From the shadow to the centre: Tensions, contradictions and ambitions in building graphic design as a profession

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Abstract

Traditionally, design was understood as a hinge area between the art and production system, which took, on the course of the twentieth century, a peripheral place in the context of the artistic and cultural production. Design as a profession was built in this permanent tension between a commercial vocation and an aesthetic sense, and it was often despised or ignored by the academia and the 'art worlds'. C. Wright Mills (1958), for instance, saw designers as the 'men in the middle', alienated and frustrated, caught between the worlds of creativity and commercialism. However, this view has been changing considerably during the recent decades. In late capitalism, design has acquired a new role in society, due to the massification of its presence in economies that have become more and more 'design intensive' (Lash & Urry, 1994). Designers have become key-figures that look at themselves as cultural operators and creative agents. Simultaneously, the profession became massified, in a process which was accompanied by a greater structuring of the design education and research system. Paradoxically, in this process of affirmation, design as a profession has been increasingly degraded and became precarious. The chapter draws mainly on several interviews conducted with Portuguese graphic designers, from different generations and with diverse professional paths, in order to analyse and discuss some tensions and contradictions on the construction process of graphic design as a profession.

1. The relevance and centrality of design in contemporary societies

In recent decades, there has been a blazing growth of design, broadening speaking, gaining a great relevance in political, economic, social and cultural terms. This evolution is related to broader transformation and restructuring processes of contemporary capitalism which, especially since the 1990s, made the design a key element of the post-Fordist economy. In fact, in the context of contemporary capitalism — which is characterized in particular by rapid technological transformation processes, by the globalization of cultures and economies and by the growing importance of brands and marketing — the design seems to structure, in an increasingly decisively way, the systems of production and exchange of goods and services, contributing to differentiate

them, ensuring competitive advantages and added value for its customers (Bryson & Rusten, 2011; Julier, 2008; Julier & Moor, 2009). As noted by Hal Foster, the design has invaded all spheres of society — "from genes to jeans" (Foster, 2002: 17) — in such a way that, as suggests this well-known historian and art critic, today we can even talk of a new "political economy of design" (Foster, 2002: 22), which is increasingly relevant.

However, the attention, the relevance and the centrality that is now given to design clearly contrasts, as we shall see, with a long period in which this discipline and, particularly, the designers have remained in the 'shadow' — that is, taking a quite marginal position in the context of the artistic and cultural production, often being ignored or sometimes even despised by both the academy and the 'art worlds'.

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the designer profession and how it has been transforming in recent years. Particularly it aims to explore some elements of tension which are related, on one hand, with the process of increasing recognition of design as a specific disciplinary field and of its importance in contemporary societies but also, on the other hand, with a set of broader changes that have recently come to affect the labour market, particularly in Europe. It will seek to illustrate some more general reflections concerning major changes in graphic design world (from an western standpoint) with empirical evidence resulting from field work carried out over the past two years, within an on-going Ph.D. research concerning graphic design careers in Portugal, since mid-1970s onwards. Methodologically, this chapter draws mainly on several interviews conducted with Portuguese graphic designers, from different generations and with diverse professional paths, in order to understand how designers have transformed their (self)interpretation of their position within this creative field, analyse how changed the work processes and also discuss some tensions and contradictions on the construction process of graphic design as a profession.[1]

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2. A (brief) journey about the social sciences' standpoint on design and designers

Research in design arises essentially in the late 1960s. Historically, that time was characterized by the rapid development of design, especially in Europe and the US, driven by the Fordist industrial momentum of mass production and consumption (Bony, 2006; Julier, 2004; Dormer, 1993). It should also be remembered that, since the post-war period, there has been an increasing 'normalization' of design as an discipline, which is visible in a progressive distance from more artistic, experimental and avant-garde approaches, which will be gradually replaced by a new kind of approach, with a solid rationalist inspiration, that advocated a strong orientation of the discipline for the 'problem-solving'. Moreover, this process of 'normalization' of design was followed by an expansion of a specialized education offer on design, especially in more advanced capitalist countries like the UK (McRobbie, 1998), France (Dubuisson & Hennion, 1995), Italy or Germany (Bony, 2006).

Specifically in graphic design, this disciplinary reorientation is linked to the rise of the so-called 'Swiss School' and it's International Typographic Style, during the 1950s, which came prove to be deeply influential, establishing the canon of what would be seen as 'good design graphic' — in terms of communication effectiveness and also of the accuracy, clarity and order in the reading of information. Jobling and Crowley (1996: 162–164) emphasize the modernist ideal that underlies this set of rules and graphic and typographic standards, according to which it would be up to the designer to assume an important role in the organization of the post-war Western societies and, thus, to move away from a certain avant-garde graphical and typographical guidance that was dominant during the first decades of the twentieth century. It was precisely in this context that was the emergence of the first social sciences research concerning design, focusing mainly on the analysis of design objects and, and, in some way, neglecting the role of designers, as noted by Jonathan Woodham (2001).

This is a trend that is particularly relevant in the art history research field, which was driven, mainly since the 1980s, either by the cultural studies related to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies — strongly inspired, as is well known, by the theoretical contributions of authors like Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, among others —, and also by the influential analysis carried out by

historians such as John Heskett (1980) and Adrian Forty (1986). In the fields of women's studies and anthropology also emerged, during the same period, proposals of analysis that aim to explore the relationship between design and consumption, social representations and the cultural imaginaries related to specific genres and certain lifestyles (Woodham 2001: 7–9).

Also the graphic production was, for a long time, studied mainly from the angle of publicity and propaganda, topics that aroused great interest from media studies and cultural studies. Through an investing in analysis with a strong semiotic inclination, these two disciplines sought to interpret and deconstruct the discourse conveyed by this type of communication objects, understanding them as production vehicles of ideologies, of mythologies and of pleasure. In a context characterized by a wide discussion on the so-called 'mass society', the work carried out by Judith Williamson on *Decoding Advertisements* (1978) was an important milestone in the semiotic analysis and content analysis of advertising speeches, which will serve as a relevant inspiration, arousing the interest of many researchers. On the other hand, it should also be noted that, along with the publicity and advertising analysis, also arise, during this period, some research works that emphasize the relevance of other elements related to visual culture, in which the graphic design has an important role — including not only advertising, but also magazines, fanzines, posters, record covers, fashion, etc. —, relating them to certain lifestyles and urban subcultures (e.g. Hebdige, 1979).

In short, it can be said that, between the late 1960s and mid-1990s, the major focus of research on design held in the social sciences realm — carried out in different disciplinary fields: history, cultural studies, anthropology, women's studies, sociology — has focused mainly on the symbolic dimension associated with the consumption, on the critical deconstruction of social representations, cultural imaginaries and meanings associated with this kind of cultural products. Consequently, most of these analyses did not explore the role of designers and the specific conditions under which they perform their work (Soar, 2000, 2002c). Interestingly, the first sociological reflection on the role of designers in post-war society dates back to the end of the 1950s. However, as we have just seen, until recently this kind reflection on the role of the designer doesn't have great continuity and deepening. In 1958 C. Wright Mills gave a lecture at the *8th International Design Conference*, held in Aspen (Colorado, US), which was later published under the title *Man in the Middle: The Designer* (Mills, 2008). Here, Mills looks at the role of designers, understanding them as

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members of what he designates as the 'cultural apparatus'. His vision is clearly marked by a negative tone, seeing the designers as the 'men in the middle', alienated and frustrated, caught between the worlds of creativity and commercialism:

> Designers work at the intersection of these trends; their problems are among the key problems of the overdeveloped society. It is their dual involvement in them that explains the big split among designers and their frequent guilt; the enriched muddle of ideals they variously profess and the insecurity they often feel about the practice of their craft; their often great disgust and their crippling frustration. They cannot consider well their position or formulate their credo without considering both cultural and economic trends, and the shaping of the total society in which these are occurring. (Mills, 2008: 173–174).

For Mills, most designers succumbed to commercial imperatives "which use 'culture' for their own non-cultural — indeed anti-cultural — ends" (Mills, 2008: 178). Within this framework, the solution proposed by Mills is a return to *craftsmanship*, where this sociologist seems to find the values of integrity and independence (see Treviño, 2014). The re-reading of this text, in light of current days, proves to be a quite interesting exercise insofar as, somehow, Mills analysis anticipates a certain critical view of the designers themselves about the exercise of their profession, while echoing a certain idealism of modern avant-garde (such as the Bauhaus, e.g.) about the 'reformist' role of the designer in society (Soar, 2002c: 34). However, this is also a text marked by a period, and we inevitable find in Mills pessimistic discourse on the designers and his dichotomous view between 'culture' and 'commerce' many contact points with the Frankfurt School, for example. Although Herbert Marcuse (2011), Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2006) do not make explicit references in their texts on the role of designers, they surely share with Mills concerns about the risks of a growing instrumentalization of culture, assuming it as an instrument of ideological propaganda, control and manipulation of public opinion (namely through the use of the mass media to spread values such as consumerism). Finally, this is also an interesting text because, as Matthew Soar points out,

> Mills anticipates Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the cultural intermediary — an individual (i.e. 'the man in the middle') whose function is to provide a bridge, or a liaison between, two distinct worlds that can be variously labelled production and consumption, or manufacture and distribution, or commerce and culture (Soar, 2002c: 33).

It should be remembered briefly that the notion of 'new cultural intermediaries' was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, published originally in 1979, where he analyses the key role played by a wide range of social actors —journalists, opinion makers, marketers, advertisers, etc. — as transmitters of the 'good taste' that characterize the upper classes (Bourdieu, 2010). Within a context marked by a growing reflexivity of the social actors and where personal lifestyles is becoming a more and more relevant issue (Lash & Urry, 1994; Featherstone, 1991), the individual consumption become understood as 'class markers' and social distinction factors, the cultural intermediaries — or the intellectuals of the "new petty bourgeoisie" that emerged in France in the post May 68, as they are also called by Bourdieu (2010) — have been assuming a key-strategic position. Indeed, it's up to them to select, categorize, distinguish and even certify the artistic and cultural objects (in a very broad sense) that are worthy of attention and consumption (see also Lash & Urry, 1987: 292–296; Featherstone, 1991: 87–94; Bovone, 1997; Nixon & Du Gay, 2002; O'Connor, 2015: 376–377). Later, authors such as Mike Featherstone (1991) or, more recently, Justin O'Connor (2015) also highlight the important role of the cultural intermediaries in the affirmation and legitimization of a new urban popular culture in the post-war period, contributing to the blurring of old dichotomies and symbolic hierarchies associated with different cultural forms, expressions and manifestations and thus helping to create more extensive and informed audiences.[2]

Although very relevant and influential, the very broad and generic nature of the concept of 'new cultural intermediaries' has been criticized by Liz McFall (2002), Sean Nixon and Paul Du Gay (Nixon & Du Gay, 2002; Nixon, 1997, 2003; Du Gay, 1997), among other authors that warn about the need of more detailed analysis of the different professional groups that constitute the cultural intermediaries' group, in order to understand the specificities of their work, their different cultural and educational backgrounds, among other aspects that may be relevant to a more accurate assessment of their work and its impact. These authors also argue, on the other hand, the advantages of abandoning the epithet of 'new', since some of the professions related to cultural intermediation have already several decades of existence.[3] In this sense, authors such as McFall,

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[2] See Ferreira (2002) for a good summary of the main sociological perspectives on the notion of cultural mediation.

[3] See McFall (2002) study on the pioneers of advertising in UK, during the nineteenth century, for example.

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Nixon or Du Gay, among others, propose that researchers start to simply use the designation of 'cultural intermediaries' *tout court*.

Following these criticisms, several researchers have been studying some of these professional groups, focusing on the specific conditions of those who work or aspire to work in the field of culture, in a broad sense. It is precisely within this context that will emerge the first sociological approaches seriously committed on understanding the specific outlines of some professional universes that are related to the design field, namely exploring the career paths of young fashion designers (McRobbie, 1998, 2016), advertisers (Nixon, 1997, 2003; Soar, 1996, 2000; McFall, 2002; Cronin, 2004; Luczaj, 2016), graphic designers (Ringing, 2002a/b/c; Wijk and Laisink, 2004; Vinodrai, 2006), or new media workers (Gill, 2002, 2007).

Unlike the proposal of sociological analysis advanced by C. Wright Mills (2008), this renewed look of sociology on designers proves to be averse to excessively dichotomous and simplistic visions (see Soar, 2002c; Aronczyk, 2010). Instead, it seeks to interpret the quite diverse and complex ways through which many of these cultural workers understand their practices, how they organized themselves professionally, exploring the often contradictory and ambiguous ways that the identities of designers, as a professional group, are built and developed, the expectations that are generated in different contexts, and the concrete reality of an increasingly adverse labour market. The next section of this chapter aims to present a brief systematization of some of the main features of the work organization within the design field, discussing some specific aspects related graphic design field. As it was previously mentioned, this reflection is particularly informed by the research that is been held in Portugal concerning the specificities and diversities of careers within the graphic design worlds.

3. Conceptions and work organization models in graphic design

Historically, design has a strong tradition of flexible labour, with a predominance of self-employment and freelance, project-based work schemes (Dormer, 1993; Julier, 2008; Julier & Moor, 2009). According to some authors (McRobbie, 1998; Wijk & Leisink, 2004; Julier, 2008), self-employment is even an essential characteristic of the social identity of designers as a professional group, being

actively encouraged in peer relationship, especially during the training period.[4] In my own research I have found that also in Portugal there is a strong tradition of self-employment in the design sector, a condition that is shared by almost all interviewed designers who began working between the 1960's and 80's. Despite this remains a very usual situation nowadays, it must be recognized that, from the 90's onwards, the situation begins to become increasingly diverse, with the namely with the entrance in the national market of multinational advertising agencies and the emergence of some bigger design studios.[5] On the other hand, it appears that the large majority of the interviewed designers aspire — or aspired — to have their own studio, where they work on their own, as freelancers or small-scale entrepreneurs, hoping to have the conditions and the opportunities to develop their *own style* (a question which, as we shall see later, is connected with the growing importance of authorship issues in the design field).

In interviews with young designers, the issue of freelance is often seen as an intermediate step in a career that, despite being seen as (increasingly) arduous and difficult, it is expected that culminates in the opening of their own studio.

> After school there is a huge gap to manage to get work to carry on to professional level, seriously speaking. That's the freelancer phase, a period to show that we can work properly, to make our portfolio and, at the same time, to make enough money to, later then, we can create our own studio... (André, 23 years old, degree in graphic design; currently working as a freelance while completing his master's degree in graphic design)

In other cases, the decision to establish an own studio — whether it is formally constituted as a company or as an informal collective of freelancers gathered under the same common 'brand' — seems to be seen almost as a measure of 'resistance', reflecting the assessment made by these young designers about the difficult situation that the country is experiencing, especially since 2008, with the increasing growing of precarious working conditions. Let's

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[4] In this regard, Ellen Van Wijk and Peter Ink Laws state that "The teacher at the art academy, who are self-employed designers themselves, enact the social structure of graphic design in which 'creative freedom' and freelancing are connected." (Wijk & Leisink, 2004: 107).

[5] Of course, these processes cannot be separated from broader processes of change (socio-economic, cultural and political nature) that occurred in the Portuguese society, from the 1980s onwards, with very significant impacts on the organizational modes of the activity of the designers, design studios and advertising and communication agencies (see Souto, 1991; Santos, 2002; Almeida, 2014; Silva, 2015; Bártolo, 2015).

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look, as an example, the following excerpt from an interview conducted with some elements of a small design studio from Lisbon, explaining the circumstances and reasons that led to the decision to create the studio:

> Joana Sobral**:** Yes, now we can consider that our transition from university to the work world was very naive because the truth is that, at that time, we didn't have a single client! What we had was the conviction that we had a good group dynamic while students in college so we wanted to keep working together (…).
>
> Rafael Lourenço**:** Somehow we anticipated the difficulties to start from scratch and we realized that joining our forces in a single project would be easier than working as freelancer individually but… (…)
>
> João Silva**:** Also, none of us wanted to do a six month internship, unpaid, and then return to the starting point…
>
> (Vivóeusébio, design studio founded in 2006 by four graphic designers, between 31 and 32 years old; all with a degree in graphic design)

Once this activity always has been organized, from the labour point of view, according to principles of a flexible economy, one can state that — like other artistic areas — the design anticipates a set of transformations that have been widespread in the labour market (see Menger, 2005; Ross, 2000, 2006–07; McRobbie, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2016; Osten, 2007, 2011; De Peuter, 2014). Recent studies demonstrate that many designers and other cultural and creative workers continue to incorporate this sort of labour market way of relationship and organization; but, simultaneously, they also stress its deeply negative impacts, including:

- Preponderance of irregular, project-based work regimes, often in self-employment schemes and freelance;
- Predominance of low wages and lack of social protection;
- Tendency to a multiplication of jobs;
- Growing difficulty in dissociate labour time from 'free time', which tend to extend and mix, creating a kind of continuum;
- Great uncertainty about the expectations of building a professional career;
- Under-representation of women and ethnic minority communities, who often work in the more unfavourable or unequal situations;
- Gatekeeping and networking have a great importance, putting the creative professionals under a great pressure to constantly 'self-promote' themselves (and thus contributing to the work/leisure continuum);

▪ Worsening trend of a low ability of workers' organizational and collective action in this sector (individualism prevails).[6]

But these forms of work organization also have a profound impact on the subjectivity of social actors. Recent research conducted by David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2010, 2011) on the working conditions in three different fields of the creative industries sectors in the UK, for example, rightly warns for the relevance of analysing sociologically some of *emotional* or *affective* dimensions of creative labour — related not only to the stress and work pressure in highly precarious labour models, but also related with how the management of another kind of feelings (such as frustration, disillusionment and disappointment) — and their impact on quality of life. Since this are highly competitive contexts, that are generally characterized by a strong atomization and isolation of workers, many investigations have allowed us to understand that there is a trend towards more acute feelings of insecurity, which often leads creative workers to find flexible management mechanisms of their expectations and ambiguous feelings, combining pleasure and pain in complex mechanisms of 'self-exploration', as explains Angela McRobbie (1998, 2002, 2011, 2016), in an approach clearly inspired by Michel Foucault's analytical framework of the "technologies of the self" (see Foucault, 1988).

It is therefore necessary, as argues Rosalind Gill (2002), to question the coolness 'aura' usually related with creative industries — and particularly with design —, denouncing the deeply negative impacts of such 'flexible' forms of labour relationships. In Portugal, the hunger strike "for a job and a decent future" carried out by José Cardoso, a Porto-based graphic designer and illustrator, in September 2012, shows, in a very dramatic way, the numerous contradictions in the current mainstream rhetoric on 'creative entrepreneurship', warning for the high degree of desperation that are experiencing some of the Portuguese designers (and not only them), particularly in such a time of deep crisis and economic downturn like the current ones. Indeed, these seems to be propitious times for a heightening of the risks of volatility, flexibility and job insecurity of

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[6] This synthetic overview is based on a criss-cross reading of different studies on work in cultural and creative fields, which goes beyond the strict limits of the graphic design field. However, once there are many points of contact between these different areas, it justifies thus this kind of criss-cross reading. For some main sources, see Menger, 2005; McRobbie, 1998, 2002, 2011, 2016; Ross, 2003, 2008; Gill, 2002, 2007; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Conor, 2010; Blair, 2001; Banks, 2006; Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Mould, Vorley & Liu, 2014; Cohen, 2012; De Peuter, 2011, 2014; Brophy & De Peuter, 2007; Neff *et al.*, 2005; Borges, 2007, 2011; Borges & Costa, 2012; among others.

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creative workers such as graphic designers, which in an 'normal' context were already in a quite high level (see Quintela, 2013).

To conclude, it should be stressed the relevance of this sociological research line — one that, in fact, goes beyond the design field *stricto sensu* —, once it allows us to critically question some hegemonic rhetoric concerning the cultural and creative industries that has been spread over the European political and economic mainstream during the last decade (Flew, 2012; O'Connor, 2007, 2011; Hesmondhalgh, 2007, 2013; Pratt, 2009; Pratt & Jeffcutt, 2009; Ferreira, 2010), celebrating the 'flexibility' and 'entrepreneurship' of those that Richard Florida (2002) has called the 'creative class'. However, when we analyse the design field these issues get a particular relevance. Rhetorically, the design is becoming increasingly seen as a kind of virtuous' paradigm of a successful application of 'creativity' (typical of the arts and culture) and 'innovation' (typical of engineering and applied sciences), able to provide, in an efficient and pragmatic way, tailored solutions to answer to the constant market needs, increasingly voracious and demanding. Thus, the analysis of this issue implies a detailed analysis of some recent changes in the design field, focusing particularly in those that are specific of the graphic design field — which will be developed in the next section of the chapter.

4. Design as a paradigmatic field of the new 'creative economy'

The design has undergone, over the past few years, profound changes that led to successive enlargements, triggering new professional practices and the involvement of designers in new networks and professional contexts. According to David Bell and Mark Jayne (2003), design is currently a 'fuzzy term', stressing the authors the increasingly dilated, undefined and, in a sense, ambiguous character of this activity. This is, in fact, an increasingly large and complex disciplinary domain, intervening in several fields, producing an extensive range of goods, services and landscapes. Moreover, as the presence of design invades more and more the public and mediatic space, it also becomes an increasingly multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary domain, which also results from the growing interest of other fields of knowledge in this activity (Bony, 2006; Julier, 2008). On the other hand, design has also incorporated, in both rhetorical and pragmatic plans, a new set of political, social and mediatic 'agendas' — ecology

and environmental sustainability, the efficient and innovative management of territories and businesses, among others examples (Foster, 2002; Julier, 2004, 2008; Julier & Moor, 2009; Lanteois, 2010). Finally, we witness an expansion and transformation of the design idea, increasingly 'de-materialized' and 'de-aestheticized', gaining greater relevance its procedural dimension, as a management method, as an instrument to fostering innovation and as a creative tool to problem solving (Kimbell, 2011; Tonkinwise, 2008) — the most famous example is probably the so-called *design thinking*, which has been gaining increasing prominence and disciplinary autonomy. Consequently, design has recently come to intervene in new domains, particularly those related to strategy, management and planning. This ability to introduce changes and add value is a crucial aspect and a key-argument in all the rhetoric surrounding the design and its importance in innovation processes.

It's precisely in this sense that Philippe Bouquillion (2012: 30) suggests that nowadays designers are exemplary figures of the new 'creative economy': equipped with specific creative tools and skills, these professionals have the ability to develop innovative approaches to different kinds of organizations and companies, actively contributing to increase their differentiation and competitiveness. Briefly, the designers exemplify three key-ideas that structure the contemporary rhetoric on creativity, namely: (1) the creative industries are one of the key growth drivers of contemporary economies; (2) the 'creative' human capital is now at the core of contemporary economy, being advantageous to invest it in 'non-creative' sectors; and, finally, (3) the importance and suitability of new patterns of 'flexible' work, project-based, currently being spread throughout the economy. Therefore, one should not be surprise that design is nowadays one of the most emblematic areas of creative industries' 'mantra', repeatedly addressed in various technical reports and political speeches on this subject. In this sense, Andy C. Pratt and Paul Jeffcutt argue that "the design field, [is] perhaps the most amorphous but emblematic area of the creative industries, particularly for politicians and lay people an expression of the 'creative' premium." (Pratt & Jeffcutt 2009: 15).

In a circumstance where the design concept continually expands and complexifies, also the contexts of the designers' professional practices change, becoming required new skills of argumentation, negotiation and management of interests and priorities. But, on the other hand, we are also witnessing to a strengthening of the symbolic power and the ability to influence these

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professionals, as the designers are increasingly present in public and mediatic space (Julier & Moor, 2009).

It should be remembered that the public recognition process of the designer dates back to the last two decades of the twentieth century, when there is an intensification of the presence of design in contemporary societies. Under a strong influence of postmodernism, especially since the 1980s, the language of design has changed profoundly, emerging new approaches that show a strong eclecticism, hybridity and a permanent intertextuality of visual, cultural and historical references. In what concerns graphic design, if the post-war period corresponded to a 'normalization' which, as we have seen, is characterized by a hegemonic notion of 'good design', in the 1980's and 90's it takes place a recovery of some avant-garde artistic currents that marked the beginning of the discipline — such as the Russian Constructivism and the Surrealism, e.g. — that were reappropriated, deconstructed and reinterpreted by a new generation of graphic designers (see Jobling & Crowley, 1996: 271–290; Poynor, 2003).

It is precisely in this context of increasing recognition of the role of design in society that emerges an intense debate on *authorship* in design (Rock, 2005; Poynor, 2003; Moura, 2011) and the new role as *producers* that many designers are beginning to claim (Margolin, 2002; Lupton, 2005; Blauvelt & Lupton, 2011; Bártolo, 2011 e 2014; McCarthy, 2013). This change reflects a clear desire of emancipation of, more or less, functionalist views of design; and, simultaneously, it points out to a new set of aspirations, in social and professional terms. Within this new context, the design begins to be more clearly assumed as a cultural expression, which will contribute to a gradually mitigate the traditional distinction between artists and designers.

If the affirmation of the graphic design notion in the late 1920's — surpassing other competing terms, such as 'commercial art' — was crucial for this activity gradually move away from the strict field of advertising, giving graphic designers a greater disciplinary autonomy and also recognizing a greater complexity in their work (Jobling & Crowley, 1996: 1–2), it's also important to recognize that the contemporary debate on authorship in design seems to take other contours, perhaps more radicals, especially when it underestimates some foundations of the profession, such as the existence of an external client who makes an order or puts a problem that the designer must answer. Indeed, there is a growing number of graphic designers that, in recent years, began working by their own motivation, developing self-initiated projects, assuming themselves fully as authors, able to produce without a client's order

and often having as an audience their peers (other fellow designers, illustrators and artists). In this context, the search and affirmation of one *own style* — associated with a particular designer or design studio —, easily recognizable by peers and also by clients, becomes an increasingly important issue (Philizot, 2007; Jobling & Crowley, 1996: 284).

Clearing approaching the worlds of art and contemporary architecture, issues like 'talent' or 'originality' are becoming increasingly important in building a reputation within the design field. Also, a tension between two extremes poles is developing within this field: on one hand, more strict 'commercial' approaches that, in graphic design, are related mainly with advertising projects done by large design studios or communication and advertising agencies; and, on the other hand, approaches that clearly are more 'authorial', which often are associated with more 'experimental' projects, usually for clients related with arts and culture, which are typically carried out by individual designers or small design studios (Poynor, 2003, 2004; Philizot, 2007). Vivien Philizot (2007) claims, perhaps too schematically, that the graphic design field is currently structured between, on the one hand, a very small number of 'authors-designers' (which form a sort of an elite or a star-system) and, on the other hand, a large number of 'semi-authors' and 'executants' designers, with different levels of prestige, recognition and autonomy. Regardless the merits of the typology advanced by Philizot (2007), it seems to be unequivocal that this new understanding of the designer as author has been widely disseminated within the field, changing profoundly the professional aspirations and expectations, especially of a new generation of graphic designers.

It's important to highlight here the key role played by arts and design schools. As previously mentioned, there is a long tradition in graphic design education to valorise and emphasize the designers who own their own studio and also to encourage, since an early stage, the students' 'creative freedom', motivating them to set up in the market as self-employed designers (see Wijk & Leisink, 2004: 107) — an aspect which, as already mentioned, is very clearly present in the interviews conducted with Portuguese graphic designers from different generations. However, there has been, in recent years, a notable increase of this positive appreciation and valuation of this authorial dimension related with design and the profession of designer. In Portugal, this phenomenon is clearly visible, for example, in the recent proliferation of academic events (meetings, conferences, workshops), for which are usually invited designers and design studios whose portfolio is usually considered as

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more experimental or authorial. Furthermore, the recent boom of design-related initiatives (such as exhibitions, publications, conferences, workshops, artistic residencies, etc.) also contributed to increase the visibility and recognition of a cultural dimension associated with the design, and simultaneously encourages self-reflection and critical questioning of Portuguese designers about their own professional practices.[7]

Often conceived and organized by designers, these initiatives have helped to develop new spaces dedicated to the theory and design critic in Portugal, encouraging the self-reflection and critical questioning of designers about their professional practices. Although it's important recognize that, by their own characteristics, many of these initiatives end up having a quite delimited impact (in time and space), revealing some fragilities in this dynamic (Quintela, 2014b), the recent proliferation of events, publications, exhibitions and other initiatives is nonetheless an indicative of the trend towards a growing maturity and autonomy of the design, as an disciplinary field and profession — following an wider international trend (see Soar, 2002a/b/c; Bártolo, 2014).

However, this trend should not be mistaken with some kind of unanimity or consensus; on the contrary, in my own field of work I have found a multiplicity of perspectives, opinions and positions on the profession. Anyway, although not every interviewed designers recognize themselves as 'authors', it seems to be a widely shared desire and ambition to build a career which is regarded, recognized and valued, both by their peers and clients. At the same time, many interviewees reveal a profound mismatch between their personal and professional expectations and an increasingly adverse reality.

It's precisely within this context that in recent years several Portuguese designers, individually or collectively, decided to develop self-initiated projects through which they seek to: (1) find spaces for personnel fulfilment; (2) find spaces to emancipate themselves from more conventional professional models; (3) and also to search for alternative answers to an increasingly saturated labour market, marked by the deterioration of the work conditions and the lack of projects that designers consider to be 'challenging', from an creative standpoint.

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[7] For an overview of some of these initiatives, see Bártolo (2015). Frederico Duarte (2014) provides a more detailed analysis of some Portuguese design projects authorial-oriented. For a review on some recent changes in what concerns exhibitions and other similar projects related with an idea of a Portuguese design heritage, see also Coelho, 2013; Quintela, 2014a; Bártolo, 2014b. Finally, for an analysis on the emergence of a design criticism in the context of the national blogosphere, see Moura, 2014; Quintela, 2014b.

Some of these projects take a critical positioning on design, the way this designers relate themselves critically with their profession and also with the market that it seems to be interesting to deepen here.

Indeed, for their craft and handmade characteristics, and its slow rhythm of production, sometimes using production methods that openly call to a physical effort in the process of its implementation — silkscreen printing, for example — many of these projects can be seen as a criticism to the degradation of the work conditions and as a form of resistance to the growing technological complexity of contemporary graphic design (see Lantenois, 2010: 53–64). During the interviews conducted, some designers involved in this kind of projects explicitly express their discontent with the dissatisfaction with the preponderance, in their creative work processes, of the computer and the several graphical editing softwares.

> We are very saturated of spending so many hours in front of a computer screen and at least this [work associated with manual silkscreen printing] is a more physical wear that forces us to think about how to achieve the plasticity that we could not get from the computer. (Miguel Carneiro, 34 years old, member of the collective Oficina Arara; hold a degree in fine arts/ painting)

Somehow, most of these projects are seen as spaces of resistance and creative freedom by many of these graphic designers who often are, at the same time, pursuing their professional activity in more conventional and, from their perspective, less creative ways. On the other hand, some of these self-initiated projects also play an important role in the improvement of the designers' professional portfolio — which also explains the investment made in the careful production of some of these graphical objects. Finally, these projects also show the desire of these designers to fully assume their status as authors, controlling the entire process — from the conception to the production and, sometimes, even the distribution and sale. Indeed, it's important to stress that although most of these projects answer to personal pulses, being developed in an independent and do-it-yourself way, many of them intended to be sold. At this point we can hardly speak of a professionalization linked to such practices, because generally designers combine these practices with other professional activities to ensure the economic sustainability or recur to family support, particularly in case of young students (but not just them). However, this doesn't mean that these self-initiated projects cannot generate some sort of economic return, fuelling what Teal Triggs (2010: 209) calls 'micro-craft economies' that nowadays thrive in

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online and offline independent circuits dedicated to the sale of self-publish publications, fanzines and other kind of graphic objects (see Quintela & Borges, 2015).

4. Concluding remarks

This chapter addresses how the design has been complexifying and diversifying itself over the last years, getting an unprecedented recognition in contemporary societies which, as Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) explained, result from a massification of its presence in contemporary economies that became increasingly 'intensive design'. Also, design has become increasingly complex and diverse in the last years, gaining an unprecedented recognition. However, the central position design holds today clearly contrasts with a long period in which this activity and particularly its professionals remained in the 'shadows', ignored either by the 'art worlds' as by the academy. As we have seen, in recent years this situation has deeply changed, with the emergence of several research works that sought to analyse this activity, trying to understand the design complexity as a discipline, as well as exploring the specific conditions under which designers work.

Design has a number of historical features that make it a fascinating research subject: on one hand, it constitutes an hinge area, between art and the production system, where different forms of creativity are confronted and make compatible, and whose the results, in principle, aim to answer to the market needs (Dubuisson & Hennion, 1995); and, on the other hand, it is an activity that always has been organized, from a work point of view, according to principles of a flexible economy, marked by the self-employment and freelance (Dormer, 1993; Julier, 2008; Julier & Moor, 2009). Perhaps this is why designers are currently being seen as role models of the new 'creative economy', being constantly mentioned in studies and reports (Bouquillion, 2012; Pratt & Jeffcutt 2009).

However, how it was argue before, this kind of idealized view of the design often do not consider the negative impacts associated with how the designers relate themselves with work and organize professionally. Thus, it proves to be of utmost importance continue further with researches related to work realities in cultural and creative sectors which, as we have seen, have contributed much to offer a contradictory look to the hegemonic idealized, stereotyped and overly

generic and homogenizing visions of the working experience in creative fields such as creative design.

From my perspective, the design is currently a privileged domain of sociological study, allowing us to: (1) realize how this type of labour market organization are incorporated and reproduced; (2) reflect on the negative impacts associated with the way designers relate themselves to work; and (3) identify mechanisms of managing of expectations and micro-resistance within this creative field. Throughout this chapter were introduce some reflections that result from the on-going research on Portuguese graphic designers careers from different generations. However, the experiences of the youngest designers have a particular focus in the analysis, mainly because this is the group that have been more impacted by this new rhetoric around the importance of design in contemporary societies, being strongly encouraged, throughout their schooling and beyond, to affirm themselves individually in the market. However, in the conducted interviews, many of these designers show not only an acute awareness of the difficulties encountered at the moment of entering the labour market — and that, in many cases, still remains —, but also demonstrate a quite critical perspective on the mainstream rhetoric surrounding the 'creative entrepreneurship'. As we have seen, in some cases it was even possible to identify a clear desire to find alternatives that, although uncertain and possibly economically unsustainable, enable these designers to overcome some of the material difficulties associated to the increasing deterioration of their working conditions and, above all, help them to manage the feelings of frustration.

It is precisely in this context that, from an sociological standpoint, it seems interesting to follow the current debate on the enlargement of the designers' activity that, increasingly, are looking at themselves as cultural players — authors, publishers, curators, critics, writers, etc. —, and try to realize what will be the impact, in the long term, of these changes that, until some time ago, were not so clearly associated with this professional activity. This is certainly a promising research path that I personally want to continue deepen. However, I'm also confident that the analysis of the Portuguese reality will certainly benefit from comparative analysis with other territorial contexts, as well as criss-cross readings with other different disciplinary fields that integrate the cultural and creative sector.

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