The Business of Being Creative

The Professionalization of Graphic Design in Lancaster, PA

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ABSTRACT:
Through collecting the perspectives of graphic designers in Lancaster, PA on design community, the profession’s place in the world, and the challenges and payoffs facing those in the field, it became clear that designers see graphic design as caught between the worlds of bureaucratic business and creative visual arts, with its respectability in flux as a result of the confusion. The conflict between business and artistic ethos reveals the greater conflict in the changing profession’s growing credentializing and bureaucratic systems. Graphic designers must be able to legitimize the value of their commodified work in terms of the capitalist market. This is just one among many examples of unrelenting commodification’s influence on professions. As graphic designers relate to the creative ethos while also seeking respectability, the artistic individual charisma is institutionalized into systemized networks of credentials. When Max Weber’s theory of rational routinization of religion is applied to professions, it comes to mean that an individual can gain prestige through charisma but that a group of individuals trying to gain prestige for a profession must rationally routinize their community in order to communicate their worth to outsiders. Here, one can be persuaded by charisma to believe in the worth of an individual while the worth of a group has to be systematically established because group identities are harder to understand from the outside. In addition to the business ethos’s strength in the capitalist West, this reasoning of rational routinization explains why it is an unavoidable process. Graphic designers seek the legitimization of their profession rather than legitimization of themselves as individual designers because organized networks are the routinization mechanism of capitalism. The unyielding forces of commodification demand that work be translated into standardized terms of economic value. This is the cultural context in which graphic designers desire respect and then enter the process of rational routinization.

Scholars Square keywords:
Graphic design, Weber, 21st century capitalism, creative class, rational routinization, creative work, anthropology of business, advertising, Lancaster art scene, artistic ethos, business ethos, professionalization, profession, anthropology of creativity, AIGA, Creative House of Lancaster, Clipper Magazine
INTRODUCTION

Consider the image of an artist at work. Creating in an isolated room or in the quiet of nature, anywhere outside the influence of society. Perhaps among the people, but void of interaction. Renouncing the world and thus able to depict it truthfully. Inspired from the interior. Creative by being apart. In the West, we admire outsiders for their independence, but usually only when they contribute something to society, like art. The individualistic artist has “charisma” as a romanticized embodiment of Western ideals.

This is the Western myth of creativity and individualism. It builds up the artist as transcending society and its rules. Creativity is constructed as an otherworldly entity. Yet the reality is that no person can transcend culture, nor does creativity. Economically, the capitalist art market has made it possible for artists to sell their work during their lifetime. There are systems in place to connect artists with buyers. The success of the artist is largely based on his/her position in the market, and this success has a currency. The artist no longer starves, but his/her creations are commodities subject to the economic ethos of the capitalist markets.

Graphic design products are certainly commodities as well. Graphic designers must work with businesses to create their products, and graphic design is not marketable solely as art. Graphic design can be defined as the process of translating ideas and concepts into visual communication through color, layout, arrangement, imagery, and typography. The success of such visual communication is about persuasion and advertising in addition to appeal of visual creativity. Graphic design products promote commodification, mediating objects in our world as commodities. Commodification redefines work in terms of profit and currency (Marx 1972: 215-25). The creative work of graphic designs is thus deeply embedded in the culture of capitalism. Within that culture, graphic designers still see themselves as artists. As creative
workers, they conceive of themselves as independent, forward thinking, non-bureaucratic, unconventional, and even bohemian. But as much as they subscribe to the ideals of the artistic model, designers work within business organizations and networks. The myth of the creative individual therefore causes tension in the designer’s self-conception.

Graphic design is still in the midst of creating its identity. Although its title was conceived with the term *graphic design* appearing in an article by William Addison Dwiggins in 1922 (Thomson 1977: 1), the history of graphic design is very slippery. One of my informants says that the term just started being used in place of “commercial art” when he was in high school about fifteen years ago (*interviewee 16*). Others trace graphic design’s heritage back to the invention of printmaking. With such a contestable history, the perception of modern graphic design is no clearer. As creative workers, designers find themselves conflicted between the artistically creative ethos and capitalist economic ethos. In the long run, as is the case for other developing professions in Western American capitalism, the business ethic has the cultural propensity to win.

Right now, graphic design is not yet “rationally routinized” under the business ethic. Max Weber used the term “rational routinization” to describe the development of religions in which the following of a charismatic individual grows and becomes institutionalized and rationalized after the death of the individual (Weber 1978: 246-29). Neo-Weberian economic anthropologists apply the notion of “rational routionization” to professions in the tradition of our modern, bureaucratic, and “rational” culture. Rational routinization, in this sense, is the process of building up networks of employment and prestige through credentials, licenses, organizations, schools, and accrediting. It is the process referred to in everyday language as becoming a profession, or professionalization. Professionalization is the process by which a type of work
becomes recognized with both a commercial presence, thus separating it from hobbyists, and a prominently held belief that difficult-to-gain expertise is necessary for that work, thus separating it from amateurs. Professionalization builds the systems of education, professional networks and licenses necessary to be a respected and successful worker in a field.

Designers perceive the effects of still growing into a bureaucratic system. They feel misunderstood, undervalued, and disrespected, a self-conception that I call the “underdog mentality.” In 19th century America, barbers could provide many of the same services as doctors. This was an embarrassment to those who considered themselves professional doctors. A similar embarrassment is felt by professional graphic designers towards the Everyman designer hobbyist. What can separate the professional from the Everyman designer? Bureaucratic systems demand that individuals pass through standardizing processes that result in being valuable, economically and in terms of respect and prestige. In the unrelenting capitalism of America, this process of rational routinization is inescapable.

This process is also not rational at all in the sense of promoting greater efficiency and profit. The process is cultural and practical. Designers seek respectability, which is not an estimable factor in profit maximization or greater efficiency. The creation of employment networks through schools is the force guiding the growing emphasis on holding degrees in graphic design not the actual training. Designers frequently claim that the actual training they receive in schools is less important than the training they receive on the job. Professional networks in Lancaster include the Central Pennsylvania chapter of the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) and The Creative House of Lancaster (CHL). These organizations are being formed right now. The Central Pennsylvania chapter of AIGA was founded in 2004 and The Creative House of Lancaster in 2007. The contemporary formation of these organizations
reflects the present-dayness of the professionalization processes I witnessed. Whereas professions like medicine and law experienced rational routinization in the 19th and early 20th century, graphic design’s professionalization is happening now.

It is clear, then, that professionalization is not about the rationality of capitalism. It is about building up all the aspects of meaning which help determine the quality “professional,” including business practice, networks, and prestige. Action based on the graphic designer’s feeling of inadequacy in persuading outsiders of their skills and worth is not part of rational capitalist markets. It does not fit in the profit making lines. But this does not mean that the culture of graphic designers’ self-conception is “false” in light of an economic reality. Rather, it demonstrates the cultural embeddedness of capitalism.

The cultural embeddedness of capitalism was not always the theory of economic anthropologists. Karl Polanyi believed that the economic practices of non-industrial cultures were heavily embedded in the culture, while capitalism was markets disembedded from culture (Polanyi 1944). Within this supposedly culture-neutral market system, individuals are represented by the “rational economic man” and calculate decisions universally based on profit maximization and efficiency. The tradition of cultural embeddedness reevaluates Polanyi to say that we, too, are cultural beings. Clifford Geertz examines the cultural conditions for capitalist “take off” in Peddlers and Princes, showing that even in its roots capitalist systems are culturally constituted. He determined that the Javanese town with a market system was less culturally ready for capitalism than the Balinese un-entrepreneurial bazaar economy town. Roger L. Janelli argues that Korean conglomerates like Hundai may appear to be culture-neutral with capitalist characteristics, but are actually deeply imbued with Korean cultural beliefs proving that capitalist systems are all “uniquely human creations” (Janelli 1993: 235). Robert W. Hefner’s collection
on New Asian Capitalisms exemplifies the “moral, legal-political, and organizational arrangements,” rather than universal economic forces, on which new capitalist economies depend (Hefner 1998: 29). Michael S. Billig describes Janelli and Hefner as members of the resurgence of Weberian perspectives in economic anthropology, focusing on institutions as sites where both economics and culture interact and showing that just as economy is not removed from culture, culture is not removed from economy (Billig 2000: 771). This analysis of active institutions makes sure that when economics are interpreted as being culturally embedded that the culture part is not a “static, prior, and disarticulated ‘thing’” (Billig 2000: 784). Jane L. Collins’ writes about the globalized apparel economy as truly made up of distinct culturally determined corporations. These economic anthropologists investigate the culturally embedded systems of rationality in economic decision-making. I assert myself within this tradition, challenging the socially-removed “rationality” of the economic man character in neoclassical economic models.

This is not to say that because rational routinization is embedded in culture that it is a smooth or even agreed-upon process. Graphic designers are in a unique position to be resistant to rational routinization because they have the opportunity to work outside of organizations. The freelancer is a graphic designer who operates his/her own graphic design business. Graphic designers are also very vocal about rejecting bureaucracy and leaving positions in bureaucratic businesses in favor of creative authority. This career trajectory flows in the opposite direction of rational routinization, although there are many designers that describe growing into bureaucracy as their career trajectory, labeling it as their “disenchantment” with creative idealism. The reality is that the graphic design freelancer exists because of the practices of businesses that hire out project-based designers rather than employ their own designers. My informants make it clear that
they obtain freelance work through networks rather than rational competition. Here, a designer can work independently, but still not be able to escape the bureaucratic system of networks, accounts, overhead, and supplies.

One example of the bureaucratic systemization of graphic design in Lancaster is the Clipper Magazine company. Here, the business has managed to take control of 250 creative workers and instill in them the primary goal of efficiency. From speaking to Clipper Magazine employees, I can determine that the bureaucracy manages the creative workers without crushing their souls. Designers (and non-designers as well) in Lancaster bemoan the “Clipper Machine” as the bane of design’s existence in this city. However, from the inside, it seems that Clipper may be the future of rationally routinized graphic design.

In my thesis, I examine the anthropological concerns of meaning, prestige, and networks at work in the rational routinization of the graphic design profession. I also demonstrate what this process looks like at work and how designers speak about it in everyday terms. I will begin with an explanation of my methodological concerns and how I tried to gather voices of Lancaster graphic designers by asking about their views on the city, community, and their works place in it. In my first ethnographic section, I explain the different manifestations of the creative/business conflict in the graphic designer’s self-conception. This conflict is apparent in the designers’ definition of creativity as unconventional, following the lead of artistic individualism. I also use the designers’ views on their relationship with the artistic community of Lancaster to demonstrate their relationship with the problematic artistic ethos. I also use the designers’ views on advertising and reevaluate the notion of the “freelancer’s freedom” in terms of business commitments in order to show the business dimension of the graphic designers’ self-conception.
In my second section I pursue designers’ preparation for the rational routinization of the profession. On symptom of the pre-rational routinization is the “underdog” mentality of how designer’s feel about the respectability of their field. Designers desire greater prestige in the business community, perhaps a side effect of their self-conception anxieties, but also a reaction to the democratization of design technology of desktop publishing. I then describe the designer’s advocacy for attention to network relationships in reaction to the technological democratization of design, a sign of the beginnings of rational routinization.

In a third section I examine the evidence of rational routinization at work in the growing emphasis on degree and credentials, the attention on establishing standardized ethics, as well as the organizational structures of AIGA, The Creative House of Lancaster, and Clipper Magazine. Overall, this thesis reveals the unique situation of capitalism catching up with a profession that perpetuates capitalism itself.

METHODOLOGY

I began finding and interacting with informants by marching up to the third floor of Franklin & Marshall’s Old Main building – home to the College Communications department, responsible for F&M’s designed materials – and asking the employees there about what and who they knew. I had worked in this department as a graphic design intern, so I used my existing connections as well as my position as a student of the college to start the process of finding out the designers in Lancaster. My background in graphic design was a helpful tool in this instance, giving me an insider edge with which to begin. I did try to break outside the network of designers that I was investigating link by link by seeking out informants in unique positions in the design community. I sought out the Creative House of Lancaster founder, Millersville and
PCAD professors, and Clipper Magazine employees without using personal connections from my F&M starting point. Despite these efforts, it is still important to recognize that many of my informant knew each other, and that there may be other perspectives still, perhaps radically different, which I was unable to collect my research. I did not gather any informants from the Armstrong corporation or Lancaster’s advertising giant Godfrey advertising; organizations that I would like to break into if I had a second chance.

The other weakness I must highlight in retrospect was my isolated focus on interviews as a research method. My aim was to attempt to understand how designers think about their work, not necessary the reality of what they are doing. This is why I chose to focus on interviews in order to collect my data. However, I’m sure my research would have largely benefited from participant observation in the workplace. Here, I would have observations of work interactions and behavior with which to compare the designers’ explanation of their work, the others whom they work with, and the nature of the workplace. I could, for example, gauge to what extent perceptions of relationships with businessmen that seemed to be exaggerated in comparison to others were really an exaggeration, or not, of the work atmosphere. As much as my questions were about the way designers view their work and their professional, the reality of the work that can be gleaned from participant observation would be a strong cross reference for my data from interviews.

In my interviews with all the new, unfamiliar contacts, my graphic design background helped me gain my informant’s trust. Even if I tried not to share my graphic design background in order to have the designer talk to me as a design-outsider, my artistic identity was communicated through the way I chose to dress in the part of the “creative,” rather than an average college student’s casual or business apparel, for my interviews. I think I established
legitimacy by being interested in the graphic design community at all. Interestingly, much information was dispensed to me in the form of advice. These people did not know me, but they knew what I needed to know as a “young designer.”

Overall, I interviewed nineteen informants who are designers, students, administrators, printing vendors, or ad agents. Asking for more references from each person I interviewed, I followed a trail from individual to individual, each aware of one another in some way. I have listed my interviewees in my “Interviews Cited” section at the end of the paper. I gained permission from all my informants to use their real names and left those anonymous who did not wish to be named. I made “kinship charts” of the ways my informants knew each other and other design industry Lancastrians to help me track the complex, changing social and business relationships in town. Ultimately, my goal in examining the networks of relationships among designers and some outsiders was to see how graphic designers in Lancaster perceive business, value, community, and culture.

Conceptually, I did start with a question from my design experience—how related are design work and isolation? Because I am the only serious design student that I know of at Franklin & Marshall College and no longer have a design mentor on campus, I was thinking a lot about the different situations in which designers are isolated from each other. The most extreme case is the isolation of the at-home independent freelance graphic designers. With such independent conditions of work, how do designers come to interact with each other? What kind of design community exists in Lancaster, or is perceived to exist? These issues sparked my interest in the character of design community in Lancaster, but later came to reveal the prominence of Western notions of individualistic creativity in my view of freelance work. In wondering how many designers “work alone,” I assumed that physically sitting at home in a
room of one’s own to design would constitute one’s work. Really, there are interactive networks necessary to gain clients, print products, research ideas, and gain inspiration through others. Even if one designs in isolation, the preparation for that act is highly socially constituted.

My prior knowledge of the design community was based on perspectives on design technology, so I was biased towards an analysis of the influence of technology on the design community. This was like a focus on the tools of works that anthropologists might adopt in interpreting primitive cultures. It almost reminded me of an archaeological, object-based approach to the modern world. Perhaps it was a good start for me to distance myself from the design culture and start with the basics of the tools of the trade. But it was wrong for me to assume that technological change guides cultural change. Contemporary “technoutopianism” (Florida 2002: 24) most likely influences my hunch that technology was the force initiating change in the graphic design community. Perspectives on technology really reflect designers’ positions in a conflict. Whatever relationships I perceived designers having with technology were really executions of their relationships with other designers and outsiders. In all, I was able to get a sense of the broader picture by using interviews as my primary ethnographic method and realizing that when designers talk about technology, they are always talking about it in terms of how it describes themselves and others.

Anthropology of Organizations

As I examined the social and business relationships among designers, the anthropology of organizations was a concern. How do I find out about the structure of these design workplaces, as well as come to understand what they mean to designers? How does an anthropologist collect information on the organizational networks that connect designers across
workplaces? Ultimately, the strength of an anthropological study of organizations is in giving the worker who make up those organizations voice, thus deconstructing the separate-from-human identity of the organization and its authorities. One sociological study of nonprofit theatre cites immersion, another word for anthropological participant-observation, among the “multiple methods, and multiple data sources” they used, demonstrating that the collection of subjective perspectives with other types of data to examine seemingly objective issues of organization (Voss 2000: 331). Voss, Cable, and Voss used immersion activities, focus group discussions from managing directors, and personal interviews with managing directors as qualitative data, asking questions such as, “What does your theatre value? Which value is most important to your theatre? Do customers, government funders, corporate and foundation funders, etc. share your theatre’s value? How important is it that customers, funders, etc. share the values of your theatre?” (Voss 2000: 334-335). Interview methodology is much in the spirit of anthropology, but I found favoring the nonprofit’s hierarchy system by only interviewing managers, and the specific, data-driven questions to be inappropriate for my anthropological goals. I focused my research on interviewing designers in many different positions in organizational hierarchies, because one cannot understand an organization only from the people who run it. A person’s situation in power hierarchies frames their experience, and someone at the top cannot really account for the experience of someone at the bottom. Persons in charge are also more likely to give descriptions of work experiences that promote the company, while others may be more honest. Methodologically, I also tried to focus not only on gathering data on how the organizations of graphic designers work, but how people think about them and how these perspectives are shaped, shared, and enacted by designers.
Organizational structures of graphic designers at work, and as a form of community, are more important to understanding creativity than we might think based on the cultural concept of the isolated, creative artist. Lampel, Lant, and Shamsie explain, “Individual inspiration is often championed because it is easier to identify (even when it is not so easy to understand), but without the support of a creative system it is unlikely to be fully exploited.” (Lampel 2000: 269) It is necessary to remember that, even though the creative product seems to offer an alluring individualistically creative model, independent-minded “creatives” exist within business, social, and cultural systems.

**Studying Cultural Production Instead of Aesthetics**

Most studies of graphic design focus on the products. My project rejects the privileging of the visual output of design in academic investigations of the field by focusing on more than the designers’ perspectives on visual style. A professor in visual communications at University of Alberta, Jorges Frascara, directly addresses the problems I sensed in discussion of graphic design. He writes that “graphic design is the activity that organizes visual communication in society...and this involves, to a greater or lesser extent, a perceptual and a behavioral concern” (Frascara 1988: 20). I aim to shed light on these perceptual and behavioral concerns that cannot be teased out from the final visual product, but only from human voices. Frascara puts graphic design in social context by questioning any investigation of aesthetics in an attempt to understand design, writing “The solution to a client’s need is not the production of the visual communication; it is the modification of people’s attitudes or abilities in one way or another” (Frascara 1988: 21). Graphic design mediates our contact with the reality around us. Graphic
design does not just communicate the information within the designed product. It frames the way we experience places, people, and objects.

The anthropological study of the production of visual culture and advertising is critical because many anthropologists chose to focus on cultures as influenced by or reacting to media forces, but few concentrate on work that produces these media forces. I would argue that graphic design is a central part of the modern media orienting people in our contemporary environment. Anthropologist John McCreery, for instance, looks behind the veil of the anonymous “media forces” by investigating advertising firms. He challenges anthropologists to look further into the practices of persuasion, what he calls the “crudities of selling” (McCreery 2001: 163), at work in business exchanges between advertising agents and clients. In regards to the supposedly “rational” economic model of Western business, McCreery asserts, “marketers are more like surfers trying to catch the next wave than engineers building dikes” (McCreery 2001: 164). He investigates Western notions of the “romantic individualism” of the authority of the creative advertising agent by countering American ideas about advertising with examples of Japanese firms that focus instead on giving the client many choices from which the client has the authority to choose. McCreery’s work is similar to the question posed by Lampel, Lant, and Shamsie of whether cultural production expresses the desires of consumers, or consumers develop the desires established by cultural industries. The direction of the influence between the outside and inside of an organization can be unclear.

Voss et al.’s study of cultural production in nonprofit professional theatres uses five dimensions to evaluate the theatres’ organizational values in relations to external: prosocial, artistic, financial, market, and achievement (Voss 2000: 330). This study pinpoints how to link graphic design and other types of creative cultural production asking what are the “underlying
tensions between competing values in cultural firms, such as pressures to be both artistic- and market-oriented.” (Voss 2000: 330). The researchers comment that

“like many other cultural industries, the nonprofit professional theatre industry is marked by ambiguous and unstable environments because its products are aesthetic, interpretative, and experimental, ensuring that nonprofit professional theatres must cope with uncertain consumer demand, rapidly changing products and production processes, and unpredictable product success” (Voss 2000: 331).

Even though cultural production is traditionally thought of as the visual/musical/theatrical arts, it is because of this classification of cultural production that I consider graphic design to be part of this category. Hirsch defines cultural goods as “‘non-material’ goods directed at a public of consumers for whom they generally serve as an aesthetic or expressive, rather than clearly utilitarian function” (Hirsch 2000: 356). Although graphic design has the utilitarian function of communicating information, aesthetic or expressive functions include beauty, order, or indulgence in the designer’s own personal graphic interests and preferences. It fits into a category of cultural production. Lampel, Lant, and Shamsie’s definition of cultural goods as “experiential,” “deriv[ing] their value from subjective experiences that rely heavily on using symbols in order to manipulate perception and emotion” (Lampel 2000: 264), makes me comfortable with placing graphic design in this category. Graphic design cannot be mechanized into objective models because audience receptions of visual objects are so subjective due to the symbolism of visual cues such as colors and organization.

Voss, Cable and Voss incorporate a discussion of the influence of uncertainty on interior-exterior relations in the nonprofit theatre industry; and I likewise found uncertainty in my subjects – of identity, of acceptance, of purpose – to be an influential factor on the cultural
coping mechanism of Lancaster graphic designers. Conditions of uncertainty are also not limited to cultural/creative industries. Jennifer Alexander and Paul Alexander also examine reactions to condition of uncertainty as they spur cultural constructions of personal relationships in Javanese marketplaces (Alexander 1991: 496). Alexander and Alexander make the argument that uncertainty routinely affects culturally constructed networks of people; I chose the pervasive affects of conditions of uncertainty upon how graphic designers make cultural sense of the world.

David Hesmondhalgh writes about the British dance music industry in a case study of independent cultural production. He framed cultural production in terms of both centralized and decentralized orientations, which helped me look beyond the myth of the individual creative genius to better understand the organizational dimensions of graphic design work. Hesmondhalgh’s study emphasizes that being “independent” does not have to mean being “isolated”, as the artistic genius myth suggests. For Hesmondhalgh, “independent” is more of a mindset of individualism, anti-institutionalism, and self-sufficiency as compared to the more physical and society detachment of “isolated.” It is interesting how some of the major issues in creating British dance music are similar to concerns of graphic design in Lancaster, PA. These include the politics of anonymity, authorship, economic/creative tensions, technological access and relationships with the mainstream. Hesmondhalgh addresses the popularization of the idea of the “bedroom studio,” reflective of the accessibility of musical technology that allows a person to participate in creating dance music as a hobby without the formal space of a professional studio, which Hesmondhalgh calls a “Do-It-Yourself” appropriation (1998: 237). It is very similar to the democratization of design technology resulting from initiatives of the design program industry. Unlike other music artists, dance music artists chose to remain anonymous in
order to celebrate the collective nature of their art and because less value is placed on the work individuals than on the “voice” of the dance music genre as a whole. Design is usually anonymous to its consumers as well, but in order to focus on the product identity rather than to inform some “collective” design identity. This differentiation shows the specificity with which one should examine elements of cultural production, in this case author anonymity. Hesmondhalgh argues that “countercultural discourse clearly overstates the opposition between the two ideal-types, majors and independents” (Hesmondhalgh 1998: 243) with majors being dance musicians signed on major records labels and independents being signed on independent records labels. Awareness of the exaggeration of tensions in the dance music industry was helpful in orienting me toward the subjective nature of the business-creativity opposition. Hesmondhalgh’s investigative goal, which I also apply to my anthropological data on graphic designers’ perspectives, is to see “the extent to which ‘independence’ is effective, or even possible, in the increasingly concentrated and internationalized cultural industries of the [present]” (Hesmondhalgh 1998: 236). This investigation of the provocation and application of “independent” identities in work relates well to the graphic design freelancer’s aspiration for creative independence. It shows that the person who calls him/herself independent is actually rooted in social networks, cultural systems of meaning, and economic modes of transaction.

“The Anthropologist in Business and Industry” and Theoretical vs. Practical Aims

In examining economic modes of transaction in the graphic design world, I must address the tradition of economic anthropology and the anthropologist’s place in business. Burleigh B. Gardner argues that the only place where an anthropologist logically fits in a business organization is in the personnel department or in consumer research. This is a popular viewpoint
in the field, which I think underestimates the influence of ethnographic information. Gardner writes, “The social anthropologist is trained to look at any group or organization as a social system and understand its meanings for the members of the system. Business today has no idea of how to use these skills” (Gardner 1977: 171). His viewpoint clearly privileges the idea of the business-anthropology link as a way for anthropology to teach business people purely functional skills. An example of this is when anthropologist Elizabeth Briody applied anthropology to business when she was hired to help with newcomer orientation programs at the General Motors Research Laboratories. However, businesspeople can learn from anthropological perspectives not only in gaining relevant skills but also through anthropological data and ethnography about business as a whole. A protégé of William F. Whyte, Gardner researched human relations in industry, “not oriented toward research for knowledge’s sake, but research for solving problems” (Gardner 1977: 171). I would argue that we cannot be overly concerned with the issue of problem solving in culture because we cannot really control a culture, even a business culture, for our own benefit. Anthropology can help in developing perspectives on business that define it or give a better understanding of it, as well as evaluate and elaborate on economic perspectives. Rather than returning with ‘lessons’ for the business, anthropologists could open the businessperson’s eyes to cultural realities they can see for themselves. There is a booklet for designers called *The Ethnographic Primer* that explains how to use ethnography as a tool for design. True, this is a functional context, but it puts the designer in the anthropologist’s shoes instead of describing the inefficient cultural practices of designers. The primer reads that, “Designers need to understand the relationship between what they produce and the meaning their product has for others,” (AIGA 2007: 3) which is the true place of anthropology in the business place—promoting awareness of the importance of systems of meaning and of relationships.
Much of economic anthropology is a matter of investigating and usually debunking the mythology of the rational, economic decision-making individual. Citing Karl Polanyi, Asaf Darr writes about the cultural “embeddedness” of our understanding of personalized business relations, notably gifting practices, as less advanced than the capitalist commodified form. Darr points out that

“Unfortunately, insights from economic anthropology regarding gifting have not been fully integrated into studies within the emerging social embeddedness school, which demonstrates how the construction of interorganizational ties is inextricably bound up with social phenomena such as friendship networks and trust building” (Darr 2003: 32).

Darr’s case study of New York City electronic sales shows how business people’s decision making is largely based on social networks rather than based on “rational” economic choices such as profit maximization in the market system. Actually, his informants used a term called putting an order “on the street” to refer to exchange most like the common economic model of a market system, a term that has connotations of increased risk and uncertainty (Darr 2003: 38).

Ultimately, Darr demonstrates that gifting is part of a “‘moral economy,” defined by Grint as “the pattern of work relationships that are rooted in social, moral, and symbolic norms and traditions, in contrast to the ‘market economy’ where relationships are presumed to be based wholly in individual rational evaluations of effort, cost and reward” (Darr 2003: 49). I think it is very important to explain the moral economy of graphic designers in their rationality for the professionalization of the field.

The study of nonprofit theatres mentioned above contests an assertion by Collins and Porras (1996) that “organizational values are essential and enduring tenets that are intrinsic to the firm’s mission and unaffected by the external environment” (quoted in Voss 2000: 330). Voss,
Cable and Voss write that “markets often fail to capture valuable information because it is difficult to place a price tag on the ‘particular approach or style of production, or a spirit of innovation or experimentation’ that is critical to the success of theatre” (Voss 2000: 333). Our market perspective can be so invisibly cultural that we apply what Jennifer and Paul Alexander call “commonsense inference” to anthropological investigations, an oversight which does little to make real sense of Javanese market motivations (Alexander 1991: 497).

Indeed, it is crucial in general to debunk the myth of the rational economic man not only because the supposedly “objective rational” is culturally embedded, but because some of the models are flat-out wrong. One example on this wrongness is the idea that competition for business necessarily creates better products. In graphic design, the competition is for both high paying jobs and creatively flexible clients. Designers may not always be seeking the profit maximizing project if they have room in their schedule and budget to take on a lower-paying, more creatively open client. High paying clients may not necessarily provide the conditions for the best design production. A large, high paying client may have more restrictive demands than one who is smaller and lower paying. Another example that questions the improvement that competition makes upon products is in the computer program design sector. According to Oudshoorn, Rommes, and Stienstra’s account of electronic communication networks design, competition creates such a high level of suspicion towards outsiders that

“ICT [information and communication technologies] companies are reluctant to test new products among potential users for fear that other firms will become aware of their plans at an early phase of product development” (Oudshoorn 2004: 31).

In the end, the wider user-friendliness of these products is compromised because the companies only test on technology-aware male users inside the company, thus making the communication
networks unsuccessful at achieving the goal of “everybody” being a potential user. Here, competition did not serve as the force to make the best product.

As much as economic models are social constructs and imperfect, there still is an economic reality to graphic design. Graphic design does not function on creativity alone, but is a combination of “artistic imperatives and business realities” (Voss 2000: 335). An anthropologist investigating creative activities must then be sure not to get carried away by the impressive power of the stories of artistic lives. Voss, Cable and Voss critique the favoring of the Western individualistic artist myth in previous literature on nonprofit theatres, writing, “An intrinsic focus on artistic creativity, innovation, and independence emerges throughout the extant literature on the cultural industries.” (Voss 2000: 336) Voss, Cable and Voss investigate outside of the Western individualistic creativity myth by examining the social dimensions of cultural production at the nonprofit theaters, and how the values of a theatre are determined by social forces.

My studies of the culturally constructed business rationality of graphic design and American business-at-large support the view that the non-West is not the only home to the culturally reasoned decision. Alexander & Alexander self-reflexively point out that while we do not have information about how peasant economies control and distribute information concerning prices and supply conditions, “there are...very few empirical accounts of the way in which information concerning prices and supply conditions is distributed and controlled in any economy, not only peasant economies” (Alexander 1991: 498). As evidence of our non-market rationality, they cite that

“Empirical studies of markets in industrialized economies during the seventies revealed practices which were equally difficult to explain in terms of conventional economic
theories. Firms tended to produce intermediate goods themselves rather than buy them more cheaply on the spot market” (Alexander 1991: 500).

Graphic design, as an industry ultimately determined by the existence of industrialized economies, is a great specific target for testing assumptions about market economics. This is because graphic design currently does not function under the rule of capitalist pragmatism because it is going through the process of rational routinization now. As graphic design is in transition towards credentialization, conflicts between art and business in their self-conception are aggravated and amplified.

CONFLICT IN THE GRAPHIC DESIGNER'S SELF-CONCEPTION

The popular but vague adjective “creative” is coded with heavily veiled historical assumptions and is a major characteristic by which designers identify themselves. Art historical canons construct an understanding of creativity as super-human inspiration, as above and beyond normal human functioning and abilities. My graphic designer informants speak of creativity as one way to relatively distinguish risk-takers from other types of people, a less-exclusive variant of the creative genius model. Here, creativity comes to be defined not as a personal skill, but as a position of social standing that is in opposition to or outside of what creative people conceive of as mediocre and stagnant popular, normal, or average thought. To identify oneself as creative is to identify oneself as part of an existent class of persons more open-minded and intelligent than the average person, assuming similarity to others who identify themselves as creative. According to Richard Florida, “creatives” in the “creative class” are just the bold people that make use of a capacity that everyone has. Historian and social critic Paul Fussell would call this the false American conception of “classless class” (Fussell), which appears whenever a social
theory masks the exclusivity and restraints of the class system in place. I wonder if the so-called “creative” is fundamentally different from other people, as in the “divine genius” Michelangelo archetype, or just acts differently because he/she has placed himself/herself in this cultural classification. The restraints of the “creative” cultural classification, with an institutionalized visual history riding on its back, create a conflict for designers who perceive certain choices in their work as being between the “creative” world and the presumed oppositional “business” world. This conflict is spurred by the almost nonsensical cultural assumption that creativity does not adhere to the rules of the straight-laced, business world, of social class’s restrictions, or perhaps to any rules at all.

Standing Out as a “Creative”

Many of the qualifications designers use to distinguish their creative selves from other selves is through refusing conventional “corporate” workplace expectations. The creative director I spoke to, a job that involves managing designers within a firm, said he was interested in design through artistic aspirations, that he loved art but “wanted to be able to get work at a job and only shave once a month” (interviewee 18). One PCAD professor also commented on the ability of impressive design students to bypass the traditional rules of conventional appearances (interviewee 3). She said that there is a stereotype that design students have piercings and a strange appearance, but at PCAD they do not try to teach students to disprove this stereotype because the professional staff there see evidence that employers look past personal appearances to students’ portfolio of work. There is a tension between seeking the legitimizing affect that non-conventional appearances achieve for the individual within the design community, and the
negative judgments that persons outside the design community make of that same appearance. The creative persons I spoke to agree that their creative mindsets affects their perceptions of non-creatives, such as this case of the creative director visualizing shaving as characteristic of the straight laced, un-creative world. In terms of workplace standards of personal appearance, another designer said, “we can get away with being eccentric and dressing less corporate” (interviewee 10). I thought that the “get away with” language was an important indication of the designer’s view of himself/herself as outside of a certain system of bureaucratic rules. This designer also said that “creatives” are different because “we don’t require our peers to be the same as us.” This construct of creative identity as different from a conformist norm is interesting in that the “conformist norm” may not be as thoroughly binding as creatives portray it. In fact, Lampel, Lant and Shamsie write, “knowledge without creativity can rarely meet the challenge of continuous innovation needed to sustain advantage” (Lampel 2000: 264). It is clear that the emphasis on creative identity is part of graphic design’s cultural ideal rather than a response to some objective reality in which other people are not creative.

One major influence that the creative identity has on the graphic design work culture is that working freelance is considered the moment of self-actualization in one’s design career. Most career trajectories of the designers I spoke to included a positively noted transition from a firm or in-house position to working for themselves. Most designers identity freedom and creative challenge as motivation for leaving the more bureaucratic workplace for self-employment. One designer framed it as a choice between corporate American and the creative life, saying that “We can work in corporate America, but we don’t want to” (interviewee 10). This framing of freelance as personal choice resolves the reality for some of going freelance as being “pushed out” of the bureaucratic system or not being able to handle it. The creative
director did call the movement from agency to agency to freelance as indicative of those “crybabies,” who will always have something to complain about (interviewee 18). Regarding a designer who recently left the ad agency to start his own small design company, he said, “being idealistic is beautiful, but not sellable.” It seems that designs that are made to be beautiful are too unconventional for the account executives to persuade clients to pay for them. “Sellable” means conventional when clients are apprehensive about taking risks.

Another reason “creatives” leave a firm or business is not because of freedom, but because of wanting a challenge, a desire that seems to incorporate more understanding of workplace reality than the dream of creative freedom. One PCAD instructor said she went freelance to get the variety of work she did not receive in projects delivered by creative directors at the firm (interviewee 3). The tension between creative and economic motives is something that every designer faces and the tensions change as the designer’s career progresses. Designers seem to reflect the rational routinization of the profession in becoming more rationally routinized as they work in the field. The initial idealistic charisma subsides as practical concerns mount.

Urban theorist Robert Florida is a major figure in the redefinition of the creative ethos and his work was recommended to me by some of my informants. He leads the way in promoting an economically savvy model of creative workers, labeling them the “creatives” of the “creative class.” Florida promotes the idea of creative business as fundamental to a health economy, a viewpoint that Heil supports when she commented in a 2003 article, “people often underestimate the economic impact that arts organizations have on a city...the Pennsylvania School of Art & Design estimates that it generates about $11 million in economic activity per year” (Olencheck 2003: 1). A new definition of creativity is emerging that is more engrained in the economic ethos.
Florida cites a definition of creativity from Boden that seems to address the issue of creativity’s origins that reads “Creativity draws crucially on our ordinary abilities. Noticing, remembering, seeing, speaking, hearing, understanding language, and recognizing analogies: all of these talents of Everyman are important” (Boden quoted in Florida 2002: 32). The Western individualized artistic ideal has been spotlighted as a cultural construction by both feminist artists and modern artists that reveal commercial processes as fundamental to their work (one example being the public works artists Jeanne-Claude and Christo). However, these challenges to the Western artistic ideal question the networks between artist and public, but have not addressed the cultural constructions behind creativity and inspiration. In the realm of design, creativity can be redefined in terms of the social network’s influence on the ideas of the individual.

*The Problematic Artistic Ethos*

Despite artistic creativity’s social roots, one way for designers to orient themselves in the hybrid, in-between realm of graphic design is to identify with the classical, historically legitimized idea of individualistic artistic creativity. The main reason designers identify with artists in Lancaster is because of the effort to foster the arts community, which designers see as helpful to their cause of making the public aware of the ubiquity of their creative work. A few of my informants agreed that if the visual arts community is growing in Lancaster and helps people appreciate what visual artists do, then people will, by the transitive property of better understanding creativity, understand the work of designers, too. One Lancaster native and long time designer said that the specific Lancaster arts city marketing initiative of First Fridays is causing “creative people to come out of the woodworks,” some of whom may be both fine artist
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and graphic designers, working in both fields and drawing attention to both types of work (interviewee 7). Two former PCAD students also commented that the quality of PCAD students is growing and that while it used to be mostly “local kids,” PCAD is able to recruit nationally now and attract a stronger pool of students owing to the enthusiasm for the arts in Lancaster (interviewees 7 and 18). One initiative of the Creative House of Lancaster, an informal networking group for creatives in Lancaster, is the Art in Alternative Spaces, which coordinates the display of designer’s design and artwork in local spaces, such as Rachel’s Creperie. The founder of the CHL says that this type of event “forces commercial artists to say their work is art and is just as good as artwork” through the practice of public display in a non-functional (i.e. a poster for an event that has passed) context (interviewee 10). One ad agent commented on creative people’s possessive egos, saying designers can’t really claim as much ownership to their work as they do because he thinks, “if it’s not hanging in a museum, it’s not yours” (interviewee 5). The CHL’s Art in Alternative Spaces is a defense against this perspective because it tries to show that designed materials can be displayed and appreciated even when the information they are communicating is not time-relevant. This practice feeds off of the enthusiasm for the art community to prove the design is not just similar to, but equal to or better than, visual arts.

Lancaster city’s emphasis on the arts through local gallery support and promotion is a complicated aspect of the designers’ relationship with artistic creativity. The question comes up often as to whether a growing gallery scene and art market culture really affects design culture. Is it true that the gallery culture and Friday Fridays have influenced design institutions? PCAD’s college gallery is on Prince Street and is incorporated into the community of Gallery Row venues that stay open late on the first Friday of every month; one PCAD student sees the expansion of the PCAD building’s Prince Street facade as indicative of how the design community is growing
with the arts community (interviewee 2). These physical changes in an educational institution that is formally part of the city do not necessarily reflect cultural changes in the more informal design community, however. The Pennsylvania Academy of Music on the same street has likewise expanded, seemingly indicating that PCAD’s rejuvenation may have more to do with Prince Street rejuvenation efforts than any city initiative to promote design. The growth in the arts community has certainly sparked discussion and evaluation in the graphic design community of the similarities and differences between art and design. But what aspects of the design culture could really be changed? Perhaps the creative community cannot be cleanly separated out into categories of visual arts, graphic arts, and musical arts. One informant commented on the music scene with the Chameleon Club as its focal point, encouraging arts and design both through inspirational underground community and through work needed to be done for concert and music venues (interviewee 7). There is this tension between graphic designers seeing themselves as part of a greater creative movement and as part of a unique profession. This reveals the individualistic ideal in the desire to assert uniqueness and the socially constituted reality of belonging to an organized economy and creative culture.

Graphic design culture also mimics the art historical ethos of spotlighting and heroicizing specific individual artists. The major example of this process, canonization, in graphic design history is the attention to book designer Chip Kidd. Veronique Vienne claims that “His fame is the product of a culture that lionizes artists in order to turn them into commodities” (Vienne 2003: 10) and that he has been described as “a designer demigod”, “an inky colossus” and “the closest thing to a rock star” (11). In her account of Kidd’s career, Vienne makes sure to situate him within the social influences of his design studio, mentors, and the growing proliferation of stock photography which sparked his ironic photographic juxtapositions. She also emphasizes
his “nerd hero” status in order to challenge the projection of artistic ideals onto graphic
designers. She mentions that he was in the marching band when he studied at Penn State and
that “it is people like Kidd–the slightly nerdy types who go to comic books conventions–who
turn out to be smarter than all of us because they can read between the lines. They are the
outsiders who get the inside jokes” (Vienne 2003: 23). Chip Kidd is a famous graphic designer
who represents the art historical tradition of canonizing individuals while also offering grounds
through which designers express their graphic design specific ideals.

Designers are also likely to orient themselves as uniquely outside of the arts community, thus
legitimizing themselves through differentiation. Not only does graphic design require more
business interactions to make money than fine art, but also one design scholar writes, “Graphic
design is both a rational and an artistic activity. The decision-making process in graphic design
alternates between the consideration of objective information and intuitive leaps” (Frascara
1988: 26). One designer put it clearly, that “some art is Graphic Design, but not all Graphic
Design is art,” thus eliminating the interchangeability of the terms “art” and “design”
(interviewee 7). A PCAD teacher said that there is a certain amount of camaraderie between
PCAD design students created just because they are different from fine art students (interviewee
1). One advocate for the individuality of the design community says that “we have to set
ourselves apart as doing different work than the visual arts” in order for graphic designers to
really gain more respect and authority (interviewee 10). These theorists believe that tagging
along with developments in the visual arts distracts the graphic design community from the
public misunderstandings that need to be righted. Such designers are the ones forming the UPC
initiative in Lancaster, the Underground Promotional Collective, which aims to raise awareness
of what designers do– why design is important and why designers deserve respect– mostly
targeted towards the business community. These designers do not take the growing art scene as an appropriate response to the plight of the “design underdog”: as one designer commented, it seems to be more a development for tourists, not the working creative class. One designer commented “all the arts do is make Lancaster a destination, which brings people in from out of the area” (interviewee 7). The people from out of the area are not dependable spenders and are not doing business with the working creative class of designers. They are buying paintings and leaving (or even just looking at the painting and leaving), therefore the Richard Florida followers see the “creative” economy as a whole, including designers, as a more stable local money-maker.

Other problem-solving emphasizing designers see design as different from the arts in terms of how it communicates and its functionality. One designer for the Sunday News says that “fine arts come from macro-orientations, such as general and personal symbols, while graphic design is very specific” in its symbolic communications (interviewee 7). Different from visual artists, designers take pleasure in doing things for the needs of others. One young designer described what designers do as to “simplify what clients complicate,” noting that “visual clutter is confusing and intimidating and we create a starting point for viewing information” (interviewee 14). This designer, as well as many others, take pleasure in serving the clients’ needs despite the conflict and restrictions it may place on creative expression and innovation. One PCAD teacher said, “it is satisfying to have a finished piece, but the purpose is not to please myself” (interviewee 1). A creative director asserts, “Art for yourself is fine art, that is where criticism doesn’t count” (interviewee 18). Here, he defines graphic design in the context of the cultural artistic ideal. Criticism does count in fine art, especially the art critics that influence galleries, buyers, and museum curators. Yet at the end of the day, if an artist does not sell a painting, he/she usually does not change the painting, but rather tries to put a new spin on its description
or moves on to create a new painting. For graphic design, client and manager criticism is part of the process and graphic design products are not printed into a physical reality without facing critique. Incorporating outsider needs and critique suggests that designers see themselves as more socially oriented creatives as opposed to the isolated, self-oriented artist. These designers justify design’s respectability independent of the fine arts by highlighting the special social contexts of graphic communication’s production and influence.

One way that designers identify each other is through establishing “nerd” or “geek” identities. The “nerdy” identity is quite different from the artist identity. While the artist is self-expressive, the nerd displays an intense interest in social specificities. I remember when self-described Hollywood geek Simon Pegg said in Interview Magazine in May 2007, "Geek is just another word for enthusiastic. As long as we keep loving stuff and remain unembarrassed by our enthusiasm, I think other people will feel the same way.” Although there are many different ways to be enthusiastic outside the “geek” classification, this particular definition can be used to validate the designer’s technical interests in light of the artistic ethos. I think a good working definition for the design geek/nerd is one who is obsessively enthusiastic about seeking out knowledge regarding design technology, typography, design history, and design in popular culture. The enthusiasm for technology and harboring deep obsessions with fonts, designs artifacts, and design trivia enables designers to relate to each other as nerds. And this is an exclusive club, one in which they proudly assert themselves outside the mainstream.

One example of the designer nerd community at work is the production of and hype surrounding a little documentary about the eponymous font Helvetica. Regarding the typographically-oriented design nerd’s interests, designer Erik Speikermann said that,
“I'm obviously a typomaniac, which is an incurable, if not mortal disease. I can't explain it, I just love, I just like looking at type...other people look at bottles of wine or whatever or girls' bottoms and I get kicks outta looking at types. It’s a little worrying I must admit, a little nerdish thing to do” (Speikermann 2007).

I would argue that seeing Helvetica is almost like a rite of passage for designers nowadays. If you know that this movie exists and have seen it, you have proved your nerdiness by finding a documentary about a typeface.

Another interesting characteristic of design work that leads some designers to classify themselves as nerds is the need for inventive use of language to express design concepts. Since design does not have a fully developed language of its own to describe all the visual, organizational, expressive concepts it involves, designers create their own language in order to communicate with each other. There are new words and new uses of old words at work. In Helvetica, type designer Jonathan Hoefler of The Hoefler Type Foundry gives an example of a creative use of metaphor he uses to communicate a typographic idea to his partner, saying “This needs has that centered five rocket NASA quality and it needs to have that orange plastic Olivetti typewriter roman holiday espresso feeling.” One Lancaster designer said, “Designer language is a marker of a different design community from the idiot masses” (interviewee 17). Some of the types of language he refers to are knowing technical shorthand terms for paper, about hung punctuation, and about the en and em types of dashes. The foundations of a self-identified “geek” seem to correlate with the direction of the credentializing process. “Geek” involves technical consideration and enthusiasm for sharing information within exclusive networks.

The artistic ethos also arises in debates over creative authorship, the right to lay claim to ideas involved in the design process. Do ideas belong to oneself, to the clients, to the public?
Establishing this context can help us ground our understanding of a certain type of work in terms of its purpose. Unfortunately, graphic design teeters on the edge of all of these types of ownership. The controversy over creative authorship is a defining characteristic of graphic design. The opinions on creative authorship in graphic design are widely varied and assertive, and I pretty much heard them all throughout my informant interviews.

Some designers believe that design creativity is similar to and equivalent to the creativity demonstrated in the visual arts. The Creative House of Lancaster’s “Art in Alternative Spaces” encourages designers to see the creative value of their work beyond its function. One creative director and former designer that I spoke with would see this as a reflection of new “wonder” with the field, which dissipates once you have been at it for so long. He called graphic design a “burnout field” due to the constant stream of criticism from clients and bosses, stressing that one must toughen up in order to handle it all (interviewee 18). To do so designers find ways to make the work more impersonal, usually by transferring authority over projects to the client. Some who subscribe to this school of thought see the designer who is distanced from his work as more mature than one who is more attached. The creative director I spoke with referred to distancing oneself as “growing up,” and that he grew thicker skin and had to put his ego aside when he realized, “at the end of the day I’m convincing people to buy stuff they may or may not need” (interviewee 18). These opinions clearly come from the cutthroat advertising background of design.

The instructor I spoke to at Millersville teaches her students to assert creative authorship over all types of design (interviewee 6). Her goal is for designers to be able to create from beginning to end without client input, then market the finished product to a client afterwards. These approaches would only work for certain products rather than brand-specific advertising
and identity design. An example of this instructor’s execution of the "create & sell" strategy is a nutrition game about diabetes that they designed, then sold to a game distributor. It is necessary to say, though, that this strategy is not widely considered or attempted by graphic designers in Lancaster because it does not ensure income.

Designers who are not as interested in asserting creative authorship are usually more interested in carrying out the goals of the client. They believe that goals of creative innovation create tensions between the designer’s desires and the client’s desires or needs. Oudshoorn documents that one case in which the goal of creative authorship became problematic involved communication technology design in Amsterdam during the 1990s. Originally, the internet-based communication technologies were intended to bring people of all different backgrounds together by making the technology as accessible as possible to different types of users. However, “the designers’ objective to leave their own marks on the program resulted in a design that made the interface far more complicated to use” (Oudshoorn 2004: 38) and “instead of user-friendliness and access for everybody, ‘experimenting’ and ‘positioning Amsterdam as an innovative city’ became the key concepts that shaped the design” (Oudshoorn 2004: 39). It is true that some designers believe that it is selfish to place your desire to be innovative, and thus stand out from the crowd as a designer, over what the client wants. The ultimate innovation-driven designers would argue, though, that the client does not know enough about design to have an opinion.

Overall, the traditional Western conception of creativity is highly entrenched in the individualistic artistic ethos. In resisting the bureaucratic realities of rational routinization, some graphic designers look to the artistic ethos as a model for legitimizing graphic design creativity. Others orient themselves as outside the artistic model for work and concentrate on the creative
and business aspects of design. These designers are in the forefront of the rational routinization process by advocating for the professionalization of the field and essentially demanding respect. It is clear that the rational routinization process does not operate at a culturally disembedded level. It involves the cultural rationalized initiatives of designers who think outside the artistic ethos, as well as the resistance of those who do not. This tension between the bureaucratic designers and the creatively resistant makes for messy definitions of who is a professional design insider or outsider.

Interconnectivity with Advertising

The overlap and disjunctions between what is graphic design and what is advertising also serves to distort the views of design insiders and outsiders. A graphic designer may be involved in the advertising industry, but not always or in all his/her work. A graphic designer does not necessarily always work with the purpose to sell. Sometimes the purpose is to inform and educate, to shock the viewer into awareness, to cause social action, to improve the aesthetics of an existing visual identity, to identify a non-commercial institution, etc. An advertising company can be known for excellent graphics and advertising executives may have design awareness and employ designers, but advertising involves much more than the visual. It involves psychological audience analysis, sociological study, planning the placement of designed objects, writing slogans communicating brand identities, discerning the information to be relayed, public relations management and product impact assessment. Some designers incorporate an advertising-like vision into their services, but these are seen more as “graphic designers plus” rather than the work of true graphic designers. A graphic designer offering the sort of marketing initiative associate with advertising agents is likely to gain more business, but may also be
viewed as an outsider, traitor, or sell-out by some designers because he/she has not limited himself/herself to the visual field. A designer who also sets up Facebook pages for her clients is using social networking to reach the audiences of her designs through an additional medium. This designer-advertiser combination may well be the new face of the graphic designer; an adaptation to serve a business environment in which having the creative people in charge of the advertising is more successful than the advertisers being in charge of their creative counterparts. Nevertheless, the tension between the designer and the designer-advertiser illuminates a self-conception in flux.

It seems that contemporary graphic design was born of a growing awareness of the visual tools of advertising (layout, printmaking style, imagery, and especially typography) that expanded to include an awareness of the visual tools in other industries—notably publishing, news and other media, as well as graphic elements in interior space. Graphic design also has come to entail the digital realm, with graphic design associated with work done using computers. Although many modern graphic designers use handmade elements and experiment with old-fashioned printmaking strategies, they do so expressively rather than out of necessity or practicality. Graphic design’s connotation of newness is situated in a technological framing of the profession. Because the tools are redefined, the profession is being redefined. There is no longer the tradition of craft on which designers can rely to define their work and demand respect. The clouded redefinition of the field based on technology is one part of the graphic designer’s rationale for the rational routinization of the profession.
The Business Reality of the “Freelancer’s Freedom”

One aspect of graphic design that rationalizes resistance to rational routinization’s bureaucracy is the opportunity designers have to work independently as freelancers. While discussing their work as freelancers, designers place the emphasis on achieving more creative freedom than they had within the bureaucratic constraints of a larger business. The creative aspect is clearly valued over the business context of the situation of working on one’s own. A few designers, however, shared with me practical concerns that caused tension for them, requirements for running one’s own business that exist outside the cultural ideal concept of the “freelancer’s freedom.”

One designer, for instance, explained all the steps he had to take to set up his freelance business last year (interviewee 17). The groundwork it takes to get a freelance business up and running is definitely glossed over in career trajectory tales of getting fed up with the firm and accessing creative freedom through freelancing instead. One recently established freelance designer said that to lay the groundwork for his freelance business, he had to buy a domain name for a website, set up an email address, website and stationery with the business name, set up the price list for clients and a price estimating template for himself, create invoices, memos, letter templates, and organize his address book in terms of clients, printers, photographers and paper companies. In terms of purchases, he replenished his paper samples, and bought a printer, an SLP camera with tripod, a scanner, office equipment, an extra hard drive and his own copy of InDesign. All of these purchases required extensive research because he needed to seek out reliable reviews for design work rather than the reviews of the average user who is not as professionally demanding of his/her scanner or printer. The designer estimated that he spent 30 to 40 hours researching the printer purchase alone. Even after all of that, he must set up a
business name in Pennsylvania and obtain a bank account for it. A lot of these tasks had to do with setting up his business identity legally through the state government and visually through stationery and so forth, which is a process some freelancers may skip altogether by working under their personal name. These freelancers nonetheless have to deal with the reality of managing their own businesses, even if they choose to identify their work by their personal names rather than a business name. They have to have the money to start a business, even before there is a revenue stream, and the marketing capabilities to bring in new clients.

Because of the independent work necessary prior to beginning actual design work as a freelancer, some designers prefer not to do freelance work. One designer said that after he separated from his previous employer, and before he decided to start the freelance business, he completed 60 applications in 4 months, spending about 20 hours per week on the project of finding a job at a firm or business (interviewee 17). Maintaining the business after the initial establishment can also be a turn off. One newly-independent designer now in a two-person partnership said that he feels as though he has less time to spend on designing than he did at the firm, where division of labor separated the business aspects from his responsibilities (interviewee 14). He says that now he is involved in business, financial, and hiring decisions as well as working on gaining new business. He says “it’s all a balancing act” between business and design tasks, whereas he only designed at the firm. Clearly, specialization of labor offered in bigger firms has a practical rationality in making it possible for designers to be doing the design tasks they want to be doing rather than running the business.

Some other problems include what one designer called the “feast or famine” syndrome, referring to the ebb and flow of freelance work that is more dramatic than the regularized workflow at a firm (interviewee 17). At a firm, the bureaucracy determines a more even pace of
work because supervisors and administrators focus on dividing up tasks in an orderly fashion. One designer described how when he became a freelance designer, the new employee who filled his old position at a small publishing business could not handle all the work and the publishers hired the original designer as a freelancer to help out (interviewee 17). One communications director made a striking comment that no other informant spoke of, which was that “the biggest problem of going freelance is having no healthcare” (interviewee 11). Sometimes, the bureaucratic system is an effective construction meant to help the employed.

There are also other reasons for leaving the more bureaucratic firm for the individualized freelance work besides the desire for creative authority. Many designers described the process of moving on as inherent to the difficulty of the business. The creative director I spoke to said that people move on because they have become disenchanted with the field due to the pressure of fitting in with clients’ and supervisors’ preferences and that moving to another firm or to freelance work is a way to try to shake that disenchantment (interviewee 18). Weber would argue that the disenchantment is a condition of the rational ethos of Western capitalism. Others just see the firm atmosphere as not offering enough challenges and opportunities for personal and creative growth. Striving for a challenge is different in one’s design work from the fantastical ease with which the freelance is perceived to create freely. Others see the process of moving to freelance as a natural flow of things rather than a radical decision. The creative director calls this the “grass is greener syndrome.” He commented on how moving from firm to firm to freelance is based on not being happy in your work environment no matter what. Despite his critique of the pickiness of “grass is greener” designers, he sees the “incestuous” process of moving from firm to firm as a bigger picture system of bringing a growing number of workers into a place. If there is enough business to support increasing numbers of freelance designers, as seems to be the
case in Lancaster, the flow of designers out of firms to freelance also creates a flow of designers into town to take the open positions at the firms. Overall, bigger economics trends of labor specialization are at work in catalyzing the designer’s freelancing goal than just the individual’s creative motivation. Here, we see how an independent-minded creative is bounded within a culturally constituted context that may even enable and promote that sense of individuality.

Lancaster’s Part in Designers’ Self-Conception

The specificities of place frame the individualistic creative person’s work experience. Lancaster is an excellent resource for modern cultural research. The city is large enough to contain a diversity of creative perspectives, but small enough that some people do perceive cohesive cultural identities or relate to the city very intimately. I have been especially interested in the area because it is a creative environment in flux. The historic printing legacy of the region is transforming into graphic design, while the public promotion of the visual arts offers dynamic conditions. All of this demands designers to assert their identity in the mix.

Designers see graphic design as particularly thriving in Lancaster because they perceive the area to be one of the manufacturing hubs of the East Coast, with massive manufacturing businesses requiring local advertising sources. Examples of this manufacturing concentration include companies like Armstrong, home improvement and flooring businesses, and a Starbucks roaster in York. This concentration, when combined with advertising needs of hospitals and travel tourism, creates what one designer calls a “ready-made market” (interviewee 18). Some Lancastrians believe Pennsylvania College of Art and Design (PCAD) president Mary Colleen-Heil’s hypothesis that Armstrong was the seed that caused “artsy-types” to relocate to Lancaster, and that because of the influx of new residents and the increase in tourism, Lancaster is now a
“semi-destination” for residing and for tourist spending. This promotion of the idea that Lancaster is an especially strong advertising economy is one component of the graphic designer’s experience in Lancaster– one that offers the benefits of job opportunities as well as the challenging conservative aesthetic preferences of the advertising agents.

One designer proudly boasted that 50% of American manufacturers live one and a half hours from Lancaster and explains this as a force drawing graphic designers into the area (interviewee 18). It is not important to the anthropologist whether this is true, but how the statement demonstrates informants’ belief in this truth affects the ways they perceive the strength and prominence of the Lancaster design community. Lancastrians tend to identify Lancaster as a cultural focal point, with cities like York and Harrisburg being industrial cores. Here one can see the insider-outsider perspective in action. Designers feel sure about what Lancaster is like because of what it is not like, which is readily evidenced by the types of businesses prominent in other local cities. One designer from York can see local concern for the arts and culture here reflected in the way people on the street are much more expressive in how they dress (interviewee 14). Expressive dress can be described as seeking styles of clothing outside what is offered to the public in mass-produced, easily available form. Expressive dressers search for clothing in thrift stores and vintage stores from different decades and realms of society to find pieces of clothing that they feel more specifically express their selves.

The printing history of the city lays the foundation for designers’ pride in Lancaster’s design past. Benjamin Franklin founded his printing press in Lancaster in 1751 and was squashed by the previously established Ephrata press (Stolzfus 2009: 1). The fact that the American father of printing was run out of town by an already existing printing business in Lancaster County shows that a successful local industry existed independent of the urban
printing celebrity. Such a historical anecdote has the power to inspire resident designers to see Lancaster as a “natural” home for design that even preceded Benjamin Franklin. It is directly linked to Lancaster’s German-Lutheran and Reformed population, which imported a deeply imbedded print culture from Europe. In addition to widespread printing resources that survive from this historical industry, Lancaster designers have access to a number of photographers. Before desktop publishing, photographers were required by designers to shoot images to go in printed works, which were then dealt with by production houses that direct the production of various forms of advertising including print. Because desktop publishing programs compressed the photographer’s job into digital tasks, Lancaster is full of photographers left over from the production houses, individuals who now work freelance and in local advertising. One Lancaster designer discusses the resources situation by saying that photographers are “coming out of our ears” (interviewee 18). Being secure in such resources and seeing this as an ideal place to print projects must affect whether designers think there is a design community.

This combination of printers as resources, and manufacturers as clients, offers the ideal atmosphere for advertising agencies. As a result, the competition between designers for advertising agency clients is perhaps not as fierce as in other cities of the same size. Lancaster designers are very comfortable discussing the business aspect of acquiring jobs, because they feel as if there is a lot of work to go around. This enables a system of passing on and trading jobs, based on one’s work load or skill set. If one company or freelancer is too swamped to take on a job, the client will be recommended to another company or freelancer because it is more important to be reliable and finish jobs than it is to try to acquire as many jobs as possible. A similar networking and sharing system is referenced when a designer does not feel comfortable with the skill set required for a project. They will recommend another designer for the job if the
original designer feels that he/she can’t sufficiently learn the skills quickly or well enough for the job. For some projects, a designer might use the networking system to gain the skills needed, at least well enough to complete the project. For example, one designer described seeking out advice for a project that involved floor plan drawings (interviewee 3). However, if the project had involved medical drawings, the designer would have to pass the challenge of that skill set to another person.

One freelance designer who began his freelance business in 2008 has been fully occupied by business gained through networks made at his former place of employment (interviewee 17). One of the characteristics of graphic design that most designers can agree with is that there are many skills related to the field, either as perceived by the designers or by clients—computer programs, knowledge of web design, business and marketing savvy, drawing and artistic skills, production knowledge relating to transforming things from digital to physical domains, typographic sensitivity, skills in developing charts, graphs and other graphic representations of data. In the Graphic Artists Guild Handbook designer Marshall Arisman says, “We have become a one-man or one-woman band. We are going to have to play all the parts. We will orchestrate, conduct, and dance to our own tunes.” (Handbook 2007: xi) Shifting between the designer’s preferred skills to work with the skills needed by a particular client, a designer has to cover a lot of technical ground that cannot really be faked. One designer isn’t capable of completing all the different types of projects that may be offered to him at the quality that will gain him respect in the field. This high specialization is possible because there are so many designers in the city. According to the economic model, labor specialization is explained by the fact that
“Workers make human capital investment decisions on the depth and the breadth of their skill. Given that firms have diverse job requirements and increasing returns to scale, workers invest more for the depth of their human capital and less for the breadth as the size of the labor market increases.” (Kim 1989: 692).

Here, we see that the economic model matches the reality, but does not explain it. Specialized labor is based on the cultural rationality of prestige and the availability of a network to use to help the client still get a designer.

Another aspect of Lancaster city culture that several of my informants commented on is the tradition of the “German work ethic.” Some see the supposed German work ethic as a force motivating responsible work, discipline, and efficiency. However, others see this tradition as an enforcer of business community conservatism, with the German work ethic being biased against the different systems of value that designers use to evaluate creative work. While physical work could be gauged in hours, for example, a creative design may take a short amount of time if the designer is well researched and particularly inspired. These short and fast hours may not fit neatly in to the framework of the German work ethic. Designers do not always keep traditional work hours either. Freelance designers work according to their own understanding of the ebb and flow of their creative energies, and firm designers may have to put in long night hours to account for the inconsistent work flow when business is heavier. The manufacturing work ethic is also perceived to differentiate the area from the advertising ethics of the West Coast, which caters more to fashion and sports industries.

Another aspect of the conservatism of Lancaster community is the insider/outside dichotomy. As much as the Lancaster-born pride does encourage outsiders to consider living here, the Lancaster-born do not readily extend community ties to outsiders just because those
outsiders live and work in the city. According to one Lancaster-born printing vendor, Lancastrians feel it is false to accept people from the beginning of a relationship; being “closed off” until you prove yourself is a way to build stronger both business and personal relationships in the end (interviewee 4). He ties the suspicion of the out-of-towner to the old farm community traditions. One Lancaster-born designer to whom I spoke finds outsider influence suspect because of the devastating effects that Park City Mall’s construction had on downtown business throughout the 70s and 80s (interviewee 7). In-towners have seen how big a change it is that downtown independent businesses are now opening, and that the arts are creating a healthy community culture again. They are resentful of outsiders who do not understand how hurtful to the city it could be if things slip again. Some designers may interpret the creative conservativeness of businesspeople strictly as Lancaster conservativeness, but some of the tension between designers and business people represents conflict within the cultures of both fields, which I will discuss at greater length below.

One major force pulling people into Lancaster is the affordable cost of living in this town relative to nearby advertising powerhouses like Philadelphia, New York City, Baltimore and Washington, DC. One instructor at Millersville even sees a trend of creative people who are educated in Lancaster, leave for work somewhere else and then return to the city, bringing with them new ideas, creative enthusiasm, and experiences from outside the area (interviewee 6). She said that “I still feel the area is somewhat conservative and the older design studios are more conservative but in new businesses people are coming back to Lancaster and doing more exciting things.” It is becoming more and more ambiguous whether Lancaster is really just a “stepping stone city” where people go to lay groundwork for a “better” career in the big city (interviewee 2). My informants’ emphasis on the affordability of Lancaster misses the point that creatives in
the design profession are not by nature struggling for employment. Designers do have
opportunities to make enough money to live elsewhere. To cite affordability as a major concern
aligns designers with the myth of the plight of the poor artist. Perhaps playing up the financial
decision making involved in settling in Lancaster enables the designers to portray their residence
as an undiscovered cultural gem, something they had an influence on, something their creative
perspective helps them enjoy, rather than depicting the city as a flashy, commercial, big money
place to live.

Another aspect of Lancaster’s appeal to designers is the city’s efforts to highlight the
visual arts and the edginess the residents see downtown as a result of this creative push.
Lancaster promotes the city with a tagline, “the Edge of the East.” One Clipper Magazine
employee shared his view that “whether it’s a coffeehouse or a restaurant, I feel that it has a lot
of character, it just lends itself to be a sort of artsy town” (interviewee 16). Whatever pieces of
the Lancaster identity designers embrace, it is true that many designers really love the city and
this may play a part in how they perceive design and the design community in the city. What
they see in the city may be what they see in their experience in the design community, something
that has enabled their existence as designers. Like most places, perceptions of Lancaster are very
clearly based on both experiences and expectations and range from enjoying the “small town
feel” of Lancaster combined with a “hip edge”, to seeing the conservativeness as a challenge
they want to work to overcome. Those who are intrigued by the combination of positive traits
and room for change are going to be interested in working hard to make their impact on the city
and will be loyal, while also pushing for change. It is telling that in this post-modern, big city,
mobile world the young founder of the Creative House of Lancaster says, “I’ll never leave
Lancaster” (interviewee 10). Graphic designers in Lancaster are trying to build community open
to newcomers while also credentializing the profession. We can see how the rationality of the designer is fundamental to the realization of rational routinization process.

**THE GRAPHIC DESIGNER’S RATIONALITY FOR PROFESSIONALIZATION**

The biggest issue spoken of by most graphic designers in Lancaster today is the promotion of a professional identity for the field of graphic design. Many designers commented on how there is no official certification to become a graphic designer, like an architect or some other creative professional would have to achieve. The democratization of design technology owing to desktop publishing made it possible for people with a wide range of skills and visual sensibilities to perform the tasks of graphic designers and even call themselves “graphic designers.” This has perhaps opened up the field too much. It is clear that many designers do believe this to be true, but the celebrated-outsiderness of early graphic designers is incongruous with the goals of limiting the insiderness of professional design. Designers want to celebrate their heritage of unconventional innovation while also promoting respect for the field by seeking to professionally limit who can be considered a graphic designer. The methods through which designers, whether individually or collectively, encourage a more exclusive idea of the class of graphic designers highlight the creative-business conflict. Though their thoughts support the theory of rational routinization as a necessary process for professions to have credentials in capitalist culture, I also wanted to show how the designer’s opinions describe the way they perceive their own reality. I did not just want to describe the process in Weberian terms, but also in the designers’ term. Rane Willerslev likewise chooses to promote the validity of the viewpoints of his informants in a study of Siberian Yukaghirs hunters. He challenges the ascribing symbolic anthropology of Tylor, who once said,
“It is to be observed that the explanations which I give of many of the following customs are not the explanations offered by the people who practice these customs. Sometimes people give no explanation of their customs, sometimes (more often than not) a wrong one.” (Willerslev 2007: 16)

The designers’ perceptions of the professionalization of graphic design are valid and important for seeing how the theory of rational routinization looks in everyday life.

The Technological Democratization of Design and the Underdog Mentality

Technology is a part of the everyday experience of designers that is used to describe and evaluate professionalization processes. Namely, the democratization of design technology through desktop publishing programs is used as the focal point of the designer’s “underdog mentality” and desire for respectability. In 1990, Apple first offered the design programs PageMaker 1.0 and the Apple LaserWriter printer. These technological objects made the tasks necessary for printing a designed page quicker, requiring less specialized training and practice. The increase in the number of people who could design their own newsletters and brochures, and the concomitant fostering of the perception that design is simple, created a major point of conflict in graphic designers’ self perceptions resulting from less demand for their services.

Owing to the development of desktop publishing programs like Microsoft Word becoming part of the default computer operating systems, people with little or no training can perform simple design tasks quickly and independently. The anxiety that designers feel about people who think they can be designers without training is great. Many of my informants spoke of the people who think they are designers just because they have purchased the appropriate computer programs. This represents an interesting conflict because, for both the “non-designer”
with the programs and for the designer interpreting the situation, the software is treated as an object that possesses knowledge and skills. The problem of indiscriminate access to design programs has actually changed for the Adobe generation– Adobe design programs Photoshop and InDesign have a high price tag, and the average layperson cannot afford such costs simply for recreation. Only professional designers can invest in the superior programs, while others are left with the less powerful and less prestigious Microsoft programs. I myself have been waiting until design school acceptance to purchase the programs, but use the programs on my work computer outside of work hours for personal design projects. However, designers still describe the design situation as if everyone is running the same programs as they are. A design-savvy student at F&M commented on the fact that not everyone can afford the Adobe programs, and even with her interest in design, she is still made an outsider by her financial status (interviewee 19). This elitist attitude towards over-ambitious secretaries and other non-professionals is at odds with designer’s pride in the outside-the-system quality of their self-taught colleagues and calls into question the reality of the democratization of design.

One of the biggest influences that this shift to professional specialty programs has had on the designers is in how they see non-professional designers forming new opinions about design work. The comment made by most every designer I interviewed is that because of the computer, “everybody thinks they can do everything,” “everyone thinks they are a designer,” “everyone thinks they know design.” However, one designer made a perceptive comment that “in terms of the status of designers in the technological world, it got a lot better after it got a lot worse” (interviewee 17). He agrees with all the other designers that the introduction of Mac design programs created a disaster in terms of people respecting the field of graphic design. But now he says Target and Apple are examples of “design conscious companies, which make people aware
of their designs” and that people are writing about fonts in the New York Times. The designer’s anxiety today about the status of design is perhaps a reaction to the popularizing interest in “good” design that may make the design-aware community large and less intimate. It may also be influenced by a comfort in playing the role of the underdog.

One point of anxiety is that designers must collaborate with clients outside of the field. It is rare that there is an instance that a designer designs for another designer as a client (although there is a genre of “design for designers” that constitutes designers as audiences for certain design books and periodicals, but not as clients directly). Designers have to work with marketing specialists, editors, CEOs, and even family pizza-shop owners. Some workplaces can be more business-centric or more creative-centric than others, but the work always involves non-designers as clients. A designer can work in the advertising or design sector of a larger company, such as Armstrong or Starbucks, and only design for that corporation’s identity. The name for this is “in-house designer.” This is very business-centric because the designer is creatively limited to adhering to a consistent representation of the company, with either typefaces, logos, and/or color restrictions. The designer may also be the only designer for the business if it is a small business. This designer only works with marketing and business specialists for the company and is usually outnumbered in decisions involving choices between conservative, conventional and rule-abiding, or creatively innovative and visually challenging design.

An advertising firm is more creative-centric because it caters to a variety of clients, so there are many different types of visual problems to solve. However, advertising agents tend to stress more conservative creative practices, emphasizing efficiency and reliability as “sellable” qualities in design. Advertising firms are just more creative because there are a variety of clients
and projects to move among, rather than focusing on a single corporate identity. A creative-heavy workplace would be the graphic design-only firm, which focuses on a range of visual production beyond advertising. In contrast to projects with a marketing purpose, graphic design can have informative purposes, too, that do not encourage the viewer to buy anything. A design firm is the workplace with the largest designer population percentage, where the manager or owner may even still design himself or herself or has at least formerly been a designer. Here, the creativity-focus is created relative to the production environment rather than the client base specifically. Whether an in-house designer, ad firm designer, graphic design firm designer, or freelance, all designers have to work with outsiders, whatever their workplace connectivity with other designers may be.

The problem with working with design outsiders is that their perceptions tend to simplify and devalue the work of a designer in light of the public confusion about what designers do. Designers feel that their clients do not understand the time that goes into design and thus do not equate appropriate financial value with design work. This is both a business and an identity issue for designers: they have difficulty negotiating price because people do not have an awareness of the process of design and this makes their job harder. Other misunderstandings result from equating design with the larger category of “artsyness” and the assumption that all designers can draw or have other visual art skills. One PCAD instructor told me that one of the misunderstandings about graphic designers that she has encountered with clients is that designers have fine art skills like painting that they can apply to design projects, implying that some people assume that designers are either failed or sell-out artists or that the design work is so easy that they must have other visually creative skills beyond the design work (interviewee 1).
Designers also adopt the “underdog” mentality into their interpretation of their work’s place in the greater culture and visual environment at large. When speaking about noticing other public design as part of her inspiration, one PCAD instructor and designer said, “Design is the quiet backbone of everything in this country” (interviewee 3). Designers are willing to discuss the visual impact of their designs, but do not believe design itself is very visible as a profession. It is possible to say that the underdog mentality reveals that designers believe more in the power of their work, of the material culture objects that they send into the world, than of themselves as workers. Because their products are working—advertising, informing, persuading, influencing—there is less focus on the work that goes into make those products. The product focus also has to do with the creativity bias towards the creative product that eliminates the social conditions of the productions. Credentialization reflects a belief that the work of graphic designers should be respected just as much as the product.

Un-filtered assertions of identity come from designers who are reflecting on the outsider’s misinterpretation of how designers work. In response to the question of “What is the biggest misunderstanding about graphic designers?”, one designer noted that “People think they can do things themselves, but there is a process to distill something down to its essence” (interviewee 14). When designers share reactions to what they think is a misunderstanding of what design is, it helps an anthropologist learn about what designers think design really is. A good deal of design culture and bonding originates from coping with feelings of anxiety and identity confusion. Networks of people that become more and more solid in face of anxiety and identity confusion will build up the credentializing networks of the profession.

Oudshoorn, Rommes, and Stienstra write that “technologies may create new identities, or transform or reinforce existing identities, by delegating and distributing specific responsibilities,
skills, and tasks to users” (Oudshoorn 2004: 32). The designers with whom I spoke who worked in the field before the advent of desktop publishing are proud to emphasize the laborious work they had to do for their jobs. Clearly, the tasks designated to them by the type of technology available when they entered the field helps them understand their identity relative to younger designers entering the field with access to very different technologies. The printer vendor with whom I spoke explained that in 1984 designers had to cut letters out with exacto knives and place them on copy boards (interviewee 4). They used colored tissue to introduce color into the design and had to draw a complete silhouette of an image in order to show shadows in the design. On the printing end, there would have to be eight people at the printing studio working in “pre-press,” which is preparing a project for printing. Today, there is one “pre-press guy”, also training as a designer, at this printing vendor’s print shop. One designer I spoke to argued that all this extra time and labor kept one from focusing on design (interviewee 18). He said, “When it took five hours to lay out type, you didn’t have time to design.” This shows that some differentiate between design as putting letters on a page in printed form and design as an action of creatively active, visual decision-making. It is like the difference between architectural design and construction, except today designs are expected to do both. By differentiating the physical construction from the “design,” this printing vendor reflects a few of design as luxury compared to the act of printing. The high stakes of making mistakes also prevented those working with the printed page from taking too many risks, risks that one might interpret as “being creative.” My printer informant told me “in the beginning of desktop publishing it cost thousands of dollars if you made a mistake” (interviewee 4). Clearly, personal authorship and creative innovation took the backseat to practical and financial issues in early desktop publishing and before.
There is the interesting question as to whether reliance on digital technologies affect the current generation's conceptions of the physical world. Older designers would probably agree that digital technology weaken younger designers’ conceptions of the physicality of their design projects. What I find interesting is that the digital world and the Internet are still restricted by place– computers exist in the physical world and where they exist matters. For example, in the instance of new communication technologies systems being promoted in Amsterdam during the 1990s, there could be no public openness of the Internet technology without computer portals being accessible to the public. Determining the locations for portals was important for carrying out the goals of access for everybody, and “terminals were placed in the library, in an old people’s home, in a public-access area of the city hall, at a hospital, in a museum, and in the cafe of de Balie” (Oudshoorn 2004: 38). When computers could not be maintained in good working order, the plan of public access was abandoned, because it was more important to the ICT companies that the portals represented the company positively than they offer public access (Oudshoorn 2004: 40). It is evident in this case that the Internet does have place and its bounded by place due to the necessity for computer hardware. Internet space being highlighted over physical space is a cultural construction rather than a natural consequence of using the digital world. I think that the fact that older designers see digital tasks as interfering with a younger designer’s concept of physical reality reveals an anti-technology bias. To speak of computers as technologies rather than tools or materials shows that older designers devalue computers as a mode of production. With computers making the mode of production “easier,” designers feel they must rethink the profession in order to build the prestige of the field.

The analog-to-virtual shift arguably widened the generational gap between younger and older designers. For the most part, older designers were suspicious of the production capabilities of
younger designers. The printing vendor commented that the designers he works with now that are coming out of art school— he calls them the “younger crowd”— put more of an emphasis on design and the look and do not know how to link the image and font files properly to the design files as required for printing (interviewee 4). He advised me that “you have to conceptualize the processes once it leaves your hands, and that this truly grows the base of your knowledge.” One experienced designer commented that “kids today want the flashy stuff” and that they do not have experience in what you can do with the printing press, particularly in working with the grain of different paper and folds and spreads (interviewee 17). Another older designer says she believes that “you don’t really know a designer ‘til you open up one of their files” (interviewee 8). To her, a creative design is less impressive if the files are not appropriately prepared for easy printing. She believes part of the problem is that there is not enough of a focus on production at PCAD. Older designers also are skeptical of the work ethic of younger designers who were only trained in contemporary digital technologies. One former PCAD teacher said he stopped teaching because no one wanted to work hard and that “the MTV generation has a mentality of instant gratification” (interviewee 18). In this case, the popular culture and technological world seem to frame the working world. Younger designers, however, do not seem to so heavily emphasize the creative. They refer to it as a process, but do note older designer’s accounts of type-cutting days. Some study printmaking (or the history of printmaking, like me!) to understand the physical dimensions of graphic design and its history. It is clear that older designers’ concern for the technical shortcomings of younger designers reflects a desire for more stringent credentializing guidelines rather than a widespread reality. Discussions of technology all seem to reveal perspectives on the state of the profession in general.
Recognizing the Important of Interdependence

Designers evaluate the field in terms of network relationships in addition to technical proficiency. Pre-computer design was very specialized. All the tasks involved in realizing a project were totally interdependent, creating a network of interconnected workers. This explains why the print vendor understands so much about the specifics of the earlier designers’ work. Design labor was divided up between the typesetter, the advertising director, the photographer who shot photos of the images, and the printer. One of my informants who began as a typesetter does not even identify herself as a graphic designer, even though she works with design programs on design projects (interviewee 8). She explained that she identifies herself as a “graphic arts specialist,” since she is fascinated by the production end and not in the aspect of creative innovation. Her identity is more specialized than the title of graphic designer and is based on her experience in a more specialized version of the working field. The older division of labor also divided the responsibility, especially for errors, so that even though things may have gone wrong more often there was shared blame. One designer pointed this out, particularly in the case of photo reproduction quality (interviewee 17). Previously, the photographer, production house, and printers shared responsibility for photo reproduction quality, and the designer was barely involved at all. Now the designer is responsible for manipulating photos appropriately, placing them in the document and later interacting with clients about any possible printing errors. Now the designer is responsible for mastering the tasks of what were previously four different positions.

Because computer programs make design processes physically easier, a project does not require as many people to assemble. To most older designers, computer programs seem to erase the previous networks of connections among design technicians. In their eyes there is an inverse
relationship between technological efficiency and strong personal relationships. The printing vendor previously had personal relationships with designer clients based on their dependency on him to understand how to complete projects; he explained how the self-sufficiency of computer programs has “made the environment a little colder because designers don’t rely on you as much” (interviewee 4). He noted that computer technology “in a way is really good in terms of expediency and design aspects, but the personal relationships have dwindled.” Ever since the dawn of desktop publishing, design relationships have become more and more distanced. At this point, one does not even need to exchange a file-holding medium in person, accompanied by social interaction, in order to share a file with a client or printer. One of my younger informants pointed that the way designers exchange files has changed from zip disks to CDs to DCS to email or uploading files onto remotely accessible FTP websites (interviewee 14).

This means that another important component of modern design technology is the Internet. The Internet affects the formats in which designers and clients, and designers and printing vendors, interact, as well as expands the physical distances over which a designer can reach. Many of the designers I spoke with commented positively on how the Internet fosters one’s ability to cater to non-local clients. One local designer manages her own company of multiple designers with national clients completely on the Internet (interviewee 13). She has clients from DC to California and designers working for her from outside the city of Lancaster.

One Lancaster designer is working on a set of long-term projects with a client in Spain and expressed enthusiasm for the fact that the kind of task would have previously required a lot of FedExing (interviewee 17). However, he also told me about the precise scheduling preparation it takes to coordinate international phone calls with his clients in Spain based on the difference in time zones. His open, freelancing work day is directed differently, based on early morning or
late night phone calls. One communications administrator’s comment that “you don’t have to stay in your own backyard” anymore seems to connote the local as limiting (interviewee 11). But he also said, “People like to be near the people they’re paying.” So, it seems from at least the business perspective that the tradition of fostering local trust still applies. This administrator embodies the two competing perspectives of non-local potential but local preference.

As much as the capacity to take on national clients seems to foster a non-local orientation, one designer commented on how long distance work relationships losess the grip that “power-cities” like Los Angeles and New York City have on design business and design authority (interviewee 17). He said that the digital era still allows for a mix of local and non-local orientations. Despite digital interconnectedness nationwide, design work still conglomerates in cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles and New York. But other cities are able to assert themselves even if there is not much local client potential based simply on the area’s talent pool. For example, this designer explained that Minneapolis is getting a lot of business like the power cities now. Faced with worry about homogenized culture, designers in various towns and cities also can do business with national clients while still asserting perceived local values and identities. This is what I am arguing is part of Lancastrian graphic designers’ loyalty to the city. They actively engage with the city environment and events in order to reject the notion that non-local business is erasing local design culture.

The reality for some designers is that they can cater to local clients online if both parties do not hold a bias against web communication. The free “economic gardening” initiative for small businesses at the Lancaster library—called “Biz Info to Grow: BIG”— privileges web communication by helping businesses gets online and also takes advantage of social networking websites. There are sites like myspace.com and facebook.com, through which users can interact
join groups that may have local themes, informing their users about local events and businesses. CHL’s founder works with businesses through BIG and suggested that the fastest growing demographic online is people in their 40s and 50s (interviewee 10). This is supported by data from the PEW Internet & American Life Project that asserts “The share of adult internet users who have a profile on an online social network site has more than quadrupled in the past four years -- from 8% in 2005 to 35% now, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project’s December 2008 tracking survey.” (Lenhart 2009: 1) This informant is part of a forwarding thinking population of social networking site users because the study also reports that “Professional uses are less prevalent; less than a third of social network users are using them for professional purposes, regardless of which site they use.” (Lenhart 2009: 6)

This designer recently helped the “Buy Fresh Buy Local” organization set up a Facebook group, which currently has gained well over 600 members in a couple of months’ time. Such enthusiasm for online networking and communication comes from the belief that online connections can be readily transformed into real world relationships. The Creative House of Lancaster’s plan, for instance, was based on the belief that a virtually created world can be brought to the real world. She believes that “creatives are more open to random strangers because they bare their souls online.” By making designer friends in the area through myspace.com, she has been able to create real life friendships as well. She says that she has been able to meet designers in a three-block radius of her house, with whom she socializes. It amazes her that there are so many designers in such a small space. This social dimension exemplifies the Internet’s potential physical reality.

However positive internet communication can be, it still makes some designers anxious and makes participants in the design business feel isolated at times. One designer says she
teaches at PCAD to “get away from sitting at the computer 8:30-5:30,” a working situation in which “no one calls anymore” (*interviewee 1*). She says that “I literally don’t have to leave my home” to do work, but that she still meets in person with clients when possible. She says about her current communication situation that “it’s working for now.” Another designer comments, “I literally don’t have to leave my home” (*interviewee 3*). She temps at ad agencies when they are too busy and need extra help and also teaches at PCAD. The “creative temp” is an interesting work situation created by the uneven workflow in graphic design and advertising. Even the business people cannot account for the busy times in their work staffing, except through temporary help. The businesses do not really need to hire people when they can temporarily bring in this mobile workforce, made available as a subproduct of the freelance ethos.

Older designers feel particularly that the younger designers are more disconnected participants in relationships with vendors. One older designer says that “the relationships I’m most proud of are with vendors” (*interviewee 8*). She says it is important to her to know she’ll get what she needs, while younger designers desire to be more self-reliant. In her relationships with her printer vendor, this designer says he helps her with technical problems with her design programs by connecting her with other designers he has as clients who have knowledge of specific types of problems. In fact, she has been working with this particular printing vendor for 23 years, taking her business to the different companies by which he was employed. She says that when he was fired from one printing company in the middle of a mess over the ownership of the company, she withdrew her business. The process of withdrawing her business was no easy task– she had to pull the supplies that the company she worked for had given to the printer to use for their projects, notably special papers and dyes.
This vendor believes that people are not as aware today about the personal aspects of getting printing jobs done because of a focus on technology of production. He says, “Technology has turned the whole industry around” (interviewee 4). He explained that his relationships with clients are 40% personal and 60% business, though these proportions often are in flux. He has clearly seen the benefits that personal relationships have had for his business, but he makes clear that the personal side of relationships is meant to benefit the designer as well. To make a designer comfortable and able to trust him to the point of relying on him to answer technical questions, he says he might “end up talking to one lady for thirty minutes about her dog.” He says that the details of a project can be so simple that gaining a feel for the other person’s time is important, especially in order to figure production schedules that fit the client’s needs. It is also important for the vendor to understand the personality of his/her client so the vendor can predict and account for technical strengths and weaknesses.

Also in terms of technology’s effect on personal relationships, one advertising agent noted that the debate within and between advertising firms about adapting to technological innovation has made advertising competition less personal and more about technological choices (interviewee 5). In describing creative disagreements that reorganize people into different advertising companies and partnerships, he says that it is “becoming about the technology and whether one wants to go web or interactive and not so much about egos and client accounts anymore.” His perspective shows that companies are defining themselves in the market by their technological choices and perspectives instead of the older possessive battles over clients. Even if technology is not socially disembedded, the fact that designers can perceive it to be is influencing the existence of the old system of networks in the profession. However, perhaps this is making way for the creation of new, rational routinized networks.
THE PROCESS OF RATIONAL ROUTINIZATION IN ACTION

Besides graphic designers’ vocalization of a desire for prestige, the growing emphasis on networks for designers in Lancaster also demonstrates the reality of rational routinization. As much as designers celebrate a heritage of self-taught, independent and unrestrained creative types, the professional networks that educational institutions create encourage the growing importance on design degrees. The dialogue about pricing ethics also demonstrates a desire for the standardization of rational routinization. This dialogue also makes the cultural embeddedness of economics clear because it spotlights pricing as cultural constituted rather than culture-neutral market calculations. Lancaster organizations such as the Central Pennsylvania chapter of AIGA and The Creative House of Lancaster address the professional benefits of networks, although AIGA is more bureaucratic than the creatively charismatic CHL. Lastly, Clipper Magazine’s bureaucracy of over 250 Lancaster graphic designers demonstrates the efficiency potential of rational routinization. Overall, there are Weberian forces in action in the Lancaster graphic design profession, but also a degree of resistance inspired by the designer’s artistic ethos.

The Growing Importance of Degrees

We can tell that the field of graphic design is still not rationally routinized because one can be trained in graphic design to a professional capacity without earning a degree. Although the standards for professional work have not been regulated and standardized to the extent that one must have a degree in the field to be considered a professional, this is changing towards a favoring of credentials. The creative director of a small advertising company shared many cases
in which the flexible education requirements of design influenced his life choices (*interviewee 18*). During his senior year at PCAD, he almost left his degree incomplete for a job offer in Chicago at an organization that would have taken him even if he had not finished. Because he decided in the end to finish his degree, he had to put his portfolio together in two weeks in order to graduate.

My creative director informant also noted that in 1988 he managed to obtain work teaching the Mac computer programs Illustrator and Quark Express with no previous experience. Since Macs and these design programs were so new at the time, his students did not have the experience to judge what he was teaching them, which was what he learned about the programs in an hour in the computer lab before class. That is just another example of how the ever-changing knowledge base necessary for design means that a degree only serves as a foundation for the learning one has to do throughout one’s career merely to keep up with the changing technology. In this case, my informant clearly did not have to have a degree to teach because no such degree in the skill sets he was teaching existed. He probably gained his position based on charisma in addition to the hiring network he entered as a student at PCAD. Now, these hiring networks through educational institutions are becoming more degree specific. His experience in the 1980s differs from the contemporary climate.

PCAD first offered a certificate in desktop publishing, a culmination of the classes offered there in Mac design programs, in the early 1990s because of the idea of an adult student who had taken courses in all the programs (*interviewee 7*). Before then, in the 1970s, if one wanted to learn new design technology in Lancaster, one could even be sufficiently prepared by taking night courses at Conestoga Valley High School. One of my older informants took this avenue learn how to use the new IBM stand-alone typesetter so she could work for her husband and
friend’s typesetting company (interviewee 8). The potential to work in such small, local, personally held businesses meant that one did not have to gain professional training that is the foundation of some professional careers. Simply put, graphic design’s roots are in more of a craft industry than in academia.

Though degrees are becoming more common, graphic designers share that they benefit more from the personal interaction with professors and networking than the actual training. For example, at the Clipper Magazine company, every employee receives a month of job training despite their educational background. One of my informants, who graduated with a graphic arts minor from Millersville University said that he learned more from his month of Clipper training than from his coursework for his minor (interviewee 15). One Senior Art Director at Clipper said that she took more fine art classes as an undergraduate than graphic design, and Clipper helped her get up to speed on the design programs in two weeks (interviewee 9). Others, such as my creative director informant, argue, “It isn’t the degree that matters, because you live the business” (interviewee 18). He believes that dealing with the demands on your time, patience, and mind determine whether you can be a designer.

Graphic designers have not required degrees also because design history has something of an oral, uninstitutionalized tradition. Written histories are usually considered inadequate by designers, because such histories are never specific enough. One Millersville design professor said that “We’re just now getting historians writing about design, so students usually get historical background from older professionals” (interviewee 6). Some of my informants call into question whether students are prepared for the workplace at all by their academic courses. Older designers perceive an emphasis in this coursework on individual creative identity that slows students down in terms of work efficiency. One older designer said that when you have
the experience of working for an evening paper, you have to know when to quit on a design (interviewee 8). You do not have the time to constantly work and rework a design so that it represents your creative identity and is perhaps innovative and thought-provoking as well. She says that, in much of real world design work, “you have to know how to work quickly, almost instantaneously.” The consideration of processes and innovation allowed in design education is believed by some to be detrimental to their workplace value. Even those who promote slower-paced, innovative design and privilege the creative still acknowledge the fact that in working with clients, sometimes a design has to be compromised, and students might not be prepared for handling the inevitable conflict between client and designer. Despite the debate over design the relative importance of efficiency or design creativity, one deficiency that designers from different schools of thought agree on is that students do not seem to be ready for the workplace in terms of preparing files for the printer. Because students use personal LaserJet printers to print their work for class, they do not have to know how to send files to offsite, professional printers. This production knowledge is often a major point of pride for designers who like to differentiate themselves from the masses. This knowledge is learned on the job if it is not acquired in schooling, revealing the importance of on the job training.

Anthropologist David Thornton Moore studied the effectiveness of different work cultures to foster non-classroom learning in a three-year investigation of 35 sites of one experiential learning program in a major American city. His goal was to study “how newcomers in work organizations learn” (Moore 1986: 167) and discern how to compare the success of learning comparatively between the different sites. In the article “Learning at Work: Case Studies in Non-School Education,” he argues that tasks are one of the major features of a workplace that orient people towards “collaboratively using a system of knowledge-facts, skills, norms, world views,
principles and conceptions of social relations” (Moore 1986: 167). He studies the technical and social means features of the tasks, ultimately arguing that social means “constitute the pedagogy of work experience because they represent the choices participants make in shaping the interns’ access to knowledge” (Moore 1986: 169). Comparing two cases, Jacob Olsen’s Furniture Shop and The Animal Protection League, Moore demonstrates that the work environments that offered more tasks to the interns (the furniture shop) taught more successfully than those that did not allow the social communication of knowledge provided by tasks (The Animal Protection League).

Moore’s research relates to my ethnography of graphic design work and education because it shows that when there are many separate tasks that go into a project, that workplace allows for knowledge to be communicated through task distribution. Creative, production, research, client relations, and business matters are all parts of graphic design. Moore (1986: 183) writes that

“It is that the central educational question in the work place is not whether rich forms of knowledge are in use in the environment, but rather whether and how newcomers like interns get access to that knowledge: how they encounter it, take it in, are called upon to display it, get to work on it and even transform.”

After reading this article in light of my ethnographic evidence, I think that non-educational learning has traditionally been privileged in graphic design world because workplaces make knowledge more available through the systems of diverse task distribution intended to keep designers from getting bored. However, the degree as a credential questions whether on-the-job training is enough to be a professional. The dis-embedded “rationale” would be that an individual would only seek a degree for training that would increase their profit-maximization
potential. Here, the culturally embedded rational poses the degree as a credential to gain more respectability, which does not have an economic value in the disembedded model.

Whether or not a degree is considered necessary in terms of training, educational institutions are becoming very important parts of hiring networks. Connections between PCAD, Millersville, and the Art Institute of York exist at institutional levels between the schools and firms and at personal levels between local designers and professors who are themselves designers. One current PCAD student commented on how the school is “feeding” the firms in the area (interviewee 2). Such language indicates that he perceives that in this hiring/placement process, the flow from PCAD to firms is inherent and necessary. This student also described the idea that the college “recycles”– meaning recycling people by having them serve the purpose of the college as an educational institution as students, then having them serve the purpose of the college as a placement/hiring resource by returning as graduates looking for new hires. Also, in terms of pulling people into the area to attend the school and then perhaps keeping them there, PCAD even reverses a little the flow from small city to big city between Lancaster and Philadelphia. A PCAD student indicated, for instance, that PCAD commuters even come from Philadelphia to Lancaster.

Educational institutions are hubs of production of local design culture. The process of placing students from an educational institution into local companies means that colleges have a direct influence on the values held in the local design community. Most of the designers with whom I spoke who described the flexibility of education on a formal level had taken design classes in some form. They seem to have preferred their workplace learning, but none had really been self-taught even while they described its virtues. One Millersville professor who began working in the field with some design coursework, but had a degree in sculpture, said she felt
insufficient in her training, so went to obtain a masters degree at Syracuse University (interviewee 6). Whether design education is necessary for business is an important debate among designers who are self-reflective about the field. However, the experience shared and community perpetuated by design colleges is one cultural aspect of design education that cannot be replicated elsewhere. This is how credentialization through rational routinization begins.

One aspect of community building at educational institutions is the pride that some have in being the survivors of a grueling and misunderstood process. My creative director informant said that many people dropped out of the PCAD graphic design program when he was there because they thought it would be easier than it was (interviewee 18). In fact, one young designer I talked to did say that he became involved with design because he saw being creative as easier than other things, but that was also because he was specifically avoiding going to a four year college because of his dyslexia (interviewee 14). In the creative field, he was able to achieve a 3.6 GPA for his degree when he did not do well in high school. This designer, however, made it clear that design is still an elite field, aggressively asking me if I wanted to be a graphic designer “just because it seems cool?” The creative director said that, “There is a huge dropout rate at art schools because kids think communications and art is a piece of cake.” Many designers see people leave school and leave the field, and they view these people as not tough enough and as having unrealistic expectations of the field as glamorous. The creative director says that those who stay in the design programs definitely bond, through their two and a half, five and seven hour-long classes, and hours of work outside of class are so demanding of their physical and mental energy. The creative director said that in 2008 he attended a reunion of 200 PCAD students at Bubes Brewery, proving that PCAD students are part of a closely-knit community in the Lancaster area.
Designer networks established in school are reinforced right after school because many design students end up in the same workplaces due to the feeding system and they bond over the entry-level demands. One current advertising agent and former illustrator says that at his first job, the young people would take breaks during overnight stints to finish work by playing the very first network computer games with the polygon tanks, yelling at each other on the speaker phones and making a tradition of getting hoagies (interviewee 5). He says, “It used to be a pretty good crowd.” Another designer similarly reminisced about the overnight hours necessary to finish work. He had a cot, alarm clock and coffee maker at the animation office where he once worked because he would spend the night there sometimes. Obviously, to have that equipment there meant that he spent the night fairly often. Such overnight stints constitute a bonding experience for young designers, because there is “an excitement to do it being young.” One of my informants who became involved in graphic design later in life expressed both a feeling of disconnection from the local designers as well as a feeling of singularity as a non-degree designer, saying that he did not go to school for design, but “I’m sure I’m pretty unusual” (interviewee 17). As secure as degree designers may be in the openness of the field and the plethora of self-taught designers, self-taught designers do not have the same ready-made professional networks. The growing important of professional networks involving schools means that educational institutions are part of how designers learn to work within the structure of a rationally routinized profession.

Establishing Pricing Ethics

Standards of ethics provide learnable structure for design professionals. The graphic design community’s discourse about ethical pricing also provides evidence for the theory of the cultural
embeddedness of economic markets. In the “rational” economic model, there is no ethical dimensions to pricing because it is determined by profit maximization, efficiency concerns, and market clearing numbers. However, agreed-upon ethical standards are manifestations of the values of the culture of graphic design, or of the different subcultures of values within graphic design. They’re also part of the professionalization of the work practice. As much as business people take comfort in making decisions based on economic “reason,” the cultural value systems of graphic design ethics tell us something useful about the cultural dimension of all business decision making.

Lampel, Lant, and Shamsie write that the subjective experiences of consumers of cultural goods have an unpredictable quality that makes it difficult to establish standards of quality (Lampel 2000: 264). Cultural goods are expected to “entertain, stimulate, and provoke reflection” and “consumers need familiarity to understand what they are offered, but they need novelty to enjoy it” (Lampel 2000: 264). This means that designers, and other producers of cultural goods, must balance gaining the audience’s recognition and offering them a new pleasure as well. Standards for design revolve around concepts of “boring” or “fresh,” which are in flux as they are culturally embedded. Designers look to each other through communal or organization values, rather than an inhuman, “perfect” and fixed hierarchy, to define standards of quality.

*The Graphic Artist’ Guild Handbook to Pricing and Ethical Guidelines* is one resource that designers look to for advice. The Creative House of Lancaster holds meetings revolving around the *Handbook*, both examining its content and promoting awareness of its existence. Rather than market calculations, the pricing guides in the *Handbook* are based on “pricing surveys that are the basis for the most current pricing date” (*Handbook* 2007: xv). One of the designers I spoke to
commented that the Graphic Artists Guild’s pricing guidelines are too high and are meant to promote the prestige of the field but are not really like the realistic prices he asks for (interviewee 17). So, the Graphic Artists Guild Handbook is more about maintaining the cultural ideals of graphic designer culture than about its reality. Examining it, however, can help me as an anthropologist discern the models that designers strive to emulate as well as to see examples of what the main ethical problems for designers are, whatever the solutions given by the handbook may be.

In the Graphic Artists Guild Handbook, as well as in the perspectives of my informants, pricing is a prominent ethical point of conflict. In several conversations with designers, pricing was an issue demarcating the generational divide in the design community. As we have seen, older designers see younger designers as less oriented towards personal relationships. One former illustrator, now ad agent, who has been in the Lancaster scene ever since graduating from Franklin & Marshall College in 1985 said that “young people have less sensitivity towards personal relations and will make low prices that force clients to break bonds with agencies for the lower prices, but then the younger people raise the prices once they have the client” (interviewee 5). Even a designer in her 30s to whom I spoke, who would be considered “young” by the pre-desktop publishing generation, commented on the need for design community in Lancaster (CHL and AIGA) to educate younger designers on more ethical pricing (interviewee 10).

Not just the numbers, but also the types of price rates are contested. One can choose between charging an hourly rate or a project rate. Economically rational clients like to see records of the hours spent on design and there are computer resources for designers that allow them to keep a digital stopwatch timer for every segment of time spend working on a design. Designers who
price their work at an hourly rate may develop a stopwatch lens on their overall perspective of value. One freelancer described the set-up process for his freelance business in terms of hours.

Some designers see this time-keeping as detrimental to the “designer’s cause” of legitimating the work that designers do by functioning separately from business and economic rationale. Defensive designers understand pricing as not only part of the financial relationship with a client, but also part of the representation of the field. Designers with whom I spoke expressed the view that those who charge lower prices than theirs, or who do not seem to push their prices higher when feasible, are misrepresenting graphic design as being not of financial value, and thus of less social value in this capitalist society. Interestingly, Martha Walker, a Brooklyn-based sculptor who exhibited at the Phillips Museum of Art, spoke at her opening reception about similarly recording the hours she spends working, because of client interest in such facts, and because the hours of work can contribute to the market value of her pieces.

It is a cultural value that designers should be concerned with promoting the respectability of the field through the inferred social value of higher prices. Many designers I interviewed seemed to speak more freely of promoting the field of graphic design than they did of self-promotion. A good deal of work can be obtained in Lancaster through networks of project/job sharing, but to take advantage of these networks a designer has to be comfortable with self-promotion. Many designers seem to share with artists a discomfort with marketing themselves. Artists, and graphic designers, too, sometimes like to think of their work as able to speak for itself without aid. Claire Giblin, a Lancaster artist I know, described self-promotion of the artist as the “Pandora’s box that Andy Warhol opened up; people aren’t comfortable with speaking for their work, but it is necessary to sell.” One designer I spoke to specifically voiced how he was less comfortable as a freelance designer than he was working for a larger company because he is not
the kind of person who likes to self-promote. He often finds himself thinking or saying, “surely you can find someone better and cheaper” (interviewee 17). Here, he was not truly deprecating his work, but rather operating without the individualistic artistic ethos of needing to assert one’s worth for all to see. I think the underdog mentality that humbles designers, as well as the community-oriented sharing practices of Lancaster designers, makes them less concerned with individual self-promotion.

Like the practices for marketing freelance businesses, issues of ownership are also not as regulated and standardized as one would expect. However, the leniency of practicing without standardized rules can produce positive interactions. In terms of gaining clients, when designers look at clients through the cultural rather than economic lens, they are more likely to adopt practices of strategic sharing rather than cutthroat competition. One informant told me that Lancaster ad agencies are more likely to compete over and steal workers than they are to compete over and steal client accounts (interviewee 5). This is because they look at the social relationships between clients and agencies and see that the bond between worker and agency is easier to subvert than the bond between client and worker. Clients and accounts will follow the “stolen” designer to his/her new firm, another way of “stealing” clients. The strength of the client/designer relationship also affects how designers acquire and share work. In one small online design business in Lancaster, the owner works with her old clients herself and distributes new clients among contributing designers working for her business, and among designer friends with their own freelance operations. The only formal practice that an informant shared with me relating to client possession was that he had to sign an agreement with the advertising firm he left to start his own business to promise he would not contact the ad firm’s clients for one year after leaving (interviewee 14). The interesting part of the agreement is the client’s superior
position—if the client contacts him for business, that is within the parameters of the contract.

Making sure the old employee is not soliciting the old employer’s clients is more important than whether the clients stay with the old employer or not. This is because the client is not under contract to the company, except for certain jobs. He is free to take his business elsewhere unless he’s signed an exclusivity contract. In the face-paced trendy world of advertising, most clients would not want to be exclusive.

In the category of responsibilities to clients, one matter of ethical choice is the speed at which work is expected to be completed. Outside of deadlines adhering to outside forces, the value a designer places on client authority and appropriate work speed is key. The preference for taking time to return an innovative project over being as “efficient”, or speedy, is possible for projects that are not on deadlines constrained by public events, such as a logo. One who is more comfortable with the client’s perspective as pertinent to design and who sees efficiency as key will spend less time on a less innovative design in order to serve those values. One who is concerned with asserting the value of the designer’s perspectives by creating outside the perspective of the client, and who sees creative innovation as more important than speed, will spend more time on getting a design just right, just as an artist revises and manipulates a painting, in order to serve their own value system. The value systems of my different informants depended on one’s workplace, mentors, personal experience, previous studies, and dreams and goals. When these experiences become more streamlined by bureaucratic and rationally routinized professional networks, graphic design ethics become more streamlined, too.
AIGA and The Professional Organization

It is clear that designer ethics are not yet streamlined because designers have such different expectations for professional organizations. Throughout my informants’ explanations of why they sought out interactions with other designers, many different business and social objectives were discussed. Many wanted to interact with people they do not have to explain themselves to, in contrast to how their work is misunderstood by clients and business associates. One young designer, as President of the local chapter of AIGA, looks to other designers for advice on dealing with troublesome clients, for fresh eyes or critiques of a design, to recruit freelance copywriters for projects and for “networking” (interviewee 14). A PCAD teacher said that the system of “networking” in place “gets you in the door, name get passed on and you put your face out there” (interviewee 1). Networking is the “shaking hands” that is important to being professionally visible. But for some, the system of professional networking is not enough and they seek alternative forms of community.

One forum designers can use to create a community is through professional organizations. The designers tend to prefer designer-only organization to other options. The Ad Club of Central Pennsylvania, for example, offers formal business and social networking opportunities, but one designer I spoke to said that people resent the awards system on which Ad Club interactions are predicated (interviewee 18). The designers are deterred by what seems to them to be big, old Lancaster firms “patting each other on the back.” One designer says, “Godfrey [Advertising] wins a lot of awards but people think they just have good clients and are boring” (interviewee 17). The Ad Club’s reputation for being a “good-old boy’s club” prevents designers from outside that network from becoming excited about interacting with non-designers in the advertising field outside of the workplace. Another example of designer/non-designer
Designers’ preferred professional organization is the Central PA chapter of AIGA, the American Institute of Graphic Arts. Lancaster designers can join the Graphic Artists Guild as well, but the closest regional chapter is in Philadelphia. The Central PA chapter of AIGA was only recently founded, in 2004, thus interest in it is strong and optimistic for the most part. The chapter currently has 150 members and is connected to the initiatives of the national organization with 65 chapters nationwide (The Graphic Artist’s Guild only has 11 regional chapters).

According to the current AIGA president, the goals of the organization are “to inspire, improve the community and unite local businesses as well as put on programs, speakers and national initiatives such as ‘Get Out the Vote’” (interviewee 14). According to the AIGA mission statement,

“AIGA, the professional association for design, is the premier place for design—to discover it, discuss it, understand it, appreciate it, be inspired by it. It is the place designers turn to first to exchange ideas and information, participate in critical analysis, and research and advance education and ethical practices. AIGA sets the national agenda for the role of design in its economic, social, political, cultural and creative contexts. AIGA serves designers with five critical functions: Information, Communication, Inspiration, Validation, Representation.” (AIGA’s mission)

These goals combine designers’ interests in both their work and validating it. However, it seems difficult for designers to align with goals of a bureaucracy, even if they may be the same as their
own. This is probably because many types of AIGA events are designed to promote and ensure the longevity of the organization above all other goals.

One of the major symbolic attributes of the AIGA organization is that membership serves as an absent mark of the professional degree. Since there are few formal markers of professional standards that can be acquired by designers, membership in AIGA stands enabling the designer to demonstrate that he/she holds professional standards and has intellectual involvement in the field. The PCAD instructor who advises the student AIGA chapter at the school as well as the advisor of the Millersville student chapter says that it is good for students to have that association with AIGA on their résumé (*interviewee 1*).

One of the main ways that AIGA creates and supports community among designers is by orienting them towards common goals. One of these goals is to promote local design by educating the business community on its value. One of the business-design connections AIGA members make is by promoting local hiring. One PCAD student called hiring design students locally in PA” keeping them ‘in house,’” a term usually used to refer to a designer who works within a greater corporation (*interviewee 2*). Seeing hiring practices as part of community building focuses on the workplace as a regional community building structure. It makes it seem that inherently, if educational institutions work on placing students, the “resources,” in local workplaces, those students become part of a community. It is hard to say whether local hiring increases the sense of communal unity for local designers. One informant who spoke of the role of local hiring practices in landing a job that normally would be advertised in trade journals (*interviewee 7*). Another goal that AIGA guides designers to unite around is to give back to the community. These types of programs include doing portfolio review shows for young designers and through minority high school out-reach initiatives. The PCAD student chapter of AIGA
imitated the philanthropic goals of the national AIGA organization by planning a 24-hour free design-a-thon for nonprofits.

One set of programs that AIGA provides that seem the most successful at enabling designers to interact is the practice of holding social events. For example, the AIGA Halloween costume party is a major social event on designers’ annual calendars and doubles as a creative outlet with designers striving for costume awards and peer regard. Richard Florida also points out the popularity of Halloween parties in creative workplaces because it is a non-religious party and communicates, “non standard people welcome here” (Florida 2002: 79). According to one designer, these social events are like “frat parties” (interviewee 18). However, the lasting cultural impact of a raging party is hard to decipher. One of the problems of AIGA is the loftiness or vagueness of the goals of the organization versus its real lasting impact. One former AIGA board member says that, “it looks good, but it could fold at any minute” (interviewee 17). Programs with “moderately big name speakers,” book discussions, or screenings of Helvetica may not really persuade the majority of Lancaster graphic designers into uniting. AIGA members can interact with printing vendors at a popularly titled “Paper Jam” event, but does not seem to designers to be so different from business “networking” facilitators. As a part of a national group, the bureaucracy of bylaws and the hierarchy of leadership may appear to some to imitate mundane qualities of business. Free-flowing creative interaction seems to be facilitated only by parties, where designers can assert their creative and individualistic fun-loving identities, within the realm of AIGA projects. That free-flowing creative interaction is the main goal of another organization available to designers, The Creative House of Lancaster.
The Creative House of Lancaster and Creative Interaction

The Creative House of Lancaster is one community group that defines itself as organic. It is not registered officially as a non-profit organization, participation is free, and it began through the social networking website Myspace. One Lancaster designer who has been here two years, a non-member, cites the group’s informality when she said it is about “trying to get people together” (interviewee 13). Perhaps it is the modesty of the goal, to get people together, that makes the CHL so successful. The group is less than two years old and there are 450 people on the email list. The founder, Anne Kirby, says that there is an average of 40-60 members at regular monthly meetings, 80 at special events, and 100 at the winter holiday party (interviewee 10). CHL has also succeeded at reaching other goals that more formal, official non-profit groups include in their missions. It has provided a safe haven for Lancaster transplants/outsiders and been seen as inviting for a blend of small-time and large agency members, too.

The success of the group can be measured not only in attendance numbers and public awareness, but also in the creative projects that are materializing from the group members. One group of CHL members is working on a theatre/multi-use community space downtown and some other members have learned about and contributed to the local business “Building Character.” Still others are founding a counter-culture, volunteer-powered group called UPC, “Underground Promotional Collective,” which aims at mobilizing the creative class using online, innovative marketing to spread Richard Florida’s mantra that creative business is good for local economy. The UPC’s Myspace and Facebook pages report that the group is “for anyone who feels disenfranchised by the current city marketing plan.” It seems that the initiative springing from the CHL incorporates many of the goals that a group like AIGA has trouble materializing
through its formal organizational structure. Philanthropic goals encouraged at a big scale level by AIGA seem to be a reality in CHL’s members’ day-to-day lives, as many buy local. They believe that using local creative services to keep money in the community is an example of buying local and promote their cause by buying local for themselves.

CHL seems to be founded on a principle of “not trying too hard” at networking. Anne Kirby says the CHL is truly, “just a group” (interviewee 10). It is the antithesis of business-to-business networking groups, which stress active initiative and gauging of results. The official mission statement reads,

“The Creative House of Lancaster (CHL) advocates the success of Lancaster County Small Businesses and individuals interested in art, music and design by committing its members to supporting each other in their business, personal and professional development and growth. We believe in taking creative and innovative leaps that redefine the local business community by harvesting local talent, promoting collaboration, fair-trade, teamwork, networking, mentoring, social communication, and nurturing a sense of community.” (The CHL Mission)

The goals of CHL, in contrast to those of AIGA, can be accomplished by just providing a positive atmosphere where people can interact. Here, creatives can be part of an organization and be productive through intrinsic motivation.

Anne says that at CHL meetings she can tell, “these people don’t necessarily feel comfortable with [business-to-business] B2B networking.” Graphic designers and other creative workers even push the boundaries of traditional business cards due to the constraints of the business networking world; some Lancaster designers are now using “Moo cards,” mini business cards that come with different images of their work printed on the back of each card. CHL was
begun in June 2007 when Anne invited five Lancaster designers she found on My space to an initial meet and greet, encouraging those designers to do the same and invite five more new My spacers. Twenty-two people came to that first meet and greet and the informal invitation strategy was a deemed success. Other informal aspects of the group include the way it was promoted after the first meet-up and the way it is run now. There were no formal promotions of the group after it’s founding in order to keep it from growing too quickly. Rather, word-of-mouth was enough to keep the group growing because Anne believed that traditional marketing tactics would have been “too effective.” If too many people came to a meeting all at once because of a public advertising, it would be more overwhelming for new members with less quality interactive. The group also runs on “no hierarchy” principles, avoiding the executive board politics of AIGA. Members are not required to attend in order to gain status in the group, because there is no status. Members volunteer when they can, and Kirby says the “motivation to stay is enjoyment.” Ultimately, she says CHL members “work as a team to make the whole stronger.” Whether the group is completely egalitarian or not, or whether all members agree with Kirby’s perspective, it is still true that the cultural ideals at CHL are much more informal than at AIGA. In light of most graphic designers’ aversion to bureaucracy, perhaps the informal is the realm in which designers best thrive not only personally but also in building communal relationships. In Weberian thought, the ultimate creative enthusiasm of the CHL will become routinized as the group ages and becomes more like an institution.

Managing Creativity and Workplace Socialization

In like of the individualistic creativity ideal, Lampel, Lant and Shamsie write that creativity is “a resource that ultimately cannot be controlled” (Lampel 2000: 268). From my interviews with people who manage and oversee graphic designers in the workplace, it is evident
that they are aware of the idealized creative goals of the designers and take the cultural viewpoints of designers into consideration when managing creativity. The creative director, a former designer, I spoke with at a Lancaster advertising firm, said that he looks at managing creativity in three parts (interviewee 18). He said, “First, I do my best to keep people happy by keeping pay and benefits competitive. Second, I keep them stimulated by distribution of creative and production work. Third is a fun environment internally.” The fun environment, described as “fun, fresh, and active” specifically, is made up of jeans days and food theme days in the office, gifts of IPods with preloaded playlists of songs the designers will like, and rewards for hard work. The rest of the “internal” environment is composed of outings: movie nights with beer, kayaking, winery tours, client nights at bars, baseball games or a Broadway show in New York City. This creative director also says he holds a party twice a year at his own house for employees at which “everyone gets stupid.” Much of managing the creativity of graphic designers specifically is oriented towards the task of generating workplace loyalty through social bonding. This is based on the principle that the creative director shared that “designers work and play together.”

The Clipper Coupon Magazine company makes for an excellent case study in managing creativity. Clipper Magazine is a national company that originated with two Franklin & Marshall students, who brought a third non-fumper on board later, and currently operates its magazine production out of the Lancaster area. The company was run and owned Bob, Steve & Ian until a recent sale of the company to Gannett Communications. The entrance exam at the interview starts off the process of generating Clipper insider loyalty by testing applicants on Clipper history. The lobby of the Clipper Magazine office building features a series of floor-to-ceiling banners (the artist I interviewed printed 8.5x11 copies of for me to take for my research)
representing moments in Clipper history and how they correlated with popular and historical events. Bob, Steve & Ian still have offices on site and counsel the managerial employees. They are referred to as the “founders” rather than “owners.” One graphic designer—a position called “artist” at Clipper Magazine—said that there are 250 designers “on team” at the Lancaster production house, with 550 designers employed by the company nationwide (interviewee 15). Many Clippers “artists” are excited by the social atmosphere of having such a large number of creative people in one place, what the Assistant Art Director I spoke to called “a big melting pot of personalities” (interviewee 16). The process of generating Clipper loyalty is really the process of convincing people that what they have heard about the “Clipper Machine” as soul-sucking is untrue. The sources of these rumors are designers who use Clipper Magazine as an example of the lowest end design. Judging from the amount of design product in the magazines, outsiders tell horror stories about the Clipper employees who only add drop shadows to text and images in an assembly line.

At Clipper, the carefully calibrated system is an exercise in managing creativity because it is designed to keep designers loyally working hard for the company. One part of the system is organizing the designers into work “teams” that handle certain regionally specific Clipper Magazines and function as teams for social company events. Social events include dress-up days, food days, a tag football event with a cookout, laser tag, softball, casino night and a company end-of-the-year celebration. Clipper employees encourage each other’s creative expression outside of workplace goals. In terms of artistic expression, Clipper “teams” will hold photography contests to encourage the promotion of employees’ artistic talents. The Senior Art Director I spoke to sees a lot of musicians working at Clipper and learning about what each other likes in terms of their music (interviewee 9). The team which the Senior Art Director and
Assistant Art Director I spoke to had a “No Shave November” contest in November, which formally challenged male team members to grow the longest beard in the team and informally boosted morale in one of the busiest months in the work year. Teams will also coordinate bringing in food to work on different days which employees are meant to experience as team bonding, but one Art Director notes it is also meant to “to keep people here so they don’t go out to lunch” (interviewee 9)

Clipper Magazine makes movement between positions accessible, both upward through the ranks and between departments. There are people whose job it is to train Clipper employees as they move around departments. These trainers only work at Clipper in order to facilitate Clipper Magazine employees who wish to try out different positions. The Clipper “artist” I spoke to said that one of the major “pros” of working there is the room for advancement and interaction with other departments, in addition to the team atmosphere (interviewee 15).

However, the advancement process does involve some element of asserting yourself as being different from the crowd, and my Clipper artist informant said, the major “con” of working there is that it “can be hard to get noticed and it is easy to get lost in the pond.” The constant growth of the company also allows for persistent new job opportunities. The Senior Art Director I spoke to was made an art director after working at the company as an artist for only one year because the company was growing so fast at the time (interviewee 9). New teams are created to accommodate growth, and she was given a position on one of the newly created teams. In terms of current growth, the Senior Art Director said they are about to grow out of the current Mountville location, where they initially occupied one floor and rented the second. The company is now growing into and out of the second previously rented floor.
The nature of the work is seemingly simple—a Clipper artist will design four to eight ads in a day or, depending on the day, do up to 15 rounds of edits on one ad. The design work is considered by most Lancasterians to be far from the creative innovation end of the spectrum. One third generation Lancasterian who designs in the city said, in defense of the design work output at Clipper, “well of course things look good with space,” meaning that the space restrictions of the coupon magazine format inherently restrict creativity (interviewee 7). The Clipper artist who spoke to me described graphic design as “not rocket science, but it takes a little effort” (interviewee 15). He said at Clipper Magazine, “the trouble is convincing a client not to put a picture of their children in a pizza ad.” The pervading public opinion on the “Clipper Machine” comes from the both production and marketing driven ethics at the company. The Senior Art Director of a team of 45 artists that I spoke to exemplified this when she said, “I always tell people we’re not making masterpieces, we’re selling hamburgers” (interviewee 9). The focus on structure over innovation can be comforting. The Clipper employees told me that the Clipper system of discipline makes things both “easier” and more stable. The Assistant Art Director I spoke to said, “freelance seems a little scary” (interviewee 16). I do not think it is unfortunate that these people choose the secure workflow of Clipper magazine over “freelance freedom.” As much as outsiders may see a skewed value system in terms of design, there is strong sense of security and positive feeling among Clipper artists.

The socialization process at Clipper Magazine is clearly necessary. No one in Lancaster County seems to aspire to work at Clipper Magazine. However, the socialization process is effective. The employees I spoke to all become supporters of the company after working there for awhile. One employee told me, “This is a privilege. It’s an opportunity to come here and do graphic design for this place” while another told me that “This is graphic design at its finest”
(interviewees 9 and 16). For the “artist” I spoke to, Clipper was the first job that took him after graduation from Millersville University (interviewee 15). In describing the situation of getting this job, he said “you gotta do what you gotta do,” but that he likes it now. The Assistant Art Director I spoke with said that originally, “I told myself that I would just start at Clipper and then look for bigger and better things” (interviewee 16). After eight years, he is in a management position and still loves the socially bonded work environment and the opportunities he has to lead with his ideas. Looking back on his own opinion of Clipper, as well as those of what I think Clipper employees would label the “design snob,” this Clipper employee asserted “I think a lot of people when they’re fresh out of design school have a false vision of what graphic design is about...because you don’t just make things that look cool to you.” This statement reflects the trend in rationally routinized design thought. Though respect is the goal, the rationally routinized Clipper Magazine seems to be lacking it.

In some instances, such as the Clipper Magazine case study, we see that a business structured as a community relieves some of the conflicted drama that designers experience. Such a structured work environment allows designers to be situated in a stable set of beliefs. Though the beliefs of Clipper Magazine promote productivity as essential to design ethics, this position subscribes to the business cultural ideal that other designers are observing as well. But this structure is not created just for the benefit for Clipper workers. It is the pragmatic capitalist ethos at work. The work of Clipper magazine employees is highly commodified–you can even judge an “artist’s” design in the market context of how many coupons from the ad get used at the store–and the workers are alienated from the fruits of their labors as the magazines they work on in Lancaster are mailed in ever other state across the company. The comforting structure allows
workers to keep producing product despite alienation. This rationality, like all business rationality, is deeply embedded in the culture of coupons that values functionality over creativity.

CONCLUSIONS

The graphic design field exemplifies the cultural theory of the embeddedness of economic markets. The growing professional networks for graphic designers are rationalized in terms of cultural self-conceptions rather than in terms of “culture-neutral” market capitalism. Graphic designers want to bolster reputation in the wake of the democratization of design, help businesspeople understand and value their work, and have a respectable and prestigious identity.

I have argued in this study that the major conflict perceived by graphic designers is being split between the supposedly different worlds of creativity and business. The positions of my informants in this conflict were clearly vocalized in speaking of matters of the future of design, what design should be, what young designers in the new generations are lacking, and how outsiders should treat designers. The different defenses of graphic design as a profession include creative innovation as a mean to legitimization, ethical standardization, either broadening or specifying services offered, and the demand for superior technological knowledge of the younger, “artsy” generation.

In light of the business/creative conflict, professionalization discussions were based on both capitalist business ideals and art world individualistic ideals. Some pursue initiatives to either encourage designers to appeal to the business ethic through standardization to gain respect—like the Graphic Artist’s Guild and AIGA— or to use diverse creative innovation to gain legitimacy outside of business ethics, such as the Creative House of Lancaster. The tensions created by different contexts of the credentialization goal is perpetuating the cultural conflicts
graphic designers are experiencing. In some instances, such as the Clipper Magazine case study, we see the acceptance of bureaucracy on the inside and fear of the “Clipper Machine” from the outside.

Listening to the way graphic designers describe matters of the business/creative conflict reveals that the business and creative characteristics of their work they are referencing are cultural ideals. The cultural embeddedness theories of economics must be used to judge the creative/artistic ethos as well. For designers to refer to themselves as less corporate than the businessman and more structured than the artist assumes that business is rule-abiding (especially the “rules” of economics) and art is free of rules. It becomes apparent that an ideal’s cultural constructedness is not necessarily a falsehood if it has a practical function in orienting people in their everyday lives. These ideals will help graphic designers try to describe their experience as their profession is rationally routinized and credentialized through social networks.

In the end, the bureaucratic business ethos is leading to the growth of credentializing organizations. Graphic designers must be able to legitimize the value of their commodified work in terms of the capitalist market. This is just one among many examples of unrelenting commodification’s influence on professions. As graphic designers relate to the creative ethos while also seeking respectability, the artistic individual charisma is institutionalized into systemized networks of credentials. When Weber’s theory of rational routinization of religion is applied to professions, it comes to mean that an individual can gain prestige through charisma but that a group of individuals trying to gain prestige for a profession must rationally routinize their community in order to communicate their worth to outsiders. Here, one can be persuaded by charisma to believe in the worth of an individual while the worth of a group has to be systematically established because group identities are harder to understand from the outside. In
addition to the business ethos’s strength in the capitalist West, this reasoning of rational routinization explains why it is an unavoidable process. Graphic designers seek the legitimization of their profession rather than legitimization of themselves as individual designers because organized networks are the routinization mechanism of capitalism. The unyielding forces of commodification demand that work be translated into standardized terms of economic value. This is the cultural context in which graphic designers desire respect and then enter the process of rational routinization.
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