

THE CULTURE OF DESIGN



CHAPTER 10

COMMUNICATIONS, MANAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

As well as end-users in the public sphere, design and branding are also concerned with 'upstream' contexts. Organizations such as companies or educational establishments have features that are not normally seen by the general public, such as training events or internal documents. Sometimes, though, there is an indirect effect intended as design is used to establish ideas, attitudes or even language amongst members which are then communicated through to their clients, customers or end-users. In turn, employees themselves become 'consumers at work' as they internalize enthusiasms for their own corporate brand. Design is used to engage workers in emotional or aesthetic dispositions. Chapter 10 is therefore concerned with the role of design in internal management and communications as well as in engaging various forms of participation. It goes on to analyse how, in the context of creative quarters, contexts might be consciously left 'undesigned' to engender a sense of informality, if you will, and in order foster something of a creative ambience. Finally, we look at how the public itself is engaged in urban design processes in order to build their long-term commitment to a locality and its communitarian value as well as a way of facilitating attitudinal change and building aspirations. Thus we see that the culture of design can permeate organizations and locations in ways that are not necessarily obvious, and that the object of design might not be material or digital, but behavioural or attitudinal.



It's a party. And yet the guests are in their office gear: suits, skirts, ties, shirts, lapel-badges. In other words, then, it is a corporate bash. This is no ordinary occasion, however: each event may combine such features as artists' installations, illusions, interactive technology pieces, psychologists, light and laser sculptures, reflexology practitioners and a stylish array of cocktails and canapés to produce a multi-layered creation. Guests wander through a series of spaces, each one rich with extraordinary displays and surprising encounters. Even the bartenders and cooks wear specially designed outfits and turn the serving of food and drinks into a performance in itself: a virtual waiter wall where individual canapés are dispensed from perspex windows; an eat me wall where boxed puddings are plucked from a velcro surface. It's almost as if a 1960s alternative *happening* has gatecrashed a corporate board meeting.

These are not gratuitous entertainments, however. Each party is orchestrated around corporate messages such as 'virtuality', 'liquidity', 'borderlessness' or 'transparency', which are then threaded through the scenography and performance of the event. To underline the more serious aims of the party and reinforce product by-lines, an introductory speech is made before the event gets underway. 'Enjoy yourselves and Xpand your Horizons', announces the host. He is Dr Francioni of Deutsche Börse Group, Europe's leading facilitator of equity capital.

From 1996, when the Deutsche Börse Group established an office in London, these events have been organized by Vamp, a consultancy specializing in the design and implementation of one-off productions. Vamp seeks out empty warehouses or office blocks – neutral spaces – turning them into multimedia environments that 'embody the corporate culture' of the client (van den Munckhof and Dare 2000). In the case of the Deutsche Börse Group, Vamp deals with a multinational organization comprising three divisions. Collectively, these provide an information technology-based cash and derivatives market trading system and a range of information products and consultancy to players in financial markets. Its core business is therefore entirely built around online services and products which, by their very definition, seem intangible. It is also a complex organization with several layers and types of activity. The Vamp events provide an opportunity for the Deutsche Börse Group's international marketing and sales teams to meet with other group members and outside corporate partners. They usually coincide with important announcements such as new product launches or mergers. The parties offer an environment to encourage corporate bonding while



Views of parties for Deutsche Börse Group organized in London by Vamp from 1996
Source: Vamp

immersing guests and employees in visual and material manifestations of company values. These aims and objectives are constituted in more direct and simplified forms than are usually experienced in their workaday lives. At the same time, it is hoped that the cultural capital of the organization is reinforced and that values of modernity and creativity are communicated both externally to guests who have come from outside the company and internally among its professionals.

The Vamp/Deutsche Börse Group parties are perhaps an extreme example of a nascent arena of design intervention from the late 1990s where consultancies are directly involved in the formulation of strategies to develop the corporate culture of a client. This focuses on the ‘below the line’ elements of a company: that is, the parts that ordinary customers do not see. In design terms, this may embrace the aesthetic environment of a company, but in turn it is expected that this has an attitudinal effect on the way employees see themselves, interact with each other and with their clients and customers.

INTERNAL BRAND BUILDING

Traditionally, corporate identity has been regarded as a design tool by which both employees and their public relate to an organization. This is where the overall ‘personality’ of a company – its values and attitudes, its ‘ways of doing things’ – is communicated through a range of signifying data: logos, uniforms, letterheads, buildings and so on. Internal brand building draws a closer relationship between the employee and the products or services it purveys, and ultimately a closer relationship to its audience. It may therefore put the employee in the shoes of the consumer. Put otherwise, it aspires to inculcating an emotional investment in, as well as intellectual knowledge of, what it is hoped that the consumer eventually experiences.

As such, internal brand building represents an attempt to achieve coherence between the products or services of an organization and their mediation at all levels. This is effectively done through the collapsing of a series of boundaries. In the design profession this is done in some instances through amalgamating advertising, communications and design consultancy. For the

client company, this strategy may be seen as part and parcel of the shifts in management theory and practice instigated in the 1990s. An important effect of this is that traditional distinctions between producer and consumer are increasingly blurred. In turn, for both the employee of a company and the end-user, the domains of ‘public representation’ and ‘private life’, as articulated in Johnson’s ‘circuit of culture’ (see Chapter 4), appear to converge. The rest of the chapter explores the background to these changes and some further examples which illustrate them.

THE END OF ADVERTISING

Among many large corporate clients in the 1990s, responsibility for brand development and management ceased to rest solely in marketing departments, and by extension with their advertising agency. By 2000, a survey of 200 senior UK managers revealed that 73 per cent anticipated restructuring their companies, putting the brand at the heart of the organization and building its working structure around it (Manuelli 2000). With a greater fluidity as to the internal ownership of brands, it may subsequently be anticipated that corporate consciousness of it and action on its behalf pervade the organization more fully.

Despite this development, statistical indications are that advertising expenditure by no means receded during the 1990s – economic expansion and emerging global markets ensured continued growth for Western advertising agencies (CITF 1998). However, much has emerged to challenge any assumption that advertising is the sole guardian and mediator of brand values. (Within this discussion we must be careful to separate the notion of pure sales from brand values. Sales are dependent on a range of issues, stretching from product origination through advertising to promotions, positioning and pricing – all those elements of the ‘marketing mix’, in other words. Brand values refer more to the qualitative elements of recognition, emotional response, aesthetic appeal and, indeed, aesthetic illusion.) Schudson (1993 [1984]: 74–89) presents a convincing picture of an advertising industry which is fraught with divisions as to the efficacy of different techniques, in particular the question as to whether ads should be informational or emotional. Following his discussion, it appears that scientific approaches to the creation of ads, which would include market surveys or the pre-testing of ads on focus groups as part of the planning, vie with questions of intuition and artistry; this is typified by the creatives-versus-researchers tension in ad agencies. In turn, a lack of clarity as to what actually works and what doesn’t calls into question advertising’s efficacy. This leads to the often quoted and widely attributed remark on the part of a client that ‘I know that at least half of my advertising money is being wasted. My problem is – I do not know which half’ (quoted in Schudson 1993 [1984]: 85).

Schudson goes on to consider the consumer’s information environment: that is, the methods by which the audiences receive data about products or services against which they set their advertising. His list of nine resources begins with the consumer’s personal experiences of products or related products and ranges through government reports and consumer group information through to their interpretation of price (1993 [1984]: 90–1). This sets up powerful and constantly variable criteria by which consumers may challenge the claims of an advertisement. The growing sophistication of consumers in piecing together and interpreting different aspects

of their respective information environments means that ad agencies have an ever-increasingly difficult job in producing plausible ads. This may lead them to be increasingly explicit and reflexive by developing a language which comments on the mechanics of advertising while purveying an ad at the same time (see Williamson 1988 [1978]: 7). Another response has been to deliver advertising in unexpected or novel contexts – ambient advertising as it came to be known in the late 1990s – such as by projecting it on to the sides of buildings or printing it on the back of bus tickets. In either case, it seems that some ad agencies began to take some desperate and extreme measures to get their message seen and talked about by an increasingly critical audience.

In order to defend this financial basis of their existence, but also their own integrity and *raison d'être*, representatives of the advertising agencies campaign hard sell the idea of publicity. This may not necessarily be in the face of any perceived threat from other practices in the creative industries, including design consultancy. More often this is directed at other elements of marketing used to secure brand loyalty, such as product promotions or customer loyalty schemes (see, for instance, Bond 1998; Crosthwaite 1999). Equally, however, letters to the professional design and communications press reveal considerable discomfort with the shift of some design consultancies repackaging themselves as brand consultancies (see, for instance, Massey 2000), with many arguing that the need to integrate marketing, strategy and design requires more than mere repositioning but considerable internal restructuring instead.

BRAND AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANCY

From the 1990s representatives of sectors within the creative industries would provide evidence and counter-evidence to maintain their market share. On the other hand, fragmentation of working practices within the creative industries allowed groups to reconstitute their professional aims and the constellation of skills required to achieve these. This was matched by changes in internal brand ownership among clients and perceived developments in terms of the public reception of brand identity.

To focus on just one example as evidence of this shift, one might cite the communications and brand consultancy Circus, founded in 1998. With some 20 employees, Circus was not set up to carry out the specific making of design work themselves; rather, they formed partnerships with a network of some 50 other design studios and consultancies in the creative industries. Their aim, then, was to bridge the gap between ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ – and thus between strategic knowledge and design action – by carrying out design auditing, project development and, more straightforwardly, developing design briefs alongside clients. As such, the design outcomes of these collaborations would be characteristically diverse, according to the desired end-results, and require the consultancy to partner with a broad range of design and communication disciplines. Circus could therefore stray across professional demarcations between design and advertising.

In this way consultancies conspire to broaden the means by which brand values are held, managed and mediated. To return to the example of Circus, just as their working practices were mixed by collaborating with a wide range of other consultancies, so the design platforms on to which

solutions were placed varied. In essence, they worked from a model which involved the exploration of the relationship between the brand and its 'community'. Between the two, it took into account notions of 'place' (meaning the forms by which the brand was communicated), 'voice' (being the various details which make up its content) and 'structure' (the systems, both internal and external to a company, that manage the communication of the brand). As such, a complex matrix of relationships linking both the hardware (for instance, anything from a company's corporate logo to its buildings) and software of a client (such as the organizational structure of a company or even the way its products are viewed by its workers) are considered (Mottram 2000).

Shifts away from either advertising or design in their traditional senses towards communications and branding infer that an artefactual outcome (in the shape of an advertisement or a new retail scheme, for instance) does not always predominate. If, after all, the ultimate role of a consultancy in the commercial arena is to maximize profits, then it is incumbent on it to seek the most effective device in order to achieve this. An example of this is in Wolff Olins' development of a brand identity for the mobile telephone group Orange in 1993. In positioning the company in a highly competitive market they identified Orange's proposition as being 'outstanding value' and 'futureproof', supported by five values that were meant to describe the way customers should experience the brand. These were: 'straightforward', 'refreshing', 'dynamic', 'honest' and 'friendly'. The consultancy originated a tightly managed visual identity to reflect this. However, a key feature of the brand positioning was in advising that Orange adopt 'per second billing'. At the time, Orange's competitors all used billing systems which rounded call-time up. The insistence on 'per second billing' not only gave the brand a 'unique selling proposition' it also served to reinforce the brand values in the way the company did its business (Hamilton and Kirby 1999). Thus a 'weightless' solution was employed to consolidate the client's external brand image. In turn, this innovation served to re-invigorate the reputation of Wolff Olins among its own competitors as an organization that delivered imaginative and holistic brand consultancy (Vinogradoff 1999).

In other instances, highly artefactual design interventions may be mobilized in order to create brand awareness internally to a company's representatives so that this may be directly communicated externally. Imagination employs up to 400 professionals to specialize in the creation and management of events, environments and experiences. Their activities include communications planning, retail and leisure design, project management, television productions, films, touring shows and theatrical events. They therefore move fluidly between the upstream elements, such as the staging of corporate events and training, trade shows or conferences for companies, to the downstream public face, such as retail environments and experience centres. In doing so, Imagination strive to achieve a coherent fit between brand identity as understood by a client's representatives and brand image as perceived by end-customers.

One of Imagination's important long-term clients is the car manufacturer Ford. As with all automotive producers, Ford experienced increasingly refined competition for market share in the late 1990s. In part this can be attributed to production outstripping overall demand, particularly in Europe. But it was also because by this stage – after nearly a century's development – potential buyers took it for granted that a modern car was safe, well-equipped, economical and reliable. Small cars perform beyond what is actually required, while extended warranties even made the few less-reliable cars still attractive. Within product types, many makes have become almost indistinguishable in their overall look and performance. With a level playing field between

manufacturers in terms of product performance, distribution networks and post-purchase back-up, they are therefore forced towards using branding strategies more intensively than ever before. Part of the strategy for ensuring this was massively increased spending on publicity. In the mid-1990s, industry analysis calculated that between £200 and £600 of the cost of a new car was attributable to the manufacturer's advertising budget (Coppes 1996). However, given the limitations of advertising as the sole guardian of brand identity, other systems of diffusion had to be sought.

Into this context Ford launched the Cougar and the Focus cars in 1998. For this, Ford and Imagination developed the Aurora Project in order to establish awareness of a set of new brand identities for the corporation. The cars were featured on Imagination-designed stands at the major European automobile trade fairs throughout that year. In addition, however, they set up a major event in Berlin during July of that year which was visited by 20,000 representatives of the Ford dealer network of franchises throughout Europe with the aim of instilling brand awareness upstream, among Ford's salespeople.

Staged in a disused factory, visitors entered the site via a 65-metre bridge. A bridge was also used in the trade shows to signify the continuity between the heritage of the Ford brand and its future as embodied in the new Ford Focus. In an area of 25,000 square metres, the Aurora Centre comprised a presentation arena, four areas which featured audio-visual shows, computer stations and sculptural arrangements carrying the brand message (brand 'DNA rooms' in Ford parlance), offices and meeting rooms, a restaurant and kitchens. It was also surrounded by a kilometre-long drive familiarization circuit (Imagination 1998).

In common with all franchise systems, the core corporation's job is not just to market products to customers, but also to provide its distributors with the necessary knowledge and experience of it in order to make all aspects of its provision appear seamless. While part of the Aurora Project was to provide basic product information for its sellers, it was also to train them up in the appropriate 'brandspeak'. To this end the primary Ford brands (being 'design and package', 'driving dynamics', 'ingenuity' and 'accessibility'), which make up its 'DNA', were translated into the artefactual data of the Aurora Centre. Direct experience and knowledge of the cars was layered with visual and textual metaphors which would communicate the emotional appeal of the brand to its human mediators – the dealers themselves. In addition, through careful copywriting of speeches and textual information, they would be given a language of description which could subsequently be used on prospective customers in the selling process (Pickering 1999).



The Aurora Project: developed by Imagination for Ford Europe, Berlin, 1998
Photos: Imagination

EMPLOYEES AS CONSUMERS

In the case of the Deutsche Börse Group events created by Vamp, we saw how the informal context of the company's party was used to facilitate business networking and reinforce corporate messages. In doing so, the boundaries between the public representation and the private life, both of a company and its individual employees, are relaxed. Guests from other firms are invited to

the parties; they are fed something of the inside atmosphere of the group and see its members at play; but this is also within the parameters of the corporate event. Equally, the highly textured, sometimes intimate patina of the events, with their heady mixture of interactive features, encourages subjectivity and, to some degree, self-actualization; but again, this is mustered as an integral aspect of the corporate culture. Paul du Gay (1997: 316-18) lays emphasis on how a consequence of the globalization of finance has meant that, in fact, elements of communications, display and presentation have become more important. Transactional relationships of trust and affability between corporate players are highly valued. Financial networks are therefore, in essence, socio-cultural networks.

This example is also indicative of a shift towards a more complex and, indeed, aestheticized worker-employer relationship. This is where management interest has extended from creating and controlling the basic activities of work (what people do in their jobs) into managing its *meaning* with increasing vitality. Management has always entailed an element of ensuring its 'morality', as Salaman argues, but now 'they [also] seek to define the workers' emotions and relationships' (1997: 239-40). This therefore entails the development and management of 'meanings', 'feelings' and 'beliefs' which are important to the quality of service they deliver (du Gay 1996: 130). This evidences a shift from an authoritarian JFDI (Just Fucking Do It!) culture to one which is calculated to motivate employees into a personal engagement with and self-actualization within the attitudinal framework of the company. Furthermore, since the early 1980s this practice has been supported by the theories of corporate culture consultants such as Peters and Waterman (1982) and Deal and Kennedy (1982). They have advocated a 'hearts and minds' approach to corporate management in which the attitude and voice of employees are sought, won over and made loyal. Corporate culture therefore entails the self-conscious production of particular relationships between workers and the company, its products and services, and between each other.

Similarly, the Aurora Project to promote the Ford brand among its dealers was concerned with building enthusiasms and belief structures around a brand. A key feature, however, was that these ideas were being sold to them, albeit in a more spectacular fashion, as the dealers sell the product to their customers. This system of internal branding might have been done through direct mail or presentations to convey the key messages but, as the project's originators declared, 'it would have fallen short of delivering the essential degree of motivation' (Imagination 1998). So momentarily, members of the producing system become consumers. Again, the scenario of the event focuses on building emotional ties between corporation, product and employees. Within this process, subjectivity, normally associated with consumption, is found within the productive sphere. As du Gay states:

The relationship to self that the employee is expected to develop builds upon and extends the identity he or she is deemed to have as a consumer: both are represented as autonomous, calculating individuals in search of meaning and fulfilment, looking to 'add value' to themselves in every sphere of existence, whether at work or at play. (1996: 79)

By taking part in the construction and implementation of systems, environments, ideas and values within organizations that communicate to and on behalf of individuals, design consultants are indulging in what Buchanan (1998a: 14) calls 'fourth order design'. In his estimation, this evidences a mature state of design practice. In first- and second-order design, practitioners

are engaged in problem-solving towards the creation and implementation of signs, symbols and images ('first-order design') and physical objects ('second-order design'). In 'third-order design', they are involved in a more strategic decision-making mode which originates activities, services and processes for their client. Within 'fourth-order design' they ensure systems for the incorporation and functioning of those decisions. Both the Vamp and Imagination practices aspire to this fourth level: they are instrumental in ascertaining particular management messages but also devise ways of making them work.

The distinction between third and fourth order is fine. The former may provide a set of goals but does not necessarily guarantee their achievement. Fourth-order design, however, proposes enabling a transition with the organization towards those goals. This transition 'depends on discovering the core idea, values, and thought which organize a culture or system and propel it forward in a new search for expression in appropriate activities and products' (Buchanan 1998a: 16). Ultimately, this form of design practice does not exclude the other three; rather, it is hoped that it integrates all four orders in a complex, interdisciplinary approach which extends through pre-existing systems of provision and circuits of culture and, in doing so, alters their configuration. It follows, then, that if either Vamp or Imagination were to extend their service further back towards originating and shaping core products for their clients, then they would be covering all four of Buchanan's bases.

AESTHETIC LABOUR

The Vamp and Imagination examples demonstrate the depth to which design culture extends. We have seen how products such as the iPod produce new practices and how, indeed, consumers themselves invent new practices around the product. In these cases the 'rules' of these practices are, arguably, not so overtly formulated as compared with situations where corporations are directly training or influencing their staff. Here, design is mobilized to develop a vocabulary of understanding, either for its sales staff in terms of the products the corporation sells (in the case of Imagination/Ford) or in terms of its core values (in the case of Vamp/Deutsche Börse Group).

At times, highly localized and specific instructions for workers are developed and implemented in order to assist in the materialization of a brand. Hochschild (2003 [1983]: 5–9) wrote of Delta Airlines' insistence that flight attendants *smile*, and smile as if they really meant it. According to her account, the smile was considered to be the company's greatest asset, itself reproduced as a smile-like strip of paint on the nose of each of its planes. She called this very conscious addition to the performance of more mundane tasks of in-flight service 'emotional labour'. Workers were required to act out a feeling that might directly affect the passengers' own sense of comfort and ease, but this 'emotional labour', as she called it, would also communicate the airline's brand.

Similarly, Pettinger (2004) writes of how sales staff in clothing retail are invariably required to wear the same brand clothes as the shop they represent. They should embody that particular style not only through what they put on to go to work, but also in their personal enthusiasm for and knowledge of the clothing lines. By contrast with Hochschild's account, there is a shift from the exposition of a particular feeling that comes from within the emotional resources of the worker to the adoption of an aesthetic disposition. The shop worker literally puts the 'uniform' of the clothing brand on in order to promote it, but also so that the clothes themselves are

identified with the kind of people who work there. Witz et al. (2003) explore this notion in relation to a hotel chain that has a strong emphasis on its modern design values. They found that staff were hired not so much according to their experience in hotel work, but more for their potential to have the ‘right image’ and embody the hotel’s designerly values. How they spoke, wore their hair or addressed guests would have to be nuanced towards the overall aesthetic of the organization. Training is directed at fashioning workers as ‘animate components of that corporate landscape’ (Witz et al. 2003: 49).

In the case of both the retail and hospitality examples, this kind of work is therefore described as ‘aesthetic labour’. Work is extended into a signifying practice that integrates cognitive, motivated and embodied dispositions, or, as Bourdieu (1984) would have it, a particular *habitus* is designed, produced and managed. This effect has considerable resonance with a wider discussion of branding that sees it as way of exploiting common social world to create surplus value. Arvidsson (2005) argues that by getting consumers to take an interest in, exhibit or talk about brands, so corporations are effectively harnessing their labour for free in that it is they who are helping to promote them. Brand management is about developing techniques to promote this process.

Thus just as the subjective processes of consuming are melded into the worksphere within aesthetic labour, so the processes of consuming are appropriated towards productive ends.

DESIGNING FOR CREATIVITY

This blurring of the distinctions between consumption practices and the milieu of production has become a recurrent trope in the design of work environments, particularly where creativity is a key value to be promoted. Most iconic among these was the example of St Luke’s (Law 1999). This London advertising agency, created through a management buy-out in 1995, dispensed with a traditional office system to provide lockers, cordless phones and shoulder bags for its creatives. The assumption was that advertising requires that teams work on various projects, each of which would have a dedicated room.

Similarly, the new British Airways headquarters near London, designed by Niels Torp and opened in 1998, incorporated several features to encourage less hierarchy and greater flexibility into its working culture. Hence a central walkway linking six small office blocks, which apes an English village street (complete with cobbles and trees), runs through its building. Workers are obliged to use this thoroughfare when arriving or to get to the canteen and thus ease of informal communications is promoted. In such ways, workplaces are designed around a ‘geography of circulation ... that promotes the “flocking” ... of people around particular creative intensities, on the principle [that] innovation often comes from taking ideas across boundaries’ (Thrift 2005: 150).

This marshalling of ‘creative intensities’ also finds its way into urban planning and design within regeneration and place-branding strategies. Here, the creation of cultural or creative quarters (introduced in Chapter 7) within cities or large towns has often been motivated through a tourism strategy. But this has also come from a desire to harness, encourage and communicate the creative resources of urban centres. They engage a mixture of functions and activities that are arranged in a variety of ways. They might restrict themselves to specific stand-alone museums or galleries that nonetheless create a ripple-effect of cultural production and consumption activity around them (e.g. Guggenheim, Bilbao; Tate Modern, London; Baltic, Gateshead), or to larger

building complexes that incorporate a range of cultural institutions, such as opera houses, galleries and artists' studios (e.g. Bute Town Docks, Cardiff; Lisbon's Bairro's Alto and Chiado), or include entire quarters or networks of locations featuring galleries, bars, restaurants but also a dense clustering of creative industries such as design studios, ad agencies, media companies, artists' studios and craft workshops (e.g. Temple Bar, Dublin; Northern Quarter, Manchester; Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham; Veemarktkwartier, Tilburg; Lace Market, Nottingham). In 1999, O'Connor counted in the UK some 50 local government authorities developing creative quarters and districts. They have been adopted in local government planning in diverse locations including Lewisham, Folkestone, Nottingham, Dublin and Adelaide (O'Connor 2001).

The overlap of production and consumption in such areas is a conscious element in their planning. Most noteworthy in the formulation of this strategy has been the work of Comedia cultural consultants, whose work has influenced policy in several European and Australian cities. Its founder-director, Charles Landry, traces the historical background to this correspondence to the period of the Viennese Secession (1880–1914), where café culture provided the basis for the networking of ideas within a creative milieu (Landry 2000). A romanticism for such a past is evident elsewhere. Phil Wood, also of Comedia, typifies creative quarters in that they 'combine cutting-edge producers and demanding streetwise consumers in a self-reinforcing 24-hour economy' (Wood 2001). Elsewhere, singling out Manchester's Northern Quarter, he claims that

so far as the cultural industries are concerned, [production and consumption] are one and the same thing. It is in the very process of consuming sounds, images and symbols of the city that today's creative producers are evolving the sounds, images and symbols which will be tomorrow's creative products ... and on it goes in an endless cycle. (Wood 1999)

The aforementioned Northern Quarter in Manchester demonstrates both the strength and brittleness of promoting creative quarters. This area, measuring 56 hectares, is located close to Manchester's city centre and yet this creative quarter typically exhibits much of the louche liminality that has come to be associated with such areas. The building stock is made up mostly of former textile workshops and storage that now house a range of independent bars and restaurants combined with some 105 creative industry firms (Drivers Jonas et al. 2003). A 'Public Art Scheme' was developed from 1996 to encourage artworks that expressed its identity for the area. This was coordinated between the Manchester City Council and the Northern Quarter Association, representing stakeholders in the area (McCarthy 2006). Both its internal workings and its external appearance have been subject to careful scrutiny and an element of managed development (Wansborough and Mageean 2000).

These kinds of development represent, for urban planning studies, something of a 'cultural turn'. Mommaas (2004) believes that the conscious creation or nourishment of these clusters or 'milieux' is becoming an 'archetypal instrument in the urban cultural planning toolbox'. This moves the use of culture in regeneration to a more nuanced level than its more spectacular use in flashy museums, theatre complexes or festival agendas. Here the refined, horizontal relationships of key actors become the main driving force of decision-making as regards regeneration. Thus the facilitation of human and cultural capital go hand in hand. We might even fuse these to produce the term 'human cultural capital'. This would take Bourdieu's term of 'cultural capital' one step further. Instead of an individual's or group's ability to distinguish on the basis of cultural

products, human cultural capital involves a distinction on the basis of cultural actors: who is active within a certain milieu, how they act and how their action is harnessed symbolically.

Creative quarters are promoted for their agency in urban regeneration. They come to represent a wider identity of transformation and the entrepreneurial selfhood of the city. In developing brand values for Manchester, Hemisphere Marketing and Design stated in their report that ‘Market Street may be the economic engine of Manchester’s retail scene but it is the independent and quirky Northern Quarter that is seen as most epitomising “Manchesterness”’ (Hemisphere 2003). This is expressed within the values of ‘attitude/edge/enterprise’. Thus as the Northern Quarter materializes notions of creativity, difference and entrepreneurialism (or, one might therefore say, reflexive modernization), so this becomes emblematic for the city of Manchester. ‘Manchesterness’ is mediated through design outcomes and by the wider design culture of the place. Attention is focused towards the ‘flows, processes, mobilities and “horizontal” connections’ (Edensor 2002: 30) that make up a place and its wider identity. The Northern Quarter’s network sociality, its louche avant-gardism and its inhabiting of liminal spaces are made to symbolize that identity. Thus the Manchester case ultimately exhibits an attempt to appropriate a pre-existing designscape into an officially sanctioned marketing ploy.

However, while the creative intensity of the Northern Quarter was judged to provide a useful cue for Manchester’s transformation, interesting tensions in the implementation of a design policy for the area emerge. The Northern Quarter was seen by consultants Drivers Jonas, Regeneris Consulting and Taylor Young to Manchester City Council as important to the Manchester Knowledge Capital Prospectus (Manchester City Council 2003). This outlined the centrality of the knowledge economy – with the usual attendant notions of ‘innovation’ and ‘creativity’ – to the city. Within this strategy, the Northern Quarter figures for its contribution to this process. They held that ‘very few other locations elsewhere in the UK are able to boast this concentration of *both* creative production and cultural consumption’ (Manchester City Council 2003). The Northern Quarter (or N4 as it has more recently become) has a strategic role in the wider re-imagining of Manchester. Hence it was argued that ‘The ambition is for much wider national and international recognition of the unique qualities of the N4. The N4 will be increasingly seen and promoted by all our partners as a fundamental part of a growing global city’ (Drivers Jonas et al. 2003). However, in the detail of their regeneration recommendations, they were understandably coy, wishing to maintain its edge and atmosphere. They argued that:

Certain aspects should, however, remain unchanged. The Northern Quarter will retain its own distinctive identity as a location for the independent sector, where residents of Manchester and visitors can experience something different and soak up the atmosphere of a truly ‘working quarter’. (Manchester City Council 2003)

Thus recommendations for small-scale improvements to lighting, street furniture and signage were made. But developments involving larger-scale building schemes were eschewed. These were seen to be a threat to the maintenance of that area’s ‘distinctive’ and ‘unique’ character.

This awareness of the need for sensitive intervention or non-intervention no doubt indirectly stems from the widely understood threat of gentrification of such areas (Zukin 1989; Lloyd 2006). In short, the trend involves de-industrialization, bohemianization, gentrification and then

the inflation of land values. The original trail-setters, ironically, are then squeezed out as rents become too high for these creative types of people.

The radical urban planning group based in Rotterdam, Urban Unlimited, takes this argument a step further by arguing for ‘free zones’ in cities. They suggest that for creative milieux to thrive, areas should in fact be left deliberately unplanned. In other words, ‘cities can be saved from design in the name of creativity’ (Thackara 2005b: 271). Furthermore, however, they argue that, in any case, the creative milieux are not so much arranged around places as around networks (Urban Unlimited 2004). The Northern Quarter, judged in this context, may be promoted on the romantic myth of place-bound network sociality rather than a more open understanding of the dynamics of creative industries.

This precarious balance between human capital and urban fabric, or, in other words, creativity and its materialization, has a long pedigree. The notion of identifying and promoting certain cultural milieux within a framework of urban policy harks back to the 1980s. In the UK this was formulated by a number of Labour-dominated councils (significantly, the Greater London Council), while in the USA the not-for-profit organization Partners for Livable Spaces focused on developing urban cultural infrastructures as a way of building local communities, citizenship and economies. Within this, Stevenson notes that an attempt is made to ‘reconceptualize cultural activity as encompassing dynamic and pervasive processes rather than as a static range of artistic objects and products’ (2004: 123). In other words, the new emphasis is on the social, knowledge networks that produce cultural activity rather than on the privileging of certain aesthetic outcomes within a hierarchical format. More recently, of course, this thinking emerged in the work of Charles Landry in the UK (2000) and Richard Florida in the USA (2002) to play a highly influential role that brought the promotion of cultural, social and knowledge capital together under a single rubric within policy circles.

This turn away from hierarchy and from objects and products means that the core identity of creativity has to be rendered invisible or virtual. The flagship or landmark building that works as a trigger for a place-brand in other locations (again, for example, Bilbao’s Guggenheim) cannot play its operational part here. Instead, the demands for a liminal aesthetic, where creativity might always be about to happen, mean that the Northern Quarter will always be required to slum it.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND DESIGN ACTIVISM

All the examples explored so far in this chapter involve the use of design within relatively rarefied corporate or civic contexts. Their ultimate aim was in enhancing productivity through, basically, the inculcation of particular values into a specific labour force or population. Acceptance and performance of these values involved a balance between disciplining and autonomy. On the one hand, they had to be embodied. Whether it was wearing the clothing correctly or using the right vocabulary, their dispositions and sensibilities had to be agreed, adopted and acted upon. On the other hand, they also encompassed and were dependent on a shared sense of enterprise and creativity. With possibly the exception of the Northern Quarter example, the processes of development and implementation of these values was largely a top-down affair involving the use of expert consultants to determine what they might be, how they might be mobilized and who would be most appropriate to carry them out.



The movement of design into Buchanan's (1998a: 14) 'fourth order', where designers are involved in developing the implementation of management strategies, resonates with the idea of design culture as 'encultured practice'. This understanding of the term, which has been introduced in Chapter 1, is one of several notions of design culture as action, but it perhaps best captures an ambition towards greater complexity both in terms of the outcome and the interdisciplinarity of design practice. Maier-Aichen refers to a 'Utopia of less ... *but better*' that requires creatives not only to create compelling design products, graphics or interiors, but also 'to find innovative ways of communication, materialising and dematerialising things' (2004: 10). The emphasis here is on developing design as a transformative process or as a way of reconfiguring routine and outlooks.

Design culture as encultured practice may also extend beyond the orchestration of new consumer–producer relationships within corporate frameworks, to a process that works to transform everyday, public lives and aspirations. In the UK, Huddersfield-based 'creativity activists' Heads Together work strategically as catalysts by putting communities at the centre of the decision-making process in the regeneration of their localities. Their role is not in deciding the end-form for improving neighbourhoods, but in facilitating the



interface between end-user and a constellation of creative experts. This involves the flexible, slow-moving negotiations of relationships and expectations so that ordinary people become empowered to take a lead in the decisions over their environments. They are media-agnostic in that they do not prescribe a particular creative platform in response to situations; rather, whichever is most appropriate to address a context and issue will emerge from discussions. It might be the foundation of a community radio station or making a film to represent the lives and aspirations of a neighbourhood. Here, creative practice is about socially engaged, highly networked activities that are process- rather than object-centred.

The Methleys comprises 300 terraced houses in a suburb of Leeds in the UK. The area suffered from an unstable and transitory residential population, with attendant problems of crime and vandalism. With no gardens, the only outdoor space is the streets themselves, though these were largely considered as thoroughfares rather than the meeting-place of a community. From 1994, neighbours had begun to develop street activities during the summer months, including, in 1995, an outdoor movie screening. In the summer of 1996, local activists making up the Methleys Neighbourhood Action Group, aided by members of Heads Together, found funding and sponsorship from a mixture of public and private institutions to lay 800 square meters of turf through the neighbourhood's main street. This created a temporary 'park space' for a weekend, during which the 'Methleys Olympics', displays and even pony rides took place. The aim of this was not as an end in itself, but to open up an imaginative sense of possibility among residents (Sinclair 2006).

With a new feeling of neighbourhood vitality achieved, the next step was to establish the area as a 'home zone'. This concept had existed for over 25 years in Germany and the Netherlands. It is where neither pedestrians nor vehicles have priority, but street-use is reconfigured for neighbourhood conviviality. Heads Together's new role was in heading a campaign to establish the Methleys as Britain's first Home Zone. They were commissioned to make a film about the concept, while they also coordinated neighbourhood involvement in persuading the local council and national government to fund the initiative. The film has subsequently been used by hundreds of community groups in their campaigns for safer, better-designed residential streets (Sinclair 2006). By 1998, the UK government had pledged £30 million to establish 60 more home zones nationally (Biddulph 2003).



The Methleys (above) turfed for a week, 1996; (below) launch party of Methleys Home Zone, 2002; (opposite) seating and signage, Methleys Home Zone
Photos: Methleys Neighbourhood Action; Empics; Lizzie Coombes/Heads Together; Katy Hayley/Heads Together

The Methleys' home zone itself was achieved through a range of design features, including: gateway treatments which incorporate custom-made artwork that make non-local drivers aware of the changed environment; the use of road paving to indicate a shared pedestrian space; and traffic-calming measures that also functioned as communal garden space. A detailed survey of residents' attitudes and changed uses 'before' and 'after' the Methleys' home zone's development provided evidence of improved quality of life for residents (Layfield et al. 2003). The issue of improved community relations was less evident in the survey. However, it should be recognized that engaging residents in developing ideas, and through that process creating a problem-solving community, took place over several years and may not be evident through a 'snapshot' survey. While a reduction in crime or road traffic accidents is easily measurable and discernible, attitudinal change can remain more hidden. However, it is perhaps significant that it now has its own website, and street events continue to be part of its annual calendar.

The emphasis in all of the Heads Together projects is on the transformation of communities as much through the end-user participation in the development process as through the end result. Within such processes, the role of the designer is altered towards a facilitative approach. This should not necessarily disempower the designers, whereby their role is simply to carry forward, project manage and materialize the unfiltered desires of groups or individuals. Instead, their expert role is to locate and build on their potential, to open up possibilities, to challenge the collective imagination and to help in the fashioning of new dispositions. In doing so it reconnects people, practices and place.

Through 25 years of activity Heads Together evolved their own working methods, moving through a range of creative practices, including theatre, photographic projects, radio production, curating and programming community events through to facilitating and managing design projects as we have just seen. This kind of socially motivated design draws the large majority of its revenue stream from non-commercial sources such as arts funding, local or regional government regeneration budgets, European Union grants or charitable organizations. The flexibility of skills and approach of a group like Heads Together matches its range of supporters and their expectations. There are pragmatic demands of such work in demonstrating relevance and effectivity to potential demanders. Nonetheless, such work is also driven by political desires that not only aim for democratic engagement with the processes and outcomes of creative practices among citizens, but in these, also seek a transformative effect on their everyday outlooks. As such, this may be termed as 'activist design'.

Design activism may be identified and interpreted in distinct but overlapping ways. Thorpe (2008) lays emphasis on design activism in the production of artefacts within social movements such as campaigning graphics or products that proclaim adherence to ecological values. Fuad-Luke (2009) views it as a way of shifting the aims and methodologies of design so that its processes are adapted to the foregrounding of social, environmental or political values over commercial ones. DiSalvo (2012) discusses the possibility of design as being 'adversarial' in the way it can create an iterative set of contestations such as objects that challenge the dominant status quo of urban life, or even provide citizen tools for revealing its more harmful aspects. Markussen (2013: 38), drawing on Ranci re (2004, 2010), sees a role for design activism that, 'is not a boycott, strike, protest, demonstration, or some other political act, but lends its power of resistance from being precisely a *designerly* way of intervening into people's lives.' As it

involves the development of artefacts that exist in real time and space, it is situated within everyday contexts and processes of social and economic life and impacts on it. It is nonetheless disruptive and destabilizing.

The example of the turfing-over of a street by Heads Together may be interpreted within all the frameworks of design activism given in the last paragraph. It seems most forcefully, however, that the way it disrupts the routinely accepted notion of the street (as a place to park cars and as a conduit for them between places beyond it) leads on to an intervention on the affective domain of its users. This is a designerly intervention. By rapidly and dramatically turning it into a secure space for play, alternative bodily dispositions in the street emerge (children turn cartwheels or adults put out picnic blankets). Outlooks – in terms of what the street could be – are changed not just through representation but also by physical engagement.

CONCLUSION

The motivations of the creative practitioners discussed in this chapter are diverse: corporate clients may afford designers large budgets to realize their creative ambitions; within local regeneration strategies, activist designers might be able to nudge on their political aspirations. However, the examples discussed in this chapter all show how design can be used to blur the line between above- and below-the-line elements and between traditional conceptions of producers and consumers.

In the case of the Deutsche Börse and Ford examples, we saw how employees are, in a way, reconfigured as consumers of their own organizations. Events are designed as ways of informing employees about their products or reinforcing a sense of corporate belonging. Visual and verbal cues are worked into these so that employees adopt a common language of description, or even shared enthusiasms and attitudes within that corporate culture. In its turn, this process turns labour into an aestheticized practice where the tastes, bodily dispositions and emotional expressions of workers are also drawn into and become part of the brand. Here very personal attributes of behaviour and identity – traditionally associated with the subjectivity of sovereign consumers – become appropriated into the sphere of work.

The use of design to signify and promote certain forms of labour and attract interest is also discernible in the creation of so-called ‘creative quarters’. Again, design is mobilized to produce a certain, refined milieu where the distinctions between producing and consuming again are, to a degree, concealed. In a bid to encourage the clustering of creative workers in urban centres, a mix of work and leisure spaces are planned that are attractive to cultural intermediaries, including bars and restaurants, but also appropriate workspaces. We saw in the example of Manchester’s Northern Quarter how a careful decision-making process was applied to the public realm in order to preserve a certain air of avant-garde ‘edginess’ for the area. In turn, this also fed into the city’s brand identity. In this case, and similar ones, creative quarters fulfil a double function: they provide locations for the fostering of enterprise and communicate certain values of modernity about a place.

The development of the urban realm in the Methleys in Leeds demonstrates a further example of how design takes it beyond the fashioning of objects, images or spaces and into the domain of

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people's outlooks and experience of the world. By involving members of a neighbourhood in a slow-moving, decision-making process over the design of their streets, the results are not just an improved quality of life for dwellers, but also, it is hoped, a transformation in their aspirations and demands as citizens. Ultimately, in all these cases it should be noted that design objects are active agents. They function materially within the social relations that make up a corporation, a workplace or a neighbourhood. They also work to signify, or articulate, these various assemblages. In the next chapter, we shall pursue these ideas of assemblages, articulations and networks further.



