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*Culture–practice–discourse:  
a theoretical framework  
for a critical approach  
to communication design*

### AUTHOR

*Veronika Kelly*

### ABSTRACT

*Communication design is a purposeful activity that involves human subjects and relations, is tied to action, representation and is context-bound. Furthermore, ‘effective’ communication design can be understood as accomplishing its purpose in having a desired influence on an individual’s belief, values, behaviour, or action, and is a basic concern of the design practitioner. In this regard, design practice knowledge—‘practice’ meaning both professional situations and preparing for such situations by increasing expertise—can be conceived as being created in and by a particular culture, at the same time that it also creates culture. As design practice knowledge is socially*

*and culturally produced it can also be conceived as a discourse. This paper considers the relationship between design culture, practice, and discourse and proposes an emergent theoretical framework for critically reflecting on communication design as a discursive practice—a practice that both shapes and is shaped by culture and wider discourses, that is both regulated and has the potential to transform its operations.*

### KEY WORDS

*Communication Design,  
Practice, Culture, Discourse,  
Production, Critical  
Practice, Theory*

1 – In this paper the terms 'communication design' and 'design' are used interchangeably.

## INTRODUCTION

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Communication design<sup>1</sup> that is 'effective' in achieving its purpose can be conceived as having a desired influence on a person's belief, values, behaviour, or action. In this regard communication design can be understood as a purposeful activity that is enacted socially, is culturally mediated and historically situated, and therefore tied to context. At the same time, the designs these designers produce (that are increasingly dispersed and dematerialised) whilst being conceived by culture and creating culture—are assimilated into the ubiquitous network of public communications that constitute everyday life. As Tony Fry (2009) points out, design structures both 'features of the world in which we dwell' as well as 'many of our material and immaterial relation[s] to this world' (p. 24). In this regard, whilst observable changes in a human subject's values, behaviours, or beliefs are indicators of design effectiveness, in reality isolating 'the design' itself to evaluate the degree to which it is responsible for an effect is problematic given that visual communications are intricately tied to context. What this can mean is that the ways in which a designer's practice materially changes reality whilst being ideologically invested may not be easily observable. Nevertheless, the implication is that communication designers need to be more critically aware of the values engendered through designing 'effective' visual communications and how their designs discursively shape reality, rejecting the idea that communication design is value-free and neutral.

The aim in this paper is on setting out how discourse—as knowledge—both reveals and shapes design practice culture that in turn shapes the 'real

world'. As 'culture', 'practice' and 'discourse' can be understood differently, taking into consideration the scholarship of Michel Foucault, Donald Schön, and Norman Fairclough helps inform examination of the relationship between communication design, culture, practice, and discourse. A key aspect of this relationship is an understanding of design practice knowledge being produced in its culture of use, and as a language because it works through systems of representation. This article aims to propose an emergent theoretical framework for critically reflecting on communication design as a discursive practice to explore how design practice knowledge both shapes and is shaped by culture and the wider discourses from which it draws.

## A (DE)MATERIALIZING PRACTICE

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Over recent decades, graphic design practice has been transformed through desktop publishing and the integration of digital environments into professional practice and design culture (Blauvelt, 2006, pp. 8-11). Communication design has emerged as a practice that has expanded from the design of artefacts that have an ongoing physical presence to the design of communications that are 'dematerialised, temporal and nonlinear...more experience than artifact' (McCoy, 2002, p. 210). The context of communication design practice is global and decentralised public communication, a time of 'cultural productivity' where greater importance is given to 'modes of life, values and symbols' than physical objects, highlighting the significance of culture for design practice (Kyoto Design Declaration, 2008).

An example of the assimilation of design and culture can be observed in the blurring of boundaries between advertising and design that came with the growth of branding in the 1990s and also entered the surface rhetoric of professional practice (Julier, 2008; van Toorn, 1994), where advertising, public relations and marketing forms of expression replaced the liberating power of visual language (van Toorn, 1994). For instance, whilst branding was initially ‘an approach for creating reputations for commercial products’ (Drenttel, 2006, p. 161) it has become part of a procedure towards conformity. Branding is a way of selling symbols as social activities to engender trust and commitment via an individual’s attachment to a particular identity and set of values. The relevance of the product is subsumed by the importance of an attachment to values and identity, reflecting design’s role in the expansion of the market and corporations as powerful political and cultural forces (Julier, 2008, 2013; Klein, 2001), implied in comments such as those by Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop: ‘What’s imperative is the creation of a style that becomes a culture linking you to the community. You can only do that through good design’ (Roddick, n.d.).

In design practice and literature, a graphic designer’s concern for and responsibility to the public has been widely described in ways that include identifying with the public (Garland, 1999), avoiding misrepresentation by telling the truth (Glaser, 2002), and ensuring that visual communications are ‘helpful’ and ‘meet their needs with dignity and respect’ (Nini, 2004, para. 11). At the same time, as professional designers are ‘always dealing with a triad – the client, the audience and [the designer]’ (Glaser, 2002, p. 4), the force relations of the market economy are commonly in play.

Given the multivarious character of contemporary design practice and its intricate relationship to context, it can be difficult for communication designers to gauge the actual effect of their role in advocating courses of action or beliefs for human subjects through the designs they create – as in the case of branding where ‘design outputs’ may be transient and dispersed across multiple sites, regions, and time.

*...‘What’s imperative is the creation of a style that becomes a culture linking you to the community’...*

Consequently it is not unusual for communication designers to refer to reflective knowledge-in-and-through-practice, good client feedback, and return business from clients as indicators of design success and effectiveness (Kelly, 2013). To understand design practice knowledge, we require an understanding not only of its domain and its wider conditions, but also the culture of design practice.

#### **DESIGN AS CULTURAL PRODUCTION**

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Clive Dilnot (2009) speaks of ‘the relations between things and persons and things and nature’ as being the essence of what design designs (p. 183). Following this, design knowledge can be considered as being

created in its culture of use and production and through interactions with other people and the world. Designers use systems of representation when they interact with their colleagues and clients in professional situations about design and designing (and what makes design effective), and when they produce visual communications. As language is central to the way people communicate and understand each other, semiosis as a process of making meaning is important to understanding the culture of a design practice. Communication design, therefore—as a signifying practice that operates through systems of representation—constitutes a language. For ‘any representational system which functions in this way can be thought of as working, broadly speaking, according to the principles of representation through language’ (Hall, 1997, p. 5).

The term ‘production’ can itself take on different meanings to that generally used to describe a graphic design process, where ‘production’ as a form of making has historically referred to the final stages of the technical production of artefacts or products (preparation of artwork, prototyping, printing) in preparation for delivery or installation into target environments. Production in that sense signifies the culmination of design development and consultative processes with clients and manufacturers. However, a perception of production limited to the material artefact as the end result of a design process can operate to diminish the significance of a visual reader’s relation with a design and therefore design’s social and cultural operations. The idea of ‘production’ can also be conceived as a form of relation—the visual communications that designers ‘produce’ (from artefacts such as posters and signs to branded,

dispersed digital communications) and the relations intended for readers who navigate amongst these ‘productions’.

## *...‘production’ can also be conceived as a form of relation...*

If design designs the relations between things, people, and their worlds, then in this sense, production can also point to the conduct of designers in design practice and to people interacting with design. For example, Guy Julier (2008) posits design production as including ‘all forms of conscious intervention in the origination, execution, distribution and circulation of goods and services’ (p. 12), which inevitably involves the organisation and enactment of values in approaches to designing. Additionally, production can be conceived with respect to the role of visual readers as change mediators in design; the very act of reading can be understood as a silent production (de Certeau, 1984). For Michel de Certeau (1984), reading as a kind of consumption is akin to wandering ‘through an imposed system (that of the text, analogous to the constructed order of a city or of a supermarket)’ (p. 169). A ‘text’ is therefore beyond categorisation as solely written, verbal, or visual: it is society itself, adopting ‘urbanistic, industrial, commercial, or televised forms’ (de Certeau, 1984, p. 167). This conceptualisation of a text is relevant because it draws attention to communication designs as strategic products in their intent to influence the actions, values and attitudes of visual readers.

For example, communication designers use grid systems to create visual hierarchy so as to encourage an order of reading, or they select typefaces and settings that can affect reading flow, speed, and physical orientation.

At the same time however, reading as an active process of invention is distinct from the intent (design) of a text. Reading is tactical because it refers to the active reappropriation of a text in making sense of something. De Certeau (1984) explains a strategy as ‘the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an “environment”’ (p. xix). A strategy adopts the place of the ‘proper’ that operates as the foundation for creating relations with something that is distinct and exterior from it, such as ‘competitors, adversaries, “clienteles,” “targets,” or “objects” of research’; a tactic, by contrast, cannot rely on a proper—given as a ‘spatial or institutional localization’ (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). Everyday practices such as reading and moving about are tactical in nature, and they ‘insinuate’ themselves into the proper’s place, ‘fragmentarily, without taking over in its

*...communication designers are occupied with ‘human interactions with artifacts and situations that contain a great deal of uncertainty’*

entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance’ (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). In this respect, an expanded view of production reflects a contemporary design context in which people (i.e. readers) not only have the opportunity to ‘shape the information economy by choosing what to look at’ (Lupton, 2006, p. 25) they are directly shaping it. Production is both a strategic operation (here, design practice is the ‘proper’ e.g. an organised system) and a tactical manoeuvre (reading and interacting with a design) in the creation of culture. Designers in practice and readers each therefore contribute to practices that shape culture, and their own reality.

The idea of culture itself can also be understood differently. Because design is a purposeful activity and effective communication design is conceived as a desirable influence on a person’s actions, beliefs, or values, what is required is a conception of culture that extends beyond being a ‘set of things’ (objects) or a ‘set of practices’ concerned with the making and exchange of meanings (Hall, 1997, p.2, original emphasis) to include the guiding values that inform the way people act upon each other and their world. Likewise, Foucault (2005) interprets culture as a ‘hierarchical organisation of values’ (p. 179). Here, culture is a set of values that are ‘accessible to everyone, but which at the same time gives rise to a mechanism of selection and exclusion’ (Foucault, 2005, p. 179). Culture is concerned with creating meaning *and* also with the organisation (i.e. prioritisation) of values with respect to those meanings. In this way a design practice may be conceived as being circumscribed by its values, in which some are imbued with more importance, and some less so (or not at all)—whether this prioritisation of values is explicitly acknowledged or not. Conceiving of culture in this way

is necessary because communication designers are occupied with 'human interactions with artifacts and situations that contain a great deal of uncertainty' (Swann, 2002, p. 51). The designs they conceive and produce advocate certain courses of action, attachment to values or beliefs—in effect to reduce uncertainty—for respondents in specific situations. And because communication design as a practice prescribes ways of acting, believing and identifying with things/ideas, it involves the exercise of power relations. As such it is a discourse, 'a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation' (Fairclough, 1993, p. 63). All discourses (there is never only one discourse) are methods of 'constituting and constructing the world in meaning' (Fairclough, 1993, p. 64).

What is indicated is that at the same time that a design practice is mediated by culture, it also contributes to creating culture. The values that guide a design practice come into play through the design work that is created and through interactions with others that materialise in the visual communications that are generated and produced (in the broadest sense of this term), advocating ways of being and subject positions. Design is created by people with personal lives, histories, and beliefs. A question that arises is: to what extent are designers aware of the positions they take up (and that are available to be taken up) in design practice discourse that contributes to the production of culture?

## **DESIGN AS A PRACTICE**

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According to Schön (1983) the term 'practice' is ambiguous; it can refer both to 'performance in a range of professional situations' and to 'preparation for performance' (p. 60). In the context of communication design 'practice' can mean firstly, a professional practice and secondly, an activity (i.e. experimentation or repetition to increase skill in/for practice). The first meaning of practice incorporates what designers do in professional situations, the clients they engage with and each other, their audiences, the focus and scope of their design work, all which are informed by culture and context. The second sense of practice, as experimentation or repetition to increase proficiency, is recognised in the activity of designing; this is the aspect of repetition included in professional practice, in which 'a professional practitioner is a specialist who encounters certain types of situations again and again' and where 'the workaday life of the professional depends on tacit knowing-in-action' (Schön, 1983, pp. 60 & 49). To repeatedly engage in certain kinds of situations in professional situations involves a kind of knowing that is implicit, dependent on 'tacit recognitions, judgments, and skillful performances' (Schön, 1983, p. 50). Communication design as a practice can therefore be understood as both the routinised behaviours and procedures in a professional situation and also experimental or repetitive activity linked to increasing proficiency. A routine behaviour suggests an understanding on the part of a designer as to what is required as a matter of course in a given situation.

Each behaviour or act of doing constitutes how design knowledge comes into being and how in Dilnot's terms, 'design designs' (2009, p. 183, original emphasis).

The behaviours that play out in both senses of design practice are inevitably informed by culture as a hierarchical organisation of values. These meanings of practice are consistent with Foucault's (2005) third and fourth conditions of culture as:

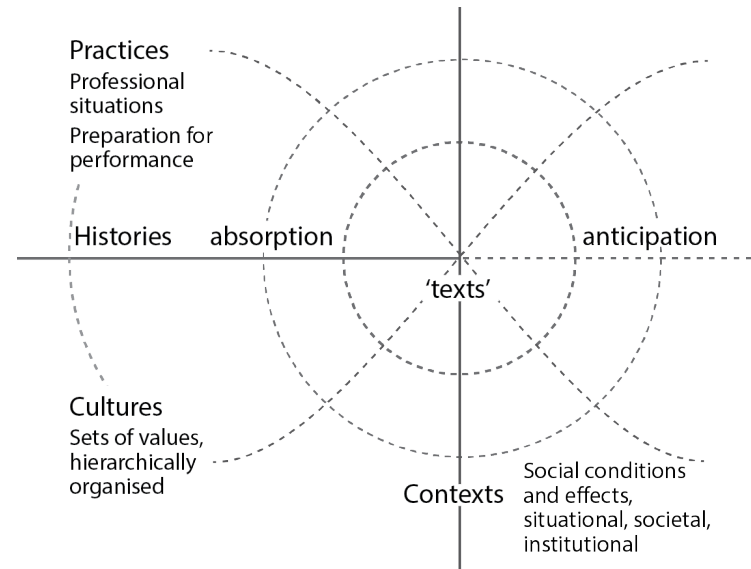
*precise and regular forms of conduct [which] are necessary for individuals to be able to reach these values [and] regular techniques and procedures that have been developed, validated, transmitted, and taught, and that are also associated with a whole set of notions, concepts, and theories...with a field of knowledge. (p. 179)*

Both senses of practice involve the exercise of relations of power and the potential for agency. Fairclough (2002) explains that at the same time that a practice is 'a relatively permanent way of acting socially which is defined by its position within a structured network of practices' it is also 'a domain of social action and interaction' that has the potential to transform the structures which it reproduces (p. 122). So at the same time that design practice is shaped by its culture within a structured system, design practice creates culture by reproducing practices and structures. These ideas about practice are reflected further in how discourse can be understood.

**DESIGN DISCOURSE**

Where discourse is commonly understood as pertaining to language use and the interpretation of spoken and written texts, it is also 'a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or a reflex of situational variables' (Fairclough, 1993, p. 63). Discourse reveals how language use functions as a type of social practice that 'constructs the objects of which it purports to speak' (Cameron, 2001, p. 123). A critical approach to discourse (with its roots in critical theory) also understands reality as constructed and shaped by social forces and emphasises critique for social change, rather than solely to explain and understand 'texts' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Figure 1: A conceptualisation of the intertextuality of design discourse based on the absorption and anticipation (i.e. shaping and transformation) of a 'text' following Kristeva (1986), and Fairclough's (1993) thought on discourse. Axes show histories and contexts intersecting with cultures and practices in the production of knowledge, where 'texts' are shaped by and in turn shape wider discourses (e.g. societal and institutional).



Additionally, Julia Kristeva's idea of intertextuality is relevant as it pays attention to each text being situated historically in relation to others in a chain of texts, to its 'immediate and distant contexts' whilst socially conditioned and constrained (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). Any text (e.g. verbal, written, designed, spatial) absorbs and responds to what has come before it and anticipates what is to follow, as well as being mediated by culture and the wider contexts and discourses that constitute it (and which in turn it shapes) (figure 1). In this way, design practice discourse (i.e. knowledge) operates through its own rules and is historically situated. For instance, communication designers in practice use and also elect to use systems of representation (including language use) that can frame how people perceive their world (Krippendorff, 2006; Reddy, 1993) and by implication is a process of inclusion and exclusion (Kelly, 2015).

Approaching communication design as a discursive practice—where discourse and design are both social and cultural practices—provides a means of drawing attention to the production (and reproduction) of knowledge and how it is understood in a contemporary practice. Carol Bacchi and Jennifer Bonham (2014) build on their interpretation of Foucauldian discourse to argue that a discursive practice 'refers, not to people practising "discourse" (i.e. language), but to how discourse (i.e. knowledge) operates through "rules that are its own"' (p. 182). The rules pertaining to design practice are those that circumscribe design practice's domain, providing it 'the status of an object...making it manifest, nameable and describable' (Foucault, in Bacchi & Bonham, 2014, p. 182). And it is these latter aspects that materialise via systems of representation and design culture.

These 'rules' manifest in the conversations that designers have with each other, their choices about ways of acting in professional situations and the designs they produce (e.g. a particular visual language), as well as the wider influences and conditions that shape design practice discourse, such as the market economy where design is about selling, and scientific discourses where visual communication is measurable and quantifiable.

Design is also a discursive practice because its knowledge domain is produced and reproduced by the people concerned. Designers have certain ways of approaching design and running a business: using systems and processes, developing beliefs and attitudes about design, clients, audiences and what it means to 'be' a professional designer. It is in conversation between designers and clients and in collaboration with others that the ethos and culture of a design practice is enacted and knowledge is produced. These are all procedures that, to varying degrees, are reflected in the discourse of professional associations and on designers' websites. And as Wendy Holloway (1998) argues 'practices and meanings have histories, developed through the lives of the people concerned' and 'are not the product of a single discourse' (p. 236). A design practice may therefore also be conceived of as 'layers of socially-constituted activities in which individuals are carriers of collectively held practices, and may comprise sets of conventions and procedures' (Julier, 2006, p. 74).



### **A LOOK AT DISCOURSES OF DESIGN SUCCESS AND QUALITY**

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It is useful to return discussion to design's assimilation with management, marketing and public relations as an aspect of design culture that has developed over recent decades to become both attitudinal and organisational (Julier, 2006). Over this time design practice has increasingly taken up the discourses of wider socio-cultural and economic structures (design as practice and profession in a developed market economy). For example, 'client' is itself an economic term that circumscribes design's domain as a transaction and service to be bought. As already stated these wider discourses have contributed to the surface rhetoric of design, and in reproducing what constitutes 'successful' design in practice with its 'value' preserved in commercial terms.

The above aspects can be observed on the current websites of prominent Australian-based, internationally recognised design practices operating in the area of branding and identity design. For instance, Frost\* Design offers 'solid strategic foundations and mindful brand management [that] ensures that brands continuously add value and lead businesses forward' (Frost\*collective, n.d.). Similarly, Cato Brand Partners 'creates thought-provoking brand stories built on rigorous analysis that makes business strategy visible' (Cato Brand Partners, n.d.) and Parallax's work is based on understanding their clients' objectives, and 'informed by strategically-driven thinking' with 'solutions that separate our clients from their competition' (Parallax Design, n.d.). In each example, design is framed in language that 'business managers can understand' (Heskett, 2009,

p. 71), contributing to how success and value comes to be understood in branding and identity design. Following de Certeau (1984), design practice is a 'strategy' that takes up the place of the proper as a basis for creating relations with those external to its domain. An implication however is that a communication designer's role as a social actor is elided, absorbed into the macro-level discourse of the market economy and reproduced as an aspect of design culture. Designers' websites are virtual networks that while intent on creating relations with clients also operate to support a forum for design culture 'by which globally diasporic actors connect, communicate, and legitimate their activities' (Julier, 2006, p. 71). These actors include other designers, emerging designers and students of design, and the general public who may be interested.

Although brands and identities may have singular components (a logo, text, images, and their application to different formats), in totality they are less material, disseminated amongst multiple sites and platforms, both physical and virtual. As discussed earlier, communication designers are now not necessarily designing physical products—in the case of brands and identities it may be more meta-level design that is dispersed, 'rolled out and implemented by others' (Julier, 2013, p. 228). These designed communications then operate to structure interactions in and with the world thereby permeating human conduct—between designers, their 'clients' and in turn how human subjects are positioned through design and interact with each other. It comes back to the way in which discourse—as a social practice—shapes the objects that it signifies within the constraints of the structures that are available. Discourse reveals how practice as a whole can work to 'regulate, replicate and

modify our domain of habitation (“our” world)’ (Fry, 2009, p. 25).

It is not the intent of this paper however to suggest that there is only one design discourse nor is it to criticise individual designers. The purpose is to draw attention to wider discourses that shape design practice discourse, reproducing knowledge of what makes design ‘successful’ and how it may be valued and preserved. The point is that social structures are both an effect of and condition for social practices (Fairclough, 1993, p. 64). For just as any discourse makes positions available for human subjects to select (Holloway, 1998), design practice discourse operates to constrain and modify behaviours in professional situations.

As a fundamental concern of the communication design practitioner, ‘effective’ design is an indicator of ‘successful’ design. This idea of design success—as a change effected in a situation or a person’s behaviour, value, or belief—also links to that of design ‘quality’. Katherine McCoy has commented that as designers share a common history and engage in discussions about design they can at times agree on a design’s quality, regardless of their values or bias. Quality in design is characterised as something that produces an ‘instinctive recognition and response from a viewer/reader’ (McCoy in Poynor, 1998, p. 51). Similarly, Jorge Frascara (1995) describes quality in graphic design as ‘*measured by the changes it produces in the audience*’ (p. 49, original emphasis). This idea of quality can be further linked to economic circles where it has been described as something that ‘a customer gets out [of a product or service] and is willing to pay for’ (Drucker, 1986, in Heskett, 2009, p. 76). According to John Heskett (2009) ‘if quality is a factor in competitive

success, it is highly relevant in discussing the economic value of design’ (p. 76). The above examples each highlight how quality can be seen as a discourse that operates to activate and prescribe subject positions: from engendering an instinctive response or a change in the audience to something that a person ‘gets out of’ a design.

From McCoy’s notion of instinctive recognition to more formal process, communication design associations also define the profession on their websites, and state the aims and the role of designers in contemporary practice. They organise design award programs and post the winning designs, commonly judged by peers, on their websites, signifying what members of the design profession consider as work of excellence and the highest quality. Returning to Foucault’s thought on culture, design award programs can be seen as examples of the third and fourth conditions: ‘precise and regular forms of conduct’ that enable the attainment of certain values and comprised of ‘regular techniques and procedures that have been developed, validated, transmitted, and taught’ in association with ‘a whole set of notions, concepts, and theories’ within a knowledge domain (Foucault, 2005, p. 179). In other words, the characterisation of quality in design awards refers to a consensus created discursively by designers, and reveals how discourse operates to both reproduce and regulate a designer’s social identity and values as a professional, and the way that individual voices are also formed from the ‘social voices already available’ (Lemke, 1995, pp. 24-25). In any design context what ‘quality’ means therefore may be contingent on the culture of a design practice, and on the values that are prioritised (and activated via practices) be they implicit or explicit. Design quality

can be considered as being created by design culture and contingent on conduct, even though it may be naturalised in design practice discourse. To conceive of design quality regardless of culture is to potentially aestheticise and decontextualise design.

A potential for transformation of practice knowledge becomes possible when an understanding of how ideas about culture—practice—discourse intersect in the production of knowledge. To conceive of the culture of a design practice as a prioritisation of values invites designers to reflect not only back on action but also on the ideologies and histories invested in their actions, naturalised in design discourse. This invitation speaks to Fry's (2009) critique of designers taking up compliant positions and remaining within the 'internal dialogue' of their profession (p. 120). Inevitably, the values that are prioritised in designing visual communications are designed to appeal to certain values more than others. For instance at a local level an agreement in a team to use a certain visual language or style of typeface when designing can have ideological significance: it may be made 'partly on the basis of the image [designers] thereby construct for themselves' (Fairclough, 2013, p. 61). An example might be the frequent use of a sans serif typeface such as Helvetica because it is 'clean' and 'efficient', revealing a belief in neutrality and universality of form consistent with a modernist ethos. Similarly, whether a decision materialises as a 'design strategy' to serve a particular client or a 'design solution' that responds to a problem, it is mediated by the values and their prioritisation that establish the culture of a design practice.

In other words, the individual and social voices that are available in any discourse are historically situated and in part constitute how designers come

to understand themselves and what they value as designers – in effect their truths and their social identities. As Fairclough (1993) says: 'discourse contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it' (p. 64). Consequently, the importance of reflecting on the culture of any practice reveals the way that designing involves action and choice that by extension implies human conduct. Dilnot (1998) points out that:

*Design therefore potentially provides insight into the interface between the artificial world—or the world-made-artificial—and ourselves, particularly in the double respect of the manner in which this relation can or could be inflected and nuanced on behalf of subjects and world versus the manner of how it actually is so inflected and nuanced in practice. (p. 67, original emphasis)*

This reference to 'the manner in which this relation can or could be inflected on behalf of subjects and world' speaks to the available possibilities (both in terms of what is physically accessible/available and what is perceived to be available) for making choices in advocating interfaces between readers and design. That this manner 'versus the manner of how it actually is so inflected and nuanced in practice' speaks to what actually occurs in design practice (in both senses of practice as posited by Schön). These are factors and conditions that impact upon the possibilities for designing and the conduct and choices of designers, that materialise as an organisation of values constituting the culture of a particular design practice, that in turn contribute to shaping relations with and in the world.

## **CONCLUSION**

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A theoretical premise that posits a relational framework of culture—practice—discourse aims to draw attention to the ways in which communication design practice both shapes and is shaped by social conditions and culture that has recourse to the positions made available and those taken up in a discourse. As with all discourse, design practice can also be conceived as regulated by its own truths and as such is a means of both producing and reproducing design knowledge that has the potential for transforming its domain. A capacity for knowledge transformation requires the suspension of an attachment to fixed and delineated behaviours and thought to open up what communication design could be or might become. Whilst this thinking may have implications for contemporary design practices, its significance is perhaps most pertinent for design pedagogy and emerging designers involved in shaping design futures.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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**Veronika Kelly** /  
Art, Architecture and Design /  
University of South Australia /  
veronika.kelly@unisa.edu.au

Dr Veronika Kelly is Program Director and Senior Lecturer Visual Communication Design in the School of Art, Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia, lecturing in undergraduate and postgraduate design studies. Her key research areas are communication design and rhetoric, cultures of design practice, and critical design pedagogy. Veronika's professional background is in visual communication in her own design consultancy and as broadcast and motion graphics designer with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

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