This research explores how human values and concerns are manifested and negotiated through the process of design. In undertaking this study, a variety of design interventions were explored to facilitate how values can be articulated and discussed amongst project stakeholders during the design process. These design interventions will be referred to as projects within the exegesis. In this exegesis, I will argue for the importance of a dialogic process among project stakeholders in the creation of a human-centred design practice in communication design.

This exegesis explains the central argument of the research and how the research questions were investigated. It presents a journey of the discoveries, learnings and knowledge gained through an inquiry of the research questions. The total submission for this research consists of the exegesis, exhibition and oral presentation. Through each mode of delivery I will share and illuminate how the research questions were investigated.

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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 exegesis is the result of the work which has been carried out since the official research program; and any editorial work, paid or unpaid carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Yoko Akama
5th May 2008
There are many people who I would like to acknowledge. The list would possibly be endless if I truly included all the people who took part, even if their involvement was momentary in my research journey. However, I would like to sincerely give thanks to the people who were most instrumental in supporting and encouraging me in the research project.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction provides the framework and background to the research. Key terms and concepts that are significant to this research are clarified. Outline of the research questions are given, personal motivations are made explicit and the research methodology undertaken is explained.

- What is human-centred design?
- Human-centred design in graphic design discourse?
- What are values in relation to design?
- What has led me here?
- How did I research?

Chapter 2: A journey of discovery through design projects

A detailed description of each design project is given in this chapter. It describes why, how and with whom the design projects were undertaken. It is structured in a chronological order to explain how the iteration of each project shifted or evolved its focus based on previous project learnings. Excerpts from my research blog and diagrams are used to articulate the process of reflection with each project’s critical incidences.

- Management vs Community
- Dear John
- Practitioner Conversations
CHAPTER 3: Illuminating the politics in design practice ......................... 143

Experience of conducting three different design projects illuminated how politics and power dynamics can affect the design process and project outcomes. This chapter identifies politics as an inherent obstacle in undertaking projects within a human-centred design framework. Given this political context, valuing input by various stakeholders in a design process is not a ‘default’ setting that comes automatically with the project. The role of the designer then is to facilitate the discussion that can illuminate the politics within projects so that any stakeholder agenda or assumption can be discussed. The importance of the role of discussion is a significant focus of this chapter.

The ‘human’ in practice
Politics and power
Politics as the main content and outcome of design
The ‘messy’ human realities of practice
Audiences …?
Audience control

CHAPTER 4: Articulating and discussing values through design ‘scaffolds’ ..................................................................................... 165

Sanders’s use of the term ‘scaffold’ was borrowed to open up and examine the variety of interventions that had occurred in each project. Further critical reflection of the design projects revealed how certain design interventions or ‘scaffolds’ were catalytic in enabling and facilitating dialogue, which in turn illuminated values that were important in each project. The research revealed how these scaffolds can capture, articulate, manifest and communicate stakeholders’ values. These scaffolds facilitated a dialogue that enabled understanding of what the values were and why they were important to the project stakeholders. That human-centred design is about how people are valued in projects and also about how values are collectively negotiated through the design process has been a significant discovery in this research.

Designing ‘scaffolds’ in Management vs Community
Designing ‘scaffolds’ in Dear John
Designing ‘scaffolds’ in Practitioner Conversations

CHAPTER 5: Significance of values in design ........................................... 191

In this chapter, a greater focus on values and its relationship to design is examined. Discourses on ethics and design and how values are discussed by various academics are examined to understand how they attempt to enable designers’ awareness of values that become embedded in design processes and outcomes. Through this examination, the danger in abstracting, dictating and prescribing values was discovered. Instead, I realised the importance of being aware of one’s own values and how they can be embedded or can impact upon the engagement with others through design. Design scaffolds cannot be instrumentally deployed to enable stakeholders to be aware, perceptive or reflective of the values embedded in design projects. They are only means to ‘heighten the resolution’ of values to oneself and others. The discovery of my values and how they can manifest in projects has been significant for how I create my own practice.

Design and ethics in design discourse
Abstraction and prescription of values
An awareness of values through reflective practice

CHAPTER 6: A ‘way of being’ in design practice ...................................... 211

In this conclusive chapter, the contribution of this research to the practice of communication design and human-centred design discourse in general is summarised. The research contributes knowledge that has been discovered through exploring the two main research intentions discussed at the beginning of the exegesis. The research proposes considerations, methods and tools to create a human-centred practice in communication design. It also suggests how to build on its research discoveries, which could lead to many possibilities and opportunities to create a different kind of communication design practice. I believe that this could lead to a different kind of agency for designers in the socio-cultural landscape.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................... 217
This research explores how human values and concerns are manifested and negotiated through the process of design. In undertaking this study, a variety of design interventions were explored to facilitate how values can be articulated and discussed amongst project stakeholders during the design process. These design interventions will be referred to as projects within the exegesis. In this exegesis, I will argue for the importance of a dialogic process among project stakeholders in the creation of a human-centred design practice in communication design.

A fundamental driver of this research is my concern for understanding design’s social role. Design is often perceived as both an intensely commercial practice and a significant mode of cultural production. However, design also plays a central role in shaping and informing the ideas and behaviours of people and their environment (Frascara 1995). In response to this, I argue that design is a way to construct what our world could be. Design can express social priorities and can also carry cultural values (Howard 2002). These values are often invisible and yet pervasively inscribed into the design process (Willis 2004). A critical focus on how and which values can become inscribed through the design process can lead to a better understanding of the social worth of the outcomes and experiences of communication design.

Many scholars, such as Clive Dilnot, Jorge Frascara, Tony Fry, Ezio Manzini, Victor Margolin and Victor Papanek have argued for many years that designers need to think more critically about what they are doing and the cultural, social and environmental conditions they contribute to. These arguments are yet to achieve a significant impact where practitioners of communication design are addressing them daily within their own practices. This research responds to the call made by these various scholars for the need for us to critically examine the role and practice of design in a social context.
In starting this study, the research initially explored how people are valued and involved in the design process and what outcomes result from their involvement. This research places emphasis on ways to consider people, including designers, audiences and clients as knowledgeable, informed and empowered individuals who have much to contribute to the design process. The research explored the role of the designer in a human-centred framework and what he or she could bring to the design process to enable stakeholders’ input. The questions that initially guided the research were:

What design interventions could facilitate stakeholder input in the design process?

How are audiences considered in design projects? How are they advocated?

These initial research questions focused on people’s interactions in the design process and how design interventions could facilitate their input. At this stage, I was also keen to understand the role of the audience and how they are advocated in the design process. Literature readings on user-centred design, participatory design and human-centred design were significant in enabling this understanding. Through knowledge gathered from readings, critiques received from academic peers and critical reflection on the design projects that were conducted, the importance of values emerged. As the research progressed, I began to realise how people’s values are manifested and negotiated through the processes and outcomes of communication design projects. As a result, the research questions evolved to reflect the transitions that have occurred.

The following are the research questions that emerged as the research evolved – they framed the investigation and guided the research in its latter explorations.

How are values manifested and negotiated in the design process?

This research established a human-centred design framework to explore what, why and how values are manifested through the design process. It seeks to understand how values are negotiated amongst the various project stakeholders. The research also investigated how design interventions can enable and facilitate ways for people to express, understand and discuss collective values in a project.

How does an awareness of values lead to a social contribution of design?

Led by a concern of design and the designer’s role in society, this research aims to understand the role of values in creating a social practice of design. This question seeks to discover how one becomes aware of one’s values as well as consider the values of others through designing. The following section provides a theoretical outline to the terms that are significant to this research. I have conducted a contextual analysis of the literature to understand how people are valued and considered in design. In particular, human-centred design is a key theoretical framework that has been significant to this research. An investigation of human-centred design in communication design literature has illuminated that this is an emerging area of theory and practice. Discussion on why, when and how people’s views and concerns are positioned centrally to the design process is currently limited. This research explored a human-centred framework in communication design projects, which has revealed the complexities of what it means to value people in practice. Politics and power-dynamics amongst project stakeholders were identified as obstacles and challenges in applying the principles of human-centred design to projects. This research has discovered how these obstacles and challenges can be addressed and overcome through dialogue. The research has revealed how design language can capture, articulate and communicate values that stakeholders bring to the project. A variety of design interventions can manifest embedded values so that they can be discussed and negotiated amongst project stakeholders. The research enabled an understanding that human-centred design is about how people are valued in projects and also about how values are collectively negotiated through designing. The research will contribute knowledge to the field of communication design and build on the discourse of human-centred design, drawn from applying and practising human-centred design within design projects.

The term values is also briefly discussed in this chapter. However, the understanding of values became much more complex when explored in the context of a day-to-day design practice. Through the process of research, the understanding of this term deepened. A discussion on values will therefore be undertaken in greater detail in the later chapters as a result of the enriched understanding gained during its exploration in design projects. The exegesis documents the journey that enabled deeper understandings of the concepts of values and human-centred design through revisiting and critically reflecting on the projects conducted. An awareness of the values that are central to my design practice as well as an understanding of how to be reflective and receptive to the values of others, has enabled a way to create a human-centred practice in communication design.
The exegesis concludes with a summary of the discoveries, learnings and knowledge gained through an inquiry of the research questions. The total submission for this research consists of the exegesis, exhibition and oral presentation. Through each mode of delivery I will share and illuminate how the research questions were investigated.

What is human-centred design?

The origins of human-centred design can be traced back to the 1980s where it emerged from a concern with researching the usability of the human–computer interface. This approach to design and knowledge creation was originally termed ‘user-centred design’ within the discipline of human–computer interaction (HCI). HCI identified that an understanding of human cognitive capabilities was required in order to improve the design of single-user interfaces (Fallman 2005; Winograd 1996). This approach often involved the development of methods to understand user needs and to test users on how they interact with design prototypes. However, prompted by a recognition that these individual users and their computer interfaces exist in a broader social and organisational contexts, many software engineers began collaborating with sociologists to understand a social perspective to inform software design. A key example of this is Lucy Suchman’s research documented in Plans and Situated Action (1987). Suchman illustrates the sociality and situated nature of human activity through an ethnographic study of photocopier use at Xerox PARC. Her work prompted a general shift towards a sociological participation in designing systems for work activities (Button 2000) that has led to HCI branches such as computer support co-operative work (CSCW).¹

This departure from perceiving users as single entities to understanding them as existing in a more complex social setting is significant to the emergence of human-centred design as a framework of design. Whilst there are some who still associate human-centred design with usability and user testing (Wilson 2002), others have called for it to be differentiated from the main characteristic of user-centred design (Hanington 2003; Poggenpohl 2002; Sanders 2002). Hanington emphasises the ‘humanness’ in human-centred design to argue that ‘user testing and usability often too narrowly define the range of human concerns of interest to design’ (2003, p. 10). He calls for ways for design to be affective, pleasurable and emotive. A design process that seeks to elicit satisfaction or delight from users is different to a design process that seeks to verify through usability testing. The former often emphasises a process that is generative, open-ended exploration of possibilities through an on-going conversation between the designer and user, whereas the latter emphasises a process of refinement through user evaluation of prototypes or finished products. Willis (2004, p. 2) similarly argues that the concepts of ‘use’ and ‘user’ are restricted by an overt instrumentalism that ‘sits uncomfortably within the vaguer promises and ambitions of the experiential that cluster around so many contemporary products/services’. In rejecting the overly functionalist emphasis of user-centred design, researchers such as Norman (1998), like Hanington, have begun exploring and extending other branches of user-centred design such as ‘emotional design’. Human-centred design’s departure from user-centred design is an attempt to integrate the rich and complex contexts of who people are, and how they interact in their world, into the design process.

Departing from user-centred design, human-centred design has evolved to become more holistically ‘human’ focused through integration of participatory design methods. The Scandinavian origin of participatory design embeds a democratic political ideology of enabling people to equally participate in decision-making (eds. Schuler & Namioka 1993). Prominent researchers such as Sanders (2000; 2002; Sanders and Suarez 2001), Fischer (Arias & Fischer 1997; Fischer 2000) and Ehn (1988), have been exploring how people can be more effectively involved in the early stages of the design process in order to contribute to idea generation. These researchers have explored generative design methods with stakeholders with the intention to develop a new ‘language’ that will enable all to contribute directly into the development of products, goods and services.

This new design ‘language’ was developed by researchers exploring various ways of designing with users through methods such as using paper prototypes, objects, drawing, storyboards and playful games. This approach to designing repositioned the role of designers from being producers of products and end outcomes, to becoming ‘builders of scaffolds for experiencing’ (Sanders 2000, p. 3). Sanders’s metaphorical positioning of design as a ‘scaffold’ suggests that designers will be creating and using tools that expand the language and methods of design for all project stakeholders. These tools can act as supportive structures that enable engagement between people during the design process. The metaphor proposed by Sanders echoes Bourriaud’s (2002) definition of ‘relational aesthetics’, where an artwork, born from a social process, simultaneously performs a role in generating relationships between people. This alternative framework for design highlights how a design process can be a collective, generative activity amongst stakeholders. Various people can become co-authors and co-creators of communication activities within the design process, in contrast with a perception of design as an activity belonging only to designers.

¹ CSCW is a field of study that focuses on understanding the way people work in groups to design computer based technology to support such co-operative work.
Human-centred design is a process of designing that values people equally to each other, and the role of the designer is often to facilitate various people’s input. Many regard this role more highly still and place themselves in opposition to an autocratic designer who stamps their vision on the material world (Crabtree et al. 2003). However, emphasis on the facilitatory role of designers has led some to question how creativity and intuition play a part in human-centred design (Fallman 2005; Wolf 2006). More recent discussions in human-centred design have begun to explore the designerly knowledge that designers can bring to the process. For example, Fallman (2005) and Wolf (2006) argue the importance of embracing a generative, iterative process of knowledge creation in human-centred design. In particular, they discuss how the process of designing artefacts, and understanding how this process engages project stakeholders, can contribute to design knowledge. Design knowledge as an interplay between materials, their use and the process of creation is also echoed by other writers, such as Cross (2006), Downton (2003) and Lawson (2004). Similarly, Krippendorff (2006) and Sanders (2002) are prominent advocates of the creative role of the designer and what they can enhance through their involvement in design projects. The emphasis that Krippendorff, Sanders, Fallman and Wolf place on what designerly knowledge can be brought to the design process, as well as creative ways to enable other stakeholders to take part, is significant to how human-centred design is currently evolving. This aspect is also critical to this research in valuing the input, contribution and knowledge that designers bring to the project.

The evolution of human-centred design illuminates how it is ideologically motivated by values that relate to empowerment and participation. As mentioned previously, participatory design’s influence on human-centred design has brought values of democracy, transparency and equality to the design process. Amongst researchers who have undertaken participatory design in a variety of project contexts many have pointed to the challenges of applying this model (Luke et al. 2004; Spinuzzi 2002; 2005). These researchers have outlined issues such as lack of time and resources; mismatch of stakeholder expectations and commitment; skill and knowledge gap amongst participants, as examples of challenges to overcome. The practical and ideological issues in undertaking a human-centred approach to communication design projects was also encountered through this research. Ways in which these challenges were addressed and overcome is elaborated further in the later chapters, in particular, chapter three (p. 143), ‘Illuminating the politics in design practice’.

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**Human-centred design in graphic design discourse?**

Graphic design’s contribution to the discourse of human-centred design has predominantly been through a focus on the usability and functionality of information design. Graphical methods of conveying statistics, maps, time, events and movement have evolved over many centuries. These methods required visual, artistic and mathematical skills to communicate a complexity of information in a manner most understandable to the reader (Tufte 2001). Within the literature on information design, there are various texts that discuss usability and functionality of user input and testing. For example, in web design (Nielsen 2000) or electoral ballot forms (Zeni 2003), functional aspects of information hierarchy, visual organisation and legibility are emphasised. Similarly, Frascara’s (1995) work on traffic safety communications emphasises a functional and social need for communication materials (public campaigns and information) to be tested by users to measure their effectiveness. Much of the discourse on human-centred design in graphic design is therefore still limited to an instrumentalism that characterises user-centred design.

Human-centred design may still be in its infancy in graphic design, however, there has been a healthy discourse relating to its social ideology. More and more designers and academics are questioning how design or designers can become socially responsible. A growing concern regarding the social, cultural and environmental impact of graphic design has fuelled many, like Frascara, to question the process and product of designers’ activities. Within the literature in graphic design, this trend is evident in critical writings contained in books such as Looking Closer series (eds. Bierut, Drenttel & Heller 2002 and 2006), Citizen Designer (eds. Heller &Vienne 2003), Obey the Giant (Poynton 2001), and Design Studies (ed. Bennett 2006).

Questions surrounding graphic design’s social, cultural and environmental impact have mainly arisen from a concern with graphic design’s relationship with intense commercial practices and the realities of designing in the capitalist world. One of the seminal provocative texts in the field has been Ken Garland’s First Things First manifesto. Initially penned in 1964, it was republished again in 2000 (which was called First Thing First Manifesto 2000) and ignited discussions in the graphic design community. The manifesto argues that:
Designers who devote their efforts primarily to advertising, marketing and brand development are supporting, and implicitly endorsing, a mental environment so saturated with commercial messages that it is changing the very way citizen-consumers speak, think, feel, respond and interact. To some extent we are all helping to draft a reductive and immeasurably harmful code of public discourse (quoted in Poynor 2001, para. 3).

The manifesto indeed prompted discussion amongst students and graphic design academics. It appears also to have polarised the debate, by positioning socially responsible design in opposition to design in the commercial sphere. On one hand, criticism has been fired at designers pandering to capitalist consumption. In redrafting Garland’s manifesto, Poynor (2002) cautions that a vast majority of widely disseminated design projects address corporate needs, which is a decisive vote for economic considerations over social, educational, cultural, spiritual and political concerns. He argues, ‘[i]f thinking individuals have a responsibility to withstand the proliferating technologies of persuasion, then the designer, as a skilled professional manipulator of those technologies, carries a double responsibility’ (p. 10). On the other hand, criticism is aimed at the idealist preaching that designers should alleviate social conditions by rejecting all commercial work. In Parrinder’s Just say no… quietly, she argues that ‘there is no simple, unified system which one can legitimately set up as a “bad thing” and therefore clearly oppose or defect from to a “worthy thing”’ (2002, p. 15). The First Things First manifesto is well intentioned in initiating debate but, at best, reveals Garland’s ideology and his personal, social and political values that he deems important. Many have since critiqued the manifesto as an abstract, reactive way of simplifying what is a more complex moral issue. For this reason, the debate does not offer any direction or alternative framework through which graphic designers can move forward.

Within the debate on design’s social role, arguments for social responsibility are still largely framed by charity and good intentions. In this argument, a designer’s responsibility is framed by ideas of doing pro bono work for socially oriented organisations, or using environmentally friendly methods of printing and production (Bush 2003). The literal and simplistic provision of solutions to this complex debate is one of the impetuses for this research. In contrast to discussing design as something to be applied to achieve either a social or commercial outcome, this research firstly positions design as an integral part of the political, social, cultural, environmental, commercial and technological world around us. In its diversity of manifestations design expresses social priorities and carries cultural values (Howard 2002). This research questions how, which and whose priorities and values are expressed through design.

A human-centred design framework is therefore crucial in exploring questions of values, as it focuses on empowering how people have input into the design process. The small, yet increasing number of designers and academics that are seeking to explore designing for, and with, other people have prompted Bennet to state that graphic design is at a crossroads:

Looking back, one sees designers engaged in a process where intuition informs the development of visual rhetoric intended to evoke a response from a target audience. Looking ahead, one sees them engaged in a process where research is integrated into the design of objects and experiences for and with the audiences (2006, p. 14).

Bennet points to the conceptual and methodological shifts that are manifesting in graphic design. This has occurred as a result of many designers and design academics who have begun to question the role of design and designers in the larger context of their social and cultural environment. Frascara (2002) similarly prompts this shift by exposing values of inequality that are implicit in design practice. Rather than assuming that the designer’s role is to tell things to people, he argues that designers should seek partnership with people in the process of change; ‘unidirectional communication is unethical and inefficient, and it promotes a passivity that in the long run will weaken our civilization’ (ibid, p. 34). Human-centred design at its most practical and literal level can begin to facilitate this shift.

The shift is also prompted by many who question the limitations imposed by the term ‘graphic’ design that obscures and mis-represents the practice. Frascara (2004) argues that the word ‘graphic’ places too much emphasis on the flat, graphical, physical element and omits the essential aspect of the process of designing effective communications. According to Frascara, the study of the interaction of visual elements that has absorbed the attention of designers so much in the past is only one means by which to organise a communicational event. This view is echoed by Bielenberg who argues that ‘the intoxicating power of the design solutions we see in design shows, and around us daily, interfere with our ability to clearly understand the role of the designer in the communication of a message’ (quoted in Holland 2001, p. 171). The focus on communication as the main process and outcome for design has prompted many to adopt the term ‘communication design’ as an alternative title to describe the activity of the discipline.
This research uses the term communication design due to the focus on the role people play in both communication and design processes within projects. In particular, the word ‘communication’ emphasises the interaction and exchange of sharing ideas and information amongst people. The research explores the active participation and involvement of people in the process of communicating and designing. The term ‘people’ includes a diverse range of participants, such as designers, clients, and audiences as valued stakeholders in the communication and design activities. The research emphasises the activity of communication and design as a social interaction that manifests as a communication design outcome.

What are values in relation to design?

Values are an integral part of people’s lives and vary across people, time and cultures. There are many kinds of values, such as ethical or moral values; ideological, political and religious values and social values. As such, the diversity of values is studied across different fields, such as philosophy, psychology, theology, sociology and so on.

While it is not possible, nor relevant to this research, to do a justified account of the myriad and plural concepts of values within these fields, attempts to provide a definition or a framework for this research has been sought from various philosophical, educational and sociological texts. From these texts, it can be argued that values enable judgements to be made on what is preferable and important to us. According to Keleti (1988), human values are not commodities that can be separated from the individual:

The holder of the value has an understanding for the pre-conditions of its existence, the origins that give the value its vitality, the terms under which it can be, and has to be, shared. The holders of the value might be wrong, but being wrong is their privilege and we have no right to question their decisions (p. 76).

From his statement, we can begin to see the complexity of value systems that can be shared and disagreed amongst people. Haydon (2006) states that there is a clustering effect in how each individual shares a greater or lesser agreement of values. This can create and be ascribed to different cultural, social, political and religious groups. However, a discussion of why we have values and why there are individualist and collectivist dimensions to values will not be examined here. A discussion of this kind would require greater depth of knowledge of values and it is not a main concern for this research. Instead, it is acknowledged that values are important to people, individually and collectively, in order to discuss how values relate to design.

As argued earlier, design is a human activity whose actions influence the behaviour of peoples and shape future worlds. Design methods, theory and practice owe their development to the exploration of the complex contexts of design’s connection to human, social, cultural and political values. A brief look at the history of design can illuminate this fact. For example, Margolin (1989) explains how the modernists like El Lissitzky, Bruce Archer, Richard Buckminster-Fuller, Walter Gropius and Emil Ruder have tried to align design thinking with scientific and technological values by creating and exploring various forms of design. Lissitzky in particular was enormously influential in developing new conceptions in graphic design through his exploration of typographical and graphical compositions (Spencer 1982). Common to this group of thinkers were their ideologies relating to social progress through advancement of science and technology, which in turn provided paradigms for design thinking. It is apparent, according to Margolin, that in their worldview, design could help solve social problems. They believed that communication could be objective and that optimum solutions to design problems could be found, and in turn, their designs privileged concerns with functionality and objectivity.

Modernism provided a significant springboard from where many other designers defined different relationships between design and values. This is characteristic of postmodernist discourse where diversity, not uniformity, becomes a characteristic of postmodern culture (Burkhardt 1989). For example, in graphic design, Wolfgang Weingart was a seminal figure who led the ‘new wave’ of postmodernism (Poynton 2003). Weingart was trained as a typesetter in Basel, Switzerland. The minimal aesthetic of Swiss modernist typography espoused values of neutrality and rationality. However, determined not to be constrained by the reductive conventions of modernist typography, Weingart began breaking its rules to ‘prove once again that typography is an art’ (quoted in Poynton 2003, p. 20). Weingart’s explorations with typography reflects how postmodern thinkers no longer believed in universally applicable values or solutions. Instead, they explored individuals’ expression of values and how design can facilitate this (ed. Margolin 1989). Another prominent ‘new wave’ graphic designer was April Greiman who was taught by Weingart. She explored various mediums and technology
(expedited by the development of the Apple Macintosh computer) as a way of constructing the self and a means of reinforcing one’s identity (Poynor 2003). This can be seen in a poster design where she used a life-size image of her naked body and a timeline that marks various inventions and developments, including her own birth, which culminate in the development of the Mac.

Many other designers have followed in the wake of the ‘new wave’ created by prominent designers such as Weingart and Greiman. Poynor (2003) has published a critical survey of postmodernism in communication design. In this book, he explains how the exploration and expression of self through design led to the emergence of ‘designer as author’, which is one of the key ideas in graphic design in the postmodern period. Discourse on authorship continues to provoke designers to explore various ways to assert their presence and significance in the contemporary visual culture (Lupton & Miller 1999; Rock 2002). Poynor explains how many designers feel limited by the baggage of modernism that defines designers as service providers and whose role is to translate the client’s messages in the spirit of neutral professionalism. Yet, design can never be an entirely neutral process – it is always informed by the influences it is surrounded by (Kinross 1989). This point is also argued by Bird, a design critic and historian (quoted in Dinot 1989, p. 227):

> [T]he designer is a member of a social group and thus comes under specific social and economic conditions, shares certain values and beliefs, and, in the widest sense of the term, represents in his or her work an ideological position.

In other words, there is a need for designers to understand the ideological role that is performed by design and the values that are embedded in it through the process of designing. Wills argues that it is a double movement – design’s expression of ‘humanness’, and in turn, design’s impact on ‘humanness’ – that is ‘far more pervasive and profound than is generally recognised by designers, cultural theorists, philosophers or lay persons’ (2006, p. 1). This research attempts to understand why, how and whose values become inscribed and expressed through the process and outcomes of communication design.

The popularity and prevalence of design-authorship discourse in communication design indicates how designers are still struggling to articulate the role they play and how this influences the performance of design in contemporary society. However, design-authorship discourse in communication design is still limited to a polemic of the agency of the designer. The design authorship polemic argues that the designer either has agency through complete ‘control’ and autonomy via self-initiated experimental designed projects, or they have a limited agency in serving the needs and production requirements of the client (Moline 2006). This research questions this black-and-white view of a designer’s agency to include the broader contexts in which designers work. In doing so, it highlights the variety of involvement by project stakeholders and how their collective and diversity of interests steers the design process. It is within this complexity that the research seeks to understand the deeper, implicit layers of how various project stakeholders, including the designer, manifest and express their values through the design process. Through this deeper understanding, I believe that designers and design will further their contribution to current and future worlds.

The discussion on values will be returned to again in greater detail in the later chapters. Through a process of revisiting and critically reflecting on the projects conducted, my understanding of values and design deepened. An awareness of the values that are central to my design practice, as well as an understanding of how to be reflective and receptive to the values of others, will be discussed in the final chapters of this exegesis.
What has led me here?

This section discusses how my background, professional and personal experiences provided significant impetus for this research. Reasons for my interest in design’s socio-political role and my investigation of this are made explicit. I intend to make clear why and how certain notions are important to my research, teaching and design practice.

My past and current design practice focuses on working with non-profit organisations. My choice of clients has been determined by the extent to which their activities and communication messages were things I wanted to support and endorse through design. I have worked with various environmental and human rights organisations for a period of eleven years. My role as a designer was to engage a broad general public through the creation of various communication artefacts. The intention was to inform and to change attitudes and behaviours relating to human rights, education and environmental issues. In addition, I have been teaching communication design at various levels in Australian universities for six years. During this time as a lecturer, my consideration of how to teach communication design has deepened. Whilst opposing a curriculum that emphasises technical production and ‘finish artist’ skills, I had little understanding of how to address design’s role in society through teaching.

What kind of teaching model might enable students to explore and question their role and the role of design practice in society? Undertaking research around design’s social role was the first step in exploring the questions that emerged from my teaching and design practice.

As an undergraduate student I was influenced by texts written by Victor Papenek, Katherine McCoy, Jeorge Frascara and Tibor Kalman – prominent members of the design community who questioned the limitation of design’s social role. Siân Cook, Teal Triggs and Liz McQuiston, as my undergraduate lecturers, were powerful role models and influences. Together they formed the Women’s Design and Research Unit (WD+RU) and were vocal in gaining recognition for women in design in the early 1990s. Through these various influences my choices and activities as a practitioner were directed towards questioning design’s role in society. I considered the ways in which design relates to people and the effect design has on the physical and socio-cultural environment.

As a result of these investigations, I harboured a feeling of unease about the over-emphasis of communication design’s role in promoting consumerism in society. I felt let down when I attended design conferences, as the content of these presentations were usually uncritical, show-and-tells of visual design work by a celebrity designer. The prominence of such designers in the late 1980s and early 1990s focused attention on the aesthetic of the graphic artefact. This scenario is illustrated well in Burdick’s text, Neomania (1992):

Nancy Skolos presented a gorgeous brochure that she admitted had unfortunately failed to increase sales for the client. That it was presented to an audience of designers for its formal qualities says that Skolos/Wedell considered it one of their better (looking) pieces in spite of the fact that it did not ‘function’ in a way that was meaningful for the client who had commissioned it ... meanwhile we seek out paper company promotions or open-minded clients whose projects allow more creative freedom: these are the projects we finesse into the wee hours of the morning (para. 8).

More importantly, these are the projects upon which our reputations as ‘good’ designers are made. They win the awards, the professional seal-of-approval that guarantees we will be asked to lecture, to show this very work, and will qualify us to judge the work of our peers in the next design competition (para. 11).

I believe Burdick’s text reveals some genuine concerns of a communication designer, revolving around gaining peer recognition for their aesthetic skills brought to a design project. These aesthetic skills were, and continue to be, the predominant way of showcasing and promoting communication design within its literature and conferences.

When the First Things First manifesto by Ken Garland was recirculated again in 2000, I was frustrated by its abstract, reactive way of simplifying what I believe is a more complex issue in addressing design’s social role. As I noted earlier (p. 19), the debate it aroused on the social responsibility of designers were still largely framed by ideas of doing pro bono work for socially oriented organisations, or using environmentally friendly methods of printing and production (Bush 2003).
The literal and simplistic provision of ‘solutions’ to this complex debate was a topic of a discussion I undertook with Michael Worthington (Co-director of the Graphic Design program at California Institute of the Arts, USA). Worthington was invited as a guest critic during the initial stages of my research. During this time, our discussions generated significant questions for my research. He asked me to consider whether designing for Greenpeace is a greater contribution to society than exploring how to design a shampoo bottle. His critique addressed what I considered to be a social contribution and social role of design. Is my contribution to society defined by what I design or who I design for? Or is it how I design? During this questioning, I reflected on an experience I had while working for a human-rights organisation. This is documented in my blog entry below. The conflict with the director general, as recalled in my blog, was a significant impetus that led me to explore the research topic. This experience illuminates the frustrations I encounter frequently when working with non-profit organisations. Even though we may share similarly aligned values in supporting the same causes and hold the same beliefs in social change, I felt frustrated that my role was limited to producing ‘layouts’ for the content they wanted to convey to their audiences. My opinion of how the public could be engaged in a particular issue often contrasted with how they believed this could be done. My frustration resulted from how my opinions weren’t listened to, or weren’t asked for. I believed that there was more I could contribute in creating a better, effective design outcome if they allowed me to discuss other alternatives. Was this frustration due to my designer-ego? If I wanted to continue being a socially-responsible designer, is this a role I would have to accept? Is designing for non-profit organisations the only way for design to contribute to society? Investigations of my interest in design’s social role and its meaning were undertaken critically through practice-led research. As a result of this deeper questioning, I was able to identify what I designed and who I designed for, and how I designed were not mutually exclusive, and that they are intricately linked. However, the understanding I lacked previously when working with the director general in a human-rights organisation was how I design with people. I did not have an understanding of the complex interactions that occurs amongst project stakeholders during the design process. I did not yet possess the understanding to enable a better articulation of my role, leading to a greater ability to have input in the communication outcome. In short, I lacked the experience, knowledge, understanding and, most importantly, the language to discuss an alternative way of designing with others. The various design projects I undertook in this research became vehicles to explore more deeply and critically how my personal values are manifested through designing. The recognition of the designer-researcher as a ‘political being’ has been a significant illumination point within my research. This understanding enabled me to instate a critical distance from which to examine my practice and research more analytically. As a result, I have been able to illuminate values that thread through my research and design practices. These values became evident through the projects I have chosen to undertake and they have informed how I have worked with others within the projects and the intended outcomes of those projects. The participatory aspect of this research began by learning how to practise participation. Reason and McArdle (2004) explain that a participative world-view sees people connected to other people and their environments as a whole. They state how our world and being is constructed experientially; it is not separated from other people or from our minds. A participative paradigm acknowledges and emphasises the ‘other’. Its significance lies when our minds meet ‘other’ minds and ‘other’ worlds (as opposed to just our own mental construction of ‘reality’). Someone who has a participative world view is willing to be open to the ‘other’ and has the intention of being ‘active’ in their participations with the ‘other’.
The participative view is significant for my research due to how I focus on the activities and relationship that designers have among other people within design projects. The designer’s relationship to others, the community and society through design, are also areas of enquiry.

Upon encountering Reason’s participative world-view, it echoed with my practice and understanding of Shinto and Taoism. My Japanese heritage, spiritual practice and identity has Shinto at its core. Shinto, which is the dominant and indigenous religion in Japan, emphasises one’s spiritual connection to nature and surroundings (ed. Suzuki 2004). Echoing many other indigenous religions and customs, it began with a respect and worship of nature as sacred and life giving. The sun, the stars, the world, the objects and creatures in it, including humans, are seen as ‘one’. This belief and the connection of humans to their surrounding are similar to Taoism. Taoism is a religious and philosophical practice that originated in China (Star 2001). There are numerous interpretations of Lao Tzu’s texts and teachings. The emphasis of Taoist teaching is on what the reader or learner makes of his or her textual interpretation and how it is internalised and manifested in their lives. Upon reading Taoist text and practicing this through Tai Chi for the last four years, I began to learn that we each carve our own Tao, a ‘path’, of understanding of who we are and our connection to this world. In this sense, there is no one ‘path’ or one ‘world’ that is the right one. The path we carve is an individual experience and it can lead to an understanding that our individuality is inseparable to what surrounds us. The physical actions and movements of practicing Tai Chi every week have led me to this philosophical understanding; this differs from an intellectual understanding arrived at through simply reading various interpretations of Taoist texts.

Reading literature by Reason (1994) and others, the intuitive and spiritual understanding of Shinto and the weekly practices of Tai Chi have assisted me to become aware of how my values are central and important to my practice. The design projects were vehicles to explore my values – how I think about them more deeply and critically in the context of my practices of research, teaching and designing and in demonstrating how they integrate with each other. In turn, a growing awareness of my values has steered the research process and outcomes. It is through action and reflection that I have come to understand, to discover and to learn. Through this research, I have been able to manifest my understanding of the social role communication designers’ play within their practice, in various communities and within society as a whole.

The significance of ethics in design is central to this research. Input from and interaction with other people has been the focus and a method of this research. As such, collaborations with other people in projects were conducted under ethics guidelines that endeavoured to respect and consider the values of those I worked with. In addition, the Ethics Committee of RMIT University approved the interviews that were conducted. The identities of the participants who have taken part in this research have been withheld. Where images of people and artwork are shown consent has been obtained for it to be presented in this research context.

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2 Lao Tzu is often credited as the original scribe of Tao Te Ching text, however, the present form and understanding of Taoism is an amalgam of combined wisdom and insights of many Chinese sages, which took place between the seventh and second centuries B.C. (Star 2001). The poetic and abstract nature of Chinese language and its translation into English have therefore produced different interpretations of Taoist teaching. Amongst the various texts available, I have preferred Star’s publication that includes the original texts with a reference guide to each character. This affords the reader the opportunity to construct their own meaning while using the reference guide for assistance.
How did I research?

This research has been undertaken through a human-centred design process in communication design projects. The research has examined the theory of human-centred design in literature and applies it in practice in this field. In doing so, the research bridges the gap between theory and practice to understand what human-centred design could be in the day-to-day practice of communication design. Rather than perceiving human-centred approach as an ‘ideology’, this research explores the obstacles and challenges in creating a human-centred design practice and what might be learnt or discovered through this experience.

Researching through the practice and method of design employs a critical, cyclical process of design action and reflection, revealing and illuminating theories derived from practice, which in turn inform the practice (van Schaik 2003). Its emphasis is on using methods, language, materials and the practice of design to create knowledge that transforms understanding of the possibilities of the discipline (Haseman 2006). This method of knowledge creation is a growing area of research that has links to arts-based research or project-based research in creative arts disciplines and other fields such as business, education and social sciences (Barone & Eisner 1997; eds. Barrett & Bolt 2007; Boucher & Holian 2001; McNiff 1998).

The research enquiry that I was most familiar with when embarking on this research was ‘research-oriented design’, a term used by Fallman (2005). It typifies the kind of research that is conducted in undergraduate studio-based design projects or when undertaking projects with clients. Fallman describes ‘research-oriented design’ as a way of deploying appropriate research methodologies to create a designed artefact. Information is researched in order to enable the designer to undertake and support designing and the creation of the designed outcome. Downton (2003) similarly refers to this approach as ‘research for design’. Such research parameters can include information about the client’s contexts; collection of material, data and information that is intended to enable specific design work to be undertaken; general reading of books, journals and on-line sources or first-hand observations and documentations. In contrast to this approach, Fallman terms a method of knowledge creation through the process of designing as ‘design-oriented research’. Researching through design, as explained earlier, uses the method, language, material and practice of design to create knowledge. It is a qualitative research approach that aims to know from ‘within’ a particular situation (Schwandt 1997). ‘Design-oriented research’ and ‘research-oriented design’ are not mutually exclusive when conducting design projects as a method of research. Both approaches have been used in this research as intertwined processes that support one another. This is evident in the design projects where research was undertaken to support the designing and creation of the designed outcome. These design projects then became the vehicle and method to explore the research question and to create and discover knowledge. Both approaches to research that are distinguished by Fallman are complementary to one another and their respective strengths lie in their different emphasis on how and what knowledge is produced.

Practice-led research is often criticised for not producing knowledge in a systematic, scientific approach that produces findings that are generalisable (ed. Barrett & Bolt 2007). There is suspicion that the production of knowledge that is personally situated, interdisciplinary, diverse and emergent presents little that is relevant and thus transferable to the wider community of design practice. Such issues in defining what constitutes research are frequently discussed amongst design research literature. It is the focus at conferences such as Research into Practice conference (held biennially in the UK) and the on-line PhD design discussion list hosted by the Design Research Society. Through various forums, conferences and literature, new conceptualisations of the relationship between design and research is evolving. Emerging from this discourse, greater recognition is given to the philosophical and knowledge-producing role of creative practices. It presents an alternative and robust form of knowledge creation to that of other traditional research methods (eds. Barrett and Bolt 2007). Traditional approaches to research emphasise empirical ways of pursuing knowledge that are objective and generalisable. In contrast, researching through design is characterised by the process of designing and accounts for individual subjective thought and action. The practitioner-researcher travels down the path of knowledge creation through responding to hunches, propositions and generating new questions as tangents are explored (Grocott 2006). Downton (2003, p. 91) further argues that ‘research is undertaken to test existing knowledge, and to produce and increase knowledge;
design processes both use knowledge and also produce personal knowing and collective knowledge. Such knowledge is different, not inferior’. Research through design puts forward the idea that ‘designing is a way of researching, and is a way of producing knowledge. Design knowledge consists of the knowing and knowledge designers have and use, concerning design and how to do it’ (ibid).

To understand a situation of practice that is complex, uncertain, unstable and unique (Schön 1983), knowledge has been drawn from an exploration of action in context. In this way, the experience of how I have engaged as a design practitioner in the various design projects conducted is significant to my learning. Learning, through discovery and experiences, is situated in the personal. This is echoed by de Certeau (1984) who puts forward the notion of understanding one’s practice as a way of engaging with real contexts in distinctly individual ways. The ‘tacit knowledge’ (Polanyi 1962) situated in my design practice is articulated and made explicit in this exegesis. Knowledge of human-centred design and its exploration in practice has thus been drawn from experiences in person, in order to formulate what it means in practice and as a practitioner as opposed to an investigation based on literature as a theoretical framework.

**Design projects**

Several design projects were undertaken as part of the research design. These are called Management vs Community, Dear John and Practitioner Conversations. Details of these projects, their methods and outcomes are discussed further in chapter two (p. 43), ‘A journey of discovery through design projects’.

Through the design projects, I have been able to explore the research questions about the designer’s role and how values are negotiated and illuminated in the design process. The design projects involved working with clients, interviewing various design practitioners and undertaking collaborative activities with other designers. These projects were undertaken as an action research orientated inquiry where other practitioners were examined in action to provide discoveries in context. The context of each project was diverse and varied and this in turn affected the role I played. The variety of the project contexts and observations of people’s interaction within them has enabled significant understanding of the process of engaging people in a design process. These discoveries were illuminated through observation, questioning and undertaking a critical reflective inquiry.

The design projects described in the next chapter provided a vehicle for the research. They supplied primary data as well as a variety of methods, contexts and people to explore design processes with. Each project underwent a cyclical process where it was examined and reflected upon to illuminate its significance and learnings. The research was critiqued by fellow research peers, external design practitioners and external academics as part of RMIT’s biannual Graduate Research Conferences. The cumulative result of this input led to significant shifts and development in knowledge of my design practice. This form of knowledge creation through projects and critique is typical of practice-led research (Douglas, Scopa & Gray 2000).

**Maintaining critical subjectivity**

In practice-led research, the researcher also becomes the subject of research whilst employing critical subjectivity. Critical subjectivity is a subjective state through which the researcher sees the world, as opposed to how the world is (Reason & McArdle 2004). Cherry (1999) discusses how ‘critical subjectivity and knowing’ means both fully knowing the individuality of the meaning and standing aside to place meaning in a different perspective to trigger new meaning. Such awareness is ‘an important skill for the learner intent on understanding and changing self’ (ibid, p. 78). Through this process, I have critically engaged with and questioned the processes, interactions and artefacts of my practice in communication design. I have also explored certain behaviours, theories, assumptions and beliefs inherent in my own subjective viewpoint and have critiqued this understanding to make knowledge explicit.

Situated experiences and meanings derived from the design projects inform the practice-led researcher. The quest for meaning leads me to aspects of phenomenology where the focus is on lived experiences and the making of meaning. Phenomenology suspends the everyday assumptions of perception and thought. Instead perception is awakened through attention and develops and enriches conscious experience of the life-world (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Thus, my own experiences and the way in which I question them have profound implications on my discoveries.

Similarly, Newton (2003, p. 104) discusses ‘designing as disclosure’ as an inscriptive rather than a descriptive process that ‘demands an active challenging of how things are understood, an active openness to new possibilities and an active
revision of understanding’. The emphasis on inscriptive design ‘affords design a unique and challenging role in knowledge creation’. This experiential design process places emphasis on learning from a phenomenological process of doing. It differs significantly from an empirical model of design learning where one seeks particular facts about design.

**Reflective practice through writing**

Reflection as a way of understanding my practice was facilitated and accelerated through the use of weblogs. Blogs, in short, are on-line personal diaries or journals where daily entries in the form of text, images and videos can be uploaded. This activity was initiated early on in my research and it was an instrumental research tool.

In the beginning, my blog was predominantly a ‘dumping space’ for my thoughts. Through daily or weekly entries, I began reflecting on what I was writing and documenting. Through the discipline of ‘noticing’ (Mason 2002) I became more analytical in my entries – linking thoughts to other thoughts, actions and discourse. As Mason states, I began to ‘strengthen awareness’ and ‘to awaken ... to possibilities’ (p. 201). Blogging is markedly different to writing down thoughts and doodles in a sketchbook, which was something I also undertook. The public forum of the blog space and the possibility of others reading it, critiquing it and commenting on it, forced clarity and assertiveness in my thinking and writing.

The entries became moment-by-moment research accounts of practice-led research. They document the discussions with others, thoughts and questionings whilst undertaking design research. From the vast number of blog entries made during the design projects, I have selected a handful of examples that capture the concerns, questions, reflections, discoveries and critical incidences that were significant at certain stages of the research. The inclusion of these entries in the exegesis text is intended to illustrate the iterative, cyclical process of how the research was conducted. It demonstrates a method of a ‘discovery-led journey’ (Newton 2003) through continual loops of reflective practice (Schön 1983).

The activity and discipline of writing was difficult to initiate at the start of the research. I suffered a lack of confidence in my writing due to a lack of practice. Writing is not a skill that communication designers are required to have, or to develop. Spacing, framing, highlighting, punctuating, and giving the writing a typographical style and a visual historical-cultural references is the common intervention with writing undertaken by designers (Lupton & Miller 1999), who apply their visual design skills to what has been written by others.

The research blog was an effective way to initiate and practice writing. Through this research, I have discovered similarities in the processes of writing and designing. Both approaches can be a language of enquiry. Both designing and writing involve multiple iterations to temper and shape concepts. Many ‘sketches’ to articulate a concept can be created through a process of re-writing or re-designing. Numerous attempts, in both activities, are made without having a concrete path or objective.

Conversations, readings, thoughts and observations coalesced through writing and designing. This was an example of reflective practice articulated as ‘reflection-in-action’ (thinking on our feet) and ‘reflection-on-action’ (thinking after the encounter) as observed by Schön (1983). This process of writing as a way to assemble, configure and meditate on discoveries opens up opportunities for clarity and criticality to emerge when examining the unfamiliar. Reading and reflecting on my writings at some distance brought forth a fresh perspective. This concept is expressed poetically in de Certeau’s text (1984, p. 97): ‘their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together’. What is learned through this process is then re-applied to the activity of designing – thereby continuing a multi-cycle of practice informed by reflection. The reflective process of writing and designing is documented and enhanced through my blog – it was instrumental as a research and reflective tool. This aspect is demonstrated clearly in the following chapters where the blog is used as a reflective tool to capture and critically think through the experiences I have undergone.

**Reading**

Undertaking a variety of readings also provided reflective space to examine my research through different lenses. Each reading provided different theoretical frameworks for my research. Each reading prompted a different kind of questioning and also accelerated the articulation of certain concepts. Through the knowledge gained from literature, I was able to further my own understanding of the research.
The readings were from diverse fields of design including communication design, industrial design, architecture, interaction design, human–computer interaction (HCI) and computer support co-operative works (CSCW). Readings from these fields were instrumental in formulating a robust and contextual understanding of design, human-centred design and in particular the relationship between people and design. Additionally, literature from the fields of management, economics, sociology, ethnography, psychology, philosophy, education, social justice and cultural theory were also referenced. This enabled a deeper and broader understanding of people, culture and society, which includes people’s interactions, conceptions, constructions and organisations in this world. Having this understanding was significant to contextualising my research on design’s role in society and how design is a process and outcome in exploring what our world could be.

Reflective practice through discussion

Many people were participants in this research. Many people have critiqued this research. Much of this research was designed based on the human-centred activities of interaction, exchange and conversation. These have been instrumental in the research. The discussions with others took place at forums, conferences, through comments posted on my blog and through frequent informal encounters.

Discussing my research with others significantly accelerated my learning, especially with external visiting critics who attended the Graduate Research Conferences at RMIT University. This research was presented and discussed over five years at this bi-annual forum. A panel of leading national and international academics and design practitioners who attended my presentations gave advice, critique and feedback. This input was critical to my research. It further enhanced critical distance, highlighted blind spots that I was unable to notice previously and greatly accelerated my self-reflective practice. Additionally, several presentations made at external national and international conferences were instrumental in enabling this research to be current and relevant to its field.3

Furthermore, peer critique was constantly undertaken with fellow researchers, which is a common practice in art and design fields. Group critique is a form of co-operative learning (Reason 1994) that fosters a learning community where feedback aids the researcher as well as strengthening the whole community of practice (Barone & Eisner 1997). By sharing the research exploration with others I have been able to frame my research within a broader practice of communication design.

Interviews

Several interviews were conducted with various communication design practitioners to unearth complex human interactions that are situated in practice. The series of interviews became a design project called Practitioner Conversations. These interviews were conducted with a diverse range of practitioners in order to sample from a broad range of roles, contexts, clientele, knowledge, backgrounds and experiences. They include an art director in an advertising agency, several creative directors that undertake web design and broadcast design, designers in a studio, a finished artist, an in-house designer in a publishing house, an interaction designer, and a director of a company who didn’t identify himself as a ‘designer’ but still designed systems for communication. A detailed description of each participant and a rational of why they were chosen can be found in ‘Practitioner Conversations’ section (p. 97).

Objects and artefacts, and their uses, were explored to facilitate the conversation during the interview process. Discussion with Daria Loi on her work on ‘playful triggers’ (2005) facilitated a way to begin thinking of artefacts that could stimulate and trigger a playful, participatory dialogue. Artefacts are considered by some as ‘a language of interaction’ (Krippendorff 2006, p. 46). These objects or artefacts were considered another ‘language’ to communicate through to facilitate conversations with the selected practitioners and compliment a ‘traditional’ interview approach. Through their use in the interview context, it was discovered that these artefacts were effective conversational lubricants amongst participants as well as being a useful way of visualising and mapping the interactions that occur in design practice. The methodological argument for the interview process and what this has revealed are discussed later in the exegesis.

The communication outcome of the research

Practice-led research uses the language of practice to communicate its research outcomes and uses the aesthetic and material tools of its craft (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). However, articulating tacit knowledge is paradoxical. Polanyi (1962, p. 95) states ‘owing to the ultimately tacit character of all our knowledge, we remain ever unable to say all that we know, so also, in view of the tacit character of meaning, we can never quite know what is implied in what we say’. This ambiguity leads practice-led research to create ‘different rhetorical forms’ that ‘reverberate and harmonise with observable experience’ (Grech 2006, p. 36).

Knowledge of the practice is embedded in the outcomes and material forms of the practice. Tonkinwise and Lorber-Kasunic (2006) argue that a designed artefact can materialise knowing to the receiver by how it is used. In other words, the designed artefact is a manifestation of the knowledge of practice for other communication designers. It is a phenomenological way of constructing and creating meaning. Thus, phenomenology not only informs my research, but also informs the ways in which I communicate to others about how I design.

Van Manen (1997, p. 345) emphasises the phenomenological role of text where it ‘has the effect of making us suddenly “see” something in a manner that enriches our understanding of every-day life experience’. Though van Manen refers to the power of language and poetry, I believe that the materiality of artefacts can have a similar resonance for an audience. Like narrative, borrowing Bruner’s (1996) idea, artefacts can have ‘verisimilitude’ through telling stories. Through the imaginative participation of an audience, artefacts become another tangible form of language to create empathic forms of understanding.

The notion of designing as a human-centred activity also includes myself, the designer-researcher. I recognise the active role I have played within this research and the agency I brought to it. This exegesis has been written from a designer-researcher’s perspective in questioning what, why and how people are valued and involved in the design process and what outcomes result from their involvement. The research intention is not to provide ‘how to’ solutions, but to prompt discourse. I believe that there is never one answer to a solution but, instead, multiple possibilities. My intention is to put forward my perspective as a body of knowledge in order to connect to a wider, critical community of researchers and designers.

The next chapter contains a chronological account of each design project undertaken in this study. Various diagrams, visuals, and images are presented within the text in order to clearly articulate the projects conducted.

Some of the visuals are presented in a way which shows how the artefacts were created during the projects, while other visuals are shown to articulate intangible processes in order to make them explicit to the reader. For example, the Management vs Community project focused on designing ways to facilitate stakeholder interactions. To maintain the anonymity of the project participants in Management vs Community, the visual identity of the association or any images and design work undertaken for this project have not been shown.

In order to illustrate this interaction, Yowies (plastic impressions of Australian animals) have been used to visualise and represent this process to the reader. Please note that the Yowies were not used within the Management vs Community project as artefacts. Rather, the Yowies were deployed as reflective tools which were used to make sense and visualise the interactions that took place among the project stakeholders after the project was completed. A detailed explanation of how Yowies are used as reflective and visualising tools for human interaction is discussed within the section, ‘Practitioner Conversations’ (p. 97) and ‘Designing ‘scaffolds’ in Practitioner Conversations’ (p. 179).
In this chapter a chronological account of each design project is given. These projects are called Management vs Community, Dear John and Practitioner Conversations. Each project describes the context, research intention and project outcomes. The diagram on the next page shows how I revisited the project outcomes through repeated reflection and critique. This enabled a deeper understanding of values and how people were valued in the design process. A critical reflective enquiry enabled an understanding of the importance of values and how they manifest through dialogue to emerge at a later stage. These discoveries will be discussed in later chapters.
Explored tools from PD, eg. personas and artefacts that revealed values in project.

Developed tools from PD. Playful triggers communicated human relationships in practice.

Revealed the significance of dialogue to understanding the diversity and differences of values.

Further examined various design ‘scaffolds’ that facilitated dialogue.

Management committee intervened in the outcome of the identity. Viewed this project as a failure.

Use of personas enabled discussion on audience and designers’ values. Enhanced collaborative process.

Highlighted the power dynamics between stakeholders in projects. Importance of relationship.

How to enable project stakeholders’ input in the design process?

How to consider potential audiences of the project?

What interactions occur between people in other design projects and practices?

Management vs Community

Dear John

Practitioner Conversations

Project Focus / Intention

Project Outcomes

Discovery Through Critical Reflection

How to enable project stakeholders’ input in the design process?

How to consider potential audiences of the project?

What interactions occur between people in other design projects and practices?

Management vs Community

Dear John

Practitioner Conversations

This diagram shows how I revisited the project outcomes through repeated reflection and critique. This enabled a deeper understanding of values and how people were valued in the design process. A critical reflective enquiry enabled an understanding of the importance of values and how they manifest through dialogue to emerge at a later stage. These discoveries will be discussed in later chapters.

Double-loop learning of critical reflection

- This is discussed in chapter 2 (p. 43)
- A journey of discovery through design projects
- This is discussed in chapter 3 (p. 143)
- Illuminating the politics in design practice
- This is discussed in chapter 4 (p. 165)
- Articulating and discussing values through design ‘scaffolds’
- This is discussed in chapter 5 (p. 191)
- Significance of values in design

‘Scaffolds’ used language from com design, with limited understanding of UCD to undertake workshops.

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Explored tools from PD, eg. personas and artefacts that revealed values in project.

Developed tools from PD. Playful Triggers communicated human relationships in practice.

Design ‘scaffolds’ can facilitate human relationships. They can enrich the experience of dialogue and exchange amongst project stakeholders. However, without a self-awareness of one’s own values and how that can be embedded or impact upon the engagement with others through design, it is not possible to become reflective or receptive of the values of others.
Management vs Community was the first design project undertaken in October–December 2003. This project developed a visual identity⁴ for a housing and resource association through a consultative process with the association’s members. The identity of the association, its members, workshop participants and the designers who took part in this project remain anonymous in this exegesis.

Management vs Community was the very first research project embarked upon in this study. As such, my approach at the time had been to explore an application of a consultative process with various project stakeholders. I was keen to investigate and understand the role of the designer in enabling and facilitating stakeholder input in the design process, and what designed outcomes may result from this. I was invited on to this project by a team of designers who were also members of the association. Undertaking a consultative process, which was intended to be straightforward and democratic way of enabling input, became far more complex than initially expected. There were challenges and complications due to shifting roles and unclear boundaries amongst the community stakeholders. The description and reflections provided here describe the revelations and illuminations from this project. Again, my research blog was instrumental in several ways. It became a place to document the observations and reflections made while undertaking this project. Audio recordings of these meetings and workshops were made and notes were simultaneously taken. This documentation assisted in recalling details that became descriptive entries in my blog; these were written following meetings and workshops. The blog entries also captured how I felt or what I thought could have been done differently. These entries assisted how I reflected on the projects and excerpts from it features within this exegesis. However, the deeper critical reflection took place at a later stage in the research, due to the learnings gained through conducting several subsequent projects. The Management vs Community project text is shorter than the other project descriptions, however, insights gained through this project will be re-visited in later chapters to reveal deeper understanding.

⁴ The design of the visual identity is not shown in the exegesis to maintain anonymity of the association.
I was invited by the design company to facilitate a consultative process between the community and the design team. The consultative proposition was an ideal process and outcome for a socially based association to engage in. Designing an identity for this association involved an internal and external communication process. It involved the consolidation of who they are as a diversely collective internal community, as well as a communication of a unified identity to the people outside of the association. Furthermore, an open forum with the rest of the community was also planned. This event was requested by the management committee so that other community members could engage in this project and have a say on the evolving design.

The community feels that the current visual identity is out-dated. Would your design company be interested in re-designing it?

The site of the design intervention was an association that provides office space to small socially or environmentally based non-profit organisations. A survey conducted within the association by their management committee earlier in the year revealed that the members felt that the associations’ visual identity did not appropriately reflect the activities of the association.

As a result, the association decided to have a new visual identity designed. The management committee asked a design company within their association to re-design the visual identity by undertaking a consultative process with their internal community members. The key objective of this project was to empower the community members to consolidate the values of the association that could be translated into an identity system, which could then be applied to stationery, the association’s website, and interior and exterior signage.

Project description

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The community feels that the current visual identity is out-dated. Would your design company be interested in re-designing it?

We would be happy to.
The specific context of this project meant that there were no clear-cut boundaries separating the client, audience and designers, as they were all part of the community housed within the association. I was the only ‘outsider’, brought in to facilitate the consultative community workshops that took place. Due to the nature of the association all stakeholders possessed similarly aligned values of respecting mutual input in decision-making. I initially observed that the community consultative process was designed to balance-out power relations within the association in order to avoid any single stakeholder controlling the outcome.

The role of the management committee (comprised of elected members from the community) is to undertake the day-to-day management of the association. The designers and the management committee discussed how the consultative workshop participants should play an active role in steering the visual identity. Direct involvement from the management committee thus seemed minimal, as the designers were asked simply to report back on the progress at key stages of the design process.

The diversity of the non-profit collectives housed within the association (for example, human rights, disability, environmental, indigenous issue groups etc.) posed an interesting challenge in creating a visual identity that represented them as a whole. In an attempt to harness the diversity of the association, a group of five representatives were selected from the wider community. They ranged in age and gender and were drawn from associated grass roots-groups. Two participants who were partially disabled also took part in the consultation process, to represent the needs and views of the disabled community in steering the design outcome.

These participants took part in several workshops that generated discussions and critiqued the progress of designs for the visual identity. My particular focus as a designer and workshop facilitator was to create a forum where the participants, who each brought diverse backgrounds and experience to the workshop, could actively engage in generative discussion with the designers about the visual identity.
However, one of my concerns in conducting the workshop was the participants’ unfamiliarity with the language and knowledge of design. Designing a visual identity is a process of distilling the values and personality of an association into a simple, graphic message. There were varying levels of design skill and knowledge amongst the workshop participants. I was unsure whether the participants’ position as ‘novices’ of design would create anxiety when generating ideas with the ‘expert’ designers. Arias and Fischer (2000) term this difference in expertise as ‘the symmetry of ignorance’. They state:

[N]o individual stakeholder, or group of stakeholders, such as a Community of Practice, knows all the relevant knowledge, yet the knowledge of all of them is equally (symmetrically) important in the process of framing and resolving the problem (p. 2).

Concern for the uneven level of design expertise resulted in the first workshop being conducted without the other designers present. I also avoided using a formal language of design to generate discussion. Instead, word and image association games, visualisations and brainstorming exercises were undertaken. We looked at logos of other organisations and companies and discussed how and why certain words were associated with the logo. Other exercises revolved around a list of qualities that the participants identified with the association. These exercises were catalytic in generating possible directions to pursue. Discussion on selecting core qualities and characteristics of the association enabled the participants to grasp the complexity of representing the association in just a few words. This realisation enabled them to understand the difficult task that lay ahead for the designers.

The consultative workshops were open, informal and organic. This ensured that all participants felt comfortable sharing different viewpoints, participating in discussions and generating ideas for the visual identity. The workshops were productive and effective in identifying values for the association that could be explored within a visual identity. The participants voiced their awareness of how the association was undergoing change in its activities and aspirations. The participants felt that the visual identity project was a good vehicle for exploring the association’s potential and for reflecting this aspiration.
After the first workshop, and following discussion with the designers, the generated ideas and values were turned into a brief. Since the designers were not present in the first workshop, I undertook the role to advocate on behalf of the workshop participants, detailing the discussions that took place.

From the brief and the discussions between the designers and I, several possible visual directions for the identity were designed. I was asked to give feedback and to critique the visual directions that were created.

A second workshop with the same participants followed where the proposed visual directions were discussed and critiqued. The designers also took part in this workshop. They were keen to learn and understand first-hand what the workshop participants thought of the visual directions. The workshop participants were intrigued and showed interest in the visual concepts shown. They unanimously felt that the designers had thoroughly explored the directions proposed in the last workshop. As well as showing enthusiasm for the visual concepts the participants also offered critique. For example, some visual concepts were ambiguous or illegible for the participants who were visually impaired. As a result, the tactile quality of the identity was also explored by considering embossed signage and letterheads as potential directions.
From these discussions, the workshop further consolidated four strong proposals for the visual identity; these were based on the values generated from the first workshop. Below are summaries of the feedback from the participants on the different proposals.

**Proposal #1:** The strongest in linking to and continuing with the existing visual identity. It is familiar and immediately recognisable. It is an easy and safe option with the least amount of transition and alienation. It represents solidarity and people and connects the old to the new. However, it is too similar to the existing visual identity and shows little dynamism or progression.

**Proposal #2:** Strongly represents community and connection of people. Communicates nurture and support – important values for the association. The colours used in this proposal connect to the existing colours in the visual identity, which would make the transition to a new identity easier and less alienating than if the colours changed.

**Proposal #3:** An eye-catching design and very unique. Has an organic feel and represents growth and connection amongst people. However, some participants also associated this visual with other irrelevant things like chemistry and traffic lights. This concept was less preferred than the first two proposals.

**Proposal #4:** A progressive design that reminded participants of an aerial view of people. However, it had little association with the qualities of the organisation. It was busy and not memorable enough.

As a result of the discussions at the end of the workshop, the participants and designers felt that proposal #2 had the most potential for the direction of the visual identity and were ready to report this progress back to the management committee. The workshop participants and the designers felt that proposal #2 captured the aspirational values that they identified with the association, reflecting the changes that they felt could occur.

Subsequently, the four proposals were presented to the management committee. While they were informed that the preferred proposal by the workshop participants was proposal #2, the committee asked the designers to proceed with proposal #1. The management committee explained that the association was undergoing a difficult transitional period where stability and security was of greater importance than radical change. These priorities were reflected by the management committee overruling the workshop participants’ preference for the proposed visual identity.
Considering this turn of events through my research blog (above) revealed to me the hidden politics behind this project. Despite endorsing a democratic process of community consultation, the management committee overruled the community’s preference based on their own agenda. Their intervention at the critical stages of finalising the visual identity revealed that the workshop participants and the designers never had any authority over the ultimate decision.

I observed that the designers were very passive and voiced little concern when these revelations were made. On discussing this incident later, the designers commented that they felt ‘intimidated’ and that they ‘lacked control’ during this stage of the process. I believe these feelings were reflected in their passive behaviour.

The designers’ disempowerment was most obvious during the open forum organised at the management’s insistence to provide hearing for other community members’ views on the evolving visual identity. During this event, I noticed how nervous the designers seemed when displaying the designs to the participants. As a facilitator of the open forum I made every effort to ensure the forum was constructive rather than critical, yet the most vocal people appeared to sway the opinion of others. One vocal member in particular voiced negative criticisms on the designs that made both the designers and myself feel uncomfortable. These criticisms seemed to be made out of personal dislike of the identity’s visual form. As a result of this negative feedback, the designers and I were unclear about how to address and incorporate the feedback from the open forum. We were also concerned that it may impact upon the visual and conceptual directions that had been generated and pursued in the consultative workshops. On reflection, I had little leverage in this forum to enable valued exchange between the participants, even though my role was to facilitate the session. This forum may have enabled the attending community members to feel included and valued, but it resulted in both the designers and myself feeling judged and devalued.
The outcome of the project was disappointing. I had anticipated that the inclusive and consultative design process would result in an outcome where all stakeholders were valued and empowered. However, the workshop participants and designers were marginalised and disenfranchised due to the politics that surfaced during the project. Literature on human-centred design and participatory design emphasises that empowerment of people is a significant social value that design can bring about. That this project did not achieve this made me perceive it as a failure until I began to reflect upon it again from a position of time and distance. Thus, further illuminations from this project will be discussed in greater detail in the later chapters.

In establishing my next research project, I wanted explore how to facilitate ways of considering stakeholders who may not be physically present in the design process. In contrast with Management vs Community, which had a more instrumental and physical input into the design process from its stakeholders, another design project that could explore ways to advocate for stakeholders who are not physically present, offered an interesting option. This led to my involvement in the next project, called Dear John.
Dear John was a collaborative project undertaken in conjunction with five other postgraduate design researchers from the Communication Design programme at RMIT University. It took place from March–October 2004. The designers who collaborated in this project explored their own research topics within the established collaborative framework. This project was unique as a site of investigation as it enabled various design researchers to contribute to, as well as explore, their own research investigations.

Overview

The team of designers created a design intervention, which included a website called Dear John, to coincide with the Australian federal election in 2004. Our design team was motivated by the significance of grassroots websites for fostering community action and the increasing power of viral electronic campaigns to influence change. The Dear John website set out to mobilise and spread its message by encouraging young voters to engage in downloading and forwarding witty emails and materials to their ‘networked’ community. Recognising that many people have turned away from being politically engaged in the traditional sense, the rhetoric of politics or journalism was avoided on the website. Instead, Dear John invited people to download copyright-free t-shirt transfers, badges, posters, screen savers and to forward letters and clip art to their friends. In addition there was a gallery space on the site to showcase materials made by the public. Dear John’s message communicated that personal political involvement could be a simple act of wearing a t-shirt or putting up a poster. Through the website and its artefacts Dear John intended to create an alternative way for young voters to be involved in political discourse.

5 The Dear John project is also a part of the Masters by Research Project submissions of Ryan (2005), Geddes (2006) and Haslem (2007).
The Dear John project provided rich opportunities to explore how to enable a team of designers to collectively undertake a human-centred approach to designing. It was a different context to the previous project, Management vs Community, where I felt that the designers were not empowered at critical stages of the design process. As I explained in Management vs Community section (p. 58), I observed how the designers were disempowered by the management’s intervention at the final stages of the project. Concerns about the designers’ disempowerment led to a greater focus on exploring the processes and interactions amongst designers in the Dear John project. Dear John was led and initiated by a group of designers, therefore, it did not have a client or input from other stakeholders. This context seemed fruitful for exploring ways to consider stakeholders such as potential audiences who were not physically present in the project.

My main contribution to Dear John focused on how the team of designers can collectively discuss concerns surrounding the intended audiences of this project. In a collaborative project consisting of designers, I investigated how to advocate on behalf of the potential audiences of this project and what discussions and outcomes may result from this. One method that was used to explore this was the creation of ‘personas’ (Cooper 2004) as tools for communication between the team to collectively discuss concerns surrounding the audiences. Through this process the team discussed who the potential audiences might be. This enabled the team to actively consider the variety of audience values and the multi-dimensionality of their lives. On reflection, the personas were revealed to be an effective tool in facilitating discussions, and thereby enhancing the collaborative process amongst the team of designers.

The nature of our team’s collaborative practice was very organic – the designers volunteered roles and tasks to be undertaken as and when it was necessary, based on their availability or inclination. As such, there were no set or delegated roles. The project idea itself was woven from the input of its collaborators over a period of many months. All of the designers involved contributed and yet no individual was in control of the project outcome. As such, the project was led by multiple authors who each brought to the project nascent ideas and concepts relating to their own research. The open and unpredictable nature of this process enabled me to facilitate the team of designers, collective exploration of a human-centred approach to designing.

Due to time constraints many of our initial ideas had to be rejected and the Dear John website was online for just over a month prior to 9 October 2004 (federal election day). As a final challenge, we had to write press releases and copy to promote the website – skills that are not commonly emphasised as important or inherent in the practice of communication design. We managed to overcome these challenges by seeking advice and input from other fields of practice.

Dear John was an agent of activism and political intervention. Dear John also encouraged active participation amongst its audiences and designers. The project enabled the designers to participate with the audiences to co-create a public forum for voicing concerns within the context of the approaching election. By embracing diversity and different voices, Dear John encouraged personal expression and connection with political issues. In Dear John design played a catalytic role in empowering people to be active, thinking and decision-making participants in society through the way they communicated to one another. This project provided a valuable learning experience in understanding a designer’s agency in relation to the wider society. A deeper understanding of values such as empathy, participation and empowerment began to emerge through this project. Through reflection, these values became significant later in understanding ways to create a human-centred practice of enabling and deepening the engagement between design’s various stakeholders.

My research blog was again instrumental in documenting the observations and reflections that arose from this research. Descriptive entries were entered each time a meeting or workshop took place.6 Audio recordings of these meetings and workshops were made and notes were simultaneously taken. Discussions also took place on a forum board where we shared ideas and reported on activities undertaken. Excerpts from the blog are woven into the following text to indicate how the project was continually reflected upon. A deeper critical reflection took place at a later stage in the research as a result of undertaking further projects and receiving external critique. The reflection of this project will continue to be revisited in later chapters to reveal richer and deeper understanding of the importance of values in this project.

6 The entries can be read in my blog under the category, ‘Dear John.’ http://raws.adc.rmit.edu.au/~e48618/blog/?cat=16
Background

The disaffection and sense of powerlessness apparently felt by many people is a source of mounting public concern. Demonstrations in Seattle, Prague, London, Gothenburg and Genoa confront governments and media with worrying signs of disturbance in the depths of the social body. If there is still a tendency to stigmatise all acts of protest as the work of an irresponsible carnival of activists, falling voter turnouts in national elections are beginning to oblige even the most complacent politicians to face the fact that growing numbers of citizens feel their democratic votes count for nothing (Poynor 2001, p. 8).

With an election looming, our team of designers recognised that many people in contemporary Australian society have turned away from being politically engaged. Resulting from a desire for new leadership in government discussions began amongst the team about the idea of a collaborative project exploring design intervention in a political context. Apart from our shared desire to remove John Howard from office due to the frustration we felt with the conservative economic rationalist government, we also wanted to initiate positive long-term change.7

During the discussions the team considered how to encourage the politically cynical target audience to understand that their opinion counts; help the politically vocal increase the effectiveness of their voice; encourage young people to care about who governs their future and let the apolitical know that politics isn’t about ‘stiff, boring men’ with empty words. We felt that this design intervention could play a role in changing people’s attitudes toward politics.

Creating and developing a design project within the context of the national election was an exciting challenge. What could designers create that could be engaging and meaningful for people? What agency could they bring to this political activism? The challenge lay in defining ways to motivate people to discuss and debate the socio-cultural issues that affect the society they live in.

After weeks of discussion, the design team came up with the core concept. A “Dear John letter” was a World War Two phenomenon in the United States whereby wives or girlfriends wrote letters to their boyfriends or husbands who were servicemen stationed for long periods overseas in order to announce the end of their relationship. Dear John seemed a perfect title for our project. It enabled the public, in first person, to announce that they no longer wished to associate themselves with certain policies represented by John Howard, and to explain why. We decided to reinforce this message by asking people to place the Liberal Party of Australia last on their voting slips, but also to make their own choices on who else to vote for.

From this initial idea we decided to create a website called Dear John to engage uncommitted voters between the ages of 18 and 30. The challenge was to capture the interest of this often cynical or uninterested demographic in the 2004 national election.

Many of us in the design team did not have any experience in political activism. As a result, we looked to other socially oriented movements and campaigns as models. Moveon.org, based in America, were mobilising thousands of people by providing tools and information for grass roots activism in the lead-up to the US presidential election. Similarly, in The rise of network campaigning, Miller (2004) used the Jubilee 2000 campaign as a model for discussion. He highlighted the importance of ‘looseness of institutional structure and diversity of tactics that make network campaigns different to traditional approaches’ (p. 208). To reach different clusters of audiences he describes how network campaigns can allow a ‘diverse grouping of organisations and individuals to participate through commitment to a shared purpose, while remaining autonomous individual agents’.

Encouraged by Miller’s text, discussions immediately began about our collective of designers’ shared goals. Through this, we reasoned that many young voters’ lack of interest in politics would resonate with the following three phenomena. Firstly, diminished belief in the rhetoric of the empty sound

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7 For more explanation of why the team of designers felt frustrated with John Howard’s government, please read the text on Dear John’s website. www.dearjohn.net.au/dearjohn_why.html
My main focus within **Dear John** was to explore how the team of designers could collectively discuss concerns surrounding the intended audiences of this project. I explored how to advocate on behalf of the potential audiences of this project, and what discussions and outcomes might result from this advocacy.

Discussion about audiences can often be related to how research is conducted to gather data and build an understanding of them. Market research and focus groups are the most common form of research within the practice of communication design, particularly in retail, packaging and advertising sectors. Focus groups, often requested by the client, are conducted at certain stages of the design process to gauge consumer responses to design prototypes. The feedback from focus groups can have significant impact on the design process – sometimes to the detriment of the entire project. Focus groups have been criticised as prone to error, which can result in distorted outcomes. Gross (2003) discusses an alarming statistic that suggests a high frequency of incidents in which focus group participants lie. He alludes to factors that influence their responses, such as group pressure and mind games. He states:

> The primary function of focus groups is often to validate the sellers’ own beliefs about their product. Focus groups, which are supposed to explore the psychological needs of consumers, may serve as much to fulfil the psychological needs of sellers (ibid, para. 11).

Similarly, demographics are the most common form of capturing consumer data. This method generally utilises categories such as age, gender and income to provide details about certain facets of people’s lives. However, this pigeonholing abstracts the real contexts that constitute people’s complex, overlapping roles and lifestyles. These simplifications may result in generic or simplistic design artefacts that fail to engage or elicit response from their intended audiences. It can restrict the designer to responding only to a set of generalised characteristics rather than to the more complex characteristics of the actual audience.
Personas

To begin thinking about and discussing who Dear John’s audience could be we listed potential voters in a political spectrum. This ranged from people who were politically active and vocal to those who were apathetic about politics. This gave us a good starting point to work out who would be most responsive to Dear John’s messages.

Inspired by Cooper’s research (2004) we trialed the use of ‘personas’. Personas require the creation of characters, like in a novel or film. The personas are given names, genders, occupations, activities and relationships. The personas we used were based on combining traits of multiple people that the designers knew of. Thus, they had echoes of real persons, which made them plausible and believable to others.

Each designer was delegated a persona from the defined political spectrum. They were asked to describe what they were like. The following are the personas that were created for Dear John.

Averages do not exist in reality, only in statistical measurements. For example, an average family in Australia has 2.4 children, yet there are no families that have 2.4 children. There are mostly families who have either two or three children. Similarly, if we considered what we ourselves, and our friends and families, are like in reality, could this be represented without judgement and pigeonholing? This question illuminates fundamental problems in the way audiences are represented using such statistical methods. How can the richness, specificity and diversity of audiences be accurately captured? What effect would capturing these qualities have on design’s processes and outcomes?

These questioning led me to write this entry in my research blog:

Without a client, who ordinarily provides the project parameters, the project became mired in endless consideration of the competing possibilities of what it could become. These ongoing debates were fuelled by the designers’ individual ideals, desires and agendas. The discussions on ‘who’ the audience of Dear John led to further discussions of the objectives of the project.
Jules


But some of my friends are rich. But they've got their priorities straight. They're protesting like me. We organise protests. About things that matter. I get so frustrated by people who don't think about these things. Or know something's wrong but don't do anything about it. Like Jim. What's up with you man? It's simple! You're getting robbed! Vote those $#*$!@#$'s out! Anyway. That's why people like me exist. To restore balance. To abolish the ruling class. (By Stuart)

Charlie

I think a key aspect of my nature is that I will generally seek out information, or further information, I also like to read perspectives and editorials – though I may be found to be bias to particular media streams (by this I mean political alignment) – though I am always on a continuous search for new outlets. When major events happen I will also tend to seek out in-depth understanding of the immediate situation and the historical path that has lead to a point in time. During my life I have no doubt had some influential role model(s), whether at college or in social situations, I have also had a strong-willed parent(s), which I have either been in opposition to or heavily guided by.

Some of my friends are politically/socially active, whilst others feel that not one particular organisation would represent them, though they will get involved when the time is right. In this light there is a serious desire for radical change and shift in the social and political make up of the world as we see the interconnection of many problems and issues. We as a group certainly like to discuss ideas at any possible point, and will listen to others with a greater understanding and knowledge than ourselves, or who can offer a different perspective. (By Keith)

Jim

I've moved over from Adelaide to come to Uni. I've voted when I was back there, but I haven't done it here since moving to Victoria. I haven't registered so I guess I keep slipping the radar and so not getting the fine. I'm a bit uncomfortable talking about politics, I don't trust politicians. But I don't agree with the fee hike that students have to pay so much for their education. I think that's wrong.

I guess what would make me enrol if I know that by voting it's gonna make some difference, for me. There's nobody who I want to vote for anyway, and there's no one speaking to us in our terms or in our language, you know? I don't think they care about us, and none of my mates are that interested in politics either. But I'm pissed off about having to pay more for my education when my folks are struggling as it is, I wanna make sure that my action would go towards changing this. I've signed petitions that the student union were sending around – because it seemed like my voice counted ... (By Yoko)

Sinclair

Hello, my name is Sinclair. I teach Political Science at the University of Melbourne. I used to live in North Fitzroy but I recently moved to Clifton Hill. I hold two systems of belief in regards to the political systems inherent to Australia in the current day. The first is in relation to my curriculum and students. This system of belief looks at politics as a social and cultural phenomenon to be studied and dissected to more fully understand the world we live in and eventually ourselves. My second system of belief pertains to my personal politics. I believe firmly that it is my social responsibility to actively discourage the current drift in global politics towards the right. Of course I can most effectively participate in this activity locally and thus you will find me trading in my knitted vest and corduroy suit jacket with chamois elbow patches for a 'Free The Refugees' t-shirt at rallies. Around the dinner table at Clifton Hill my family and friends regularly and rigorously debate politics. My children at times chide me about being an old communist. I tell them they don't know the half of it. (By Stuart)

Jules

I live in Fitzroy. Or Brunswick. I'm an artist. Or a student. Some people think I'm a hippie. But it's just that I only wear natural fibres. And I'm a vegetarian. The dreadlocks don't help either. But none of that matters. What matters is that I care. I vote. I protest. I go on demonstrations. Most of my friends do too. Some of my friends are rich. But they've got their priorities straight. They're protesting like me. We organise protests. About things that matter. I get so frustrated by people who don't think about these things. Or know something's wrong but don't do anything about it. Like Jim. What's up with you man? It's simple! You're getting robbed! Vote those $#*$!@#$'s out! Anyway. That's why people like me exist. To restore balance. To abolish the ruling class. (By Stuart)
Ben & Vicky

Every time I go to vote, I just put in a donkey vote. I don't want my vote to count towards anything. I just donkey vote to avoid getting a fine. My girlfriend Vicky tells me off when I do this, she votes for The Greens because she's from the country. But I don't want to vote like her, I don't follow trends. I don't believe in politics, politicians and the voting system. Take the 'War in Iraq' for example, there's been an overwhelming resistance to Australia's involvement in the War, but did the Party listen? Would they ever listen? I'd rather spend my energies expressing how I feel in other ways, either creatively in my work or supporting a non-political organisations who have something significant to say. (By Yoko)

Duncan & Karen

I guess you could say I am a swinging voter, but it is not because I don't care about politics. It just seems to me that sometimes you know that a certain party deserves your vote more than others. I guess I get most of my information from the news on telly — don't really discuss politics with my family or friends. It's not like the telly tells you what to think, but listening to the news I often just start to get a sense of who I want to support.

But my wife also changes her vote from one election to the next — but she doesn't trust the media, she tries to tell me that I am being manipulated by the news, but I don't see it that way. She went to uni so was always a little political I guess — like she gets angry with friends who she thinks don't think enough about their vote. For Karen it's all about debating the issues that affect her community at the moment. You'd have to ask her ... but I think she makes her mind up from talking it over with friends. They all seem quite informed. Not sure where they get their information from, but I know Karen's brother is always searching online for news stories — but I am sure they don't all have time for that kind of commitment.

I guess you could say that Karen's family was very different to mine. I think her parents often voted for different parties and enjoyed discussing politics at home. My folks always voted Labor, but that was easy because so did all their friends. I don't ever remember them talking politics, but it seems like in those days it was more obvious who was on your side. (By Lisa)

Jason

Interestingly, Jason was also one of the collaborating designers in our group early on. Even though Jason was not part of the project later, his persona played an instrumental role. The 'Jason' persona represents the handful of people at the cutting edge of fashion, music and trends. 'Jason' often exchanges information amongst his networked peers. He is saturated with knowledge from magazines, following extensive web-links and reading fringe media. Sometimes labelled as 'early-adopters', 'Jason' can often influence a large group of fashion conscious people to follow.

Interesting discussions ensued where we recognised that some personas were similar or dissimilar to our own self-recognised identities. Unfamiliar personas, who resembled few people that we knew, were more challenging to understand. Yet the familiarity or unfamiliarity we felt with the personas was of little importance. More important to the process was how believable the personas were and how well their values could be captured by their respective descriptions. As a result, lengthy discussions revolved around each persona described. Through this process the team shared their knowledge of the audience, which facilitated everyone’s understanding. It allowed the team to be conscious of the variety of values held by the audiences and to conceptualise the multi-dimensionality of their lives. The technique of using personas thus helped to ‘bring sociopolitical issues to the surface’ (Pruitt & Grudin 2006, p. 14).
I had concerns about stereotype playing a negative part in the creation of the personas, especially in relation to ‘Jules’ or ‘Jim’. Stereotypes are based on certain characteristics shared amongst people. Assumptions or short cuts often accompany stereotypes and my concern with this exercise was how effective or detrimental stereotyping might be in our understanding of the audiences. Cooper (2004, p. 128) states:

Stereotypical personas are more effective if the stereotyping lends more credence to the persona. My goal here is not to be politically correct but to get everyone to believe that my personas are real ... I am shooting for believability, not diversity.

Cooper’s argument notwithstanding, I observed that a persona created based on stereotype provided very little insight into a person’s life because it was based on assumptions.

Our activity of describing the activities and behaviours of ‘Charlie’, ‘Duncan’ and ‘Ben’ seemed effective because it enabled us to understand the reasons behind their (non) political activities – for example, why they were ‘swinging-voters’ (a voter who may not be affiliated with a political party) or ‘donkey’ voters (in a compulsory electoral system, a ‘donkey’ voter deliberately spoils their vote to reflect their protest or apathy for the election). The descriptions led us to understand the complexity behind their voting choices. The depth provided by the personas allowed us to define grey areas and saved us from a reductive, simplistic understanding of our audiences. Even though we wanted to engage audiences of 18- to 30-year-olds, ‘Charlie’, ‘Duncan’ and ‘Ben’ enabled our team to have a greater, deeper understanding of our potential audience demographic.

As a result of the discussion about personas, the picture of the potential audiences became far more complex, intricate and sophisticated than we had ever imagined. Valuable lessons were learnt through undertaking this exercise and devising a communication strategy. It enabled us to understand that the messages didn’t have to be catered uniquely and specifically to every persona identified. It enabled us to recognise how ‘Duncan’ may not engage with Dear John initially. ‘Duncan’ was a swinging-voter persona who informed himself through National Nine News. His partner, ‘Karen’, another swinging-voter, discussed issues with her friends. Dear John had a better chance of engaging ‘Karen’ through her friends, than engaging ‘Duncan’ directly. ‘Duncan’ may not be the kind of person who would seek out Dear John’s website, but ‘Karen’ might talk about it with him over dinner.
These considerations revealed that though the personas may have been specific, they weren’t partitioned in a matrix. Each persona had many overlapping activities and connections with the other personas, which generated a vital understanding for our team. We were able to see the start of a web of connections between the identified personas as depicted in the diagram. This enabled the team to formulate a strategy of how each persona might come to notice Dear John’s messages. The personas’ political viewpoints also became irrelevant because their activities and connections were not determined by political decisions. On reflection, the political spectrum initially devised now seemed to be another arbitrary categorisation.

The blog entry on the left was prompted by a discussion with an international guest critic, Denise Gonzales-Crisp (Associate Professor at the College of Design, North Carolina State University, USA), at a time when I was involved with Dear John. It begins to question what I mean by ‘understanding’ the audience. The understanding that we had of the audience in Dear John was largely based on accumulated and collective knowledge of people whom we knew. The personas used in this project did not represent ‘real’ people and were not based on ethnographic studies. Some argue for the importance of basing personas on ethnographic data and a full range of quantitative and qualitative research methods to establish ‘credibility and achieve[s] successful outcomes’ (Pruitt & Grudin 2006, p. 312). Dear John could potentially suffer similar criticism from those who evaluate a persona’s effectiveness based on its incorporation of actual user research (Warfel 2005). Yet, I would argue that their fictional quality does not prevent us believing that ‘Duncan’ or ‘Charlie’ can exist. It is precisely this believability that has enabled us to incorporate what might be important to them, to be addressed as a central objective and concern for the project. In this project context we were not concerned with how ‘credible’ the personas were or how many of their characteristics were based on ‘real people’. The chief intention behind the creation of our personas was to ensure integrity of the characters.

From a human-centred perspective I was keen to explore what personas could enable or facilitate in the design process. When conducting design projects like Dear John the designers are often imagining and speculating a future that has yet to eventuate. As explained earlier, we had not taken part in a project of this kind before, therefore, there were no rules or guarantees as to who Dear John’s potential audiences would be. Criticisms of market research and focus groups’ abilities to anticipate audience reaction become even more pronounced in this context. How could the audience’s anticipation be captured or measured if they haven’t experienced the designed outcome yet? The concept of the audience can therefore be nebulous, fuelled by the designers’ embedded presumptions, ideology, speculation and imagination. Designers can embed their own notion of audiences into designed outcomes – Coney & Steehouder (2000) have observed this as a common activity. Personas used in Dear John are therefore a social tool that forced us to make our notion of the audiences explicit to others and to ourselves. This fictional-yet-believable quality of the personas was instrumental in balancing an element of creative openness as well as truthfulness. The personas stimulated our imagination to design engagements that the audiences might respond to, as well as enabling us to maintain integrity and consideration of what we could design for them.
Discussion around personas with the designers during the project and undertaking critical reflection on my research blog resulted in many valuable lessons. It highlighted a shortfall in how I had previously considered audiences in design projects. Even though I have always valued and considered audiences as stakeholders of the project, the understanding I had formulated of them in the past suddenly seemed simplistic, functionalistic and verging on superficial in comparison to the understanding gained here. My previous simplistic notion of audiences may have been due to a lack of critical awareness of how I had come to formulate those understandings. On reflection, my previous notion of audiences was based on client directives, which were usually brought to me as demographics. Deeper questioning and intensive critique aimed at genuinely trying to articulate the audience’s lives and values was rarely conducted with the client.

However, to my surprise, I was unable to participate in this discussion. My detachment from the content of this discussion was partly because it seemed arbitrary and endlessly generative. The discussion on artefacts presupposed who the audiences were. A premature focus on artefacts can result in obscuring and limiting their role and their possible engagement with the audience. Prior to the discussion on personas the team had little collective understanding of who the potential audiences might be. We had not formed a consolidated strategy for reaching them. Therefore, any attempt at critiquing the ideas generated felt inadequate because it was conducted without being grounded in a thorough discussion of the audiences.

In the end, our team spent approximately four months discussing and negotiating the strategy of *Dear John*. This, on reflection, seems critical to its outcome. During the four months we planned, discussed and critiqued our strategy in weekly meetings. This gave clarity to how the website and artefacts for *Dear John* were designed. The communication objective and the strategy in reaching the audiences were continually revisited through discussion. This cyclical process (shown in the diagram below) provided a collective understanding of how to achieve the communication objective. In particular, discussions surrounding the potential audiences became a vital part in clarifying the communication objective and led to a focused critique of ideas and artefacts.

With this hindsight, a discussion that took place at the beginning of the project was critiqued. Earlier discussion amongst the collaborating designers focused on what to design. These included possible artefacts, such as *Dear John* t-shirts and ideas for music videos. It was apparent that aesthetics and solutions were the main fuel that inspired and engaged the other designers, as if they were conducting a brainstorm for potential artefacts. This seemed to reinforce a common observation that communication designers have a natural affinity for the creative and expressive processes of making and visualising artefacts.

However, my previous simplistic notion of audiences may have been due to a lack of critical awareness of how I had come to formulate those understandings. On reflection, my previous notion of audiences was based on client directives, which were usually brought to me as demographics. Deeper questioning and intensive critique aimed at genuinely trying to articulate the audience’s lives and values was rarely conducted with the client.
Artefacts

Artefacts were considered to be a critical element in enabling active participation by the potential audiences in Dear John. Our intention was to create various artefacts that could facilitate a diversity of activities and resonate with different audience values that we identified through the personas.

The Dear John letters that appeared on the website were written to capture as many different values and viewpoints as possible. Some were lengthy detailed letters, others were short and to the point. The content and issues included national patriotism, concerns for the environment, treatment of asylum seekers and the increase of university fees. Some of these letters are shown here. The letters were then extended into various other artworks.

In total, the Dear John website featured five poster designs, ten t-shirt designs and 13 versions of the Dear John letter, as well as badges, stickers and screen savers. Each designer produced a variety of designs that attempted to give the project diverse voices. These artefacts had a variety of tones, use of language, visual styles and messages. They were designed with various considerations of how the audience might engage with them. Some utilised hand-drawn illustrations with a naïve and childlike quality in order to initiate a personal and intimate connection. Artefacts that aimed at specific interests, for example on privatising universities, used more direct language and referred to particular issues that might elicit targeted responses. Other artefacts featured simple ideas or instructions for do-it-yourself practice that might inspire people to create their own message. As well as the various issues captured by the Dear John letters, the artefacts created different mechanisms for people to engage with.

Through press releases sent to broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, television and radio stations and web publishing houses Dear John received nationwide media coverage. In Melbourne, for instance, the ‘A3’ lifestyle section of The Age newspaper published a feature story with a fullpage front cover colour photograph of people wearing Dear John t-shirts (Murphy & Burgess 2004). In general, the media took a ‘politics and fashion’ angle on the project without trivialising Dear John’s cause or messages. Statistics from the website revealed that the highest number of hits and downloads coincided with mentions in the media.
Dear John

I heard about Federal funding to schools only if they raised the flag and sang the National Anthem? I think that is a fabulous idea John, about time these kiddy-winks learnt the proper words to ‘Waltzing Matilda’.

I wondered whether you considered employing a National Flag Raising Instructor – you probably need a team of trustworthy and patriotic Australian citizens to carry out this very important job around the country.

My CV is attached - I hope you will kindly consider the services I can offer (In particular I would like to bring your attention to my long career in pole dancing in a popular establishment).

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
Humanness of design

The Dear John project experience and outcomes allowed me to explore and understand what it means to value people in the design process. The reflections and revelations are summarised here as key themes.

Valuing and encouraging participation

The website design facilitated audience participation by creating a welcoming space. People were free to enter, encouraged to take away ideas and tell friends about it. The design of the website communicated an open, friendly feel with downloads available within three to four clicks. We also ensured that anyone with a basic home computer and printer could produce the posters and t-shirts themselves.
People were invited to send in letters that they had written themselves and artworks they had created in response to what we had made available on the website. These were, in turn, displayed in the site’s public gallery. This interaction was considered to be an important aspect of Dear John as it allowed people to voice their opinions and, in effect, restituted the site as a public domain. This enabled the designers to participate with the audiences in order to co-create a public forum to voice concerns. We hoped that Dear John might become a virtual space for people who, having a sense of solidarity generated through shared concerns about the outcome of the election, might practice and participate in the democratic process.

The notion that the public can recreate the work undertaken by the designer can be confronting to those who believe that the designer’s role is to control how the designed outcome is interacted with. A designer’s authorial control can be conceived of as a way to limit how a designed artefact can be engaged with, for example, designing forms that will be filled out ‘correctly’ or that will effectively convey a particular piece of information. However, Dear John created a framework for participatory authorship and actively encouraged the public to take away the designs and remake work themselves. It was a delight when the public did indeed respond this way, most notably with Josie Ryan’s ‘dingbats’. She created a set of John Howard dingbats (caricatures of John Howard and his cabinet ministers) that could be downloaded as digital files. Subsequently, they were recreated, animated and personalised into other works imbued with the creator’s sense of humour. These were often emailed back to the website as a way to share the humour with us and the public.

Visitor statistics, hits to the website and people’s sending of photos, artworks and emails demonstrated the various ways in which Dear John’s messages were received. The overwhelmingly positive and encouraging responses from various people established connections between myself and audiences. Dear John enabled people to engage and participate in politics and, in turn, made me engage and participate with other people. Dear John encouraged me to have a greater and stronger awareness of my connection to other people, communities and the wider society.

Embracing diversity and differences

Dear John established a language of words and artefacts that utilised an intimate, first-person storytelling technique to communicate with people. A diverse range of letters and artefacts were housed on the website, which invited different levels of audience engagement, ranging from specific messages that allowed for a specific level of participation to an open-ended engagement that encouraged different ways for meaning to be co-authored and co-created. Some of these artefacts are shown in the diagram on the following page.

In order to be effective with those fatigued by cynicism or overwhelmed by rhetoric, we avoided polemical language. We also did not want Dear John to look like a political announcement. We were not focused on provoking parties into denials and counter-attacks. Instead, we asked people to inform themselves on issues that mattered to them and to choose who to vote for themselves. In order to facilitate this process, the Dear John site had links to most political parties (including the Liberal Party) and independent media outlets. This access to other websites empowered people to independently source information.
This diagram illustrates how the artefacts used varying content and 'language' to elicit different levels of engagement with the audience. The artefacts ranged from specific messages that invited a specific level of participation, to an open-ended engagement that encouraged different ways for meaning to be co-created and co-authored.
Our site stood out from other political sites in its look, feel and manner of communicating. Other politically sympathetic sites at that time relied on pushing information-intensive criticisms about the Howard government’s policies, a technique that considered audiences as passive recipients of information. The approach of other sites seemed to be based on assumptions that factual information and reasoned argument are sufficient to convince the public. These other sites highlighted a failure to consider the wide range of voters and showed less concern for undecided and less opinionated voters. From observation, these sites all used the common approach of talking at their audience, assuming that the importance and seriousness of the content of their messages would make readers take note.

Embracing diversity and difference was a significant aspect of Dear John’s platform. As a tool, the personas enabled the team of designers to consider the diversity of the audiences that Dear John might engage. Through the discussions that took place, the team also embraced the diversity and differences that we each brought to the project. This became our collective strength. Generative discussions and brainstorming sessions allowed the diversity of people on the project to bring their individual skill sets to Dear John.

**Connection through empathy and empowerment**

The presence of people and voices on the site, established through photos and messages, emphasised the individual and the human. It demonstrated how different people can be involved in and express opinions about politics. The language of Dear John, which relied on intimacy and first-person narrative, promoted an empathetic connection between people.

Even though Dear John declared its aim to remove John Howard from office, this, in my view, became a secondary purpose to the project. Within the context of the 2004 Australian national election, Dear John, as a design intervention, engaged people by enabling conversations and encouraging people to voice their concerns. The notion of providing mechanisms for people to amplify their voices and of creating a space for such voices to share and communicate resulted in unique interactions. Dear John explored a broader application of the power of design by offering a different way of engaging audiences within a political campaign discourse. Rather than perceiving audiences as passive or silent receivers of information in the communication exchange, Dear John demonstrated a potential role for design that can empower people to be co-creators in a design project for them to express their concerns. In my view, this different model of design has potential to contribute to society in many ways: it empowers people to be active thinking and decision-making participants in society.

The response and feedback from the audience created a greater awareness of my empathetic connection to other people. Dear John enabled audiences to create their own connection to others by how they chose to communicate their messages, in response to what we had designed. This had an empowering effect for me as a designer. Through Dear John I was able to embrace and manifest the social values that are important to me in my design practice. This project has enabled me to understand the civic role I can potentially play as a designer.
Thinking with my research blog assisted a questioning of how the key concepts discovered through the conducted projects might translate across the broader practice of communication design. Are notions of participation and empowerment evident in other designers’ practices? How do other practitioners value the input of other stakeholders in the design process? How would they describe the interactions and relationships that occur within their own practices? This has led me to conduct several interviews with commercially practicing designers, which became the next design project called Practitioner Conversations.

The Dear John and Management vs Community projects had vastly different project intentions and outcomes, activities, methods, interventions, processes and people. Within the richness and variety afforded by these projects, I was beginning to discover the deeper layers of how people are valued and involved in the design process and what outcomes result from their involvement. The results of conducting two major design projects began to illuminate threads that would later become significant to this research. Politics, empathy, empowerment and participation began to emerge as key concepts in creating a human-centred design practice capable of enabling and deepening the engagement between people. These projects will be revisited again at a later stage. Repeated reflection upon each project enabled the importance of values and how they manifest through engagement and dialogue to emerge. These reflections will be revealed and discussed in the chapters to come.

The project experiences of Dear John and Management vs Community were situated within two specific contexts. Upon receiving critique and feedback from critics including Cameron Tonkinwise (Senior lecturer at University of Technology, Sydney) at the Graduate Research Conference in 2005, I planned another project that would build upon the learning and discoveries already achieved. This consideration has been documented in my blog entry below.

*BLOG ENTRY ‘DEFINING MY DESIGN PRACTICE’ AT HTTP://RAWS.ADC.RMIT.EDU.AU/~E48618/BLOG/?p=95*
A series of interviews were undertaken with a diverse range of communication design practitioners, which became the Practitioner Conversations project. These interviews were not intended to be a comprehensive survey of practitioners, but to aim to sample from a broad range of different roles, contexts, backgrounds and activities. I wanted to understand practices that had different contexts, concerns and stakeholders to what I have had personal and professional experiences of through my own practice and the previous two projects. I chose several designers across different roles, titles and contexts. They provided a good starting point to begin examining the complexity of the human interactions that take place in a design practice.

Succinct summaries of the interviewees’ descriptions are provided below. For reasons of privacy the identity of each participant has been kept anonymous.

- Designer in a small-scale design practice, consisting of two designers. This art director mainly works in the fields of web design, TV broadcast and interaction design. The studio’s clients range from small to large media companies. Freelance designers are hired as and when they are needed for a commissioned project.
  Conversation location and date: A café in Collingwood on 17th August 2005

- Designer in an advertising agency. This designer works in large creative teams consisting of copywriters, web designers and art directors. They also work closely with people from other divisions such as marketing and public relations that gather research from target markets. They handle large corporate accounts and advertising campaigns.
  Conversation location and date: At the agency’s studio on 13th September 2005

- Freelance designer. Having worked in small studios previously, this designer is now freelancing in alliance with other studios or working for various clients directly. The flexibility afforded in this role allows this designer to also work on self-initiated projects, which includes the publication of a public poster magazine with a group editors, illustrators and communication designers.
  Conversation location and date: A café in the city on 24th September 2005
The descriptions provide an idea of some of the various kinds of practices that exist within the field of communication design. They highlight the diversity of roles, practices and contexts of the field and this was a key consideration in selecting the people interviewed. All designers were in Australia, with some based in Melbourne and some in Brisbane. The interviews took place over four months between August and December 2005. Audio recordings were made and interactions with objects were photographed. Some took place in public settings such as a café, others were held in the interviewee’s studio or offices.

These conversations investigated how designers build human-centred considerations into their practice. How designers interact with others, or how and why key stakeholders are considered or involved within a design project, are often implicit concepts in the designer’s practice. It was observed that this knowledge that is situated in practice, is not commonly discussed in communication design literature. There are many design manuals that address how to build successful business relationships with clients or that discuss what could be achieved through a collaborative process with the client (Berger & Dougher 2003; Mau 2000; Shaughnessy 2005). Similarly, design management literature often prioritises commerce and financial concerns. The design management literature emphasises effectively deploying resources, including people, in order to pursue corporate objectives (Best 2006).

Design management rhetoric that seek to streamline people and tasks in the most cost and time efficient manner differ significantly with what my research attempts to discover and understand. The interviews attempted to reveal knowledge of what, why and how valuing of people occurred in the design process. Understanding the social role of design by examining how people are valued in projects and practices strongly influence one another. I had some understanding of these issues through my own professional practice and project experiences, but I wanted to understand them from other practitioners’ perspectives. I observed that knowledge related to human practices in a social context was embedded in day-to-day design practice and was not widely addressed in communication design literature, as argued in the ‘Introduction’ chapter.

All nine interviews were conducted as informal face-to-face conversations modelled on an unstructured interview process. Each interview ran for approximately one hour. The gathered data (transcripts, visual data, notes and observations) from the interview were progressively analysed. The objective of this process was to identify similarities, differences and patterns to inform the research undertaken in understanding implicit knowledge and interactions embedded within design practice.
Before embarking on the interview, a ‘language’ of design practice was explored to determine the method for the interview. It is common practice amongst many design disciplines to create artefacts through visualisations, drawing, sketching, mock-ups, prototyping etc. Often these processes are a way to walk through thinking processes and articulate intangible thoughts in more tangible forms. These ‘non-linguistic’ artefacts are also effective in communicating between different knowledge groups or to enhance collaboration amongst project participants (Ehn 1988). Methods and case studies on how artefacts can facilitate engagement and communication amongst project stakeholders are central to participatory design literature. Upon reading various participatory design texts I began to explore how artefacts could act as triggers or catalysts to facilitate engagement amongst people. For example, ‘boundary objects’ (Arias & Fischer 2000) are artefacts that act as brokering tools across disciplines and support reflection within a shared context. The use of ‘boundary objects’ involves translation, coordination and alignment between different perspectives in order to enhance shared understanding between different communities of practice. In conducting the interviews, engaging the participants through their visual literacy, and facilitating interaction, were interesting areas to explore. Using objects or artefacts to explore visualisations afforded an interactive dimension even though I acknowledged the effective use of drawing as a method that other researchers have used (Grocott 2005; Lawson 2004). I was keen to explore how participants would interact and engage with objects in order to visualise their design practice in another way, and what this may enable. Such thoughts and exploration of various interview methods have been documented in the research blog entry over the next two pages.

Blog entry 'playful triggers' at http://raws.adc.rmit.edu.au/~e48618/blog/?p=102
Discussion with Daria Loi about her work on ‘playful triggers’ (Loi 2005) was instrumental when it came to exploring interview methodologies. It facilitated a way to consider how artefacts could stimulate and trigger a playful, participatory dialogue. As Loi describes it,

> Playful triggers generate receptive modes through their tactile, visual, mysterious, playful, tridimensional, poetic, ambiguous and metaphorical qualities. They ask people to challenge taken for granted or conventional ways of doing, seeing and articulating things to co-generate shared understandings and collaborative practices (p. 18).

‘Playful triggers’ share many characteristics with ‘cultural probes’ (Gaver, Dunne & Pacenti 1999) and other devices commonly discussed in participatory design that facilitate engagement between people. ‘Cultural probes’ are widely used, discussed and critiqued methods of gathering user data in participatory design. However, despite the role of data gathering emphasised by many researchers (Crabtree et al. 2003), Gaver emphasises the role of ‘cultural probes’ in creating relationships between the designer and user. He argues that it can trigger reflective thoughts, provoke different ways of thinking and enable learning for both participants. Similarly, design companies like IDEO commonly use ‘method cards’ as triggers that can facilitate design processes. IDEO state how the ‘method cards’ can prompt the participants to ask certain questions or adopt a different mind-frame. Whether they are cards, probes or triggers, these tools of engagement have been demonstrated in participatory design literature as being effective in establishing conversation between stakeholders in the design process.

Using triggers as part of the interview process provided a method that corresponded with the research intention of valuing engagement with people. Prompted by the literature, and discussion with other scholars, on the use of triggers as a social lubricant, a diverse range of objects were initially self-triailed for the purposes of facilitating the interviews. This was discussed in the previous blog entry (see last two pages). I considered how the quality and affordance of each artefact could be useful in an interview context. Unlike the ‘playful triggers’, the selections were not purposefully ‘designed’ but were a collection or modification of existing artefacts that shared similar qualities to the ‘playful triggers’. The artefacts were selected for their playful, ambiguous, tactile and quotidian qualities. When placed in a specific context, the artefacts take on different meanings that are projected onto them by the participants.
Artefacts are considered by some to be ‘a language of interaction’ (Krippendorff 2006, p. 46). Objects or artefacts used in the interviews were considered to constitute another communicative language through which to facilitate conversations with the selected practitioners, one that complimented a traditional interview approach. A more traditional or formal interview emphasises textual and verbal language as the means for facilitating and recording the interview process. The use of artefacts as another communicative language provided an interesting possibility for exploring ways to capture and facilitate the fluid, temporal aspects of interaction and conversation. The use of artefacts in an interview context seemed to be an appropriate way to illuminate the complex human interactions that take place within design projects and practices.

Building on the first interview, I further added a range of coloured ‘mints’ to the Yowies. I discussed with Interviewee C how effective the Yowies were in facilitating the interview. The response I received was very positive but I was also recommended to add other objects that were more ‘generic’ and that would contrast with the Yowies. I agreed that adding generic objects that connotated fewer specific meanings might enable other concepts to be communicated more readily. At this stage, I recalled the tin of mints I had initially considered. They were given different colours to make them more playful and ambiguous and were included in the toolkit of objects to be used in the next interview.

Using the collection of artefacts with other interviewees was equally as successful in subsequent interviews as in the first. After conducting several more interviews, I observed that they facilitated a different kind of interaction to the traditional format of an interview that is based on the interviewer asking questions and obtaining answers from the interviewee. In my context, the chosen artefacts often became ‘ice-breakers’ and most participants were immediately fascinated by them and touched and played with them. Others expressed bewilderment and puzzlement at the beginning when the objects were taken out of their boxes. One participant visibly communicated how uncomfortable they were in interacting with the artefacts. In each interview I initiated the engagement by using the artefacts to clarify certain concepts that emerged during the conversation. By asking, ‘… so, is this what you meant?’ whilst moving the objects around I invited the participant to interact with the objects. This approach was most successful as most participants then intuitively interacted with the objects and seemed to relax and actively engage with the task. However, some participants did not interact with the artefacts. Two out of the nine interviews were conducted without the artefacts due to lack of time and space. Of the other seven participants, only one decided not

Furthermore, these artefacts resonate with the work of Sanders (2000, p. 4), in which she explored co-generated tools to ‘elicit emotional response and expression from people’. As a result, I decided to trial the Yowies in the first interview.

The blog entry above recalls the first interview undertaken and how the Yowies were effective in facilitating the conversation. Using the Yowies was initially an intuition that I had when exploring what kind of artefacts could facilitate an informal, conversational discussion on various aspects of a designer’s practice. The Yowies also functioned as ‘ice-breakers’ to relax the participants. The first interviewee, C, was immediately fascinated by them, touching and playing with them.

8Yowies are the name of a company that manufacture chocolate eggs that contain plastic toys inside. They are commonly found in the confectionery section of Australian shops.
to physically engage with the artefacts during the interview. This was not a detriment to the conversation that took place, as this participant seemed to be more comfortable in articulating concepts through words rather than using the ‘playful triggers’.

The participant conversations began with open-ended questions addressing the aims, roles and interactions that took place within their respective practices. Through narratives and storytelling the participants shared their design experiences and provided illumination of certain aspects embedded in their own processes. The organic and flexible nature of the conversations allowed fruitful new tangents to emerge. This approach was engaging for participants where certain themes were generated and explored through exchange.

The interviews undertook an ethnomethodological approach to explore how people make sense of their world, and how they use that understanding. An ethnomethodological approach focuses on the ways in which people understand their everyday activities from within and reflexively display their understandings of it (Garfinkel 1967). Consequently, ethnomethodology employs a documentarian method to read everyday events as opportunities through which members of the community use their cultural competence and contextual knowledge to make sense of the world (Button 2000). In this way, the design practice of others and the human interactions within it, have been made explicit. The artefacts used in the interviews facilitated the translation of knowledge from implicit to explicit and provided the participants with another ‘language’ to communicate this knowledge to others.

The methodology used in this interview context builds upon various work and knowledge in participatory design. In particular it builds upon Loi (2005), Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti (1999), Sanders (2000) and Arias and Fischer’s (2000) work by exploring how people use objects for reflection, communication and the co-creation of meaning. The objects enabled the participants to communicate knowledge relating to how they considered potential audiences for projects and the interactions that can occur amongst project stakeholders. Their responses were captured in photographs. These illustrate how participants chose and used the objects in various ways to articulate complex processes and interactions that occurred amongst stakeholders in a project. The understanding gained through the interviews was significant to understanding what, why and how valuing of people occurred in various practitioners’ design processes.
Critical reflection and questioning has been undertaken in my blog entry on the previous page. The entry describes how conducting these interviews simultaneously initiated a parallel investigation into the methodology of interviews. Significant discoveries about what the objects enabled and facilitated in revealing aspects of designers’ practices are further discussed in the chapter (p. 165), ‘Articulating and discussing values through design scaffolds’. To clarify, the research focus is not a methodological exploration of ‘playful triggers’ in an interview context. For this reason, no prior experiments, testing or measuring of the effectiveness of ‘playful triggers’ as an interview tool were conducted. Rather, the focus of this research is on an exploration of various design interventions, tools and methods in enabling and deepening the exchanges between people. ‘Playful triggers’ as one such method explored an iterative process of designing a method of engagement, which led to preliminary findings of its successes and shortcomings. The findings from using ‘playful triggers’ in an interview context is significant to this study as it builds upon existing knowledge of how artefacts are an effective way in facilitating conversations and fostering relationships amongst people. It shows great potential to be explored further and could be extended in a post-doctoral study. Further discussion on this method is undertaken in ‘Articulating and discussing values through design scaffolds’, (pp. 179-185).
Through transcribing and reflecting on the conversations conducted, the interviews were progressively analysed. Visual diagrams, such as the one captured in the blog on previous two pages, facilitated ways of noticing certain words that were repeatedly used or themes that began to emerge. For example, words such as ‘aspiration’, ‘assumption’, ‘truth’ or ‘ownership’ began to appear from conversations regarding how participants considered their potential audiences for projects. Themes such as collaboration, audiences, and participation were a focus that I wanted to discuss with the interviewees at the start of each conversation. However, as the conversations began, other themes such as trust, negotiation and relationships began to emerge. These themes emerged from mapping the interactions that occur in design practice. Using ‘playful triggers’, this map captured the power dynamics and stakeholder relationships that exist in various designers’ practices.

The varieties of accounts from each designer were collected under headings of ‘collaboration’, ‘audiences’, ‘negotiation’ and ‘relationships’. Each of these headings consists of various interviewees’ explanation and articulation of particular aspects of their practices. For example, it describes how they collaborate with people, how they consider audiences, how they negotiate with whom and why, and how they build relationships with the stakeholders involved in the design projects or practices. Most of these accounts are illustrated with photos and direct quotes from the corresponding interview. Within the various accounts, the process of engaging people in the process and outcome of design remained constant. From the vast amount of data collected from the interview, which included photographs and transcripts of the conversation, the headings provided an effective way to sift through and organise relevant and important information for my research. The process of sifting and organising the conversations and photographs inevitably involved decisions on what to include and what to dispense with. These decisions were based on clarity, the variety of the accounts and the relevancy of the information to the research focus.

The conversations will be revisited again at a later stage. Repeated reflection on previous projects and conversations enabled an understanding of the importance of values in practice to emerge. When I later returned to the Practitioner Conversations project and read through the notes and transcripts again, it revealed how different values were inscribed in each designer’s practice. These values will be revealed and discussed in the latter chapters to come.
A collaborative practice is a complex social relationship amongst participants. Many designers attested to the importance of collaboration amongst the stakeholders in a design project. Through these human interactions knowledge from individual stakeholders can be shared and built upon.

Please note: Quotes from the designers interviewed have been transcribed in an idiomatic manner to preserve individual expression.
This image shows a designer (kookaburra) designing a turtle by undergoing a design process, illustrated by the coloured mints.

The turtle was a requirement of the client and their brief. The designed outcome has already been decided. To fulfil the client’s requirements the designer had to ensure that the design process delivered a turtle. The coloured mints are placed in a straight line to reflect how the process underwent a predicted and linear development.

In contrast with the previous image, the designer here depicts a collaborative process. This designer collaborated with someone very different to themselves, just as a kookaburra differs from a fish. These differences become strengths in a collaborative process. Each individual’s input and contribution influenced the other’s processes in design. Surprising, challenging and unexpected things happened from this collaborative process. The scattered coloured mints indicate this process.

‘To be true to a collaborative process, you need to submit to the unexpected things that can occur along the way. You will only know that you’ve got something when you see it.’

As a result the collaborative process delivered a crab as a designed outcome – an unexpected result.
A collaborative process is shown in this image. The scattered coloured mints show how the kookaburra and fish have undergone a design process that allowed each other’s input and contributions. This designer explained that an unexpected process that delivers uncertain designed outcomes may not work in the industry. So, if a client wants a turtle the designer may have to give them a turtle and not a crab.

The designed outcome, like the crab or the turtle, is often used to represent the design practice but the process a designer undergoes (coloured mints) is as valuable to represent what designers do. This is an important aspect of a designer’s practice that needs to be communicated to clients.

This image shows how design work is communicated to the client.

The design team consists of magpie, pelican, platypus and kookaburra. The parts that each individual has worked on are brought together (cluster of coloured mints). The team has undergone a collaborative process and has ownership over the entire process and outcome. Design work (red coloured mint) is then communicated to the client (frill-necked lizard) as a whole team effort rather than in parts.
This designer spoke in depth about the value of collaboration in design projects. A collaborative practice is most common amongst a team of designers but it can also include clients.

‘The [website I worked on] is all about people with different ideas coming together. It’s all about sharing your perspective and sharing your knowledge and that’s really rewarding. Majority of all broadcast design work have lots of level of collaboration. All projects are collaborative anyway, even with your client. You’re both collaborating to get to the end, regardless of the amount of work you’re both putting into the project, or whose hand is sculpting, or who’s actually applying the brushstrokes. It is collaborative.’

In a collaboration various stakeholders bring expertise to the design process. The cluster of animals around the coloured mints shows this. Through years of working together each stakeholder builds an understanding of what their team contribute to the process and how to communicate amongst the diversity of expertise.

‘With us, it’s been a learning process over a number of years. We’ve learnt how to speak to this person, and this person. Working on one job with someone establishes enough rapport and understanding that they know where I’m coming from, and I know where they’re coming from and communication isn’t a problem. The client [koala] and the provider [magpie] might not have the same rapport, but that’s why I’m [penguin] there.’

FROM THE CONVERSATION WITH INTERVIEWEE C

FROM THE CONVERSATION WITH INTERVIEWEE F
In a design project the stakeholders who are physically present can actively share their views and opinions and provide input into the design process. Yet, in the absence of an intended audience, the project requires the client, designer and other stakeholders present to advocate on the audience’s behalf. Many designers interviewed discussed the ways in which other stakeholders advocate on behalf of the audience. They explained that advocating for the audience is a critical and significant part of the design process to ensure that the design outcome is engaging and meaningful.
This designer commented that they observe and experience how design engages people by reading, talking and listening to other people.

‘For a lot of what we do, it’s about seeing ourselves as part of the audience. [Some designers] see duality between clients, designers and audiences where there is a divide. I don’t think it’s that simple. We’re part of that same community that we’re talking to, we don’t go out into the community with lab coats and microscopes taking notes like science. We’re part of it everyday. We live it. Of course there are specific audiences who are outside of our experiences, but it helps to just understand that we’re part of what our visual messages adds up to.’

This image shows how this designer tried to understand the project’s intended audience. The kookaburra represents the designer. The client (not shown) has categorised their audience (frill-necked lizard, spotted ray and crab) according to their ‘tastes’ indicated by market research. The coloured mints clustered in front of the audience represent their preferences. Here, the research shows that the lizard likes ‘green,’ the ray likes ‘blue’ and the crab likes ‘red.’ This designer discussed the importance of doing her own research rather than relying solely on the market research brought by the clients.

‘Designers [kookaburra] sit here, next to blue crab [audiences]. To be a good designer or a great designer, you pay attention. When you’re designing for the blue crab, you go to where the blue crab goes and check it out, and you look at what the blue crabs look at, and you see what they’re reading and what they’re listening to and you get a sense of what it’s like to be a blue crab.’
The role of the designer is to see how the audience sees the world. The blue crab represents the audience in this image. This designer surrounds the blue crab with the coloured mints. ‘The blue crab is in a world like this. It’s surrounded by different stimulus. News, current affairs, sporting goods and stuff.’

However, this designer is often frustrated by the limited understanding of the audience that clients have.

‘I think the major problem in the whole world of advertising and design is this ‘lowest common denominator theory.’ It’s just so limiting and so frustrating because they say we want to pitch to anyone and we’re going to pitch to the dumbest, the most closed-minded, the most redneck, the most conservative individual you can possibly imagine and that makes your job very difficult.’

This image shows a discussion between the designer (pelican) and the client (platypus). Frill-necked lizard brings market research conducted on the audience. In the discussion between the designer and the client the designer questions the data brought by the market research. Market research says ‘most audiences [kookaburras] like ‘green’ and that’s the truth.’

But the designer believes the market research gives a limited view of the audience. ‘Kookaburras may like green, and they also might like purple, and blue, and red, and brown, and orange and white … and there are lots of colours to chose from and lots of arbitrary truths. There’s truth that someone wants to push. That’s a whole different issue. There’s truth in meaning at the end of the day. A designer’s role is to bring that meaning to the surface so that the work isn’t just a veneer of a colour, and the truth is essentially the message.’

From the conversation with interviewee c

From the conversation with interviewee b
A design project involves working with a variety of people. This inevitably involves differences of opinion, viewpoints and values. Through the process of discussion and negotiation, opinions and viewpoints can be exchanged. Discussion can also illuminate hidden agendas or assumptions that stakeholders bring to the project. Exchanging different opinions and viewpoints can provide opportunities to learn from one another and become better informed. Through a process of discussion, relationships and understanding can be fostered amongst stakeholders, resulting in the validation of contributions from all those involved in the design process. Many of the designers interviewed shared how this process takes place within their own professional contexts, and how difficult it can be.
This designer shared an experience where the client’s agenda had dictated the design outcome. In this scenario the designer was not given an opportunity to discuss how the client’s agenda can impact on the communication objective. ‘I have some clients that are so tough, they’re like, “it’s red, that’s it. It’s all about red. I don’t want to hear anything else, there’s no other colour. I don’t even want to know about what other colours are.”’ This is illustrated by the way the koala bear (client) is sitting with the red coloured mints with its back to everyone else.

The client’s authority in this project context had restricted the designer from proposing any other potential direction. It reveals how the client did not value the designer’s input and contribution to the project, apart from carrying out the client’s demand. As a result, this designer gave in to the client’s demand, even though the aesthetic specification imposed by the client was questionable for the communication objective.

This image shows how a designer accumulates their skills and how that accumulated knowledge informs their way of discussing a design project with clients. Here, the platypus represents the designer and the penguin represent the client. The coloured mints represents the designer’s skill, knowledge and experience.

‘Every job is a culmination of the learning of everything I’ve done. I’ve done all these jobs and every job I do, I get a little piece and I’ve learnt something else. When the client comes and says, “I want green, I can say I’ve got green, I know what you’re talking about and I know how to work with that.”’

FROM THE CONVERSATION WITH INTERVIEWEE B
Discussions can reveal tacit or hidden agendas. Once illuminated, they can be negotiated amongst the stakeholders. This negotiation can lead to significant difference in the designed outcome. For example, understanding how much of someone's input involves their personal taste can lead to a more relevant contribution in designing a visual message for the purposes of engaging the intended audience.

‘When [clients] haven’t been involved in creative processes, when they have that involvement, they want to make the most of it. Their personal tastes become an issue, and it’s not an unreasonable thing. As a stakeholder, their opinions are valid. But there is a responsibility to discuss who the visual messages are for … for our idea to be relevant and engaging for the audience, someone’s personal tastes – even if they have the final say in it – aren’t as relevant as getting the visual messages right for their audience.’

The designer (magpie) and the client (frill-necked lizard) are discussing the design job (the coloured mints). However, this time the designer explains the value of understanding the complex context the client operates under.

‘We don’t know the pressure the client [frill-necked lizard] feels. What we see is this [the design job and the client]. What we don’t know is, back here, he’s got a boss [fish] that he answers to, and he’s got a boss [galah] that he answers to. And at the end of the day they’re all accountable. We just see this [the client], but we do have to understand that ‘red’ [design concept] has to carry through and work here [fish], and here [galah].’
Many designers discussed the importance of building relationships amongst the stakeholders in a project. Much of these relationships are built over time, involving discussions and interactions. During these dialogues a common vocabulary and language is established to facilitate communication amongst stakeholders involved in the project. This process is crucial in establishing and strengthening working relationships between people. Understanding can then begin to deepen between the stakeholders, resulting in an awareness of the value that each person contributes to the design process.

This scene illustrates how the client (frill-necked lizard) wants a ‘safe’ design outcome out of fear of alienating the audience. The designer (kookaburra) has many design options (coloured mints) that can engage the audience (crab).

The client says to the designer, ‘well, there is all this stuff you’re giving me and I think that he [crab] might hate that, so let’s give him the most plainest thing around, and that’s probably the least thing he’d hate.’

The designer finds this situation very hard to deal with. ‘I look at my collection of thoughts and feelings and what I want to bring to the project. I don’t know how to do beige. Beige makes me miserable. Working in an ad agency, you have to do a lot of beige. You do a lot of stuff that makes clients happy. At the end of the day, that’s the most frustrating thing. Even if you know that this is the best idea in the whole world and this guy [lizard], he’s not going to buy it, there’s nothing you can do about it. It’s so frustrating. He wants this [the bland coloured mint], and you want to give them that [other coloured mints], and those two are never going to be the same colour.’

FROM THE CONVERSATION WITH INTERVIEWEE B
‘[The relationship with the client] . . . is like a partnership or a dialogue. The moment any designer is briefed or contacted by a client your mind is activated starts straight away, that’s the beginning of the process. I know with myself I’m like an avalanche of questions, and you need to ask those questions. It should be a relaxed environment, so as soon as that client starts talking to you about stuff, start throwing things out there and don’t hold back. You’re really just trying to get to that fixed point. The beginning of a project is so essential when you can sit down and really just sketch anything out invisibly in the room. Talk about stuff, refer to other things being done. You can gauge your client’s response. It’s a nice malleable topic, and the client is involved and you’re really on level.’

This designer has a diverse range of clients. In this image she mapped out how complex her practice is.

The designer is represented by the skink in the middle of the image. Various other animals in view represent different clients, some who are from different companies and based in different geographical locations around Australia. The coloured mints represent the interaction this designer has with the various clients. She has built up a professional relationship with these clients over the years that enables her to practice in a way that she feels most comfortable.
This designer voiced the importance of building a relationship in a project. A professional relationship amongst stakeholders in a project can span many years. Through this relationship the stakeholders learn how to trust each other, how to have faith in the ability of others and, most importantly, how to be themselves in the projects.

‘For the duration of a project you start to develop a relationship with all those people involved – the client, the audience, yourself – and you explore what that relationship is. And you start looking for the things you share.’

This designer works in a company where different people take on different roles. The pelican, galah and frill-necked lizard look after the sales. The kookaburra manages the accounts. The sales people seek new clients (fish, pelican and platypus). The kookaburra is the interface between the designer and the clients. The designer (hidden from view, left of the kookaburra) works with the kookaburra who briefs the designer on design jobs. The designer doesn’t liaise with the clients directly. The company boss (crab) oversees the complex activities within the company, but is mostly concerned with bringing in business.

The designer has built a good working relationship with the kookaburra. She relies on the kookaburra to bring briefs to her in a manner that she understands. Often the process involves asking questions and obtaining clarification on aspects of the project brief brought to her by the kookaburra.

FROM THE CONVERSATION WITH INTERVIEWEE D

FROM THE CONVERSATION WITH INTERVIEWEE C
This image shows the initial phase of a design project, prior to a brief being written. Following a meeting with the client (koala) and designers (penguin, dingo and magpie) various stakeholders are also taken on board. Other stakeholders may include a photographer (platypus), a web designer (skink) and various other suppliers (kookaburra and galah). The brief (various coloured mints) is then sculpted by the collaboration and involvement of other stakeholders. Coloured mints are added and some are taken away. The brief evolves through a process of discussion and negotiation until all stakeholders are clear on the communication objective. A clear understanding and clear communication are vital parts of this process.

This designer shared the importance of establishing a dialogue with the client to explore the possibilities of the design brief. The importance of inviting others to share knowledge amongst the variety of stakeholders is stressed.

‘[I]t’s really good to talk to your clients about this [another way of doing the design], surely possibilities are the most wonderful things we could embrace, especially before anything is said or done. It’s not going to hurt anyone if we just talk about it and make it up here in this room, you can shoot it down, but there’s no harm in exploring that. I often find with new clients when I start to engage them in this dialogue, their eyes light up. I don’t think they’re often challenged to think about these things in this open context. I often find that the experience they’ve had in the past with other designer have been closed, where it’s been an ‘us’ and ‘them’, and there’s no sense of partnership, and no sense of process. They’re often quite pleased to be included, because everyone knows something about something, everyone has knowledge, and everyone has something to share and have a perspective. It’s a real mistake to ignore that in a client, or anyone.’
In summary, the data gathered through the interview process was instrumental in informing the research topic. Mapping the interactions that occur in design practice through ‘playful triggers’ had captured the power dynamics and stakeholder relationships that exist in various designers’ practices. Accounts grouped under headings of ‘collaboration’, ‘negotiation’, ‘audiences’ and ‘relationships’ reveal the complexity of human engagement in projects and practices. This discovery was significant in understanding the learning I had overlooked in the first design project, Management vs Community. In the next chapter, I return to this first project to investigate what I had missed before on how power dynamics and relationships affect design process and project outcomes. Through loops of critical reflection, I discovered how politics could affect interactions that occur amongst the project stakeholders. The next chapter discusses how this is so.
Chapter 3

Illuminating the politics in design practice

Through the experience of conducting three different design projects, Management vs Community, Dear John and Practitioner Conversations, I began to understand how people’s engagements and interactions could be manifested in human-centred approaches to design. Through the richness and variety afforded by these projects, I was beginning to understand how people are valued and involved in the design process. In particular, the Practitioner Conversations was instrumental in revealing how power dynamics and stakeholder relationships are implicit in various designers’ practices and the effect it could have on project processes and outcomes. Accounts by various designers in Practitioner Conversations revealed the complexity of human engagement in projects and practices. This new lens provided a focus to relook at Management vs Community to understand what was not revealed before.

| How to enable project stakeholders’ input in the design process? |
| How to consider potential audiences of the project? |
| What interactions occur between people in other design projects and practices? |

Management committee intervened in the outcome of the identity. Viewed this project as a failure.

Use of personas enabled discussion on audience and designers’ values. Enhanced collaborative process.

Highlighted the power dynamics between stakeholders in projects. Importance of relationship.

Relook at Management vs Community to understand what was not revealed before.
After completing Management vs Community, I considered it a failure for not achieving what I had expected. I had expected an inclusive consultative process of designing to lead to an empowerment of all stakeholders and to deliver a model of social practice in communication design. That the project failed to deliver and confirm my expectation was disappointing. I could not see whether there was any intervention on my part that could have been done differently. The disappointment caused by the project to deliver what I had expected prevented valuable knowledge from being discovered. After the Management vs Community project, I was too eager to conduct new and different kinds of projects. Time and distance enabled me to evaluate the valuable lessons inherent in this project. Two years later, I was prompted by the critics at the Graduate Research Conference to investigate Management vs Community more directly and more critically. Having illuminated nascent ideas on relationships and power-dynamics through the projects I had undertaken subsequently, I felt I was ready to examine key events and stakeholders’ roles more closely. This has been documented in my blog entry below.

The intention of the Management vs Community project was to explore a somewhat ‘literal’ application of a consultative process in the evolution of the visual identity. Undertaking a consultative process, which was intended to be a straightforward and democratic way of enabling input, became far more complex than initially expected. On reflection, this project revealed how politics and empowerment play significant roles in the design process. As revealed in my research blog entry, I observed that there was a ‘delicate power balance between people’ that became an important factor in the outcome of the project.

Management vs Community provided a unique context to explore what the designers’ contribution could be if their involvement was sought from the earliest stages of the design process. As described in the project description earlier (p. 47), their positioning as ‘community members’ enabled the designers to have input alongside the workshop participants in generating possible directions for the visual identity. It was anticipated that this would position the designers and workshop participants as equally valued stakeholders in the process. It was also agreed amongst the designers and the management committee that the workshop participants should play an active role in steering the visual identity. Direct involvement from the management committee thus seemed minimal. I initially observed that the community consultative process was designed to balance-out power relations within the association in order to avoid any single stakeholder controlling the outcome.

However, the roles of the management committee and designers transitioned later in the project. Despite the lack of a traditional ‘client’ role, the management later behaved in a ‘client-like’ manner. Despite promoting and agreeing to a consultative, democratic process for the project, the management took control of the final decision based on their own agenda. Their intervention at a critical stage of finalising the visual identity revealed that the workshop participants and the designers never had any authentic decision-making authority about the visual identity. When this shift in the power balance occurred, the designers then silently proceeded to finalise and produce the visuals that the ‘client-management’ had chosen. This turn of events led me to question whether the common positioning of designers being ‘subservient’ to the client (Poynor 2003) had contributed to the outcome of the project. By being labelled as ‘designers’ and not as ‘community members,’ could the designers have been less valued by the management committee? Could there have been a history or an implicit relationship amongst the community that I was unaware of that might have hindered the workshop participants or the designers to voice their concern when these revelations were made?
On reflecting on the interactions that took place in the project’s open forum, I recalled how I had little leverage in this event to enable valued exchange between the participants, even though I was brought in to facilitate the forum. As I explained earlier (in p. 58), one particular member voiced negative criticisms that made both the designers and myself feel uncomfortable. These criticisms seemed to be made out of personal distaste for the graphic form of the identity. The designers and I were unaware of the politics that were manifesting before us during the open forum. On the surface, the open forum may have enabled the attending community members to feel included and valued, but it resulted in both the designers and myself feeling judged and devalued. Reflecting on this experience later made me realise the different ways in which community involvement in the design process can occur.

Respecting and valuing the input and contribution that all stakeholders can have in the process is not as straightforward as I had initially imagined. This project experience reveals how there were complex, ‘messy’ and embedded power dynamics in this community that surfaced abruptly through this project. I was unaware of such politics because I was not part of this community. As an outsider brought into this project, I had assumed that the relationship amongst them was equitable, and they insisted that equity was indeed valued in the association. When the designers accepted, without protestation, the task of finalising and producing the visuals that the management committee had chosen, it revealed a relationship where this was not the case. It revealed that the designers were not empowered to challenge the management’s decision. Similarly, the community were not compelled to question the management’s interventions in this project. Being part of a single community can be a double-edged sword and any criticism voiced by an individual could have negative repercussions on relationships among each other in the future. Irrespective of the reasons or politics that accounted for the designers’ and the community’s reluctance to vocalise their concerns, these stakeholders played a passive role in this project.

Long after the project was completed, I reflected on how the management committee could have dictated to the designers what they wanted for a visual identity at the beginning of the project. Such a situation would have made their style of management more ‘transparent’ and would have made the process much simpler (and cost/time effective) for all stakeholders concerned. However, I speculated that the management had not initially intended events to unfold the way it did. During the course of the project the workshop participants illuminated certain aspirational values that they identified with the association, reflecting the changes that they felt could occur. I believe that once the management committee realised this, they became ‘afraid’ of these changes and preferred to maintain the continuity and stability associated with the past. I speculated that these politics might have been uncovered through the process of the visual identity project.

Continuing this reflection through the lens of politics and power dynamics, the discussion that follows examines how politics and power dynamics can impact upon human exchanges in the design process. It brings together the reflections from all the design projects undertaken and uses literature to discuss the complexity of what it means to value people in practice. This chapter addresses how valuing input by various stakeholders in a design process can never be an inherent ‘default’ setting that manifests itself automatically. It discusses how politics and power dynamics in design practice can be illuminated and therefore addressed in order to undertake a human-centred approach to design.

The ‘human’ in practice

CLIENT
… It’s a full colour pocket-sized brochure. The text and images will be given to you on Wednesday. Could you show us initial visuals by the middle of next week?

DESIGNER
Why is it a brochure? How will it inform people about changing their attitudes and behaviour on climate change?

CLIENT
It’s packed full of useful information that tells them what to do. It’s pocket-sized so they can carry it around. I would find it a really handy and useful way to remind myself of things I could do. Wouldn’t you?

DESIGNER
(hesitantly) … I’m not sure. We might not be the best representation for the audience. I think we need to have a clearer understanding of who they are first. Then perhaps we could discuss how to engage them on this issue …?
The desire to discuss the ‘communication problem’ was manifested in the conversation between the client and myself. The sketch illustrates my quest to discern whether the predetermined outcome (a brochure) was appropriate to achieving the declared communication objective. I questioned who the client was intent on engaging and whether the intended outcome was achievable via this mode of delivery. In questioning the form of the outcome, I was also willing to discuss the potential of the design to achieve greater engagement with the audience. The questions I raised and the frustration caused by the limitations of my role could be interpreted as ‘designer arrogance’. Designers can often be perceived as ‘egocentric’ due to certain celebrity designers’ obsession with ‘self’ (Poynor 2001). A designer’s desire to elevate their position to mutual partner or collaborator in a design project can be aligned with the ‘designer as author’ discourse within communication design. It could be argued that the designers’ continued interest in this discourse is an attempt to ‘exercise some kind of agency where there has traditionally been none’ (Rock 2002, p. 243). However, the flexible definition of the word ‘author’ is problematic and has often been confused and criticised as another way for designers to ‘play centre stage’ (Bush 2003). The questions raised in the conversation with the client were not intended to be disagreeable or to question the client’s reasons for wanting a brochure. I initiated the discussion to establish a common understanding with the client of the role of the potential brochure and its likely engagement with an intended audience. In doing so, I was attempting to have a different role in this design project to that of a finished artist.

The conversation here between the client and the designer is a sketch drawn from a design project I was once involved in. This sketch reveals that the client perceived my role to be that of a finished artist, which has often been a cause of frustration in my design practice. At odds with the enjoyment I felt in designing visual compositions and crafting artefacts the frustration I felt was often the result of my involvement in the latter stages of a project. I believed that my role as a communication designer was to devise communication strategies and outcomes to achieve or maximise the engagement with a client’s intended audience. I perceived that my late initiation into projects limited my input in the communication outcome. This interaction indicates a mismatch of expectation between parties. This was the first time that the client and I had worked together on a design project and the client assumed that my role as a designer was to layout the contents of the brochure.

A client’s assumption that my role is to act as a finished artist was not a surprising revelation. The production of artefacts is often promoted and emphasised in communication design. This was discussed and critiqued in the ‘Introduction’ chapter. Burdick (1992) demonstrates how the communication designer often attempts to gain peer recognition for the aesthetic skills they have brought to a design project. These aesthetic skills continue to be the predominant way of showcasing and promoting communication design within its literature and conferences. Many scholars, such as Frascara (2004) and Bielenberg (Holland 2001) have critiqued the overemphasis on artefacts in communication design as it can omit the essential aspect of the process of designing effective communications. Emphasising a ‘form-giving’ role for the designer can position them at the tail end of a project. However, within the field of communication design there is a genuine desire by designers to assert their professional presence and significance within contemporary visual culture. The desire to establish a mutually respectful relationship with their clients and other stakeholders is a rejection of being delegated the task of a ‘stylist’ or ‘window-dresser’ at the tail end of the design process. Poynor (2003, p. 120) explains:

> Designers have always insisted that, to function effectively, they need to question and perhaps ‘re-write’ the client’s brief. They have argued that the client’s understanding of the communication problem may be imperfect and that this is why the client needs their help in the first place.

The desire to discuss the ‘communication problem’ was manifested in the conversation between the client and myself. The sketch illustrates my quest to discern whether the predetermined outcome (a brochure) was appropriate to achieving the declared communication objective. I questioned who the client was intent on engaging and whether the intended outcome was achievable via this mode of delivery. In questioning the form of the outcome, I was also willing to discuss the potential of the design to achieve greater engagement with the audience.
Politics and power

A closer examination of the previous conversation reveals hidden politics and the existence of a power dynamic between the client and the designer. It illustrates different approaches to the exchange of opinions in order to reach a consensus between two people. This exchange of opinion occurs in any human relationship, including those within the practice of communication design. The Practitioner Conversations revealed how communication designers rarely work alone (unless they are undertaking a personal project that is intended only for themselves). The practice of design is characterised by engagements with various people and all of the design projects I have undertaken in this research were conducted with other people. Through this people-centred design investigation I was able to observe and reflect on the inter-subject space in which design occurred and what effect this had on the design process. I observed various interactions and exchanges that were often complex, value-laden and ‘messy’.

Working with a variety of people inevitably involves differences of opinion, viewpoints and values. The diversity and differences are the humanness in the design process. Amongst the human exchanges within design projects, politics and power were observed as key agents. In what ways could politics and power hinder a human-centred approach to design? Acknowledging that politics and power dynamics can become significant factors in influencing a designer’s role in a project. These factors were examined in order to understand how, why and when certain people or roles are given greater value than others within the design process. In this examination, certain stakeholders were observed to be controlling the process and outcomes of the design project. The politics that informed these complex human interactions were expressed in ways that ranged from tacit to explicit manifestations.

By examining politics and power dynamics more closely, the discussion begins by defining the difference between the politics that exist between people in design projects, and politics as the content and outcome as reflected in a designed artefact.

Politics as the main content and outcome of design

There are numerous designed artefacts that exist as examples of where designers have created political content toward a purposeful political outcome. These design examples can vary in content, from a call to action by Amnesty International to campaigns for specific political parties. Being actively political was an explicit objective in the Dear John project, where the aim was to involve young people in discourses around political issues during the Australian national election. In this context the designers’ role as political agents enabled the audience to actively participate in political discourse. In this model, where politics is the content and outcome of design, debate within communication design is often polarised. On one hand, some designers argue that they are apolitical. In this argument the designer’s role and professional obligation is to provide the best possible service irrespective of the client’s personal ethics. Likening the designer to a lawyer, some argue that ‘prejudice must be put to one side’ so that the client might be provided with the ‘best possible corporate clothes’ (Rich 2002, p. 192).

On the other hand, some designers argue that designer’s political position is determined in their choice of whether or not to endorse a client’s activities. McCoy (quoted in Poynor 2001, p. 139) suggests that the political debate centres on the choice of client. ‘The decision to concentrate one’s effort as a designer on corporate projects, advertising, or any other kind of design, is a political choice.’ Similarly, when choosing clients, I have been conscious of their political inclinations and choices, and have made decisions based on whether or not we shared similar values. Similar to choosing between products made in sweatshops or those sold under a ‘fair trade’ label, I have always exercised a political choice in design. I chose to work with clients whose activities and communication messages I wished to endorse through design.

In addition this research has revealed another political aspect to communication design practice. It revealed the ways politics play an active role in interactions between stakeholders in projects. The stakeholders in focus are the client, the designer and the audience. Political power dynamics factor significantly in influencing a designer’s role in a project, and were examined here through the reflections upon the design projects. They illuminated how certain stakeholders were valued more highly than others within the design process. The following section discusses the human realities of design practice. By examining the politics and personal agendas revealed in the design projects, this research explores how it can impact upon a human-centred framework of how people are valued in the design process.
The ‘messy’ human realities of practice

In design case studies involving a client and a designer, the financial authority of the client often grants them ultimate power in decision-making processes. Some clients can use this authority to push certain agendas, whether personal or business-driven.

In the Practitioner Conversations project, one designer shared an experience where the client’s agenda had dictated the design outcome. In this example, the designer was not given an opportunity to discuss how the client’s agenda could impact on the communication objective. ‘I have some clients that are so tough, they’re like, “it’s red, that’s it. It’s all about red. I don’t want to hear anything else, there’s no other colour. I don’t even want to know about what other colours are”’ (Interviewee B). The client’s authority in this project context restricted the designer from proposing any other potential direction. This reveals that the client did not value the designer’s input and contribution to the project, apart from in carrying out his or her demand. As a result, this designer gave in to the client’s demand, even if the aesthetic specification imposed by the client was potentially unsuitable for the communication objective.

Similarly, in the Management vs Community project, the management committee’s agenda was deliberately disguised from other stakeholders. This revelation was even more pronounced since they espoused that a ‘democratic’ consultative process would be undertaken in designing the visual identity. After the community nominated values of the association to be translated into the visual identity the management intervened. In the end the management used their authority to decide on a design outcome they most valued and disregarded the directions proposed by the community members involved in the consultative process. The Management vs Community project revealed the ‘messy’ realities of applying a theoretical human-centred design approach. Through this project I discovered that power and politics are a constant component of every design project. Most significantly, I learnt that valuing input from various stakeholders in a design process is not a ‘default’ setting that can be expected to develop automatically.

Other designers share examples where design studio politics deliberately mystify the design process for the client. Vince Frost (a prominent international designer who was a partner in the design company Pentagram) explains that Pentagram had a ‘policy’ where ‘clients were never allowed up the stairs … where all the designers worked’. He explains that he was instructed not to ‘show how easy it [design] is … because you won’t be able to build it up and bullshit’ (Finn & Frost 2004, p. 33).

Whether agendas are disguised, mystified or openly shared they can have a significant impact on design processes and outcomes. Many design practitioners interviewed attested to the value of discussing these issues with project stakeholders. Discussions can help to determine whether a stakeholder’s opinion is a reasoned input or one based on personal preference. Discussions can illuminate the complex context informing the communication objective. It can further the understanding between stakeholders in co-creating design outcomes. In Practitioner Conversations, one designer explained the value of understanding the complex context under which the client operates:

We don’t know the pressure the client [frill-necked lizard] feels. What we see is this [the design job and the client]. What we don’t know is, back here, he’s got a boss [fish] that he answers to, and he’s got a boss [galah] that he answers to. And at the end of the day, they’re all accountable. We just see this [the client], but we do have to understand that ‘red’ [design concept] has to carry through and work here [fish], and here [galah] (Interviewee B).
Discussions can reveal tacit or hidden agendas. Once illuminated, these can be negotiated amongst the stakeholders, leading to significant differences in the designed outcome. For example, understanding how much of someone’s input derives from their personal taste can lead to a more relevant contribution towards designing a visual message that will engage the intended audience. One designer interviewed gave this example:

When [clients] haven’t been involved in creative processes, when they have that involvement, they want to make the most of it. Their personal tastes become an issue, and it’s not an unreasonable thing. As a stakeholder, their opinions are valid. But there is a responsibility to discuss who the visual messages are for … for our idea to be relevant and engaging for the audience, someone’s personal tastes – even if they have the final say in it – aren’t as relevant as getting the visual messages right for their audience (Interviewee A).

This designer reflected on how the client appreciated the discussion about ‘who the messages are for’. The discussion highlighted an issue that the client was previously unaware of, thereby furthering the client’s understanding. By acknowledging each stakeholder’s personal opinion and input, these can be addressed and discussed to determine their relevance to the overall designed outcome.

A continued process of discussions and negotiations can illuminate politics, power dynamics and agendas amongst stakeholders. Illumination of these issues can lead to a better understanding in determining how they will shape the design process and overall outcome. This understanding can enable both clients and designers to be empowered to be aware of and manage these influences.

**Audiences …?**

Returning to the earlier conversation between the client and myself regarding the brochure design, it is evident that one of the key stakeholders is absent. The physical absence of the audience in this conversation required other stakeholders to advocate on their behalf. Again, power and politics can play a part in how audiences are represented. The physical absence of the audience can allow other stakeholders to make assumptions about who they are, which in turn can significantly affect the overall outcome and engagement of the project. This is reflected in the concerns I raised with the client. When the client stated, ‘I would find it a really handy and useful way to remind myself of things I could do. Wouldn’t you?’ it indicated to me an assumption that the audience would engage with the brochure in the way that the client would. I lacked the necessary knowledge to determine whether the audience could engage with the brochure in this way. To highlight the assumptions that both the client and I may have about the audience, I replied: ‘I’m not sure. We might not be the best representation for the audience. I think we need to have a clearer understanding of who they are first. Then perhaps we could discuss how to engage them on this issue …?’ In this way, I attempted to initiate a discussion with the client.

The absence of the physical participation of an audience in a design process is common in the practice of communication design. This is reflected in the accounts from Practitioner Conversations, as well as the observations I have made in my own design practice. Furthermore, the audience is commonly perceived as passive readers in the communication process (Tyler 2006). In this context, many designers see their role as subtly or explicitly ‘controlling’ audience engagement through designed artefacts. This control can manifest in informing people of specific information, or in making commodities desirable though their packaging and advertising. Most artefacts are designed to achieve a specific response from the audience. By careful and attentive manipulation of the content and materiality of the designed artefact, the designer orchestrates the communication of a message so that it can be understood and enacted by the receiving audience. Frascara (2006, p. 31) describes that the design ‘solution to a client’s needs … is the modification of people’s attitudes or abilities’. Frascara’s description highlights how engagement with the designed outcomes can result in deeper and significant changes in the receiving audience.
A contrary argument holds that audiences are participants in the communication exchange and have an active role to play. Communication occurs when the audience completes the message by bringing ‘their own expectations and interpretive practices to the exchange’ (Bush 2003, p. 26). This concept can be confronting for designers who believe that the control they have over the means of production can be confused with having control of what the designed outcome means for the audience. This political agenda is revealed in Keedy’s discussion, Greasing the Wheels of Capitalism with Style and Taste, or the ‘Professionalization’ of American Graphic Design (2002). He argues that when an audience is viewed as a ‘silent, indifferent and undifferentiated entity’ that designers and clients need to be ‘surrogate expert[s]’ to become the spokesperson[s] for the audience’ (p. 199). He continues:

The designer’s and client’s confidence that ‘we know what’s best for you’ is based on the fact that they do know and care a lot more about design than the audience does. The fact that the audience is often unwilling to concede this point is proof of the ignorance and contempt they have for any specialised knowledge and expertise in design (ibid, p. 200).

According to Keedy, having confidence in ‘what’s best’ for the audience is based on how much the client and designer know and care about design, and not about the audience. In this model, design ‘elitism’ is the political agenda for both the client and the designer. Their design values are privileged over those of the ‘ignorant’ audience. The role of the audience as co-partners in the meaning-making process is not considered within this discussion. This way of ‘advocating’ for the audience is problematic in a human-centred approach to designing. Krippendorff criticises how it ‘not only stereotypes a whole population of people, it smacks of paternalism’ (2006, p. 64). It can lead to design outcomes that relegate the audience to being unequal partners in the communication exchange. Outspoken celebrity designers like Keedy can confuse understanding of the role of designers in the design process for other designers and non-designers alike. I believe that the inequity of the relationships between the client, designer and audience can devalue the outcome of design through devaluing people.

As discussed earlier, controlling the means of production by the designer and client can lead to an assumed control and authority over what the designed outcome might mean for the audience. This assumption can be potentially problematic to the creation of designed outcomes that are engaging and meaningful to the audience. One cannot control the process of meaning-making by the audience, as it has many variables (Bush 2003; Krippendorff 2006).

One designer in Practitioner Conversations shared an example of how the design ‘control’ was rebuked or ignored by the audience. As designer of a public poster magazine that is displayed on urban walls, his intention was to engage passers-by with the visual design and content of the magazine. With this intention in mind, the designer claimed that the poster had a ‘civic’ role. Within the magazine’s layout he had designed ‘pregnant spaces’ for the public to physically participate in – either as crossword games or lists to complete. However, audience engagement on this level had been minimal for several issues until, one day, a member of the public wrote over the poster magazine, covering most of the content. The text that was written was not abusive but abstract and it was clear that this member of the public had taken a long time to draw carefully on the poster. The designer revealed that the magazine team were angered by this act of ‘vandalism’. The publication is funded and produced entirely by the team who saw this intervention as an act of aggression towards their efforts.

Through our conversation, it became clear that the team had not perceived this event as an act of participation by the public. In other words, contrary to their lamentation that public participation in the magazine had been minimal, the magazine had succeeded in engaging an active participation by their audience. This particular audience member chose not to participate by filling out the crossword or activities that were designed for them but instead negotiated their own engagement by breaking the designer-imposed rules. However, this public intervention seemed to cause tension amongst the magazine collaborators. The audience engagement had challenged the embedded design system and authority, and the designer was clearly troubled by this.

It was interesting to observe that since this incident, the design structure of this public magazine changed very little. Rather than embracing the act of participation by the public as a catalyst to reevaluate the magazine design, the magazine continues to feature similar crossword puzzles and lists to complete, anticipating future public participation. This case study indicates again how the audiences are relegated to being unequal partners in the communication exchange. The civic role this magazine claims to play is thus questioned, as the discussion reveals an underlying agenda that privileges certain stakeholders over others, raising the question of who this design magazine is really for.
Communication designers are known to take pleasure in creating style and form. Designers can indulge in an ‘obsession with the visual’ (Burdick 1992, para. 10). The designer’s personal tastes, influences and individual style can give a visual signature to their work. A designer’s portfolio plays a vital role in attracting new clients and securing employment. The designer’s aesthetic sensibilities and their intuitive responsiveness to style and trends can result in engaging and meaningfully designed artefacts that contribute to contemporary visual culture. This research embraces and celebrates the cultural contribution that designers can make through the aesthetic of designed artefacts. However, I also argue that designers can further this contribution through adopting a human-centred process of designing.

By valuing and considering the audiences as knowledgeable agents in the communication exchange, designed outcomes can also empower audiences equally. I believe that design can lead to a social contribution by potentially enabling ways for people to take part in their world.

**Audience control**

Concern over the passive role of the audience in communication exchanges has led to design approaches that specifically centre on the user or audience. As discussed in the ‘Introduction’ chapter, user-centred design, participatory design and human-centred design have shared intentions of empowering users and audiences in the design process.

In participatory design, users or audiences are actively and deeply involved in the process as co-designers. This initiative empowers the users or audience so that they can propose and generate design alternatives (Fischer 2003). Participatory design originates in Scandinavia which has a strong history of social democracy. Their political ideals of equality and transparency are embedded in participatory design processes. Participatory design methods can therefore highlight ways for the audience’s physical participation and empowerment in the design process, which can bring about change in their own environment (Crabtree 1998; Spinuzzi 2005).

In some participatory design case studies, the audience is given control of the design process. Bennett (2006) proposes a participatory graphic design process where the audience is the primary ‘designer’. She argues that the ‘audience rather than the graphic designer dictates which ideas reach fruition and potentially in which form(s) they do so’ (p. 180). In a case study of designing culturally sensitive communication materials, Bennett discusses how local laypeople were trained to become ‘designers’ by a professional designer. By undergoing an audience-controlled design process, Bennett explains, the designed outcome became more relevant to the audience’s particular context and culture.

Most critical to the discussion of an ‘audience-controlled’ design process is how the concept of design is defined. Design in this context often echoes a scientific or engineering approach that values quantifiable, empirical justifications. This definition of design is commonly discussed in human–computer interaction (HCI) and computer supported cooperative work (CSCW) literature when user-centred design or participatory design approaches are explored (Fallman 2005; Wolf et al. 2006). This approach was similarly applied in Bennett’s case study where the lay audience were taught an empirical model of designing. Design led by an emphasis on empirical proof and justification confines design to a single area of activity and contribution. This can limit or ignore the creative, generative stages of the design process.

In contrast, design can also be a propositional activity that is future-driven (Downton 2003). In the generative stages of designing, the role of the designer is significant in imagining worlds that do not yet exist:

> Designers make propositions about the way some thing or things could be; their propositions incorporate speculations about a desired way things will work and look; they want to know what will transform the existing into the desired; they want to find the ways and means to achieve the desired (Downton 2003, p. 93).

Designers are skilled and trained in the ability to transform the ‘known’ into the ‘un-known’ in order to make propositions for the future. Design is more than the technical realisation and implementation of an audience’s expressed need. Design involves a complex synthesis of knowledge that integrates unexpected propositions and expressed needs, manifested in an outcome that maximises engagement and function. Designers can bring this understanding and design knowledge to their involvement with the other stakeholders in the design process.

Solely privileging audiences and their needs is problematic in the model of designing explained above. Yet it is a common feature in design processes led by market research and focus groups. In this context design’s focus is on responding to the needs and desires of the consumer. Their views and voices can drive the
language of many communication design projects (Holland 2001). The fields of branding and advertising have developed many ways to capture the needs and aspirations of consumers. Similar to the critique of market research and focus groups that was made in ‘Dear John’ section, (p. 69), some designers argue that responding to an audience’s needs and wants does not result in innovative breakthroughs in design. For example, Kelley & Littman explains that most customers are happy to tell you what’s wrong with a current product but cannot tell you about future products they haven’t seen or experienced yet. The purpose of marketing is to sell something that already exists, not to invent something new. He points to the danger of a design model that simply responds to consumer needs:

> If you asked people what they wanted in a VCR, they might suggest ‘super-fast rewind.’ You might set out to create the fastest-rewinding VCR in the world, but just as you released your fancy new model, you would’ve been blown away by the arrival of the first DVD players (Kelley & Littman 2005, p. 37).

Similarly, many designers interviewed as part of Practitioner Conversations expressed a dislike for the directives brought about by marketing, as these can place limitations on exploring future design directions. However, they acknowledge that the data from focus groups or market research is often an attempt by the client to represent the audience’s ‘voice’ in the design process. Whilst it is important to listen to the research brought by the client, many designers interviewed also stressed the value of doing their own research to further their understanding of the project’s intended audience. This is usually done by observing and experiencing the ways in which design engages people through reading, talking and listening to the intended audience. One designer commented:

> For a lot of what we do, it's about seeing ourselves as part of the audience. [Some designers] see duality between clients, designers and audiences where there is a divide. I don’t think it's that simple. We’re part of that same community that we’re talking to, we don’t go out into the community with lab coats and microscopes taking notes like science. We’re part of it everyday. We live it. Of course there are specific audiences who are outside of our experiences, but it helps to just understand that we're part of what our visual messages adds up to (Interviewee A).

The knowledge of the audience that both client and designer bring to the table can then be discussed. Through the process of discussion and negotiation, opinions and viewpoints can be exchanged. This process can also illuminate hidden agendas or assumptions that both stakeholders bring to the project. Exchanging different opinions and viewpoints can provide opportunities to learn from one another and to be more informed. This can lead to the creation of new knowledge and an ‘understanding of someone else’s understanding’ – a second-order understanding (Krippendorff 2006, p. 66).

Krippendorff explains how the second-order understanding employs an empathetic approach in viewing the world from another person’s perspective. The client has their way of seeing the world, the designer sees the designer’s world, and the audience sees the audience’s world. This acknowledges that people’s worldview is subjective and constructed from his or her own actions and logic. According to Merleau-Ponty (2002), the association we have with others or the world is not an ‘autonomous force’. He claims that this association ‘acts only in virtue of the meaning it has acquired in the context of … former experience[s] and in suggesting recourse to [those] experience[s]’ (p. 21). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological way of associating with the world can be interpreted as what Krippendorff calls a ‘second-order understanding’. It is a way of establishing understanding based on meaning and acknowledges that different things can mean different things to different people.

I believe that this understanding based on meaning is significant to communication design, because the nature of communication can be argued to form a dialogic process of meaning-making through exchange. Communication design is a process that is based on how to apply and manifest different kinds of understanding, and to explore what designed outcomes could mean for different people. Embracing and acknowledging the diversity and multiplicity of viewpoints of all stakeholders can allow the design process to explore the potential and possibilities of the meaning of different design outcomes. Viewed this way, it is more pronounced to move on from ‘graphic design’ to ‘communication design’ as the title of the field, than what was argued earlier in the ‘Introduction’ chapter (pp. 21-22).

Placing emphasis on the diversity of people’s perspectives and on what design can potentially mean to people is significant to understanding human-centred design. The human aspect of our lives can involve numerous roles depending on the context we are placed in. For example, one can be a daughter, a mother, a friend and a wife in the presence of different people and contexts. The multiplicity of
roles that people play can also be mirrored in design. I believe that acknowledging the diversity of roles we adopt is central to a human-centred perspective. Our diverse roles lead to diverse perspectives that enable us to understand the multi-dimensional context of people’s lives. This understanding is significant to accepting and respecting the different views and concerns that people have.

A design project can often involve those who are not physically present in the design project. The discussion in this chapter may have revolved around key stakeholders such as the designer, client and audience as a way to begin discussing the diversity of agendas, but in this scheme, each stakeholder may represent a ‘multiple’ of roles. As explained by Interviewee B in Practitioner Conversations, ‘What we don’t know is, back here, he’s got a boss [fish] that he answers to, and he’s got a boss [galah] that he answers to’ (p. 153). The client’s agenda may be comprised of the agendas of their manager and their manager’s manager. The same applies to designers, who may need to express the agendas of the studio or their creative director. Similarly, the diversity of audiences who may be imagined engaging with the designed outcome could not be reductively represented. The potential for future engagement with the audience raises concerns of who they might be in the future, in addition to who they have been known to be in the past. This is a point that was raised in Dear John. The personas’ fictional quality lent a believability to the potential audience’s concerns. This believability enabled the designers to incorporate what might be important to Dear John’s potential audiences and for these concerns to be addressed as a central objective of the project.

In the realities of practice, fiscal, logistical and time-imposed parameters may only allow a handful of stakeholders to be involved in a design project. However, human-centred design is not a literal approach that can simply allow for the input of those who are physically participating in the design process to the exclusion of those who are not. The research has discovered that to enable human-centred design, stakeholders within the project have a responsibility and duty of care to value and consider those who also have a stake in the project but are not physically participating in the process.

To make such stakeholders’ presence more explicit within the design process, design interventions such as personas were observed as instrumental in Dear John project.

To summarise, this chapter has revealed how the tacit and complex inter-relationships between various people provides a consistent ‘human’ context for communication design practice. A design process can thus be situated as a political negotiation between stakeholders in a project. Given this political context, valuing input by various stakeholders in a design process cannot be seen as a ‘default’ setting that comes automatically with a project. As demonstrated in this chapter, some stakeholders may be valued over others. In this political framework the success of the designer’s role relates to how well he or she expresses their personal and professional view of the world and enable and facilitate others expressing their view of the world. Through this process the designer becomes a key agent in facilitating each stakeholder to understand other stakeholder’s understanding. It is a second-order understanding, as argued by Krippendorff, that also includes other stakeholders who may not be physically present in the design process. Thus, in undertaking a human-centred approach in design projects, the designer’s role is to initiate and facilitate a discussion that can then illuminate the politics and any stakeholder agendas or assumptions within projects. Politics are inherent to all design projects and practices and the project stakeholders need to be empowered to begin discussing them.

The importance of the role of discussion has been a significant illumination within this chapter. The next chapter examines this dialogic process more closely. It will continue to focus on dialogue amongst project stakeholders to highlight how it can build relationships. Building relationships can enable understanding to deepen between the stakeholders, resulting in an awareness of the value that each person contributes to the design process. In the next chapter, another critical reflection on the design projects is undertaken. Through this process it is revealed how a dialogic process amongst stakeholders is crucial to how values are manifested and negotiated in the design process. Further focus on certain dialogic moments led to an understanding of various design interventions that revealed the values central to each project. The discussion in the next chapter documents how each design intervention evolved from one project to the next, which in turn, enabled different project values to emerge.
The previous chapter argued that a continued process of discussion and negotiation can illuminate politics, power dynamics and agendas amongst stakeholders. The politics within projects and practices have been identified as obstacles and challenges in undertaking a human-centred approach to design. The process of engaging stakeholders in a dialogue or discussion is identified as a way to overcome these obstacles. The importance of empowering stakeholders to initiate and enable discussions was also addressed. Illumination of issues and concerns through discussion can lead to a better understanding of how these aspects shape the design process and overall outcome. This understanding can enable all stakeholders to address and manage these influences. Krippendorff regards a dialogic process as a model of participatory design: ‘[p]articipants may have diverse backgrounds and expertise but dialogue grants each of them dialogic equality, the possibility of participation. In dialogue, nobody’s voice may be suppressed’ (Krippendorff 2006, p. 258). A deeper, focused enquiry on how dialogic processes can be facilitated through designing may lead to a creation of an equitable, human-centred practice.

This chapter examines the significance of dialogue amongst the stakeholders in a design project more closely. A focus on dialogue amongst project stakeholders has highlighted how it can build relationships. Building relationships can enable understanding to deepen between the stakeholders, resulting in an awareness of the value that each person contributes to the design process. Various designers in the Practitioner Conversations also shared how dialogue was significant in building professional relationships. Another critical reflection on the design projects revealed how a dialogic process amongst stakeholders is crucial to how values are manifested and negotiated in the design process. Focus on certain dialogic moments led to an understanding of various design interventions that revealed the values central to each project.
The discussion in this chapter documents how each design intervention evolved from one project to the next, which enabled different project values to emerge. These design interventions were previously perceived as ways to value people’s input in the process. I had intended them to be trials or experiments to undertaking a human-centred approach to designing. However, upon reflection and critical questioning, it revealed that the design interventions were also instrumental in highlighting the values implicit in projects. It led to an understanding of what the values were and why they were important. This realisation enabled me to understand that human-centred design is about how people are valued in projects and also about how values are collectively negotiated through the design process. A greater focus on values will be undertaken in the next chapter, however, this chapter examines design interventions that were catalytic in manifesting and negotiating collective values for each project.

As discussed in the ‘Introduction’ chapter, literature on co-design and participatory design often emphasises how to empower users or audiences in the design process to propose and generate design alternatives (Fischer 2003; Sanders 2000; Spinuzzi 2005). Sanders (2002) in particular, discusses how designers could design ‘scaffolds for experiencing’ to enable users or audiences to create their own experiences. Sanders explains how traditional design research methods focused on observing what people do or listening to people about what they think. However, she explains how designers could go beyond simply ‘knowing’ the user, but to empathise with them by accessing a deeper level of expression. The role of the designer, then, is to design ‘scaffolds’ to promote ‘collective generativity’ amongst ‘ordinary people’ and designers. ‘Scaffolds’ are therefore proposed by Sanders as new tools that can enable people to express their thoughts, feelings and dreams.

Sanders’s metaphor of a ‘scaffold’ seemed an effective lens to critique and understand the design interventions undertaken in my research. The ‘scaffolds’ were interpreted as design activities that were less concerned with giving form and materiality to artefacts than with being catalytic in enabling and facilitating dialogue. The use of the ‘scaffold’ metaphor avoids the conventional limitation of artefacts as the term ‘scaffold’ can also include tools or conceptual methods. I have borrowed Sanders’s use of ‘scaffolds’ to open up and examine the variety of interventions that had occurred in each project. This process revealed how certain kinds of dialogue were central to manifesting and negotiating values collectively in projects.

Artefacts that can catalyse friction and differences are discussed by de Freitas (2004). She describes a particular case study where the artefacts created through collaborative practice were observed in playing a role ‘as a site of differentiation’ (p. 5) in relation to ideas contributed by the collaborators. Extending de Freitas’s observation further, this chapter reflects upon the role of artefacts and scaffolds that enabled values to manifest through people’s use, interaction, creation, engagement and participation with them. The manifestation of values in this research echoes Sanders’s claim of how such ‘tools’ can enable access to people’s feelings, dreams and imagination so that designers can establish resonance with them.
After the first workshop, and following a discussion with the designers, the words, sketches and values were turned into a brief. Since the designers were not present in the first workshop, I detailed the discussions that took place around the materials generated. The informal, open and organic process we undertook ensured that all participants felt comfortable in sharing values that they felt were important to the association. Difference of values and viewpoints could then be discussed and consolidated in a supportive environment. In this environment we valued each other’s input and appreciated and accepted different opinions. There was a collective purpose to the activities that were undertaken. The process fostered a sense of ownership of the visual identity through active involvement. Allowing various inputs by the participants allowed unexpected interactions to emerge. Fischer (2000) discusses such a framework of design as ‘social creativity’. He explains ‘bringing together different points of view and trying to create a shared understanding among all stakeholders can lead to new insights, new ideas, and new artifacts’ (p. 2). In other words, the design of the consultative workshop ‘scaffold’ created a generative, creative forum for all participants to explore and express the values of the association. Through the workshop and activities, their input was equally valued and respected.

Designing ‘scaffolds’ in Management vs Community

In the Management vs Community project I explored how to design ‘scaffolds’ that enabled members of the community to consolidate the values of the association. As described in the project account in ‘Management vs Community’ section (p. 47), workshops fostered generative discussions amongst the participants, who each brought with them diverse backgrounds and experiences. Each participant had unique understandings and experiences of the association, including values that they felt were central to it. My intention was to use the workshops to facilitate the stakeholders to reveal values that they identified with the association. To ensure a balanced, generative and constructive discussion I asked them to undertake word and image association games, visualisations and brainstorming exercises. For example, a word and image association game invited the participants to look at the visual imagery of commonly-seen logos and interpret what might be associated with them. To illustrate this example, examining the Qantas logo highlighted how the red triangle indicated the tail of an airplane, and the streamlined and stylised drawing of the kangaroo, and its red colour, conveyed speed.

Playing games with familiar logos and interpreting embedded meanings led to an understanding of how values could be expressed through imagery and symbolism. The participants were astute and receptive in understanding the complexity of how various qualities can be revealed and associated through a simple visual like a logo. After this first workshop, my initial concerns about the workshop participants’ position as ‘novices’ of design was abated – they had a high level of visual literacy and were easily able to translate meanings from visual symbols. The logo exercise was instrumental in building the next exercise, which used word associations to capture the characteristics of the association. Various words were extracted from existing communication materials from the association. This prompted discussion of the meaning of each word. We undertook brainstorming to generate associated words. Some words were also expressed through drawing, where many participants drew circular sketches to communicate words such as ‘nurture’ or ‘community’.

After the first workshop, and following a discussion with the designers, the words, sketches and values were turned into a brief. Since the designers were not present in the first workshop, I detailed the discussions that took place around the materials generated.

The informal, open and organic process we undertook ensured that all participants felt comfortable in sharing values that they felt were important to the association. Difference of values and viewpoints could then be discussed and consolidated in a supportive environment. In this environment we valued each other’s input and appreciated and accepted different opinions. There was a collective purpose to the activities that were undertaken. The process fostered a sense of ownership of the visual identity through active involvement. Allowing various inputs by the participants allowed unexpected interactions to emerge. Fischer (2000) discusses such a framework of design as ‘social creativity’. He explains ‘bringing together different points of view and trying to create a shared understanding among all stakeholders can lead to new insights, new ideas, and new artifacts’ (p. 2). In other words, the design of the consultative workshop ‘scaffold’ created a generative, creative forum for all participants to explore and express the values of the association. Through the workshop and activities, their input was equally valued and respected.
Trust was built amongst the workshop participants and the designers over several workshops during the initial stages of the Management vs Community project. However, in the latter stages of the design project the management committee overruled the design direction proposed by the workshop. The trust in the management committee to support and respect the consultative process was broken. In other words, the project outcome reveals how the management failed to trust the process or the people within the project. In their effort to gain power and control of the process, and the outcome of the visual identity, they lost the ability to trust others. Solomon and Flores (2001, p. 24) explain: ‘[t]rust and control are incompatible because the core of trust involves freedom. To trust people is to count on their sense of responsibility’. They argue that people in a position of control often command using power rather than employ trust. Control can often guarantee security, but trust involves risks and uncertainties.

This observation highlights how ‘scaffolds’ were not put in place for other critical stages of the project, especially with the management committee. An opportunity to undertake an informal, discursive and generative process with the management committee was not made available to the designers in this project context. As reflected on in previous chapters, the designers’ feeling of ‘intimidation’ and ‘lack of control’ that resulted from this project was due to their disempowerment. Reflecting on the project, the designers later revealed that they would usually undergo a more informal, dialogic process where the designs are critiqued and discussed with key stakeholders as they progressed. A dialogic process amongst the stakeholders, especially with the client, is an important activity in building a professional relationship. During these discussions, different points of view, concerns, alternatives and potentials are explored and exchanged amongst the stakeholders. A lack of such a discursive process with the management committee during certain stages of the project is a contributing factor to the project outcome.

As reflected on in the previous chapter, I speculated that the management might have not intended the events to unfold the way it did. The workshop participants may have illuminated certain aspirational values that they associated with the association, reflecting changes that they hoped might occur. I believe that once the management committee realised this, they possibly became afraid of these changes and preferred to maintain the continuity and stability associated with the past, and opted for a visual identity that reflected this. If so, it indicates that there were contrasting values held by the management committee and the participants in the workshop. Even though the management committee commissioned the change for a visual identity, the changes they were prepared to make were different to the aspirations of the workshop participants.

This situation in Management vs Community echoes commonly encountered incidences where clients abruptly change their minds at the final stages of the project. Upon seeing the design shaped into a plausible and realistic outcome, clients often contradict themselves on what they want. To illustrate this point, a hypothetical example of a client’s comment could be, ‘I know I said it should be purple, but seeing how it’s looking now, I don’t think it’s right anymore’. When such comments are made at the latter stages of the design process it is frustrating for designers to redo the work again, especially if the designers had already addressed a concern with the colour during the evolution of the designed outcome. In this instance, the client’s lack of awareness of the problem with the colour was withheld, not because they were being deliberately devious, but often because they genuinely did not see it as a problem before.

To counteract such occurrences, there are design companies that utilise realistic ‘prototypes’ at the earliest stage of the briefing process. Seeing a realistic representation of a designed outcome can elicit discussion on issues and concerns that surround it, which the client or the designer may not have been able to perceive before. Such visual disclosures can circumvent problems earlier. Design companies like IDEO or Livework, who undertake human-centred design approaches to projects, often design and deploy prototypes in discussion with clients as a way to ‘sketch’ future scenarios. Manzini and Jegou (2004) utilise this method and they have created everyday future scenarios to highlight and make real the issues surrounding environmental sustainability. The scenarios are illustrated visuals of people in specific urban settings that can tangibly communicate the alternative ways people can work, consume, use transportation, interact with one another, and situate concerns of sustainability at the core of each activity. Such scenarios have a projective quality to enable project stakeholders to evaluate and critique the role and outcome of design products and services, prior to its ‘realisation’.

Manzini and Jegou’s scenario example illustrates how a scenario, as an artefact, can become a catalyst to facilitate dialogue, communication, collaboration, and to manifest and critique values embedded in project contexts. The artefact’s role and deployment early in the design process contrasts with a view of artefacts as end outcomes to be designed. Creation of, and interaction with, artefacts can transform them into an open-ended ‘language’ for project stakeholders to discuss the designed outcome’s potentiality. For example, the workshops in Management vs Community explored how the language of logos and visualisations facilitated dialogue on the values associated with the association. The activity enabled such values to manifest more readily.
The use of visualisations, such as sketching and drawing are common activities in communication design. Visualisations undertaken in the workshops in Management vs Community played a complimentary role to words and facilitated a discursive engagement between the participants. Communication based solely on words and text can be potential obstacles when working with stakeholders from a diversity of background and knowledge. This communication ‘problem’ caused by words and texts was observed in a project called HDM. In the HDM research project there were team members from diverse fields such as sociology, nursing, HCI, interaction design and communication design. This multi-disciplinary team with their multi-disciplinary practices posed potential problems in establishing a collective understanding of the aims of the project. There was a general research objective to this project but the research-led focus lacked a concrete approach that guided the project. The team members who gathered from diverse disciplines and backgrounds had subtly different understandings of the core concepts of the project, such as ‘design’ or ‘ethnography’. The specificity of certain words used in different contexts and disciplines led to confusion amongst stakeholders in the project. Different definitions of a word can create misunderstandings caused by the use of different terminologies and divergent bodies of knowledge and languages.

To overcome this communication ‘problem’ the team utilised visualisations as another form of language to clarify the aim of the project. I undertook the role of initiating numerous visual iterations that might capture the essence of the project. These visualisations were not intended to ‘lock down’ definitions of the project, but rather to open up other ways of thinking about it. The process of creating various visual iterations triggered different interpretations of how the project was read and understood. The variety of understandings held by different team members triggered discussion amongst the team. Thus, the visuals became a catalyst in extending our multi-disciplinary understanding of what this project aimed to achieve. As the discussions continued, it became clear that the visualisation process was another form of collaborative practice between team members. The process generated dialogue and debate. It led to a re-examination of the team’s assumptions about what the project was and what we believed it could be. The discourse surrounding the visuals became expansive and generative and the by-product of this process was a sense of collaboration, ownership, mateship and a deeper understanding and appreciation of our different perspectives. These discussions enabled the project values to emerge.

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9 The Human Dimensions Methodology project is not included as part of this research due to the difference in research focus. It was undertaken as a part of ACID (the Australasian Cooperative Research Centre for Interaction Design). This was a contracted research project where I was a member of a team of researchers. HDM investigated a human-centred consulting methodology for interaction design projects. Its aim was to develop a design-driven, ethnographically informed consulting methodology that focused on knowledge creation, knowledge management and knowledge dissemination throughout interaction design projects. I was invited to take part as a research associate for one year, between October 2005 and December 2006. In this role, I facilitated particular communication design activities amongst project participants. This project created another space in which to reflect on my research. The activities I undertook in this context became significant to exploring ways to facilitate engagement and communication amongst the team members.
Visual disclosure can allow the discovery of new meaning and engender possibility. In the context of discussing the process and outcomes of mapping, Corner (1999) explains how mappings can be agents in uncovering realities that could not previously be seen or imagined. He states:

> There are some phenomena that can only achieve visibility through representation [rather] than through direct experience … mapping engenders new and meaningful relationships amongst otherwise disparate parts (p. 229).

Artefacts such as sketches, diagrams and visualisations can become another form of language through which to communicate amongst project teams. They were successfully used to engage the workshop stakeholders in Management vs Community. A visual language can reflect the dialogue that is taking place amongst stakeholders. It can capture the abstract and illuminate the tacit. Visualisations can become a space to reflect on or to accelerate certain concepts. The process of visualisation can affect how the team behaves and what they are able to see. On discussing maps, Kerbs (Abrams et al. 2006, p. 97) explains, ‘I see the maps as sense-making documents: when discussed, we all get smarter … or start asking better questions’.

**Designing ‘scaffolds’ in Dear John**

Using Sanders’s metaphor of the ‘scaffold’ to understand the design interventions in Dear John revealed how personas enabled and facilitated dialogue amongst the collaborating designers. Personas were methodologically effective in raising consciousness of the variety of audience values and of the multi-dimensionality of their lives. As documented in Dear John’s project text (p. 63), the use of personas facilitated discussions that consolidated the values of potential audiences that we wished to engage with. Through rigorous discussion, we were able to formulate a collective notion of the role of audiences in this project that helped us to make informed decisions about the project’s outcome. The discussions facilitated through personas gave the team greater ownership of the project. This also gave us greater responsibility to be clear in the response we wanted from our potential audiences. Grudin and Pruitt (2003, p. 3) claim that the persona’s ‘greatest value is in providing a shared basis for communication’. Our shared notion of the audiences enabled us to critique our process by having something constant to refer back to when defining the communication objective. Thus the use of personas became a catalyst in accelerating and facilitating a rigorous discussion that, on reflection, was crucial to shaping the overall outcome of the project.

More significantly, the personas allowed our team to critique and question our assumptions about the values and activities of the audience. The personas became a catalyst to further question our own values and assumptions of what we each wanted the project to become. Personas have an instrumental use of bringing attention to the stakeholders who are absent and unrepresented in the design process. The use of personas helped to ‘bring socio-political issues to the surface’ (Grudin & Pruitt 2003, p. 14). As with any tools, it is their use that makes them valuable and effective. Personas have a creative capacity to fuel and contain the designer’s imagination as well as sharply reveal any reductive assumptions. The use of personas eventuated in discussions that illuminated each stakeholder’s values, including the designers and potential audiences. It endowed us with a responsibility to make these values a central concern and focus of this project. The discussion about these values resulted from our conversations on the reasons behind people’s actions, motivations, feelings and beliefs, including our own.
Dear John was the first project that the team of designers collaborated on. To maximise effective collaboration, the team engaged in weekly or daily discussions. These discussions ranged from questions regarding our assumptions of the values and activities of the audience to debate about our own political concerns and clarifications of the objectives of the project. These discussions also became a forum for voicing concerns and debating disagreements that were often personally confronting. There were times when decisions were made that we did not all agree with, or when compromises had to be made due to differences of opinion. These forums were rigorous. Carter explains, ‘[c]ollaboration is always, first of all, an act of dis-memberment’ (2004, p. 9). Carter’s use of the word ‘dis-memberment’ has a violent connotation, suggesting that collaborative activity can be discordant, resulting from a clash of ideas or opinions. These dynamics were certainly observed in the Dear John project.

Carter explains the notion of ‘re-membering’ as a way to retain the original memory of the individual in a group. This suggests that the participants do not blend into an indistinguishable mass through collaboration. The whole group is a sum of parts where each member participates as an individual. The interaction that occurs between individuals retains each of their own identities and values, but recognises that each member can share, be inspired by, reflect on and be confronted by each other’s values and opinions. This rigorous and complex dialogic process amongst the team drives the design process.

The discursive forums were a significant aspect of the Dear John project. Generative discussions and brainstorming sessions allowed the diversity of people involved in the project to bring their particular perspectives to it. Humour also played a vital part in lubricating interactions. Humour amongst team members enabled the team to share different opinions and to smooth out tension or conflict. Through these human interactions, knowledge from individual stakeholders was shared and built upon. In this way, knowledge-making can occur through interactions between people, practices and artefacts (Spinuzzi 2005).

The weekly discussions undertaken in the early stages of the project were instrumental in how the artefacts were created in Dear John. The artefacts were considered to be a critical element in enabling active participation by the potential audiences. Our intention was to create various artefacts that could facilitate a diversity of activities and resonate with different audience values that we identified through the personas. The variety of artefacts reflected the diversity of values that were central to the Dear John team. On the website, people were invited to send in letters they wrote themselves and artworks they created in response to what we had made available. These were, in turn, displayed in the site’s public gallery. By enabling these artefacts to be downloaded, passed on and modified by the public, it also enabled the audience to reciprocally share their values and concerns. Dear John, as a design intervention, performed in a similar way to how ‘cultural probes’ (Gaver, Dunne & Pacenti 1999) function as ethnomethodological tools. Like ‘cultural probes’, the collection of artefacts housed in the website triggered and enabled various emotive resonances from our audiences. Provoked, informed, engaged or inspired by Dear John, members of the public re-created our artefacts to voice their concerns and expressed their values through them. Dear John was a ‘scaffold’ that enabled the expression and manifestation of different values by different people.

However, in a critique of Dear John, even though it had initiated some engagement and resonance with some members of the public, it was largely a designer-led, design-focused project. The public’s responses were still limited to the aesthetic and functional boundaries placed by the team of designers in Dear John. The designerly aesthetic of the site may have prevented people from submitting artworks that were less ‘refined’ or ‘professional’. Further consideration could have been given to enable people to write text-based letters on the site as opposed
Designing ‘scaffolds’ in Practitioner Conversations

The exploration of the use of artefacts to facilitate interaction and dialogue was further explored in Practitioner Conversations. In this project, it explored an interview method of using artefacts called ‘playful triggers’ (Loi 2005). They were adopted and extended in this context to visualise, communicate and capture the complex human interactions that occur within the practice of communication design (discussion on why they were chosen is stated in ‘Practitioner Conversations’, p. 100). Reflecting on the interactions fostered revealed that they were a catalyst for reflection and imagination, tools for the articulation and communication of ideas and experiences, and facilitators of participation and generative meaning-making. More importantly, the artefacts assisted in revealing the values that are central and important to the designers’ practices. Significant discoveries about what the artefacts enabled and facilitated in the interview context are discussed in detail below. This discussion builds on existing discourse on the role of artefacts in facilitating and triggering interaction between people by Loi (2005), Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti (1999), Sanders (2000) and Arias and Fischer’s (2000) and Ehn (1988).

Accelerate communication through visualisation

One significant aspect of the artefacts used in the interview context were their ability to accelerate communication through visualisation. This aspect differs and departs significantly from the work by Daria Loi on ‘playful triggers’. Loi discusses how ‘playful triggers’ are specifically designed social lubricants for collaboration between people. They are triggers to initiate and sustain conversation, and are not used to express or communicate the participants’ thoughts or position. ‘Playful trigger’s’ indigenous origins in participatory design have been developed further through their use and application in a communication design context in this research. This aspect is significant in extending the role of artefacts in communicating human relationships, as well as their role in fostering and facilitating them. In other words, these artefacts begin to demonstrate a role that externalises the complexity of values and interaction.

to limiting them to producing artworks. Such considerations could have made the site more inclusive to a wider audience, therefore enable a greater diversity and number of people, values and concerns to be expressed through it. These shortfalls and lack of consideration are easier to critique in hindsight but were difficult to perceive at the time. This critique echoes Sanders’s criticism of Gaver’s ‘cultural probe’ (2007). She states how Gaver’s probes are not designed to understand or empathise with the people probed, rather it is a designer-centred object to obtain design inspiration. Her critique points to Gaver’s insistence on allowing the returned probes to remain ambiguous and interpretive (Gaver, Beaver & Benford 2003) by not meeting the respondents or knowing the specifics of how the probes were interacted with. Like Gaver’s ‘cultural probes’, Dear John can be critiqued for limiting audience engagement through designer-centred interventions, even though it had optimistic and well-meaning intentions of engaging the public.

A DEAR JOHN LETTER THAT WAS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC WAS PLACED ONTO A BLANK T-SHIRT PHOTOGRAPH TO EMPHASISE IT AS AN ‘ARTWORK’.
that are embedded in individual practices. I believe that artefacts’ ability to externalise and communicate the complexity of human interactions that occur in practice can enable practitioners to reflect upon and understand how and what occurs amongst people in projects much more readily.

Re-examining what had emerged from Practitioner Conversations has provided an understanding of how participants articulate knowledge of their role and interactions with others during design projects. In particular, the Yowies were frequently chosen to represent people. They became ‘avatars’, where participants projected either themselves or those who they work with onto them. This was a ‘safe’ (and therefore popular) phenomenon because an avatar created distance between the interviewee and their past experiences, allowing ensuing conversation to be less personal. The animals were sometimes chosen because they reflected certain characteristics of people. For example, Interviewee B purposefully chose a particular animal to represent a client who they associated negative feelings with. ‘We’ll make him the lizard, he’s nastier.’ On the other hand, Interviewee C expressed their curiosity about a new client by choosing a kookaburra. ‘To meet the kookaburra is a thrill, and I’ve never done any work for the kookaburra before, and he tells me he wants to eat snakes and likes to sing before it rains.’ Similarly, instead of using the first person ‘I’, the Yowies, such as ‘the dingo’ or ‘the koala’, were used frequently when participants talked about an interaction that involved themselves and others. The participants were observed comfortably re-enacting interactions, conversations and relationships that are situated in practice.

The artefacts enabled an exchange of knowledge in the interviews, visually mirroring conversations as they unfolded. During the flow of conversation, both participant and researcher would manipulate artefacts in order to explore details of the interview theme. Participants frequently used words like ‘this’ or ‘that’ whilst manipulating the artefacts to abstractly represent specific relationships, processes and interactions that occurred within the projects. The artefacts were observed to accelerate communication between the interviewer and participant, who would move each object around to clarify each other’s point of view. The artefacts tangibly reflected conversations that both participant and researcher had ownership of but that neither had claimed authoritative control of. Thus, these artefacts enabled and facilitated the co-creation of meaning; both parties were active participants in establishing contextual understanding. In this context, the artefacts became instrumental in clarifying, articulating and communicating values that are central to the participants’ particular processes and interactions in their practices. In this sense, the artefacts became catalysts for engaging stakeholders in an active co-creation of meaning and experience. The resulting placement of artefacts was photographed and captured in linear succession. These photographs became firsthand ‘visual quotes’ to convey and demonstrate specific moments of interaction in a designer’s practice.

Various examples of how the ‘playful triggers’ were instrumental in capturing and communicating values that are important to a designers’ practice is presented in the section on Practitioner Conversations (pp. 113-140). Under the headings of ‘collaboration’, ‘audiences’, ‘negotiation’ and ‘relationships’, are various accounts of how the designer expressed their views, concerns and ways in which they interact with people in their practices. These accounts will not be repeated again here, but one example is given on the next page to illustrate this point:
This account by Interviewee B illustrates how the designer has reflected on previous project experiences to reveal values that are in conflict with the client. In this instance, the designer believed that there could be a diversity and variety of ways to engage the potential audience of a project. The designer considered that their role in the project was to generate a variety of creative options, represented by the assortment of coloured mints. However, the client did not value this role and perceived that the outcomes generated might be too risky, which is expressed by the client’s comment ‘all this stuff you’re giving me … he [crab] might hate that’. The client valued their knowledge of the audience over the designer and did not value the options that the designer could provide. The designer expresses how the client did not respect and value her input; ‘Even if you know that this is the best idea in the whole world and this guy [lizard], he’s not going to buy it …’ The designer expresses their frustration and disempowerment with the situation and their relationship with the client in this project; ‘… there’s nothing you can do about it. It’s so frustrating’.

As demonstrated in the example above, the ‘language’ of artefacts complemented the verbal words used to describe the complexities of a designer’s practice. Rather than being caught up in definitions of words, which would inhibit the process of achieving quick mutual understanding, the artefacts had enabled another form of literacy. Interviewee D commented at the conclusion of interview, ‘I always find it so hard to say what I do. This is a great way to communicate it’. In the interview, she was amazed to find how easily she had been able to ‘map’ out the complicated roles and relationships in her practice. Her reflection on the interview process revealed how the artefacts had assisted her ability to articulate the complexity of values and how they manifest in her practice.

Communicating reflection – a process of making sense

The artefacts were used to re-enact conversations that had taken place between stakeholders in design projects. When using the artefacts to recall particular moments or mimic past interactions, the participants were observed to be reflecting on those particular incidents and experiences. This echoes the notion of using artefacts and visualisation through diagrams (Grocott 2005) to assist reflective practice. As explained earlier (p. 180), the Yowies frequently became people or products whilst the coloured mints were used to represent directions, processes, products, qualities or ideas. Once meaning or roles were assigned to the artefacts, they became visual cues for the conversations that took place during the
invited meaning to be transposed onto them, abilities that we, humans, possess naturally. A similar situation could be observed when the ‘offside rule’ is explained using salt and pepper shakers. In an attempt to explain this complex football rule, the table transforms itself into the football pitch and the salt and pepper shakers become players, the ball and goal posts. By moving the objects around, the players’ complex manoeuvres can be captured. I believe that the transformative ability of objects in context is something that humans acquire through play during childhood. As a child, a cardboard box can become a car, a boat, a house through imagining its role in the story being told. In discussing ‘transitional objects’, Winnicott (1974) describes how objects can be possessed by the child’s imagination so that they occupy a space that is neither fully part of the self nor explicitly external. He further explains that, in playing, ‘the child gathers objects or phenomena from external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality’ (p. 51). The artefacts used in Practitioner Conversations were not ‘analysed’ to decode embedded psychological meanings as to why certain animals were chosen to represent particular people or situations. However, it is acknowledged that the situated cultural and social context of their being Australian animals, and that they are toys that Australian people were familiar with from their childhood, have played an instrumental part in their engagement.

To reiterate, these objects were deployed as a designer’s ‘hunch’ in response to a particular context rather than one based on empirical research. Judgements that are ‘felt’ rather than cognitively made are common, prevalent characteristics of a designer’s process (Schön 1983). As documented in the blog entry in Practitioner Conversations (pp. 101-102), my hunch led me to try the Yowies with the first interviewee. I was pleasantly surprised by how effective they were, and therefore continued to use them in subsequent interviews without realising how significant this discovery was to the research. To clarify, I do not claim that the artefacts used in Practitioner Conversations represent the best, most effective ones possible in communicating and reflecting upon the human interactions that occur in communication design practice. Rather, they, in conjunction with others’ research, further demonstrate the potential role of artefacts in communicating and facilitating how values are illuminated and discussed amongst people in specific settings. I believe that the artefact’s ability to externalise and communicate the complexity of human interactions that occurs in practice can enable the practitioners to reflect upon and understand how, and what occurs amongst people in projects, much more readily.
The artefacts used in Practitioner Conversations highlight a potential to be developed into a methodology in a future study. Further work would need to be undertaken to specifically explore their role in revealing and articulating embedded values within human interactions. It would require a thorough focus on designing or trialling various artefacts in a variety of contexts in which they are deployed. Using different ways of capturing and documenting the interactions, for example through video and still photography, will provide alternative means of analysis. Asking participants to reflect on their interactions with the artefacts will facilitate learning and analysis of the artefacts’ effectiveness. The critique, questions and concerns raised earlier on the quality and characteristics of the chosen artefacts could then be investigated in detail. Such exploration is unfortunately beyond the limit of this research, however, it is a strong possibility for pursuit in a post-doctoral study.

Reviewing how each design intervention evolved through successive iterations revealed the trajectory of how the scaffold for articulating and discussing values was explored. The trajectory of exploration is visualised in the diagram on the right. Literature, theory and multi-disciplinary practices have contributed to deepen and widen the exploration of each scaffold. Initially in Management vs Community, the scaffolds utilised methods and languages from the practice of communication design whilst applying a limited understanding of user-centred design. The activities undertaken in the workshops enabled some success in collectively discussing the values that were central to the stakeholders within the association. However, events that followed revealed how the scaffolds were inadequately designed to manifest and negotiate the values of other stakeholders, in particular the management committee.

The next project, Dear John, broadened and widened its exploration through methods, tools and theory from participatory design. In particular, the use of personas was incorporated by designing a scaffold that enabled the illumination and negotiation of values amongst the team of designers. Later in the project, an understanding of ‘cultural probes’ revealed how Dear John enabled and invited audiences’ values to be communicated through artefacts and the website. On further reflection (pp. 177-178), I critiqued how these scaffolds still limited the diversity and expression of values, views and concerns from the public due to the designer-led, design-focused forms of communication.

Finally, in Practitioner Conversations, the research began to build on methods, tools and theory from participatory design through its application in a communication design context. This aspect is significant in extending the role of artefacts in communicating human relationships, as well as their role in fostering and facilitating human interactions. The scaffold in Practitioner Conversations facilitated in allowing both participants (interviewer and interviewee) to reveal the values embedded in the interviewee’s practice, through dialogue. The artefacts became a conduit in the dialogic process and engaged both participants in an active co-creation of meaning and experience. I believe that the artefacts’ ability to externalise and communicate the complexity of human interaction that occurs in practice can enable the practitioners to reflect upon and understand how and what occurs amongst people in projects much more readily.
To recapitulate, the initial concern of this research was to explore how people are valued in the design process. As the research progressed, the significance of dialogue amongst project stakeholders began to emerge. This dialogic process can illuminate and overcome obstacles that surface in projects, such as politics and power dynamics, which were discussed in the last chapter. This chapter examined dialogic processes amongst stakeholders and how it is crucial to manifesting and negotiating values in the design process. Further critical reflection revealed how certain design interventions or scaffolds were catalytic in enabling and facilitating dialogue, which in turn illuminated values that were important in each project. Various scaffolds, such as drawings, visualisations, language games, workshops, personas, artefacts, digital media, objects, triggers and probes were explored through the three design projects. The research revealed how these scaffolds can capture, articulate, manifest and communicate stakeholders’ values; these scaffolds facilitated a dialogue that enabled an understanding of what the values were and why they were important to the project stakeholders. That human-centred design is about how people are valued in projects and also about how values are collectively negotiated through the design process, has been a significant focus of this chapter. The discussion on values and their significance to design and the designer will be given greater emphasis in the next chapter.
Undertaking several design projects and critically reflecting on them enabled the significance of the role of values in design practice to emerge in this research. I believe the importance of values had always been an implicit understanding in this research but I was unaware of how significant it was to the design projects and why. Exploration of the design projects, alongside critique and literature reading, has enabled this understanding to become clearer and more explicit. Through this process, I focused on the role of dialogue and design ‘scaffolds’ within the design projects to examine how values are manifested and negotiated amongst stakeholders in projects. In the previous chapter, various examples of ‘scaffolds’ were examined that had enabled this to occur.

However, the discussion in the last chapter also revealed that the scaffolds are still exploratory propositions. This research does not claim that such design scaffolds have sufficient immediacy to enable stakeholders to become sensitive to the values expressed by one another or to become perceptive to the values embedded in projects. The discussion does not prove or promote that any design intervention or scaffolds can enable values to manifest without the designer’s consciousness that they can be ‘sensed’ in the first place. This realisation illuminates that the designer firstly need to be sensitive to values in order to know how they can be manifested and negotiated amongst project stakeholders. It seems to highlight a paradoxical situation of a ‘chicken or an egg scenario’. Heidegger similarly highlights this predicament. In Winograd and Flores’ interpretation of Heidegger’s text, *Being and Time*, they explain how ‘our implicit beliefs and assumptions cannot all be made explicit’ (1986, p. 32). This is because there is no neutral viewpoint to objectively view our values as ‘things’ because ‘we always operate within the framework they provide’. This then poses the question of how does one become aware of and sensitive to values?
To clarify, the discussion here is not concerned with being aware of how values are translated through various design elements, for example the way that green can symbolise nurturing, growth or the environment. Indeed, it is common for clients to state their business and organisational values explicitly in the project brief so that they can be represented via a combination of various design elements. Designers often require clarification on the client’s business and organisational values during the project briefing. The workshops undertaken in Management vs Community are an expanded version of this process of clarifying values of the association. However, as the project reflection illuminated, it was the subsequent engagement amongst project stakeholders during the design process that impacted significantly upon the designed outcome.

Rather than an analysis of the translation of organisational values into design elements, this chapter addresses the values that manifest within human interactions within the communication design process and seeks to understand how designers can become aware of and sensitive to them. Furthermore, in this chapter, a greater focus on values and their relationship to design is examined. In exploring the question posed earlier, I examine discourses on ethics and design and how values are discussed by various academics. I sought to understand how others have attempted to enable designers’ awareness of values that become embedded in design processes and outcomes.
Design and ethics in design discourse

Questions that address what’s right, what’s wrong, what ways of life are desirable, or what qualities are admirable, have been a central concern for design. Ethics is often used in association with design as a way to question how we live and what kind of society we create through design. In one editorial of Design Philosophy Papers, Willis explains how ethics is ‘pervasively and invisibly inscribed into the design and designed operation of our entire techno-material-symbolic cultures’ (2004, p. 1). In the same issue, Tony Fry (2004) critiques how ethics is often understood pragmatically as a professional conduct, limited to compliance or a moral obligation of the designer. His critique questions the limitation of responsibility to one that is only bound within legal and operative dimensions of functional performance. He gives examples like an employer’s conduct towards employees or the public, or adhering to environmental or health and safety regulations. Ethics that have a functionalist place in professional life are inadequate ‘when trying to deal with how designing subjects are created, how they are directed and for what ends, as well as how what they bring into being impacts upon the socio-cultural and material order’ (p. 1). Fry describes the fundamental problem with cultures of design where it lacks the conceptual tools to think ethically. He bases this as a reason for why ethics remains a ‘stranded debate and almost totally without the transformative agency it needs to have if design is to ethically progress’ (p. 3). Fry’s well-argued indictment calls on designers to take responsibility for being anthropocentric and accept this as an unethical condition. He claims that it is human nature to be non-sustainable creatures of destruction. To counteract this anthropocentrism, designers then need to become remade ethicists. He suggests that the consequences of unsustainability should be continually exposed, questioned and removed by destroying the things that are not sustainable – a practice that he calls ‘elimination design’ (2003). Making an ethical judgement on what is or is not sustainable design then becomes a measurement to create or destroy.

The intellectual argument put forward by Fry leads to the question of how. The enormity of the responsibility he places on designers’ shoulders is enough to make one want to give up practicing as a designer. How does one know what to do or how to proceed with such a challenge? Furthermore, there is an assumption that by placing the ethical discussion within the domain of design, designers are the sole custodians of design. In contrast, this research argues that there are more people than designers who are and can be part of this discussion. I believe that design is a human activity whose actions influence the behaviour of peoples and shape future worlds. A discussion on what this world could be, through design, can be undertaken amongst the variety of people who are participating in the creation of a designed outcome. It is through the collective input from project stakeholders as a group, including designers, that can determine how, why and what values should be manifested through designed outcomes. Engagement and interaction amongst various people through the design process can illuminate and manifest the values that each stakeholder brings to the project. The role of a social designer is then to create a practice that enriches the discussion and engagement of values amongst people. Through the experience and engagement in the practice of design, designers, together with others, can collaborate to co-create what this world could be.

Abstraction and prescription of values

The question posed earlier in the chapter, ‘how does one become aware of and sensitive to values?’ is returned to once more. This question prompted further reflection on the projects with a focus on the particular values that emerged from each project. In order to make sense of the values that emerged through each project, several visualisations were attempted. This ‘mapping’ activity identified different kinds of values – ones that were important in engaging people in a design project and ones that became central to each project. As a result, values such as fun, trust, respect, equality, empathy, diversity, participation and empowerment emerged as significant ones in engaging people in projects. These values were identified as significant for enabling and deepening the exchange between people in the projects, which in turn enabled each stakeholder’s values to manifest. These values were discovered to be significant to my design practice in my conducting of projects. The diagram on the next few pages are attempts to think about the values that emerged from each project context within this research.
These diagrams attempted to capture the values that emerged from each design project. They visualise how some values were instrumentally applied from the project inception and how others emerged as the project progressed. These values were significant in enabling and engaging people in the process of design. In Management vs Community, different colours indicate the difference between project values and the values that were considered for the visual identity. In Dear John, values such as participation, diversity and empowerment also became important in engaging the potential audiences of the project. Please note that these diagrams do not communicate the findings of this research, instead, they are sketches undertaken to visualise my thought processes.
The diagram illustrates how some values were instrumentally applied from a project’s inception and how others emerged as a project progressed. These values were significant in enabling and engaging people in the process of design. For example, in Management vs Community, values such as equality were important in designing the scaffolds of the workshop forums, but the importance of trust was only revealed later when the management intervened in the design process. In Dear John, the process of engaging people through design scaffolds, such as personas and artefacts, facilitated how values relevant to the project emerged. Values such as participation, diversity and empowerment became important in engaging the potential audiences of the project. In Practitioner Conversations, playful and dialogic engagements using artefacts communicated the human interactions that occur in designers’ practices. Values of participation and empowerment that were embedded in how the ‘playful triggers’ were used, enabled the interview participants to reveal values that are important to their practices.

However, undertaking several mapping and visualisation processes illuminated how the diagram on the previous pages flattened values into singular, reductive terms. How the values are linked, how they emerged, how they were abled and disabled and the rich context that surrounded them have been lost through this visualisation. Despite this critique, the diagram has been included in this section to illustrate how I became aware of the danger of abstraction and what I have learnt from this mapping exercise. The diagram was used as a tool to critique what the research had discovered. It illuminated the danger in abstracting values or dictating and prescribing them to others. From here, I returned once more to the literature on design and values to learn from and critique the literature’s discourse.

In Margolin’s The Citizen Designer (2006), he calls for designer-citizens to have a ‘calculus of values’ that can enable them to ‘proclaim the true quality of a product or service’ (p. 122). He argues that this will enable ways to assess and avoid ‘unwittingly participating in a situation that has a negative effect on someone or some group involved in the conception, planning, production, distribution, or consumption of the product’. Despite Margolin’s call for the identification of such values, I have illuminated the danger in isolating values from people and contexts. It can lead to the abstraction and disconnection of those values and can potentially become meaningless. As Keleti (1988) explains, human values are not commodities that can be separated from the individual. The value of things we pursue or avoid depends on our individual aims and concerns. Yet, to appreciate other people’s values, Nagel (in Darwall 2003) argues the importance of our relationship to these people. He asserts that other people’s values can only be appreciated according to the interest we develop in them and the place we give them in our lives. It is then that:
[W]e can acknowledge the validity of the reasons they give for action without judging that there is a neutral reason for any of those things to be done. That is because when we move to the objective standpoint, we leave behind the perspective from which the values have to be accepted (ibid, p. 94).

Nagel’s argument points to how other people’s values become valid within our own lives according to our relationship with these people. Our values are not impersonal or detachable and cannot be subsumed under a more universal value or comparable importance. In contrast to this argument, many companies, businesses and organisations consolidate values that are collective and important to the company. It is common practice that their staff, as a requirement, adopt these values. For example, Berry (1999) identifies a set of core values that permeate a selection of successful high-performance service companies. The core values identified include, excellence, joy, innovation, respect, teamwork, social profit and integrity. Berry describes it as the role of ‘value-driven leaders’ to live out the organisational values in their daily behaviour. ‘Through their actions large and small, leaders demonstrate core values. Through their words, they reinforce what they model’ (p. 43). Upon reading Berry’s text, the ‘values’ it describes are akin to a company mandate that defines what staff are required to ‘perform’ out of duty. There is a perceived risk of being hollow and inauthentic in how these values are adopted and interpreted. When values are detached from the individual and are severed from their context or the reason for their importance, it becomes abstract and meaningless to others. Whatever values exist, they need to matter to the person who cares about them to enable them to be translated into action (Haydon 2006). Furthermore, a study by Jones (2003) on how organisational or management processes impose values on professional work practice, reveals the frequency and the kinds of conflict that occur within such contexts. For example, he discusses how formalising complex work into easily manageable activities could promote ‘counterproductive work practices and social conflicts’ (p. 27). In such an instance there is a continual negotiation of personal, professional and organisational values that occurs between project members. Jones’s observations of the continual negotiation of values resonate with similar occurrences in the design projects conducted in this research, including the designers’ accounts from Practitioner Conversations.

Aspects of branding frequently attract this same criticism, of espousing values that are in conflict with how they are actualised. Holland (2001) reveals how many large American corporations undertake ‘chess games’ to protect or increase their brand’s value in the eyes of the consumer. She points to companies like tobacco multinational Philip Morris who ‘buy loyalty’ from their audiences through donations to worthy causes. She argues that their donation to the arts is a strategic corporate move to ‘persuade artists and arts lovers to continue to support the tobacco giant despite Philip Morris’s despicable core business’ (p. 18). The maintenance of this deception and the disjunction between their daily activities and the values that the company promotes, is not too dissimilar to experiences one might have with a rude and brisk service from a staff whose company branding proclaims to ‘put people first’. Gobé warns how the challenge of adopting values in branding is ‘to make a real connection; otherwise it’s false, and the consumer is too savvy to tolerate [falseness]’ (quoted in Holland 2001, p. 16). The disjunction of organisational values and the manifestation of them through the actions of community members was also observed in the Management vs Community project. Experiences of that project highlighted the difficulty in establishing a set of values for an organisation that can be then carried through and manifested by the community in the facets and variety of their daily activities.

There is a danger when the role of design and designer is reductively understood as a way of translating values into design elements. Elizabeth Tunstall (Associate Professor of Design Anthropology at University of Illinois, Chicago, USA) argues that the role of the designer is to ‘match the expression of … values into tangible experiences for multiple audiences’. Upon being questioned on how and what values are to be determined as important prior to their translation into tangible forms her response indicated that this task was largely the client’s responsibility. Her response implied that once the clients had clarified their values, they could then be given to the designer to be translated into tangible forms. I believe that this perception of the design process and the designer’s role is simplistic and reductive. Each of the design projects in this study demonstrates that engagements that occur amongst project stakeholders are significant to the process and outcome of design. In this context, the values that clients write on the project brief are only the beginning. In fact, I argue that the dialogue on how these values are discussed with the client is equally, if not more, important than what they espouse them to be in the project brief for the reasons discussed in the paragraph above.

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10 This quote by Dori (Elizabeth Tunstall) was posted on her blog on 22nd August, 2007. Our discussion can be read here: http://doril.typepad.com/my_weblog/2007/07/american-values.html#comments. I initiated a discussion with Dori as I was curious whether her views on ‘democratic design’ represented a like-minded approach to design. However, as the discussion unfolded, it became apparent that she valued ‘democracy’ as a value to be translated through the design form, rather than as a value for the process of designing. Further discussions on the complexity of values and the role of the designer’s values were initiated but did not receive a response. I have reflected on our discussion in my blog entry ‘More on values’ at http://raws.adc.rmit.edu.au/~e48618/blog/?p=202
The discussion here also leads to the consideration of another danger, when values are dictated or prescribed. The problem with dogma that adopts a top-down model is that it is difficult to observe in practice. Those who dictate tend to assume that those values are more important than any other values, or that those values are equally significant to other people. Adding to the critique of the First Things First manifesto made earlier in the ‘Introduction’ chapter (p. 19), the reductive way values have been prescribed is questioned here. Parrinder argues ‘there is no simple, unified system which one can legitimately set up as a “bad thing” and therefore clearly oppose or defect from to a “worthy thing”’ (2002, p. 15). Parrinder’s comment reveals the complexity of an ethical environment and how there are a plurality of values (Haydon 2006). It is not as simple as prescribing the ‘right’ or the ‘wrong’ values for people to have – whatever values there are, those values need to matter to people to care about them enough to translate them into action. Parrinder further critiques how the manifesto inadvertently disables people through its overt idealism. She states how this idealism ‘is impossible and impractical to live up to on an everyday scale’ (ibid, p. 14). Her criticism also points to how ‘good’ values for design to ‘uphold’ have been determined by Garland. Similarly, Bierut comments that those who have signed the First Thing First 2000 manifesto ‘specialised in extraordinary beautiful things for the cultural elite … A cynic, then, might dismiss the impact of the manifesto as no more than that of witnessing a group of eunuchs take a vow of chastity’ (2004, p. 27). Common amongst critiques of the manifesto are feelings of anger, guilt, frustration and a sense of disempowerment by practicing designers. These feelings may have resulted from being told what values should be addressed in a designer’s practice. A large part of the argument surrounding a designer’s responsibility places importance on adopting values that designers may find difficult in applying or translating to their daily, commercial practices. To clarify, the critique I make is not about whether social and environmental values are important. Instead, the critique points to the lack of understanding of how values are discussed, communicated and of knowing of ways that can be manifested in a designer’s practice.

Parrinder’s critique of the First Things First manifesto points to how idealism can be problematic when values belonging to one person are imposed upon another, or within a project. Designers are known for having idealistic tendencies and I believe designers, like myself, who advocate for human-centred design have even greater idealistic inclinations. As I discussed in previous chapters, critical reflection on the Management vs Community project revealed how I had idealistic expectations of its process of mutual stakeholder input leading to a better designed outcome for all concerned. The ‘failure’ of realising this idealism enabled valuable lessons to be learnt about the gap between ‘ideal’ and ‘reality’ within design practice. The reality of the consultative process was that the overall design project took much longer than the designers had anticipated. This resulted in loss of income for the extra hours that were invested in the project. Reflecting on this experience later, the designers in this project lamented that implementing a consultative design process in the future may necessarily be limited due to the extra time and costs the clients may incur. Such are the realities of practice. This observation also echoes the practical challenge of participatory design methods in commercially oriented projects.

Spinuzzi (2005, p. 169) explains:

Participatory design research takes an enormous amount of time, resources, and institutional commitment to pull off. That institutional commitment can be hard to come by. From the standpoint of a profit-oriented business, participatory design seems to provide little structure and no deadlines … Researchers find that they have to cede considerable control to workers, who must be committed to the process and cannot be coerced.

Project experience from Management vs Community made me understand how to curb my idealistic tendencies and not to pose unrealistic expectations upon people or projects. Again, it is a lesson I have learnt on how values cannot be prescribed or imposed. Thus, in order to accommodate the ‘realities’ in design practice, one must have the willingness to acknowledge and discuss the variety of stakeholder values and concerns in a project. Facilitating and accelerating discussion amongst project stakeholders through various design ‘scaffolds’ can lead to building a design project that is within the means, in terms of time, fiscal limitations, resources and commitment, of each project stakeholder.

Academics like Fry, Margolin and others make valid arguments in criticising that the discourse on design ethics and design’s social responsibilities are not being addressed daily within designers’ practices. However, it is clear from various practitioners’ accounts that there are obstacles in translating the academic argument into design practice. This research addresses this theory and practice gap. This research was continually provoked and informed by discussion and critique from academics. In turn, their writings led to a different approach to understanding and manifesting ethics and design through this research. It sought to gain understanding from the day-to-day practices, encounters and challenges of designing with people, and from reflecting on the designed outcomes of the three projects. This research explored design and the role of designers to discover how values become an integral part of a project and a designer’s practice through designing. It used design as a way to think about values and used the language of design as a vehicle and a catalyst to discuss and illuminate them. As practice-led
Values are embedded in the personal and surface according to contextual circumstances. This is also observed by Jones (2003, p. 22):

> [V]alues are tacit, revealed through actions, choices, everyday behaviours, and assumptions. They show up within interaction, negotiation, communication, in the conflicts of individual and organizational pursuits. Like other forms of personal knowledge ... they can be observed, but not easily articulated.

Designers who were interviewed in *Practitioner Conversations* were not asked to explain and articulate their specific values in practice. It is doubtful whether such discussion would have been possible or effective, according to Jones’s argument. Rather, the participants were engaged in a dialogue, which encouraged the participant to reflect on specific interactions and conversations that occurred amongst stakeholders in projects. The reason why values could be revealed in *Practitioner Conversations* is by analysing the ‘pause’ in dialogue – quotes that were captured as words and artefacts. Through closer examination of their statements reveals what values are important to them and how these values manifest in the engagement that they have with project stakeholders.

Jones’ statement of ‘the conflicts of individual and organizational [sic] pursuits’ also echoes a point made in an earlier chapter about how the design process is political. Designing is political because the values of the individual, or the organisation, community or society surface through designing. Being aware of this can enable the designer to accelerate the surfacing of those values through interventions, scaffolds, dialogic processes and relationship-building. It is through friction, generation, conversation and discussion that the constant evaluation of what the values of a project are, and how significant they are to each person and as a collective group of people, can be attained.

Reflective practice enables self-reflection and evaluation. Tonkinwise (2007) claims that to be able to step aside and view oneself as a subject is the true value of reflective practice. Furthermore, he argues that the aid of others, such as fellow research peers and academic and design practitioners can assist the reflective practitioner to be more critical of one’s own blindness to one’s ego. Through this process, this community can aid the reflective practitioner to question ‘how reflective and honest have you really been?’ This criticality demands the reflective practitioner and the community of peers to take the risk of confessing all and not hold back for the sake of politics or politeness.

An awareness of values through reflective practice

Realising the danger in abstracting, dictating and prescribing values became apparent through the mapping exercise and the questioning of various discourses on the relationship between values and design. The question I posed myself earlier in the chapter, ‘how does one become aware of and sensitive to values?’ remained unresolved. Reflections and rereading of project accounts and previous research writings were intensely undertaken again until I realised that the very thing I was doing, reflection, may be the key. Its obviousness was concealed by the fact that it was a practice that was undertaken repeatedly, having applied critical reflective practice for the past five years during this research.

Through critical reflection I was able to reveal the values that emerged in the projects. Through this, I realised the importance of awareness and gained an understanding of how values can create a designer’s practice. The discussion here stresses the importance of the journey in which the values in this research were discovered through reflection. ‘A journey of discovery through design projects’ and subsequent chapters highlighted and documented how, why and what values became important to my practice. Without this narrative, the values illuminated lose their meaning, connection and context. It is the story of discovery, the twists and turns, the excitements and disappointments, of specific design project contexts that bring these values to life. Only then could they have any value and meaning to me or anybody else.

research, the knowledge from this research has been created through the process of designing. To use Heidegger’s term, it is a way of understanding the ‘world through the practical involvement with the ready-to-hand’ (quoted in Winograd & Flores 1986, p. 32), not through a detached contemplation of the relationship of values and design. It is knowledge generated from exploring how values are illuminated, negotiated and manifested through designing with others in communication design contexts. It builds on the discourses on design’s intrinsic relationship to ideology, social and personal values. Amongst the diversity of discourse on the role of values in design, it attempts to contribute knowledge specifically from the field of communication design. The intention is to provide knowledge discovered through practice that contributes to the practice – that could then connect to a wider community of researchers and designers in communication design and beyond.
Self-reflection and evaluation were observed as being the strength of a collaborative practice, in examples such as the Dear John project. As discussed in the Dear John project section (p. 63), the weekly discursive forums facilitated the collaborative process in Dear John. The collaborative process in turn facilitated how we each became self-reflective and open to feedback. A collaborative practice enhances the work of a self-reflective practitioner because through such processes participants provide spontaneous feedback and critique to each other. In such processes one cannot avoid being self-reflective and open to feedback. Fresh perspectives offered by those within the collaborative group speed up the design cycle. It must also be emphasised that the team of designers in Dear John were all design researchers practicing reflective practice within the project as well. I believe this particular characteristic was instrumental to the discussions that took place. The team of reflective design practitioners accelerated the discussion on manifesting and negotiating the values that then became central to this project. Cycles of designing, critiquing and reflecting on the critique again are common activities for reflective practitioners. The design scaffolds, such as personas, artefacts and the website in Dear John performed a facilitative role in this particular context. It confirms my critique in the last chapter that such scaffolds cannot be instrumentally deployed to enable stakeholders to be aware, perceptive or reflective of the values embedded in design projects. They are only means to ‘heighten the resolution’ of values for oneself and others.

In Practitioner Conversations, the ‘playful triggers’ were indeed useful in communicating various human relationships in practice. However, to add to the critique made earlier, ‘playful triggers’ on their own did not make the interviewees reflective or aware of the values implicit in their practice. Reflection was only possible through the act of responding to my questions. These questions prompted them to reflect on certain moments, exchanges, encounters and interactions that they had with others in their practices. It is through this open dialogue and encouragement to be reflective that enabled the participants to reveal the values in their practices, for example:

In any collaborative project the thing that comes to the forefront is that I’m self conscious about the other person. I really think about the other person. You don’t want to let the other person down. What are they trying to achieve here? I do tend to find myself in those collaborative moments when that subconscious voice starts to speak up in my head. A different part of me switches on, “you’ve got to listen to the other person, you’re in this experience with another person, you’re there to gain something from this exchange.” It makes you more aware of what you’re about as well. Alarm bells goes off, they signal you if you disagree with something, or when something you feel is important and it’s being ignored, those alarm bells goes off inside of you in a collaborative effort, so you voice those things. It’s not that other people find them important as well, but you can expose those views, and tell others that this is what you bring to it (Interviewee C).

Through our open-ended conversation, Interviewee C recalled moments when collaboration was undertaken. This designer commented on how a collaborative process helped him to become self-reflective. The interaction and engagement with others had heightened his awareness of the values that they each brought to the project. This designer’s account demonstrates how a deeper engagement with others facilitates self-reflection. I believe it is through dialogue, by being receptive to the views and opinions of others, by listening and reflecting on them that an awareness of values is enabled.

Through this critique, I have discovered a core understanding of human-centred design. Various scaffolds such as conceptual tools, methods, design interventions, objects and artefacts can indeed communicate and facilitate human relationships and exchanges that occur in design. I believe they have an important role to play in enriching the experience of dialogue and exchange amongst project stakeholders. They are indigenous to design practice and this birthright makes them novel and accessible to design practitioners. I acknowledge the agency and value of these scaffolds and I do not intend to downplay their role and significance in a design process. However, without a self-awareness of one’s own values and how that can be embedded or impact upon the engagement with others through design, I believe it is not possible to become reflective or receptive to the values of others.

A similar critique is made of an emerging model of designing called ‘critical design’. Dunne & Raby (2001) claim that artefacts can be designed and deployed to provoke questions of the project and therefore reveal issues and values embedded within it. Pullin describes a case study from IDEO that has applied critical design to many ‘profound social issues and successfully seeded new discussions’ (2007, p. 1). In this case study Pullin discusses a critical design of ‘social mobiles’ that exposed the ubiquity of social inconveniences caused by other people’s use of mobile phones. A variety of humorous and over-exaggerated designs were created that informed the caller (via an electric shock) when they were speaking too loudly and that enforced self-awareness. The social mobile made values that are affected by the use of the phone more acutely visible in its design. Through its
visibility and awareness, further iterations can be created to address values of phone etiquette central to mobile phone design, alongside its usual values of connectivity and convenience.

Yet Pullin’s case study does not make clear how the social concern was initially determined to be central, prior to the design of the prototype. How did those values surface, how were they negotiated and discussed, and with whom? The case study only states that the social values were determined and addressed through the prototype design, but fail to illuminate the discursive stages prior to it. Were any pre-prototypes used as a ‘critical design’ prior to designing the prototype? This is not made clear in his paper. Equal criticism is made of Dunne and Raby’s ‘Placebo objects’ (2001) as an example of ‘critical design’. They have created a conceptual electronic object, such as a ‘parasite light’ or a ‘nipple chair’ that are normally viewed in an art gallery and have placed them in people’s homes to observe how the objects can provoke consideration on issues that they raise. The examples they present already determines the issue or the concern to be addressed via the ‘novel’ designed objects, such as raising awareness of invisible electromagnetic fields inside our home. Dunne and Raby’s artefacts attempt to promote criticality of the social world that is outside of their design practice. This calls to question the effectiveness of how the artefacts enable them to be critical within their practice – to discuss how issues and values become embedded in their design projects amongst stakeholders. There are a growing number of researchers who are exploring how critical design can provoke collective discussion on values amongst project stakeholders (Bowen 2007) and it is a promising and potential area for future research exploration. In particular, discussion on ‘reflective design’ by Sengers et al. (2005) is most interesting. Sengers et al’s case studies have identified how critical reflection can identify unconscious values and assumptions that are built into how design problems are conceived in an HCI context. Their work is of particular interest to this research as they have also explored technologies that support project stakeholders to be reflective of their values. They have focused on facilitating dialogic engagement through technology between designers and users to enhance reflection.

The journey of becoming aware of my values has been extremely significant to this research. It has enabled an understanding of who I am and what I can bring to each project. The awareness of it has enabled me to know how it can be manifested, what impact it can potentially have on others and the resultant effect it could have on the project process and outcome. I am also aware when these values are prevented or disabled, or when they are beyond the ‘realities’ of design practice.

I have been able to identify values that are important to my practice in creating engagement with others. However it is also acknowledged that how they are applied in practice and ‘lived’ may differ from the values and practices of another designer. The Practitioner Conversations project demonstrates how each designer creates their practice through engagement with project stakeholders in similar and different ways. Embedded in each conversation were values that motivated and gave reason to their actions and decisions in practice. Within the various accounts, the process of engaging people in the process and outcome of design remained constant.

A recognition and acknowledgement of one’s own values as well as the values of others can provide a greater connection with others and society. This realisation and understanding has been the most significant discovery in the projects undertaken. As critiqued in the ‘Introduction’ chapter, the connection I have with society is not as literal as designing for non-profit organisations or doing pro bono work. I believe it to be much more than this. As I have explained, the issues and concerns I have relating to the environment and the socio-cultural condition of the world form part of my value system. Yet, whether I am directly involved with such issues in the content of a design project is no longer relevant. This is because I have discovered ways to manifest my value system in other contexts through the way I engage and interact with people in design projects. Now I understand that the social contribution I make through design is how I create my practice.

The awareness and understanding of my values has provided significant illumination within this research. I have discovered that the value I bring to design projects lies in facilitating ways for each participant to engage and express their views, voice their concerns and to share excitement and wonderments with others regarding what this world could be. I believe that the social contribution I make is through my practice in creating a human-to-human connection through design. I am able to connect to other people and to the wider world through my interaction with others in design projects. Through design, I am able to forge a strong connection to society and the environment. This connection also reflects my spiritual Shinto background and Taoist philosophy of one’s connection to the world – nature, objects, creatures, including humans, are all as ‘one’ in this worldview. This research has enabled me to understand a ‘way of being’ in practice. The use of ‘Tao’ in the title of this research reflects how my path is carved by the way I practice. The practise of practicing design and continuous reflection upon it has heightened my awareness of ‘being’ – who I am and how I am in the world.
In conclusion, this research contributes to the emerging area of human-centred design discourse within the practice of communication design. The research builds on the larger discourse on human-centred design by proposing methods to overcome obstacles and challenges of applying human-centred design in practice. The research contributes knowledge that has been discovered through the exploration of the two main research intentions as discussed at the beginning of the exegesis.

Firstly, the research investigated how values were manifested and negotiated amongst stakeholders in the design process. Exploring a human-centred framework in communication design projects revealed the political nature of a design process. As was discussed in chapter 3, ‘Illuminating the politics in design practice’ (p. 143), designing is political because the values of the individual, organisation, community or the society surfaces through designing. Human-centred design is, then, about how people are valued in projects and also about how values are collectively negotiated through the design process. Friction, generation, conversation and discussion provide constant evaluation of what the project’s values might be and how significant they are to each person and as a collective group of people. Awareness of how values manifest can enable the designer to discuss them amongst project stakeholders. Various ‘scaffolds’, such as conceptual tools, methods, design interventions, objects and artefacts can communicate and facilitate human relationships and exchanges that occur in design. This was explored in chapter 4, ‘Articulating and discussing values through design ‘scaffolds’ (p. 165). I believe these scaffolds have an important role to play in enriching the experience of dialogue and exchange amongst project stakeholders.
Secondly, the research explored how an awareness of values can lead to a social contribution by design. Propelled by a concern of design and designers’ roles in society, the research set out to understand the role of values in creating a social practice of design. As a result, I have discovered the importance of awareness of one’s own values, and how these values can be embedded in processes or can impact upon the engagement with others through design. Without this awareness, I believe it is not possible to consider the values of others through designing. ‘Significance of values in design’ (chapter 5, p. 191) argued that a recognition and acknowledgement of one’s own values as well as the values of others can provide a greater connection with others and society. This realisation and understanding has been the most significant discovery in this research. I have discovered that the social contribution I make through design is how I create and conduct my practice.

To summarise, this research proposes considerations, methods and tools to create a human-centred practice in communication design. The design projects, experiences, reflections and outcomes are provided as case studies to provide knowledge that can be transferable and applicable to other designers’ practices. The case studies have highlighted potential methods and considerations for designers to further explore in creating human-centred practices. Alongside the dominance of business values that can often be emphasised in design practice – such as efficiency, reliability or professionalism – this research posits one’s personal values as equally significant to practice. The research encourages designers to critically reflect on their personal values and the importance of them in order to raise awareness of how they manifest in their practice. This act of reflection may also illuminate how their values are facilitating the process of engagement with other people and how other people’s values are considered during the design process. As this research has demonstrated, this task is not as easy as it may sound. As explained in the previous chapter, values are deeply embedded in our lives and can only be revealed through our interaction with others. In light of this challenge, the Practitioner Conversations project illuminates a possible option, through the use of artefacts, to prompt and reflect on past project experiences. I believe that artefacts, such as the ones explored in Practitioner Conversations, have the ability to externalise and communicate the complexity of human interactions that occur in practice. Their use can enable the practitioners to reflect upon and understand how and what occurs amongst people in projects much more readily. Further exploration of these artefacts, methods and interventions, and the sharing of knowledge generated through their use, can open up many possibilities and opportunities to create a different kind of practice of communication design. I believe that this can lead to a different kind of agency for designers in the socio-cultural landscape.

Similarly, the variety of design interventions or ‘scaffolds’ explored in this research have potential for further exploration in different contexts. The research has revealed how design scaffolds such as conceptual tools, methods, design interventions, objects and artefacts can facilitate the manifestation of embedded values, so that they can be discussed and negotiated amongst project stakeholders. The use of scaffolds in design research and practice is an area that has potential for further exploration outside of this study. Such an investigation may result in different roles and different interactions between people, creating new ways for communication designers to practice and provide new knowledge. These are some propositions for taking this research further across different contexts in the future.

My design practice has evolved significantly through this research. I have sought to discover knowledge on how values become an integral part of a project and a designer’s practice through the process of designing. The practice-led research journey has enabled me to understand what human-centred design could be in the day-to-day practice of communication design. This experience has made me aware of my values and ways to create a human-centred design practice that considers the values of others. The way I engage with people on various design projects have transformed considerably due to the knowledge gained through this research.

Returning briefly to the earlier recount with the director general of a human rights organisation (in ‘What has led me here’ section, p. 26), I can now see how the differences of values that we each brought to the project and the lack of understanding of these, influenced the unsuccessful resolution. The learnings and discovery of this research have enabled me to understand how I would now negotiate the scenario differently, and, perhaps, how I would have played a different role by building a different relationship with the director general. Differences of values can be observed amongst any two people in a project, whether the design context is for a non-profit organisation or a commercial client. This research has highlighted the importance of being aware of differences in values and how a designer can enable ways for them to be discussed amongst stakeholders, irrespective of the context those stakeholders are placed in.
Undertaking this research has also transformed my teaching practice. For example, the Practitioner Conversations project highlights a potential method for teaching students. Using a collection of designers’ reflection on their projects and practices may assist the students to learn and discuss how designing is a process of conversation amongst stakeholders. This discussion could be coupled with projects that enable the students to become aware of their own and others’ values, through reflection on their own collaborative group work. Avenues and resources for teaching communication design students through this model are currently being sought.

Discovering my connection to other people, society, culture and the environment through design has nurtured my sense of self and has fostered personal growth. Bruner (1996, p. 93) explains that ‘it is through this dialogic, discursive process that we come to know the Other and his points of view, his stories. We learn an enormous amount not only about the world but about ourselves by discourse with Others’. Through a human-centred framework of design, I can observe how I am significantly different in mind and spirit through the evolution of this research project. The continual process of designing with others has become a significant aspect of my life. The transformation that has occurred through this research project echoes what Freire (2003, p. 90) names when he speaks of what it is ‘to be fully human’. He describes how the pursuit of acting upon and transforming one’s world enables one to move towards new possibilities of a fuller and richer life, both individually and with others.

The exciting challenge for me is in continuing the process that this research has begun through my designing, teaching and research practice. It is a ‘way of being’, a ‘Tao’ that I have only begun to fully understand as I conclude this exegesis. I perceive that many more discoveries, revelations and surprises will occur in this pursuit. Through this process my hybrid practices of designing, teaching and research will continue to evolve – enabling a greater understanding and connection to the people and the world I live in.
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