are few agreed formal processes.

The brief in professional graphic design practice

A study by Bec Paton and Kees Dorst (2011) with fifteen professional graphic designers attempts to dissect designers’ perceptions of different aspects of briefing as a process of “framing”. It is relevant to this research in that, by building on the academic theories of more generalised design researchers such as Cross (2006), Lawson (2006) and Schön (1983, 1987), the study suggests that most of the designers preferred a collaborative briefing process where both they and client stakeholders were directly involved, without intermediaries. This suggests concurrence with the desire, from the graphic designers in Chapter 2, for direct engagement with the primary sources of creative inspiration. It is a practice which many of the graphic designers suggested and which Murray notes in her ethnographic study (1993) rarely occurs. Moreover, as will be discussed, this lack of direct engagement has resulted in graphic designers’ practices often having to become adaptive, reactive and even experimental.

Literature from within professional practice on the creation and function of graphic design briefs is often formulaic (Phillips 2014), from professional bodies such as the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA 2011) or variations on simplistic templates from mass-market print shops such as Kwik Kopy (2016), to marketing-driven and brand-development approaches (Cracker 2016) and instructional YouTube videos (TastyTuts 2017). This, once again, highlights the inconsistencies of the design brief in professional practice. At the same time, these numerous forms of communication indicate a pattern of acknowledgement within the industry of both the importance of the brief, as well as the desire, by professional graphic design bodies, commentators and suppliers, to ensure that both designers and stakeholders engage properly with the design briefing process.
Indeed, within online discourse the lack of clearly defined frameworks for graphic design briefs is an often viscerally debated topic. As the following example from Graphic Design Forums (2016) indicates, the discourse is, yet again, interspersed with graphic designers’ perceptions of stakeholder belligerence and misunderstanding. In this discussion, designer experiences range from only ever receiving informal verbal instructions – “Basically, we’ve been handed design work and they tell us ‘We need this by EOD’” (VFernandes 2016) – to being forced to pressure stakeholders to provide a brief – “Put the burden on them to flesh out the details of a real brief and provide comprehensive material input” (HotButton 2016) – to resignation that attempting to gain adequate design briefs from stakeholders is inherently futile because – “they will most likely never change” (KitchWitch 2016). These negative assumptions reinforce Koslow, Sasser et al.’s (2003) research within advertising agencies suggesting that the lack of a comprehensive brief is the most terrifying thing for designers within the creative process.

Much of the aforementioned research is consistent with my own professional graphic design practice. For example, the brief is a key initial method of communication between designers and stakeholders, and can serve a number of functions including: outlining the creative requirements, intended audience and scope of the project; confirming project requirements; and assigning and documenting roles, procedures, methods and approval processes. The format of design briefs varies from complex multi-page procedural documents (Patterson & Saville 2012; Ambrose 2015) produced by marketing departments and sent to competing graphic design agencies to simple statements (Nov & Jones 2006; Jones & Askland 2012; Elebute 2016) from small to medium-sized businesses. These can be described as the initial proposition of the design brief, with the following interactions comprising the ongoing briefing process. However, in many situations Koslow, Sasser et al.’s findings pointing to concerns about the lack of adequate briefing information (2003) also ring true. Indeed, as Murray notes, despite its centrality to graphic design, the briefing process rarely lives up to designer expectations or requirements, and the approach itself is often haphazard (1993), reinforcing the necessarily adaptive and flexible nature of professional graphic design practice referred to by many design researchers (Cross 2011; Paton & Dorst 2011). However, rather than these adaptive and flexible designer abilities being seen as laudable and positive everyday design attributes, the examples highlighted in this research suggest that these traits are often perceived by professional practitioners themselves as having evolved as a result of imposition by stakeholders, rather than being embraced by graphic designers as positive designer skill sets.
Nevertheless, this adaptive and flexible approach to the briefing process is one way in which the experimental nature of this research mirrors professional graphic design practice. On many occasions I have produced the brief myself, either as clarification in response to an initial client brief – an approach sometimes referred to in other design practices as a return brief (Blyth & Kimbell 2011; Vermaas, Dorst et al. 2015) – or because the client or stakeholders have not provided one. The brief often serves multiple roles, including assigning responsibilities and scope to the project, and gaining formal client approval, but also because, as in Paton and Dorst’s study (2011), I consider stakeholder collaboration and inclusion integral parts of my design practice and crucial to a successful design process. For example, I usually try and send a copy of the brief to all major stakeholders outlining everyone’s role and how all our actions relate to deliverable outcomes. This gives everyone a chance to better understand, respond to and question the design process before it begins. Similarly, on one occasion this prompted a departmental head to identify that a new brochure would no longer be needed, as the project it covered would soon be changing its focus. It is something that might otherwise have gone unnoticed until a much later stage and wasted time and expense. My perception is also that, if stakeholders become engaged in a project, they are more likely to understand its values and complexities, and also to take joint ownership for it. This occurred during one design project, when photographs of a board of directors were required for an annual review. Consistency of photographic style was important and so a single photographer was required. The organisation had staff all over the world, which would have potentially made this process costly, and so highlighting these issues during the briefing process allowed the relevant stakeholders to coordinate the directors’ time during the organisation’s annual meeting, thereby ensuring that their photographs were taken by the same photographer.

Moreover, as my practice has developed I have increasingly treated the design brief as an educational tool encouraging stakeholders to ‘buy in’ to the design process, rather than perceiving it as a disruption of their familiar practices. It allows me to keep stakeholders informed about the tasks involved in their project and also to help in their decision-making process. Indeed, recent research in the area of co-design suggests that a collaborative approach offers both process and educational advantages, particularly in the dramaturgic area of persona development (discussed later in this chapter), which the author describes as having the ability to discover the “real” brief (Taffe 2017).
While being informed by the many discourses of design briefing formats, it is this experiential, adaptive and responsive approach to a design brief which this research has adopted for the Performative Design Brief. As Alastair Blyth and John Worthington (2010) argue, briefing is a creative process which is designed. It is a collaborative and negotiative process, but one which helps me, as a creative professional, to elucidate and manage the disparate parts of a design process such as timeframes, stakeholders and task responsibilities, as well as the cost implications of stakeholder actions such as unscheduled amendments. In that sense, it incorporates the informal verbal brief, as well as the one-page creative brief of advertising agencies, combined with some more formal project management practices, but allows for some of the fluidity of more agile approaches: acknowledging that changes may be required, but keeping all parties informed and involved. For example, in this research my interaction with the theatre director started with a series of verbal conversations, followed by a formal written brief, some email interactions and responses to questions, as well as ongoing adjustments right up until, and then throughout, the Performance Workshops themselves.

Informing the Performative Design Briefing process

The briefing process in this research has a dual function. Firstly, as an artefactual outcome, the reflections combined with the graphic designer interviews and online interactive designer discourse, as source material, to inform the design practice themes, theatrical tropes and performative motivations of the Performative Design Brief process. Secondly, the enquiry into the design briefing process allowed a reflection on the process itself, as well as intersecting with the sparse existing discourse on design and creative briefs as a whole.

Thematic methodology

As an initial source for the Performative Design brief, I utilised a linear approach to evaluating data from the designer interviews, to see if some consistent themes could be extracted for use as theatrical prompts and motivations for the Performative Workshops. A tabular approach was used, informed partially by Madsen, McKagan et al.’s (2014) use of tables to create stakeholder personas as part of developing a methodology for implementing new innovations in teaching methods.
Utilising a tabular structure has allowed me to identify and organise the designer interviewees’ responses alongside the interview questions and to identify themes and trends for the process of creating stakeholder tropes and motivations. The tables themselves (such as Figs. 7 and 8) are divided into rows, one row for each of the interview questions, and into columns which relate to designers’ answers in relation to specific stakeholders. The approach was especially helpful when interview questions had been designed to generate short, formulaic responses or answers which took the form of a list. For example, it was this method that initially indicated that most of the designer interviewees responded positively to writers in relation to questions of trust. As discussed in Chapter 2, notions of trust were interrogated with questions such as ‘which stakeholder would you most trust to look after your plants and feed your pet while you were on holiday?’ By highlighting the answers in the table, it is possible to infer that writers are overwhelmingly viewed by the designer interviewees as the most trustworthy stakeholders (Fig. 7). Similarly, the tabular method has helped to inform the theatrical persona profiles, such as highlighting stakeholders’ hobbies, tastes in clothes and so on (Fig. 8). For example, when analysing the designer interviewees’ perceptions of the clothes that stakeholders might wear, ‘casual’ could be assigned to the same category as ‘jeans and sneakers’, allowing for broader themes to be applied to personas.

As can be seen in the artefactual Performative Design Brief, many of these themes and tropes have been repurposed and presented as written examples and within theatrical scenarios. Many of these themes and tropes also re-emerged in theatrical format during the Performance Workshops, which are investigated in the following chapter.

Ethnographic context

As the primary methodology from anthropology (Atkinson, Delamont et al. 2001), ethnography encompasses a plethora of qualitative approaches to research. As with many ethnographic studies, the narratives in the Performative Design Brief comprise a hybrid of approaches, rather than a single method (Atkinson 2001). Indeed, ethnography is defined largely by its aim of enquiry: to gather data about participants within social, cultural and organisational environments (Brewer 2000; Ejimabo 2015) and to interpret and understand meanings and behaviours. The specific emphasis of ethnography is on the researcher being immersed, rather than simply observing (McGranahan 2014), often as an active participant (Brewer 2004; Sangasubana 2011; Watson 2011), thereby allowing researchers to de-centre traditional hierarchical research relationships and more closely
### Fig: 7 | Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Suit</th>
<th>Formal / suits</th>
<th>Bespoke / Made to Measure</th>
<th>Smart Casual</th>
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<th>Smart Casual, like marketing managers</th>
<th>Neat casual, to sloppy</th>
<th>T-shirt, jeans, like Steve Jobs, etc.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Account handler</td>
<td>Suit</td>
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<td>Project manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writers/journalists/editors</td>
<td>Dressy casual (with jeans)</td>
<td>Smart Casual</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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### Fig: 8 | Fashion

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</table>
engage with the subjects under study (Angrosin 2007). As discussed in Chapter 2, during the interviews this manifested when I immersed myself as a graphic designer engaging with other graphic designers, using dramaturgic devices to both make strange and metaphorically re-create the graphic design process. Indeed, contextual interviews are a staple of ethnography (Whitehead 2005), often as collaborative interactions (Skinner 2012), and are useful when digging deeper into the various meanings and contexts of the groups being studied (Ortiz 2003).

In adopting these embedded and engaged approaches, ethnography is especially useful where the topics being researched, as with relationships between designers and stakeholders, are difficult to unpack or even hidden (Hobbs 2006). Although not utilising the textually based empirical methods of institutional ethnography (DeVault 2006), the interviews draw on that discourse’s often used method of the ethnographic interview, utilising interviewees’ responses to build a broad narrative of similarities from across design organisational relations (DeVault & McCoy 2006). As such, the interviews can also be construed as an ethnographic immersion into the graphic designer interviewees’ professional practices, with the Performative Design Brief manifesting as an artefactual narrative representation (Maanen 1995) which is used as a persuasive experiential account (Geertz 1988) or cultural description (Spradley 2016) of graphic designers’ relationships with stakeholders. Viewing the Performative Design Brief as an ethnographic outcome also builds on Denzin’s assertions about the historical role of interviews being simulacral devices for the repurposing of scenarios and events into a performative ethnographic form of their original, rather than functioning simply as data-gathering exercises (Denzin 2001). In constructing the scenarios for the Performative Design Brief as an ethnographic artefactual outcome, the method also informs both professional practice and design research discourse about graphic designers’ shared assumptions (Maso 2001) of everyday professional relationships with stakeholders.

**Ethnography, dramaturgy & performative ethnography**

The scenario-based format of the Performative Design Brief also draws on narrative enquiry and manifests as reconstruction (Bruner 1995) of professional graphic design practice development as a literary device (Freeman 2004). Aspects of it have also drawn on ethnographically informed vignettes (Humphreys & Watson 2009; Berry 2017), to help clarify and inform the theatre director, using details and insights from the interviews (Jacobsen 2014). Most specifically, the Performative Design Brief is informed by some of
the methods of performative ethnography, which will be engaged with further in Chapter 4. Performative ethnography comprises a range of research activities and terms which involve ‘scripts’, performances and varying sources of ethnographic informants (Bird 2015). These approaches, as with the ethnographic method itself, tackle the transient complexities of human interaction via forms of dramaturgic reportage which maintain the characteristics of the original within an observable performative framework (Ackroyd & O’Toole 2010; Saldaña 2011). Methods have ranged from early approaches of repurposing oral histories to more recent implementations manifesting in community action (Anderson 2007) and use as tools to directly dramatise the experiences of people involved in contemporary historical events (Mienczakowski 2006), for example the London bombings of 2005 (Jupp 2010) and the Australian bushfires in 2003 (Whitton 2006).

Within performative ethnography, it is documentary (sometimes called verbatim) theatre (Paget 1987) which has been most informative for this research. Documentary theatre is developed by reproducing the words and contexts of researched participants in such a way as to treat performance as a research method more than a form of theatre (Luckhurst 2008). For the Performative Design Brief process, the work of Smith is both authoritative and informative. Her approach involves interviewing a series of participants, scripting their words and then performing the interviews at a later stage (2005), as well as often dramatising complex cultural issues (1997). In using what Barone describes as “ethnodrama”, Smith’s approach enables third parties to understand participants’ motivations vicariously (2002). In using these dramaturgic practices, Denzin describes how Smith’s work mirrors yet also enables critiques of the societal topics being portrayed (2001). It is a mirroring which has parallels with Meisiek and Barry’s analysis of organisational drama as a looking glass (Meisiek & Barry 2007), which the Performative Design Brief also channels by repurposing the outcomes from the graphic designer interviews into performative ethnographic narratives.

While my research borrows the idea of interviewing the subjects of research – the graphic designers – and repurposing their narratives performatively for the purpose of mirroring design practice, it adapts the practice by intentionally not reproducing the interviewees’ words verbatim. Instead, it draws key themes from the interviews and re-presents them as a composite for investigation via performance. This is partially an ethics issue, to conceal the interviewees’ identities. However, it also follows the research’s methodological trajectory of making strange, by reproducing composite thematic data from the interviews for further interpretation by dedicated actors using the actors’ own professional interpretative practices, in the next stage of the research – the Performative Workshops –
which will be discussed in Chapter 4. In doing so, the method draws on Saldaña’s use of ethnotheatre which, while using traditional dramaturgic practices to create experiential performances of ethnographic informants, also empowers the researcher’s own interpretations of the acquired data (2003), often using vignettes or multiple perspectives of the participants to build up an evocative, as well as data-driven performativity (1998). In that sense, my method is closer to the professional and academic design methods of persona and scenario development (discussed shortly). One way in which this research’s methods diverge with Saldaña’s is that theatrical entertainment for an audience is not a concern. Indeed, especially at this prototype stage, it is purely a dramaturgically informed research tool, with the audience being primarily myself, as a researcher, and the actors as additional informants. Outcomes which emerge from this in the Performance Workshops, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Smith’s use of non-actors as dramaturges, to assist in the preparation of scripts (Denzin 2001), is also channelled in my use of the designer interviewees as dramaturgic informants. Indeed, the case for designers as dramaturges, and even auteurs, has been argued for (Meany and Clark 2012; Curtis 2016). For example, Michael Rock suggests that graphic designers can sometimes satisfy the three basic criteria of an auteur: technical ability, a signature creative style which gives meaning to their work, and a consistent creative vision (2002). Within my research, the designer interviewees act as both subjects of the research and as dramaturges, in that the narratives from the interviews inform the metaphorical ‘script’ of the Performative Design Brief for the performance part of the research. As such, they also become metaphorical actors in what some service designers call co-production (Hatami 2011), forming a collaborative design process which also includes myself, as designer auteur, and the theatre director.

The Performative Design Brief as a professional process and research ethnography

Dorland’s immersion in a design studio (2016, 2017b) and Murray’s earlier study (1993) are rare examples of ethnographic research specifically set within professional graphic design. However, within broader professional design practice, ethnography has been more widely used, for example where traditional research methods such as focus groups and surveys have been found to be insufficient for understanding how people interact with technologies via persona development (Blomquist & Arvola 2002; Binder & Brandt
2008), prototyping and imagining future design scenarios (Halse 2010) and investigating how people interact with each other via interactive design mediums (Blomberg, Burrell et al. 2003; Blythe & Wright 2006).

The Performative Design Brief builds on this ethnographic base by contextualising it within a design research framework by using more formalised graphic design briefing formats, and adopting and adapting existing persona and scenario development methods of allied professional design practices. For example, in academic design discourse ethnography has featured in participatory and experimental design research (Clark & Caldwell 2016; Clarke 2016). In utilising scenarios and personas as narrative devices, the scenarios in the Performative Design Brief leverage the storytelling function of graphic design (Bennett & Bennett 2006) and enable it to function as a narrative design artefact, an intentional simulacrum (Baudrillard 1994) of professional graphic design practice containing artefacts of performance writing (Denzin 2001), which aid in making graphic design practice strange and for use as performative probes for the actors during the Performance Workshops.

Persona and, as a result, scenario development is not common within traditional graphic design, with professionals typically relying on intuition, observation, conversations with clients and research about clients’ customers (Givenchi, Groulx et al. 2006). However, within allied discourses such as interactive design, it is a far more common practice where personas are developed as metaphorical ‘users’ (Massanari 2010; Eriksson, Artman et al. 2013). The Performative Design Brief scenarios are informed by existing design practices of persona and scenario development, for example within product design and testing (Penin & Tonkinwise 2009) and where qualitative observational and other data is used to create personas and scenarios (Pruitt & Grudin). In the context of this chapter, persona and scenario development is used as a design practice which helps to inform an enriched understanding of stakeholders’ perspectives (Blomquist & Arvola 2002; Johansson & Messeter 2005; Rosson & Carrol 2009) and as a form of making strange (Djajadiningrat, Gaver et al. 2000) for critical reflection (Bell, Blythe et al. 2005; Blythe & Wright 2006). In doing so via the designer interviews, as well as comprising elements of both biography and ethnography, it defines the scenarios as both process-driven and artefactual outcomes (Ellis, Adams et al. 2011) of graphic design practice.
The artefactual Performative Design Brief

The physical Performative Design Brief is an artefactual creative outcome of the graphic design interviews, the tabular method and ethnographic reflections. In channelling the outcomes of these methods, it represents the graphic designers’ perceptions of their professional relationships with stakeholders, and it is these perceptions which were turned into performative personas, scenarios, tropes and motivations for the actors to re-create in the Performance Workshops.

As well as reproducing verbatim content from various exchanges between myself and the theatre director, the physical Performative Design Brief includes a scenarios section which contains overall themes, a short set-up of each scene and input from the designer interviews which feeds into each scenario, as well as sections on different stakeholder roles and motivations which the theatre director used as motivation for the actors. For example, on page 5 of the artefactual Performative Design Brief a probe from the interview questionnaire, “it won't take you long”, is dramatised. A scenario background is given, followed by responses from the graphic designer interviewees. A list of key stakeholder protagonists and motivations follows this to complete the scenario. In another scenario, account handlers have been described as being concerned with “making a logo bigger” and salespeople are described as “making promises to clients that they cannot keep”. Having emerged from the interviews and research discussed in Chapter 2 these are, by design, subjectively generated graphic designer-centric interpretations of these stakeholders motivations.

As well as the artefactual Performative Design Brief functioning as a documentation of the research briefing process, it also serves as a creative outcome. In this sense, like Smith’s vernacular scripts (Barone 2002) its purpose is also to showcase how a sample group of graphic designers perceive their everyday professional practice and the stakeholders within it, in an accessible format, which may be informative for creative practitioners and researchers outside of graphic design practice. This, in itself, adds to the existing ethnographic and professional outcomes which tackle this topic.

Creating the Performative Design Brief has channelled the practice of making strange, in that it partially upsets this normative aspect of professional graphic design practice. As discussed above, graphic designers tend to be the recipients of the initial brief, however informal. In this context, the Performative Design Brief is an inversion of professional graphic design practice because, as well as often clarifying and elaborating upon a client or
stakeholder brief (Blyth & Kimbell 2011; Vermaas, Dorst et al. 2015), graphic designers often brief suppliers of services such as printers, artwork producers, photographers, illustrators and software developers. Moreover, as Phillips suggests, it generally makes little sense, for all stakeholders, for a collaborative approach not to be utilised (Phillips 2014) and the outcome of the Performative Design Brief was largely a collaborative process, a negotiative communication process in which both the research requirements and the practical requirements of the theatre director had to be met.

In creating the physical briefing materials, it was essential to provide as much information to the theatre director as possible about what professional graphic design practice actually consists of, so as to provide an overall professional and organisational context which contributed to the metaphorical ethnographic script (Bird 2015). The initial briefing materials included an overview of the project, as well as a series of performative scenarios which were informed by the designer interviews. Like the aforementioned ethnodrama examples, these scenarios comprised a form of interview-informed (Jacobsen 2014) fictional ethnographies (Humphreys & Watson 2009; Berry 2017). Each scenario started with a background in which I constructed a plausible professional practice scene. For example, in Scenario 1 (on page 5 of the artefactual Performative Design Brief) I have used the theme of designers having to perform tasks within tight time constraints.

Following this, I reported some of the responses of the designer interviewees, which produced a series of narratives from which the theatre director could choose to dramatise. After listing the main theatrical ‘protagonists’, or personas, I portrayed the key motivations of, firstly, the graphic designer and then the stakeholders as envisioned by the design interviewees. The narratives for the scenarios are further informed by using the tabular methodology to develop broader summaries of findings from Chapter 2 – for example, the designers’ perceptions of stakeholders’ physical appearance, clothing style and hobbies – with the aim of bolstering the persona motivations. These performative scenarios are intentionally concise, rather than being academic reflections, because they were targeted at providing the theatre director with ‘script-like’ performative motivations.

Indeed, it was intended for the theatre director, and by extension the actors, to performatively engage with these themes using their own unique professional interpretive skills, rather than having the themes interpreted for them. Outcomes were then observed and reflected on by myself as a design researcher, and are discussed in Chapter 4.
Engaging with the briefing process

As noted, it is rare for the content and context of design briefing methods to be interrogated within academic discourse. Indeed, it is partially for this reason that the previous contextualisation has been carried out. Establishing the pivotal nature of the design brief in professional graphic design practice, and consequently in this research, requires that the Performative Design Brief process itself is given some consideration.

The theatre director’s active role features most prominently in Chapter 4, as a core requirement of the Performative Workshops. However, as a key stakeholder the theatre director’s involvement started much earlier. The theatre director had no experience of working with graphic designers and only a casual understanding of the roles of designers and the design industry. Therefore, it was important to ensure that she was fully briefed about the roles of graphic designers and the context of the research. As well as the educational aspect of the brief being clear and easy to understand, it was important to ensure that the brief was in a format which would be useful for repurposing into theatrical prompts and motivations. As a result, the performative format of the Design Brief, utilising scenarios and personas and covering a broad set of themes and tropes, is an intentionally designed approach and their manifestation in the artefactual Performative Design Brief will now be discussed and contextualised.

Contextualising the briefing scenarios and personas

Scenario 1, which is located on page 5 of the artefactual Performative Design Brief, deals with how tight deadlines and related issues can impact on graphic designers’ perceptions of the creative process and of stakeholders, and suggests how themes from the interviews might be explored in the Performance Workshops. For example, it indicates graphic designer frustrations at not being allowed enough time to explore creative conceptual design work, resulting in feelings that they are being treated as technicians. In doing so, it highlights some of the touchstones where different outlooks and disagreements between graphic designers and stakeholders can arise in everyday practice. The scenario indicates instances of where and how the graphic designers perceived that their design capital was being compromised, despite being under pressure to produce high-quality designs. For example, the scenario dramatises: how tight deadlines can result in low-quality photography being downloaded from the web, upsetting designers but being seen as adequate by stakeholders; when designers feel pressurised or misled by stakeholders into
rushing their designs; and when designers feel that stakeholders don't appreciate the complexities of their profession. The themes draw from the interview outcomes, for example when Bruce and Patricia described how stakeholders didn't have an understanding of what designers do or what resources they need. Overall, Scenario 1 channels some of the outcomes from Chapter 2 which indicate the lack of affinity with or understanding of the design process by stakeholders leading to potential conflict (Mark, David et al. 2002; Holzmann & Golan 2016; Jacobs 2017), themes which were then explored during the Performance Workshops, discussed in Chapter 4.

Tight deadlines and fast design turnarounds are themes which manifest particularly prominently within in-house design environments and it is worth exploring the context. Often motivated by utilitarian reasons and enabled by new technologies, many non-design organisations have increasingly adopted formerly specialist graphic design services in-house (Geraedts, Verlinden et al. 2012; Silk & Stiglin 2016) to create fast, non-creative yet essential collateral communication and promotional design materials. This is part of an industry growth which has increased steadily in recent years (Duggan 2013; Silk & Stiglin 2016) and is predicted to continue to increase (Ponce 2017). Two of the design interviewees who had worked in in-house capacities, Patricia and Margo, indicated a particular lack of respect from many stakeholders. Patricia described how stakeholders want many different design concepts but often do not want to pay for all of them, something which can be partially explained because, unlike with external creative agencies, the monetary costs of in-house design are often hidden (Baker 2008; Phillips 2015). Similarly, Margo's description of an internal stakeholder suggesting that an untrained relative could have performed her role further indicates the lack of capital that professional graphic designers believe they have within an in-house environment.

This challenge to in-house designers' professionalism is something reflected by Cathy Fishel (2008) in her book *In-House Design in Practice; Real-world solutions for graphic designers*, in which she suggests that in-house graphic designers are undervalued, misunderstood and disrespected, often fighting a constant battle for legitimacy and respect. There are also suggestions that stakeholders perceive in-house designers as not possessing the same degree of creative skills as external designers (Baker 2008; Staff 2008; Brown 2014; Silk & Stiglin 2016; Flavin 2017), with the vast majority of organisations preferring external agencies for creative and conceptual input while appreciating the in-house model for speed of turnaround and low cost (Walsh 1996; Morrison 2017).
This lack of gravitas is also addressed by Peter Phillips’s own book on in-house graphic design *Managing Corporate Design: Best Practices for In-House Graphic Design Departments*, where he argues that corporate managers do not value design because they see it as a support service rather than core strategic profession. Moreover, while he and the designers he sources consider the situation unlikely to change, he suggests that it is up to designers themselves to learn to communicate strategically, by framing graphic design as an effective business solution (Phillips 2015). However, he goes on to argue that this communication with stakeholders is something which graphic designers appear especially inept at (Phillips 2015). Further evidence that professional graphic designers are good at communicating on behalf of others but not at advocating for themselves comes from academic design thinking research, which suggests that designers’ overfamiliarity with their own practices renders them incapable of externalising and explaining these practices (Schön 1983, 1992; Cross 2006). This, in turn, provides further motivation for the use of methodologies of making strange within graphic design professional development. However, the particular negativity felt by the designer interviewees with in-house experience may also be cultural. This is reflected in the evidence that in-house design work is often described as uncreative and dull with conservative working environments and dress codes (Baker 2008; Staff 2008; Brown 2014; Flavin 2017).

Scenario 2 continues the theme of design capital, but relocates it to examples where the graphic designers perceived that stakeholders were overstepping their professional boundaries. It dramatises the frustrations that some of the interviewees, such as Marcus, Patricia and Bruce, felt about stakeholders, in particular salespeople, when they described them as dishonest or not understanding the design process, yet still wanting to be involved with the design process or, worse still, wanting to control it. Scenario 2 re-creates a scene of stakeholders pointing at a computer screen and giving designers instructions. It is indicative of observations made by Koslow, Sasser et al. (2003) about designers in agencies across the industry perceiving such creative interventions by stakeholders as being intrusive. This reduction of the role of the graphic designer to that of a technically adept implementer carrying out menial changes to design documents also symbolises the increasing symbiotic influence of disruptive technologies (Bower & Christensen 1995; Christensen & Overdorff 2000; Ashburner, Bell et al. 2016) within traditional graphic design practice, something which Jessica Helfand (2002) argues results in the marginalisation of design as a result of ceding control to computers and which the legendary graphic designer Milton Glaser believes renders professional graphic designers mere stylists (Lunenfeld 2004), having relinquished their design capital to stakeholders. Through the use of the ‘pointing at
the screen’ trope, the scenario reimagines an everyday challenge to the freedom of self-expression and the professionalism of graphic designers (Barnes, Taffe et al. 2009) which has been enabled by technological advances (Drucker & McVarish 2013).

Scenario 2 also reflects the findings from Chapter 2 which found that, while most of the designers from across the data sources want access to the briefing process, few indicate much empathy for the client-facing roles. Indeed, some sources suggest that designers are more focused on producing creative outcomes, while client-facing stakeholders feel more focused on the constraints of client requirements (Koslow, Sasser et al. 2003), with designers being less cognisant that a design project needs to achieve a client’s objective (Johar, Holbrook et al. 2001). In acknowledging this, it will be informative to see how this has manifested in the Performance Workshops themselves.

Scenario 3 re-creates a trope based on the practice of graphic designers providing three sets of conceptual proofs to showcase to stakeholders and, invariably, clients. This is a method of design concept presentation, utilised within many graphic design agencies, which typically requires one ‘out of the box’ design concept, which a client is expected to reject as being too extravagant, then one ‘boring’ design, followed by a third and final ‘balanced’ design, which sits in-between the two and which the client is expected to approve (Shapiro 2014; Phillips 2015; Heller 2017). Various explanations have been given for this practice. It can function as a sales technique, intended to provide stakeholders with the perception that graphic designers have considered all creative options. Furthermore, it allows stakeholders the impression of having made the design decision themselves; they can allow themselves to reflect upon the extravagant design as well as the boring design, safe in the knowledge that there is a happy medium for them to take back to their superiors. Some designers suggest simply giving stakeholders and clients “what they want” (Greer 2012), while others recommend taking advantage of the sales approach, for example by making the extravagant design extra ‘scary’, thereby influencing stakeholders to default to choosing the creative option (Airey 2012).

However, the three-concepts approach is contested among graphic designers. Some argue that this approach devalues the professionalism of designers and wastes time (Menard 2016). Others suggest that it takes a project off course (Karjaluoto 2014) or is even a sign of a broken design process which is “stuck in the days of the decorative design mindset where armchair designers (stake holders) chime in on the design as decoration dog and pony show” (Myers 2017). Some graphic designers suggest a middle way, arguing that staggering the showcasing of design concepts – only showing one at a time until the
stakeholder is happy – can be a more productive way to manage the process (Smith 2009; Cousins 2017). The organisational efficacy, or otherwise, of these different approaches is a vast and problematic topic, and clearly further research is needed. For this research, this scenario functions partially as a reaffirmation of graphic designers' perceptions of contested aspects of their practice. However, this scenario is primarily used to highlight the pitfalls of investigating this and other contested areas of professional graphic design and also to interrogate the method itself.

Informing persona creation

In addition to scenario development, the artefactual Performative Design Brief includes a breakdown of various graphic design and stakeholder job descriptions, as well as potential performative motivations for those job descriptions. The Brief documents how persona data from the graphic designer interviews was provided to help the theatre director to develop theatrical roles and characterisations. For example, the briefing materials included narratives about: how the designers perceived the dress sense and hobbies of particular stakeholders; the degree of trust and other relational information between the designers and different stakeholders; and designers' attempts to cast stakeholders theatrically, using filmic persona types such as ‘hero’, ‘love interest’, ‘zombie’ and so on. Conveying these theatrical tropes provided the theatre director with a composite metaphorical cast of characters – in essence, a performatively constructed set of personas. Providing this information allowed the theatre director to repurpose the information into motivations for the troupe of dedicated actors within the Performance Workshops, discussed in the following chapter.

The results of the briefing process allowed the theatre director (and myself) to move onto the final part of the research, where thematic outcomes from graphic designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders were triangulated back via a series of improvised performances, performances where dedicated actors simulated the designer informants’ perceptions of the design process by functioning as ‘proxy designers’. In doing so, these perceptions of everyday professional graphic design practice were made strange and re-presented as a simulacral dramatic parody, allowing the designer perceptions to be viewed, reflected upon and evaluated by myself as a graphic design professional and researcher. As will be expanded upon in Chapter 4, the performances themselves are presented in curated form online and, like the design brief, serve as an artefactual outcome, as well as a prototypical educational performative design source.

4 Some of these examples can be seen on page 17 of the Performative Design Brief.
Chapter conclusion

The creation of the Performative Design Brief continued the process of making graphic design practice strange, using experimental design methods. The chapter has demonstrated how a customised use of an everyday professional graphic design method, the design brief, has been reframed in order to repurpose a series of interviews with graphic designers by extracting core themes and authoring them into a performative narrative for use by a stakeholder – the professional theatre director. In the process, the method has co-opted existing design practices of scenario and persona development, as well as borrowing from existing performative ethnographic methodologies, to further make strange the graphic design process. This has enabled further reflection on graphic designers’ perceptions of their everyday relationships with stakeholders, as well as a contextualised interrogation of the design brief within professional graphic design and research practice.

By using the designer-informed ethnographic narratives to create structured scenarios, the Performative Design Brief has served as a crucial conduit for continuing to channel graphic designers’ perceptions about stakeholders, with particular emphasis on outcomes which point to designers’ perceived lack of access to design capital. By breaking these themes down into identifiable dramaturgic tropes, scenarios and personas, it has also reinforced the criticality of the design brief as a creative and organisational tool within professional graphic design. The chapter has further reinforced the continuing ambiguity of the professional graphic design process itself. Critically, it has identified the importance and under-researched area of graphic design briefs. In doing so, it has brought into academia the largely neglected role of design briefs within wider professional creative practice. As is evident from the literature, there appears to be little consensus within professional creative practice as to the role, extent and format of graphic design briefs. Strengthening the evidence from Chapter 2, the research in this chapter has identified that, within academia, the topic of design briefs is rarely addressed. Even where it is engaged with, this often lacks the depth of investigation required if it is to address graphic designers’ perceptions about the brief’s crucial role in enhancing their design capital within professional practice.

By using the format of a design briefing process and physical briefing outcome as a method of performative ethnographic narrative enquiry, the chapter has also expanded on the use of both design and ethnographic research methods, in particular the use of vernacular manifestations of ethnodrama to uniquely repurpose graphic designer interviews for creating personas and scenarios. Much as Luckhurst describes practitioners of documentary
theatre repurposing the original sources of their performances (2008), so the themes from
the designer interviews have provided material for the Performative Design Brief. This
builds on the activities of Smith’s (2005) documentary theatre and Hope’s (2011) research,
as well as enabling the conditions for a critical mirroring of the original sources (Denzin
2001; Meisiek & Barry 2007). In doing so, the artefactual Performative Design Brief and
the collaborative briefing process with the theatre director combine to inform and extend
the discourse of performative ethnography and design research.

Establishing the dramaturgic format of the Performative Design Brief, as a metaphoric
theatrical script, cements its use as a design research probe (and device for making
strange). In using it as a practical design tool for interacting with the theatre director as a
creative stakeholder, the Brief is also promoted as a method warranting future research
and further repurposing as a prototype for use in prospective professional development
within creative practice. The ways in which these methods, processes and results
manifested in the next stage, the Performance Workshops, will be discussed and evaluated
in the following chapter.
Shklovsky’s 1917 essay ‘Art as Technique’ pioneered the term ‘making strange’ (Bell, Blythe et al. 2005; Forrest 2007). In his essay, Shklovsky documents the phenomenon of making strange within creative practice by citing a piece of fiction by Tolstoy entitled ‘Kholstomer’ (1965). Discussing the story, Shklovsky describes how Tolstoy’s use of a horse as a third party narrator renders the subtext (the concept of private ownership) strange, allowing Tolstoy to tackle readers’ hegemonic perceptions about private property. In projecting the narrative literally through the horse’s mouth, allowing the reader into the mindset of the horse as it contemplates its position as an owned commodity, this challenges the reader to move beyond normative assumptions. Shklovsky’s example depicts fictional textural narrative being used as a metaphorical device to first make strange and then render familiar a complex philosophical outlook. Chapter 4 shows how a philosophical lineage with the original concept of making strange has been re-created by discussing how the use of Performance Workshops with trained actors operating as third party narrators (proxy designers) functioned as a theoretical continuity and also as an extension of that original concept of making strange, with the aim of revealing and reinterpreting graphic designers’ normative perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders.

What follows are reflections on the culmination of the bricolage of experimental research methods, manifesting as a series of three Performance Workshops which together comprise a metaphorical creative artefact designed to re-present narratives from within everyday professional graphic design practice. It encompasses a generative simulacral and intentionally strange ethnography of the perceptions of graphic designers’ relations with stakeholders, re-performed by dedicated actors functioning as proxy designers. The discussion that follows investigates these dynamics, which the graphic designers perceived as playing out within professional practice on an everyday basis, yet are seldom overtly identified, let alone analysed. The chapter engages with the outcomes, as well as the method itself, and discusses the contribution to academic research, as well the potential value for professional graphic design practice.
Building on the dramaturgic framework of performance ethnography and ethnodrama in Chapter 3, the chapter starts by contextualising the Performance Workshops against a background of theatrical research methods and performance in design research, as well identifying the Performance Workshops as an intentionally designed research tool for rendering professional design practice strange. It illustrates how the use of the Workshops provides a simulated refractive metaphorical prism for professional graphic design practice, enabling the research to identify aspects of graphic designers’ perceptions of their professional relationships with stakeholders which were previously elusive or obfuscated within everyday practice. The chapter describes how the Performance Workshops generated an intentionally strange simulacrum of professional graphic design and then, in re-enacting aspects of the graphic design process, re-familiarised the process to reveal previously hidden aspects of designers’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders. In doing so, the chapter argues that the workshops have enabled the research method to move beyond, what ethnodrama theorists have variably described as, performative or organisational mirroring (Denzin 2001; Meisiek & Barry 2007; Strickfaden & Rogers 2015).

The themes that emerged during earlier stages of the research, in particular graphic designers’ perceptions around design capital, remain pivotal elements of the perceived conflicts and organisational insecurities. Engagement with these themes manifested methodologically within a series of three workshops, consisting of five actors and a theatre director, which performatively engaged with the thematic outcomes from Chapters 2 and 3. In engaging with the continuity and consistency of themes from this research, this chapter ultimately illustrates how the use of experimental dramaturgic methods, designed to make strange professional graphic design practice, can help to illuminate and challenge graphic designers’ assumptions about their relationships with stakeholders within professional practice. In doing so, the chapter focuses on three sample workshop scenarios, each of which interrogates different emergent aspects of the graphic designers’ notions of design capital within everyday stakeholder interaction. Scenario 1 interacts with communication, perceived gatekeeping practices, and organisational compromise; Scenario 2 explores notions about managerial stakeholder hierarchy, as well as designers’ self-perceptions of their own gravitas; and Scenario 3 uses themes around perceptions of clients as stakeholders, to begin to engage with the Workshops method itself.

Unlike Shklovsky’s use of a literary horse as a third party device, the Performance Workshops have to contend with the added complexities and lack of control which live actors bring to an improvised exposition. As a result, after outlining the events and activities of the Performance Workshops (illustrated in Fig. 9), the discussion will critique
the Workshops methodology itself, including its limitations, by engaging with some of the unique approaches, in particular the use of ‘proxy-designers’ instead of the designer respondents themselves. In acknowledging the method as experimental and prototypical, the chapter also assesses the approach alongside key informative research. This includes an assessment of the use of theatrical constraints, as well as engaging with the roles of the theatre director, the actors and also myself as researcher and designer. The chapter also reflects on compromises which would need to be considered by future researchers and creative professionals for adopting, adapting or extending the methods.
Contextualising performance, ethnography, design and research

As introduced in Chapter 1 and expanded upon in Chapter 3, the use of dramaturgic methods outside of formal theatre, and in particular within research, has a diverse history. The background of its implementation within practical performance has ranged from the interventionist methods of Boal’s Forum theatre (2000) and the Epic theatre methods used by Brecht (1964) to the educational practices of process drama (O’Neill 1995; Schneider & Jackson 2000) as experimental research tools (Edmiston 2003) and to practical applications of various performance ethnography, persona design and organisational methods (Mangham 2005). Within organisational discourse and professional practice, the everyday dramaturgy of Goffman (1973) and Burke (1945) has also long been adopted and adapted (Oswick, Keenoy et al. 2001; Mangham 2005). It is a form of reproduction of the everyday theatre as metaphor (Boje, Luhman et al. 2003) in what David Boje (1991, 1995) has described as collective performative stories which take place every day within professional organisations. For this chapter, it is professional graphic design practice stories, told from the perspective of graphic designers, which are being recontextualised and made strange by theatrically re-creating them in the Performance Workshops.

In addition, ethnographers have extended Goffmans’ theories of performance in everyday life (1973), to propose the performative nature of rituals and activities in the everyday. For example, Richard Schechner argues that there is a continuum between the role of actors on stage and the roles which are played out in ordinary life (Schechner 2002, Carlson 2011), with the value lying less in the skill of performance than in the distance created between the original and the simulacral re-production by actors (Carlson 2004). In doing so, performance, D. Soyini Madison suggests, communicates the subjects’ (such as the graphic designers) worlds in their own words and exposes aspects of that world that are not otherwise visible in the everyday (Madison 2011). As such, performance becomes a method for making strange on the one hand while, paradoxically, also making visible.

Performance in design and as design

While drawing on these discourses and engaging performative approaches, the Performance Workshops continued the research’s perspective of myself as a designer using performative methods within a dramaturgic framework as a design method to investigate a professional design subject – graphic designer perceptions of stakeholders. Performative
methods have some precedent within the wider field of design research and professional practice. For example, Kees Dorst (2009) writes about designers within organisations performing different metaphorical roles, such as film producers or gurus. Moreover, dramaturgic paradigms such as the intentional creation of theatrical stereotypes are often manifested in the use of personas and scenarios within professional design, as well as research and testing (Penin & Tonkinwise 2009). These dramaturgic uses span a plethora of development practices which are applied within many interactive design methodologies (Eriksson, Artman et al. 2013) such as Agile (Obendorf & Finck 2008) and have also been used for product design, as well as to improve design project communication (Blomquist & Arvola 2002). These dramaturgic applications can vary from rough sketches to “fully fleshed out fictional characters, as might be encountered in a film or novel” (Pruitt & Grudin 2003, p. 313). One could even point to the metaphorical language used in graphic design software tools such as Adobe’s Flash, which uses a stage and toolbox commands such as scripts, actions and casts.

**Beyond metaphor: making strange and performance**

Indeed, metaphor plays a key role in the visualisation and performative techniques of design. For example, in his chapter on generative metaphor in Andrew Ortony’s *Metaphor and Thought* (1993), Schön (1993) discusses how metaphor can be used as a way of seeing different perspectives and carrying them over from one frame of reference to another. The generative aspect becomes relevant with regards to how that process can be accomplished. Oswick et al. (2001) and others identify a number of implementations of the application of metaphor within organisational dramaturgic practice (Cornelissen 2004). The metaphor of the design process mirroring that of dramaturgy is explored by Megan Strickfaden and Paul Rogers where, in contrasting design with film, they state that there are “more similarities than differences” (Strickfaden & Rogers 2015, p. 7). However, using performance to make strange seeks to move beyond this.

The Performance Workshops have been used as a refractive tool, moving beyond the looking glass of organisational drama (Meisiek and Barry 2007) and generatively using theatre’s default tendency to dramatise the subject at hand (McKee 1997) in order to metaphorically re-perform the Performative Design Brief, rendering those everyday themes strange. In doing so, the Performative Workshop methods are a practical continuum of Shklovsky’s original conceptual definition of making strange (Lemon & Reis 1965; Bell, Blythe et al. 2005; Forrest 2007) which permeate and inform every stage
of this research. These are methods which include, for example, the playful ‘games’ and interventions of the visual arts (Gooding 1991; Eisner 2003) and the experimental designs of Dunne and Raby (Seago & Dunne 1999; Dunne & Raby 2001) within wider design fields such as HCI (Bell, Blythe et al. 2005). By bringing these methods into the research of professional graphic design, the Performative Workshops have repurposed them as an interventionist research method, within a professional graphic design framework, which disrupts the automised ‘habitual recognition’ of familiar professional graphic design practice. By utilising the Performative Design Brief as a graphic design probe, the format also brings the informal everyday practices of making strange within professional graphic design into academic discourse. However, as will be shown, in using trained actors as proxy designers, the Performance Workshops go beyond playful design devices, probes and interventions, which are intended primarily as provocative artefacts of inspiration (Loi 2007; Sanders & Stappers 2014), to channel the original concept of Shklovsky’s estrangement.

Using performance to explore design capital: authority, ownership, boundaries and process

Themes around design authority, or ownership of the design process, have arisen in all stages of this research. This was evident in Chapter 2 when exploring discussions between graphic designers in online environments and in the interviews; consequentially, this was carried forward into Chapter 3 when discussing the Performative Design Brief; and finally, this chapter shows how these outcomes also manifest in the Performance Workshops. Of all the outcomes from graphic designers in previous chapters, those concerning the multiplicity of variations around creative authority – what I have called design capital – are most prominent. These themes: have been hypothesised as a result of my own professional practice experience; are documented in academic research, for example represented by the unequal nature of the procedural and creative compromises within the design process (Lawson 2006; Benson & Dresdow 2014); and emerged prominently during the online interactions from Chapter 2, from the graphic designer interview informants such as Marcus and Cedric who respectively described the stakeholder–graphic designer communication process as “one-sided” and “top-down”, as well as the discourses which emerged from contested notions about the role of the graphic design brief from Chapter 3. In turn, the findings have been documented and re-created in the Performative Design Brief upon which these workshops are based.
Design capital has emerged as the apposite term because, as we saw in Chapter 2, the use of terms such as ‘authority’ when discussing the graphic designers has proved imprecise and refers primarily to professional confidence, expertise and especially creative ownership, rather than to managerial, hierarchical or even financial reward. Indeed, in my own professional practice experience and during the designer interviews, the latter definitions have rarely been expressed. Frustration with stakeholder authority was expressed when it was perceived that creative boundaries were overstepped or because stakeholder behaviour or lack of process understanding was deemed to have impacted negatively on design outcomes, rather than in relation to concerns over organisational hierarchy. For example, the designers who wanted business cards with the title ‘art director’ on them desired professional credibility, rather than hierarchical status. Similarly, the findings from the online discussions indicate that designers’ complaints about stakeholders were motivated by a desire for creative gravitas or control, and as a rejection of being seen as technical functionaries. The ambivalence to hierarchical authority is further illustrated by designers during the interview process who, when asked to visualise graphic designers hierarchically, responded with comments such as: “Really important, but no authority”; “In charge of a smaller group, but not too high up”; “Slightly in charge”; and even the view that “Design is a flat structure”. These relationships to design organisational authority build on Murray’s observations that authoritative distinctions between senior and junior graphic designers are peculiarly informal, differentiated predominantly by who gets assigned the more creative design work, rather than by hierarchy (1993).

Contextualising performance, as a method and in its use within this stage of the research, indicates how performative methods have been coopted as practical design tools (within a design project) to continue to explore perceived relationships between graphic designers and stakeholders. It shows how the methods extend the continuity with the dramaturgic approaches in Chapters 2 and 3, and further enable the graphic design process to be made increasingly strange, allowing exploration of perceptions of design capital within designer–stakeholder interactions which might otherwise have been obfuscated.

Many of these interconnected elements of design capital were engaged with during the many hours of the Performance Workshops. The examples which follow tackle these topics by interrogating how these themes of graphic designer perceptions of design capital manifested during the Workshops. In particular, the discussion will focus on: design process timescales and time sensitivity; stakeholders as gatekeepers within the design process; issues around hierarchy and managerial authority; and contested boundaries of practice within professional graphic design.
The Workshops: performing graphic design

As a researcher and professional designer, I have treated the process of engaging with theatre professionals as an extension of my professional interactions with any other pivotal stakeholder from professional practice such as a printer, developer or photographer. This meant that, while the project requirements and limitations were defined by me, I deferred, professionally, to the theatre director with regards to the specificities of structuring the performances. (Issues which emerged from this professional deferment will be discussed later in this chapter.)

Similarly, the process of recruiting the actors was a continuation of the design briefing process, a stakeholder engagement process requiring a brief, in most cases initially via email, followed by a verbal interview and exchange of questions and answers, requirements and clarifications. Actors were recruited using printed posters displayed in actor training schools and advertising through dedicated theatrical websites, the latter proving to be the most fruitful approach. In contrast with the anonymity required for the designer participants, the actors were happy for the project to be public – indeed, much like the graphic designers’ reluctance to assume managerial status during the interviews, in my experience many appear to prefer to let their work speak for them. As will be shown, this helps to inform the choice of the theatrical medium in using outgoing actors to help expose practices which are normally played down by designers.

Structure and format

Following discussion with the theatre director, a format of three separate Performance Workshops was agreed, to be spread over a period of four weeks and lasting between two to three hours each. The Workshops were held in closed session and, as well as video-recording carried out by a hired camera operator, the events were documented by me using still photography and written notes. Much as the Performative Design Brief, as a graphic design narrative, is an ethnographic outcome, so the photographs and video, as well as the experience of producing and analysing them, become a part of ethnographic knowledge (Pink 2013). For documentation purposes a selection of still photographs are reproduced as a photo-book that is supplied as a separate document and videos of the workshops have been curated at www.designingstrangeness.com.
The workshops comprised the following participants:

Fig: 10 | Workshop participants

The overall method of the workshops lay in improvised but director-guided theatrical exercises. The theatre director converted themes from the Performative Design Brief into a series of dialogues, assumed personas and scenarios for the actors to perform. These took a number of forms, including simple two-person dialogues, physical theatre, word games and fully fledged scenario-based improvisations. As will be shown, at the end of some scenarios, participants were brought together for debriefing sessions to explore and reflect more deeply on the performances.

Incorporating the Performative Design Brief, discussions between the theatre director and me formed a part of the Workshop design process. Initially these discussions revolved around the aims of the research, but broadened out into the practicalities of organising the Workshops and their structure. For example, the theatre director recommended that the size of the acting troupe be limited to five actors – a size which she felt happiest working with and which she believed offered the best dynamic for experimentation. The theatre
director also suggested three Workshops and we both decided that a week's intermission between Workshops would be ideal for reflection, discussion and adjustment of the Brief as themes and outcomes emerged.

The degree of direct participation by researchers in ethnographic performative research methods is as varied as the research topics of performance ethnography itself; in some cases practitioners are direct participants and collaborators, at other times they just form part of the audience (Beck, Belliveau et al. 2011). Initially the theatre director thought it would be best if I was, at least partially, involved as a kind of ‘guest’ actor. I was cautious about this, as I wanted a clear demarcation between the involvement of professional designers and that of professional actors. As the discussions progressed, the theatre director and I agreed that it would be best if I did not take a participatory acting role, restricting my role to a form of ‘questioning audience’. This allowed for distance to be maintained in order to allow for my critical reflection specifically as a designer and researcher. This is not to dismiss the subjectivity of the researcher’s voice (Ackroyd & O’Toole 2010) in my research. On the contrary, as discussed in the Introduction the research has emerged from my own experiential perceptions of professional design practice. Moreover, as an ‘audience member’ for the Performance Workshops, the metaphorical outcomes of the research (the performative re-creations) eventually triangulated back to me as researcher and subjective observer.

Workshop scenarios

Scenario 1 | Re-performing communication, gatekeeping and compromise

Themes around communication and gatekeeping were common outcomes during Chapter 2, among graphic designers on online discussion forums as well as from the interview participants. They often mirrored suggestions from academic and professional design sources that stakeholders default to a managerial position and, in turn, can affect the creativity of graphic designers (Jacobs 2017), in particular when those stakeholders lack industry experience of working with designers (Mark, David et al. 2002; Holzmann & Golan 2016) or approach the design process from a different perspective to designers (Wall & Callister 1995). A core outcome from Chapter 2 was that the graphic designers
often perceived the managerially assumed role of stakeholders as an obstructive gatekeeping presence, negatively impacting on the communication process itself and serving as an unnecessary division between them and the sources of the creative or design brief. One Workshop scenario which engaged with issues around communication and gatekeeping is based on a popular theatrical exercise often called Telephone or Whispers.

The exercise was set up with all five actors sitting in a row (Figs. 11 & 12). The exercise would begin with the theatre director privately briefing the actor at the beginning of the row with a key phrase. The actors would then pass this phrase down the line by whispering it into their neighbour’s ear, with the final actor, in this example Khyal, revealing what they understood the message to be. This led to the final recipient of the whispered message having to interpret a ‘third-hand’ variation of the original message. Invariably the final received message would have been distorted during the communication process. By placing an actor representing the designer at the end of the communication ‘chain’, in this case Khyal, the exercise performatively re-created the perception of many of the graphic designers from Chapter 2 of being the last people in a process to receive often distorted or unclear information as a result of the gatekeeping role of stakeholders.

Telephone is a well-known theatrical game and the superficial outcome, the distorted message itself, is predictable. In the context of the research, it is the intentional use of the performative probe as a dramaturgic metaphor for how graphic designer informants of the research perceived the communication process which is of importance. The use of the exercise in this example recompiles and re-performs communicative aspects of professional graphic design practice as a simulacrum, a practice made intentionally strange. This, in turn, allows for themes from this everyday scenario to be reflected upon from a uniquely unfamiliar perspective. This usage channels Schön’s argument that the practical use of metaphor to repurpose one frame of reference within an alternate setting enables those frames of reference to be viewed from a newly strange perspective (Ortony 1993; Schön 1993). In this case, the repurposed frame of reference manifests within a theatrical exercise, in combination with the actors, who explore some of the communication issues which have been raised by the graphic designer participants.
Fig: 11 | Telephone 1: the exercise begins

Fig: 12 | Telephone 2: the chain inevitably results in miscommunication
Design compromise and/as performative constraints

The graphic design process is continually subject to creative compromise and organisational constraints (Arias, Eden et al. 2000; Dorst 2009; Ambrose & Aono-Billson 2011; Arntson 2012). Some of the effects of these constraints on designer–stakeholder relations include the managerial requirement to balance designers’ creativity against budgets and client limitations (Jacobs 2017), as well as hierarchical and organisational limitations, which designers often find challenging to implement (Lawson 2006; Benson & Dresdow 2014). These were experiences elucidated upon in their everyday form in relationships with stakeholders by the designers in online forums and during the designer interviews. Therefore, it was informative to observe the theatre director repurpose some of these compromises into constraints for the actors during the performances.

The Telephone exercise symbolises a communication scenario which engages with several themes around design capital expressed by the graphic design informants and which are symbolised in the Performative Design Brief. One example is the introduction, by the theatre director, of timescale pressures. These were invoked by applying theatrical ‘constraints’, such as informing the actors that they had to re-perform an exercise, each time within an increasingly shorter space of time. The results of this were, unsurprisingly, increased mistakes in communicating the whispered message. Upon completion of the Telephone exercise, the theatre director asked the actors to visualise themselves in the roles they had just performed and to imagine what they would do to deal with similar communication issues in a ‘real-life’ design situation. The following discussion focuses, in particular, on the responses of the actor Khyal and his role in the exercise. His responses are informative because they allow us to interrogate how themes from the Performative Design Brief have been carried forward into the Workshop Performances.

Initially, Khyal said that he felt that the exercise was like a line of command in an email chain. Khyal had noticed that the exercise had created a hierarchical framework for him and his fellow actors. He elaborated to explain that, in a “real-life” email chain (in his role as a designer), when faced with a series of conflicting messages Khyal’s tactical response would be to react only to the most recent email and act on what he was asked to do there. Khyal was pressed further by the theatre director. She pointed out that, during the exercise, miscommunication had occurred every single time the actors had performed the exercise, so what if the misinformation which had occurred during this exercise had happened for “the hundredth time”? Khyal replied that he would just ask the previous stakeholder in the communication chain to clarify the instruction. Channelling the

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http://www.designingstrangeness.com/content/cited-videos/video-00162/
http://www.designingstrangeness.com/content/cited-videos/video-00163/
narratives from Chapters 2 and 3, Khyal, as ‘designer’, had little choice but to query his immediate stakeholder in the communication chain. When asked to reflect on his day as a designer, Khyal replied that it would have been a waste of a day. When questioned, still thinking as a designer, about how to stop this miscommunication problem from repeating itself, Khyal responded that he would have wanted a better design brief from the beginning. This is a response which is reminiscent of some designers’ responses from Chapter 3, such as one online forum poster who suggested that graphic designers ought to “Put the burden on them [stakeholders]” to provide a comprehensive design brief (HotButton 2016). For Khyal, that request would ideally have been aimed at the stakeholder who had initiated the chain of communication, Judith, who concurred because the exercise indicated that communicating in this convoluted way was a waste of time.

The above example goes beyond showing that such a convoluted communication process is organisationally deficient. It plainly is. Its importance lies in the indication of continuity of graphic designers’ narratives from Chapter 2 and further represented in the Performative Design Brief of Chapter 3, as well as concurring with my own professional experience. It also reimagines themes around design capital which have continually emerged throughout all stages of the research. In particular, the exercise re-performs graphic designers’ perceptions of stakeholders as gatekeepers between them and the source of creative information – whether that be in the form of a client (represented in this case by Judith) or the design brief (represented by the whispered message itself).

Similar themes, attributed to stakeholder miscommunication, were perceived by many of the designer interviewees. Marcus, for example, described a number of scenarios where the design team had been working from incomplete briefing materials: “You often have this after a concept or research has already been done. Then, at the end, you suddenly get handed the real text and images.” The result of this is the stakeholder becoming frustrated that the project is taking too long, a situation which Marcus believed can be avoided by involving the designers at an earlier stage and giving them direct access to the client, instead of having to communicate through a chain of several stakeholders. One outcome of this sense of ‘exclusion by gatekeeper’ is that it reduces the role of the graphic designer to that of a reactive implementer of design, or a mere design technician (Schön 1983). As Koslow, Sasser et al. (2003) observe, it is frustrating for designers to be implementers of a brief which they have no direct involvement in creating and little ability to question or influence.
The theatre director’s introduction of time as a constraint was informative as issues around stakeholder communication leading to time-sensitive problems were often perceived by the graphic designers. Indeed, the Performative Design Brief cites examples of stakeholders suggesting that a project “won’t take long” or asking why a project is “taking so long”, something which designers attribute to stakeholders either not listening to them, misunderstanding or not adequately communicating the requirements of a design project. For example, in Chapter 2 we saw how design interviewees Patricia and Bruce respectively suggested that stakeholders “don’t really understand the process” and “just try and tell you what you want to hear”. The Performative Design Brief contextualises these themes by suggesting that stakeholders are often under pressure from their superiors or clients, and that their lack of technical understanding of what is involved in the graphic design process may contribute to this behaviour. The accumulated results of this often lead to perceived time-sensitive issues and potential mistakes. This feeds back into broader design research discourse by symbolising the ill-defined, unstructured or ‘wicked’ constraints which graphic designers face in their everyday practices, resulting in professional designers often having to settle on ‘satisfactory’ solutions rather than the deeper analysis which academic research requires (Cross 2006). In turn, this suggests a contributory explanation for the previously identified dearth of graphic design–specific academic research.

The frustrations expressed by the actors over the outcomes of the communication exercise are to be expected: it was designed in that in mind. This also indicates that, in implementing that form of exercise, the theatre director correctly interpreted the narratives and motivations within the Performative Design Brief. The Telephone exercise, while simple, allowed themes around designer perceptions of stakeholder communication from Chapter 2, as interpreted via the Performative Design Brief, to be inserted into the performative space and made strange. That strange performative space allowed the theatre director (herself a ‘stranger’ to the design process) to intervene in the actors’ performances and, in doing so, bring to the fore themes and perceptions around design capital, the importance of which might otherwise not have emerged or been engaged with. As an observer and researcher, the performances manifested as familiar to me – the format was strange, but the performed themes were recognisable and consistent with those of the rest of the research and, indeed, with my own professional practice, despite not having been overtly so prior to the research.
Chapter 3 has shown how graphic designers’ professional hegemony has increasingly been challenged by the interrelated areas of evolving technology (Helfand 2002; Drucker & McVarish 2013), the growing ambiguity of designers’ roles (Girard & Stark 2002) and the rise of in-house design departments (Geraedts, Verlinden et al. 2012; Duggan 2013; Silk and Stiglin 2016). The resulting graphic designer battles for gravitas (Fishel 2008) and perceptions around the insecurity of their professional value (Lunenfeld 2004; Barnes, Taffe et al. 2009) are explored in this Scenario.

In this exercise, the theatre director gave the actors the task of “rebranding a law enforcement authority”\(^6\). Rather than providing each character with a job title, the theatre director instead motivated each actor with characteristics and motivations drawn from persona descriptions from the Performative Design Brief. For example, one actor was briefed that their characteristics included ‘health and safety’ as a part of their role, while another role include ‘time management’. Other characteristics assigned by the theatre director to actors’ personas included the kinds of clothes that each character might wear, as well as their hobbies and other motivations, also drawn from the Performative Design Brief.

As the scenario progressed, it was noticeable that the character which appeared to have taken on the ‘designer’ characteristics, played by Katherine, increasingly took on a reactive, even subservient role. For example, shortly into the improvisation Katherine sat down and pretended to be quietly working, while all the other actors remained standing, discussing and debating wider ‘strategic’ issues (Figs. 13 & 14). During these performances Katherine remained silent, only speaking when spoken to or when asking for confirmation about questions such as “so, do you just want me to…”.

Observing Katherine’s performance reminded me of the lack of design authority expressed by many junior designers I have worked with in professional practice, an apparent lack of authority often manifested by similar reactive behaviour. This is an experiential subjectivity which is reinforced by the online design forums, literature and designer interviews from Chapters 2 and 3, and communicated via the Performative Design Brief and the theatre director. Indeed, remembering that all roles and scenarios being performed are projections of the graphic designer informants, it is unsurprising that the performances themselves support those narratives. This is a performed manifestation of a consistent narrative which perceives graphic designers as lacking in design capital. While the performances of these scenarios are strange manifestations of those everyday

\(^6\) http://www.designingstrangeness.com/content/cited-videos/video-00142/ (from approx 6m)  
http://www.designingstrangeness.com/content/cited-videos/video-00143/
narratives of practice – actors masquerading as proxy designers within improvised and even absurd theatrical re-creations – the performances also unravel and make familiar again graphic designer perceptions which would otherwise have been difficult for me to identify, let alone reflect upon and analyse.

One initial response, when reflecting on Katherine’s performance of the meek and reactive designer, was to wonder about the broader organisational and educational position of graphic design. In earlier chapters it has been suggested that a lack of direction in the teaching of graphic design (Poynor 2011b; Heller 2015; Dorland 2016; Jacobs 2017), alongside its haphazard historical professional development (Frascara 1988; Julier & Narotzky 1998), are broader organisational contributors to graphic designers’ perceptions of a lack of design capital. While this may be the case, observing an everyday manifestation of this being re-performed by dedicated actors, as a result of a design and research process in which the research sources were consistent in their perceptions about design capital, has made it possible to identify and engage with those graphic designers’ perceptions. Performances such as Katherine’s, which bring to the fore these everyday (and previously unacknowledged) insecurities theatrically, support the broader literary evidence and suggest a degree of graphic designer insecurity within their own professional practice. Indeed, Brian LaRossa suggests that such insecurity among graphic designers results from the practice’s historical and educational lack of focus (LaRossa 2017) and this perhaps contributes to Phillips’ assertion that graphic designers lack organisational negotiating confidence (Phillips 2015).

Constraints and motivations reveal designer perceptions

As the scenario progressed, the theatre director introduced additional motivations and constraints for the actors. In one example, the theatre director stopped the action to announce that the design studio was in a “state of chaos” with “additional deadlines”.7 At another point, she announced that the team would suddenly have to deal with “multiple issues”. Each time these additional constraints prompted the actors into increasingly exaggerated performances of their personas. The diagram overleaf (Fig. 15) illustrates how the theatre director’s use of constraints during the performative process intervenes in the Workshop scenario exercise and how the actors, playing roles informed by the Performative Design Brief, are probed to respond. Both the scenarios themselves and the constraints have been drawn from the Performative Design Brief.

7 http://www.designingstrangeness.com/content/cited-videos/video-00143/
While the other actors simulated an increasingly chaotic workplace, Katherine remained calm and seated at a table pretending to work. This part of the performance is indicative of how many graphic designers from Chapter 2 perceived their everyday role, visualising themselves as competent and professional under pressure while, at the same time, there is an element of othering of stakeholders by the graphic designers: seeing them as disorganised, intrusive or incompetent. It is informative that this othering has carried through into the Workshop Performances; Katherine, symbolising the graphic designer persona, remains calm under pressure, while the actors performing ‘stakeholder’ roles run about in a state of theatrical chaos at the slightest provocation. Signs of graphic designers’ perceptions about the hierarchical managerialism of design processes also appear to have filtered through to the scenario performances. During the debriefing session following the performance, Katherine confirmed that she had been focused on reactive practical solutions, such as “listening to the important things that everyone had been saying and trying to do the work”. Conversely, the other actors claimed that they had been focused on more conceptual and organisational issues, such as “separating the jobs and discussing them” and “looking at current perceptions and changing them”. This was also noticeable in the use of marketing jargon, such as “cutting through the chatter and getting at the main crux for pulling the idea together”.

Fig: 15: Constraints
The performative re-creation by Katherine of the assumed managerial status of stakeholders made me think of graphic designer responses from Chapter 2. Both the interviews and the online discussions often contain forthright views and frustrations about stakeholders which the designers believed are not being addressed. At the same, despite the forthrightness of some of the views, Katherine’s performative representation of the graphic designer persona reinforces the responses of some of the interviewees who appeared to undermine their own design capital, such as Bruce (2013), who described his role as “off to the side. Really important, but no authority”.

This strange, even absurd performative simulacrum of the professional graphic designer–stakeholder dynamic is reminiscent of issues highlighted in Chapter 3, such as Phillips’ assertion about graphic designers’ lack of ability to evangelise on their own behalf (2015) and Fishel’s description of in-house graphic designers’ constant battles for organisational legitimacy (Fishel 2008). It can even be seen as a performative exposition of a core argument from traditional design research discourse: that designers have difficulty externalising their own knowledge (Schön 1992; Cross 2006). With graphic designers such as Bruce above, one could extend the argument that some even appear to have difficulty valuing their own knowledge, instead deferring to stakeholders that, in the same breath, they feel are acting as managerial gatekeepers overstepping boundaries in the struggle for design capital. For example, Gary, in Chapter 2, perceived his organisational position as “not too high up” and only “slightly in charge” (2013). Yet, inevitably, graphic designers’ frustrations and challenges for design capital still emerged, albeit in ways which are not the most productive, such as focusing on the grandiose job titles discussed in Chapter 2, or manifesting in the obstructive ‘games’ with stakeholders which were re-performed in this chapter, or manifesting in the flippant and often sarcastic responses described by Roberts, Wright et al. in their survey of graphic designers (2015).

Re-performing the struggle over design capital: compliance and rebellion

This performative scenario starts with one actor, Katherine, sitting at a table with some coloured pens and a piece of paper. Another actor, Judith, stands behind Katherine, watching her work. Katherine has been assigned a task by the theatre director to “design” a warning sign to be placed in a field. Judith is told that she has the ability to express a variety of opinions including “comments, questions and suggestions” that challenge Katherine’s decisions during the task of creating the design. In the first part of the exercise, Katherine is instructed to cooperate and “accept and adapt” to all of Judith’s
suggestions. In the second stage, the exercise is repeated but with Katherine rejecting all of Judith’s suggestions. In both versions of the exercise, Katherine has to justify why she is either accepting or rejecting each of Judith’s suggestions.

No job titles are assigned to the actors, nor are there any overt references to which stakeholder role the actors are playing. However, the concept of the exercise, of stakeholders being perceived as transgressing into creative territory which designers feel is theirs, is recognisable as being drawn from Scenario 2 in the Performative Design Brief, which discusses annoyance among many graphic designers when feeling that stakeholders are intruding into their creative process. For example, in Chapter 2 the online poster ‘Schneider’ berates stakeholders not to “suggest colors or placement of elements” (2015). In my own professional experience, this has become symbolised as a meme about stakeholders standing over designers, pointing at the screen and issuing instructions, while they are designing. During a briefing conversation with the theatre director I discussed such examples, including one of a designer I worked with in an advertising agency who would get up and leave the room if a stakeholder interacted in this way, and instances where such behaviour had led to designers resisting even sensible suggestions from stakeholders.

For graphic designers, who may already be insecure about their creative gravitas, it is unsurprising that such interactions can be problematic. Indeed, this is an area which appears to cause some of the most overt hostility towards stakeholders. For example, in Chapter 2 graphic designers complained about stakeholders attempting to “dictate the designs” (Kristin 2018), believing that “they think they should tell you what to do” (Neverman 2018) and having “no boundaries when it comes to graphic design” (designzombie 2018). The designers’ perceptions have some precedent in previous research, which suggests that there is often an unequal negotiative balance between designers and stakeholders when attempting to reach creative compromises (Lawson 2006; Benson & Dresdow 2014), differing outlooks over balancing professional motivations (Wall & Callister 1995; Jacobs 2017), as well as stakeholders lacking experience of working with designers (Mark, David et al. 2002; Holzmann & Golan 2016).

The symbolism of the behaviour reproduced in the ‘compliance versus rebellion’ exercise is reminiscent to a degree of the ineffectual attempts of the graphic designers in Chapter 2 who attempted to increase their gravitas by upgrading their job titles. The graphic designers’ responses are reactive and largely ineffective in a professional environment, yet the performative re-creation indicates their everyday frustrations and feeds into wider discourses of graphic designers perceiving stakeholders as intruding on their creative practices.
One can see how stereotypes of designers as being argumentative and obstructive have developed (Roberts, Wright et al. 2015). This also reinforces previous indications within creative environments that stakeholders need to be professionally experienced at working with designers and that downplaying “the role of creativity” can lead to conflict and result in designers becoming “stroppy” (Banks, Calvey et al. 2002 p. 258). Nevertheless, it seems clear that, even where this is the case, graphic designer perceptions of boundary encroachment by stakeholders remains a professional issue in the everyday, as well as in wider discourse (Koslow, Sasser et al. 2003). However, it is not the role of this research to cast blame, let alone resolve the wider organisational issues of designer–stakeholder interactions. Rather, it is the method of investigation which is being offered for critique and further exploration. In that sense, it is once again possible to observe how themes from earlier stages of the research are brought to the fore by performatively rendering aspects of professional graphic design practice strange. For example, in this scenario the theatre directors’ use of deadline constraints during the performances brings to the fore designer perceptions from Chapter 2 of about having to deal with unreasonable or unknowable stakeholder communication, such as Patricia’s complaint that stakeholders have little understanding of “the process” (2013).

The ‘compliance and rebellion’ exercise presses further, re-performing perceived stakeholder incursions into designers’ territory despite designers’ lack of confidence in their ability to do so. For example, in Chapter 2 Marcus (2013) suggested that stakeholders have a “sense of false confidence and bravado”, with Cedric (2013) contextualising the fear that stakeholder behaviour is often perceived as “top down” and unwelcome. The designers surveyed in the online interactive environments concurred, with stakeholders being described as having “no boundaries when it comes to graphic design” (designzombie 2018) or that they “try to dictate the designs” (Kristin 2018). These re-performed scenarios reinforce suggestions that graphic designers’ limited control in the creative process (Soar 2002) and perceived lack of compromise with stakeholders (Walsh 1996) are pervasive in professional practice. The Performative Workshops have created an alternate perspective from which to view these everyday designer perceptions and assumptions, elevating topics that might otherwise have remained under-emphasised, considered unimportant or even unnoticed in plain sight.

The second scenario tackles many of the outcomes from Chapter 2 around hierarchy, gravitas and designer personas. In the process of re-enacting these themes, actors such as Katherine engage with graphic designer perceptions of their lack of organisational gravitas. Once again, the performances have taken graphic designers’ notions of design
capital and, using persona motivation, rendered those perceptions strange via absurd, stereotypical and often theatrically extreme performances. For example, some of Katherine’s performances simulate designer perceptions through a persona which is wilfully acquiescing to a perceived role of subservience and even insecurity, filtered through to her via the design brief and the theatrical motivation of the theatre director. The performances reinforce the construction of theatrical personas of graphic designers consisting of self-perceived narratives as downtrodden players, functioning on a metaphorical stage where stakeholders are assumptively perceived by graphic designers as unskilled managers intruding into areas where they are not welcome. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the interpretations of the theatre director, the set-up of the scenarios and personas, as well as the centrality of the roles of the theatrical participants in the performances are influential on the outcomes and require reflection about the format of the research method itself. As a result, the following scenario considers some of the limitations and potential pitfalls which have become apparent while analysing the Performance Workshops method.

Scenario 3 | Engaging with the method

Scenario 3 is informative because it provides a unique opportunity to begin to tackle the limitations of the research methods, alongside comparative approaches. This scenario brings into focus some of the challenges of using the performative method, with particular regard to the roles of the participants in the Performance Workshops. In continuing the practice of making strange, the Performance Workshops have been intentionally designed to cast everyday graphic design through a refractive prism, rather than functioning as a clinical laboratory of a graphic design studio. As a result of the Performance Workshops jettisoning the notion of third-party audiences – along the way rejecting Saldaña’s (2003) assertion of the need to entertain – the ‘audience’ for this research is myself as interchangeable designer, auteur, dramaturge and, of course, professional graphic designer. While I have previously argued the intentionality of these approaches, it becomes necessary to also acknowledge the limitations of the method and engage with the outcomes, most specifically how my role as researcher intersected with that of the theatre director.
Engaging with the role of the theatre director and actors

The inclusion of a theatre director was to fulfil a role which I did not have the professional skill set to carry out. These included functions such as repurposing themes from the design brief and turning them into theatrical motivations, and using a dramatic language which the actors would understand and be able to respond to and perform. Indeed, as the Workshops progressed I realised that there were also more functional tasks which the theatre director was responsible for that I had not overtly considered, such as starting each Workshop with warm-up exercises to help the actors feel relaxed and focused. Inevitably, despite my reliance on a theatre director being a requirement of the research project, one of the concerns of delegating these tasks is handing over design control to a stakeholder. Indeed, the dialectic between our practices occasionally inserted itself into our briefing discussions; with the theatre director initially defaulting to framing the performances as a form of entertainment into which she suggested I take a role. However, the separation of stakeholder roles was also an intended feature of the research method – I intentionally wanted the theatre director to perform as ‘traditional’ a role as possible, while my own requirements were for treating the performances only as research and, as a result, I wanted to take a backseat during the actor performances. Similarly, while I was unable to exclude myself from the Workshops (as I had excluded the graphic designer informants), I wanted to allow the theatrical professionals the freedom to use their professional interpretative skills to repurpose the design narratives into theatrical ones. Nevertheless, the decision to enable this delegation also held limitations for the method. Similarly, I have argued the advantages of using actors to simulate designers (instead of using the original participants) to enable the discovery of previously hidden perceptions of stakeholders. However, paradoxically, there is also concern about a lack of ‘authentic’ representation or understanding by the actors, a group so distant from the graphic designer respondents. These issues are explored in the following example.

In this scenario, a table is set up and two actors, Katherine and Sasha, are assigned roles which resemble that of a client panel. A third actor, Judith, is assigned the task of ‘pitching’ a design idea to the panel. Unbeknownst to Judith, the theatre director has briefed each of the panel members with different personas to perform. Katherine is to play the persona of a positive and enthusiastic stakeholder who welcomes all of Judith’s ideas without question (Fig. 16). Sasha’s character, on the other hand, will be disparaging and negative about Judith’s proposals (Fig. 17).
Fig: 016 | 'Good' stakeholder

Fig: 017 | 'Bad' stakeholder
Initially, from the set-up of the scenario and knowing of the Performative Design Brief as a source, I thought that I was going to see a performance of the classic three-design concepts presentation technique. However, it appeared that the theatre director had set up a scenario which was overtly portraying interactions between designers and clients; a classic ‘design confrontation’ between Judith in the designer persona and Sasha and Katherine in the client personas. It was an emphasis which I initially found disappointing, as I was keen to avoid such binary ‘good cop, bad cop’ interpretations of designer–client relations. It appeared that either the briefing process had been unclear or had been misunderstood by the theatre director, or perhaps that the theatre director had been influenced by external assumptions of design practice from outside of the design brief. This prompted me to reflect on the broader methodological issues of the Performance Workshops.

As informative as it was to observe professional graphic design practice being reflected through the metaphorical prism of theatrical performance in order to critically engage with the pitfalls and limitations of the Performance Workshops, it was helpful to compare and contrast these methods alongside two uniquely influential research projects: Hope's work at University College London and Howard, Carroll et al.'s study at University of Melbourne. While there are no comparable graphic design projects, the following research is informative for its use of dramaturgic methodology with different creative practitioners. As will be shown in the next section, Hope's work is informative because it uses performativity to engage with relationships between artists and stakeholders. Howard, Carroll et al.'s study is important because, while dealing with designers from a different discipline, it shares with my method the use of dedicated actors.

Critiquing the method

Creative ownership and compromise

Hope’s research engages with themes around authority, notably with regards to the relationships between artists and stakeholders, the stakeholders being the commissioners of arts projects. Hope’s work performatively engages with the actual projects of the artist participants, who act out examples of artist–stakeholder interaction (2011). These
performative scenarios are often overtly confrontational, with many artists expressing resentment at having to compromise with stakeholders. At one stage, this prompts Hope to question the dynamic itself:

We are left asking if compromise is an inevitable part of the art commissioning process and that if an artist is not willing to make these compromises, should they be commissioned in the first place? (2011, p. 124)

Without straying too deeply into comparisons between art and design practice, this warrants reflection between the two creative practices in light of earlier suggestions about graphic designers being focused more on their creative motivations than on the compromises required for wider project requirements (Johar, Holbrook et al. 2001; Koslow, Sasser et al. 2003). The artists in Hope’s research appear to have stronger personal creative attachments to their projects, having generally been involved in their projects from the inception and in many cases having developed the projects themselves from scratch. When the artists had to compromise or perceived obstacles placed in their way by stakeholders they often reacted negatively. Some withdrew from projects or had projects taken away from them because of their reluctance to compromise (Hope 2011).

The graphic designers’ responses in the online forums, interviews and re-performed scenarios often expressed similar frustrations to those of Hope’s artists. However, they appear to take a more resigned approach to perceived stakeholder encroachment, accepting that “Everyone is an art director” (Steve_O 2018) or that the dynamic will “never change” (KitchWitch 2016). This apparent resignation may simply be due to the organisational reality within which graphic designers operate – professional graphic design is predominantly a reactive service industry, whilst art is not. It is a discourse first raised in Chapter 2, with a range of researchers suggesting that the graphic design process functions within an ongoing state of knowing compromise (Arias, Eden et al. 2000; Dorst 2009; Ambrose & Aono-Billson 2011; Arntson 2012) acknowledged by designers (Lawson 2006; Benson & Dresdow 2014) as well as stakeholders (Crawford 2008; Greever 2015). For example, one online forum poster acknowledges that stakeholder obstruction “happens at every company I’ve worked for” (designzombie 2018), while another rationalises stakeholder intrusion by acknowledging that stakeholders have a client to report to: “they believe they understand what their client wants as they’ve spoken with them – and you haven’t” (Neverman 2018). As seen in some of the interview responses, many of the designers even respected stakeholders’ negotiative positions, with Patricia for example suggesting that some were “assertive and critical” to the process. From
a graphic designer perspective, it is a compromise which presents as a form of Gramscian
tacit consent (Sum & Jessop 2013) that, while designers may not approve or agree with
the hegemony of unequal creative negotiations within the graphic design process (Lawson
2006; Benson & Dresdow 2014), there is a spectrum of acquiescence to the everyday
reality of the commercial graphic design process. This also rings true in my own professional
experience. For example, when I was designing weekly publications, as deadlines approached
designers regularly worked until the early hours of the morning. Despite the situation being
acknowledged as the result of stakeholders missing deadlines, there was a tacit acceptance of
having little control or authority within this flawed design process.

This acceptance has manifested in Katherine’s performance during Scenario 1. Despite an
increasing level of chaos and miscommunication being performed during the scenario, the
proxy designer, played by Katherine, continues to play her role, determined for an outcome
to be achieved and project goals to be engaged with and completed. Similarly, the other
stakeholder roles play their parts, as subjective projections of the graphic designers who
informed the Performative Design Brief. Regardless as to the reality of the scenario to
actual professional graphic design practice, the subjective perceptions of resignation and
compromise by graphic designers has been reproduced in the scenario. This representation
of everyday professional graphic design narratives, rendered strange and then made
familiar by re-presenting them performatively, supports the method as a viable prototype
for investigating previously obscured subjective graphic designer perceptions about their
relationships with stakeholders. It also allows for future research of the format to be
interrogated, expanded upon and potentially customised for professional development.

Hope’s research also engages with the concept of making the hidden visible, functioning
as a mechanism for rethinking and sharing material that might otherwise go unsaid. Hope
approaches this by enabling the creative practitioners themselves, who use masks and
other props to interrogate themes from their own practices which they might otherwise
have been reluctant about airing, such as expressing criticisms of stakeholders (Hope
2011). It is partially in recognition of the uniquely reactive practices of commercial
graphic design that my research has chosen to remove the creative participants from the
Performance Workshop and, instead, employ dedicated actors to perform as the informant
designers’ subjective perceptions, what I choose to call ‘proxy designers’. It is a unique
approach which is partially informed by Howard, Carroll et al.’s use of dedicated actors
and, as a result, aspects of their research which will be compared and engaged with below.
The use of dedicated actors as a further form of refractive distancing of the Performative Workshops from the original sources of enquiry raises questions about the efficacy of this method of making strange, more specifically, the degree to which different amounts of making graphic design practice strange would influence the outcomes. Indeed, the theatre director and I had come to the same opinion, that each of the three Workshops should experiment with different degrees of making strange with regards to how the graphic design themes from the Performative Design Brief were introduced to the actors. For the theatre director the concern was practical, allowing the actors time and space to absorb and engage with the methods. As a researcher I was interested in how differently the continuity of themes from the Performative Design Brief would be interpreted, repurposed and performed depending on how overtly the actors were briefed. As a result, themes from the Performative Design Brief were introduced to the actors gradually. Initially, this meant that the actors were motivated by more covert references drawn from the Performative Design Brief, with more overt design references only gradually being introduced to the performances over the three weeks. This eventuated as an experiment into whether varying the degrees of making design strange, when briefing the actors and setting up the scenarios, affected their engagement with the themes and the outcomes. It is a topic worth discussing because, while the concept of making the professional graphic design process strange is central to this research, it is also necessary to examine the subtleties and limitations of the method in practical usage. It is also informative in enabling reflective comparison with Howard, Carroll et al.’s research. As a result, the three Workshops were set up as follows:

Workshop 1 was partially devoted to exercises and drama games to help the actors to relax and become comfortable with the performative format and get to know each other. Exercises in this workshop also functioned as an introduction to the Performance Workshops method. The actors were provided with general themes and narratives to work with, but were not overtly informed about which specific role they were playing or what the contexts of the scenarios were.

Workshop 2 drew more overtly from professional design practice themes within the Performative Design Brief, bringing the themes into the scenario exercises that the actors were asked to perform. These included using personas and scenarios which might begin to be recognisable as coming from professional design practice, but no job titles were used and design-specific terminology was avoided.
Workshop 3 used more direct interpretations of professional design practice, engaging more literally with themes drawn from the Performative Design Brief. The actors were given more overt information about which stakeholder role they were playing and more detailed information about the scenario context.

Like the Performance Workshops, Howard, Carroll et al.’s (2002) approach is unusual in departing from more typical performative methods which utilise theatrical concepts within design research by immersing users, research participants or stakeholders themselves into performative scenarios. By deploying dedicated actors as “surrogate users” (2002, p. 178), instead of the more common approach of attempting to transform the subjects of research into actors, they hypothesised that trained actors would be more equipped to explore “contextual scenarios” (2002, p. 178). Their research also invokes making strange by speculating that this approach might allow them to “discover activities and goals that did not currently exist” (2002, p. 179). This is similar to the goals of my research; however, a key difference is that my methods take a step towards further making strange by intentionally separating the actors from the subjects of the research (in this case, the graphic designers), as well as having no participant designers present during the performative sessions. Indeed, until the final Workshop there was also limited direct involvement even from myself as researcher. In evaluating the Performance Workshops, it is informative to reflect on the outcomes in light of these varying approaches.

For example, during the Telephone exercise in Scenario 1, the actor Kyahl indicates his frustration about his seemingly intractable position of dealing with unrealistic deadlines. It is possible to speculate that, had there been active involvement of graphic designers in that exercise (as there was with Howard, Carroll et al.’s research), they might have tutored and advised Kyahl during the performances, as well as perhaps answering his questions in the debriefing sessions. From one perspective, this would have run counter to the aims of my research: the intervention of graphic designers would inevitably have resulted in Kyahl responding and altering his performances – positively or negatively. Indeed, he may have been intimidated just by the presence of the designers as an expert and critical audience. Moreover, had he been made aware that these designers were the ones who had provided the motivations for his performance, this would most likely have applied even more pressure on his responses. Indeed, in Howard, Carroll et al.’s project there is evidence that the involvement of designers did impact on performances, with the actors indicating awareness and even empathy with the designers, at once stage commenting:
Its unusual when you are up there (on stage), and I’m feeling sorry for you guys (the designers) having to watch this, and you’re writing things down! What are you writing down!? (2002, p. 189)

Kyahl’s performance and follow-up comments suggest that excluding designer interviewees from the Performance Workshops may plausibly have resulted in some loss of opportunity. For example, having the graphic designers’ guidance during the Performative Workshops might have helped to motivate Kyahl to assume the role of designer and produce more ‘realistic’ performances. Indeed, at one point during a debriefing session Kyahl expressed frustration at what he was being asked to do, exclaiming, “I don’t know, I’m not a designer”. A similar issue arose during Howard, Carroll et al.’s project where, due to the fact that their actors were not being asked to accurately portray designers (something Howard, Carroll et al. describe as the normative expectation of an actor), their actors were often puzzled as to what was expected of them (2002).

Having the actors intentionally motivated only ‘by proxy’ (informed by the Performative Design Brief) has allowed a degree of distancing from subjective external influence, which appeared to have yielded insights into obfuscated aspects of professional design practice, such as in Katherine and Kyahl’s performances. However, the increased degree of experimentation and isolation from the sources of motivation (the designers themselves) may have led to confusion on the part of the actors and increased the potential for digression from the topic. Intentionally extending beyond Dunne and Raby’s “slight strangeness” (2001, p. 75), as well as dispensing with Howard, Carroll et al.’s (2002) continued use of actual designers as moderators of actor performances, meant that the proxy designers and the theatre director during the Performative Workshops, were literally left to their own interpretive devices for rendering professional graphic design practice strange. As discussed in the methodology, and critically for my research, the latter was an intentional design, to go beyond previous persona and scenario design, and performative ethnography approaches. Indeed, to transcend this limitation would be to alter the focus and reach of the research. Designers were omitted from the Performance Workshops project because it would have been counter to the experimental intent of the research – to intentionally distance the actors from the designer subjects of the research and to render professional design practice strange by several degrees.
Stakeholder exclusion and proxy designers

The intention to take advantage of making strange is one reason that I, as a designer, declined to take a more directorial role during the Performance Workshops. To become more hands-on would have meant that I overtly assumed the role of a designer doing design, rather than taking advantage of the opportunity to observe the outcome of the process. Moreover, the actors’ role was never to learn about the opinions or subjective perceptions of design practice directly from designers. On the contrary, the actors were there to perform the intentionally obfuscated perceptions of designers drawn from the Performative Design Brief and communicated by the theatre director, which is why the dedicated actors are described as ‘proxy designers’. It is for similar reasons that other stakeholders were intentionally excluded from participation in the research. Had stakeholders themselves been involved (at any stage of the research), their input might well have been informative with regards to the motivations of the actors for dramatic performance and perhaps also for the designers and even for the stakeholders themselves. However, the research was not intended to directly intervene in, or influence, how stakeholders communicate or interact. The use of actors as proxy designers takes a different approach: to interpret, intervene and re-present themes arising from reflections on professional graphic design practice from a third-party (strange) perspective. This is an approach with which Denzin (2001) concurs when describing how drama transcends itself to become research by enabling critique of the topics being portrayed. As such, the research has moved beyond creating critical distance. In acknowledging that the everyday complexities of graphic designers’ interactions with stakeholders are so entrenched and established as to render them largely obscured in everyday professional practice and also by many other research approaches, a method of enquiry which makes these everyday design interactions strange by creating distance and then passing them through a refractive prism of enquiry, such as the Performance Workshops, becomes almost obligatory. However, as the following examples indicate, the method is not without its challenges.

Proxy designers: projection and authenticity

We have established that the Performative Design Brief and, as a result, the Performance Workshops, are a subjective manifestation of graphic designer perceptions. We have seen this when Katherine, in her role as a harassed designer in Scenario 2, portrays the graphic design role as stoic and even as the hero of the scene, while the stakeholders are portrayed as harassed, concerned with broader issues or otherwise out of touch. While this validates
the ability of the method to convey graphic designer perceptions of their interactions with stakeholders, it also portrays the designer-centric subjectivity. This is something which emerged during the discussion with the actor Khyal following Scenario 1, where he expresses deep dissatisfaction with his predicament in the design process. At one point, in the post-performance debriefing session, he explained that:

I think that, as a designer, I think that there would be a bubbling frustration that my job is not like an accountant’s job – where I am just processing people’s accounts – I think I would want to give them the best idea that I can, based on what they have given me, but knowing that they might make changes and I can’t control that. And I think that the more successful I was, the less open I would be to making changes, but even then I think you would get better at selling your ideas, rather than putting limits on changes, because that’s never going to sit well. 9

Khyal’s expression of frustration echoes the perceptions of the graphic designers in Chapter 2: feeling caught in a powerless situation, wanting to produce their best work and yet lacking the design capital to negotiate and compromise adequately within the creative process. Khyal also reconnects with designers’ resistance to making changes, suggesting that greater success would provide more authority to do so, while acknowledging the need for better designer ‘sales’ skills as a more desirable option. Khyal’s sense of frustration in his response appears to vocalise the manifestation of an actor having absorbed themes from the design brief and having been able to act as a designer, channelling designers’ motivations, rather than simply portraying a pastiche of a designer gleaned from preconceived notions of what designers do. I use the term pastiche here in the sense that Frederic Jameson (1991) uses it to describe simple mimicry, a neutral form of reproduction lacking in deconstructive parody or interventionist power.

Khyal’s performance as a proxy designer manages to reproduce, or at least parody, an aspect of interaction between graphic designers and stakeholders. It appears that Khyal, as an actor, has gone beyond the neutral performative act of mimicking the perceptions of a designer, moving closer to reproducing an ‘authentic’ phenomenological aspect of graphic designer–stakeholder interaction, his performance helping to re-familiarise those subjective perceptions through the strangeness of the Performance Workshops. This is something which the actors playing the non-designer stakeholder roles seem less able to indicate during post-scenario discussions, reverting instead to preconceived notions of design practice or attempting to solve assumed or ‘common-sense’ organisational problems. This indicates a difficulty for the actors in ‘authentically’ re-enacting stakeholder roles which are purely a projection of the graphic designer perceptions, rather than also

9 http://www.designingstrangeness.com/content/cited-videos/video-00163/ 5:58m
having a basis in experience. In turn, this suggests a limitation of the method as regards the transference of the themes from the designers, through the design brief, and into the final performances. At the same time, acknowledging this finding further distills the orientation towards graphic designer perceptions as the core focus of the research. Whether as a limitation or a feature of the method, it seems clear that the construction of personas and their re-enactment during the Performance Workshops have been affected by this designer subjectivity and this needs to be acknowledged for any future research or professional design application.

Chapter conclusion

The Performative Workshops are a culmination of the experimental methods used in this research. They have been crucial in further uncovering and engaging with a series of graphic designer perceptions about professional relationships with stakeholders which have proved to be elusive, or even invisible in plain sight, within everyday professional practice, as well as being largely absent within academia. Where these designer–stakeholder topics have been identified or acknowledged, such as in Dorland’s ethnographic studies (2017b) and Phillips’ research on in-house designers (2015), the Performance Workshops have enabled the discourse to be elaborated and expanded upon by rendering the everyday perceptions of graphic designers strange as a result of the third-party performative re-interpretation enabled by trained theatre practitioners.

Focusing on a series of sample scenarios, it has been shown how thematic outcomes from previous chapters have been successfully parsed, via the Performative Design Brief, through the refractive prism of the Workshops and engaged with theatrically by the actors. This parsing of themes supports the methodological consistency of the approach. For example, Scenario 1 theatrically reproduces and engages with outcomes from Chapter 2 about designer perceptions of stakeholders in relation to communication and gatekeeping, while at the same time tackling themes around creative compromise. In Scenario 2, the use of actors as proxy designers utilises this alternate usage of personas to engage with graphic designers’ perceptions of hierarchy and stakeholders as managers, and to explore designers’ own self-image, communication and organisational negotiative abilities. The ‘compliance and rebellion’ exercise adds a dramaturgic perspective to the narratives from Chapter 2 around unproductive designer responses to a perceived lack of design capital such as concerns about job titles on business cards and literary observations.
from Phillips (2015) and others about designers’ underdeveloped personal communication abilities. The persistence of these themes of struggle around design capital in particular, as well as the ability to engage with them performatively, has allowed a level of reflection that was not possible beforehand, indicating the suitability of the Workshops for theatrically rendering professional graphic design practice strange and, at the same time, uncovering previously obfuscated themes and providing a format for engaging with those themes.

Nevertheless, while extending the frameworks of previous research has proved beneficial, the chapter also explained the limitations of the method, confirming its status as an experimental prototype to be built upon and adapted for purpose. In particular, the use of dedicated actors as proxy designers comprises a precarious balance of requirements and the chapter has telegraphed advantages and disadvantages that will need to be evaluated for purpose by future researchers or creative organisations wishing to adapt the methods for professional development. However, showing the prototypical validity of the research method – by making strange and then re-familiarising thematic narrative – proposes a framework for future researchers and professional learning developers within creative organisations to decide how best to utilise the method for their own aims and objectives.

These outcomes highlight the difficult balance of research priorities and outcome objectives which need to be weighed up for any future academic research or professional development repurposing of the method. It also provokes the question as to whether there is a trade-off between gaining more informative outcomes at the expense of reducing the level of strangeness of the performative motivation and, as a result, risking the actors being influenced by loaded terminology, rather than the intended aim of motivating their performances with thematic subtleties from the design brief. Indeed, one of the concluding comments from Howard, Carroll et al. suggests that using actors as surrogate users (or proxy designers, in this research) requires the skills of the actors and their understanding of performance to be tailored when acting out scenarios. Moreover, simply providing actors with context is not enough for them to act, even if this means limiting discovery as a consequence (Howard, Carroll et al. 2002). The outcomes from the Scenarios give credence to Howard, Carroll et al.’s finding that tailoring motivations for actors might be useful in future projects when using actors as proxy designers. However, my research indicates that being too overt in tailoring motivations for actors in performance may cause the performers to rely more on external or preconceived factors, rather than on the intended research focus. A careful balance of methods, alongside clear objectives and requirements, seems key for future research.
Within the wider research framework, the Performance Workshops have brought together the final manifestation of the bricolage of experimental research methods intentionally designed to render strange everyday professional graphic design practice and, more specifically, the perceptions of graphic designers about their interactions with stakeholders. It has shown how the Performance Workshops were informed by the Performative Design Brief, itself a product of the series of dramaturgic interviews with professional graphic designers. The Performance Workshops, as the final act in the process of making strange, via the use of theatrical performances by proxy designers, feed back into the research as a whole by bringing to the fore and enabling engagement with perspectives which were previously obfuscated within professional practice and in the research topic itself. This brings the research back full circle to the original creative practice of making strange, simulating Shklovsky’s metaphorical third party to render strange, before refamiliarising, complex or previously hidden concepts.
This thesis has argued that graphic designers’ assumptions about their everyday relationships with stakeholders can be illuminated, and as a result challenged, by making those professional interactions strange using a series of experimental ethnographic and dramaturgically informed design methodologies.

As discussed at the beginning of the thesis, overt and vernacular assumptions about relationships between graphic designers and stakeholders present themselves in a number of media. These range from informal conversations to online debates and professional sources. The often overtly conflictual nature of these relationships and the reasons asserted for them are rarely nuanced or professionally productive, and academic research is sparse. This research being motivated by and emerging from my own professional practice, the dearth of existing research alongside the indeterminable nature of the topic suggested a necessarily experimental approach. The creative practice of making the familiar strange appeared suitable for unpacking the ‘wicked’ nature of the topic.

Previous uses of making strange in creative practice, while often citing Viktor Shklovsky, have tended to dilute concepts of making strange. Many, such as Bell, Blythe et al. (2005), utilise making strange as a “useful tool” for “critical reflection” (2005, p. 150). Others take the lead from experimental design research uses, such as ‘probes’ (Gaver, Dunne et al. 1999; Gaver, Boucher et al. 2004), or literary techniques, to discuss and reflect on topics in an unorthodox manner (Blythe & Wright 2006). These methods are valid and inform the discourse, but many are more akin to the everyday defamiliarising methods of graphic designers which were discussed in Chapter 1, such as turning words upside-down to aid with typographical issues. However, as we saw with the example of Tolstoy’s horse as narrator, Shklovsky’s use of estrangement is more specific, its significance lying in performing an intangible, complex and metaphorically hidden topic via a medium so jarring with normativity (such as a speaking horse) that it renders the topic completely strange. Re-performing the topic within this unfamiliar framework drags it into a distorted and refracted ‘focus’, paradoxically drawing our attention to it and rendering it familiar. Estrangement is therefore a dramaturgic function, as well as an ethnographic narrative tool, at the same time informing the simulacral function of graphic design – the visual re-creation of an intentionally altered original.
Further research and development required for future academic and professional application.

Conclusion

Performative Workshops

Metaphoric design outcome

Performative Design Briefing process

Discussion and emails with theatre director

Interviews with graphic designers

Interview questionnaire

Reflection and methodology development

Professional industry hypotheses

Vernacular sources – forums, websites, blogs.

Written briefing documents

Professional design sources – magazines, journal articles.

Academic literature

Introduction

Theatrical direction

Actors as proxy designers

Briefing from theatre director

Ongoing discussion/briefing between researcher and theatre director

Workshop 1 [covert themes]

Workshop 1 [more familiar themes]

Workshop 1 [overtly familiar themes]

Graph design is a distinct, yet fluid, interdisciplinary research discipline

Making strange is a pedagogically significant method for graphic design research and professional practice

Ownership of design capital remains problematic for graphic designers

Graphic designers’ relationships with stakeholders are nuanced

Balancing the degree of strangeness in research methods can affect outcome

Further research and development required for future academic and professional application.
As discussed in Chapter 1, the lack of academic research engagement with professional graphic design practice and the still nascent state of a specifically graphic design research discipline motivated an interdisciplinary approach, for which dramaturgic and ethnographic methodological backgrounds and investigative methods were well suited. Dramaturgic narratives, for example, were productive for constructing meaningful metaphors for the everyday interactions between graphic designers and stakeholders.

In Chapter 2, these narratives were helpful during the interviews with graphic designers as defamiliarising metaphorical devices – providing a design-focused continuum of Shklovsky’s original use of making strange within literature (Lemon and Reis 1965; Shklovsky 1965; Bell, Blythe et al. 2005; Forrest 2007). Conducting the interviews with the designers incorporating a strange dramaturgic format, probed them to engage with their perceptions of stakeholders within an unfamiliar context. Continuing the creative practice use of defamiliarisation, the interviews also referenced the experimental design approaches of Dunne and Raby and others (Gaver, Dunne et al. 1999; Loi 2007; Celikoglu, Ogut et al. 2017). They also repurposed performance-ethnographic approaches to dramatising interview narratives (Paget 1987) and drew on Smith’s documentary interviews (Denzin 2001; Smith 2005) and Hope’s performative interviews (2011).

It was during Chapter 2 that three key findings were explored and discussed. Firstly, against a background of technological and organisational changes from the end of the 20th century until the present day, ambiguities around the role of graphic designers have had a negative impact on professional graphic designers’ perceptions of their design capital. This perception has included conflict with the terms that are used to describe the role, which the graphic designers believed place them at a disadvantage in their everyday creative negotiations with stakeholders. Secondly, contrary to the assumptions expressed in many online and other popular narratives, it has been discovered that the graphic designer interviewees’ perceptions of their relationships with stakeholders were nuanced. While some interviewee frustrations mirrored those of other graphic design sources, the causes of these frustrations were narrowed down to perceived stakeholder behaviour, rather than to the formal job functions of stakeholders. This included stakeholder behaviour which was perceived to be intervening in (or ‘gatekeeping’) graphic designers’ ability to directly access primary creative sources, such as access to a design brief or a client. The third key finding from Chapter 2 is that it is the interwoven combination of the above issues which contribute most acutely to graphic designers’ perceived lack of design capital.
Chapter 3 extended the use of performative narratives, utilising themes and trends from the interviews with graphic designers in ethnographic vignettes within the Performative Design Brief as defamiliarising communicative literary devices (Humphreys & Watson 2009; Berry 2017) to re-present the narratives from the graphic designer interviews in a performative format (Ackroyd & O’Toole 2010; Saldaña 2011; Jacobsen 2014). The graphic designer interviewees acted as both subjects of the research and dramaturges, in that their narratives from the interviews informed the metaphorical ‘script’ of the Performative Design Brief. This was a process of increasing defamiliarisation, which reached its final outcome in the three Performance Workshops discussed in Chapter 4, which manifested as a series of improvised performative interpretations of graphic design perceptions of stakeholders motivated by the Performance Design Brief.

Cross (2006) argues that design’s contribution to knowledge has been held back by lacking its own educational discourse. Chapter 3 contextualised a similar argument for professional graphic design practice, arguing that the lack of a specific research discourse for graphic design but focused on professional practice has contributed to the profession’s lack of gravitas. This suggests a filtering down into graphic designers’ perceptions of lacking everyday design capital. This magnifies the importance of this research as a specifically graphic design research study. In reflecting on the views of the graphic designers from Chapter 2 alongside the academic literature, it became clear that a gap exists in academic research into the graphic design briefing process (and the brief itself). Moreover, the importance given to the briefing process by the graphic designers suggests that this gap in knowledge is critically impacting on the everyday design capital of professional practitioners within creative practice.

Much as Shklovsky describes Tolstoy’s horse as a defamiliarising creative device, the actors in Chapter 4 served a similar function, as strange mouthpieces or interpretive devices for graphic designer perceptions of their own professional practice and their everyday interactions with stakeholders. In using the Performance Workshops as a metaphorical device for visualising the graphic design process, performance became a method for making perceptions of everyday relationships between graphic designers and stakeholders strange while, paradoxically, also making them visible. In reinterpreting Shklovsky’s original creative practice approach to making strange, the Performance Workshops extended previous implementations of making strange with the intentional exclusion of both stakeholders and designers, and by rendering the vernacular narratives of the graphic designer participants strange via the Performative Design Brief, thus moving the method beyond the reflective approaches of ethnodrama and making it a refractive tool which
metaphorically re-performed the Performative Design Brief and rendered those everyday themes strange. In doing so, the manifestations of strangeness were intentionally extended beyond the research of experimental designers such as Dunne and Raby (Seago & Dunne 1999; Dunne & Raby 2001), as well as the ethnodrama of practitioners such as Smith (Smith 2005) and others, as well as traditional HCI models of persona design and even the scenario-based design of Howard, Carroll et al. (2002).

Of all the findings, those relating to themes around what I have described as design capital are most prevalent. These themes emerged from my own professional practice experience, are documented in academic research in Chapter 1, emerged prominently from online debates and the graphic designer interview informants in Chapter 2, as well as the contested role of graphic design briefs in Chapter 3, and manifested in the Performance Workshops discussed in Chapter 4. That themes of design capital emerged so prominently during the Performance Workshops indicates a continuity which validates the method of enquiry as a legitimate experimental research prototype. For example, the Telephone exercise being described as a line of command and the actors expressing frustration at incomplete briefs, as well as issues around stakeholder communication leading to time-sensitive problems, were as clearly perceived by the actors as they were by the graphic designers.

However, it was the paradoxical refamiliarising effect of making strange, during the Performance Workshops, which has provided one of the most valuable research contributions. For example, realising that the actor performances were manifestations of the graphic designers’ own subjective prejudices, stereotypical perceptions and othering of stakeholders will allow future research and professional development to more intimately understand the motivations of graphic design practitioners. These are motivations which are normally overlooked or only expressed in the negative vernacular format evidenced in the online forums and blogs in Chapter 2, the flippant and ‘stroppy’ attitudes written about in professional empirical research projects (Banks, Calvey et al. 2002; Roberts, Wright et al. 2015) and in unproductive or obstructive behaviour from everyday professional practice as symbolised in the ‘compliance versus rebellion’ exercise in Chapter 4. Indeed, this discovery alone validates the use of the subjective creative practice model of enquiry. Making the familiar strange has made visible professional graphic designer motivations which might otherwise not have emerged under more orthodox research methods.
Limitations

The necessarily early entry point of this research into the under-researched topic of graphic designers’ relationships with stakeholders limits its scope to being an experimental method, laying the groundwork as a methodological prototype. While informing academic research, it is not a finished commercial professional development product.

Some of the strengths of the research also identified potential limitations in the method for future purposes. For example, extending the boundaries of previous creative practice uses of making strange has resulted in the findings discussed above. Despite this, as Howard, Carroll et al. (2002) found, it still sometimes led to confusion on the part of the actors, as the example of Kyahl in Chapter 4 indicated. This is possibly a reflection on the experimental aspect of the method, which could be mitigated when planning future research. Indeed, it is recommended that further research and professional development projects remain mindful of these potential limitations in relation to planning and scope implications.

The research methods intentionally constrained the research to drawing only from the perceptions of graphic designers. Although intentional, this also limits its perspective and further research would need to be carried out to address these limitations. As discussed in Chapter 4, the advantages of intentionally not triangulating the dramaturgic outcomes from the performance workshops back to the graphic designer interviewees also leaves an unexplored gap which could benefit from investigation by further developing and adapting the method to include these informants. Indeed, it is not suggested that this designer-centric approach should be utilised, on its own, to intervene in relations between designers and stakeholders, or to make professional practice judgements about the structure of creative practice organisations. Future research involving stakeholders could potentially complement the findings of this research and, as such, this research is limited to informing further research in that direction. Moreover, comparing the outcomes from the different methods might also be productive in future research, as might the distillation of the findings from this, or future research, into a publicly focused ethno-dramatic or forum theatre performance.

While findings from the research support previous arguments that graphic designers lack organisational gravitas (Phillips 2015), this exposes a potential paradox that some graphic designers appear conflicted at taking on what are perceived as managerial responsibilities within creative environments. This reluctance manifested during the interviews in Chapter 2 and re-emerged during the Performance Workshops in Chapter 4. This is an important
discovery, alongside many graphic designers’ apparent motivations about the value of design capital relating to creative ownership, as opposed to organisational authority. This suggests an untapped area which this research was not equipped to pursue further.

Indeed, it is only possible to speculate on the reasons for this reticence. Becoming self-employed appears to be a satisfactory option for many of those who were interviewed. Yet the struggle around job titles and roles suggests an incomplete solution. Similarly, it was not possible to deduce whether the graphic designers’ perceptions of stakeholders resulted from intentional organisational practices, historical accidents or other factors. However, it suggests a critical gap which would benefit from further research.

Significance

This research’s use of actors as proxy designers has deliberately drawn on and repurposed Viktor Shklovsky’s original creative practice usage of ‘estrangement’ – making the familiar strange by projecting normative viewpoints through a third party – a distorted prism rather than reflective mirroring. It did this by utilising existing dramaturgic and design methods, and methodically adding layers of defamiliarisation to the focus of the research – graphic designers’ perceptions of their everyday relationships with stakeholders – culminating in the use of actors as proxy designers. In doing so, the research argues for the use of making strange as a critical method for engaging with a professional practice, some of whose practitioners have been described by prior research as appearing to wilfully obscure their practice (Cross 2011), avoid engagement with (Dorland 2017b) and be resistant to research (Roberts, Wright et al. 2015), often inadequately communicating their own professional needs (Phillips 2015) and, as Chapter 2 indicated, sometimes presenting as adversarial.

As a professionally-immersed piece of creative practice research, it is also informative to offer a personal perspective. In constructing my own graphic design practice experiences with stakeholders as dramaturgic, I have allowed myself to reflect upon these experiences in a way that I normally would not have done. Similarly, by couching the designer interviews within theatrical terms, this allowed the designers to discuss their professional practices outside of their normal frames of references, thereby projecting these practices back to me and allowing me to re-evaluate my own perceptions of stakeholders. Indeed, the discovery of nuanced graphic designer perceptions of stakeholders, and the issues which inform those nuances, allows me to be aware of and evaluate the way that I
approach organisational interaction with stakeholders in my professional practice activities. Finally, allowing actors to use their skills to re-perform tropes from professional graphic design practice created further critical distance and made that practice strange to me but, paradoxically, also increased clarity by enabling me to reflect yet more deeply on my perceptions of stakeholders and observe my practice in a new manner. As a designer, this also allowed me to witness a proof of concept for a method which may inform future development of methods for professional development within graphic design practice and creative practice research.

The research informs and contributes to a fledgling research discourse devoted specifically to graphic design. This adds weight to the “growing pains” (Davis 2016, p. 130) of building scholarly bridges between professional graphic design practice and academic discourse, by informing the experimental nature of graphic design (Ross 2018) within a research framework. In qualifying the discourse as necessarily adaptive, the research adopts a bricolage of methodologies and confirms the usefulness of contextualising graphic design research as an interdisciplinary subject (Bennett & Bennett 2006; Davis 2012; Harland 2015), leaving it distinct yet versatile enough to respond to the transitory, historical, organisational, professional and academic paradigms within which the practice and its practitioners operate.

In drawing on and informing the professional graphic design practice from which it has emerged, the research cements its practice-based framework. However, the experimental research methods and their findings have wider implications within creative practice. The prototypical methods which were generated in this project engage with the practice of making strange in ways which can inform wider research discourse and can also be pedagogically significant for broader research and professional practices. This is particularly relevant for those practices which, like graphic design, are professionally transitory or have everyday practices which appear obfuscated or elusive.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Appendix 2: Ethics approval letter
Appendix 1: Questionnaire
Performatve aspects of design process

Phase 1: Questions for designers

As mentioned in the ‘Participant information’ sheet, there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. You are welcome – and even encouraged – to amend the questions themselves, to suit your own practice, experiences, or for other reasons.
What’s your job title?

Does you job title accurately describe what you do?

What do you do?

As a designer, which of the following stakeholders have you worked directly with in the past? If
you know any of these roles by a different title, please indicate. Also, if you feel that a specific
role/s has been left out, please indicate:

Account handler
Project manager
CEO/directors (as clients)
CEO/directors (as company boss)
Writers/journalists/editors
Marketing/sales
Printers
Software developers
Other
Question 1: List, in order, which stakeholder roles would you consider the most confident?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

- why/in what way?

Question 2: List, in order, which stakeholder has the most design knowledge?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

- in what way?
**Question 3:** Which stakeholder is most important to you professionally?

- why

- in what way?

**Question 4:** Which stakeholder best understands you as a designer?

- and why do you think that is?

**Question 5:** Which stakeholder’s job would you most like to have?

- why?

**Question 6:** Which stakeholder would most like to have your job?

- why?

**Question 7:** Which stakeholder are you most likely to socialise with?

- why?

**Question 8:** Which stakeholder are you least likely to socialise with?
– why?

**Question 9**: Describe the clothes that each stakeholder might wear.

Account handler

Project manager

CEO/directors (as clients)

CEO/directors (as company boss)

Writers/journalists/editors

Marketing/sales

Printers

Software developers

Other

**Question 10**: Which stakeholder would you most trust to look after your plants and feed your pet while you were on holiday?

Account handler

Project manager

CEO/directors (as clients)

CEO/directors (as company boss)

Writers/journalists/editors
Marketing/sales

Printers

Software developers

Other


Question 11: Has your opinion of each stakeholder changed over time. If so, in what way? Account handler
Project manager
CEO/directors (as clients)
CEO/directors (as company boss)
Writers/journalists/editors
Marketing/sales
Printers
Software developers
Other


Question 12: What hobbies might each stakeholder have?
Account handler
Project manager
CEO/directors (as clients)
CEO/directors (as company boss)

Writers/journalists/editors

Marketing/sales

Printers

Software developers

Other


Question 13: The following are phrases which have been heard within other communication design environments. In your experience which, if any, stakeholder is most likely to say each of the following phrases:

“It won’t take you long”

“It is that colour a bit bright”? 

“We need three different concepts”

“We need something really creative”

“Can’t we just pull an image from the web”? 

“Why does it look different on my screen?”

“I’ve just been shouted at by the client”

“We need something a bit edgy”

“They are being obstructive”

“This is award winning stuff”
“Why does this keep happening”?

“Can we make the logo bigger”

“Why haven’t I seen this before”?

“Why is it taking so long”?

“Why is it so difficult”?

“Why are we using that font”?

“Is it on-brand”?

Can you think of any familiar phrases or memes which you have heard said during the design process?

Question 14: Have you ever initiated your own design project?
   – tell me about it?
   – how was it different to your client work/normal job?
**Question 15:** If you were in the army, where do you see yourself hierarchically in relation to each of the following?

- Account handler
- Project manager
- CEO/directors (as clients)
- CEO/directors (as company boss)
- Writers/journalists/editors
- Marketing/sales
- Printers
- Software developers
- Other

**Question 16:** During the planning stage of design projects, do you see yourself primarily as a participant, observer, or in another way?  
- why do you say that?

- what about:

  - Account handler
  - Project manager
  - CEO/directors (as clients)
  - CEO/directors (as company boss)
Writers/journalists/editors
Marketing/sales
Printers
Software developers
Other

**Question** 17: How is your role unique?

**Question** 18: What demotivates you in your professional work?

**Question** 19: What would be your ideal fantasy job?

**Question** 20: Can you choose up to five words to describe the value of what you do as a designer?

**Question** 21: In a film, which role/s would each stakeholder (including yourself), play? And which famous actor would play them? Feel free to choose the same stakeholder more than once).

  action hero
  – which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?
magician
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

sidekick
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

villain
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

joker, court jester, comedian
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

love interest
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

survivor (last person standing – for example, in a disaster movie)
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

anti-hero
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

good cop having a bad day
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?
everyman/observer/bystander
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

zombie
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

alien
   - which one/s (stakeholder and actor)?

**Question 22**: Visual taxonomy of a design process. This diagram is one version of how the communication design process can be visualised. Please try to place each job title where you feel it fits best within the diagram. Feel free to add other stakeholders, if you wish.

**Question 23**: How would you re/draw this diagram? Or how would you express it differently?
This diagram is intended to be used to help locate each job role with particular functions and responsibilities within the communication design process. Where would you place each job function on this board?

There is no right or wrong location and there is also no need to try and be precise. If you wish, you can also draw your own version of this diagram.
Notes

Write or draw here…
Appendix 2: Ethics approval letter

Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN)
Sub-committee of the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

Notice of Approval

Date: 27 June 2013
Project number: CHEAN B-2000881-04-13
Project title: Performative aspects of design process
Risk classification: Low Risk
Investigator: Mr Yaron Meron

Approved: From: 26 June 2013 To: 26 June 2016

I am pleased to advise that your application has been granted ethics approval by the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network as a sub-committee of the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

Terms of approval:

1. Responsibilities of investigator
   It is the responsibility of the above investigator/s to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by the CHEAN. Approval is only valid whilst the investigator/s holds a position at RMIT University.

2. Amendments
   Approval must be sought from the CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment please use the ‘Request for Amendment Form’ that is available on the RMIT website. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from CHEAN.

3. Adverse events
   You should notify HREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)
   The PICF and any other material used to recruit and inform participants of the project must include the RMIT university logo. The PICF must contain a complaints clause including the project number.

5. Annual reports
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. This form can be located online on the human research ethics web page on the RMIT website.

6. Final report
   A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

7. Monitoring
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by HREC at any time.

8. Retention and storage of data
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title.

On behalf of the DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network I wish you well in your research.

Grace Wijnen
Ethics Coordinator
College of Design & Social Context
RMIT University
Ph: (03) 9925 2974
dscethics@rmit.edu.au
These design artefacts have been supplied as separate digital documents. The website is publicly available online.

**Artefact 1: Performative Design Brief**

**Artefact 2: Photobook**

**Artefact 3: Project website**

http://www.designingstrangeness.com