Re/framing design trends:
a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach

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Declaration

I declare that *Re/framing design trends: a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach* is my own work and that all sources used throughout the study have been indicated by means of complete references.

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Summary and key terms

This thesis illustrates the potential of Kenneth Burke's theory for interrogating visual design trend dynamics and rhetorics. The investigation originated in response to the perceived unsustainability of accelerated design trend dynamics, as amplified by rhetorically-driven aesthetic obsolescence. The hermeneutic framework developed in this study, referred to as a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach, is thus used towards *re-framing* attitudes towards and engagements with design trends. The framework is illustrated throughout the study by referring to visual design examples as well as verbal discourse surrounding prominent historical and contemporary design movements or trends. Various theoretical facets form part of the meta-rhetorical framework, namely Burke's dialectics, dramatism, rhetoric, criticism and ethics. A Burkean dialectical perspective on design trends offers foundational insights on how symbolic language creates 'design dialectics', which translate into dynamic design change over time. Burke's 'dramatism' sheds light on the human-relational 'design drama' that impacts design trend engagements. Burke's rhetoric offers insights on rhetorical strategies or persuasive tactics found in 'the rhetorical design situation', where designers are both producers and consumers of design trend rhetorics. Burke's critical theory is useful for interrogating perceived 'design (dis)orders' or design attitudes and behaviours that become imbalanced, potentially contributing to and exacerbating problematic trend dynamics. Lastly, Burke's symbolic re-framing strategies are considered towards developing more ethical, honest and responsible (less polemical or melodramatic) trend rhetorics. Burke's meta-rhetorical theory is thus presented as a valuable theoretical approach in design, for nurturing greater rhetorical awareness and promoting more responsible rhetorical design citizenship.

Key terms: design; communication design; design trends; Kenneth Burke; meta-rhetoric; rhetoric; visual rhetoric; rhetorical interpretation; Burkean dialectics; design dialectics; Burkean dramatism; design drama; design motives; design ethics; identification; persuasion; aesthetics; style.

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* The opinions expressed in this thesis and the conclusions arrived at are those of the author and should not necessarily be attributed to the University of Pretoria.

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Abbreviations of books by Kenneth Burke

ATH: *Attitudes toward history*

CS: *Counter-statement*

GM: *A grammar of motives*

LSA: *Language as symbolic action: essays on life, literature, and method*

PC: *Permanence and change: an anatomy of purpose*

PLF: *The philosophy of literary form: studies in symbolic action*

RM: *A rhetoric of motives*

RR: *The rhetoric of religion: studies in logology*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

The visual treatment of design products is in constant flux. Throughout design history, new styles and movements routinely supplant the dominant or mainstream aesthetic direction. Furthermore, modernist aspirations have been replaced by postmodern[1] pluralism since at least the 1960s, and along with it, stylistic trends fluctuate faster than ever before. Although design has always operated within the realm of creation and innovation, various design critics are concerned about the increasing acceleration of design change, leading to unsustainable production and consumption practices. Rick Poynor characterises the role of the designer in relation to the current consumer culture as follows:

> [H]ere is the central dilemma for any designer working today. When it comes to consumer goods, every new design (or old design re-editioned as if new), no matter how well considered, sincerely intentioned or just plain alluring, contributes to the gigantic over-production of things. Whatever it is, in any purely rational assessment, we almost certainly don't 'need' it, keenly as we might desire it (Poynor in Buwert 2011:19).

The stimulation of desire is one of the key market functions of visual design. Especially in highly competitive industries where products tend to be technically similar, brand image and identity, which is largely communicated through visual style, is the main source of differentiation and value. While product or brand differentiation via design is not a problem *per se*, an accelerated trajectory of stylistic design change purely to sell more products, may be considered highly problematic. This phenomenon can be described as 'aesthetic obsolescence', or, in other words, shortening the lifespan of products by making them stylistically outdated.

As Hella Jongerius and Louise Schouwenberg (2015) point out in their *Beyond the new* manifesto, a major part of the contemporary marketing strategy is to consistently present an ethos of innovation. Otherwise put, the current marketing environment celebrates the appeal of 'the new' "as the one and only, inherently desirable quality of commodities". In their manifesto, they deplore "the obsession with the New for the sake of the New" arguing that "newness for its own sake" can be interpreted as "an empty shell, which requires overblown rhetoric to fill it with meaning" (Jongerius & Schouwenberg 2015:2-5). They continue to argue that while the field of design is flourishing, the actual benefit of all this design is questionable: "[w]hat most design events have in common are the presentations of a depressing cornucopia of pointless products, commercial hypes around presumed innovations, and empty rhetoric" (Jongerius & Schouwenberg 2015:6). Klaus Krippendorff (2006:289) also refers to the "long term decay of culture and the environment" as a result of a design practice characterised by "[p]retentious semiotizations, inflating the value through appearances, introducing insignificant differences [and] adding meaningless options". While Krippendorff believes these are problems associated with marketing-driven design in particular,[2] it is possible to argue that this is the dominant kind of design today. From a graphic design perspective, Anne Burdick (1992) explains

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[1] Although postmodernism as a movement is in some respects outdated, no coherent new term has replaced it.
[2] Krippendorff (2006) supports 'Human-Centered Design' as an antidote to marketing-driven design.

how "[w]hen stylistic change […] is tied to the rapid turnover and imitative nature of fashion, we begin to suspect that our work is merely shallow trendfollowing and empty form-pushing". Similarly, Ed van Hinte (2004:183) argues that "[a]ll this ostentatious newness has become a habit. It is not really clear if it serves any purpose other than competition between companies to try and get a slightly larger share of the market. Apart from that it is mainly boring pseudo innovation".

In the above, it is worth taking note of repeated references to 'hype' and 'empty', 'shallow' or 'overblown' rhetoric, as a means of justifying or rationalising 'meaningless' new product iterations. There seems to be a suspicion that although shifting trends are aimed at stimulating consumer demand, the rhetoric employed in the promotion and justification of new trends conceals those commercial motives. Critiques such as these suggest that we operate in a design and marketing context where true motives are hidden behind rhetorical arguments. This is not a new concern, of course, and has to some extent become part of a stereotypical characterisation of marketing and advertising industries.

The tendency to employ 'empty' rhetoric and conceal motives is explored in the amusing essay by Michael Bierut (2007), *On design bullshit*. Here Bierut (2007:176), in reference to Harry Frankfurt's influential essay, *On bullshit* (1986), suggests that "[e]very design presentation is inevitably, at least in part, an exercise in bullshit". Bierut argues that the intuitive, ambiguous and often 'unexplainable' nature of design decisions necessitate the kinds of post-rationalisation often referred to as 'design bullshit'. Furthermore, designers operate within a context where the client's perception rests largely on the image of competency a designer projects when providing the rationale. To verbally rationalise or justify decisions and project a favourable professional image, is a major part of the design process and fits squarely within the domain of rhetorical practice.

The recognition of rhetorical tactics, as often found in political contexts, usually takes place when the perceived gap between true and expressed motive is perceived as somehow devious or harmful. This pejorative understanding of rhetoric, as insincere or manipulative, is seen throughout history and is also present in the contemporary usage of the term. However, the reality is that rhetorical argumentation is always part of communication, regardless of whether it is noticed or deemed harmful. It is therefore important to recognise that one cannot conflate 'rhetoric' with superficial, manipulative tactics, even if it is easy to see why the association is frequently made.

Despite widespread negative connotations, rhetoric has come to be considered an established and respected area of inquiry in design theory. Design theorists such as Gui Bonsiepe (1999), Richard Buchanan (1985), Hanno Ehses (1988), Robin Kinross (1985) and Ellen Lupton (1988) have illustrated the value of rhetorical perspectives for design and have done much to re-frame rhetoric in positive, productive terms. These theorists emphasise the connection between rhetoric and design, specifically with regard to the strategic, communicative value of visual form. There is, and always has been, a strong and rather obvious connection between rhetoric and style. As Hanno Ehses (1988:5) argues, all communication design is rhetorically infiltrated and regardless of "how spare and simple, has meaningful stylistic qualities which exceed the stated 'content' of a message".

While theorists such as Buchanan insist that design rhetoric does not only pertain to aspects of product aesthetics or styling, the rhetorical significance of surface styling should not be underestimated either. Barry Brummet (2008; 2012:813) suggests that "style is the global rhetoric for the 21st century, fuelled by the dominance of global capitalism that will depend on public hunger for style to drive markets". Richard Lanham (2006:xi) similarly argues, in *The economics of attention: style and substance in the age of information* (2006), that style is increasingly important since it has the ability to attract attention in our highly saturated *attention economy*.[3] Stylistic treatments should not be seen as 'shallow' effects, but taken seriously insofar as they are highly influential in creating appeal. As Steven Heller and Louise Fili (2006:8) explain, "[s]tyle is often chided as mere veneer (as in that familiar reproach, 'style over substance'). Yet it can be a substantial manifestation of movements, schools and individuals, born of philosophies, ideologies and strategies, endemic to all things crafted by humans". The rhetoric of style is, in other words, a significant aspect of design practice, and a major contributor to how people relate to products, services and brands.

Rhetoric is highly concerned with the strategic value of formal aspects of communication. In other words, it considers *how* something is said (or shown) in addition to *what* is being said (or shown), while also considering the reasons *why* it is said (or shown) in such a way. As Peter Hall (2009) explains, when considering a design object as a rhetorical argument it "allows us to look under the hood and consider it not as an inevitable or neutral invention but as something that embodies a point of view".

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From the above perspective, all design practice is rhetorical. However, design trends *seem* to employ rhetorical tactics to an even greater extent. This is perhaps because design trends emerge and gain traction through a highly visible blend of visual-verbal rhetorical strategies. Design trends employ visual rhetorical strategies to differentiate a product via an appealing new aesthetic. But these trends also require verbal rhetorical argumentation to justify and promote new visual directions. From this perspective, trends can be interpreted as highly mediated and discursively constructed, meta-cultural products. This relates to Guy Julier's (2008:79) notion of 'design culture' as enabled by "a complicated system of mediation and distribution". The 'culture of design' produces self-conscious or reflexive, meta-cultural products, whereby the relational, socio-cultural or symbolic value of products become more significant than functional use value. While new visual tendencies may emerge in more or less organic ways, a trend (as product of this 'culture of design') is dependent on specific kinds of discursive practices, including promotion and 'hype'. In this arena, visual and verbal rhetorical strategies go hand-in-hand to mediate the reception, and encourage widespread uptake, of a new visual aesthetic direction.

As part of the rhetorical strategy, new design movements or trends are usually positioned as improvements on functional, aesthetic or ethical factors. In other words, the rhetoric of 'the new' is not only based on

[3] Lanham (2006) explains how economics concerns the study of the allocation of scarce resources. Therefore, to speak of an 'information economy' makes little sense; there is no shortage of information, "[w]e're drowning in it" (Lanham 2006:xi). Instead, "[w]hat we lack is the human attention needed to make sense of it all. It will be easier to find our place in the new regime if we think of it as an economics of attention. Attention is the commodity in short supply" (Lanham 2006:xi).

change or difference but on some form of superiority. There is a cultural value hierarchy, whereby new products or styles are not only perceived as different but also as 'better'. In fashion industries, 'the new' is often perceived to be better, simply for the sake of being new and different. However, in other design industries more substantial reasons are usually required to justify new approaches, as *not* just for the sake of the new. In these sectors new trends are often positioned as 'antidotes' or 'solutions' to whatever may be perceived as problematic or lacking in the current mainstream direction. New movements thus tend to assert radical positions in opposition to that which came before, thereby declaring the legitimacy and superiority of the new approach.

An example may prove instructive at this point. The 'flat design' trend emerged in 2012 alongside the launch of Microsoft's new operating system, Windows 8 (Figure 1). The stark, minimalist, visual language (initially named *Metro*) quickly gained traction and as it became more widely appropriated and implemented, became known as 'flat design'.

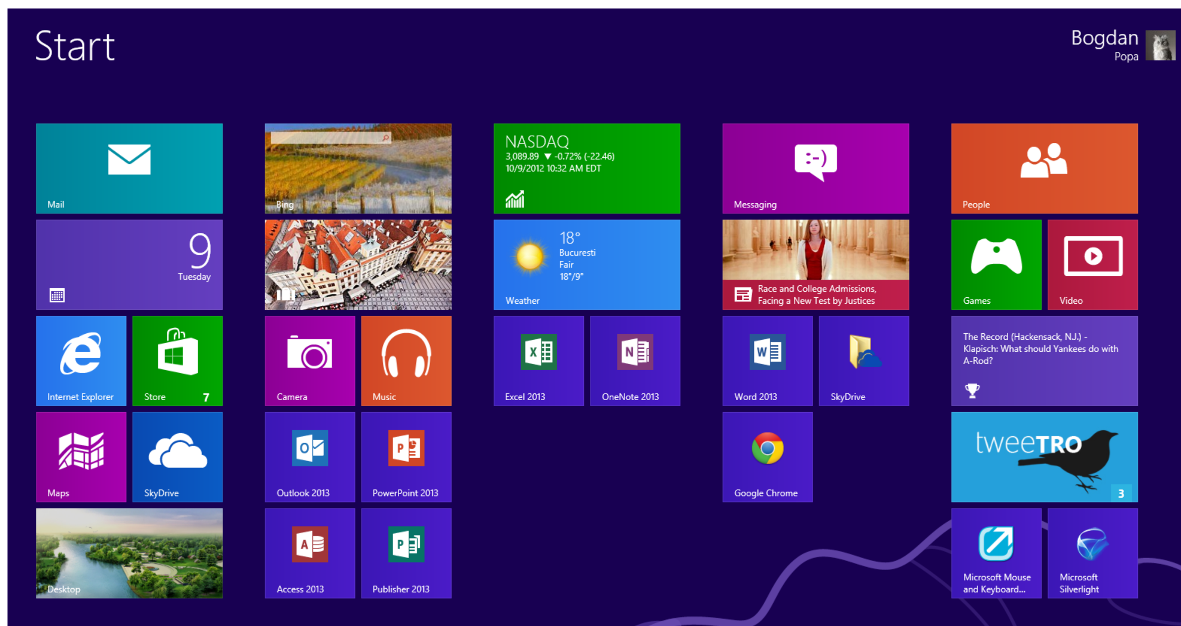

Figure 1: Windows 8 start screen, 2012 (Popa 2012).

Flat design was framed as a direct reaction against the previously popular interface aesthetic known (in retrospect) as 'skeuomorphic design'.[4] Skeuomorphic design is understood as incorporating realistically rendered physical/object metaphors and is characterised by a use of shadows, reflections and textures, simulating objects in space. This interface approach is, of course, a logical extension of the earliest desktop metaphors (such as windows, files and folders, and trash cans) which meant to assist in the adoption of new technology and improve usability through familiarity. Before 'flat design', the mimetic 'skeuomorphic' style was the dominant visual interface approach for at least a decade, and Apple (with its iOS operating system

[4] According to Dan O'Hara (in Baraniuk 2012), the term 'skeuomorphism' is misused *en masse*. He believes what is referred to as 'skeuomorphism' is really just the use of "kitsch visual metaphors" – "not the unintentional side-effects of technological evolution", which is the traditional definition of skeuomorphism (O'Hara in Baraniuk 2012).

for iPhone and iPad) was seen as the forerunner in these highly detailed, hyper-realistic and aesthetically pleasing interfaces. However, after Microsoft's aesthetic revolution, Apple also decided to move away from its skeuomorphic design style in mid-2013 (Figure 2). It is around this time that the debate surrounding the 'flat design' shift becomes increasingly prominent in design circles.

Figure 2: From 'skeuomorphic' Apple iOS 6 homescreen, 2012 (left) to 'flat' Apple iOS 7 homescreen, 2013 (right) (Sheridan 2013).

'Skeuomorphism' became used as a derogatory term to refer to the excessive and essentially functionless decorative application of textures and visual effects (Baraniuk 2012; Judah 2013). In various texts, Apple's skeuomorphic aesthetic was further attacked for being 'kitsch', 'tacky' and 'fake', as having gone 'too far' and even as 'visual masturbation' (Baraniuk 2012; Carr 2012; Downer 2012; Naeslund 2011). The detailed imitation of real-world objects for interfaces was criticised not only for detracting from optimal functional efficiency but for lacking representational integrity. 'Flat design' with its bold, minimalist and uncluttered visual appeal, was thus promoted as a welcome antidote; a more 'authentic' and 'honest' approach to digital interfaces for a new generation of users (Carr 2014; Naeslund 2011). The rhetoric surrounding the 'flat design' trend thus positioned the new aesthetic direction not only as radically different, but functionally, design-philosophically and even morally superior. As the flat design argument, which is based on powerful early twentieth-century modernist rhetorics, gained greater traction Apple had no choice but to follow a trend that they had not initiated. This naturally reflected poorly on Apple's reputation as the usual digital trend-setters (Bilton 2013; Carr 2012).

The above trend shift example provides ample opportunity for rhetorical investigation, both from visual and verbal rhetorical perspectives.[5] While it is quite an extreme example, in terms of the heated debate generated, it is useful in illustrating how, when effective verbal/discursive argumentation supports an aesthetic shift, a new direction may become a widely adopted trend or, in this case, a significant stylistic movement. What makes the example particularly useful, in the context of this study, is the way in which the rhetorics employed have increasingly come under scrutiny. A number of design critics have challenged the above arguments in favour of 'flat design', for instance, explaining how Windows 8 as well as other 'flat designs' are not nearly as functional as they claim (and initially appear) to be. In other words, there is again a perceived discrepancy between rhetoric and reality. However, regardless of whether the (visual and verbal) rhetoric reflects reality, one has to acknowledge its persuasiveness.

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On the one hand, the legitimations offered by new design trends should be taken seriously in terms of their philosophical underpinnings and resulting implications for practice. On the other hand, we need to question the validity of these claims, instead of merely being swept up by the rhetoric. As mentioned previously, it is possible to consider fluctuating stylistic trends, as justified by particular kinds of discursive practices, as 'mere' rhetoric employed in an increasingly competitive consumer-capitalist environment. While one cannot ascertain the 'true' motives or grounds for any shift in aesthetic direction, one can establish which motivations are generally perceived as more legitimate or proper, and therefore more rhetorically persuasive. In other words, it is possible to develop a greater understanding of design and trend rhetorics by paying attention to those justifications that are strategically expressed and subsequently perceived as legitimate.

Within the context outlined at the outset, there is an urgent need for designers to gain a greater understanding of design trend dynamics, as driven by design trend rhetorics. Designers are both producers and consumers of design trends; just as they are both producers and consumers of design trend rhetoric. Designers are trained in using rhetorical strategies and tactics (albeit often implicitly), but they are also influenced by rhetorical discourse within their discipline and industry. It is my argument here that designers can become more aware of the rhetorical nature of their practice, particularly in relation to trend dynamics, and develop more deliberate, reflective responses as a result. In other words, instead of mindlessly perpetuating an ethically problematic, unsustainable design dynamic, designers can become more discerning producers and consumers of design trends, as well as more responsible disseminators of trend rhetorics.

A Burkean meta-rhetorical approach

To investigate design trend dynamics, I have turned to the work of Kenneth Burke (1887-1993). Burke, an American literary and social critic in the mid-twentieth century, is still relatively unknown outside the United States of America, but his ideas on New Rhetoric – rhetoric as applied to a broader range of cultural

[5] For this reason I refer back to this 'skeuomorphic' to 'flat design' trend shift example on a number of occasions throughout this study.

production – are finding a wider audience in Europe and in other parts of the world. Burke's broad approach to rhetorical criticism touches on many aspects pertaining to the kind of investigation on trend dynamics pursued here. The various reasons why I have chosen to develop a Burkean theoretical framework for this study on design trends are briefly outlined in this section.

Firstly, while Burke is most commonly recognized as a rhetorical theorist, he spends much of his time pondering the dialectical foundations of language and conditions that contribute to the rhetorical situation. Burke's exploration of such dialectical conditions is useful in explaining why we tend to negotiate between opposite positions through rhetorical argumentation. I therefore suggest that trends can be analysed in terms of dialectical orientations and how these orientations are manifested aesthetically and rhetorically over time. Competing orientations such as progress versus tradition; mass-production versus hand-craft; objectivity versus subjectivity; and functionality versus aesthetics are often expressed as motives behind shifting design approaches. It is important to acknowledge that clear dialectical coordinates are often difficult to pinpoint, specifically in terms of postmodern production where seemingly contradictory positions are represented simultaneously. In other words, one cannot describe the oscillation of trends in simple dualistic terms. It is in investigating the complexity surrounding oppositional orientations where Burke's dialectical approach is particularly useful.

Secondly, Burke's dialectical interest (in the Hegelian and Marxist tradition) extends to studying the shifting philosophical or ideological movements and the fluctuation between opposite forces or attitudes throughout history. Throughout history, different design styles and terminologies have been accepted or rejected, praised or dismissed, depending on the socio-cultural context. According to Burke (CS:vii), "[h]eresies and orthodoxies will always be changing places, but whatever the minority view happens to be at any given time, one must consider it 'counter'". He considers transitions throughout Western history, by considering the way in which ideological systems of ideas are in continual flux, changing and adapting to the current environment. In other words, he sees ideology not as a "monolithic system" but rather as divergent and dynamic, containing competing subdivisions (Beach 2012:17).

Thirdly, Burke's main interest lies in broad-based rhetorical criticism rather than rhetorical invention. Although Burke shows an interest in rhetorical figures and tropes, his main project can be described as developing a 'philosophy of rhetoric'. Burke (RM:36) acknowledges that there are traditionally two sides to the study of rhetoric: *rhetorica utens* and *rhetorica docens*. *Rhetorica utens* relates to the use of persuasive strategies whereas *rhetorica docens* relates to the critical study of the use of persuasive resources (Blakesley 2002:14). This distinction can also be framed in *heuristic* and *hermeneutic* terms. As *heuristic*, rhetoric is seen as a productive tool for rhetorical invention, whereas rhetoric as *hermeneutic* is considered an approach to interpretation, analysis or critique. Burke works mostly in the latter category, finding rhetoric not only useful for interpreting discourse but for interpreting human relations in general. Burke does, in other words, not offer a neat set of tools for rhetorical composition or invention, but rather an interpretive perspective that can be classified as a rhetorical hermeneutic. A Burkean rhetorical approach in this study would thus enable the

exploration of underlying conditions and broader implications of design trends, instead of providing instructions on how to develop persuasive new trends.

Fourthly, it is argued here that Burke's particular theoretical approach is ideally suited for meta-rhetorical analysis, where a second level of symbolicity (symbols about symbols) is investigated. Burke believes second-level symbolicity is a unique human capacity worth studying, since valuable insights can be gained by investigating symbols about symbols, or discourse about discourse. While I explain what I mean by 'meta-rhetoric' in greater depth shortly, it is worth mentioning here how Burke's concepts and methodologies are well suited to exploring the verbal rhetorical arguments surrounding visual rhetorical styles. Otherwise put, this approach does not consider the persuasive power of visual trends in isolation but looks towards how trends are discursively framed. To look at these framings collectively enables insights about general design transition dynamics to emerge. If each trend offers a different perspective to be analysed rhetorically, the collective investigation of trend rhetorics may offer what Burke refers to as a 'perspective of perspectives'.

A final reason for situating this study within this particular framework is to illustrate the value of Burke's perspective for design theory. While Burke is commonly acknowledged for paving the way for the study of 'visual rhetoric',[6] remarkably little has been written about his ideas from within design theory. Burke's influence is sometimes acknowledged in passing or as a footnote,[7] but to date there is no in-depth application of his theory in this domain. Since visual rhetoric is considered an important and growing area of design enquiry, this study works from the assumption that an application of Burke's theories may prove valuable in furthering design scholarship. While Burke's work is situated in a literary context, not all of his ideas are immediately or obviously applicable to design. However, I believe his interest in rhetoric, by way of aesthetics, makes his ideas particularly useful to understanding design. Communication design products are highly concerned with reaching an audience; to be functional by being aesthetically potent.

This study thus embarks from the position that Burke's combined dialectical-rhetorical approach may offer new perspectives on design trend dynamics. Burke's dialectical approach to rhetoric, also explained as both "a dialectic of ideological demands and the critique of ideology" (Bygrave 1993:9), makes his theories particularly useful in considering both structural and ethical aspects surrounding contemporary design trends. Not only does his theory of rhetoric shed light on rhetorical strategies in the contemporary visual communication environment, it encourages multifaceted critique.

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[6] A number of theorists have claimed that Burke's theory has led to the application of rhetorical theory in visual communication contexts, such as Sonja K Foss (2005:141) and Lester Olson, Cara Finnegan and Diane Hope (2008:4).
[7] Theorists who briefly refer to Kenneth Burke in studies related to design include: Adream Blair-Early and Mike Zender (2008), Prasad Boradkar (2006), Richard Buchanan (1995; 2001a), Hanno Ehses (1984), Susanna Kelly Engbers (2013), Victoria J Gallagher, Kelly Norris Martin and Magdy Ma (2011) and Gesche Joost and Arne Scheuermann (2006). However, none of these theorists have conducted a sustained inquiry into Burke's theory for design.

I describe the framework developed in this study as a Burkean *meta-rhetorical* approach. Owing to the many possible interpretations, it may be useful to describe my particular intention in using the term 'meta-rhetoric'. According to the Online etymology dictionary, the Greek prefix *meta* [μετά] is:

> a word-forming element meaning:
>
> 1. 'after, behind,'
> 2. 'changed, altered,'
> 3. 'higher, beyond'

Other possible interpretations of the original Greek preposition include, 'around', 'about', 'amidst', 'between' and 'over'. This ambiguity and openness is useful insofar as it contains many of the possible interpretations I draw on in using the prefix 'meta-'.

The first interpretation of *meta-* can be indicated by the formula (x about x); for instance, *metadata* being data about data, or *metacognition* involving thinking about thinking.[8] 'Meta' here indicates a certain reflexivity, often characterised as a theoretical reflection on practice. From this perspective all rhetorical theory is already meta-rhetorical, insofar as it considers theories about a practice. George Kennedy (1999) follows this interpretation when he refers to the first synthesis of rhetorical theories as the development of a 'metarhetoric'. In other words, Kennedy sees any theoretical system of rhetoric, as opposed to the mere practicing of rhetorical techniques, as metarhetoric.[9] While this study, by developing theories on the rhetorical nature of design trends, is meta-rhetorical in this sense, the term serves to highlight additional aspects of my approach.

One basic way in which I use the term 'meta-rhetoric' is to refer to the (verbal) rhetoric about (visual) rhetoric. As mentioned previously, Burke is particularly interested in this second level of symbolicity (symbols about symbols) which he considers a unique human capacity in developing culture. This echoes Roland Barthes' notion of 'metalanguage', referring to a similar relation in which fashion discourse (as secondary text and image) serves to support and reinforce the meaning attached to primary fashion objects. In the context of this study, the rhetorical framing of design movements and trends can be examined on two interrelated levels: namely, in terms of the visual design strategies as well as discursive expressions surrounding those strategies. As mentioned previously, the justifications (or rationalisations) that accompany the development or employment of new stylistic approaches are central to the investigation of design trend dynamics.

[8] *Metacognition*, which refers to cognition about cognition, describes the knowledge of cognition and the self-awareness that enables the strategic manipulation of one's own cognitive processes and thus also indicates an abstract kind of reflexivity.
[9] This discussion relates to the sometimes awkward usage of the adjective 'rhetorical'. A rhetorical analysis is not rhetorical in the same way as a rhetorical question. For instance, is a 'rhetorical theory' a theory which seeks to persuade, or is it a theory that pertains to the domain of rhetoric? The answer here is: both; although perhaps not intentionally acknowledged. It is worth noting that a rhetorical theory or rhetorical analysis is also always a rhetorical argument, insofar as it is constructed to persuade. From this perspective, it may be more useful to use the adjective 'meta-rhetorical' when investigating the argumentational tactics employed in rhetorical theories or analyses.

In common usage, a meta-level has also come to describe a concept or area of inquiry on a higher level of abstraction, not merely *related to* or *about*, but *beyond* the immediate area of investigation.[10] Meta-rhetorical inquiry can thus be interpreted as blurring the distinction between the traditionally separated realms of rhetoric and philosophy. Whereas rhetorical analysis is traditionally directed at dissecting the strategies of particular arguments, a more broadly philosophical approach would also consider the structural conditions, socio-political factors, and ethical implications of arguments. Burke's theory lends itself to such broader contextual investigation, while always being peripherally related to the issue of rhetorical communication. It is argued here that when the discourse surrounding trends is investigated from this meta-rhetorical perspective, one can gain valuable higher-order (more abstract or general) insights on dialectical aspects of design practice and discourse, socio-political design relations, as well as ethical perspectives on design praxis. This is particularly valuable in developing an understanding of trend dynamics, in addition to identifying the rhetorical strategies used in particular trend scenarios.

Therefore, a meta-rhetorical perspective considers not only the particular design artefact or verbal rationale as rhetorical, but looks at the entire socio-political design scenario as informing rhetorical practice. This extends the investigation of trends by not only considering the manner in which new design styles and their justifications are meant to persuade potential consumers or users but other stakeholders including clients and designers themselves. By extending the rhetorical investigation beyond product parameters, a meta-rhetorical approach acknowledges the myriad motives that may not seem immediately related to visual design action. For example, designers also employ trend rhetorics to position themselves amongst their peers, or to project a favourable image when presenting ideas to clients.

Lastly, it is worth pointing out that my own critical stance towards trend dynamics is also to be meta-critically examined. Whereas most rhetorical analyses or critiques tend to problematize the way in which rhetorical tactics manipulate us, a meta-rhetorical attitude involves a reflexive critique of one's critique. In other words, I endeavour to challenge my own predominantly negative evaluations of trend rhetoric by adopting a meta-critical attitude. As will become clear, particularly towards the end of this study, this attitude is advocated by Burke as part of his ethical position. Burke's larger vision can be described as rhetorically informed ideological critique, but beyond that it is an attempt to ameliorate problematic socio-political conditions through the greater understanding *and* employment of rhetorical thinking. Burke, quite simply, imagines 'a better life' through becoming more 'symbol-wise', which requires a thorough appreciation of rhetoric. In this manner, I aim to frame and re-frame design trends from different perspectives throughout the study.

[10] R Murray Thomas (1984) explains how Andronicus' placement of Aristotle's more abstract ontological and epistomological writings after (*meta*) his work on physics, has clearly influenced the meaning of the prefix, through our understanding of Aristotle's *metaphysics*.

Although Burke does not use the term 'meta-rhetoric' to refer to his own approach, one clearly finds a sustained interest in meta-levels or second-orders of language throughout his work.[11] As mentioned previously, he refers to the unique human capacity to develop "symbols about symbols", and his 'logology' concerns the study of "words about words". Various authors have thus identified meta-theoretical or meta-critical qualities in Burke's work. Timothy Crusius (1986:34) argues that "[t]he 'meta' nature of Burke's dialectic is obvious". C Allen Carter (1992; 1997:370) describes Burke's main proposition that we should develop greater "metalinguistic awareness", while Jonathan Butler (2012) speaks about 'metarhetorical motives' in Burke's novel *Towards a better life*. Burke's approach to the critique of criticism has been described by Carter (1992), Jay (1990) and Benedict Giamo (2009) as 'metacritical'. David Blakesley (2002:9) also describes Burke's approach to rhetoric and dramatism as enabling a "meta-perspective [or] an interpretation of our interpretations". Similarly, Barry Brummet (2012), finding inspiration in Burke's approach, proposes taking a 'metaperspective' on rhetorical education. Clearly, Burke's work lends itself to meta-inquiries of various kinds and may be used towards developing new perspectives on communicative practices. I take inspiration from these Burkean meta-inquiries and propose, in agreement with Crusius (1986:34), that Burke's "rhetoric is really a meta-rhetoric".

To summarise, a meta-rhetorical approach extends the investigation beyond traditional rhetorical enquiry. Meta-rhetorical inquiry works towards understanding the conditions within which rhetorical arguments arise, as well as the broader implications thereof. Such an approach also seeks the rhetorical structures or patterns (ideologies) behind everyday rhetorical argumentation. In the context of this study, the process unfolds as an investigation of the discursive rhetoric surrounding visual rhetorical products, on both micro and macro levels. Most importantly, since "*meta-* is a term indicating the presence of reflexivity" (Sandywell 2011:408), a meta-rhetorical investigation consistently aims to reflect back on its own rhetoric.

Study aim, objectives and research approach

The aim of this study is to re-frame design trends from a Burkean meta-rhetorical perspective. In order to achieve this aim, two underlying objectives can be highlighted: firstly, to develop a Burkean meta-rhetorical framework for interrogating (framing and re-framing) design trends; and secondly, to illustrate the proposed framework by referring to visual design examples as well as verbal discourse surrounding prominent historical and contemporary design movements or trends. In the following section I describe each of these objectives in more depth while also highlighting my particular focus and methodological approach.

The first objective of the study is to develop a particular hermeneutic framework – what I refer to as a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach. The interpretive framework is based on Kenneth Burke's theories and methods and therefore an in-depth review of Burke's writings forms a central part of the study. It is

[11] Burke refers on occasion to the term 'meta-rhetoric' but he never provides an in-depth discussion of the concept. He briefly speaks about the possibility of offering 'meta-rhetorical' explanations for the "frenzied human cult of advantage, the quest of many things that cannot bring real advantage yet are obtainable" (RM:274). He also refers to meta-rhetoric in reference to taking his rhetorical concepts all the way to their logical conclusion: the meta-rhetoric of persuasion being 'pure persuasion' and the meta-rhetoric of identification as 'absolute identification' (Burke in Jay 1990:292).

important to point out that this study emphasises those Burkean concepts and terminologies most relevant to understanding design and trend dynamics and rhetorics. While I present a substantial overview of Burke's work, I do not attempt to present Burkean theory in its entirety.

I am aware that by selecting Burke's work as the theoretical foundation for this study I am necessarily deemphasising other theoretical angles. Although this can be considered a limited or narrow focus in terms of investigating design trend dynamics, this limitation also opens up important opportunities: to illustrate the potential of Burke as a resource for design scholars, and to build on Burkean scholarship by providing applications in another domain of practice. While designers and design scholars are my main audience, I believe this design-informed Burkean framework will also be of interest to scholars of rhetoric and visual communication.

This study can be situated within the broader area of design studies,[12] a theoretical counterpart to information or communication design. While the proposed theoretical framework draws on theory from outside the design studies field, I continuously draw on design theory when highlighting the relevance of a Burkean perspective. As a design scholar, I am necessarily reading Burke through a design studies lens. I continuously question the relevance or validity of Burke's ideas, in relation to my specific disciplinary context. Throughout the study I highlight the ways in which the ideas of seminal design theorists align with, compliment, or contradict Burke's ideas. I also consider how, over half a decade after Burke's major works were published, we may rethink, supplement and expand on his thought for our own time.

The second objective of the study is to illustrate the proposed Burkean framework by referring to visual design examples, as well as supporting verbal arguments surrounding prominent design movements or trends, both historical and more contemporary. I refer to the previously mentioned digital interface aesthetic trend shift towards 'flat design' on a number of occasions throughout the study, but I also attempt to show examples from a diverse range of design areas. While most of these examples stem from information or communication design disciplines (which includes graphic and typographic design practice), I also refer to architecture and product design examples on occasion. The inclusion of a wide range of design examples and discourses serves two main purposes. Firstly, a variety of examples allows for illustrating the broad range of Burkean ideas presented throughout this study. In other words, the inclusion of multiple design examples provides greater opportunity to illustrate Burke's broad-based theory than a single design case study would be able to. Secondly, the diverse variety examples serve to illustrate how visual and verbal design rhetorics tend to move between design disciplines. For instance, the well-known aphorism 'less is more', attributed to architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, is routinely used in arguments in non-architectural design fields.

[12] Buchanan (2001a:73) explains how there are three modes of inquiry that constitute design studies: history is the investigation and interpretation of what has been; criticism is the assessment and appreciation of what is; and theory is research into and speculation about the assumptions and possibilities that bear on what might be". These modes are interrelated and "they draw on and support each other". This is also the case in this particular study, where all three of these modes are present to some degree. This study refers to moments in design history in the analysis and critique of current practices, and in so doing, develops theories regarding broader design issues.

While Burkean theory can be usefully applied to analyse the rhetorical nature of particular design scenarios, this is only a part of the potential I see in Burke's theory. The Burkean meta-rhetorical approach proposed here is meant to shed light on broader trend dynamics, that is, the underlying dialectical conditions, the surrounding socio-political scenario, as well as the ethical implications of attitudes towards, and engagements with, design trends.

In light of the above, my research process can be described as a fluid hermeneutic cycle, characterised by oscillations between reviewing literature and interpreting visual and discursive design texts. Burke's theory influences the reading of design discourse (visual and verbal)[13] and this reading in turn influences my interpretation of the theory. Of central concern in this type of combined visual-verbal discursive interpretation is the identification of intertextuality, referring to the way in which "meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts" (Rose 2012:191). While new trends are defined by how they break with what came before, cyclical patterns emerge where references to past visual styles and verbal discourses are commonly employed. Insofar as new design styles (and their rhetorical justifications) frequently draw on the past for inspiration, contextual and intertextual reading becomes essential.

It is worth mentioning that, for the purpose of this study, I have chosen to focus on visual aesthetic or stylistic trend shifts in particular. Insofar as some theoretical, methodological or discursive design transitions can also be interpreted as 'design trends', I do refer to such instances on occasion. However, this is not the main focus of the study. While an emphasis on visual design styling is somewhat unpopular amidst discussions of widening the scope of design action (into intangible or immaterial realms of Design Thinking, Service Design, and so on), I believe an exploration of the rhetorics surrounding visual style remains important as long as it continues to be relevant and persuasive. While I acknowledge that design rhetoric pertains to more than surface visual aesthetics, I believe the rhetoric of design style (which, in the context of this study, includes the verbal justification of design style) warrants a sustained inquiry of this kind.

Trends are often studied from an economic or behavioural economic perspective, but this is not the approach taken in this study. Also, it is important to point out that this study approaches the question of design trend dynamics from the perspective of design praxis, and not from the consumer or design user perspective. Insofar as designers are also consumers of trends and significant audiences of trend rhetoric, some overlap with regards to the reception of trend rhetoric occurs. However, my emphasis is on trend rhetoric as part of the design process, and it is not within the scope of this study to interrogate or evaluate how external consumer audiences are persuaded. It is worth mentioning that my experiences and observations as a design educator informs my particular interpretive perspective of the design process. Many of my observations regarding design and trend rhetorics stem from teaching design studio praxis, which involves not only the direction and assessment of visual design outcomes, but also the guidance and

[13] Discourse, as a particular language or specialised form of knowledge (Rose 2012:190), refers to both the literature surrounding the area of enquiry as well as the visual texts themselves, which can be 'read' to gain insight into rhetorical and ideological structures.

evaluation of rhetorical design justification or rationalisation. In other words, my experience in paying close attention to how students speak about their design decisions has inspired the direction of this inquiry in a significant way.

While an interest in the study originated in an awareness of the problematic rhetorical justification of new design trends, it is not my intention to criticise particular rhetorical arguments. It is worth highlighting that I do not aim to 'debunk' any design arguments but rather to point towards how they often go unchallenged owing to the rhetoric employed.[14] While it is impossible to provide definitive answers about the motivations driving design action, it is possible to speculate on the different factors contributing to particular ways of justification. The privileging of certain kinds of 'language' is found within design discourse as well as in the visual manifestations of aesthetic styles. This study therefore pays particular attention to instances where designers and theorists become aware of, critique or question, the use of terminologies, with the awareness that language influences disciplinary orientation and action.

Keeping in mind the subjective nature of discursive (both verbal and visual) interpretation, it is important for the researcher to critically reflect back on the research process (Rose 2012:222). Fran Tonkiss (in Rose 2012:222) explains how, when one "seeks to open up statements to challenge, interrogate taken-for-granted meanings, and disturb easy claims to objectivity in the texts", it would be "inconsistent to contend that [one's] own discourse was itself wholly objective, factual or generally true". A modest approach should thus be taken where subjective decisions throughout the process are acknowledged, and where as many voices or perspectives as possible are openly considered. Such an approach is consistent with Burke's own dialectical method, which encourages the consideration of alternative positions, while acknowledging the impossibility of assuming an objective vantage point.

Introducing Kenneth Burke

Although Burke's theory is explored in greater depth in the following chapters, this introduction serves as a brief overview of Burke's background and main theoretical interests, while placing his theoretical contributions in context.

Brief biography

Kenneth Duva Burke (1897-1993) was an American literary and social critic, most well known for his influence on rhetorical theory. Burke was largely self-taught and did not obtain any formal academic qualifications, although he did briefly attend courses at Ohio State University and Columbia University. Burke felt frustrated at the level of undergraduate study, explaining: "there were a lot of courses I wanted to take, and I had to take so many prerequisite courses before I could get to them that I said to my father, hell, Pap, I'll save you some money and persuaded him to let me go down to the Village and rent a room and

[14] This approach is consistent with Burke's dislike of 'debunking' as a consistently negative attack on a position without offering valid alternatives (Rueckert 1994:118). While Burke aims to disarm or 'deflate' naturlised positions, he "has never been a debunker" (Rueckert 1994:6).

read all the books by myself" (in Woodcock 1977:704). Burke thus dropped out of college to join a bohemian group of writers – including Malcolm Cowley, e.e. cummings and Alan Tate, amongst others – in Greenwich Village, New York. The group was dispersed during the First World War and Burke, having failed a medical exam, spent a part of this time working in a factory "making gauges to check gauges that were used to regulate the mass production of munitions" (in Woodcock 1977:706). In this account we already find some clues about Burke's sceptical attitude towards technology, which became a strong theme throughout his work.

After the war, Burke continued to write but also began working as a translator and editor (most notably for the literary magazine *The Dial,* until it ceased publication in 1929). Alongside numerous essays, poems, and book and music reviews, he published his first book, *The white oxen and other stories* in 1924. After a brief period of conducting contract research on drug addiction, Burke published his first major work of non-fiction, *Counter-statement* (1931). This work, usually classified as literary criticism, clearly grapples with contradictions related to the role and purpose of the aesthetic. William Rueckert (1982:10) describes the most important idea to emerge from *Counter-statement* as Burke's "attitude of critical openness, the both/and doctrine which enabled Burke, in his own phrase, to 'ripen [as a critic] without rotting'". This attitude is seen throughout Burke's work.

By 1935 Burke's interest shifted from literary towards social criticism, in *Permanence and change* (1935) and *Attitudes toward history* (1937). While still referring to literary texts throughout, these works largely attempt to make sense of the changing historical situation in the context of recurring universal patterns and human needs. Most of Burke's socio-cultural critiques are introduced in these early works but are refined throughout his career. After *The philosophy of literary form* (1941), Burke produced some of his most influential work, namely the two parts of his envisioned *motivorum* trilogy: *A grammar of motives* (1945) and *A rhetoric of motives* (1950).[15] Some consider the "monolithic dramatistic system" developed here as Burke's greatest achievement (Rueckert 1982:xiii). Burke's main focus during this time can be described as "linguistic analysis as a way of confronting the world" (Rueckert 1982:xiv).

Throughout Burke's work one finds a range of theological and mystical terminologies, which he finds useful for explaining a range of secular processes. In *The rhetoric of religion* (1961), theological discourse replaces drama and literature as Burke's preferred area of linguistic enquiry. Here Burke develops an additional system he refers to as *logology*, related to the study of "words about words" (RR:1). The last of his major publications, *Language as symbolic action* (1966), contains the important essays on *terministic screens* and his *definition of man*, which provides a useful overview of Burke's major concerns throughout his career. Burke published a variety of articles and essays after this, in which he mostly reiterates and refines previously developed ideas.

[15] The last part of the trilogy, *The symbolic of motives*, was never published, though collections of essays on the topic have been released posthumously.

Although Burke was more interested in writing than in a career in academia, he taught at various institutions, including the New School of Social Research and Bennington College, with frequent visiting positions at the University of Chicago, Harvard University, Northwestern University and Princeton University. His activities in the academy earned him an honorary doctorate from Bennington University in 1966. Burke's writing efforts were also acknowledged in 1981, when he was awarded the prestigious National Medal for Literature. Despite Burke being well known in American rhetoric circles, his theories have only recently found a broader audience in Europe and other parts of the world. The first European conference dedicated to Burke's work, *Rhetoric as equipment for living: Kenneth Burke, culture and education,* was held in 2013 in Ghent, Belgium. The *Kenneth Burke society* continues to hold conferences tri-annually and the *KB Journal* provides an online platform for scholarship dedicated to Burkean theory.

Burke passed away in 1993 leaving behind a number of unpublished works. Some essays and letters have been collected and published posthumously and are often accompanied by other scholars' commentaries. *Unending conversations: new writings by and about Kenneth Burke* (2001), edited by Greig E Henderson and David Cratis Williams, features Burke's essay *Watchful of hermetics to be strong in hermeneutics*. The 2007 publication, *Essays toward a symbolic of motives: 1950-1955*, edited by Rueckert, attempts to offer a reconstruction of Burke's unpublished third motivorum book. Similarly, the 2003 publication, *On Human Nature: A Gathering While Everything Flows, 1967-1984*, edited by Rueckert and Angelo Bonadonna, was compiled in response to Burke's mention[16] of a potential fourth volume of the motivorum project.

Burke's main theoretical contributions

Burke is most frequently credited for contributing to the study of rhetoric by elevating the field's status and widening its scope beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (2000:1295) provide a useful overview of Burke's main theoretical contributions:

> Much of Kenneth Burke's voluminous work over more than fifty years has been an attempt to redefine and expand the scope of rhetorical analysis and to apply it to all forms of language use. His chief contributions have been in developing rhetorical literary criticism and analysing the ways in which language systems – philosophical, political, literary, and religious – describe and influence human motives.

Seeing the potential in rhetorical theory to describe and analyse a variety of both functional and aesthetic communication processes, Burke set out to "reclaim" rhetoric as a worthy intellectual discipline. Rhetoric's uncertain status can be framed in relation to two historical perceptions: rhetoric as inferior to logical reasoning, and rhetoric as inferior to aesthetic expression. What follows is a highly simplified account of this complex history but serves as a point of entry into Burke's working context.

The classical study of rhetoric as "the art of persuasion" was practiced within the realm of public oratory, primarily for political and judicial purposes. From this early stage disagreement with regards to rhetoric's purpose and value were common. Plato saw rhetoric as a manipulative art concerned with mere persuasion

[16] Burke (CS:218) imagined an additional volume on human relations to address the ethical dimensions of language.

and thus directly opposed to the earnest philosopher's search for truth. On the other hand, Aristotle framed rhetoric as a useful, but basically formal, supplement to other disciplines. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (1990) summarises the historical critiques surrounding rhetoric, which has pushed it to the periphery of academic enquiry, as a repression "carried out through a series of dichotomies: truth vs. opinion, object vs. subject, conviction vs. persuasion, all of which valorise the logic of inquiry over rhetoric". To this list of dichotomies may be added "aesthetic vs. rhetoric", in light of the classical, Aristotelian divide between the poetic and the rhetorical. This divide largely remains; the poetic is perceived as concerned with higher aesthetic virtues such as contemplation, while rhetoric's agenda is to persuade. However, there are historical exceptions to these divisions, as Burke endeavours to point out.[17]

Nonetheless, the prevailing perception that the expressive language of literary texts is superior to mere rhetorical exposition, led to a dissociation between rhetoric and literary studies (Bizzell & Herzberg 2000:1193). As a result of the above perceptions, the rhetorical tradition tended to focus on developing skills in rhetorical invention and composition, in both oral and written contexts. Up until the early twentieth century, rhetorical study had a pragmatic focus on improving technical skill and eloquence. According to Bizzell and Herzberg (2000:1183), as an academic field, rhetoric appeared to be in decline. Many of rhetoric's previous philosophical concerns were dispersed among other academic disciplines such as psychology, linguistics, philosophy and literary studies. Amongst these disciplines an increased interest in the linguistic construction of reality emerged, which can be considered as part of a "rhetorical turn" (Gaonkar 1990; Simons 1990). The "rhetorical turn" can be described as the increased rhetorical self-consciousness of a variety of disciplines, mostly in the humanities and social sciences, but also including the substantive sciences (Gaonkar 1990:352). Friedrich Nietzsche anticipated many of the themes that would be explored in twentieth century philosophy and rhetorical theory by asserting that "[t]here is obviously no unrhetorical 'naturalness' of language to which one could appeal; language itself is the result of purely rhetorical arts" (in Bizzell & Herzberg 2000:1168).

Burke's awareness of the above dynamic led to his proposal for a 'New Rhetoric',[18] where rhetorical theory is embraced more explicitly to serve as a useful framework for navigating the above linguistic-philosophical concerns. Burke (RM:44) saw rhetoric as encompassing "all those statements by anthropologists, ethnologists, individual and social psychologists, and the like, that bear upon the persuasive aspects of language, the function of language as addressed, as direct or roundabout appeal to real or ideal audiences, without or within". And through his New Rhetoric, he wished to rediscover the "rhetorical elements that had become obscured when rhetoric as a term fell into disuse" (RM:xiii). As part of a more explicit

[17] He points out how Longinus' *On the Sublime* deals largely with examples from oratory that was originally designed for a practical end but, long after the practical occasion had passed, was 'appreciated' by him purely as poetry, because of its beauty or 'imagination' as a robust symbolic exercising to be enjoyed and admired by readers in and for itself (Burke 1955:281).
[18] It is important to point out than in Europe, in France particularly, a 'New Rhetoric' movement also emerged under the theorist Chaim Perelman. Although Perelman and Burke do not refer to each other directly, their ideas regarding a new kind of rhetoric share many similarities. According to Bizzel and Herzberg (2000:1195), Perelman sought to revive rhetoric, to recover the "notions of argument, persuasion, audience, and dialectic for the analysis of practical reasoning in human affairs". Perelman's theories were largely influential in reviving an interest in rhetorical theory in Europe, and also for contributing "to its growing respectability in the United States (Bizzell & Herzberg 2000:1196).

rhetorical turn, Burke was, amongst other twentieth century theorists, interested in reviving and reinventing rhetoric; to combine "the philosophy of language on the one hand and literary criticism on the other [...] to consolidate once again the richness of rhetoric as a theory of language in use" (Bizzell & Herzberg 2000:1188).

Ross Wolin (2001:34) describes how "[r]hetoric was Burke's most important discovery, for it occupied his mind for the next half-century, impressing its indelible mark, directly and indirectly, on all his criticism". While Wolin (2001:35) argues that Burke "never developed a systematic rhetorical theory, despite his many fertile ideas about rhetoric" he goes on to explain how Burke "used rhetoric as a way to articulate something more basic, something more central to aesthetics, criticism, communication, social structures, and political organizations".

One of the major contributions of Burke's rhetoric lies in the shifting emphasis from rhetoric as 'persuasion' to rhetoric as 'identification'. This new approach had a profound impact on the history of rhetoric (Gaonkar 1990:350) by widening rhetoric's scope beyond political and deliberative oratory. To frame rhetoric in terms of identification opens up possibilities for seeing a variety of texts, not only those created to overtly persuade, as rhetorical. Seeing literary (aesthetic) texts as pieces of rhetoric was a minority view in this time (Hochmut 1952:133) but Burke illustrates how rhetorical methods could be applied to interrogate literature, poetry, or artistic works in general. Burke (PLF:1) explains how "[c]ritical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are strategic answers, stylized answers".

Burke further embraces all kinds of texts in his rhetorical analyses, even those dismissed as popular 'trash'. Burke believes "those things are a kind of poetry too, full of symbolic and rhetorical ingredients, and if they are bad poetry, it is a bad poetry of vital significance in our lives" (Hyman 1955:375). Although Burke considers the differences between discourses of 'art' as opposed to 'use', he maintains that "rhetorical analysis is appropriately applied to every kind of writing and speaking and may even be applied directly to the study of human relations" (Bizzell & Herzberg 2000:1296).

Furthermore, through his concept of 'identification', rhetoric's scope is extended to also include non-verbal communication. Burke paved the way for the study of visual rhetoric by encouraging "scholars to analyse all symbolic forms, including 'mathematics, music, sculpture, painting, dance, architectural styles'" (Helmers 2004:64). While rhetorical strategies may be employed by designers in unconscious ways, they understand the importance of getting audiences to identify with what they make. Although some designed products may come across as mere tools, they encourage identification through visual aesthetic cues. Other Burkean terminologies also enable rhetorical theory to be applied more broadly; for instance, his open-ended theory regarding 'symbol systems' refers to more than linguistic symbols. Broadly speaking, Burke offers rhetorical perspectives on all aspects of what we would simply refer to as 'communication': why we communicate, how we communicate, and how communication impacts human attitudes and relations.

While 'identification' is Burke's most frequently cited theoretical contribution, various theorists believe this concept has been overemphasized at the expense of developing a comprehensive understanding of Burke's theory. To understand the full complexity of Burke's theory, one has to read wider than *A rhetoric of motives*. And even in *A rhetoric of motives*, one needs to look beyond 'identification' to find Burke's main argument. Various theorists such as Bryan Crable (2009), Timothy Crusius (1986) and James Zappen (2009) suggest looking towards Burke's dialectic as significantly informing his rhetorical theory. Zappen (2009:280), for instance, sees Burke's concept of 'dialectical-rhetorical transcendence' as meriting "a place alongside identification as a major contribution to rhetorical theory". It will become clear towards the end of this study that I am in agreement with Zappen about the significance of this concept. Chapter Six, in particular, explores the benefits of 'dialectical-rhetorical transcendence' within the context of rhetorical design education.

Burke's broad understanding of rhetoric, as applied to a wide range of texts as well as other areas of human behaviour reflects his eclectic range of interests: philosophy, literature, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, politics and economics. He believes rhetorical processes undergird social relations and wishes to show how rhetorical analysis can shed light not only on particular texts but on "human relations generally" (RM:xiv). He illustrates this position by identifying studies in other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and psychology as largely concerned with rhetorical processes. For instance, Burke (RM:41) considers the anthropological study of primitive magic as "the manipulation of men's beliefs for political ends" and therefore as closely related to rhetorical concerns. Burke also relates psychoanalytical concepts, such as socialisation and rationalisation, as inwardly directed rhetorical processes. All of this relates to Burke's interest in myth and ideology as related to rhetorical inquiry.

It is easy to see why many consider Burke an early proponent of postmodern thought. As Samuel Southwell (1987:1) suggests, Burke "anticipated and quite often fully developed" a number of recent philosophical movements: "[a] revised Marxism, a revised Freudianism, hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, reader-response theory, theory of ritual, speech-act theory, even a kind of deconstructionism,[19] and much else that is called postmodernism". However, to describe Burke simply as a proto-postmodernist is to diminish the relevance he still offers today. It is important to acknowledge the historical context within which Burke expresses his concerns, and to consider ways in which the current (post-postmodern) social, political and economic situation may have changed. However, as contemporary critical theorists such as Zygmunt Bauman (2000) point out, many of our current struggles may be considered extensions or amplifications of modernity. Furthermore, authors such as Barbara Biesecker (1997:1) suggest that Burke's ideas are particularly useful for grappling with the postmodern situation, characterised by "fragmentation, disidentification, and dissensus".

[19] Some theorists have likened Burke's dramatistic method to that of Jacques Derrida's *deconstruction*. As Richard Lanham (1993:56) points out, "[a]lthough, incredibly, Derrida appears not to have known Burke's work, deconstruction's enfranchising hypothesis that rhetorical analysis can be used on nonliterary texts and on the conventions on social life itself is the pivotal insight of Burkean dramatism".

Major themes in Burke's work

Burke's theories can be described as primarily concerned with communication, the use and effect of symbols, and language as instrument that both creates and solves human problems (Dalziel Duncan 1965:xvii). Burke offers a vocabulary and methodology for thinking about how humans communicate and act; for "what symbols do to us in our relations with one another" (Dalziel Duncan 1965:xliii).

As mentioned previously, while Burke is most known for his contributions to rhetorical theory, his concept of rhetoric is intertwined and infused with his dialectic (Zappen 2009:279). Burke's dialectic may serve as a useful point of departure, since to some extent all of Burke's work deals with dialectical tensions and dynamics.[20] He frequently refers to the dialectics of Plato, Hegel and Marx and his own work is characterised by dialectical theory and method.[21] He sees dialectic as offering a foundational theory for rhetoric. William Rueckert (1982:42) interprets Burke's interest in dialectic as follows:

> Existence is a kind of dialectic of division and merger, disintegration and reintegration, death and rebirth, war and peace; the dialectic is the natural and inevitable result of the complex and ever-changing conflict relation between the human agent and his scene. This dialectic of existence – the drama of human relations – centers in what Burke speaks of as every man's attempt to build himself a character in order to establish and maintain identity.

Burke frequently explores issues by investigating the relationship between various competing dualities. Burke also shows a clear interest in dialectical dynamics throughout history in his early works *Counter-statement, Permanence and change and Attitudes toward history*. Robert Wess (1996:84) describes these works as about "an agonistic process in which cultural orthodoxies displace one another". This interest in the fluctuation between opposite forces or attitudes throughout history, such as 'continuity' and 'discontinuity'; 'nature' and 'counter-nature', is a recurring theme throughout Burke's career. Burke's later work builds on his early interests in dialectics but can be described as more mature and nuanced; as a "systematic search for a dialectic of many voices" (CS:xi). This is where Burke's *A grammar of motives*, according to Crusius (1986), makes an original contribution to the field of dialectic. In this work Burke deals directly with the dialectical nature of language and how this enables variation in the expression of motives.

Through dialectical thinking Burke grapples with the philosophical tensions and controversies in his time. Burke was, like many other writers of his era, deeply affected by international political tensions as well as the financial depression. Burke was "thoroughly engaged with political leftists of every stripe" (Zappen 2009:282) and had a strong affinity towards Marxism. Human hierarchies, the politics of work and the division of labour are central to Burke's critique. However, Burke saw Marxism as a valuable ethical critique more than a functional, scientistic system. The word 'communism' appealed to him, insofar as it shares a root with 'community' and 'communication', but he never became a member of the communist party (or any other political party). He continued to work around the edges of Marxism and developed a "metacritical and

[20] In conversation, Robert Heath (1986:157) asked Burke why he did not call *A Grammar of motives* a 'Dialectic of motives', whereby Burke responded: "I could have named all my stuff dialectic".

[21] Bizzell and Herzberg (2000:1296) explain how although Burke's method was dialectical, "deconstruction may be a better term today for characterising his practice of revealing contrary meanings in supposedly positive terms and his emphasis on the way language 'defeats' reality".

holistic" approach instead of following any particular philosophical school of thought (Giamo 2009). Burke did on occasion refer to himself as "marxoid", indicating both his affinity with and deviation from Marx's theory (Burks 1991). Burke, for instance, did not share the Marxist optimism towards technological development, nor did he believe the rigid, dogmatic and bureaucratic mechanisms of communism would be successful.

Like his contemporaries, Burke was also deeply troubled with the vast power and evil potential of Fascist politics. However, his essay, *The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle* (1939), is an intellectual engagement with Hitler's *Mein Kampf,* in stark contrast to other purely dismissive reviews at the time (Pauley 2009). In this essay Burke clearly shows how a rhetorical perspective can offer valuable insights on the use of propaganda. Here rhetoric is used to make sense of the underlying conditions of what otherwise seemed like irrational human behaviour.

Another major theme throughout Burke's work is his concern over technological expansion, accompanied by planned obsolescence, overconsumption and waste. From the early essay, *Waste – the Future of Prosperity* (1930) to one of his latest essays, *Variations on 'Providence'* (1981), this preoccupation with the negative consequences of technological progress is visible throughout his career. Ian Hill (2009) explains how Burke's "writing was fraught with technological anxiety", and how technology "came to serve as a central locus of Burke's critical agenda". Hill (2009) further describes how Burke's initial ridicule of the absurdity of planned obsolescence turned "into a deep distrust of most technological behaviour" later in his life. According to Coupe (2005:3), Burke's concerns over environmental degradation "was consistent throughout his career, [but became] increasingly urgent in his later years".

It is easy to see why many consider Burke a technophobe or Luddite. Burke even described himself as "agro-bohemian" (Burks 1991) in reference to his low-tech lifestyle.[22] Burke's concerns over rampant industrialisation and increasing environmental destruction are considered prescient of later twentieth century ecocriticism (Coupe 2001). As early as 1937 Burke (ATH:150) wrote: "[a]mong the sciences, there is one little fellow named Ecology, and in time we shall pay him more attention. He teaches us that the *total* economy of the planet cannot be guided by an efficient rationale of exploitation alone, but that the exploiting part must eventually suffer if it too greatly disturbs the *balance* of the whole". Rueckert and Bonadonna (2003:3) identify hypertechnologism as Burke's "final enemy" and "ecological sanity […] his final idealistic goal".

As Star A Muir (1999) explains, the notion of 'balance' is a significant theme throughout Burke's work. For Burke, greater balance is needed to ameliorate the interconnected problems of the physical environment and the symbolic, socio-political realm. Burke's emphasis on balance "reflects his distress at industrial 'habits' exceeding the limits of ecological capacity" as well as his "concern with the rigidity of linguistic and philosophical perspectives that cannot mediate between realms, or even recognize the vitality of ambiguity in

[22] Burke lived with his family on a rustic farm in New Jersey where electricity was installed only in 1949, and running water another twenty years later.

human symbolism" (Muir 1999:39). Burke thus develops a 'critical ecology' based on corrective measures in the symbolic socio-linguistic realm. This involves identifying and addressing imbalances in ideological perspective as reflected in imbalanced (polemical or extremist) rhetorical argumentation.

As Marie Hochmut (1952:133) points out, the entire body of Burke's work deals with rhetoric either centrally or peripherally. Rhetoric offers for Burke a particular way of looking at the social, political and cultural behaviour of human beings. He finds in rhetorical theory the potential for investigating the linguistic construction of social experience and the framing of reality. Many of Burke's terminologies aim to describe various facets of this framing, such as *orientation, perspective* and *terministic screen*. Burke aims to show how orientations operate subtly yet powerfully to influence how people think and subsequently behave. Although Burke acknowledges the inherent need for orientations, as a basic structuring of thought, he warns against the potential dangers of dysfunctional orientations. Since orientations are constructed and therefore susceptible to manipulation, they should continuously be exposed and questioned. Burke aims to show how the hidden orientations that underpin thinking can be exposed by looking more closely at communicative utterances. He is always on the lookout for how language may be used to mystify and obscure. Burke aims to show how, through the rhetorical analysis of particular expressions, we can come to identify deeper-seated ideological positions. More specifically, Burke argues that by analysing expressions of *motive* (how we motivate thought and action, either explicitly or implicitly), we can identify these underlying positions. A major concern in Burke's work, as the titles *A grammar of motives* and *A rhetoric of motives* suggest, is this question of *motive*. Other rhetorical theorists do not seem to place as much emphasis on the concept, but Burke sees the expression of motive (the reasoning about contextual factors which impact or determine attitudes and behaviours) as a significant part of rhetorical action.

Although Burke largely avoids the term, it is possible to argue that he develops is his own brand of ideological critique.[23] However, what makes Burke's project significant, especially considering the time in which his theories were formulated, is that he does not support any new ideological orientation as an antidote to a previous ideology. Instead, he proposes not to privilege one way of seeing and to rather demystify all ideologies as both functional and dysfunctional (Beach 2012:30). Burke thus supports meta-critical approach whereby one's own critique is also subject to critique.

Burke is particularly concerned with the way in which limited orientations, or partial views of reality, are mistaken for the whole. For Burke such absolutist or extremist positions have the potential to cause tremendous amounts of harm, and a major part of his project thus relates to combatting such limited views. Burke suggests that narrow perspectives can be widened by developing a more nuanced understanding of the mechanics and limitations of symbolic/rhetorical framing. Burke further provides methodologies for recognising and presenting alternative perspectives and makes a compelling argument for how rhetorical processes should be appreciated and utilised towards such perspectival re-framing. To this end Burke

[23] Burke sees all critiques of ideology as equally ideologically loaded and he therefore chooses to describe his work in different terms. However, since his critique is undertaken in a similar spirit, theorists such as Bygrave (1993) and Beach (2012) frame his work as largely concerned with ideology.

promotes rhetorical education, as a means towards greater rhetorical (self)consciousness and more critically engaged citizenship.

Burke's style

Throughout his life, Burke actively resisted being 'disciplined' (Simons 1989:4). His eclectic range of interests, theoretical elasticity, idiosyncratic style and unconventional choice of terminologies, have been the most common points of critique. As Hugh Dalziel Duncan (1965:xiii) points out, "[i]n an age of specialists, Kenneth Burke's writings offend those who are content with a partial view of human motivation". However, Burke's disregard for disciplinary boundaries is also one of the major appeals of his work. Burke frequently spoke out against over-specialisation and the negative side-effects of cultivating narrow perspectives. One could thus interpret his anti-disciplinary approach as a deliberate attempt to overcome an academic 'division of labour'. As Stephen Bygrave (1993:9) points out, Burke's "disavowal of specialization does not have a simply corrective or reformist aim: it is one of the fundamental grounds of his practice, not only fundamental as a means of avoiding the dangers inherent in specialized vocabularies of whatever kind but also fundamental as the prerequisite for the totalizing description of human action he is ambitious to provide".

Some have speculated that it is Burke's dialectical method (which presents multiple perspectives without any convincing argument), along with his idiosyncratic style, that has prevented his theories from gaining a greater following. As Stanley Hyman (1969:212) remarks, "[t]he reason reviewers and editors have had such trouble fastening on Burke's field is that he has no field, unless it be Burkology". 'Burkology' is also characterised by an idiosyncratic and playful style. This style goes hand in hand with Burke's comic, subversive method for creating greater 'perspective by incongruity'. As Herbert Simons (1989:12) argues, "[a]lthough many question the result, few doubt that Burke's comedic style – his puns and twists and extensions and asides – are an essential part of his method". An essential part of Burke's message is that a loss of perspective is a prerequisite for broader perspectives to develop.

My approach to Burke

As mentioned previously, this study offers a reading of Burke through a design studies lens. I continuously question the relevance or validity of Burke's ideas from my specific disciplinary perspective and as a result my interpretations may differ from those who approach Burke from other fields. Furthermore, approaching Burke with a specific question in mind, namely to interrogate design trend dynamics and rhetorics, has allowed me to focus on developing a Burkean framework for a specific purpose. This focus has been tremendously helpful in filtering and framing Burke's vast body of work.

Giamo (2009) explains how "[a]nyone who has delved seriously into 'boikswoiks'[24] knows that, although tremendously rewarding, they are dense, idiosyncratic, and metacritically challenging". Rueckert (1982:4-5) provides an eloquent metaphor for the mixed, and often extreme, responses to Burke:

> "[M]any of Burke's apologists suffer, in varying degrees of intensity, from Burke-sickness, a disease which produces hysterical enthusiasm and loss of perspective. And many of Burke's adversaries suffer from Burke-nausea, a state which produces hysterical anger and a corresponding loss of perspective. In between, there is a small group of ideal critics who have attempted to purify Burke: they have in common a perspective of distance which has enabled them to avoid both Burke-sickness and Burke-nausea.

While working on this study I have suffered from bouts of Burke-sickness, but the guiding design question has provided a specific lens and enabled some measure of distance. Rueckert (1982:6) explains that in order to deal with Burke, one needs to "wait and watch" and "by a deliberate act of will, …[withhold] judgement until the sanity of distance can be combined with the power of commitment". This advice echoes the vision Burke has for his own writings – as a framework that encourages the development of patience.

Authors such as Rueckert (1982) and Biesecker (1997) refer explicitly to how they adapt Burke for their own purposes. Rueckert (1982:4) refers to his approach as a "partial purification[25] of Burke" insofar as he systematically eliminates some ideas from his discussion towards achieving a positive goal.[26] Rueckert (1982:5) further suggests that a "[p]urification [of Burke's work] is not only a matter of hacking through the stylistic and terminological underbrush, but of finding and then mapping the main route". I have thus attempted to construct a pragmatic map of Burke's ideas; one that traces a route from dialectical and rhetorical theory to meta-rhetorical thinking, but always guided by the main design question. A map is, as Burke points out, a highly simplified and reductionist representation of a territory, but it is only in its reduction that it becomes useful. In other words, my 'partial purification' of Burke's theory involves selecting and amplifying those Burkean ideas that prove most useful in understanding visual design practice and trend dynamics.

Outline of chapters

This first chapter served as a general introduction to the study. I provided an outline of the main issues to be considered, as well as my reasons for proposing a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach. I also introduced Kenneth Burke by means of a brief biographical sketch and provided a review of his main contributions and theoretical concerns. The rest of the thesis is structured in such a way that each chapter presents a different Burkean thematic perspective or angle from which to interrogate design trend dynamics. These themes (which can be broadly described as including dialectics, dramatism, rhetoric, social criticism, and ethics) are never neatly separated in Burke's own work, but it is my way of organising his broad, often bewildering 'philosophy of rhetoric' in a way that becomes more useful for design inquiry.

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[24] Burke jokingly referred to his own work as 'boikswoiks' (Giamo 2009).
[25] In reference to Burke's own phrase about rhetoric utilized towards the purification of war.
[26] Rueckert refers to Burke's idea that "negations are a means of achieving positives".

Chapter Two: Dialectical design conditions presents an overview of Burke's dialectics, which serves as foundational theory for interrogating the mechanics and dynamics of symbol systems. As part of the meta-rhetorical framework proposed here, Burke's dialectical theory is essential in grasping his general understanding of language use and rhetoric. A Burkean dialectical perspective is also particularly valuable for the study of design trends insofar as an understanding of 'design dialectics' helps to explain why and how approaches in design practice and theory change over time. In other words, this perspective is valuable for thinking about the dialectical symbolic conditions that lead to dialectical design change.

Chapter Three: The drama of design relations considers what Burke refers to as a 'dramatistic' approach to language. This approach frames language use in terms of 'symbolic action' – an approach which allows for the rhetorical interrogation of communication, as deliberate and strategic. This approach considers symbol use in socio-political context (or in the 'drama of human relations'). In this chapter I introduce Burke's emphasis on interrogating 'motives' as the rhetorical act of motivating, justifying or rationalising actions or positions. This chapter also presents Burke's well-known method for motivational discourse analysis, namely his 'dramatistic pentad'.

Chapter Four: The rhetorical design situation introduces some of Burke's most well-known concepts, which can also be described as pertaining most directly to rhetorical argumentation and criticism. In this chapter I show how interconnected visual and verbal rhetorical design strategies can be interrogated by employing Burkean terminologies. I pay particular attention to framing rhetorical design practice in relation to Burke's emphasis on 'identification', after which I consider a Burkean perspective on what may be described as trend mystification. This chapter also employs Burke's 'dramatistic pentad', as introduced in Chapter Three, to identify 'pious' modes of discursive design motivation. In other words, I consider the kinds of verbal design justifications perceived as most appropriate and therefore most rhetorically effective. I end this chapter by exploring Burke's notion of 'the terministic screen', which serves as a useful summary of the mechanics of rhetorical framing.

Chapter Five: A critique of design (dis)orders provides an overview of the major socio-cultural concerns found throughout Burke's work. These concerns are explored by considering a number of symbolic disorders or perspectival psychoses, which Burke sees as underlying, or contributing to, the problems of his time. In this chapter I consider the extent to which these disorders may also be identified in problematic design practice and unsustainable trend dynamics. Throughout this chapter I present Burke's critique in relation to other design and trend critiques, within a contemporary design context.

Chapter Six: Meta-rhetorical design re-framing presents Burke's proposed strategies for addressing the problems outlined in the previous chapter. Insofar as this chapter draws on all the theory presented throughout the study, it is here where the re-framing potential of a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach becomes clear. More specifically, this chapter illustrates the meta-rhetorical re-framing of design trends, whereby alternative perspectives on trends may be considered. Throughout this chapter I consider contemporary design responses that could be interpreted as examples of Burkean re-framing. This chapter

can also be described as presenting Burke's ethical vision, which involves the development of an attitude he describes as a 'neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism'. In closing this chapter, I consider the extent to which this Burkean ethic may assist in developing more thoughtful, responsible and sustainable design practice.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion provides a summary of chapters and reflects on the study's theoretical contributions and limitations. I briefly consider other potential areas of research and offer some concluding remarks.

CHAPTER TWO: DIALECTICAL DESIGN CONDITIONS

As part of a Burkean meta-rhetorical framework for interrogating design trends, Burke's dialectical theory can be considered foundational. In other words, Burke's dialectics provides an explanation of the linguistic-symbolic conditions that make shifting trends and trend rhetorics possible. Dialectics, in a general sense, is most frequently understood as the rational interrogation of oppositional forces. Simply put, dialectical enquiry presupposes that change is inevitable, that human knowledge is subjective and limited and, therefore, that tensions and paradoxes will necessarily arise. Burke's dialectical theory thus provides a point of departure for exploring the structure of oppositional design aesthetics and discourses as well as the processes involved in alignment and realignment in theory and practice.

It is thus the purpose of this chapter to explore the dialectical basis of design change, and how shifting dialectical positions contribute to design trend dynamics. As mentioned previously, trends are often framed in oppositional or dialectical terms, such as when a new direction is positioned as a direct antithesis or antidote to a previous approach. I thus aim to show how trends can be understood as shifting dialectical orientations manifested aesthetically and rhetorically over time. Throughout this chapter I explore Burke's dialectical theory and method, while continuously connecting these ideas to how they may be used for interpreting design trend dynamics.

I start this chapter by providing background on how dialectics as topic or mode of inquiry features in design discourse. I refer here to a number of instances where design theorists argue for a greater interrogation of design dialectics, tensions and/or paradoxes. As part of this introductory section I also provide a broad contextual overview of Burke's approach to dialectics. The second part of this chapter explores Burke's ideas regarding linguistic and symbolic ordering practices in relation to design, after which I pay more specific attention to dialectical (oppositional) and hierarchic ordering strategies in the third section. These two sections can be described as offering explanations on how design positions are typically 'ordered' or 'framed'. Thereafter I consider how Burke's theory on dialectical transition and change may be applied to understanding the nature of shifting trend dynamics. In other words, whereas the previous sections considered the framing of design in more-or-less static terms, this fourth section considers how 'dialectical orders' or frames are dynamic and changing. I then turn my attention to briefly explore Burke's thoughts on dialectical transformation and transcendence, however, insofar as I explore the potential of these processes in greater depth towards the end of this thesis, this section serves merely as a brief introduction. The last section of the chapter provides a more in-depth discussion of a variety of prominent or persistent 'design dialectics' as interrogated from a Burkean perspective.

Background

Before I delve into Burke's dialectical theory, it is worth considering the extent to which dialectics or dialectical thought, features in design discourse. A number of theorists have highlighted oppositional forces

or tensions[1] impacting design conceptions and practices. For instance, Donald Schön (1988) identifies 'tensions' in the theory of designing, which account for differences in design philosophies found throughout design discourse.[2] He suggests that we need to investigate these tensions, or at least consider them when we develop theories about design:

> A theory of designing worth its salt must somehow take account of these tensions. It must not ignore them. But they will present themselves differently depending on how we choose to represent designing and design knowledge. If we give priority to rules, for example, we will find it difficult to explain how practised designers come to see things in new ways as they respond to the perceived uniqueness of a design situation. If we give priority to particular intuitions, perceptions and judgments, it will be hard for us to explain how designers build up repertoires of broadly usable design knowledge. If we focus on the knowledge design participants hold in common, we tend to underplay the diversity, ambiguity and relative chaos inherent in much real-world designing. […] Dilemmas associated with choosing fundamental elements and frameworks for design theory are as old as design theory itself (Schön 1988:182).

Kees Dorst (2006:14;17), who also frames designing in terms of paradoxes, proposes an "alternative way to describe design as *the resolution of paradoxes between discourses in a design situation*. This alternative way of describing design potentially sheds new light on the nature of design, and on the kind of creativity that is part and parcel of design". Similarly, Duncan Reyburn (2008) highlights how "design is centered on a rather delicate balancing act […] between paradoxes in the nature of design". He argues that design, as mediation, is characterised by an array of paradoxes: "design may be understood as being noun/verb, artifact/action, process/product […] adaptive/generative, reflexive/projective […] theoretical/pragmatic, synchronic/diachronic, text/context". Prasad Boradkar (2006:5), one of the few design theorists to refer to Burke, argues for the importance of acknowledging opposing views of design, towards embracing a 'multiplicity' inherent in design products:

> Things may be defined as physical entities that are fashioned by human and/or mechanical labour with material and immaterial dimensions with symbolic and utilitarian value, that signify art as well as technology, that possess multiple and fluid meanings, and that are at once ordinary and extraordinary. […] Any theory of things needs to accommodate this multiplicity that is inherent in their existence (Boradkar 2006:5).

Boradkar sees Burkean theory as useful for explaining the multiplicity of meaning in design products, which allows for differing interpretations in consumption and engagement.

The aim of dialectical design inquiry is not only to interrogate conceptual tensions in theories of design, or contradictory meanings as embodied in things, but to consider the dynamics or flux that emanate from such tensions. Some design theorists refer explicitly to a 'dialectics' of design to interrogate not only how opposite positions are in tension, but how these tensions play out as fluctuating movements over time. One such study, *Dialectics of design: how ideas of 'good design' change* by Anne Tomes and Peter Armstrong (2010), offers observations on the dynamics of design change, suggesting that any new conception of 'good design' tends

[1] These oppositional forces are referred to through the use of a variety of terms: 'dichotomies' (Chochinov 2011), 'paradoxes' (Nelson & Stolterman 2012; Reyburn 2008), 'dyads' (Adam 2016), and so on.

[2] The four tensions Schön (1988) identifies are: tacit versus explicit knowledge; uniqueness versus generality; generativity versus uniqueness; and pluralism versus commonality. Some of these tensions relate to the 'dialectics of design' explored towards the end of this chapter.

to arise from a rejection of the values of the immediately preceeding conception. They argue that "[w]hat appear to be design fundamentals at a given point in design history, […] are actually temporary points of stasis in a long term oscillation between relatively stable but opposed conceptions of virtue-in-design" (Tomes & Armstrong 2010:29). Other design theorists have also identified the oppositional forces in design as driving debate in discourse and change in practice. In Paul Greenhalgh's (1993) *Quotations and sources on design and the decorative arts* one finds a collection of "starkly opposing views on certain [design] issues". He explains how "[d]epending on the writers one believes, the Industrial Revolution is either a blessing or a nightmare, […] popular culture is an alienating scourge or a vital element in the cultural structure, and decoration is indispensable and dispensable" (Greenhalgh 1993:xviii). Similarly, Helen Armstrong (2009:9) explains how the collection of essays in *Graphic design theory: readings from the field,* "tell the story of a discipline that continually moves between extremes – anonymity and authorship, the personal and the universal, social detachment and social engagement. Through such oppositions, designers position and reposition themselves in relation to the discourse of design and the broader society". While these issues were "key to avant-garde ideology, [they] remain crucial to contemporary critical and theoretical discussions of the field" (Armstrong 2009:15). In other words, while design movements may not be as prominent in a postmodern context as was seen during the age of modern avant-garde movements, the same debates still continue in design theory and practice.

In addition to describing oppositional and fluctuating values in design, the term 'dialectics' can also be used to describe a particular, holistic approach to design inquiry, whereby conflicting conceptions of design may be negotiated. Richard Buchanan (2007:57) suggests that 'dialectical inquiry' can be considered a branch of design research that "seeks to explain design and the products of design within a larger whole or system". For Buchanan, dialectical inquiry in design "begins with contradictions and conflicts in everyday experience – for example, the conflict of user requirements or the values of designers and their clients". The purpose of dialectical inquiry is to seek "unifying ideas and a larger context within which differences may be overcome in theory and in practice" (Buchanan 2007:57). This vision for dialectical inquiry, as reconciliatory, is developed in depth throughout Burke's work.

It is clear from the above few examples that a dialectical perspective on design is seen as valuable for a variety of reasons. To investigate design from this perspective is to attempt to make sense of the seemingly contradictory options available in developing frameworks for what design is, or what it ought to be. And furthermore, it is to examine the way in which these 'dialectical frames' form the basis, or bring about the potential, of design change.

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Burke is frequently described as a dialectician or dialectical thinker and his dialectical approach to understanding the rhetorical situation is considered one of his major theoretical contributions. For Burke, dialectics offers a rich framework for interrogating the underlying conditions of symbolic tensions and for thinking about transformational processes which negotiate (reinforce or dissolve; reproduce or transcend)

these tensions. Burke builds on a long tradition of dialectics, and is most notably influenced by Plato, Hegel and Marx. While many refer to Burke's Aristotelian rhetorical influences, Plato's[3] thought features strongly in Burke's work, specifically in relation to dialectics. In classical philosophy, dialectics is seen as a method for discovering truth by means of logical argumentation and dialogue. While Burke rejects the proposition that dialectical thought may lead us to absolute 'truth', he finds value in the process whereby oppositional perspectives are negotiated through dialogue. Burke's theory shares similarities with Hegel's dialectic insofar as "both place abstract terms by antithesis; both take partiality and limitation as fact number one about the human condition, the fact that, at root, justifies all dialectic; [and] both find the ambiguities and tensions in natural language a source of insight into ourselves and our world" (Crusius 1986:34). Whereas dialectics for Hegel and Marx serves primarily to make sense of history and historical transition, Burke's main interest is in the dialectical facets of language, which underpins his rhetorical theory. For Burke, 'dialectic' is a "purely verbal affair" (Crusius 1999:183). As Robert Heath (1986:157) explains, Burke's "fascination with dialectic results from what he sees as the 'moltenness' of language, the pliancy of terms, their dynamic ambiguity, that allows for infinite transformations". Burke's dialectics thus offers an approach to "analyzing the *dynamics* of meaning" (Heath 1986:157, emphasis added).

Burke (GM:402) states that his general usage of the term 'dialectics' refers to the "employment of the possibilities of linguistic transformation", but the following long quote serves to illustrate Burke's broader (and often bewildering) understanding and application of the concept:

> Other definitions of dialectic are: reasoning from opinion; the discovery of truth by the give and take of converse and redefinition; the art of disputation; the processes of 'interaction' between the verbal and the non-verbal; the competition of cooperation or the cooperation of competition; the spinning of terms out of terms, as the dialectician proceeds to make explicit the conclusions implicit in key terms or propositions used as generating principle (the kind of internal development that distinguishes mathematical systems); the internal dialogue of thought […] or any development (in organisms, works of art, stages of history) got by the interplay of various factors that mutually modify one another, and may be thought of as voices in a dialogue or roles in a play, with each voice or role in its partiality contributing the the development of the whole; or the placement of one thought or thing in terms of its opposite; or the progressive or successive development and reconciliation of opposites; or so putting questions to nature that nature can give unequivocal answer. An ever closer approximation to truth by successive redefinition is sometimes offered as the opposite of the dialectical method, or such 'spiraling' may very well be taken as the example *par excellence* of dialectic (GM:403).

While I refer back to, and elaborate on, many of the above conceptions of dialectics throughout this chapter, it is possible to identify a main theme emerging in the above text. The various definitions of dialectics all relate to the creation of symbolic order; to the making sense of reality through ordering and reordering. Put otherwise, Burkean dialectics considers the underlying conditions and dynamics of linguistic or symbolic framing and re-framing.

[3] Burke (GM:253) encourages his readers to interpret Plato's assertions about universal forms as insightful statements about the "abstractive nature of language".

Design and symbolic order

Throughout his work, Burke frequently refers to the human linguistic and symbolic propensity for creating order, through such processes as definition and classification. Various conceptions of design also center around the idea of 'creating order' (Csikszentmihalyi 1991) and 'making sense' of things (Krippendorff 1989). As Nelson and Stolterman (2012:14) explain, we design because we

> have the desire to be in more control of as much of our lives as possible […] we are drawn to design because we may feel a lack of wholeness – we do not find the world in a condition that is satisfying or fulfilling for us. And, ultimately, we are motivated to design because it is an accessible means to enlightenment, bringing order and giving meaning to our lives.

The notion of design as 'problem solving'[4] can also be interpreted as restoring order or banishing disorder. The desire to create often emerges from a perceived disorder; a 'perfect order' would not provide the impetus for something new to be created. The predilection for (perhaps even obsession with) creating order can be seen in both design practices and discourses.

In visual terms, information or communication design quite clearly sets out to organise information to bring about effective communication. Designers create compositions or visual orders by arranging design elements and principles[5] in a way that is deemed sensible or rational. It is worth noting that while 'order' does not necessarily equate 'simplicity', simplification has often been the preferred solution to dealing with disorder. Furthermore, visual aesthetic treatments, or styles, can also be considered visual symbolic ordering strategies. To attach a visual style to an organisation or product is, in a way, to classify it. The well-known design theorist on style, Steven Heller (1988:9), explains:

> The graphic designer is basically organizing and communicating messages – to establish the nature of a product or idea, to set the appropriate stage on which to present its virtues, and to announce and publicize such information in the most effective way. Within this process, style is a transmission code, a means of signaling that a certain message is intended for a specific audience. By manipulating visual forms into an appropriate style, the designer can attract the right audience for a product or idea.

The notion of 'appropriate style' tells us that we expect a style to 'fit' its context, meaning that it should encompass or represent the 'essence' of the content, product or organisation. To critique perceived impropriety of a style is a common theme in design discourse. Various design theorists, including Heller, believe styles are often incorrectly or insensitively applied. The idea that certain styles are intended for certain audiences or contexts clearly indicates the organisational value of visual style. Styles create order amongst the various artifacts in our environments, and breaking this order is perceived as a serious offense by many in the design community.[6] In addition to ordering artifacts, stylistic classification also becomes a

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[4] To frame design as 'problem-solving' activity could be interpreted as a broader alternative to design as 'form-giving' or 'decorating' activity. Wolfgang Jonas (1993) explains how the notion of 'design as problem-solving' is "widely accepted in industrial and engineering design", but it is also increasingly common to use this phrase in other areas such as communication design.

[5] The 'principles' of design, as taught in design school, all relate to creating some sense of order: unity, balance, hierarchy, contrast, and so on.

[6] A notable diatribe against improperly applied style is that of Tibor Kalman, J Abbott Miller and Karrie Jacobs (1994).

useful tool for ordering design history. While much has been written about the oversimplification of design history according to rigid stylistic categories, it is not my aim to criticise this dominant approach to design history but rather to illustrate how style has been used in the powerful impulse to categorise and classify design actions.

During the actual design process a variety of verbal ordering activities also take place (Dong 2006). The brief serves to frame or structure design action, while the presentation rationale serves to justify the chosen response. Throughout the various steps of the design process, verbal discussion serves to frame or structure design decisions. These discussions are in turn influenced by more deeply held assumptions about the nature and role of design. These more theoretical, discursive conceptions of design can also be categorised. Richard Coyne and Adrian Snodgrass (1995:52) refer to the ubiquity of ordering practices in design theory, explaining how there

> are many theories based almost entirely on categorization: the classification of 'design elements' (form, light, texture, color, movement, etc.); the classification of activities in the design process (lists of the things that take place during the analysis phase); the history of artifacts (lists of which artifacts belong to which period); design taxonomies; component hierarchies; procedures; and methods.

While there is much obvious value in such categorisation, Coyne and Snodgrass (1995:52) warn against the error in assuming "that such ordering captures the essence of design understanding, and that such systems must be definitive and complete". In other words, while there is good reason to order our ideas about design, we should not conflate constructed frameworks with 'objective' design reality.

Design frameworks provide powerful rhetorical possibilities. For instance, a 'definition of design' may impact design practice as well as serve as a framework for justifying practice. As Robert B Riley (2015:[sp]) explains, "[p]hilosophies of design are intellectual and verbal frameworks that organize ideas, just as styles can be thought of as visual frameworks that organize tangible things. Design theory or philosophy, then, is often a sociocultural framework[7] serving as a justification for a visual framework". Riley thus identifies a direct link between visual and discursive ordering practices for strategic purposes. Simply put, design decisions are more easily legitimated when they are supported by design theory; or, when they fit within a logically constructed symbolic order.

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Burke believes that our experience of 'reality' is mediated through symbol systems; the experience cannot be independent from the language and symbols we use to make sense of experience. All of Burke's theory on language, dialectics and rhetoric is thus founded on a basic condition, namely the human ability to use symbols.[8] For Burke (LSA:16), man is, in the broadest sense, "the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-

[7] Riley (2005) believes it is important to distinguish between a theory and a framework. He believes that a "framework can be judged on its reasonableness and its utility, but claims no exclusivity *vis-à-vis* other frameworks. If we accept these definitions, it is clear that most theories or philosophies of design are not theories at all, but frameworks".

[8] While Burke's interest in the human use of symbols is primarily concerned with language, or linguistic symbols, he acknowledges how his ideas may apply to non-verbal language, visual language as well.

misusing) animal". Throughout his work Burke emphasises the human propensity for symbolicity and, more specifically, the unique human ability to develop second level symbolicity, or, the "reflexive capacity" to "develop highly complex symbol systems about symbol systems" (LSA:24). Humans create tools that make other tools, and similarly, they use symbols to talk about symbols. For Burke (1955:279), "[s]ymbolic action proper is attested by a kind of 'second level' possibility" insofar as "language readily uses not only signs but also signs about signs". This second-level symbolicity is a prerequisite for any theory of design to exist, as well as visual design styles and trends.

All linguistic utterances are made possible by the use of symbols. The linguistic sign stands in for a concept (a letter or a word) and therefore, communication is always symbolic. However, to end the discussion here would be to miss the significance of Burke's sustained investigation of the symbolic. Even while all communication makes use of symbolic means, not all communication is understood as containing the same *level* of symbolism. For instance, one would consider poetry as imbued with a depth of symbolism in a way that a newspaper report is not.[9] The difference is understood in relation to whether information is simply and straightforwardly communicated (literal language), or whether symbolic (figurative) language – including aesthetic, formal devices such as metaphors – are used to symbolise something beyond the immediate text.

In the case of basic linguistic symbols, a symbol stands in for a concept in the real world. Burke reminds us that a "word's 'meaning' is not identical with its sheer materiality [in example the spoken sound or written text]. There is a qualitative difference between the symbol and the symbolized" (RR:16). In this way, there is an implicit duality in human symbolic behaviour; symbolicity "adds a dimension of action not reducible to the non-symbolic – for by its very nature as symbolic it cannot be identical with the non-symbolic" (RR:16). Simply put, the word (or symbol) for a thing is not the thing itself; and it is possible to do with words (or symbols) what one cannot do with the thing itself. There are thus two interrelated qualities about the symbolic to explore further: a) the connection or link between the symbol and what is symbolised, and b) the disconnection or discrepancy between the symbol and what is being symbolised. Burke explores this issue through what he refers to as the *paradox of substance*.

Before I continue to explain what Burke means by a *paradox of substance*, it may be worthwhile to begin by exploring the concept of the negative, which Burke sees as essential in the development of symbol systems. He believes a propensity for the negative is a defining characteristic of humans as "inventor[s] of the negative (or moralized by the negative)". Burke (LSA:9) explains how the negative is a "function peculiar to symbol systems" insofar as it does not 'exist' in terms of the material conditions of nature; "[t]o look for negatives in nature would be as absurd as though you were to go out hunting for the square root of minus-one". Burke demonstrates the "sheer symbolicity of the negative" by inviting us to imagine an object such a table, and to imagine all of the things that it is not: "you could go on for the rest of your life saying… 'It is

[9] While it is common to perceive some forms of communication as less symbolic, Burke seeks to question this common perception. For instance, the conventions found in newspaper report writing can be considered equally symbolic in terms of rhetorical tactics. The tone or voice, while appearing objective or neutral, is a stylistic mechanism which functions symbolically.

not a book, it is not a house, it is not Times Square'". As another illustration, he invites us to imagine 'nothing'. He argues that we have to picture 'nothing' in terms of 'something', whether that something is a 'black spot' or 'abyss;' "it must be an image of 'something', since there can be no other kinds of image" (RR:19).

It is also possible to frame design action as rooted in the negative, in the not-yet-existing (Galle 1999:66; Nelson & Stolterman 2012:127). To create anything at all is only possible insofar as one can imagine something which does not yet exist. However, designing, as a distinct type of making, involves a complex relation with the not-yet-existing; a process made possible through symbolic communication. Per Galle (1999:66) explains,

> It is, on reflection, a curious property of human language and other forms of expression that, in a sense, they allow us to talk elaborately about things or persons which do not exist, and to picture them in great detail. […] Verbal or other discourse that purports to be 'about' real material entities while in fact there are no such entities (yet), is obviously essential to creativity in design and artefact production […]

While it is possible to *make* rudimentary tools without needing to symbolically *design* such tools,[10] there can be no design practice without symbols. Designing relates to the planning, or devising of future courses of action; to plan for the future production of artifacts or systems. This symbolic practice includes the development of sketches, models and prototypes in addition to verbal communication. It is, for instance, possible to 'design' a house without ever having to build it. The design 'product' here is a symbolic vision – the verbal, textual and visual representation – of an idea.[11] In other words, while the 'design' of a product may be considered a product of sorts, it differs from the finished, tangible product it points to or works towards.

Similarly, from a Burkean perspective, a symbol is clearly *not* the thing itself. Burke (LSA:12) thus emphasises how "[t]here is an implied sense of negativity in the ability to use words at all. For to use them properly, we must know that they are *not* the things they stand for". Furthermore, when using language 'metaphorically' as opposed to 'literally', there is a clear sense in which the symbolic metaphor is also *not* the symbol referred to.[12] Burke thus argues that an ability to use language implies "having a feeling for the *principle of the negative*" (RR:18). As an aside, Burke (LSA:12) explains how irony carries the "principle of negativity to its most complicated perfection". Irony "states A in terms of non-A (as when, on a day of bad weather, we might say, 'What a beautiful day it is!')" (RR:18-19). Burke (LSA:12) believes that "we cannot use language maturely until we are spontaneously at home in irony". The ability to identify irony is clearly a sign of more mature engagement with language, as seen in the frequent misinterpretation of irony by children. While irony is an

[10] Burke (LSA:14), for instance, refers to the possibility of primates making and using rudimentary tools, without needing language to do so.
[11] In some areas of design practice, such as visual communication design, the designing and the producing (or making) are more difficult to distinguish from each other and – increasingly through digital, online publishing – may seem part of the same process. Nonetheless, in broad terms there remains a conceptual difference between designing and executing or producing, and it is in this process where symbolic communication of intention is key.
[12] Even so-called 'dead metaphors' are in some way acknowledged as not literal in order to be understood. Burke (LSA:12) argues that "since language is extended by metaphor which gradually becomes the kind of dead metaphor we call abstraction, we must know that metaphor is *not* literal".

extreme example of negative symbolicity, the general and practical, linguistic significance of the negative cannot be overstated.

Metaphoric communication requires an intuitive understanding of the negative. It is possible to call a man a 'dog', when the man is of course not *literally* a dog. If said to a friend, the meaning differs significantly from if it were said to an enemy. All symbolic (and metaphoric) meaning is understood in context. Burke (PLF:35) explains how the 'symbolism' of "a word consists in the fact that no one quite uses the word in its mere dictionary sense. And the overtones of a usage are revealed 'by the company it keeps' in the utterances of a given speaker or writer". Symbols found in visual design artifacts function in a similar manner. For instance, one can use the colour red on a valentines card, or on a horror film poster, with vastly different communicative effects. The meaning of symbolic representation is, in other words, contextually relative.

All symbols operate 'metaphorically' through processes of representation and substitution: something 'stands in' for something else.[13] Burke describes a metaphor as "a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else. It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this" (GM:503). For Burke, the more general application of the metaphoric process can simply be referred to as shifting 'perspective', insofar as a metaphor presents one thing from the perspective of another. This shifting of perspective is particularly useful when speaking about more abstract concepts. Barry Sandywell (2011) explains how "[i]t is a curious feature of thought that if we have to think about something, especially something difficult, intangible or dangerous, we think of it in terms of something else. The general term for this 'something else' is *metaphor"* (2011:409). Furthermore, "[t]o speak of metaphor is to speak of translations, connections and displacements" (Sandywell 2011:410). While we tend to focus on symbols and metaphors as providing translations and connections, we tend to deemphasise how they are also displacements.

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This issue of displacement is addressed by Burke via the notion of the *paradox of substance.* The concept seeks to explain the displacement that inevitably forms part of the symbolic translation process. The *paradox of substance* explains how the processes of symbolic representation and substitution is inherently paradoxical. By tracing the roots of the word 'substance' Burke explains how "[l]iterally, a person's or a thing's sub-stance would be something that stands beneath or supports the person or thing" (GM:22). However, the common meaning of the term 'substance' relates to the essence of something and not that which is external to it. Describing something 'in terms of' something else is, for Burke, a similarly paradoxical process. To define something (to speak about its essence or substance) requires contextual reference to what it is substantially *not.*

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[13] Burke's emphasis on metaphor is echoed in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's influential work, *Metaphors we live by* (1980), which aims to show the significance of metaphors in structuring thought. Many of their concerns over metaphors are closely aligned with Burke's understanding of symbol systems. For instance, Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) explain how the "essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another". They argue that because "many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientations, objects, etc.)" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:115). Describing our emotional state in terms of being 'up' or 'down', are often cited examples.

It is for this reason that symbols, and metaphors, can only provide partial expressions of experience insofar as the metaphoric expression does not equal the experience. While metaphorical concepts are hugely valuable in expressing more abstract experiences and emotions, regardless of how aptly they may fit, other aspects of experience remain unexpressed or hidden (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:10-3). Symbol systems are by their very nature reductionist, as Burke (LSA:5) explains:

> A road map that helps us easily find our way from one side of the continent to the other owes its great utility to its exceptional existential poverty. It tells us absurdly little about the trip that is to be experienced in a welter of detail. Indeed, its value for us is in the very fact that it is so essentially inane.

In other words, a symbol derives its very usefulness from the fact that it represents a limited aspect of experience. The key then to successful symbol or metaphor usage lies in selecting which aspect to express.

Burke (PLF:26) thus explores synecdochic[14] relations in the process of 'representation', which could be used in a variety of contexts. For example, in political representation, an elected person may come to represent a community as a whole. Similarly, artistic representation occurs where "certain relations within the medium 'stand for' corresponding relations outside it" (GM:508). As in art, it is hard to imagine design practice without the process of representation. The visual communication designer's main task is to communicate through visual *representation*. As mentioned previously, design elements and principles work together towards the visual representation of conceptual content, and styles come to represent whole eras, geographic locations, or design philosophies.

From a more theoretical perspective, any discursive metaphorical conception of design is subject to a paradox of substance. For instance, to define design as 'science', as design theorists such as Herbert A Simon (1996) have done, is to define design in terms of *something else*. Design and science are clearly not identical concepts, but design can be described 'in terms of' science when some aspect of design is linked to some aspect of science. One reason to highlight a conceptual similarity between design and science may be to combat negative perceptions of design as applied or decorative art. In other words, the connection seems to be made in an effort to elevate design's status, to present it as rigorous, objective, research-driven practice. There are, in other words, strategic or rhetorical reasons behind framing design as science. However, in defining design as a *science*, design is presented in terms of what it is *not*. This is evidenced in the way in which various design theorists have criticised this conception of design, and how they have proposed other more 'essential' or appropriate definitions.[15] The search for an essential definition of design is ongoing, and every new suggestion is followed by a new objection. This has lead to increasingly inclusive or

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[14] Burke refers specifically to synecdoche and metonymy, not only as formal tropes but as general symbolic processes. Burke (GM:508) describes synecdoche as: "part for the whole, whole for the part, container for the contained, sign for the thing signified, material for the thing made (which brings us nearer to metonymy), cause for effect, effect for cause, genus for species, species for genus, etc. All such conversions imply an integral relationship of convertibility, between the two terms". For Burke, metonymy is the reductive application of synecdoche (GM:509). He thus links synecdoche to 'representation' and metonymy to 'reduction'.

[15] Jorge Frascara (1988), for instance, argues for conceptualising graphic design as 'social science'. The accepted understanding of the 'essential' nature of design extends into conceptions of what 'good design' ought to be. In other words, conceptions of design impact design practice. To conceive of design as an art would likely produce different results than if it were treated as a science or social science.

all-encompassing definitions of design. However, whenever a definition becomes too broad, it ceases to be useful. Burke's example of a map is again instructive: a map is only useful insofar as it is a reductionist abstraction of the spatial environment. Any definition or terminology similarly derives its use value from emphasising particularly relevant qualities.

From a design practice perspective, Burke's *paradox of substance* also sheds light on the highly ambiguous translation dynamic between visual and verbal design actions. A verbal explanation cannot accurately capture the visual symbolic meaning, insofar as these two kinds of symbolic practices are not of the same 'language'. As Anne Tomes, Caroline Oates and Peter Armstrong (1998:128) point out, "the process of design routinely accomplishes the theoretically daunting task of translating meanings between two supposedly incommensurate languages; the visual and the verbal". There is no one direct way in which a verbal design brief is translated into a visual design product, and similarly, no visual design response can be accurately translated into a verbal rationale. This relates to Burke's (PLF:22) explanation of the dilemma of the literary critic, whose opponent can always resort to the justified answer: "But you have explained a complexity in terms of a simplicity, and a simplicity is precisely what a complexity is *not*. So you have explained something in terms of what it isn't". Burke thus argues that "[e]xplanation entails simplification; and any simplification is open to the charge of 'oversimplification'". This problem of translating a literary work into a short review can be seen as an analogy for what designers need to do whenever they translate the verbal into the visual and back again.

Representation, substitution and reduction are necessary principles of symbolicity and are, for the most part, used towards positive and constructive communication. However, Burke wishes to highlight that these processes open up the possibilities for symbols to be misused.[16] He points out how people tend to "cling to a kind of naïve verbal realism" that inhibits the full realization of the extent to which symbolicity influences their notions of reality (LSA:5). In other words, people are not fully aware of the extent to which symbols build realities and therefore, how subtly and powerfully symbols can manipulate. Burke's concerns around this possibility are explored in greater depth in Chapter Five of this study. For now it is merely worth reiterating that the ability to critique symbol systems shows an advanced reflexive or second-level symbolicity; the ability to use symbols to question symbols.

Advanced second-level symbolicity leads to an increased self-consciousness which has major implications for technological development in general and also for design practice. The ability to discuss and evaluate design products (and prototypes in various stages of the design process) enables a different dynamic to emerge in the making process. As Cameron Tonkinwise (2005:6) explains:

> If craft was inherently conservative, making only occasional and minor modifications in the process of primarily reproducing how things already were, design, by division of labour and the process of

[16] Burke points out how the logic of substitution and representation has far-reaching implications in other areas of human action, playing out in the social practices of punishment, compensation and scapegoating, for instance. Burke (PLF:26) explains how the 'scapegoat' serves as "the symbolic vessel of certain burdens, which are ritualistically delegated to it". In such a way, the logic of linguistic symbolicity extends into realms of social behavior. As central concerns in Burke's work, the ethical implications of symbolic practices are explored in greater depth later in the study.

> visualization was able to make more radical transformations, not just to components but to whole systems. The virtuality of sketching does not merely allow accelerated trial-and-error evolution, but enables a self-consciousness that promotes approaching situations in novel ways, even when not needed.

From a design praxis perspective, this self-consciousness or reflexivity in practice leads to a continual questioning and searching for alternatives. The ability to reflect on the serviceability or desirability of a particular design approach is, of course, what makes design trend dynamics possible in the first place. Before exploring Burke's thoughts on dialectics in relation to change or transition dynamics, it is necessary to first explain other dialectical facets of linguistic or symbolic ordering. This includes the tendency to organise experience in dialectical pairs of oppositional relations, as well as in hierarchic relations.

Dialectical order and hierarchy

While Burke's broad definition of dialectic relates to the general linguistic process whereby something is framed 'in terms of' something else, he explains how the dialectical "in a more restricted sense […] considers things in terms not of *some* other, but of *the* other" (GM:33). Burke (LSA:11) thus explores the "role of antithesis in what can be called 'polar' terms". Burke explains how oppositional terms are not only found in "Yes-No, but such similarly constructed pairs as: true-false, order-disorder, cosmos-chaos, success-failure, peace-war, pleasure-pain, clean-unclean, life-death, love-hate". Burke wishes to distinguish such polar terms from "sheerly positive terms such as the word 'table', for instance, which involves no thought of counter-table, anti-table, non-table, or un-table" (LSA:11). Burke also refers to polar terms as 'dialectical' terms insofar as they stand in opposition to each other. He explains how a "term like 'freedom' is dialectical, in that we cannot locate its meaning without reference to some concept of enslavement, confinement, or restriction" (PLF:109). The more abstract a concept, the more likely it requires a counter-concept to make it intelligible by situating it in relation to something else.

There seems to be a real appeal in classifying terms in neat oppositional pairs. Raoul J Adam (2016:6) explains how 'dyads' or 'polarities' "allow us to orientate ourselves – to move, to act, to choose, to know and to *be* – within the most mundane and profound domains of life. We can be taller or shorter, faster or slower, happier or sadder, for better or worse. […] Dyads allow us *to be* and *to belong* in relation to the being and belonging of others". In other words, these polarities are so ubiquitous because they help frame experience in relational terms. It is perhaps for this reason that positive (non-dialectical) terms or concepts are frequently framed as polar terms. The prevalence of false dichotomies attests to the tendency to polarise the merely different.

From a design perspective, we can identify similar organisational attempts to frame different stylistic approaches. One stylistic approach might be described as the antithesis of another stylistic approach. In other words, a style often implies (and relies on) a counter-style. For instance, minimalist modernism is a displacement of decorative and ornamental aesthetics and finds its identity not as one stylistic alternative of many but as *the* alternative in polar opposition. Of course not all styles will be characterised as polar

opposites, but the terms used to describe different movements are likely to draw on conceptual polarities as a means to situate particular characteristics in oppositional relation to others.

Various relationships between polar terms are possible and a variety of terminologies are used in speaking about such relations: 'dualities', 'dichotomies', 'binary opposites', 'paradoxes' and so on. Insofar as these terms describe slightly different perceptual relations amongst polar terms, some further explanation may be useful. Adam (2016:8) describes the 'binary oppositional' as "relationships [which] call us to separate and value one *against* the other". The term 'dichotomy' serves a similar purpose, to emphasise a complete division or contrast between terms. Adam goes on to describe the 'paradoxical' as a relation that "call[s] us to value the one *and* the other, even in opposition or apparent contradiction". He describes the 'dialectical' as those relations which "call us to synthesise one *with* the other" (Adam 2016:8). This is not an uncommon understanding of dialectic, as working towards the bridging or synthesis of opposing positions.

Elizabeth Trott (2002:321), provides a broader description of a dialectical relation, as existing "between terms when each idea or claim represented by the two terms is necessary for the other one to be meaningful". This definition fits well with Burke's broad usage of the term 'dialectic', as encompassing all the above relations between oppositional concepts; their contradiction or irreconcilability as well as their interrelatedness and potential reconciliation (synthesis or transcendence). To emphasise the dialectical, in a Burkean sense, is to consider the variety of ways in which conceptual oppositions relate to one another; in static symbolic relation, as well as in dynamic or changing relations.

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In addition to concepts being placed in oppositional relation to each other, as a means to orientate ourselves and structure our experience of reality, concepts are also classified hierarchically. Burke believes humans are "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)". Rueckert (1982:131) explains how "hierarchy is any kind of order; but more accurately, it is any kind of graded, value-charged structure in terms of which things, words, people, acts, and ideas are ranked". To order and classify naturally extends into ranking of concepts as higher or lower, better or worse.

Cultural hierarchy drives the creation of 'the new' and is therefore an essential part of shifting trends. In his sustained enquiry, *On the new*, Boris Groys (2014:39) explains how "[c]ulture is always already a value hierarchy. Every cultural act confirms this hierarchy, alters it, or, as happens in most cases, does both at once". While the cultural hierarchy is in a state of perpetual change, the mechanisms of change remain relatively stable. Groys (2014:32) points out how our "[c]ulture deems certain differences and not others interesting and valuable, as it always has. In other words, it continues to define certain differences as new and relevant and others as trivial and irrelevant". Design practice is intimately connected to the creation of such cultural hierarchies. The value hierarchy found in design culture is perhaps most obvious when considering the notion of 'high design'. As Guy Julier (2008:77) explains,

> At one end of the scale we might establish 'anonymous design' as a category wherein objects, spaces and images are conceived and shaped by professional designers or people from other backgrounds taking on a designer's role, but, crucially, the etiquette of designer is not formally recognized. Pencils and zippers may be examples of 'anonymous design' […] At the other end of this scale we find 'high design' where conscious designer intervention and authorship, along with the price tag, play a large role in establishing the cultural and aesthetic credentials of an artefact.

Julier (2008:78-9) continues to explain how certain objects of 'high design' may be taken up into the historical canon of 'design classics' – a label for "products which sum up the best of their time but equally whose appeal surpass their immediate historical context". Objects of 'high design' that become 'design classics', along with their designers, could be considered right at the top of the design culture hierarchy. These objects and their designers gain their high status via the mediating mechanics within the design culture industry. As Julier (2008:79) explains, "[o]bjects become the token goods of high design through association within a complicated system of mediation and distribution". In other words, Julier suggests it is not an inherent quality of the design product that allows it to ascend the hierarchy, but rather the cultural rhetorics surrounding it.

In a more general sense, all design products are concerned with value hierarchies, not only those identified as 'high design' pieces. As Reyburn (2008:6) explains "[d]esign frequently, if not primarily, deals with demonstrating to an audience that a single information product or brand is superior, and not just different, to another". While Reyburn (2008:6) does not find the notion of design differentiation hierarchies problematic *per se*, he explains how design is frequently used "to create a perceived hierarchy of difference where no actual hierarchy exists. This idea is perfectly sensible in a capitalistic culture, since competition and the creation of perceived difference are matters of economic survival". In other words, design contributes towards creating the appearance of superior value, through both visual and verbal argumentation. This ability, for design to 'manipulate' perceptions of value, is a common point of criticism directed at the design industries.

While it is important to critique problematic hierarchies, Burke wishes to highlight how hierarchy is a natural, unavoidable and not necessarily negative part of human experience. For Burke, the hierarchic principle is a motivating force in society, rooted in "the incentives of organization and status" (LSA:15). Burke's ideas regarding the implications of social, political and cultural hierarchies, as highly relevant to this study, are explored in greater depth in following chapters. For now it is important to reiterate how hierarchies feature in the symbolic ordering of experience, and to further consider the manner in which hierarchic ordering impacts the dynamics of dialectical change.

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Implicit in the idea of order is the idea of 'perfect' order. Burke considers 'perfection' a built-in principle of language, arguing that all definitions are by their nature 'perfectionist'. A definition needs to provide the 'perfect' symbol or description of a thing, and humans are forever compelled to find the 'perfect' means of expression. Burke explains (LSA:16):

> The principle of perfection is central to the nature of language as motive. The mere desire to name something by its 'proper' name, or to speak a language in its distinctive ways is intrinsically 'perfectionist'. What is more 'perfectionist' in essence than the impulse, when one is in dire need of something, to so state this need that one in effect 'defines' the situation?

In other words, Burke believes that all terminologies display this tendency towards 'perfectly' representing a concept. From a design perspective, we may recognise this tendency in the search for the 'perfect' visual representation of a concept. A major part of the design process revolves around finding the most appropriate visual metaphor or look-and-feel for a product. Any search for the 'best' design solution reflects this tendency to hierarchically order symbols; to find the most perfect symbolic expression.

Burke investigates the hierarchic tendency towards perfection in reference to Aristotle's concept of *entelechy* (LSA:17). The concept of 'entelechy' is the theory that a thing works towards its perfect resolution based on the nature of its kind, or towards its natural *telos* (LSA:17). This relates to what Burke refers to as our "terministically goaded vision [of which] Utopias are obvious examples" (Burke 2003a[1974]:74). This tendency is of course highly visible in the project of modernity, which is frequently described in terms of its drive towards progress and its ever-closer expression of truth, purity and perfection.[17] As Clement Greenberg (1993[1960]:86) remarks on Modernist painting:

> It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as its independence.

These developments in the history of the arts had major impacts on the decorative arts, design and architecture. Modern architecture and typography, for instance, share the underpinning philosophy that only that which is 'pure' or 'essential' to the medium should be allowed, with all else relegated as 'mere decoration'. This meant that each discipline was required to 'find' its pure, perfect or essential nature, which could then be expressed through a new definition (often in the form of a manifesto). Various design manifestos and aphorisms throughout the modern period attest to the search for the highest, purest ideal for design practice. A commonly cited example is *The Crystal Goblet* typographic treatise by Beatrice Warde (1955), which argued that typography should be as 'invisible' as possible, to allow for the neutral transfer of content: "[t]ype well used is invisible as type, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words, ideas". In order to achieve 'invisible' type, Warde (1955) recommends paying detailed attention to typographic skills such as kerning, which "[n]obody (save the other craftsmen) will appreciate", yet will produce a "crystalline goblet which is worthy to hold the vintage of the human mind". Warde thus presents a vision for typography as purely functional and perfectly efficient as vehicle for content. It is still

[17] Early modern aesthetic representations (as seen in art and literature) were initially meant to mimic reality as closely as possible, to provide a perfect expression of the real. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this impulse made way for a conceptually similar approach, albeit by attempting to represent unseen or hidden essences or realities (Groys 2014).

common in typographic design practice to find such doctrines of proper layout and typesetting, and those who do not achieve a sufficient level of professional 'perfection' are often heavily criticised as a result.[18]

An extension of the above argument is clearly visible in the discourse surrounding the previously mentioned shift towards 'flat design' interface aesthetics. The justification of the new style, as ushered in by Microsoft's Windows 8 *Metro* style (Figure 1 – in Chapter One), draws on the same notions of purity, transparency and minimalist functionality. As Austin Carr (2014) explains, the ethos of the flat design movement, as influenced by the Bauhaus philosophy, is that "materials must be treated in ways that speak to their essential nature". Sam Moreau describes the *Metro* style as "not about adornments […] 'It's about typography, color, motion. That's the pixel" (in Carr 2014). As Walter Naeslund explains,

> [w]hat I really like about the [Metro] design is not that it's overly pretty or tasteful […] but that it's *true in what it is*. While Apple goes the realism-route mimicing reality with wooden bookshelves and fake paper notebooks, Microsoft lets digital be digital. This is a statement that both diverges from Apple and is in tune with [Microsoft's] geek heritage. It's honest, and honesty is cool.

Tom Hobbs (2012) similarly explains how Microsoft's new visual language is "hailed as being authentic: pixels are pixels". The flat, blocky areas of colour are, to some extent, reminiscent of more rudimentary pixel graphics, but it is debateable whether this aesthetic is truly more 'authentically digital'. Nonetheless, the powerful modernist argument for authenticity or representational integrity clearly remains highly persuasive.

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While most designers no longer harbour ambitions of creating 'perfect' design products, movements, or definitions of design,[19] the hierarchic logic of continued progress persists; to create something better, and at least as near to 'perfect' as possible. This modernist logic, which is clearly still with us, could perhaps be understood in relation to the entelechial drive identified by Burke. Furthermore, it is perhaps this logic, the drive for perfection along with the inevitable failure to reach perfection, on which trend dynamics are dependent, and on which trend rhetorics operate. A new design trend, even if it is not a genuine improvement upon previous iterations, often needs to assert its legitimacy by affirming that it is 'better', for whatever reason. Because it inevitably falls short, the opportunity arises for a new trend to correct on those shortcomings; and so the dialectic continues. Burke's investigation of symbolic hierarchies are highly relevant in discussions on design trends, not only in terms of how *the new* is positioned as superior to what came before, but also in relation to how trends enable designers and consumers to position themselves in the culture hierarchy. Burke's extended interrogation of hierarchy is useful in how it relates not only to linguistic dialectical classifications, but also to socio-political relations. For instance, designers as trendsetters, make use of trend rhetorics to elevate their status, while consumers buy into trends as a means

[18] While typographic conventions are powerful symbolic orders with rules and structures in place to maintain the order, there are, of course, ample examples of designers who break the rules and who are celebrated for it. However, the conditions under which rules may be broken could be considered as another set of motivational 'rules'. This idea is explored in greater depth in Chapter Four.
[19] While there seems to be a widespread awareness that a perfect definition of 'design' may be unattainable, there is still an ongoing debate regarding which definitions are best at encompassing design's 'essence'.

to climb social hierarchies. These socio-political motives are explored in greater depth in the following chapter on the design 'drama'.

Burke's inquiry into hierarchy and perfection highlights the manner in which symbols are value-laden. But while hierarchies are powerful organisational structures, they are not entirely stable. Hierarchies are context-specific, and as circumstances inevitably change, so hierarchic structures also change. For instance, Burke (CS:185) explains how "a particular brand of art cannot be at once categorically superior and best fitted for all situations in history, since the situations in history change so greatly that, by being better fitted to deal with one, a brand of art would necessarily be worse fitted for dealing with others". Any value hierarchy prioritises a partial aspect of a larger whole, which opens it up to critique and makes it subject to change.

Dialectical transition and change

Trends are by nature transitory and temporary, characterised primarily by their dynamic quality. Burke's interest in dialectics complements the study of trends, insofar as dialectics sheds light on processes of transition and transformation. Dynamic dialectical inquiry is concerned with aspects of continuity and discontinuity; the dynamics of persistence and change. All change can be understood in dialectical terms, insofar as the new is dialectically dependent on the old; "the new is new in its relation to the old, to tradition" (Groys 2014:6). The dialectical origin of change is succinctly illustrated in a poem by Wallace Stevens (in Lanham 2006:158):

> Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
> On one another, as a man depends
> On a woman, day on night, the imagined
> On the real. This is the origin of change.

Burke frequently describes historical transitions through dialectical coordinates, i.e. permanence and change; acceptance and rejection; orthodoxies and heresies.[20] As mentioned previously, the Hegelian[21] and Marxist influences throughout Burke's work is reflected in his interest in dialectically fluctuating forces throughout history. Burke is interested in how static (or logical) dialectical positions become dynamically enacted over time, through a process of antithesis. For example, in relation to religion Burke (LSA:12) argues that

> religions are so often built *antithetically* to other persuasions. Negative motivation of this sort is attested by such steps as the formation of Christianity in opposition to paganism, the formation of Protestant offshoots in opposition to Catholicism, and the current reinvigoration of churchgoing, if not exactly of religion, in opposition to communism. So goes the dialectic!

Burke's ideas regarding permanent and fluctuating principles relates to the way in which basic human values are universal,[22] but particular values are emphasised or deemphasised depending on the circumstances.

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[20] Burke's early works from the 1930s, *Counter-statement*, *Permanence and change* and *Attitutdes toward history*, all deal with social, political, aesthetic and cultural dynamics as they change over time.

[21] Burke (RR:30) interprets Hegelian dialectics as follows: "the term 'thesis' of itself implies 'antithesis' – and both together imply 'synthesis', the element of communication between them". In such a way, the thesis and antithesis are not merely opposites, but counterparts of the same concern.

[22] These fundamental or universal human needs have been identified by theorists such as Abraham Maslow and include basic physiological and safety needs as well as more complex social and self-actualisation needs.

According to Lawrence Coupe (2005:62) Burke seeks to develop a transhistorical perspective on human nature, by looking for similarities between eras, instead of accepting a “shallowly progressive view of human understanding” where the present is always assumed to be superior to the past. Burke thus identifies recurring patterns in history. For instance, he compares magic, religion and science as three similar modes of thought[23] “concerning the nature of the universe and man’s relation to it” (CS:163; PC:59). Burke acknowledges that any response is historically situated, or in other words, contingent on the circumstances of that time. However, he also believes that there are fundamental, universal human needs, which stay consistent, even if particularities are at times discursively suppressed.

The cyclical nature of fluctuations in conditions and their attached values is, according to Burke (CS:121), a result of the “gamut of human emotions and attitudes” remaining consistent throughout history.[24] This is also why Burke sees innovations not necessarily as entirely new inventions, but rather as any “emphasis to which the contemporary public is not accustomed”. He illustrates this by explaining how “to a people improvident through excessive hopefulness, the artist who disclosed the cultural value of fear, distrust or hypochondria would be an innovator. Any ‘transvaluation of values’ is an innovation, though it be a reversion to an earlier value” (Burke CS:110). For Burke, values do not necessarily shift as drastically and comprehensively as historical accounts of movements might suggest. Some values are amplified while others are either unconsciously ignored or more consciously suppressed. Groys (2014:10) echoes this idea in claiming that “[i]nnovation does not consist in the emergence of something previously hidden, but in the fact that the value of something always already seen and known is re-valued”.

Burke’s theory highlights how ideas or ideologies oscillate because no orientation or perspective can accurately encompass reality or satisfy all human needs. This leads to the need for limited perspectives to be continually corrected, back and forth. Rueckert (1982:37) summarises this dynamic as follows:

> In the course of history, which is marked by necessary and inevitable change, one major orientation is established, rigidified, and systematized. According to Burke, the tendency is for this process to be non-cumulative; often those things in a discredited orientation which actually satisfy fundamental human needs, as well as those things which do not, perish with the orientation. Though a radical shift of emphasis in the new orientation may obscure one or more of the permanent fundamental needs, the needs remain and must be satisfied by one means or another if man is fully and adequately to realize himself.

In other words, certain positive values perish along with the negative values of an orientation, creating a new void to be filled. As Rueckert (1982:37) explains, “what is permanent, necessary, and valuable may be lost, or

[23] Burke (PC:59) identifies three main ‘orders of rationalization’ along with different emphases: magic emphasises natural forces; religion emphasises the control of human forces; and science emphasises a third productive, technological order. Nonetheless, he believes each of these orders have much in common, in terms of the human need for ‘order’, and how rhetorical strategies are used in excercising and legitimating the order.

[24] It is through the ambiguous concept of ‘form’ that Burke investigates the universal experiences available to everyone, across all ages. Burke transforms Plato’s theory of forms into a psychological theory of patterns of experience. Such psychological universals include things such as “universal situations, recurrent emotions, fundamental attitudes, typical actions, patterns of experience, and ‘forms of mind’” (Rueckert 1982:12; CS:48). Although the specific details of an experience would be unique in each situation, the “general content, the pattern and the forms of the experience would be similar, if not identical” (Rueckert 1982:13). Burke believes this is how a great work of literature, regardless of its time, still engages us. The experiences represented can be described as archetypal, insofar as we can relate them to our own experiences.

lost sight of, or dismissed in the course of the inevitable changes of history. Men often become so absorbed or lost in the historical situation that they fail to remember the universal one". Burke believes orientations tend to outlive their usefulness, surviving into new conditions for which they are unfit. He names this process 'cultural lag' (PC:179). When one loses faith in an orientational system because it is no longer deemed reasonable, a certain alienation is felt, often accompanied by a sense of nostalgia or emptiness (ATH:52-3; Rueckert 1982:36).[25] It is possible to argue that this disillusionment drives change.

From a design perspective, Anne Tomes and Peter Armstrong (2010:29) echo Burke's ideas on the dialectical oscillations of values over time. They investigate what they refer to as "[a] recurring theme in the history of design" whereby "new conceptions of good design arise from a rejection of those immediately preceding, a pattern which implies that the parameters which define good design also change". However, they aim to highlight that "[w]hat appear to be design fundamentals at a given point in design history […] are actually temporary points of stasis in a long term oscillation between relatively stable but opposed conceptions of virtue-in-design" (Tomes & Armstrong 2010:29).[26] Tomes and Armstrong (2010:30) believe any specific notion of 'good design' "tends to privilege certain virtues whilst neglecting or suppressing others. Because design can never satisfy all of its stakeholders, there is always the potential for a 'revolution' in which the virtues prioritized by an existing order are rejected in favour of those currently suppressed".

> Each era, each school of design, takes up a particular position […], and that position forms part of its idea of good design. Any position towards the extremes, however, involves a neglect, and sometimes an outright suppression, of the opposite pole of the compromise. Amongst those heavily involved in the production and consumption of design, the result is a simmering discontent with existing 'good design', which possesses the potential to explode in a dramatic change in taste and design practice, driven by manifesto in the name of the hitherto suppressed dimension of design virtue (Tomes & Armstrong 2010:38).

Tomes and Armstrong (2010:38) thus identify an ongoing dynamic: "a particular idea of 'good design' which crystallizes the priorities of school or era itself creates the discontents which eventually undermine it". Any design movement will necessarily favour certain values at the expense of others. This provides the opportunity for a new movement to correct the imbalance, *ad infinitum*. Oscillations are further made possible through a kind of historical amnesia. Designers tap into their immediate circumstances and propose solutions to current problems, without necessarily going back in history to see how their 'recycled' approach may have been tried and criticised previously.

As mentioned previously, it is possible to consider design practice as perpetual oscillation rather than true innovation. To consider dialectical change merely as oppositions in oscillation could be considered a fairly

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[25] Burke is, to a large extent, disillusioned with the main twentieth century orientation, which he characterises as "scientific, rational, technological, mechanistic [and] capitalist", insofar as it denies the realisation of some fundamental human needs (Rueckert 1982:35). The extent to which these characteristics are also identified and critiqued at present, is explored later in the study.

[26] The virtues identified by Tomes and Armstrong relate specifically to the tension found between self-expression (of the maker, designer or user) on the one hand, and the demands of mass-production and consumption on the other. For instance, modernist design emphasizes universality and standardization; it "valued mass availability over the individually-designed and crafted object, and its forms expressed function and a unified machine aesthetic rather than the individuality of either the user or the designer" (Tomes & Armstrong 2010:35).

cynical view: it is to accept that things change back and forth, but that nothing *really* changes. We feel, on an intuitive level, that progress and growth must be possible. Perhaps the situation can be interpreted as follows: while circumstances change and technologies progress, the values surrounding design creation remain part of the same range of basic human values. This helps to explain the cyclical nature of design trends, where one approach is not fundamentally superior but nonetheless gets amplified during certain periods.

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Burke is not just interested in how or why things change; he is interested in how people conceptualise change, or form attitudes about change. While Burke sees stark similarities between different historical epochs, he acknowledges how change does not necessarily happen automatically:

> In a shift from one mood to another, there is no 'conflict,' there is simply 'change'. But if a mood has broadened to the extent of becoming an attitude, and if that attitude has attained full rationalization, the shift to another attitude, requiring a different rationalization, does involve 'conflict'. Insofar as we do not 'travel light', we thus assemble much intellectual baggage, and the attempt to reshape this to new exigencies may require considerable enterprise (ATH:184).

Burke thus suggests that the type of transition may impact one's attitude towards the transition. However, in any given situation it is possible to resist change or to embrace change. This means that people can be classified as 'progressive' or 'conservative' when it comes to their attitudes toward change.

Burke seeks to explore the ambiguities of this classification, along with its implications. Burke is particularly interested in what he describes as the "Attitudes Toward the Incessant Intermingling of Conservatism and Progress"[27] (ATH:i). He thus aims to highlight the ambiguity and relativity of the 'progressive' and 'conservative' labels. Burke's discussion of the *agrarian-industrial* dichotomy clearly illustrates the fluidity of these competing attitudes with regards to technological change. The tension he identifies here is between conservative acts of retention and progressive acts of innovation as well as competing values of rural simplicity versus urban complexity. Burke (CS:117) points out the paradoxes in the attitudinal alignments he identifies, explaining for instance how "politically, agrarian conservatism is the equivalent of anti-industrialist radicalism". He emphasises the irony in labelling "the industrialists, who are responsible for radical alterations in our ways of living" as 'conservatives' and similarly, in the naming those who wish to retain "pre-industrialist modes of living and thinking" as 'liberal' or 'progressive'. This confusion is naturally the result of industrialism becoming the norm. This destabilization of values is described by Ross Wolin (2001:45) as follows: "[a]s norms change, the new becomes tradition; hence, a call to return to the old order can be attacked as 'radicalism'".

> Any attempt to halt a trend is 'reactionary'. Hence, if the public has become used to a certain amount of obscenity this year, 'progress' requires the use of still more obscenity next year. Obviously, you must call a halt somewhere – but no matter at what point you call it, you are proposing a 'reaction' (PLF:87).

[27] Burke offers this phrase as an alternative title for his book *Attitudes toward history*.

According to Burke (CS:vii), "[h]eresies and orthodoxies will always be changing places, but whatever the minority view happens to be at any given time, one must consider it 'counter'". In other words, what is heretical today may be considered orthodox tomorrow (or *vice versa*), and therefore the 'content' being labeled is relative. The labels are, however, value-laden; they serve to evaluate or judge positions rather than merely describe them.

It is possible to argue that the general design attitude is innately progressive, as the well-known definition of design by Herbert A Simon (1996:111) suggests: "[e]veryone designs who devises courses of action aiming at changing existing situations into preferred ones". Designers not only welcome change, they make it happen. According to Peter Buwert (2013:3) "what really counts in design is not heritage, nor authenticity, but movement and trajectory and progress". However, as Trott (2002:331) argues, "all design must address the dialectic of permanence and change". She explains how "neither the idea of permanence nor the idea of change on its own is sufficient to account for our experience of the world. The dialectical relation between the ideas of permanence and change is a relation of logical necessity" (Trott 2002:321).

Debates in design often reflect the dialectical tension between 'timeless' and 'temporal' (or temporary) design (Nelson & Stolterman 2012:197). For instance, while novelty and innovation are considered fundamental design values, longevity and durability may be considered more important in some contexts, such as sustainable design. In other words, not everyone shares a progressive view of, or optimistic attitude towards, the rate of change that design industries produce. As Groys (2014:6-7) explains, "[m]any consider this quest for the new [to seek newness for newness' sake] to be meaningless and, therefore, without value". This relates to the previously mentioned critiques directed at contemporary design trend dynamics, as emphasising the temporal or ephemeral over the timeless.

Various conceptions of, or attitudes towards, change feature strongly in trend rhetorics. Since the term 'trend' is ambiguous it can be framed in a variety of ways. Trends are typically understood in relation to change over time, but duration or longevity are also factors contributing to how trends are conceptualised. A trend should thus be understood in dialectical terms of temporality; as something in relative and simultaneous flux and stability. William Higham (2009:14) highlights how the term 'trend' "means different things to different people and in different contexts […] To the fashion industry, it means the latest styles. To traditionalists, it is a pejorative term meaning something ephemeral". For Pamela Trought Klein (2008:407), "[a] trend is a relatively durable direction, style, or preference in consumer behaviour that results in a prolonged market movement in one general direction". The phrase 'relatively durable' can also be interpreted as 'relatively temporary or fleeting'. A trend exists only in this dialectical dynamic.

Sometimes the duration or longevity of a cultural tendency leads to different terminologies used, such as 'fad', 'trend', 'movement' and 'style'. In general, a fad is considered more fleeting than a trend, while a movement or style are considered to have more longevity than a trend. For instance, Trought Klein (2008:407-8) explains how "[a] fad is a style of short duration" whereas "[r]ather than sinking into quick oblivion, a trend is sustained upon reaching saturation". Steven Heller and Louise Fili (2006) make similar

terminological distinctions. They argue that while the word 'style' is often used synonymously with 'trend', a style refers to something with more longevity: "before the twentieth century's dubious ethic of disposability took hold, styles became *passe* only after lengthy intervals. When mass technologies were not yet available, styles evolved and spread slowly" (Heller & Fili 2006:12). Heller and Fili thus consider 'style' a more lasting and therefore more 'substantial' category of cultural experience than a 'trend'. Aesthetic or stylistic tendencies may thus be framed in a variety of ways, through the use of value-laden terminologies. Furthermore, different options in conceptualising design trends provide rhetorical resources for justifying (or attacking) design trends.

Dialectical transformation and transcendence

No discussion of dialectics would be complete without considering the possibility to find a synthesis between opposites or to transcend tensions. Without the possibility of synthesis or transcendence a dialectic would merely be a duality or binary opposition. Dialectical thinking is the ability to think non-dualistically, to stress the relational and temporal dimensions of contradictions and how these contradictions might be reformulated. In other words, dialectical inquiry is concerned with oppositions but searches for ways to overcome rigid dualistic interpretations. Burke aims to show how this can be achieved through new ways of framing oppositional relations.

Burke (GM:402) describes "dialectics in the most general sense…[as] the employment of the possibilities of linguistic transformation". Dialectical positions are linguistic constructions and while some are powerfully entrenched, they are not necessarily fixed. Burke's dialectic provides "insight into the ways terms can be juxtaposed upon one another to create and change perspectives […] Dialectical transformation is creative because new linguistic perspectives may be created out of old ones" (Heath 1986:181).

Insofar as opposites may be perceived as irreconcilable, Burke refers to the function of dialectical transcendence; to create a bridge between oppositional terms or forces by placing them in a different 'realm' or dimension 'beyond'. In other words, opposites can be united on a higher level of generalisation or abstraction. For Burke, the dialectic of the 'upward way'[28] is a dialectical movement whereby, through linguistic devices, "we may move from a world of disparate particulars to a principle of one-ness, an 'ascent' got, as the semanticists might say, by a movement toward progressively 'higher levels of generalization'" (Rueckert 1982:138). Burke (1966:888) believes that "[o]f all the issues that keep recurring in the maneuvers of dialectic, […] none is more frequent than the theme of the One and the Many [… which] is grounded in the logological fact that terms for particulars can be classified under some titular head". For instance, the word 'tree' encompasses a broader range than any particular instance of a tree. Burke explains how "[t]he

[28] Burke (RR:8) sees words or terminologies as providing "tiny models of the Platonic dialectic, with its Upward Way and Downward Way". He goes on to explain how there is a "sense in which language is *not* just 'natural', but really *does* add a 'new dimension' to the things of nature" (RR:8). He provides an example of how words 'transend' non-verbal nature by inviting us to think of the different kinds of 'operations' one can perform with a *tree*, as opposed to the *word* for tree. In other words, "the *word* for tree 'transcends' the thing as thoroughly as does the Platonic idea of the tree's perfect 'archetype' in heaven. It is the sense in which the name for a class of objects 'transcends' any particular member of that class" (RR:10).

machinery of language is so made that things are necessarily placed in terms of a range broader than the terms for those things themselves" (Burke 1966:895). He thus sees transcendence "as a sheerly terministic or symbolic function", to build "a *terministic bridge* whereby one realm is *transcended* by being viewed *in terms of* a realm 'beyond' it" (Burke 1966:877).

It is worth highlighting that this study investigates particular practices along with their discourses, and frames them in terms of a general category, namely 'trends'. This is a dialectical process whereby similarities and patterns are identified in order to say something about trends 'in general'. The particular differences between opposing design trends can thus be 'transcended' by grouping these disparate approaches together, at a higher level of generalisation. An outcome of the new vantage point is the de-emphasising of difference, as well as the development of a new perspective from which one can look at particular trends. As Burke explains, if one where to develop classifications of novels, according to genre and so on, these classifications would impact the subsequent reading of novels: "Your view of novels would thus be modified to the extent that your system of generalizations provided you with a new 'principle' […] for judging or classing them" (GM:306). Similarly, one's interpretation of particular design trends would be transformed by the identifications and classifications of patterns found in 'trends as a whole'. It is my argument that by looking beyond a particular trend, new insights on design trend dynamics and rhetorics may emerge.

There is another reason for considering the dialectical transcendence of oppositional design trends, relating back to the opening argument of this study. Contemporary trend dynamics, as associated with aesthetic obsolescence through highly persuasive polemical rhetorics, could potentially be transcended (or disarmed) via Burke's dialectical method. While Burke's dialectical transcendence, as a type of corrective, is considered in greater depth in Chapter Six of this study, it may be useful to briefly highlight the connection here.

For Burke, dialectics is a verbal resource for transforming a troublesome *either-or* into a *both-and* (Rueckert 1982:139), which allows for a reconciliation between oppositional rhetorics. Rueckert (1982:137-8) describes this as a process of redemption: a "still moment of vision when, after the furious activity of dialectic, a fusion at a higher level of discourse takes place to produce a perceived unity among many previously discordant ideas and things". In popular design discourse, various dialectical design values are treated as *either-or* values, rather than *both-and* values. It is possible to argue that *either-or* attitudes lead to the kinds of design trend oscillations discussed previously. In contrast, a *both-and* approach to oppositional design values (through dialectical transcendence) may provide a more balanced approach. While it won't necessarily put an end to the perpetual oscillation between opposites, it might reduce the efficacy of extremist trend rhetorics, and assist in some way to increase the longevity of products.

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To adopt a *both-and* attitude towards oppositional values requires a certain acceptance of paradox and ambiguity. This is reflected in a growing body of discourse surrounding the need to embrace paradox and ambiguity as part of the design process. Instead of 'resolving' design tensions, there is talk of 'dissolving'

tensions in context. This is a prime example of dialectical thinking in action. Adam (2016:31), for instance, identifies a shift in "current models of design thinking [which] tend to encompass, rather than choose between, traditional design dichotomies such as user/producer, analysis/intuition, natural/synthetic and concrete/abstract". This tendency to consider various facets of design practice in less-dualistic terms is found throughout contemporary design discourse. This relates to Valerie A Brown's (2010:63) description of the potential of new and more open kinds of dialectical inquiry:

> Traditional inquiries seek to eliminate a paradox by a narrower definition of the issue, restating the problem or hoping it will go away. In an open critical inquiry, paradoxes provide a valued diagnostic for points at which current thinking is frozen. In traditional research, a paradox is treated as a pair of opposites. In an open inquiry, the pairs of opposites are treated as complimentary and provide a useful indicator of the heart of an issue.

A dialectical approach thus treats oppositions as complementary counterparts, and is characterised by an acceptance of paradox. To illustrate what such an awareness might look like, Burke (1989:272), highlights the "contradictions of anti-capitalist propaganda" explaining how "Marxism is war to the ends of peace, heresy to the ends of unity, organization to the ends of freedom, glorification of toil to the ends of greater leasure, revolution in the interests of conservation, etc". These contradictions are of course found in pro-capitalist discourse as well. The contradictions are not always apparent, but they can be found if one searches for them. To accept these values as interconnected, instead of denouncing one part of a dialectic, allows for a more holistic understanding of the whole.

Tony Fry (2003) provides an apt example from a design perspective. He explains how acts of design creation are in dialectical relation to acts of destruction: to build a boat is to destroy a tree. Nelson and Stolterman (2012:186-7) also explain how "[i]n any creative act, something new is brought into the world at the expense of the old – which is then destroyed". The 'old' being destroyed (through displacement) could be anything from a previous style to an existing way of doing things. Sandywell (2011:231) similarly refers to the "dialectical relationship between mass consumerism and the degradation of the environment and ecosystem" as "two phenomena being different manifestations of the same global process". In all of these examples, creation and destruction are interpreted as dialectical parts of a larger whole. However, it is common for one part of the creation-destruction dialectic to be emphasised or privileged, leading to a limited conception of the whole. For instance: producers (and often designers) do not pay enough attention to the destruction that is part of the process of creation; but perhaps environmentalists are not sympathetic enough about the creation which emanates from destruction. As Fry (2003) argues, "it is vital to know that the advancement of sustainment requires taking full responsibility for what is both created and destroyed". The main problem thus lies in the fact that the two processes are seen as opposites, instead of parts of the same process. An acknowledgement thereof might allow people on opposite sides of the spectrum of concern to build a bridge, or speak the same language.

From this perspective, a dialectical method may assist in developing greater perspectival balance. This dialectical method is at the centre of Burke's theory, where opposite views are considered simultaneously, as a means to gain greater perspective. David Cratis Williams (1993:20) proposes that Burke's dialectical

method serves as "generating principle for maximum self-consciousness of the human condition". These ideas are explored in greater depth in Chapter Six, where I consider a Burkean attitude or ethics for addressing the problems associated with current trend dynamics.

Design dialectics

I have, throughout this chapter, briefly highlighted how various attempts to grapple with the essential nature of design leads to paradoxes. The various oppositions or conflicts in design can be interpreted as dialectical positions which provide options for designers and design theorists in positioning or framing design practice. In this section, I explore some of the most common dialectical pairs found in design discourse. While I root the discussion in Burke's dialectical investigations, I draw on the work of various design theorists who have identified design tensions or paradoxes. I do not attempt here to provide an exhaustive account of all the various oppositional dynamics in design. This discussion merely serves as an illustration of the dialectical tendency in organising how we think and speak about design practice and, furthermore, how these dialectical coordinates play out in design transitions.

The dialectics of design explored here can be interpreted as oppositional conceptions of 'good design'; what design ought to be, and by extension what it ought to look like. Throughout this section I pay particular attention to how opposite dialectical values may become underpinning philosophies for visual stylistic applications, and how these conceptions change over time. In other words, I aim to highlight how design dialectics relate to oscillations found in stylistic design movements or trends. I briefly refer to the discourse surrounding some well-known historical design movements to illustrate this dynamic. Very importantly, I also consider the extent to which opposing design values have been negotiated, challenged and in some ways 'transcended'. I aim to illustrate how opposing positions, as linguistic constructions, can be problematised and re-framed. I believe that while these constructions are useful in helping us order our thoughts on design practice, they can also become dysfunctional if too rigidly accepted. In other words, I hope to show how Burke's dialectical approach relates to the overcoming of simplistic, dualistic ways of thinking about design.

Design action versus motion

Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce (2013:33) describe "designing and researching [as] processes of initiating change in the manmade world". They further explain how the "ability to initiate change is what sociologists call 'agency', a term that describes the capacity of individuals to act in the world and which is a reflection of the empowered individual's ability to make decisions based on rational choices".[29] But, as Crouch and Pearce (2013:6) also point out, while designers act, they are also acted upon by their environments or circumstances. It is this dynamic, the relation between individual agency and circumstantial contingency, which Burke explores in the dialectical discussion of action and motion.

[29] Crouch and Pearce (2013:33) refer to the work of Barry Barnes (2000) in offering this definition of agency.

As one of Burke's most frequently mentioned dialectical pairs, understanding the distinction between *action* and *motion* is essential to understanding his overall approach to language and rhetoric. Burke's (GM:418) interrogation of the 'action-passion pair' is one of the major dialectical pairs[30] that influence our interpretation of reality. Burke's discussion of this dialectical pair is usually found in relation to his preference for viewing language use in terms of 'action'.[31] While his reasons for this particular framing is explored in greater depth in the following chapter on Burke's 'dramatism', the aim here is to highlight the significance of the action/motion dialectic, as it also relates to conceptions of design change and trend dynamics. Burke's discussion of the relation between action and motion provides a useful starting position from which one can interrogate dialectical conceptions surrounding human behaviour and by extension, the nature of design activity. More specifically, the terms 'action' and 'motion' shed light on the different ways of approaching agency.

Burke (GM:14) defines 'action' as "conscious or purposive motion". Burke's ideas draw largely on the traditional Aristotelian divide between activity and passivity, related to the placement of a 'moving principle'. Harry Frankfurt (1988:59) also provides a useful description of this divide: "a thing is active with respect to events whose moving principle is inside of it, and passive with respect to events whose moving principle is outside of it".

The action/motion dialectic thus serves to frame conceptions of human agency or the ability to make decisions. While Burke hopes to convince us that human behaviour should be approached in terms of action, he explains how it is possible for people to behave *as if* in motion, such as when individual agency is subsumed in mass ideology.[32] For Burke, it is important to pay attention to the inherent paradoxes in the action/motion duality. Burke (1981:177), for instance, acknowledges that absolute freedom to choose or will a specific outcome is impossible; "an act is 'involuntary' insofar as the agent does not know enough about the 'circumstances' of that act". Furthermore, we cannot be completely free because we do not know, and therefore cannot choose, the full consequences of our acts (Foss *et al* 2002:198). While Burke does not attempt to resolve these paradoxes, he wishes to draw attention to the ambiguities since they allow for different options when framing agency.

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From a design perspective, different ways of framing agency are possible. Initially, it might seem like design as deliberate action is beyond dispute. Designing is primarily perceived as a creative activity, comprising of intentions, decisions and purposive actions. In other words, the design process is most commonly situated within the realm of action (purposive or deliberate creation), and *not* as mere motion (automatic response). A common perception in a communication design context would be that designers 'act' to 'move' audiences or consumers. However, considering the design process from a dialectical perspective allows for other insights

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[30] The other two pairs Burke mentions here are the 'mind-body' and 'being-nothing' dialectical pairs (GM:418).
[31] The idea of a linguistic utterance as being an 'act' bears some resemblance to linguistic performativity and speech-act theory. Burke's conception of language as symbolic action acknowledes how *saying* something is also *doing* something.
[32] While Burke tends to avoid the term 'ideology', his concerns are clearly in line with Louis Althusser's theory of ideology.

to emerge. Designers are 'moved' to action by a variety of factors. It is quite common for designers to express their lack of agency with regard to clients' demands, budgetary restraints, tight deadlines, or a variety of other external factors. In such instances a designer can frame their action as a kind of motion. The role of designers can thus be framed as both active and passive. Tomes, Oates and Armstrong (1998:139) explain how designers "appear as active in their exploration of the client's sense of translation from the verbal to the visual, but passive insofar as their designs are an attempt to conform to it". Even while the designer performs the design actions, he or she may perceive a lack of agency in doing so. In such circumstances, which are quite common, the responsibility or accountability (including blame or praise) for design actions becomes more difficult to assign.

On a related note, the question of intentionality in design can also be interrogated along the action/motion divide. The dominant, active view of design is that all design decisions are (or at least should be) intentional. However, Fiona McLachlan and Richard Coyne (2001) explore the prevalence of 'accidental moves' in design, where happy accidents play an important part of the design process. It is possible to argue that unintentional and coincidental 'motions' are frequently a part of practice, although such 'accidents' are not always openly acknowledged. McLachlan and Coyne do nonetheless identify instances where 'accidental moves' prove to be powerful rhetorical strategies (especially when used in the early stages of idea generation). They explain how "contemporary accidental design situates itself as non-conformist and deviant rather than formally restrictive and rule-bound" (McLachlan & Coyne 2001:88). In other words, a 'controlled accident' as part of the design process "suggests that ideas may be less dogmatic, less generated by convention" (McLachlan & Coyne 2001:97). While a whole design process in unintentional 'motion' is unlikely to be considered 'good design', it may be considered appropriate for some aspects of the design process to be less intentional or more arbitrary.

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Another dialectical framing possibility, as extension of the action/motion dialectic, is found in Reyburn's (2008) discussion of the tension between design "generation/creation" and "adaptation/derivation". In reference to the work of Wolfgang Jonas (2001), Reyburn (2008:9) explains how design is always *both* derivative and creative.

> Design draws from existing material, knowledge, scenarios and ideas in order to create new material, knowledge, scenarios and ideas. In doing so, design is forced to be both reflective/reflexive and predictive/projective. As a Janus-faced discipline, it looks back in order to look ahead (Reyburn 2008:9).

The discussion surrounding 'generative' versus 'adaptive' design could be explored further in relation to Burke's discussion of 'creation' and 'evolution'. Burke explains how there is a major difference between framing the world in terms of "the Creation" which implies purposive action; and in terms of "the process of Evolution" which implies transformation through motion (GM:63). To say that something 'evolved' involves a different conception of agency than to say something was 'created'. One finds similar

connotations surround the oppositional terms 'evolution' and 'revolution', the latter implying not only a sudden or drastic change, but also the more active or purposive instigation of change.

Both these modes, *design as creation* and *design as evolution* are found in various descriptions of the design process. In a design context, an 'evolution' can be considered a natural and gradual unfolding or progressing, even if human agents are still involved, the change is situated or framed in terms of 'motion'. A 'design revolution', on the other hand, tends to emphasise action, and with it agents that purposively act. How design change is framed may reveal deeper-seated conceptions of design agency, which have important implications for practice. Furthermore, change is framed in various ways as part of a rhetorical strategy, when evaluating (justifying or criticising) design processes.

In relation to the previously discussed 'skeuomorphic' versus 'flat design' interface aesthetics, it is possible to identify dialectically opposed conceptions of transition dynamics. For instance, flat design is characterised as an interface 'revolution' (Carr 2014), whereas skeuomorphic aesthetics is framed as a the outcome of a gradual evolutionary design process. This perceived difference is utilised as a strategic or rhetorical resource in arguments for flat design. Apple is criticised in this instance for not being more bold or experimental in their approach, and for merely continuing along the same trajectory of making interface graphics mimic 'real-word' objects as realistically as possible. Dieter Bohn, Aaron Souppouris and Dan Seifert (2013) point out how the "progression of [Apple's] iOS has been a steady drumbeat of new features that often felt inevitable". In such discussions, the 'evolutionary' design process is framed as a lack of design intent, an absence of risk (which implies cowardice), or a predictable and lazy response. Flat design is considered a welcome antidote insofar to interface development insofar as it seems to offer an entirely revolutionary approach. The irony of course is that motivations of flat design cite early twentieth-century modernist design movements as inspiration. However, flat design is not criticized for being backward-looking, possibly because modernist aesthetics and rhetorics come across as 'timeless' and therefore resist becoming outdated.

As a contrasting example, Tonkinwise (2005) interrogates what he perceives as a problematic but widespread contemporary tendency to conceptually link design and evolution. Tonkinwise (2005:7) acknowledges that some aspects of design practice can be characterised as evolutionary, insofar as all designs are iterations built upon previous iterations. However, for the most part he believes the design-as-evolutionary analogy is reductive and erroneous (even dangerous in its denial of agency). He argues that, to a large extent, design may be considered the exact antithesis of evolution.[33] Insofar as designing means to plan and purposefully produce desired outcomes, it can be situated in direct contrast with evolution, where random mutations develop naturally and survive through natural selection.[34] In other words, evolution is meant to explain the "design[-like] features in natural things without recourse to design" (Tonkinwise 2005:4). According to

[33] Tonkinwise believes that it "is by design that we designing humans break from evolution". To suggest that design is like evolution is to reduce designer agency and to belittle design's role in "decoupling humans from nature" (Tonkinwise 2005:9).
[34] Whereas some also compare natural selection in evolutionary theory to the competitive selection in the consumer market-place, Tonkinwise highlights the significant differences in these two kinds of 'selection'. He argues that "[d]esigning selects without actually putting options out there to be killed before they can reproduce successfully. This foresight into what will survive before it is produced is perhaps the essence of design, […] this prescience is exactly what evolution cannot have" (Tonkinwise 2005:5).

Tonkinwise (2005:3), the persistence of the evolution-design analogy is a result of its "perlocutionary force" or, in other words, its rhetorical or ideological function. The function here is to offer "teleological assurance" by framing design decisions "as fate" (Tonkinwise 2005).

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It is also possible for trend dynamics to be framed in dialectical terms of action/motion and creation/evolution. On the one hand, both the development of trends, as well as the dissemination or spread of trends are framed in evolutionary terms. For instance, Martin Raymond (2010), like other trend economists, believes we can come to understand the 'viral' qualities of trends by looking towards evolutionary biology, in particular the work of Richard Dawkins, *The selfish gene*. A trend, as an infectious idea, can be understood as what Dawkins refers to as a 'meme': "a cultural version of a gene in that it self-replicates in response to social, ethical, biological or environmental changes which might impact on its survival" (Raymond 2010:15). 'Memes', referring to 'mimic' or 'mimesis', "propagate themselves in the meme pool by passing from brain to brain via a process called 'imitation', whereby one person imitates a behavioural characteristic of another because of the advantages in doing so". As Tonkinwise (2005:18) also explains, "imitation is the cultural equivalent of natural evolution, the repetition with difference by which cultures alter". Evolutionary biologists believe we participate in such behaviour because it is "easier for us to survive socially, intellectually and culturally if we mirror or mimic the characteristics of others" (Raymond 2010:17). From this perspective, the adoption of a trend is not entirely voluntary. As Raymond (2010:15) argues, trends can be "compulsive, addictive and, in some cases, viral – infecting us when we least expect it, and on occasion whether we want them to or not".

As an aside, this mimetic tendency relates to another paradoxical quality of trends identified by Roland Barthes. He explains how "[f]ashion is a phenomenon both of innovation and conformity. So there is a paradox here which cannot but hold the attention of sociologists" (Barthes 2013:80-81). While fashions and trends are not identical concepts, a similarly paradoxical relation between innovation and conformity can be investigated when looking at design trends.

It is quite typical for trends to be described as if they have a life of their own, not driven by human agency. For instance, Raymond (2010:14) describes a trend as "the direction in which something (and that something can be anything) tends to move and which has a consequential impact on the culture, society or business sector through which it moves". He interprets trends as statistical tendencies to be identified by paying close attention to the market. The success of a trend forecaster lies in the ability to identify an emerging trend before others. No specific individual, or discernable group seems to be responsible for the creation of the trend in the first place. Platforms such as *Coolhunter.com* and *Trendhunter.com,* seem to suggests that trends are 'out there' and that skilful professionals can 'hunt them down'.

On the other hand, there are others who describe trends as emerging from some form of agency, or who believe that trends are more actively constructed. Trends can thus be described in more active terms, as

created or constructed, whether driven by select 'trendsetters' or by a general consumer market. Trought Klein (2008:408), for instance, explains how "trends may be initiated or driven by prominent or respected figures – that is trendsetters – that give them a certain cachet". Designers are frequently considered as 'trendsetters', which implies a greater level of creative activity or agency. However, insofar as designers are also consumers or followers of trends (implying creative passivity or lack of agency), the action/motion paradox remains in place.

The action/motion dialectic also features in distinctions between 'trends' and 'fads'. For instance, William Higham (2009:104) argues that a "trend grows organically owing to specific social, environmental or psychological drivers [whereas a] fad is typically driven by the media or by a brand". In other words, he sees a 'fad' as driven or created by an agent with private, commercial interests, whereas a 'trend' emerges organically within a community, not in response to a constructed motive. Regardless of whether one agrees with this distinction between 'fads' and 'trends', it is clear that the perceived origin or cause of a new market tendency is rhetorically significant. In pro-trend rhetoric, one identifies a 'trend' by astutely observing what people want, whereas 'fads' fabricate want through hype. Those with more critical attitudes towards trends in general may find this distinction superficial, arguing that the desire for the new is always constructed. Perhaps we need to accept the paradox that trends simultaneously reveal and construct desires.

At the heart of the action/motion dialectic thus lies the question: To what extent are actions intentionally and autonomously directed, or to what extent are they less conscious (or less autonomous) responses to the external factors? It is clear that designing always contains an element of both. Any visual application is a decision (action) but also a response to circumstantial factors (motion), whether these are in compliance with client demands or to imitate others by following trends within the larger cultural milieu. The simultaneous validity of these dialectical positions allows for competing conceptions of design agency to be continually negotiated and re-negotiated.

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It is worth mentioning at this point that Burke, throughout his work, frames language usage as deliberate, intentional action instead of mere motion. This is the essential premise of his chosen approach, to consider language as *symbolic action*, to be explored in greater depth in the following chapter. Burke believes a linguistic emphasis on 'motion', or the evolutionary process which tends to reduce action to motion, deflects attention away from the ethical. This issue relates to the perennial philosophical problems of agency, free will, contingency and the ethical questions surrounding accountability and responsibility. Burke's preference to frame language use as 'action' should not be seen as a perpetuation of reductionist dualistic thinking, but rather as a pragmatic response to the dominant, mechanistic, theories of communication in his time. While Burke chooses to emphasise action, in order to allow for ethical interrogation, he acknowledges how different emphases or framings are possible. Exactly where one decides to situate the 'moving principle' in a scenario (internally for *action*, or externally for *motion*) depends on a variety of factors, including one's preferred worldview and rhetorical agenda.

Design form versus function

Another major dialectical pair discussed throughout Burke's work is that of symbolic versus utilitarian (or practical) action. This relates to one of the most persistent dichotomies in design, that of form versus function. Similar tensions are found in design discussions of symbolic expression versus practical function or, aesthetic versus functional value. While all design activities are concerned with both symbolic and practical functions to some extent, design practice can be framed (or discursively motivated) by placing different degrees of emphasis on these dialectical values. For instance, different design disciplines are often placed on a continuum, from more practically-focussed to more aesthetically-focussed. 'Clothing design' is considered more concerned with practical, utilitarian values, while 'fashion design' is seen as trafficking almost entirely in the symbolic.

Some have argued that design is a balancing of tensions because it is a discipline in-between art and engineering. Because design is concerned with functional and aesthetic factors, technical and human issues, the dialectical tension seems more pronounced than in other disciplines. However, it is common in design theory to find attempts at bridging or transcending this perceived tension. Instead of believing a designer must choose between aesthetics and functionality, a high level of both values can arguably be achieved simultaneously. As an example, Alain Findeli (1994) suggests we reconsider the tendency to situate design objects on a continuum between instrumental and symbolic practices (as seen in Findeli's first diagram, Figure 3). From such a perspective, design is situated in-between other disciplines, between engineering (instrumental/technical emphasis) and art (symbolic/aesthetic emphasis). But, to situate design on a continuum is to suggest that the more aesthetic a product is, the less functional it will be, and *vice versa*. Instead of placing artifacts on such a linear continuum from practical to symbolic, Findeli presents a space of artifacts (second diagram, Figure 3) wherein both these qualities are present in artifacts simultaneously but potentially to different degrees.

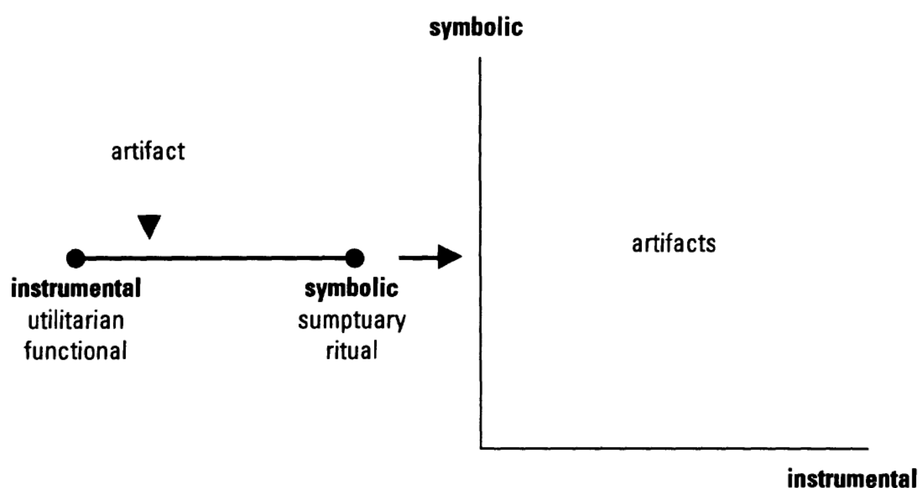

Figure 3: The instrumental/symbolic polarity: from an excluding position towards a space of artifacts (Findeli 1994:53).

While Findeli acknowledges that his map presents a highly simplified notion of artifacts, along only one set of criteria, it serves to illustrate how designers usually aim to maximise both instrumental and symbolic value. These values are, in other words, not mutually exclusive. Meaning is derived from both symbolic and instrumental values, but an object without the appropriate balance (depending on the kind of artifact) of functional or symbolic value will cease to be meaningful. Findeli (1994:53) argues that "it is practically difficult, if not impossible, to clearly separate the two principal functions of objects, in other words, to isolate a purely symbolic or instrumental object". In other words, a binary oppositional stance does not enable a coherent understanding of design purpose and user experience. The instrumental and the symbolic are not true opposites; the assumption that one needs to choose between these values is based on a false dichotomy.[35]

However, despite the fact that the symbolic/instrumental value dichotomy has to a large extent been 'transcended' in design theory, a dialectical approach to understanding the dynamic between these design qualities remains valuable. While designing is characterised as an amalgamation between aesthetic, symbolic functions and utilitarian, practical functions, the 'correct' balance between these values continue to be debated. Depending on the era and context, these values are negotiated and balanced in various ways. For instance, the well-known design aphorism, 'form follows function', is a good example of a particular attitude where utilitarian function is emphasised over formal aesthetics; or aesthetics is considered subservient to the practical motive.[36] The shifts in emphasis between these values can also be identified in contemporary trend rhetorics despite the fact that form and function cannot be neatly separated.

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An extension of the 'form versus function' (or 'form versus content') debate is found in discussions surrounding styling. In other words, we see the same tension unfold in relation to style and substance. Design aesthetics or 'styling' is often situated on the symbolic side of the continuum, insofar as it is not perceived as contributing to instrumental function. Style is often considered as superficial, surface application or decoration; devoid of substance.[37] There are, of course, many designers and design theorists who have challenged this notion. For instance, Jeffery Keedy (2006b:198) describes the notion that "content is good, style is bad" as a "dumb idea" continuously recycled in design discourse. He explains how styleless content is an impossibility and how style contains its own meaning or content. Similarly, Steven Heller and Louise Fili (2006:8) argue that style *is* substance: "[i]n graphic design, style is sometimes the look, but more often than not it is the content, the mechanism by which concepts are communicated and ideas are

[35] I have argued elsewhere (Bowie 2011) how design aesthetics and functionality are closely interconnected. High levels of aesthetic value tend to increase the functionality of a product while high product functionality contributes to an aesthetic experience of engaging with a product.

[36] We know now that this movement in design was equally concerned with form and that minimalist form was used as a rhetorical strategy to connote a certain level of functionality.

[37] Steven Heller and Louise Fili provide an explanation for this common perception. They argue that "style is the simplest thing to copy, borrow, or steal because it can be easily removed from content and separated from intent" (Heller & Fili 2006:12). The results of 'mix-and-match' "pastiche are what usually give style its pejorative reputation – and the presumption that it is not about workmanship or quality, but rather surface and showiness" (Heller & Fili 2006:12).

expressed". However, it is interesting to see how Heller and Fili still distinguish between a 'trend' and a 'style', based on a perceived difference in substance:

> Style should not be confused with trend, although they are sometimes synonymous. Trends are generally contrivances superimposed on designed objects without functional purpose. They afford a transitory buzz and have more to do with what is 'happening' at a particular time than whether or not an object's purpose is enhanced. Trends such as shadowed type, Photoshop collage, or graffiti-like scrawls come and go, stimulating action or reaction -– like buying a product or idea. But once expended, trends are as disposable as all other effluvia and detritus. […] Style is certainly the sum of many parts, but when detached from the whole, many of these individual characteristics are often trifling and shallow (Heller & Fili 2006:8-11).

While Heller and Fili aim to elevate the status of style in the context of graphic design, they tend to fall in the same trap when dismissing 'trends' as shallow or functionless.

A similar charge against 'insubstantial form' or 'shallow style' is often found in relation to rhetoric in general. In other words, the same prejudice found against rhetoric is often directed towards design styling. Since both design and rhetoric are highly concerned with form (albeit the functional value of form), this concern is seen as in direct conflict with more functional, instrumental concerns. As Richard Lanham (2006:254) explains, "[i]n our common conversation, style and substance are contending opposites. The more of one, the less of the other. […] We use the pairing as our most common putdown: what I say has substance, sense, tells the truth without artifice; my opponent, in contrast, is just blowing smoke, putting a spin on the argument for nefarious purposes". A clear distinction is thus made between matter (function or content) and manner (form or rhetoric); and a concern for the latter is treated with suspicion. From this perspective 'rhetoric' becomes a synonym for deception (Lanham 2006).

In the above discussions one can identify a clear value hierarchy: while style is ever-present, it should not be emphasised or paid too much attention. This is because we tend to "distrust self-conscious ornament, artifice that shows" (Lanham 2006:138). This helps to explain the strong criticism directed at the highly crafted, decorative aesthetic effects of 'skeuomorphic' interfaces, as mentioned previously. The arguments against skeuomorphism, and for flat design, reflect this notion that designers should concern themselves with function rather than form or style.

Lanham refers to Beatrice Warde's argument for typography as a crystal goblet as a prime example of the distrust of 'artifice that shows'. Warde argues:

> The book typographer has the job of erecting a window between the reader inside the room and that landscape which is the author's words. He may put up a stained-glass window of marvellous beauty, but a failure as a window; that is, he may use some rich superb type like text gothic that is something to be looked at, not through. Or he may work in what I call transparent or invisible typography (Warde 1955).

However, Lanham (2006) subverts Warde's dualistic argument and proposes a new way of looking at the dialectical relation between style and substance; as based on these different modes of perceiving 'at' or 'through'. The *through* ideal relates to "minimal awareness of an expressive medium" whereas the *at* ideal encourages "maximum awareness" of how we speak or paint, for instance (Lanham 2006:159). Lanham

(2006:116) highlights how "[p]rint has striven for purely *through* vision" and that "we have all been taught that the best style, for anything from writing to clothes and cars, is the style that is never noticed. A potent showcase but never the show". Lanham wishes to highlight how all symbols can be looked *at*, even if they do not overtly invite or encourage it.[38] Text set in Times New Roman generally does not draw attention to itself, but this does not mean the choice of typeface is stylistically (or rhetorically) insignificant. Lanham provides another instructive example, namely Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth house (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Farnsworth house, by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1951 (Farnsworthhouse.org 2018).

Lanham explains how the starkly modernist and minimalist dwelling astutely highlights, or draws attention to, the style/substance paradox:

> We feel its absence of ornamentation as intensely ornamental. It occupies, at the same time, the *through* and *at* extremes on our spectrum. The two ends of the spectrum seem to be pulled together into a style/substance pun. The house, in this way, seems almost a statement about the spectrum of design itself. The pun between the two kinds of vision makes us self-conscious about how we are seeing (Lanham 2006:162).

The paradox lies in how the building claims to be grounded in substance (the essential qualities of architectural purpose), while it is highly self-aware of (even preoccupied with) its form, or style. Lanham therefore argues that the style/substance dichotomy is highly relative: "[i]f you are a car designer, for you the style of the car will be the substance" (Lanham 2006:157). By considering the way in which the formal, aesthetic or stylistic facets of a product 'acts' (rhetorically, towards a strategic goal), one begins to see the functional role of aesthetics or style.

Lanham draws on Burke's work to challenge the neat distinctions between the two traditionally separated aspects of language, substance (or content) and style; also arguing, as Burke does, for greater appreciation of the value of style. Lanham believes this perspective is even more important today, since we live in what he describes as an 'attention economy'; an economy where attention is in short supply. He argues that the "devices that regulate attention are stylistic devices. Attracting attention is what style is all about. If attention

[38] Lanham (2006:27,179, 254) does not consider the 'at' mode of vision superior, but he proposes a 'bi-stable' approach to viewing texts, whereby one would continuously toggle or oscillate between 'at' and 'through' modes of vision as a means toward "revisionist thinking".

is now at the center of the economy rather than stuff, then so is style. It moves from the periphery to the center. Style and substance trade places" (Lanham 2006:xi-xii). This is, of course, a prime example of dialectical thinking in action.

Other common design dialectics

To describe all the dichotomies identified throughout design discourse would be an enormous undertaking, and is not my aim here. The few additional examples that follow merely serve to illustrate the prevalence and implications of design dialectics as well as an increased awareness of dialectical thinking in design theory and praxis.

On the one hand, design can be framed as logical, objective and rational practice; on the other, it is framed as intuitive, subjective and emotional practice. The logical approach tends to emphasise research throughout the process while the intuitive approach relies more on the designer's personal experience and tacit knowledge. Coyne and Snodgrass (1995) explore this persistent duality in design, in what they refer to as dominant 'problem regimes'. These problem regimes are still largely framed in traditional Cartesian[39] terms, where the 'rationalistic problem regime' is characterised in relation to its opposite, namely 'romanticism' (1995:41). They continue to describe the distinction as follows:

> With its roots in philosophy, romanticism found its full flowering in music, art and literature, where it operated as a force against the cold rationalist spirit. As a school of thought within design, romanticism is less coherent than rationalism. It does not enjoy the same privileged access to arguments appealing to 'pure logic' and 'objective truth'. It is more an influence, characterized by a dependence on imagination, intuition, emotion, feeling, and the primacy of the individual. In this tradition, design is commonly promoted as an art; and art is a product of the individual, who must be given free reign to exercise creativity (Coyne & Snodgrass 1995:41-2).

Coyne and Snodgrass point out how there has always been an ambiguous relation between these two modes or 'problem regimes' in design practice. For instance, the figure of the rational, scientifically-rigorous, design hero (as in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*) incorporates elements of both regimes. Coyne and Snodgrass suggest, by referring to a variety of postmodern philosophical theories,[40] how the traditional Cartesian duality seems to be at a breaking point, allowing for a post-rationalist perspective to emerge. Such a perspective obliterates the subject-object distinction and departs from the assumption that all knowledge is situated and hermeneutically constructed.

Related to this discussion on problem regimes is the debate regarding design as 'scientific' versus 'humanistic' practice. When design is framed as science, one finds an emphasis on the possibility of discovering a correct solution; while when design is framed as a humanistic discipline, one finds an emphasis on creative invention (Buchanan 1995). Richard Buchanan, as a design theorist and rhetorician, leans

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[39] Coyne and Snodgrass (1995:43-4) characterise Descartes' philosophy as "separating the thinking subject from the world of objects", thus proposing the possibility of objective reasoning. As "rationalistic design theory which trades in objectivity, method and logic" they see the common "[a]nalysis, synthesis and evaluation" method of designing as following "the Cartesian method almost to the letter".

[40] Coyne & Snodgrass (1995) cite Dewey, Heidegger, Kuhn, Rorty and Wittgenstein as influential in promoting this philosophical shift away from Cartesan dualism.

towards framing design as humanistic discipline, for reasons that will become clear in the following chapter. His ideas are well-aligned with Burke's theory on language as symbolic action.

Another prominent tension found throughout the history of design practice relates to *who* the designer is serving. Design is often understood as 'in service', but different conceptions regarding who should ultimately be served remains a pressing issue. The typical design situation sees designers as mediators, between a client and a user or audience. Insofar as the client contracts the designer, the designer is in a direct service relationship with the client. However, insofar as the designer produces something to be used by a user, there is also an indirect service relationship with a user or audience. A recent shift in design discourse, if not entirely in mainstream design practice, is the shift towards what is known as Human-Centered Design. Previous conceptions of 'product-centered design' would emphasise product-specific parameters surrounding production, which tended to emphasise client needs. Design products created primarily for this purpose are, under current conceptions of Human-Centered Design, perceived as ethically questionable. There is an attempt here to frame design practice as 'socio-cultural enterprise' rather than merely 'commercial enterprise'. Human-Centered Design is also situated in opposition to user-centered design philosophies, whereby a person is not considered holistically, but rather just as a 'user' of a particular product. As part of a Human-Centered Design philosophy, theorists such as Elizabeth Sanders and Sharon Poggenpohl thus call for more participatory or 'co-design' approaches in practice, whereby various stakeholders participate in design decision-making. However, there are others who believe designers remain the experts should take the lead in developing products or systems.

From the above few examples one can identify a tendency in contemporary design discourse, at least as found in academic contexts, to place design *in-between* various dualities, or to transcend oppositional positions by proposing new 'positions'.[41] These proposals can be interpreted as fairly evolved instances of dialectical thinking which questions the nature of design beyond simplistic dichotomies. It is worth pointing out that the issue of complexity and ambiguity in design practice is frequently addressed via Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber's (1973) notion of 'wicked problems'. Wicked problems, in contrast to 'tame' problems, are not easily defined, since the problem formulation depends on the perspective from which it is approached. As Crouch and Pearce (2013:24) also explain,

> a problem could be interpreted from many different viewpoints. When the problem becomes lost in the middle of multiple causes and when different formulations of the problem generate multiple solutions, then we can say it is wicked. A wicked problem stretches the problem/solution dialectic […] almost to breaking point.

In other words, wicked problems are "contextually dynamic and […] must be (re)solved in context rather than solved once and for all. Such problems are perplexing; they involve paradox,[42] dialectic and necessary tensions" (Adam 2016:4). This awareness of 'wicked problems' in design can be considered a move beyond

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[41] For instance, Nelson and Stolterman (2012:225) argue for seeing design not in terms of either 'science' or 'art', but propose the adoption of a 'third' tradition.

[42] Valerie Brown (2010:63) similarly describes 'wicked problems' as characterised by underlying paradoxes or "self-contradictory statements in which both propositions are true".

dualistic modes of thinking, towards accepting paradox as an inevitable part of the design process. This implies that dialectical design tensions may remain unresolved and that this should not be discouraging. The purpose of dialectical design thinking is not to resolve tensions, once and for all, but rather to grasp the complexities in practice, and to refrain from making (and buying into) one-sided, exaggerated truth claims. The ethical significance of dialectical thinking for transcending rigid dualistic perspectives, as well as Burke's proposed strategies for doing so, are explored in greater depth in Chapter Six of this study.

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In conclusion, Burke's dialectics offers a foundation for a meta-rhetorical understanding of design and trend dynamics. Amidst attempts to create symbolic order, via design practice and discourse, we find persistent conceptual tensions or 'design dialectics' that allow for competing ideas regarding 'good design' to develop. These oppositional positions, whether polar opposites or false dichotomies, can be considered resources for framing design. These options for framing allow for theoretical and practical alignments, which can also be understood as different 'design attitudes'.

The existence of competing positions in discourse and practice means that rhetorical argumentation is required to justify or legitimate chosen design responses. Burkean scholar, Timothy Crusius (1986:29), explains how dialectic is "logically prior" to rhetoric and that "dialectical substance is a condition for rhetoric, not rhetoric itself". The dialectical condition thus leads to both rhetorical possibility – different ways of framing make argumentation possible – and rhetorical necessity – amidst design paradoxes, argumentation becomes necessary in asserting a course of action.

Burke explains how, as part of the human propensity to create order, particular positions or perspectives become hierarchised. In other words, one part of a dialectic tends to be considered superior. For instance, at various points throughout design history, 'functionality' has been considered the superior value in the aesthetics/functionality dialectic. However, as an unavoidably partial position it remains open to critique and therefore subject to change. Burke's dialectical theory thus offers insights on the nature of transition and change, which is useful for interrogating design trend dynamics. Simply put, 'static' design dialectics drive dynamic design change; without tension or disagreement there would be no need for change.

I have thus argued, throughout this chapter, that an understanding of the presence of dialectical values in design theory and praxis helps to explain why opposing and conflicting views, on what design ought to be, continue to play out through fluctuating trends. In other words, it is possible to argue that design trends are fluctuating embodiments of the 'oppositional parts' found within the larger dialectical 'design whole'. As mentioned previously, Burkean dialectics as a means toward more holistic thinking, by 'transcending' partial and polemical perspectives, is explored in greater depth towards the end of the study.

Before moving on to Burke's rhetorical theory, the following chapter explores design trend dynamics in relation to Burke's notion of 'dramatism'. As part of a meta-rhetorical approach, a 'dramatistic' orientation considers the socio-political relations that impact the rhetorical communication situation.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DRAMA OF DESIGN RELATIONS

In this chapter I aim to show how a meta-rhetorical investigation of design trends needs to look beyond design objects and arguments, to consider the socio-political dynamics surrounding the design scenario. This is an important perspective, since the meanings of stylistic trends are only partly contained in design factors. As mentioned previously, design trend meanings are, to a large extent, socially constructed through highly mediated discursive practices. In other words, trends need to be understood as meta-cultural products, where symbolic, socio-cultural value is of greater significance than isolated functional use value. The dynamic or fluctuating nature of design trends means that this socio-cultural value is continuously negotiated and re-negotiated. From this perspective, design trend dynamics can be interpreted as an unfolding 'drama' between various design culture actors.

The legitimation and promotion of new aesthetic approaches in design take place between people with socio-political interests, even as they speak about design product parameters and aesthetics. It is possible to argue that a variety of non design-related or 'softer' human motives also have an influence on design and trend dynamics. For instance, a designer may need to present a certain kind of ethos, of professionalism and competence, in order to achieve client buy-in. In such scenarios, the projection of a desirable professional image could be considered a performative act, which takes place through rhetorical means. This projection of an ethos via a 'rhetorical performance' can be situated within the realms of both drama and rhetoric.

This chapter thus presents Burkes ideas regarding 'the drama of human relations',[1] as it sheds light on socio-political aspects of design practice in general and trend dynamics in particular. Whereas the previous chapter explored the dialectical linguistic-symbolic foundations for rhetoric, this chapter considers the human context within which rhetorical communication takes place. In other words, this chapter considers the social and cultural context within which designers are required to 'frame' or justify their actions. As Burke points out, we are under the social obligation to justify – or at least *position* – both our past and future actions. We defend our actions when accounting to others, but also rationalise our decisions to ourselves. In other words, when we motivate, we assign *motives* to our acts. The selection of motives is, according to Burke, a thoroughly relational and socialised process. In simple terms, people motivate their actions by referring to what others want to hear; or perhaps more accurately, what they think others will accept as appropriate and legitimate.

In order to interrogate this performative process of motivation, this chapter introduces Burke's *dramatism* as a method of "critical analysis of language and thence human relations generally, by the use of terms derived from the contemplation of drama" (Burke 1955:264).[2] While I do not intend to use Burke's dramatism as a

[1] William Rueckert (1982) frames all Burke's work in relation to 'the drama of human relations'.

[2] Burke found in drama – and later in religious discourse – representative cases for developing theories about language and human relations in general. Burke's *dramatistic* method of discourse analysis, is largely informed by his literary background, but while Burke finds inspiration in drama for the development of his system, the dramatistic method relates to the analysis of all discourse, not only dramatic literary texts.

rigid method for design discourse analysis, I believe it provides a valuable interpretive perspective, along with a set of terminologies, useful for the interrogation of design motives.

The first part of this chapter provides a brief contextual background on considering design practice and relations in terms of 'drama'. This serves as basic point of connection between Burke's 'dramatistic' angle and design. The second part of this chapter explores Burke's notion of 'symbolic action' as a necessary approach to language when developing 'dramatistic' and rhetorical perspectives on communication. I consider here how both visual and verbal design practice can be framed in terms of 'symbolic action'. The third part of the chapter frames the 'design drama' as a blend of cooperative and competitive motives. In other words, I explain how the design drama emerges from a situation in which designers collaborate with others (i.e. clients), while they also harbour their own individual motives. I then consider the drama of trend dynamics more specifically by referring to Burkean concepts surrounding dramatic cycles of change. I pay specific attention here to Burke's 'guilt-purification-redemption' cycle, as offering insights on a general sociological process that may also drive design change. The last section of the chapter introduces Burke's dramatistic method of discourse analysis, via his *dramatistic pentad*, as a useful approach to examining discursive motivations.

Note that many of the concepts introduced in this chapter are expanded upon in Chapter Four, which deals with Burke's rhetorical theory and criticism. Whereas this chapter deals with more general aspects of design action, as influenced by the sociological design drama,[3] the following chapter considers the strategic potential or rhetorical power of visual and verbal design action, as *utilised* in the design drama.

Background

Ellen Lupton (2009:6) explains how "[d]esign is a social activity. Rarely working alone or in private, designers respond to clients, audiences, publishers, institutions, and collaborators". These relationships need to be managed in order to achieve successful design outcomes, and the 'managing' of these relations could be considered both performative and rhetorical.

There are many social, political and cultural demands and expectations that designers are confronted with as a routine part of their daily practice. This means that a variety of relational factors impact design decisions, as well as how these decisions are motivated or justified. Designers interact with various design stakeholders throughout the design process, and rhetorical factors inform these interactions in significant ways. For instance, designers need to convince clients not only of their competence, but also that their motives are well-aligned with those of their clients. Professional reputation or image, as well as respect or prestige amongst peers, could be considered some of the 'softer' human factors that impact rhetorical design practice. Throughout the design process, different stakeholder interests are continuously negotiated as a

[3] This approach shares some similarities with the 'dramaturgical' approach of Erving Goffman. As Robert Kenny (2008) argues, "[a]nyone familiar with Goffman's dramaturgical approach will note the similarities to [Burke's] Dramatism".

means to ensure cooperation. A 'drama of design relations' thus plays out around the management of various professional relationships (designer-client and designer-designer).

According to Duncan Reyburn and Marno Kirstein (2015:73), 'drama' is a useful metaphor for grappling with design "in its totality, at its most fundamental ideological level". They continue to explain how design

> […] is part and parcel of the rules of relationship. Put differently, while design may be referred to as singular, it always presupposes a multiplex of material and nonmaterial processes that are continuously interacting. It is drama replete with front-stage elements, actors, and narrative trajectories, as well as the wirework and production schemes that are hidden backstage. It also, very importantly, suggests an affected audience (Reyburn & Kirstein 2015:73).

In a general sense, both design and drama can be defined as 'collaborative production towards collective reception'. In other words, drama (or design) is performed by various actors (or design producers), for audience (or user) reception. In reference to Kees Dorst's description of the designer as 'design actor', Reyburn and Kirstein (2015:73) explain how the "designer as actor is located within the drama, rather than outside it, as one of its protagonists". In other words, to consider the design scenario as an unfolding drama, is to emphasise narrative, performative and relational aspects of the design process, as enacted between various design actors.[4]

Various design theorists have argued for greater scholarly attention to socio-political aspects of design production; to expand design inquiry beyond the product and process and interrogate the broader humanistic design scenario. Humanistic approaches to design, such as those advocated by Richard Buchanan (1995), Jorge Frascara (1988), Klaus Krippendorff (2006) and Victor Margolin (2002) suggest that design should be studied as a social, cultural and political practice, as opposed to merely being thought of as a technological practice. Such humanistic approaches are closely linked with rhetorical perspectives on design insofar as design action is considered a meaning-making activity within discursive communities. As Richard Lanham (2016:139) points out, a 'rhetorical view of life' is based on the premise that the self is "a social fabrication, created by the many dramas we pass through in our lives". I thus take the position that a rhetorical view of design trends may benefit from an exploration of the drama of design relations.

In order to develop a dramatistic perspective on human relations as expressed through discursive motivations, Burke believes one needs to adopt a view of language as 'symbolic action'. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Burke chooses to frame language in terms of deliberate symbolic *action*, as opposed to *motion*. The following section explores Burke's reasons for this emphasis and aims to show how the concept of 'symbolic action' is useful for interrogating meta-rhetorical aspects of design practice and trend dynamics.

[4] It is worth highlighting that my main aim is to explore the drama unfolding between various design 'actors', or those involved in the design process, as opposed to aspects of audience reception.

Design as symbolic action

For Burke (LSA:44), a *dramatistic* approach to language essentially treats language as *symbolic action*.[5] Burke believes that while all beings are capable of practical action, symbolic action is unique to humans and requires a particular kind of second-level reasoning. Through the concept of *symbolic action*, Burke encourages the consideration of linguistic products or utterences, not only in terms of what they *say*, but in terms of what they *do*.[6] This perspective has much in common with the speech-act theory of JL Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein, who support the position that "[w]ords are moves in a sequence of actions" (Sandywell 2011:26). This relates to the manner in which words are used for strategic (rhetorical) purposes. The notion of symbolic action also highlights the manner in which the reverse scenario is true: it is possible to *say* something by the manner in which one *does* something. In such instances a physical act can also be interpreted as a symbolic act. Burke (ATH:165) uses the example of mountain climbing. If a person climbs a mountain simply as a means to get from A to B, we do not need to look for symbolism. However, if climbing the mountain is meant to serve as an expression (of endurance, adventurousness, and so on), then the act can be read as symbolic. While some people do climb mountains as part of a journey, a mountaineer clearly climbs mountains for symbolic purposes.

As another example, more closely related to the study at hand, Burke (PLF:9) explains how there is often a "borderline area wherein many practical acts take on a symbolic ingredient, as one may buy a certain commodity not merely to use it, but also because its possession testifies to his enrollment in a certain stratum of society". In such a scenario, the physical act of purchasing a product clearly contains a symbolic motive. This echoes Roland Barthes' stance on how the fashion system is built upon the symbolic value of clothing. He explains how we dress ourselves "in order to carry out a signifying activity. The wearing of an item of clothing is fundamentally an act of meaning that goes beyond modesty, ornamentation and protection. It is an act of signification and therefore a profoundly social act" (Barthes 2013:90-1).

However, as also explained in the previous chapter, symbolic and utilitarian value cannot easily be separated. Symbolic acts may serve utilitarian purposes and utilitarian acts are frequently performed in ways that serve symbolic purposes. This symbolic relation, between *saying* and *doing* is highly significant in a design context, specifically in communication or information design, where what a product *does* is communicate. Communication design aesthetics can be interpreted in terms of what it 'says' *through* what it 'does' and what it 'does' *through* what it 'says' (and how it says it). Furthermore, the formal, aesthetic quality of a design product can be considered symbolic action towards utilitarian purpose as well as utilitarian action towards symbolic purpose. Purposes may include to communicate effectively or authoritatively, to attract attention or stimulate consumption. All of these purposes can be considered both symbolic and utilitarian.

[5] Burke highlights the connection between the term 'drama', which in the original Greek relates to 'action'.
[6] Burke (PLF:89) argues that even a "poem is designed to 'do something' for the poet and his readers, and that we can make the most relevant observations about its design by considering the poem as the embodiment of this act".

In considering the design process as social drama, another interpretation of design as 'symbolic action' becomes significant. This relates to the manner in which the process of designing is itself an extended process of communication, which consists of a series of symbolic acts. As part of the design process, a design or 'image' (of a tangible or intangible product) is developed, communicated and (usually) consummated.[7] This 'image' is not only the visual representation of the proposed final product, but includes all symbolic communication of intention throughout the entire design process (Nelson & Stolterman 2012:130-1). It is for this reason that 'design action' should refer not only to the production of design artifacts (visual, material or immaterial), but also to the communicative (linguistic and visually symbolic) processes accompanying design creation. As Andy Dong (2006) highlights (also by referring to speech-act theory), a designer's communicative actions are not separate from the design process, but *constitute* the entire design process.

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Both visual and verbal design language can thus be approached in terms of Burke's notion of 'symbolic action', which draws attention to the performative significance of symbols. To classify design as 'symbolic action' is a particular way of framing, within the dialectical positions outlined in the previous chapter, namely *action* versus *motion* and *symbolic* versus *utilitarian* function. It is nevertheless possible, as many design theorists have done, to frame design in other terms, for instance, as evolutionary process (emphasising motion), or to consider design only in terms of its utilitarian function.

However, Burke believes it is essential to frame communication in terms of *symbolic action*. He explains how "the social sphere is considered in terms of situations and acts, in contrast with the physical sphere, which is considered in mechanistic terms, idealized as a flat cause-and-effect or stimulus-and-response relationship" (PLF:103). As mentioned previously, "the difference between a thing and a person is that the one merely *moves* whereas the other *acts"* (LSA:53). For Burke, *dramatism* can be summarised as a broad approach to language and thought as basically "modes of action" rather than as merely a means of conveying information (GM:xxii). He thus situates his *dramatistic* approach to language in direct contrast to a *scientistic* approach (LSA:44).[8] This choice, to emphasise the symbolic and performative nature of language use, is Burke's response to the dominant communication theories of his time, which sought to emphasise the mechanistic processes surrounding information transfer. Burke (GM:505) explains how scientific views are concerned with processing and correlation, instead of action and motivation. He argues that "as soon as you move into the social realm, involving the relation of man to man, mere *correlation* is not enough. Human relationships must be *substantial"* (GM:505). Any attempt to describe human relations in purely naturalistic or scientistic terms is therefore a "*reduction* of some higher or more complex realm of being to the terms of a lower or less complex realm of being" (GM:506).

[7] It is, of course, possible to 'design' a product (to envision it and plan for its production) but never see it through to production.

[8] Burke (LSA:44) explains how the scientistic understanding of language "begins with questions of *naming*, or *definition*", whereas the dramatistic view stresses "language as an aspect of 'action'".

For Burke, behaviorist and materialist vocabularies (which emphasise correlation and *motion*) do not allow for ethical interrogation since these frameworks suggest a person does not have agency and is therefore not truly responsible for their actions. Ethical judgement relies on perceiving humans as capable of purposeful action; an act can only be classified as such if freedom of choice is involved. In other words, if an action is involuntary it equates to being moved, and is thus in the realm of motion[9] (RR:188). It thus follows that an act, in the Burkean sense, would include the element of volition or intent. Therefore, since *action* involves choice (which in turn involves human character), it implies the ethical, whereas sheer *motion* can be considered non-ethical (LSA:11).[10] While Burke acknowledges the material conditions of motion as an underlying prerequisite for action is inescapable, he wishes to emphasise the shortcomings of the purely materialist thinking which he identifies in behaviourist perspectives. Burke argues that we "cannot relate to one another sheerly as things in motion. Even the behaviourist, who studies man in terms of his laboratory experiments, must treat his colleagues as *persons*, rather than purely and simply as automata responding to stimuli" (LSA:53).

Any rhetorical investigation departs from the acceptance that actions (by rhetors and audiences) can indeed be taken. Quite simply, a 'dramatistic' approach to language is essential if we are to consider the question of motive in the first place. It is only if we accept that humans *can* act, or make decisions, that we would consider their motives. In other words, motivation is neither necessary nor possible without the ability to act. However, while Burke emphasises *action*, he acknowledges that it is possible to behave *as if in motion*, or to frame actions as motions. It is precisely this dynamic that lies at the heart of the mechanics of motivation.

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As mentioned previously, the dramatic metaphor highlights design as relational (social, cultural, and political) practice, where the ideas and interests of various stakeholders are negotiated in space and time. In addition to the professional relations with various stakeholders, designers also become part of a broader "culture of design", characterised by second-level, discursive and meta-design products. Guy Julier (2008:40) investigates this highly mediated "culture of design" whereby design operates in a reflexive mode to self-consciously recognise design value and promote this value to a broader public. He continues to explain how

> [m]uch of the [institutionalised] history and criticism of design […] falls within a specific formal canon, thereby giving a refined language to legitimate itself and a self-perpetuating logic which identifies 'good design' as against 'bad design' or 'kitsch'. It therefore conspires to maintain the highly reflexive, self-conscious nature of design (Julier 2008:41).

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[9] While Burke chooses to base his theory of language on the principle of action, he acknowledges how there can be motion without action (purely natural or biological processes for instance), but there can never be action without motion (Burke 1955:261; RR:39). In other words, action is always rooted in physical or material circumstances. Even a thinking act is embodied in biological motions. In other words, all human action is ultimately rooted in motion, insofar as it still requires material or embodied existence. Burke (LSA:53) acknowledges the ultimate 'unknowability' of his view on action and motion, and that the distinction may be an illusion, but he nonetheless argues that the intuition of difference needs to be dealt with in pragmatic terms.

[10] 'Non-ethical' does not here equate to 'unethical', but rather refers to falling outside the realm of ethical scrutiny. As Burke (RR:280) explains, "what is responsibility but the ability to respond".

Julier (2008:79) is particularly interested in how design hierarchies are established in this design culture, “within a complicated system of mediation and distribution”. The ‘culture of design’ is, in other words, fuelled by the creation of self-conscious or reflexive, meta-cultural products. In this context the relational, socio-cultural or symbolic value of design products tends to become more significant than functional use value. All of this is only possible due the human capacity for ‘symbolic action’, as Burke describes it.

As part of the ‘culture of design’, one finds a ‘dramatic’ history of design, replete with narratives of design heroes who have made revolutionary contributions to design practice. The common genre of the design manifesto clearly indicates a high level of ‘drama’, in the common sense understanding of the term. Lupton (2009:7) describes how “designers have produced their own subculture, a global discourse that connects us [designers] across time and space as part of a shared endeavour, with our own heroes and our own narratives of discovery and revolution”. Adrian Shaughnessy (2006:168) refers to the way in which an increased interest in graphic design, fueled by meta-design products has led to an “emergence of the cult of graphic design”. He continues to explain how, like other cults, the ‘cult of graphic design’ has its own celebrities and magazines, whereby “a fan-like interest in the doings of fashionable design groups” is cultivated (Shaughnessy 2006:168). Again, these phenomena only make sense in relation to second-level symbolic action whereby value is found in the way we relate, as a discursive community, to symbols *about* other symbols.

Design trends, as part of this reflexive design culture, clearly displays the fan-like interest Shaughnessy refers to. Furthermore, when considering how contemporary design trends are frequently surrounded by controversies, debates and diatribes, it is clear to identify an ongoing ‘dramatic’ design narrative. While such melodramatic instances of design discourse offer obvious opportunities for *dramatistic* discourse analysis, more everyday design scenarios also contain elements of drama.

An emphasis on design as *symbolic action* is highly relevant in our ‘attention economy’ today. Lanham (2006:10) speaks about an increased self-consciousness in how we ‘perform’ everyday labour in an attention economy, how “[w]hen we are observed in our work, we socialize it”. Designers are, of course, experts in this kind of self-consciously performative labour. While designers understand that “the design of an object” in the attention economy, is at least “as important as the engineering of the object,” (Lanham 2006:14) they are also aware of the importance of the social framework within which a design object is to gain cultural significance. Lanham (2006:14) thus refers to the design product’s “positioning in the market […] as a version of applied drama”, explaining how, for instance, “[t]he launch of the movie will be as important as the movie itself”. Similarly, how trends are positioned, might be more significant than the formal qualities of the trend itself.

The cooperative/competitive design drama

From a Burkean dialectical perspective, all design action can be interpreted as concerned with both cooperation and competition,[11] allowing for drama to emerge. While cooperation and competition seem like opposites, they are two processes that go hand-in-hand, also in design relations. However, in the context of professional design relations, the cooperative is perhaps emphasised insofar as designers need to work with clients, other designers, end users and producers to achieve a final design outcome. In other words, various stakeholders in the design scenario collaborate towards a shared goal (to produce an artefact). As Cameron Tonkinwise (2015) explains:

> While designers make, they cannot make alone, especially at the mass production scale that is particular to design. Designers must convince many others, through many channels, of the value of making the futures they have generated – funders, suppliers, logisticians, craftspeople, marketers, users. Design is a process of persuading, alliance building, contracting, managing.

It is clear from this statement, that while design is in essence a collaborative enterprise, collaboration does not happen automatically. In order for a design to be successfully realised, various conflicts need to be resolved throughout the process. While the larger team collaborates towards the same goal, stakeholders may hold competing interests and these interests need to be negotiated.

Conflicts to be resolved can be practical (solving the practical design problem at hand) as well as symbolic (negotiating power relations between stakeholders). Most design research tends to focus on the practical, product-related conflicts that need to be resolved. This relates to balancing various design project requirements, product functionality, ergonomics, budgets, time frames, and so on. However, throughout product development discussions, symbolic factors play an important role in ensuring cooperation. In other words, socio-political relations between different stakeholders need to be managed to ensure fruitful collaboration. On this level, professional roles and reputations are as much a part of the design equation as functional product requirements, even if not overtly acknowledged or expressed. For instance, from a designer's perspective, projecting an ethos of competence and authority is vital in securing client trust and buy-in. It is this projection of ethos, via a 'performance' of motives, that one can easily situate within the realms of both drama and rhetoric.

While different design stakeholders aim to resolve conflicting interests and cooperate in the development of a design product, there is thus an element of internal 'competition' present in the process. Insofar as both designer and client may wish to assert an opinion or persuade the other of a course of action, they may be considered in indirect competition, in a rhetorical 'battle of wits'. However, this level of competition (or symbolic rivalry) is naturally deemphasised, since designer and client are on the same team and working towards the same goal. Nonetheless, these tensions exist and it is possible to argue that they have a significant impact on design actions, visual and verbal. Reyburn and Kirstein (2015) explore some of the tensions that arise from the designer-client relationship. For instance, they explain how "the designer

[11] Burke's notions of 'identification' and 'division' offer related insights on the human drama, but since these concepts are most often explored in relation to Burke's rhetorical theory, I explore these concepts in Chapter Four.

constantly needs to justify her design decisions to the client in order to allay the latter's reservations about implementing the proposed design solution. For design decisions to be justifiable they need to be based on something, preferably something with influence in the eyes of the design client" (Reyburn & Kirstein 2015:67).[12] This is clearly a matter of rhetorical motivation.

While it is possible to identify internal elements of conflict and competition within the larger design team, it is more common to think of design competition as externally directed. There is something inherently competitive about design, as used strategically in the competitive marketplace. For instance, 'differentiation through design', or what is more recently known as 'design-driven innovation', is considered a vital part of the competitive corporate strategy. On a most basic level, design is in service of commercial enterprise; different design products compete for audience attention and increased market share. This competition is naturally at the heart of any branding program, and can be considered one of the main purposes of design aesthetic trends in the current 'attention economy'.

Various kinds of competition play out in the design drama. Competition is found when design companies compete with each other for bigger contracts or more prominent clients; designers compete amongst themselves for more prestigious jobs and greater status within the industry. This competitive drive is perhaps most obvious in the arena of design and advertising award schemes. As Lizette Spangenberg (2015:26) explains, the ability to win awards are often directly linked to agencies acquiring new clients and designers earning promotions. Designers and their clients understand the potential of creative achievement to boost business via increased status. While creative prestige may be interpreted as part of an overall commercial strategy, the desire for greater status may also be considered an end in itself. These kinds of competitive drives may impact design decisions in ways that are not overtly considered. For instance, an agency or designer may make decisions on a particular client brief for personal reasons related to projecting a desired image, or developing a particular kind of portfolio. Here the private design motives could potentially encroach on, or compete with, the client's project-related motives. It is generally frowned upon when a designer seeks to gain personal attention for their work, as this is seen to detract attention away from the client's organisation or product. As Adrian Shaughnessy (2006:168) explains, "[i]t has always been a fundamental belief of graphic design that the designer must never become the story; it would get in the way of the client's message".[13] However, as long as the designer's personal motives are well-aligned with those of the client, there should be no perceived conflict of interest. It thus follows that, as part of the design process, the designer needs to convince the client that he or she has the client's best interests at heart. This is a major part of a designer's rhetorical design practice.

It is worth pointing out the common association between rhetoric and competition. The practice of rhetoric is frequently referred to as 'language-games', and the rhetorical objective is, of course, to *win* the argument.

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[12] They refer here to Nelson and Stolterman's (2012) notion of the 'g.o.d' or 'guarantor of design'. This idea is explored in greater depth shortly.

[13] Shaughnessy (2006:168) does point out how celebrity designers such as David Carson and Stefan Sagmeister "ignored this nostrum and promoted themselves ruthlessly", eventually becoming "more famous than the work they produced".

However, what Burke tries to emphasise is that rhetoric is always *both* competitive and cooperative. The competitors in any game need to cooperate in order to play in the first place. As Richard Sennett (2006) also points out, cooperation and competition could be interpreted as two modes of connection or engagement, with indifference (a lack of engagement) as their 'opposite'. Sennett's perspective, which echoes that of Burke, can be interpreted as a prime example of dialectical transformation whereby perceived opposites are re-framed by highlighting their similarities (in relation to a different opposition). Human relations (including design relations) become dramatic when cooperative and competitive motives are blended together via engagement, often in ways that blur motivational boundaries. For Burke, the manner in which these processes, of cooperation and competition, are dialectically interconnected helps to explain how sophisticated rhetorical manoeuvres emerge.

While competition and cooperation are dialectical counterparts, always simultaneously present in the productive design process, the cooperative can be emphasised above the competitive and *vice versa*. In other words, there are various options for framing design practice, as either primarily competitive, or primarily cooperative. A perceived overemphasis on competitiveness (as a characteristic of capitalist markets) is a critical theme throughout Burke's work, echoed by contemporary critics such as Sennett (2006). Such an overemphasis on competition could, arguably, be considered responsible for unsustainable trend dynamics. However, it is good to be reminded that design as cooperation can also be emphasised. For instance, even in industries where various practitioners are in direct competition for market share, they can choose to emphasise how they essentially cooperate in promoting their industry as a whole. Similarly, the recent emphasis on design as social rather than commercial enterprise sees designers collaborating with larger communities of stakeholders towards more just and sustainable futures. However, in these scenarios where cooperation is emphasised, one can still look for the competitive motives, as an inherent part of the design dialectic.

It is possible to argue that the cooperation/competition dialectic is also at work in the area of 'dramatic' trend dynamics. It is possible to argue that a high level of human drama surrounds the production and consumption of the new. The blend of cooperative and competitive motives helps to drive design change and motivates various stakeholders to buy into new trends when they emerge. The following section considers Burke's perspective on the dialectical-dramatic economy of the new, where the creation and consumption of design trends are linked to dialectical design change (as explored in the previous chapter) as well as socio-political hierarchies within the 'culture of design'.

Trend dynamics as drama

As mentioned previously, Burke finds a logical connection between dialectics and drama. He explains how drama and dialectic are similar in many ways, insofar as "[b]oth exemplify competitive cooperation" (Burke 1966:878). One of Burke's interpretations of 'dialectic' is "the competition of cooperation or the cooperation of competition" (GM:403), and it is this process that he sees as resembling 'drama'. While dialectic does not require the cooperative/competitive interaction of distinct individuals or voices, "thoughts

or ideas can still be vibrant with personality" in how they represent different facets or aspects of an argument (LSA:188). For Burke, drama *is* dialectical positioning enacted temporally through different 'voices'. As we know, a most basic quality of drama sees the *agon* (struggle or contest) play out through interaction between protagonist and antagonist. In this narrative form different positions are expressed through actors in dialogue.

Burke's concept of the *temporizing of essence* relates to the way in which different logical positions tend to be expressed in narrative form. Burke (1979:168-9) explains:

> Implicit in the negative is the possibility of polar terms which bear a timeless relationship to each other. This relationship is 'timeless' in the sense that although, with polar terms like 'order' and 'disorder,' each *implies* the other, their relationship doesn't involve a temporal step *from* one *to* the other. […] Myth, story, narrative makes it possible to transform this timeless relation between polar terms into a temporal sequence. That is, myth can tell of a step *from* either one *to* the other.[14]

Burke thus believes there is a human tendency to 'temporize' and 'personalize' ideological beliefs and values, through narrative. As an example Burke cites the Genesis myth as a narrative explanation of the origin of human evil (Carter 1997:347). Such mythic[15] retrospective temporizing is, according to Burke, common throughout various cultures and throughout history.[16] Carter (1997:344-6) points out how we hold a "narrative-ridden" or "time-ridden" view of reality, and how Burke's theory on the 'temporizing of the essence' describes this narrative tendency.

From this perspective, design movements and trends can be understood as temporisations of dialectical positions, as embodied ideas playing out in a sequence by means of 'agonistic' narrative development. We see this tendency in how design objects and movements become part of the design history canon, when placed on a timeline and given a narrative structure retrospectively. It is possible to argue that, as part of this narrative tendency, design actions are presented not only as creative actions, but as situated reactions or counter-actions. In such a way design narratives feature protagonists (linked to ideal values and those who promote them) and antagonists (design values to be purged). Perhaps the most obvious example of dialectical positions, as stylistic voices in dialogue over time, can be seen in the development of the modernist design myth: the rational minimalist voice (stylistic protagonist) overthrows the deceptive or pretentious voice of decorative ornamentation (antagonist). The previously cited *Crystal Goblet* by Beatrice Warde's may serve again as a specific example. Warde (1955) argues that her approach to typography, as neutral vehicle of content transfer, offers an antidote to the misguided practice of designers during her time:

> Printing demands a humility of mind, for the lack of which many of the fine arts are even now floundering in self-conscious and maudlin experiments. There is nothing simple or dull in achieving

[14] This characterization is presented as part of Burke's logological interpretation of theology. He explains how monotheistic theology had particular problems and 'embarrassments' owing to ambiguous qualities of a single god. According to Burke (1979:170), polytheistic myths did not have the same problems, as opposing characteristics could be embodied in different gods.

[15] Myth as part of rhetorical strategy is considered in greater depth in Chapter Four. For the time being I wish to highlight how 'essential' dialectical positions come to be understood temporally, as cause and effect; on a trajectory of perceived progress.

[16] Burke's perspective here echoes Carl Jung's notion of archetypes.

> the transparent page. Vulgar ostentation is twice as easy as discipline. […] The 'stunt typographer' learns the fickleness of rich men who hate to read.

The antagonist of Warde's narrative is the 'stunt typographer' who is only interested in easy ostentatious experimentation. The protagonist is the humble designer who produces 'invisible' type in order to allow the message of a text to be transferred without any interference. While Warde's argument (along with various other similar ones) inspired a generation of typographers, the drama does not end here.

In a continuation of the dramatic design narrative, someone like the postmodern deconstructionist designer, David Carson, emerges as a new protagonist. Carson's editorial design work during the 1990s for magazines such as *Ray Gun* and *Beach Culture* (Figure 5) became notorious for breaking with traditional typography and layout conventions.

Figure 5: Editorial design spreads for *Ray Gun* (left) and *Beach Culture* (right) by David Carson (Butler 2014).

While Carson's work is expressive and chaotic, it is considered highly appropriate in the cultural context of the alternative nineties 'grunge' music scene. As Carson (in Hustwit 2007) argues, "[d]on't confuse legibility with communication. Just because something is legible doesn't mean it communicates and, more importantly, doesn't mean it communicates the right thing". His anti-modernist philosophy is to invite reader engagement or participation in deciphering typographic chaos.

The dramatic design narrative between those who call for a 'proper' application of type (whatever that may mean at a particular point in time), and those who challenge these notions, is still ongoing. While these debates are particularly prominent in the area of typographic design, one finds similar dramas in all areas of design. Elements of these agonistic narratives can also be identified in the discourse surrounding contemporary design trends.

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The perpetual shifting of visual stylistic trends can thus be read as an unfolding drama. As mentioned previously, a major part of the popular cultural drama relates to our production and consumption of 'the new'. Boris Groys (2014:6-7) explains how "[t]he demand to produce the new is one that all [cultural producers] must satisfy in order to attain the cultural recognition they desire. Otherwise, it would be pointless to occupy oneself with cultural matters". Groys believes that in order for us to understand the

culture of the new, "we have to study the intra-cultural demands and expectations with which artists, theoreticians, critics, and historians are all equally confronted" (Groys 2014:41). To this list one can add designers. Tonkinwise (2005:6) explains how, "when you hire a (graphic) designer, the first thing that is going to happen is that all (the communications) that currently exists is going into the waste bin to make way for the new".[17] However, in addition to the basic professional obligation to produce new visual products, designers also experience socio-cultural pressure to produce 'the new', that is, distinctive and innovative work that garners broader cultural appreciation.

The production, identification and valuation of 'the new' is, of course, a socio-cultural process. According to Groys (2014:48), 'the new' "cannot be based solely on individual memory and the individual power of discrimination. The new is new only when it is new, not just for, a given individual consciousness, but with respect to the cultural archive". In other words, the valorisation of 'the new' is a communal or collective endeavour. For a work to be taken up into the cultural archive, it needs to be sufficiently innovative, have "proven its specificity, originality, and individuality" (Groys 2014:44). It is possible to argue that this cultural-economic phenomenon plays an important role in the perception of design value. Of course, not all new cultural products become mass-consumed cultural trends; many products remain cultural outliers. However, for any new product to be noticed and valued as part of the 'culture of design', the rhetoric of the above socio-cultural values of 'the new' tends to be present. In other words, there needs to be a collective recognition and valuation of an object or trend as sufficiently innovative or original.

Furthermore, value boundaries are continuously shifted so that what was once valorized becomes devalorized and what was profane becomes valorized. For Groys (2014:64) this is the basic mechanism of 'the new'. Put otherwise, "[d]evalorization of existing cultural values is one necessary aspect of the innovative gesture – exactly like valorization of the profane" (Groys 2014:72). This process is made possible by what can be interpreted as another *paradox of substance.* Groys (2014:179) explains how a "sign's duality stems from the fact that it has a culturally valorized dimension, that is to say, designates something, and is, at the same time, a profane thing that is to say, designates nothing. Depending on the historical period, one or the other dimension is actualized". Groys thus points out (as Burke also does, in relation to 'universal' values that are either emphasised or suppressed) how devalorization of cultural values does not detract value from those values indefinitely. This makes a continued oscillation of values possible. As Peter Bilak (2006:173) also explains,

> Anticonventionalism requires going against prevailing styles, which are perceived as conventional. If more designers joined forces and worked in a similar fashion, the scale would change, and the former convention would become anticonventional. The fate of such experimentation is a permanent confrontation with the mainstream; a circular, cyclical race, where it is not certain who is chasing whom.

The competitive-cooperative blend of motives found in our relationship with the new can also be described in terms of differentiation and conformity. Burke explains how 'competition' can be seen as a special case of

[17] Tonkinwise refers here to the article "Disposability, graphic design, style, and waste" by Karrie Jacobs (1994).

'imitation', arguing that "what we call 'competition' is better described as men's attempt to *out-imitate* one another" (RM:131). There is thus a paradoxical relation present in the processes of imitation and differentiation: "[f]or when you discuss competition as it has actually operated in our society, you discover that the so-called ways of competition have been almost fanatically zealous ways of *conformity*" (RM:131). As Groys (2014:50) also explains, "[n]ew cultural trends are no indication that individual freedom has triumphed; rather, they create new – albeit relatively minor, temporally limited – homogeneities, social codes, patterns of behaviour, and the new group conformity that goes hand in hand with them". In other words, while there is a perception that tradition equals conformity and the new does not, this is an illusion. It is an illusion employed in the service of those higher up in the socio-cultural hierarchy.[18]

> Fashion thus makes possible an elitist social attitude, a value hierarchy, and a system of criteria considered valid by a particular group. This short-term value system is the enabling condition for both a smooth continuation of old value hierarchies in new forms and a cultural critique that today marshals the same arguments against elitist fashion which, yesterday, were directed against established tradition (Groys 2014:51).

The constant updating of the new allows cultural elites to remain higher in the hierarchy through early adoption. It thus makes sense why a trend can only remain valuable for a specific period of time, as a marker of exclusive or special status. This relates to Lanham's (2006:2) characterization of attention structures as 'oddly self-destructive'. As an example, Lanham highlights the paradox found in the tourism industry: an exotic location becomes less appealing as soon as it becomes a popular tourist destination. The same is true of design trends. As soon as a trend becomes too mainstream, it loses its social power.

Lanham explains how the hierarchic 'attention economy' necessarily entails 'attention inequalities'. He explains how "[m]odern mass communications have created centripetal attention structures", where mass attention is focussed on a select few things, such as celebrities (Lanham 2006:11). The paradoxical nature of attention prevents the easy dissolution of attention inequality. As Lanham (2006:12) explains, when "you redistribute this subspecies of wealth, fame ceases to be fame. The egalitarian argument makes no sense in an economy of attention". In other words, if everyone or everything receives equal amounts of attention, there would simply be no attention. This attention dynamic cannot be explained simply by analysing product parameters and aesthetics. A 'dramatic' perspective on the economy of the new is therefore not only useful, but essential.

Another important dynamic to consider in the 'dramatic economy of the new' relates to Burke's exploration of social *guilt*. It is possible to argue that the socio-cultural mechanisms of shame, sacrifice, atonement and redemption also impact design trend dynamics and rhetorics. As Groys (2014:12) points out, when it comes to understanding the new, "[t]he economy of sacrifice, expenditure, violence, and conquest has to be taken into consideration as fully as the economy of commodity exchange".

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[18] To be 'higher up' in a design culture hierarchy relates to the possession of a particular kind of 'cultural capital' whereby consumers can distinguish themselves by demonstrating cultivated taste (Julier 2008). Social distinction via trend knowledge or being in-the-know enables elite status in a similar manner.

The guilt-purification-redemption cycle

A major part of Burke's dramatistic perspective on human relations is his identification of a recurring *guilt-purification-redemption* cycle,[19] through which individuals and groups assign and process various kinds of social guilt. The symbolic and hierarchic situation leads to various forms of guilt or shame. Burke argues that guilt, the secular version of sin,[20] is unavoidable since tension in the hierarchy is inevitable. Burke (LSA:15) explains how hierarchies, as differentiated social structures imply "privileges to some that are denied to others". This unequal distribution of privilege and status set the stage for pride as well as guilt to develop. Individuals and groups are confronted with guilt regardless of where they find themselves in the hierarchy. Burke (LSA:15) explains how "[k]ing and peasant are 'mysteries' to each other. Those 'Up' are guilty of not being 'Down', those 'Down' are certainly guilty of not being 'Up'". This relates to everyday social anxieties and shame about being either inadequate, or too privileged. In other words, everyday social anxieties and feelings of failure can be found both higher up and lower down the hierarchy. No person can successfully navigate the paradoxical nature of hierarchy, since it requires obedience while simultaneously prompting ambitious climbing to higher levels of 'perfection'.

Dina Stevenson (1999) supplements Burke's theory of guilt-purification-redemption with Lacanian psychoanalysis[21] to provide a psychological basis for this motivational pattern, rooted in the notion of desire. While Burke does not use the term 'desire' as part of this process, it could nonetheless be considered central to this entire social dynamic. The hierarchic drive towards greater status relates to fullfilling our desires and becoming more desirable in the eyes of others. Considered from this perspective guilt or shame, as interconnected with desire, is a common and incessant driver in society.

The next step in the cycle is purification, where an attempt is made to expunge perceived guilt. A process of 'purgation' or 'cleansing' is needed in order to be redeemed. Burke argues that purification through sacrifice is, on the most basic level, made possible through "symbolism's resources for substitution", which includes the processes of condensation and displacement. As mentioned previously, Burke sees the built-in logic of substitution inherent to all symbol use, and thus such sacrificial practices as a logical extension thereof. This in turn enables the kinds of substitution found in purification, such as "penance, expiation, compensation, paying of fines in lieu of bodily punishment and cult of the scapegoat" (LSA:8). Throughout his work Burke is particularly interested in how perceived guilt is ritualistically purged through processes of victimization and scapegoating.

Burke identifies two types of sacrifice namely, *mortification* or *victimage*. Mortification is the process whereby an individual can make a personal sacrifice in atonement for guilt, for example through self-deprivation.

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[19] Burke also refers to this process as the 'rhetoric of rebirth'. The extent to which this process is used as part of a rhetorical strategy, is explored in Chapter Four.

[20] Although Burke draws heavily on theological language, these concepts are meant to explain broader linguistic mechanisms, not only in religious contexts.

[21] In reference to Lacan's theory, Stevenson (1999:192) explains how Burke's notion of 'guilt' or 'pollution' relates back to the early infantile anxiety which emerges in the realisation of simultaneous seperateness and dependency. The aim from this early stage is to regain a sense of consubstantiality, to regain a sense of value by becoming desirable to the other. This process continues throughout a lifetime, where anxieties over separation and inadequacy need to be overcome.

Obvious contemporary instances of mortification or self-denial can be found in dieting and exercising regimes, although less logical or obvious measures to atone for sin (or pollution) also abound. The other method of purification is found in the process of victimage, whereby a scapegoat becomes the substitute, or vicarious sacrifice.[22] While the practice of scapegoating seems archaic, it continues to occur in various guises. Burke refers to significant historical scapegoats such as Jesus Christ[23] and the Jews in Nazi Germany.

After purification comes the stage of redemption, where a symbolic rebirth takes place. This is a state of rest, where feelings of relief, a new sense of identity, perspective, or optimism about moving forward are present (Foss *et al* 2002:211). It is, however, a temporary state, and the cycle continues, either in relation to the same hierarchic tension, or in terms of another. Foss, Foss and Trapp (2002:211-2) argue that this is a "life-long process of growth and change" – a quest in shaping identity towards 'perfection'. The proliferation of self-help literature is perhaps a clear indication of this continuing desire. Stevenson (1999:202) explains how 'purification' attempts are meant to place us symbolically higher on "one or more of the many shifting and reforming hierarchies that represent the internalized law of language". In other words, since the goalposts are continuously shifted (by others and ourselves), the prospect of falling short always remains.

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It is possible to argue that designers also deal with social anxieties as part of their professional practice. Guilt or shame is not a common topic in design discourse, but the potential for guilt is implicit in design as social drama. Related terms such as 'angst', 'embarrassment', 'inadequacy' or 'failure' may be more useful to describe some of the feelings designers may harbour. All of these terms point towards the potential consequences when failing to meet perceived professional demands or expectations.

As a rather obvious example, designers who use popular accessible typefaces such as *Comic Sans* (Figure 6) or *Papyrus* (Figure 7) are considered guilty of professional design malpractice. Designers (and even non-designers) who use these typefaces are routinely shamed as uneducated or uncultured philistines. The design culture establishment widely agrees that these are 'bad' fonts to be avoided. As Simon Garfield (2010:298) explains, "most people (type professionals and laypeople combined) agree […] that Comic Sans is no good at all".

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[22] The work of René Girard, partly inspired by Burke, elaborates on the scapegoat mechanism. However, whereas Burke's theory of scapegoating is rooted in linguistic processes and human symbol-use (the drive for order, the principle of substitution, the paradox of substance, and so on), Girard begins with the notion of 'mimetic desire' as leading to violence (Coupe 2005:137).

[23] The 'ultimate scapegoat' is arguably found in the figure of Christ. As Carter (1992:12) points out, the desire for a scapegoat to purge guilt, once and for all, "receives its highest expression in the account of the ultimate sacrifice (of the firstborn) by the ultimate being (God) for the ultimate purpose (the redemption of the crown of Creation)".

While Garfield believes "it is harmless and even benign, and, on account of its unassuming beginnings, perhaps does not deserve the loathing that has been heaped upon it", the shaming remains widespread. There are even whole websites[24] dedicated to bashing *Comic Sans* and those who use it.

Comic Sans

Figure 6: *Comic Sans*, typeface designed by Vincent Connare, 1994 (left) and *Typeface terrorism* (right) (Diaz 2010).

While I offer a more in-depth discussion of issues surrounding *Comic Sans'* propriety in Chapter Four of this study, the example here serves to illustrate the possibility of assigning design guilt and shame. The controversy surrounding the 'improper' use of *Papyrus* in the James Cameron 2009 fantasy/science fiction film, *Avatar*, serves as another case in point. Garfield (2010:306) describes the director's typographic choice as 'baffling', continuing to explain how *Papyrus* "is so clichéd and overused that its prominent selection for a genre-busting movie seems perverse. It also seems geographically inappropriate: as everyone who has written a school project over the last decade will tell you, Papyrus is the font you use to spell out the word Egypt".

Papyrus

Figure 7: *Papyrus*, typeface designed by Chris Costello, 1982 (left) and *Avatar* poster 2009 (right) (IMDb).

[24] For example, *comicsanscriminal.com* and *bancomicsans.com*.

It is clear from the numerous diatribes surrounding *Comic Sans* and *Papyrus* that cliché, overuse and contextual misuse are serious typographic offenses. But there are also less obvious ways in which designers can fall short or embarrass themselves. In an honest piece about her experience as a design student, Natalia Ilyin (2006) explains:

> I was terrified most of the time. Terrified that I wouldn't get it right, wouldn't be good enough, that I might break a rule – break one of those rules that was not supposed to be broken, rather than one of those rules that was supposed to be. I couldn't tell the damn difference, though everyone else could. They all blithely ran around doing clever ironic subverting things while I trudged through the dust of mediocrity […] The design language these people spoke was a foreign language to me, a language of exclusion (Ilyin 2006:70-1).

Ilyin's experience indicates that while some 'rules' are obvious and well-known (even beyond the design profession), other 'rules' remain obscure or vague. Under such circumstances one expects an increased uncertainty about exactly what the demands and expectations are in the first place. The perceived inaccessibility of information on these design 'rules' further exacerbates designer anxiety and provides ample opportunity for designers to find themselves 'guilty'.

In relation to trend dynamics, a designer's position (as well as that of the corporation or consumer) in the attention hierarchy can also become a great source of social anxiety. For some, missing a trend or being a late adopter (often referred to as 'laggard') can lead to great embarrassment. Some trend literature describe such missed opportunities as 'disasters' from which corporations do not easily recover. For instance, in relation to the previously mentioned trend shift towards 'flat design', much of the surrounding industry debate focussed on Microsoft as the new trend-setter and Apple as the unlikely follower. Nick Bilton (2013), writing for *The New York Times*, describes the reversal in corporate roles as follows:

> It might sound audacious to think that Microsoft, the arbiter of uncool, was at the forefront of design a few years ago. But it was. It turns out the company's decision to focus on 'flat design', a type of visual scheme where everything has a smooth and even look, was a few years ahead of the rest of the technology and user interface industry.

To be 'a few years ahead' of the curve is, of course, considered a tremendous achievement in design innovation, and a major compliment to Microsoft. Similarly, Austin Carr (2014) argues that the Windows 8 revolution generated so much interest because it reversed roles in the ongoing battle between Apple and Microsoft:

> Windows 8 could also transform the nature of the software giant's competition with home-run king Apple, potentially reversing a string of embarrassing defeats, especially in the mobile market. Even more improbably, Microsoft is building this comeback attempt not on its traditional strength – engineering – but on, of all things, design.

It is clear from such discussions that a corporation can redeem itself by being 'on trend', while being 'on the wrong side' of a trend can cause great corporate embarrassment.

It is understandable why being 'on trend' is a concern for many designers, and why the 'trendy designer' is such a common stereotype. For most designers, it is a matter of professional concern to be perceived as

appropriately aligned with 'the new'. It is, of course, important to acknowledge that not all designers engage with trends in this manner. For instance, some designers refuse to follow trends, as a means to exercise their individual creative agency. However, either response can be met with potential guilt. On the one hand, a designer can be guilty of being too concerned with trends, indicating a lack of individuality or originality. On the other hand, a designer can also be guilty of being out of touch with industry trends. Regardless of the designer's position, there is the possibility of being criticised for it, or simply feeling insecure or anxious about the possibility of 'guilt'. It is perhaps because of this possibility that sophisticated rhetorical justifications often accompany decisions to follow (or *not* follow) new visual aesthetic directions.

To summarise, the demands and expectations in any relationship with 'the new' implies the possibility of failing to meet those demands and expectations. In many cases, the adoption of a new trend is a response akin to the symbolic purging of shame or guilt, allowing for an elevated position in the culture-hierarchy. However, in many instances the motivation for following a trend needs to be aligned with the expectations and demands of the specific sector or scenario, thus opening up the possibility of other kinds of guilt and therefore the need for additional kinds of verbal rhetorical purification. The processes of ritual purification, often through victimisation and scapegoating, become rhetorical mechanisms for gaining advantage, either by projecting self-improvement or by passing blame. We seek, through 'purification', to convince ourselves and others of our renewed value and restored desirability. Insofar as the guilt-purification-redemption cycle, whether inwardly or outwardly directed, can be considered a rhetorical resource, this process (which includes scapegoating and victimization) is explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

Now that I have discussed the potential of framing design 'as drama' (both design practice in general and design trend dynamics in particular), I move on to consider Burke's dramatistic system for analysing discursive motivation. Insofar as design development can be considered as unfolding drama between various design stakeholders, the design discourse surrounding the design development may be investigated as dramatic text. Put otherwise, the way in which design actions are justified or motivated could be considered in Burkean dramatistic terms.

Dramatistic motivation of design action

Burke (PC:5) believes "all living things are critics" insofar as all organisms interpret the many signs around them. We are continuously interpreting and evaluating situations and actions. We evaluate the actions of others and know that our actions will be judged in return. By extension, we are under social obligation to justify – or at least *position* – both our past and future actions. We defend our actions when accounting to others, but also rationalise our decisions to ourselves. In other words, when we motivate, we assign *motives* to our acts.

The investigation of motives or acts of motivation, is, as mentioned previously, a central theme throughout Burke's work. Burke provides many partial (and somewhat confusing) definitions of 'motive' throughout his work. For instance, Burke (PC:19) explains how "motives are subdivisions in a larger frame of meanings"

and how "any explanation is an attempt at socialization, and socialization is a strategy; hence […] the assigning of motives is a matter of *appeal*". Simply put, to provide reasons for one's thoughts or actions and appeal to another's approval, is to provide *motives*.

At one point, Burke describes 'motives' as shorthand for *situations*.[25] When we ascribe motives, we are essentially describing situational factors taken into account when making a decision. For instance, how I choose to describe or frame the situation (the grounds on which I act) will differ from how someone else describes the 'same' situation. This is because, whenever we justify an action, we frame it by referring to the surrounding factors that impact the decision. We do not merely describe our actions, we describe the situational grounds on which we act; and thus the description of the situation frequently *becomes* our motive. The possibility of describing the situation in different ways, by emphasising different situational factors, allows for different motives.

Burke's notion of *motive* refers to the linguistically expressed grounds or reasons for both past or future actions. Motives are thus related to "associational linkage, of stimulus and response" (PC:29). In other words, an act (response), is framed or justified in situational terms (stimulus). However, from Burke's perspective, which emphasises human action and agency, the stimulus-response pattern should be seen as interpreted rather than automatic. Since a stimulus does not contain an *absolute* meaning, the meanings are negotiated as part of a social system. In other words, the interpretation of the propriety of a stimulus-response pattern is a socialised process (PC:32).

Linguistic acts of motivation, structured as stimulus-response statements, can also be identified in design scenarios. Throughout the design drama, different stakeholder behaviours, decisions and actions are continuously motivated as a means to ensure cooperation. This means that designers need to provide sound and persuasive grounds for their actions. As an example, one can imagine a scenario in which a designer is asked to substantiate a particular choice of colour. One possible motivation might be, "because this is my favourite colour". However, it is likely that such a justification will be ill-received. This is because designers are expected to substantiate their actions from 'outside' their personal preferences. A more appropriate justification might be, "because this colour has been shown to appeal to the target market" or "because this colour has been shown in research to elicit a desirable psychological response in the audience". As a design educator, I am deeply aware of the emphasis we place on students having to provide acceptable justifications for their design decisions. Whether a justification is a true reflection of the student's process is often less important than whether the justification comes across as reasonable and appropriate. Students need to learn the acceptable ways of speaking about their practice, which is clearly a rhetorical issue.

Various design theorists have investigated the issue of verbal design motivation. Nelson and Stolterman (2012), for instance, examine design motives in terms of what they refer to as the 'guarantor-of-design' or

[25] Burke (PLF:20), in reference to literary works, describes how an author is selective in how he or she describes the situation, and in such a way, the described situation becomes the reasons (or grounds) for actors (or agents) to act in particular ways.

'g.o.d'. Nelson and Stolterman (2012:205) identify a variety of strategies used by designers in their "attempt to find some solid and dependable base for justifying design actions".

> This yearning can be labeled as the search for a guarantor-of-design. It is a search that takes on many disguises and can be found in every design field. […] A guarantor-of-design constructs a means of measuring design judgments and decisions against some standard of 'good' or 'bad'. This allows the designer to move with confidence through the design process, lending legitimacy to the outcome at the same time (Nelson & Stolterman 2012:205).

As Nelson and Stolterman (2012), as well as Reyburn and Kirstein (2015), highlight, it is common for the guarantor to be situated 'outside' of the design actor, since this allows for the deference of personal responsibility or liability. Nelson and Stolterman (2012:205) suggest that 'guarantors of design' are frequently used either to shift, hide or "remove responsibility entirely". They explain how a designer may avoid responsibility by "restrict[ing] the degrees of freedom in the design process, by moving responsibility to something outside the control of the designer" (Nelson & Stolterman 2012:205). This can be achieved in a variety of ways; for instance, one "can move responsibility to the design process itself, or to other people, or to some other guiding principle" (Nelson & Stolterman 2012:205-6).

This method of shifting or 'moving' responsibility is essentially what Burke investigates through his theory of motives. To consider a designer's motives is to question what 'moves' the designer to 'action'. To frame an action by pointing towards something other than that action, is the basic mechanism of motivation. The process of linguistic motivation may be better understood through Burke's previously discussed concept, the *paradox of substance*. Burke (GM:40) explains how "if we quizzically scrutinize the expression 'the motivating of an act', we note that it implicitly contains the paradox of substance". He argues that "to consider an *act* in terms of its *grounds* is to consider it in terms of what it is not, namely in terms of motives that, in acting upon the active, would make it a passive" (GM:40). Otherwise put, the process of expressing motivation is somewhat paradoxical insofar as "an act is by definition active, whereas to be moved (or motivated) is by definition passive" (GM:40). Motive is thus a paradoxical concept, since it is at once an internally ascribed decision (action), yet is framed as an externally influenced response to a situation (motion). Framing an action as a 'reaction' blurs the boundary between personal agency and contextual contingency. To motivate action as a response to circumstances, or as an attempt to comply with expectations, are examples of this kind of framing.

It is common for discrepencies or conflicting stimuli to be revealed in the expression of motives. As an example, Burke (PC:30) refers to the rationalisation of an act under the motive of *duty:* "If we say that we perform an act under the motivation of duty, […] we generally use the term to indicate a complex stimulus-situation wherein certain stimuli calling for one kind of response are linked with certain stimuli calling for another kind of response". In a design context one can easily replace the term 'duty' with 'client preferences', 'budget' or 'deadline' to illustrate the tensions surrounding the design act and how it is motivated. One can imagine a common design scenario in which a budget-stimulus calls for a one colour printing response, whereas the designer's creative-stimulus may lean towards something more colourful. It is precisely because of such tensions that motives need to be continually negotiated. Furthermore, it is because

motives are scrutinised and evaluated that designers need to craft their motivations. This is, once again, clearly a rhetorical issue.

Burke wishes to emphasise how the motivational mechanism offers the potential for strategic or rhetorical justification of action. Insofar as the process of substantiation is also a process of substitution, it is a process of *strategic* (rhetorical) substitution. For Burke this also becomes an ethical issue, since verbal motivation enables us to frame actions in terms of motions, thus reducing agency and accountability. A motive is a powerful rhetorical resource that, when applied strategically, may serve as a shield from scrutiny. For instance, to merely respond, react to, or comply with what a situation demands is less risky than justifying action on personal volition.

Burke acknowledges that there are different kinds of motives (some being primitive or 'non-symbolic'),[26] but he is most interested in those related to symbolic action. Although, as Burke notes, it is impossible to ascertain the 'true' motives behind people's actions, there is much we can learn by paying attention to how they choose to frame a situation in their expression of motive. Not all motives are perceived as equally legitimate or appropriate which means that designers' chosen expressed motives tend to reveal the design community's ideological orientation. In other words, discursive justifications, as strategic/rhetorical selections of motive, can provide important clues regarding what is considered more (or less) appropriate or legitimate in design practice at a particular point in time.

While the rhetorical potential of motivational framing is explored in greater depth in the following chapter, the remainder of this chapter describes Burke's *dramatistic pentad*, as system for motive analysis. This system, or *grammar,* outlines a method for investigating the "basic forms of thought" as expressed when attributing motives (GM:xv). In other words, it outlines the various options available when framing action 'in terms of' something else.

Burke's grammar of motives

Burke identifies five available terms for his 'grammar of motives'. These five terms of the *dramatistic pentad* are thus derived from the domain of drama: *Act*, *Scene*, *Agent*, *Agency* and *Purpose*. According to Burke (GM:xv),

> Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself. But be that as it may, any complete statement about motives will offer *some kind of* answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose).

As a grammar, the pentad is meant to identify the underlying "generating principles" that structure expressions of motive.[27] Burke suggests that the relational placement of motives can be analysed by looking

[26] Such as the basic needs for sustenance and safety that motivate or drive behaviours.

[27] The purpose of pentadic analyses is to interrogate expressed motive and it is important to reiterate that the pentad "is intended as a way of analysing not actual human behaviour but only descriptions of behaviour" (Bizzell & Herzberg 2000:1296).

for discursive emphases of these terms as well as ratios between them. The first step in pentadic analysis involves identifying the dominant pentadic term (or related theme), in order to establish whether there is a clear motivational emphasis in the discourse. Burke explains how different schools of thought[28] can be distinguished in terms of how they emphasise or 'feature' one of the five terms, and subsequently develop a "vocabulary designed to allow this one term full expression […] with the other terms being comparatively slighted or being placed in the perspective of the featured term" (GM:127). The second step is to look for ratios which indicate conceptions of contingency and relational propriety. Before illustrating these ratios, I briefly outline each of the five terms and how they may be used in design motivations.

Act, quite clearly, refers to conscious or purposive action, or, in other words, *what* was done. Burke explains how the act can be seen in terms of 'form' or what he refers to as 'whatness' (Burke GM:228). It is possible to interpret the design of an artifact as the act. Insofar as I question motivations surrounding visual design aesthetics, I am interpreting the design 'act' as the selection and application of a formal visual aesthetic approach or direction.

Scene refers to the physical place or surrounding situation in which the act occurs. Burke (GM:12) elaborates on the various interpretations of scene as anything providing a "background character, such as 'society' or 'environment'" as well as "words for particular places, situations, or eras". He explains how "[t]erms for historical epochs, cultural movements, social institutions (such as 'Elizabethan period, 'romanticism', 'capitalism') are scenic, though often with an admixture of properties overlapping upon the areas covered by the term agent". Burke (GM:xvii) believes scenic framing greatly impacts how a philosophy will develop: "one thinker uses 'God' as his term for the ultimate ground or scene of human action, another uses 'nature,' a third uses 'environment,' or 'history,' or 'means of production'". Burke points out how the scene is a 'container' for the act, and that it can be conceptualised according to various *circumferences*. The chosen circumference of the *scene* will have corresponding effects on the interpretation of the other terms, in particular the *act* and the *agent*. A micro-scene may refer to the immediate physical environment surrounding the act, while a macro-scene could refer to the larger socio-political context of a specific historical era. From a design perspective, a micro-scene may, for instance, refer to the particular design studio environment (with its particular vision or ethos), whereas a macro-scene could describe the socio-cultural milieu within which a designer operates. Burke devotes much attention to explaining how motivations are frequently grounded in scenic terms. For Burke (GM:7), "scene is to act as implicit is to explicit". Scenes are thus frequently cited as dictating or determining actions and thus become the most common motivational 'grounds' for acts.

Agent refers to the individual or group executing the act, which could include "general or specific [words] for person, actor, character, individual, hero, villain, father, doctor, engineer, but also […] words for the motivational properties of agents, such as 'drives', 'instincts', 'states of mind'"(GM:20). The category of agent can be extended to include co-agents and counter-agents in a situation, as well as "collective words for

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[28] To illustrate, Burke couples each pentadic element to a philosophical school of thought. However, he has been criticised for his generalised or over-simplified explorations of the major philosophic schools. Since these examples may cause some confusion, I have chosen not to focus on them here.

agent, such as nation [and] group". For Burke, the agent is, like the act, contained by the scene and should therefore not be seen as a 'container' for an act. Burke (GM:174) believes an emphasis on the "agent as *creator*, accounts for the strong idealistic bias in aesthetic theories". From a design perspective, a motive based on the agent tends to emphasise the designer's creative role in the act. Agent-based motives could, for instance, be particularly appealing in instances where celebrity designers or studios are involved, where a high degree of creative authorship is celebrated.

A motivational appeal via *Agency* emphasises the means, tools or instruments used to perform or accomplish the act. Agency, in other words, describes any 'means to an end' and could also include anything that describes *how* an act is performed.[29] Almost any aspect that contributes to the act could be seen in terms of agency, for example: agency is not only the tool itself, but the hand that operates the tool, or the human brain that enables the movement of the hand (agent), even the educational system that develops the method or competency to use the tool (scene), and so on (GM:xxi). In the context of this study, there are different ways in which design can be seen in terms of *agency*. Firstly, any design product is a technology, instrument or tool; in essence, it is something to be used as a means to an end. But secondly, design *agencies* could also include those technologies, tools and instruments used during the design process; that is, as the means with which to accomplish the design task. Such common *agencies* could include established design methods, technological platforms, design software applications, media channels, and so on.

Purpose refers to the stated reasons for performing an act, or in other words, the explanation of *why* an act was performed. If agency is considered the 'means', then purpose is the 'ends'. Because it is possible to confuse purpose with motive in general, it is important to reiterate that the pentadic element of purpose refers to the purpose as *expressed* in the rhetorical justification, which may or may not reflect actual motive. Burke explains how the concept of purpose is most easily dissolved amongst the other terms, possibly because it tends to survive implicitly as the 'ultimate grounds' for the act. This is also true in design contexts, where ultimate purpose tends to underpin all other motivations. For instance, even if a designer cites target market preferences as grounds for a particular aesthetic response, there is an implicit understanding that this response serves a greater purpose, such as, to increase market share or client profit. However, it is perhaps more interesting to pay attention to instances where one finds explicit appeals to 'purpose' without reference to other contextual factors. The well-known design aphorism 'form *(act)* follows function *(purpose)*' may be considered a prime example of a purpose-emphasis that takes on an abstract, almost 'mystical'[30] quality. A more in-depth consideration of the common emphasis on 'purpose' in design discourse is explored in the following chapter.

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[29] At some point Burke ponders whether an additional element, *attitude*, would be a useful addition to the pentad, to distinguish means from manner. He explains, "[t]o build something with a hammer would involve and instrument, or 'agency'; to build with diligence would involve an 'attitude', a 'how'" (GM:443). However, Burke finds ways of including 'attitude' as aspects of the other terms.

[30] Burke couples a pentadic emphasis on *purpose* with the philosophy of Mysticism, insofar as it seeks essential, cosmic or universal purpose.

Burke acknowledges the almost pedestrian simplicity of the five terms, but argues that as generating principle it provides a "kind of simplicity that can be developed into considerable complexity, and yet can be discovered beneath its elaborations" (GM:xvi). Burke also acknowledges the fluid nature of the terms, explaining how this, in principle, enables the linguistic transformation, reinterpretation or new placement of motives. Burke thus intends to "study and clarify the resources of ambiguity" since ambiguity is essential for transformations to take place (GM:xix). The five terms overlap substantially and "any of the terms may be seen in terms of any of the others" (GM:127). It is precisely this fluid metaphorical process, of framing something 'in terms of' something else, which Burke wishes to elucidate. The same act can be described in a myriad of ways, and it is in this choice of perspective that hints about ideological orientation can be found. Burke illustrates how a single concept can be viewed in multiple terms:

> War may be treated as an Agency, insofar as it is a means to an end; as a collective Act, subdivisible into many individual acts; as a Purpose, in schemes proclaiming a cult of war. For the man inducted into the army, war is a Scene, a situation that motivates the nature of his training; and in mythologies war is an Agent, or perhaps better a super-agent, in the figure of the war god (Burke GM:xx).

Similarly, there is a certain ambiguity to 'design' as a concept, allowing for various interpretations. It is perhaps for this reason that the application of the five pentadic terms to discussions of design tends to lead to confusion. For instance, the 'design act' can be interpreted as the designer's actions, or can be seen as the product itself, insofar as it 'acts' upon an audience. From various perspectives, the 'design agent' may be the designer, the client or even the user. It is also increasingly common in design discourse to speak about 'design' as agent, for example, "design as agent for social change".[31] 'Design agency', in addition to referring to the design company or studio, could also refer to the tools and technologies used in the design process. Design products can also be interpreted as agencies, insofar as they are tools that enable other acts. It is also worth noting how 'design purpose' may be interpreted differently depending on who expresses it: the client's purpose may be to increase market share and profit, while the user may find purpose in utilitarian functionality or in the symbolic value of possessing the design product.

Design trends can also be approached from various angles or in terms of various 'scenic circumferences'. For instance, how we investigate trends and trend discourse will depend on whether we are approaching the issue from the perspective of the designer, consumer, client, or larger cultural milieu. Since many diverse agents participate or have a stake in the design act, it is impossible to fix a pentadic term to a particular motivational locus.

[31] This discourse is situated within the areas of social design and design activism.

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Burke suggests that motives are frequently expressed in relational terms, which can be analysed as *pentadic ratios*.[32] The ratios "suggest a relationship of propriety, suitability, or requirement among the elements" (Foss *et al* 2002:202). For instance, the *scene-act* ratio is common in assigning motive based on socio-cultural propriety in a given setting: a church setting calls for certain kinds of behaviour; "[p]raying, for example, is proper in the scene, while doing cartwheels is not" (Foss *et al* 2002:202). It is important to point out that the ratios are not intended for explaining "thoroughly causal relationships", but should rather be interpreted in terms of the rhetorical resources of selection (GM:18). In other words, whether the scene really did influence or dictate the act is not of relevance in pentadic analysis, but rather whether the scene has been selected as justification (or prescription) for the act.

Burke suggests that motivations can be ascribed in past-oriented deterministic placements as well as future-oriented hortatory placements. For instance, a *scene-act* ratio can be "applied deterministically in statements that a certain policy *had* to be adopted in a certain situation, or […] applied in hortatory statements to the effect that a certain policy *should be* adopted in conformity with the situation" (GM:13). In other words, the past-oriented deterministic position justifies why something *had* to take place or be a certain way, while a future-oriented hortatory position motivates why something *should* take place or be a certain way.

A few examples of ratios might prove instructive at this point. *Scene-act* and *scene-agent* ratios are common resources in drama and literature, but also ubiquitous in motivational assumptions surrounding real life situations (GM:11). In example, a scene-agent ratio may indicate a position towards action which sees the agent as a product of the environment. Another similar example Burke refers to is the *scene-act* ratio employed by Behaviorists, who attribute action (act) to environmental factors (scene). As mentioned previously, Burke considers scene-driven motivations as highly effective in deflecting attention away from personal accountability. He continuously emphasises how "one may deflect attention from the criticism of personal motives by deriving an act or attitude not from traits of the agent but from the nature of the situation" (GM:17). I have already pointed out how designers frequently use such motivational tactics, by pointing towards an external 'g.o.d' (guarantor of design).

While rhetorically expressed motives often tend to de-emphasise the agent as a means to evade responsibility, in instances where the agent wishes to claim a personal role in an act, to gain credit or praise, an *agent-act* ratio could naturally be exploited. This is often the case in fine art contexts, and certain kinds of architecture and design, where individual authorship, creativity and personal expression are highly valued. As mentioned previously, the design and advertising award scheme arena serves to celebrate the achievements of design 'agents' (individual designers and design companies), offering a means to boost one's status in the

[32] Burke (GM:127) explains how this relationship could be expressed "in temporal terms by saying that the term selected as ancestor 'came first'; and in timeless or logical terms we could say that the term selected is the 'essential', 'basic', 'logically prior' or 'ultimate' term, or the 'term of terms'". Burke initially suggests that the five pentadic terms allow for ten ratios, but he acknowledges throughout that many of the ratios can be inverted to offer alternate interpretations.

industry. The objects of 'high design' as identified by Julier (2008) are often justified in relation to the celebrity designer agent as primary source of value.

Burke believes "it is sometimes useful to differentiate the ratios by the order of the terms. For instance, by *scene-act* ratio one would refer to the effect that a scene has upon an act, and by an 'act-scene ratio' one would refer to the effect that an act has upon the scene" (GM:443). The *act-agent* relationship "more strongly suggests a temporal or sequential relationship than a purely positional or geometric one" (GM:16). Here the agent is not influenced by his environment (scene), but rather by his own actions. In such a way the agent is not only the "author of his acts" but "his acts can make him or remake him in accordance with their nature" (GM:16). The common idea that our habits come to define us is applicable here.[33]

The *act-agency* ratio may be used to describe how particular acts require particular means or tools in their enactment. This is our common understanding of tools and instruments, as serving the act. However, the inverted *agency-act* ratio can be identified whenever "the means selected for carrying out an act confine and restrict it in particular ways" (Foss *et al* 2002:203). In design circles one frequently finds concerns expressed in terms of an *agency-act* ratio when platforms, media channels or software applications are perceived as dictating or constraining design responses. This critique also relates to current concerns about how technology shapes behaviour. In such critiques, of greater interest is the *agency-purpose* ratio, whereby tools are seen as dictating how we find meaning or higher purpose.

Needless to say, to outline the various possible motivations of design action would be a massive undertaking, and it is not my aim to present all options here. For the purpose of this study, it is important merely to understand that the multiplicity of framing possibilities allows for rhetorical or strategic justification. The extent to which certain kinds of motives are considered more appropriate or persuasive than others is explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

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Although the pentad is often used as a tool for analysing particular discursive texts, I believe a rigid or overly systematic use of the pentadic method is less useful in the context of this study. Since every argument can be interpreted in many different ways, the task of systematic analysis easily becomes unmanageable.[34] However, I do believe there is value to be found in the dramatistic pentad, if used less rigidly, as inspiration rather than method. For Burke, the beauty of the dramatistic pentad lies in its ability to help us focus on a particular motivational perspective, while "permitting us to appreciate its scope and complexity" (Burke GM:xxiii). Hübler (2005) believes Burke's "tendency to use a wide scope" and to use the "pentadic terminology to characterize large bodies of texts or broad philosophical perspectives" is instructive. For Hübler this

[33] Burke (RR:189) refers to the Aristotelian concept of *hexis, habitus* here to describe the way in which a person may develop a particular disposition through action.

[34] One finds a fair amount of debate surrounding the validity and usefulness of Burke's pentadic method. As mentioned previously, attempting to uncover all the possible pentadic relationships in a particular scenario or discursive text may lead to confusion; an inevitable going in circles. Burke (GM:19) acknowledges this 'circular possibility' inherent in the pentadic method; insofar as the terms all act upon each other, it is difficult to establish where 'transformations' begin or end.

indicates that the pentad was not originally intended for analysing individual arguments (although this has been both the most common, and most frequently criticised, usage). In broad terms, the dramatistic pentad may assist in identifying overarching patterns in how action is verbally substantiated. In the context of this study, these patterns may reveal clues about design philosophies or dominant conceptions of 'good' design, as well as how these conceptions change over time.

The design theorist, Richard Buchanan has recognised this potential of Burke's 'grammar' for design studies. As mentioned previously, Buchanan is one of the few design theorists to acknowledge the potential value of Burke's theories. The most notable reference is found in Buchanan's (2001a) 'generative principles' for design, where he explores the various underlying assumptions that inform conceptions of design. Although he acknowledges the inspiration he found in Burke's pentad, he adapts the method quite substantially. His system does not aim to uncover 'motives' as expressed in discourse, but rather aims to identify the perceived 'causes' of design.[35] While Buchanan (2001a:83) does not offer an in-depth application of his system, he does provide suggestions on how we might interpret it: "[s]ome will find the cause of design in the action of the individual designer. Others will find the cause in underlying natural and social forces or in transcendent ideas and cultural ideals". These 'causes' may be linked to Burke's notion of 'agent', 'scene' and 'purpose' respectively. But Buchanan, like Burke, emphasises the real value of such a system in distinguishing conceptual relations:

> The generative principles that we have identified are seldom found in pure expression in the work of scholars or designers. Most often they are combined in what Kenneth Burke would call 'ratios' and 'stratagems' of inquiry. For example, one may explore the relationship (ratio) of *agent and cultural ideals* in order to investigate how personal values are expressions of collective cultural values. Or, one may explore the ratio of *agent to underlying forces* and processes in order to investigate cognitive processes of decision-making in design practice. Indeed, there is no limit to the strategies of design thinking that come from the changing ratios of the generative principles, and it would be a project in itself to demonstrate the diversity of ideas and methods that emerge in design thinking from such strategies of combination and synthesis (Buchanan 2001a:83).

Buchanan proceeds to praise those "who resist the reduction of design to a single cause and look, instead, to the pluralism of the ecology of culture, seeking the integration of multiple causes that are revealed in our interactions with each other and with our environment". It is thus clear that Buchanan's (2001a:83) aim, to work towards "a vision of design that embraces the complexity of causation […] by investigating more carefully the presuppositions that underlie our beliefs" is closely aligned to Burke's dialectical approach. As Crusius (1986:23) explains, "the Pentad is not a contribution to rhetorical invention, toward finding something to say to realize one's purpose. Rather Burke dealt with it explicitly as a contribution to dialectic, a way to question assertions about motive".

[35] Elsewhere Buchanan (2001b) draws on Aristotle's four causes in his general investigation of design and rhetoric. In this particular article, Buchanan (2001a) reduces and adapts the number of pentadic terms (with only 'Agent' remaining the same) and he constructs his four 'generative principles' along two main branches, namely the 'phenomenological' and the 'ontic'. Under phenomenological processes, Buchanan identifies two variations, namely "agent" and "experience and environment" (which could be linked to Burke's *scene*), and under ontic conditions, "underlying forces" (also related to *scene*) and "transcendent ideas" (which could be linked to Burke's *purpose*).

Broadly speaking, dramatistic analysis encourages the identification of emphasised and de-emphasised positions and therefore provides clues about underlying ideological values (beliefs about what 'good' design should be). By more thoroughly investigating how we describe, justify, promote or defend new aesthetic design directions, we may develop a broader (meta) perspective on trend rhetorics.

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I have argued throughout this chapter that a Burkean perspective on the 'drama of design relations', forms a valuable part of a meta-rhetorical investigation into design trends. By considering the relational (social, cultural and political) context of design practice, one can begin to develop an understanding of the factors that influence rhetorical design motivation as well as trend dynamics. Since design trends are highly mediated meta-cultural products their value needs to be understood in relational terms. In other words, social-symbolic value or 'cultural capital' more significantly impacts design trend dynamics and rhetorics than functional use value.

Designers are subject to complex sociological demands and expectations as part of their everyday practice. One of these demands is to produce value in the 'dramatic economy of the new', where the creation and consumption of 'the new' are linked to socio-cultural hierarchies. In other words, designers are expected to produce innovative work and to be ahead of the curve when it comes to design trends (either as trend-setters or early-adopters). Failure to meet the demands of 'the new' may lead to shame and embarrassment, but ongoing trend dynamics provide opportunities for 'symbolic purging' and renewed status in the design culture hierarchy.

As part of the relational design drama, where decisions are negotiated with various stakeholders, designers also experience socio-cultural demands to provide appropriate motives or legitimate grounds for their actions. As a means to interrogate these motives I introduced Burke's *dramatistic pentad,* explaining how various emphases on the five terms derived from drama (*act, scene, agent, agency* and *purpose*) may provide clues about accepted motivations of 'good design' practice.

While I have hinted at the rhetorical strategies employed within the design drama throughout this chapter, the following chapter considers these strategies in greater depth. As mentioned previously, whereas this chapter explored design practice and trend dynamics, as influenced by the sociological design drama, the following chapter interrogates the strategic or rhetorical usage of visual and verbal design action, from the perspective of Burkean rhetorical theory.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RHETORICAL DESIGN SITUATION

This chapter elaborates on how the dramatistic demands or expectations found in the design drama, as explained in the previous chapter, are satisfied through strategic or rhetorical design action. Both the visual and verbal rhetorical facets of design action, as related to trend dynamics, are explored here. Insofar as visual form and style contribute to strategic communication, it should be considered rhetorically significant. Furthermore, the verbal strategies used to legitimate visual design action (or, in other words, the arguments made to justify or rationalise visual form) are also rhetorical. As mentioned previously, all decisions including the creation or adoption of new aesthetic design directions need to be routinely justified as part of the design process. Some design motives are considered more appropriate or legitimate than others, thus making them more rhetorically persuasive when offered as justification for 'the new'. Designers are therefore socialised to utilise powerful rhetorical design conventions, knowing that they may be criticised for deviating from these codes.

However, designers may also be criticised if their selected discursive rationales come across as false or insincere. As mentioned at the start of this study, the criticism directed at contemporary trend dynamics often features an attack on the perceived 'empty' or 'inflated' rhetorics that accompany and justify the creation of 'the new'. From this perspective, rhetorical design strategies are considered problematic in supporting and rationalising unsustainable production and consumption behaviours. In such instances, there is a perceived discrepancy between 'real' and expressed design motives. In other words, rhetorical design justifications appear as mystifying façades to conceal dubious marketing motives.

This chapter addresses the above issues via a Burkean rhetorical perspective on design practice and design trend dynamics. While Burke's dialectical and dramatistic perspectives shed light onto the underlying conditions that enable rhetorical design practice and design trend dynamics, the theory explored here offers ways of thinking about the strategic and persuasive potential of design arguments. As part of the Burkean meta-rhetorical approach proposed in this study, this chapter presents some of Burke's ideas most commonly classified as 'rhetorical theory'. This chapter thus features some of the ideas and terminologies Burke has become most well-known for as a rhetorical theorist.

The first part of this chapter provides a brief contextual background on Burke's approach to rhetoric as well as the application of rhetorical theory in design contexts. I then offer an overview of visual and verbal design rhetoric, as related to formal codes and conventions that are satisfied to produce persuasive effects. I also highlight here how visual and verbal rhetorics are interconnected modes of translation that mutually support each other in the design scenario. The third part of the chapter considers Burke's emphasis on 'identification' as a key term in understanding rhetorical communication. I argue how this emphasis is useful in the interrogation of rhetorical design practice, which is concerned with how people identify with design messages, products or brand identities. I then move on to explain how Burke's ideas surrounding rhetorical mystification – or how 'mystery' and 'magic' enable persuasion in powerful ways – can shed light on design

and trend rhetorics. In the fifth section of the chapter I explore the rhetorical tendencies in discursive design justification or rationalisation, by elaborating on Burke's dramatistic 'grammar of motives' introduced in the previous chapter. The aim here is to illustrate the potential of Burke's 'pentad' for identifying motivational pieties or proprieties. Lastly, this chapter considers Burke's notion of the 'terministic screen' as a useful concept for understanding the overall process of rhetorical framing and for developing more critical perspectives on framing practices.

Background

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Burke does not offer a neat set of tools for rhetorical composition or invention, but rather a vocabulary for developing an interpretive perspective that can be classified as a rhetorical hermeneutic. Burke describes his approach to rhetoric, in its broad and abstract focus, as a "philosophy of rhetoric" (RM:xv). He is therefore not that interested in rhetorical figures and tropes; instead, he emphasises the underlying conditions and broader implications of rhetorical action. Burke sees rhetoric as "rooted in an essential function of language itself", as the process of, through symbolic means, inducing "cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (RM:43).[1] This broad and more positive definition clearly supports Burke's aim to rediscover the value of rhetorical theory and to extend its range beyond the traditional boundaries of verbal (predominantly political and judicial) argumentation.[2]

Burke's rhetoric and dialectics are two 'modes' of inquiry that are intimately interconnected and hard to separate. He explains how "nothing is more rhetorical in nature than a deliberation as to what is too much or too little, too early or too late; in such controversies, rhetoricians are forever 'proving opposites'" (RM:45). Burke sees rhetoric and dialectic as verbal counterparts, but he acknowledges that they are 'modes' used toward different ends. Burke describes dialectics, as developed in his 'grammar', as at peace, while rhetoric is concerned with creating and resolving conflict. Otherwise put, whereas Burkean dialectics can be considered disinterested in its investigation, rhetoric is employed towards specific purposes (Crusius 1986:24). This relates to Sandywell's (2011:519) useful description of 'rhetoric(s)' as "situated social strategies of/for signification". It is thus possible to interpret the main difference between these two interpretive 'modes' as follows: whereas dialectic considers broader symbolic dynamics, rhetoric concerns particular symbolic strategies and tactics in context.

As mentioned previously, the application of rhetorical theory to analysing visual texts is a fairly recent development, with Burke considered a forerunner in this area (Helmers 2004:64). It was only in the 1970s that visual images became widely accepted as relevant to the study of rhetoric (Foss 2005:141). Foss

[1] Burke's position on rhetoric is echoed by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's (1970:103) "symbolic behaviour theory" which assumes "man is a rhetorical being because he is a symbol-using or signifying creature capable of influencing and being influenced because of his capacity for linguistic and semantic responses".
[2] As mentioned previously, Burke wishes to 'reclaim' rhetoric in those disciplines that study implicitly rhetorical human relations, such as psychology, anthropology and sociology. Burke (RM:xiii) argues that since the study of rhetoric became obscure and its terms fell into disuse, these other social science disciplines developed new terms for what were essentially rhetorical concepts. Although these disciplines do not overtly mention 'rhetoric' as a useful theoretical perspective, they offer valuable insights on what Burke terms the 'New Rhetoric' (RM:43).

(2005:142) explains how images in the form of “advertisements, television, film, architecture and interior design and dress constitute a major part of the rhetorical environment” since these media have a similar “significance for contemporary culture than speeches once did”. Foss (2005:143) argues that the study of visual rhetoric is highly important because certain aspects of human experience are exclusively communicated through the visual.

Various design authors (Bonsiepe 1999; Buchanan 1985, Ehses 1988, Kinross 1985; Lupton 1988) have considered the way in which design products could be seen as rhetorical ‘arguments’ and have argued for the value of rhetorical approaches to understanding design. According to Richard Buchanan (1985:22) “[t]he skillful practice of design involves a skillful practice of rhetoric”. This rhetorical practice is present throughout the design process, “not only in formulating the thought or plan of a product, through all of the activities of verbal invention and persuasion that go on between designers, managers, and so forth, but also in persuasively presenting and declaring that thought in products” (Buchanan 1985:22). Inspired by Buchanan, many of the above authors employ rhetorical theory in explaining how design products function via how they communicate to users. This approach, to analyse the design product itself from a rhetorical perspective, has become the dominant usage of rhetorical theory for design. While this is a valuable perspective, design enquiries into rhetorical matters seem to neglect the verbal argumentation that forms a major part of the design process. It is also worth reiterating that rhetorical inquiries into design practice or discourse rarely feature references to Burkean theory.[3] The particularly Burkean meta-rhetorical approach as proposed in this study provides a means to consider both visual and verbal rhetorical processes as interconnected aspects of design action.

Visual and verbal design rhetoric

Both visual and verbal design actions could be considered rhetorical insofar as they are symbolic expressions aimed at persuasion, and at influencing and shaping attitudes. Visually, the design aesthetic of a product is meant to influence how people feel about or relate to a product. Discursively, verbal design rhetorics also influence attitudes towards design products and thus play a major part in the design process; to influence reception of the product and perceptions of those who created it. It is possible to argue that these visual/verbal rhetorical appeals are combined in shaping attitudes towards new design trends. For Burke shaping *attitude* is a central concern of rhetoric. He explains how “rhetoric is the use of devices that arouse in the audience the attitudes that lead to corresponding responses in the practical realm, such as voting, purchasing, or being persuaded to favor some moral judgments or policies rather than others” (ATH:414). Rhetoric is thus used to guide people’s responses in specific directions when different options are available to them.

As mentioned previously, Lanham (2006) finds rhetoric useful in navigating our current ‘attention economy’. He explains how “the more information we have, the more we need filters, and one of the most powerful

[3] Notable exceptions are Richard Buchanan and Prasad Boradkar, who find some inspiration in Burke’s dialectical-rhetorical approach, but they do not elaborate on Burke’s theory in great depth.

filters we have is the filtration of style" (Lanham 2006:19). While we may strive for 'pure' or 'objective' information, we see an increasing awareness of "stylistic filtration [… or] as it has traditionally been called in Western culture, rhetoric" (Lanham 2006:19). Designers, as highly concerned with the functional aspects of visual style, can be interpreted as a specific class of visual rhetoricians or 'attention economists'. The connection between rhetoric and style is, of course, well-established. Rhetoric is highly concerned with form of various kinds, whether verbal or visual. Style relates to the formal manner in which content is expressed, visually or verbally. In other words, both rhetoric and style are concerned with the 'packaging' of messages. Different expressions or packagings of the 'same' content, may lead to vastly different results. As Lanham (2006:18) explains,

> The design of a product invites us to attend to it in a particular way, to pay a certain type of attention to it. Design tells us not about stuff *per se* but what we think about stuff. It is the interface where the stuff we dig out of the earth's crust meets a fully human reality of feelings, attitudes, and ambitions. The role of design in product development is beginning to reflect an awareness of this interface.

Design as rhetoric thus relates to how we receive design products: *how* we pay attention to them as well as *whether* we pay attention to them in the first place.

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Both visual and verbal rhetoric can be evaluated in terms of 'form', which Burke describes as the "creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite" (CS:31). In other words, formal eloquence is achieved when a rhetorical context creates an expectation and the formal quality of the 'argument' satisfies that expectation. It is possible to argue that design eloquence works similarly. According to Katrin Wellmann (2008:251), the 'look-and-feel' of a design product, makes an impression on a viewer through creating a certain atmosphere. This atmosphere is evaluated in terms of the viewer's "expectations, needs, and experiences. If the atmosphere largely tallies with the expectation, it is perceived as harmonious, comfortable, and appropriate" (Wellmann 2008:251). For instance, sometimes a design product aesthetic is considered eloquent if it is unobtrusive or 'invisible', while at other times it may be considered eloquent if it provokes or challenges the norm. The context and intended purpose of the design artefact thus influences expectations, which either would or would not then be satisfied through form.

Eloquence thus relates to formal conventions or accepted codes of communicative propriety. This relates to Burke's analogy between stylistic form and a game's purposes and limitations as defined by its rules (RR:40). The rules of the game dictate that some formal or stylistic applications are considered more appropriate for particular scenarios than others. It is worth noting that rhetorical perspectives on design often emphasise the notions of stylistic convention (Kostelnick 2004) and propriety (Buchanan 1985; Ehses 1988). According to Hanno Ehses (1988:6), a rhetorical approach in design follows a "functional, aesthetic/ethical imperative" which "accepts the challenge to make designs that are conceptually, visually, and functionally appropriate for particular clients and audiences in particular environments". Visual rhetoric, style, convention and propriety are thus linked in design practice and discourse. It is important to acknowledge that design expectations may

differ between different stakeholders. Furthermore, clients and designers often disagree on what the intended audience or target market expectations may be. To resolve such differences, rhetorical negotiation plays a key part in the design process.

Although stylistic codes and conventions are powerful factors impacting design decisions, these codes are not entirely stable and can be challenged. In different creative contexts or design industries there are varying degrees of tolerance, and even encouragement, of unconventional thinking. It is possible to argue that creative design industries are, in principle, more open to experimentation and rule-breaking. However, it may be more accurate to interpret such 'rule-breaking' in design contexts as 'alternative rule-making', insofar as all "[c]reative problem-solving relies on rules and constraints" (Venter 2017:129). As Morné Venter (2017:129) points out, the relationship between creativity and rule-following is somewhat paradoxical. He explains how "[r]estrictive rules can easily inhibit creative problem-solving activities but rules also provide a means to structure creative problem-solving for surprising output". Venter (2017:130) argues that it is "up to the creative problem-solver to discover or choose the rule set informing the creative problem-solving process". In other words, the creative designer does not necessarily 'break' rules, but rather discovers or invents the rules for a particular scenario. This enables the designer to produce creative work and evaluate the success of the work in a particular context.

It is important to remember that the reasons for rejecting a design convention, breaking the rules, or making new rules are still judged in terms of motivational propriety. Whenever a proposal for deviating from stylistic convention is presented, a justification or rationalisation of motives (implied or overtly expressed) is required, with not all motives perceived as equally legitimate. The extent to which discursive motivational propriety becomes a rhetorical issue, is explored in greater depth shortly. For now I wish to reiterate the significance of rhetorical conventions as expectations to be satisfied in order to achieve communicative eloquence and persuasion.

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In order to communicate persuasively, both visually and verbally, designers need to be skilled in the process of symbolic translation. As mentioned previously, Tomes, Oates and Armstrong (1998) explain how the design process can be characterised by two interconnected modes of symbolic translation: from verbal to visual (solving the brief – visual rhetoric) and from visual to verbal (presenting a rationale of the solution – discursive rhetoric). Difficulties tend to arise in this translation process since there is, quite simply, no direct visual, stylistic way in which to solve a verbal brief or represent a verbal argument and *vice versa*. As Tomes *et al* (1998:128) point out "the process of design routinely accomplishes the theoretically daunting task of translating meanings between two supposedly incommensurate languages; the visual and the verbal". The designer is confronted with a myriad of interpretive and translation possibilities.[4]

[4] Richard Buchanan (1995:24; 1992:17; 2001b:194) refers to this quality as the indeterminate nature of design, whereby responses to design problems are not objectively 'found' but rather subjectively 'invented'.

This relates back to the inevitable ambiguity of symbol usage, expressed by Burke in the notion of *paradox of substance*. Burke is keen to point out how language is a powerful rhetorical resource precisely because of this ambiguity. However, while all symbols are ambiguous, Burke acknowledges different levels or degrees of possible conceptual clarity. Burke (1955:266) argues that verbal or linguistic symbol systems differ from other symbol systems (such as visual or musical) insofar as "the individual word has a kind of conceptual clarity not found in individual notes, colors, lines, motions, and the like (except in so far as these are in effect words, as with the conventionalized doctrinal representations in some traditional ritual dance)". In other words, visual design and stylistic symbolic actions may be considered even more ambiguous in how they allow for fluid and subjective interpretation. However, as Burke also points out, non-verbal symbols may become ritualised and come to represent conventional meanings, as does verbal language. This is how one can come to speak of style as 'visual language', insofar as particular visual idioms come to embody more or less clear meanings.

While there may be a level of logical visual connotation (on an immediate visceral level), the rhetoric of visual style functions through discursive, socio-cultural reinforcement. Until a new style becomes an established convention, verbal justification of its use is frequently required. Furthermore, while one group (i.e. designers) may agree on the meaning of a particular visual style, this meaning may not necessarily be obvious to other stakeholders (i.e. clients). In other words, visual styles do not contain perfectly clear meanings and they often require verbal support in order to reinforce meaning. This means that when an aesthetic direction is selected and applied in a design scenario, the decision very often needs to be justified. This verbal legitimation, or rationale, again translates from the visual back into the verbal. This translation process is also an important part of the design process. As Tonkinwise (2015) explains "[d]esigners make, but to make any thing, you have to make people do things. That second form of making is no less designing". The way in which designers get various stakeholders to see an idea through to completion is largely through persuasive verbal communication; also known as the art of 'the pitch'.

However, just as the verbal-visual translation process cannot occur 'directly', the translation from visual to verbal is also characterised by conversion discrepencies. In other words, the indeterminate meaning of visual aesthetics allows for a variety of rhetorical explanations. For instance, a designer may legitimate the same visual style in a myriad of ways, depending on who the designer wishes to persuade. The way in which visual stylistic symbolism remains open to interpretation can thus be used as a rhetorical resource. It is not uncommon for designers to exploit this possibility, nor is it uncommon for clients to be suspicious of the malleable rationales of designers.

There is thus an inherent problem with the provision of verbal rationales. Design products need to prove that they can communicate directly, since verbal justifications cannot accompany the product out in the 'real world'. As Tomes *et al* (1998:136) point out, in the visual-verbal negotiations that form part of the design process, there is usually a point in the process where the design product needs to 'speak' for itself. Somewhere in the design process, a silent test is required in which the visual design product convinces everyone that it fulfils its communication purpose. Tomes *et al* (1998:136) explain:

> In practice design must work unaided. For this reason, there are interludes throughout the development of a design in which it is displayed without comment or explication. The intention is that the observer (fellow designer or client) should experience the design as would its intended public and so be able to provide a verbal report on that experience. The test, in other words, is of whether the design engages as intended with the public's sense of the verbal meaning of the visual. For this to work, it is important that the observer does not know, or is able to clear from his or her mind, the (verbal) rationale behind the design.

From this perspective, the need for verbal justification indicates a kind of communicative failure. If verbal argumentation is required to reinforce meaning or assert the viability of a chosen design direction, there may be a problem with how the design itself communicates. This may also contribute to client concerns whenever rationales come across as too elaborate or laboured.

However, while the directly communicative (discursively unsupported) design product may seem like the ideal, there are a number of reasons why this expectation is unrealistic. Consensus in design interpretation is not easily achieved, owing in part to the abstract and highly subjective nature of symbolic meaning and taste. Furthermore, designers and clients frequently harbor conflicting opinions about target market preferences and future reception. These ideas need to be negotiated tactfully, especially since both parties may believe they understand the intended audience better, albeit from different perspectives (the designer as communication expert; the client as expert in the particular product or service offering). Under these conditions, verbal design justifications remain a necessary part of the design process, and therefore play an important part in justifying the adoption of the rhetoric of any particular design trend.

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To consider design trends from a meta-rhetorical perspective is to consider them primarily as 'symbolic products' that form part of a highly mediated 'culture of design'. As argued previously, new trends require discursive 'constitution' and communal valorisation in order to gain currency. Such a conception of design trends has much in common with the notion of 'taste regimes', as described by Zeynep Arsel and Jonathan Bean (2012:900). Arsel and Bean (2012:900) define a 'taste regime' as

> a discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates the aesthetics of practice in a culture of consumption. A taste regime may be articulated by a singular, centralized authority such as an influential magazine or blog, be disseminated by a transmedia brand […], or emerge from a loosely linked network of media related by an aesthetic sensibility.

They further explain how a taste regime "propagates a shared understanding of aesthetic order that shapes the ways people use objects and deploy the meanings associated with the material" (Arsel & Bean 2012:900). The way in which shared understandings of aesthetic orders may be deployed through consumption or possession is clearly an issue of identity alignment. A consumer or user 'designs' their identity through a series of strategic alignments.

Visual rhetorical strategies, as well as the verbal rhetorical statements about the visual, are utilised in the construction and alignment of identity. Indeed, any discussion of the strategic role of visual aesthetics or

style in design is essentially a discussion of identity. It is for this reason that Burke's particular approach to rhetoric, with an emphasis on *identification*, is so useful for studies of visual design.

Identity and identification

Burke's concept of *identification* is central to his theory of rhetoric. For Burke (1951:203), "[t]he key term for the old rhetoric was 'persuasion'[5] and its stress was upon deliberate design. The key term for the 'new' rhetoric would be 'identification', which can include a partially 'unconscious' factor in appeal". Burke (RM:20) explains, "A is not identical with his colleague B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so".

As mentioned previously, Burke's theory of rhetoric as *identification* expands the scope of rhetorical inquiry, encouraging the interrogation of less obvious ways in which human behaviour may be considered rhetorical. This perspective allows for the exploration of intermediate areas of expression – between aimless utterance and deliberate argument – that are not overtly persuasive, but nonetheless of rhetorical concern (RM:xiii). For Burke (RM:xiv), rhetoric can range "from the bluntest quest of advantage, as in sales promotion or propaganda, through courtship, social etiquette, education, and the sermon, to a 'pure' form[6] that delights in the process of appeal for itself alone, without ulterior purpose". He also wishes to highlight how identification can include partially 'unconscious' factors in appeal: *identification* can be a "deliberate device, as when the politician seeks to identify himself with his audience […] But identification can also be an end, as when people earnestly yearn to identify themselves with some group or other" (Burke 1951:203). For Burke (RM:xiv), "clear persuasive intent is not an accurate fit for describing the ways in which the members of a group promote social cohesion by acting rhetorically upon themselves and one another". Burke's approach to rhetoric, via identification, is particularly useful for examining the kinds of design scenarios explored in this study, where visual and verbal communicative aims are not necessarily overtly argumentative, but persuasive in more subtle and complex ways. Nonetheless, despite Burke's new emphasis, the connection between persuasion and identification remains clear:

> As for the relation between 'identification' and 'persuasion': we might well keep it in mind that a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience. So, there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification ('consubstantiality') and communication (the nature of rhetoric as 'addressed') (RM:46).

By using 'consubstantiality' as a synonym for 'identification', Burke wishes to draw attention to the human desire towards sharing 'substances' such as interests, philosophical worldviews, or motives. Burke thus

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[5] Despite his new position, Burke (RM:46) still acknowledges the traditional Aristotelian definition of rhetoric, as "the art of persuasion, or a study of the means of persuasion available for any given situation", explaining how, depending on the context, either 'identification' or 'persuasion' may prove more useful for "extending a line of analysis in a particular direction".

[6] Burke (RR:34) speculates about the possibility of 'pure persuasion'; the "sheerly formal" use of expressive language, without a specific directed purpose, or rhetorical motive. In other words, 'pure persuasion' is non-utilitarian rhetorical expression, symbolic action with no 'ulterior purpose' (RR:35).

situates the rhetorical process of 'identification' within a basic anthropological desire for social belonging and cohesion.

To a large extent, visual design is all about constructing and communicating identities. This is obvious when considering terms such as 'visual identity' or 'brand identity' as particular areas of visual communication design practice. Communication designers employ visual rhetorical strategies, which include the selection of visual aesthetics, in order to construct identities for corporations, products or communications. The core function of branding, which is central in our current consumer environment,[7] is to construct identities that audiences can (and want to) *identify* with. Visual form or style is clearly used in the development and communication of brand identities. As Andrew Blauvelt (2006:10) argues, "[i]t is no coincidence that the proliferation of design styles corresponded to the increase of the number of brands and the demand for product segmentation in the marketplace". Visual style is, in other words, used for identity construction via differentiation.

The meaning found in design products, and by extension design trends, is largely relational. We identify with design products or trends because we want to identify with others who identify with those products or trends.[8] As Raymond (2010:17) explains, a product can make "us feel cool, edgy, conservative, different, or perhaps more fulfilled, because we have seen the product in the possession of people who we associate with these values". Aesthetic design strategies (as rhetorical tactics of identification), are thus clearly connected to the mechanism whereby design consumers construct identities. As mentioned previously, design consumers are not only those who buy designed products, but also clients who solicit design services, as well as designers themselves, who 'consume' design trends. In other words, from the designer's perspective, adopting and applying new visual design trends are aimed at very similar goals: the strategic alignment with desirable identities, or differentiation from undesirable identities.

Klaus Krippendorff (2006:165) provides a succinct explanation of identification dynamics, specifically with regards to how shifting consumer fashions and trends are

> built on people's continuous need to reidentify themselves with new and as yet unmarked artifacts. It changes precisely when leading groups see the need to distinguish themselves from other groups that try to catch up with them. The continuous entering of a new generation of consumers into the market and its need to define itself feeds that process as well. Some products are more easily appropriated than others, and designers have to be aware that their designs enter the continuous struggle over reidentification. They can propose artifacts that fuel this process or others that resist it.

Krippendorff further explains how designers are not "immune to this sociolinguistic dynamic" or demand for continuous reidentification. Designers "not only surround themselves with artifacts that identify them as

[7] As Sandywell (2011:20) explains, it is because our commodities have become 'sign values' or conspicuous status symbols that "[d]esign, stylized advertising and the branding of commodities are today multi-billion dollar businesses in their own right".
[8] René Girard refers to this dynamic as 'mimetic desire'.

members of their profession, they also use their rhetorical skills to impress their clients with their ability to foresee where identification is heading" (Krippendorff 2006:165).

While the connection between rhetorical 'identification' and the construction of identity is not explicitly emphasised in Burke's work, the link is implicit throughout. Burke, for instance, emphasises the social and relational construction of identity by explaining how "[t]he so-called 'I' is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting 'corporate we's'" (ATH:264). Expanding on Burke, William Rueckert (1982:43) explains how "[t]he self identifies with one thing or another, consciously or unconsciously; it accepts and rejects various alternatives, merges with and separates from certain things; its growth is the drama of ethical choice and its ideal is that unity of being which constitutes the determined and forward-moving self". The ability to selectively and strategically align and continuously re-align one's identifications is clearly only possible through differentiations, rejections or separations.

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While Burke describes rhetoric as concerned with *identification*, he highlights how a state of *division* creates the need for identification in the first place. For Burke, the basic motivation behind human communication is to overcome or eliminate division, by inducing unity and cooperation:

> Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence. It would not be an ideal, as it now is, partly embodied in material conditions and partly frustrated by these same conditions (RM:22).

Burke thus sees separation and disunity as part of the human condition, insofar as individuals are entities with their own private thoughts, emotions and motives. 'Pure' or absolute identification is an ideal humans strive toward, but as separate entities, complete reconciliation remains unattainable. Burke believes this dynamic sets the stage for sophisticated rhetorical activities to develop. For instance, he explains how rhetoric thrives in situations where identification and division are ambiguously blended together, "so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins" (RM:25). Rhetoric could thus be situated within the continual negotiation between the dialectical positions of identification and division. As an example, from the perspective of the design drama, designers employ rhetorical tactics when engaging with clients precisely because they are simultaneously unified (in working towards a production goal) and divided (in their particular roles and interests). This condition relates back to the previous discussion on cooperative/competitive motives as blended together in the design drama.

From a design trend perspective, the dialectical positions of identification and division may also be extended in considering the dynamics of conformity and differentiation. Quite simply, while a new trend is characterised by its marked difference (from what came before), it only becomes 'a trend' in its widespread adoption. Without widespread uptake, a new and different aesthetic style would merely be an 'outlier', not a trend or movement. In other words, design trends or movements need to be understood in relation to the

push and pull dynamics of divergence and convergence, as dialectical counterparts in the rhetorical process of identification. Trend rhetorics, of course, tap into this complex desire for simultaneous differentiation and association in the construction, and continuous reconstruction, of personal and corporate identities.

While there is always an element of division in any process of identification (to identify with/as one thing is to *not* identify with/as something else), some rhetorical tactics emphasise division as the primary mechanism of identification. For instance, designers may consider themselves as creative outsiders as a means to differentiate themselves and achieve an alternative professional status. Julier (2008:45) explains how designers are, in a more general sense, involved in a deliberate "self-marginalization" where they "only half-heartedly aspire to conservative professional status". This strategy is used towards cultivating a nonconformist, romantic persona which becomes a promotional asset in creative industries.

For Burke, certain problems arise when identification occurs primarily through a separatist perspective. For instance, identification can be achieved "among opposing entities on the basis of a common enemy" (Foss *et al* 2002:192). Burke refers to this common rhetorical mechanism as achieving 'congregation through segregation' and warns against the potentially harmful consequences of this overtly antagonistic mode of identification. This relates back to his concern over the figure of the scapegoat, who embodies "contrary principles of identification and alienation" (RM:140). In other words, the act of scapegoating involves the simultaneous presence of identification and division. Burke points out how the scapegoat must initially be part of the group and share a level of 'consubstantiality' in order for the desired purification effect of purgation to be achieved through alienation or punishment. The extent to which such antagonistic scapegoating tactics are present in design discourse and trend scenarios are explored in greater depth shortly, where I deal with what Burke refers to as the 'rhetoric of rebirth'.

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A significant aspect of Burke's notion of rhetoric through identification relates to the inclusion of external factors, beyond the text or argument itself, as part of the larger rhetorical situation. For Burke, all 'resources' or factors that have an impact on identification can be considered from a rhetorical perspective. For instance, Burke suggests that in some instances it may be more useful to consider rhetoric in terms of "a general body of identifications that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reinforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill" (RM:26). This kind of repetitive messaging is, of course, a common rhetorical strategy found in marketing, branding and advertising industries. Consistently repeated visual systems (including colour palettes, typefaces and images) 'persuade' us merely through such daily reinforcement. From this perspective, one could argue that trends are persuasive merely because they are trends. While this does not explain why some new approaches become trends and others do not, it does help to explain how, at a certain point of critical mass, the particular content of trend rhetorics matter less than their continuous reinforcement through popular exposure.

Burke's conception of rhetoric as identification takes into account the broader context of cultural meanings and ideologies, even those factors that a rhetor may be unaware of. Through his interest in psychoanalysis, Burke introduces the idea that the self can also be the 'audience' as in a rhetorical situation. Burke (RM:38) explains how "[a] man can be his own audience, insofar as he, even in his secret thoughts, cultivates certain ideas or images for the effect he hopes they may have upon him […] and in this respect he is being rhetorical quite as though he were using pleasant imagery to influence an outside audience rather than one within". Once again this emphasises that rhetoric need not be an overtly persuasive enterprise, as exerted by one person onto another.

Burke (RM:39) elaborates on how we find an "ingredient of rhetoric in all *socialization*,[9] considered as a *moralizing* process. The individual person, striving to form himself in accordance with the communicative norms that match the cooperative ways of his society, is by the same token concerned with the rhetoric of identification". He further considers the possibility of rhetorical 'self-deception' insofar as one finds the "persuasiveness of false or inadequate terms which may not be directly imposed upon us from without by some skilful speaker, but which we impose upon ourselves, in varying degrees of deliberateness and unawareness" (RM:35). It is possible to argue that there is always some element of internal rationalisation present in the iterative design process, insofar as designers routinely need to evaluate their decisions and convince themselves that their decisions are reasonable. Burke thus describes internal processes such as socialisation, moralisation and rationalisation as thoroughly rhetorical. Furthermore, the possibility of reduced 'rhetorical awareness' clearly relates to the notion of *ideology*.

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This brings us to the somewhat paradoxical nature of rhetorical *identification*. The term 'identification' implies that the audience itself has agency: while a rhetor can appeal to an audience and invite identification, identification is only complete once the audience *identifies*. Such an approach seems to emphasise the audience's role in their own persuasion and is thus compatible with contemporary communication theories where audience reception is considered part of the complex rhetorical process. This also relates to the argument that rhetoric can only exist where an audience can choose to accept a message or adopt an attitude. Forcing someone to act would more accurately be described as 'coercion', while forcibly shaping an attitude would be termed 'brainwashing'. In such scenarios there would be no need for rhetoric.

However, we can see from rhetoric's bad reputation, as closely associated with manipulation, that these distinguishing lines are not always entirely clear. Insofar as an audience may not be fully aware of the rhetorical situation, they are not fully empowered to discern. Ethical questions arise whenever a person is disempowered to actively *choose* their identifications. This is tantamount to the ability to choose one's *attitudes* or *desires* which is, of course, far more elusive than merely choosing one's *actions*. In Burkean terms, a rhetor 'moves' an audience, suggesting a blurred boundary between audience *action* and *motion*. Otherwise put, good

[9] Building on Freud's theories of socialization, Burke suggests there are rhetorical processes occurring within an individual, in the confrontations between the *id*, *ego* and *super-ego*.

rhetors (and by extension, good designers) know how to create appeals that audiences want to identify with. The way in which rhetors 'move' their audiences in ways that they might be oblivious of can be explored further by looking at Burke's ideas on the creation of symbolic 'magic', 'mystery' and 'myth'.

Design mystification and trend magic

On an anthropological level, Burke's interest in mystery, mystification and myth relates to the way in which societies accept an order or hierarchy, and the way in which ideologies are naturalised through symbolic action. For Burke, mystery and myth are resources whereby members of a society identify with each other through sharing beliefs; however, he is also highly aware of the potential to exploit or abuse such resources. Burke seeks to highlight how mystery provides opportunities for identification as well as division or estrangement. Mystery could be seen as both a byproduct of, and a productive mechanism towards, hierarchic systems (Foss *et al* 2002:207). Mystery is a byproduct whenever the members of one group (us) are divided from members of other groups (them). A logical consequence in such a scenario is a sense of confusion or uncertainty about 'the other'. Foss *et al* (2002:208) explain how "members lack knowledge about other beings and see different modes of living by others as implying different modes of thinking. The result of these differences is the unknown, the unexplained, the secret – or what Burke calls *mystery"*.

Mystery also contributes to the social hierarchic ordering mechanism. Foss *et al* (2002:208-9) explain how mystery "enables the members of the hierarchy to identify and to communicate with one another" and "encourages the maintenance and preservation of the hierarchy". Mystery masks similarities between people (separating them), but also hides differences (providing areas for consubstantiality). Mystery can thus create barriers between different groups, whether dividing differences are significant or imaginary (Foss *et al* 2002:208); but it can also create allegiances where members would not otherwise have much in common. Fascist politics[10] clearly employ such tactics, but this process occurs in less extreme, or more everyday scenarios as well.

Dalziel Duncan (1965:xxxiii) provides a useful explanation of how Burke's concept of 'mystery' relates to the way in which "[e]ach institution strives to mystify us through surrounding its principle of order, and the roles in which this order is enacted, with its own glamor". Insofar as the creative industries are considered particularly enigmatic and glamorous, the projection of mystery is highly significant. It is possible to argue that design trends employ mystifying rhetorics, whereby a glamorous sense of 'order' is projected, while the mechanics of this order remains shrouded in mystery.

To a large extent, the valuation of 'the new' is based on rhetorics of mystery. Groys (2014:76) refers to the common attitude towards creativity, as presupposing "something mysterious, sublime, obscure, irreducible,

[10] As Robert O Paxton (2004:219) explains, fascism involves a mixture of 'mobilizing passions' including an overwhelming sense of crisis that "one's group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external" and "the primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal".

or heterogeneous that is ostensibly at work deep within man".[11] Similarly, Tomes *et al* (1998:128) refer to mystery as part of the design process, explaining how oftentimes "the design process is portrayed as a mystery of individual creation, inexpressible in ordinary language and inaccessible to rational analysis". In other words, the creative process is often portrayed as, or assumed to be, a 'mystical' process, where a design genius arrives at a solution as if by divine inspiration. This mysterious quality is often treated as a competitive advantage. For instance, some design rhetorics cite the appeal of an elusive 'x-factor'; something which cannot be understood and therefore not replicated.

Jon Kolko (2011) explains how the development of a design concept, as a process of synthesis, is frequently perceived as a kind of 'magic'. He explains how "[t]o an observer (commonly a client), the physical output, the themes, and the design ideas produced seem arbitrary, or *magically derived"* (Kolko 2011:xiii). He believes "[t]his sense of magic is both good and bad". He explains how not everyone values 'magic' in an otherwise logical process, that "for those who value logical and linear thinking – both engineers and business owners, respectfully – design synthesis is a frustrating part of product development" (Kolko 2011:xi). However, this perceived 'magic' may also be considered a strategic (rhetorical) advantage. Kolko (2011:xiv) acknowledges how "[c]lients may well desire magic, because it suggests that they have spent their money well (after all, they have hired magicians or shamans!)". However, Kolko (2011:xiv) believes this perceived 'magic' stems merely from "the lack of understandable documentation, or the decision to not share that documentation". In other words, he sees the perception of 'design magic' as a failure to articulate the process of design thinking and synthesis.

The perceived mystique surrounding the design process can perhaps be attributed to the high level of intuitive decision making, which cannot easily be translated into verbal explanation. As Reyburn and Kirstein (2015:76) point out, there is a high level of tacit knowledge employed by designers (designing as 'second-nature') and designers are often unable to articulate the basis of their decision-making. However, designers also frequently exploit the rhetorical potential in this scenario. As Reyburn and Kirstein (2015:76) explain, designers often "attribute their decision-making to their 'other': intuition and creative instinct or, even more credibly, past experience". This is a powerful strategy that provides "a veneer of professional objectivity" (Reyburn & Kirstein 2015:76), and perhaps a shield against scrutiny. Nelson and Stolterman (2012:206-7) refer to this 'guarantor of design' as an "internal slough-off", insofar as "a designer can argue that the design is a result of an internal force, such as intuition, or a feeling that is beyond the control of the designer".

> These internal sources of inspiration cannot, by definition, be inspected by the designer – or by anyone else. […] Since these sources are situated beyond the reach of our conscious, reflective mind, we cannot analyze, inspect, or influence them and, therefore, cannot judge them. The designer acts only as a conduit, a spokesperson, or a messenger, for his or her inner inspiration (Nelson & Stolterman 2012:207).

[11] Groys argues that such conceptions of creativity are "primarily based on theological doctrines of God's creative power" from which the notion of creation out of a void originates. This idea of the "divine privilege of creating things out of the void" is frequently seen in conceptions of the Western avant-garde (Groys 2014:77). However, in a post-modern context this notion of creation out of a void is challenged, insofar as "theories of intertextuality have shown that the new is always made out of the old: quotations, references to tradition, modifications and interpretations of what already exists" (Groys 2014:79).

While certain design industries would be more accepting of overtly 'intuitive' and 'mystical' qualifications of practice (such as fashion and luxury lifestyle industries), other design industries may be less tolerant thereof. However, even those design industries that emphasise rigourous empirical research and systematic or objective 'scientific' process take advantage of mystification, albeit of a different kind. Whenever a design process justification is automatically accepted, without the need to see actual evidence of that process, there may be an element of 'mythic' rhetoric present. Burke's extending of rhetorical theory into the realm of ideology – where symbolic mystifications, or myths, naturalise artificial positions – is useful in explaining how powerful rhetorics can reduce the need for overt argumentation.

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Burke (1971a) sees myth-making as a symbolic completion or 'rounding-out' of physical action. In the article *Doing and saying: thoughts on myth, cult and archetypes*, he explains, "[w]hile Hominid A is materialistically planting seeds, Hominid B is enacting a ritual (perhaps composed of words, melody, and dance-steps) designed to round out this notable occasion by corresponding acts of symbolism" (Burke 1971a:103). For Burke (1971a:117) this mythic doubling mechanism, referred to by others as 'archetypal' or 'prototypal', is an extension of the entelechial drive:

> We are all myth-men in the general sense that any notable occasion is felt to call for some kind of symbolic analogue, an exulting, a fervent saying of thanks, an impromptu jog or a lament, and so on. But only those are myth-men in the specialist sense who endow such expressive analogues with a kind of formal completing, or perfecting (Burke 1971a:103-4).

Burke (1971a:105) sees myth-making activities as taking place especially in 'boundary' or transitory moments as with birth, death, marriage, initiation, and so on. The myth-making stems from the "pious feeling that notable occasions have not been ultimately recognized until they attain their mythic completion" (Burke 1971a:104). Mythic enactments of ritual, such as rites of passage, contribute towards social cohesion. As an example, Burke refers to the common contemporary symbolic ritual where businessmen 'consummate' a deal by having a drink together at the bar. While a deal could, of course, be struck without such a ritual, in many instances the participation in the ritual is considered the proper, socially accepted or 'pious' thing to do.

Burke believes the urge to symbolically complete or 'double' an event through ritual enactment has its nearest equivalent in the 'aesthetic'. Burke (1971a:104) refers to a variety of 'myth-men', which includes "witch doctor, medicine man, shaman", as well as modern-day aesthetes such as "poets, novelists, dancers, musicians, painters, actors, dramatists (artists in general)". Burke (1981:162) explains how "religious attitudes survive vestigially in estheticized form", with both the religious and the aesthetic involving a particular kind of attention (through a "sense of congruity, propriety, piety"), imbuing events or objects with special significance (Burke 1971a:105). The widespread fetishization of design indicates this special significance. Just as art is made significant or special by placing it in a frame or gallery, new design trends are 'sanctified' as meaningful innovations via cultural mediation. The emergence of a new trend is signaled often as a momentous event, through both visual and verbal aesthetic-rhetorical strategies. Designers and design critics

(including bloggers), trend spotters and forecasters, are the obvious myth-makers in this context. In this way, new design trends, as emerging in transition, could be considered boundary moments that are ritually sanctified. This takes place through a number of meta-cultural events and products, including product launches and design awards shows, as well as online tech reviews and trend reports.

It is interesting to note how Burke (1971a:104) excludes "ad-writers, publicity men, and the like" from his list of modern-day myth-makers, insofar as they are "*not* perfect instances of the myth-man, since so much of their symbolizing does not aim at a kind of summarizing utterance that characterizes mythic completion". Burke (1971a:105) argues that advertisers or marketers use "language as an instrument of sheerly material behavior (as, for instance, a sales pitch is like an instruction needed to help carry out with maximum efficiency a process of distribution)". Burke (1971a:105) nonetheless believes advertisers and marketers operate "on the fringes of the mythic motive, and often exploit it, in bastardized form, thereby helping build popular attitudes that goad the genuinely expert myth-man to a search for relevant completion". However, it is possible to argue that strategies in advertising, and branding in particular, have become much more sophisticated since Burke's time. Today, brand messages are rarely aimed at promoting material or functional features of products. Instead, brands target complex lifestyle and identity aspirations through thoroughly aestheticicised strategies. Branding-specialists are perhaps some of the most influential myth-makers of our time.

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Burke (1971a:106) explains how the "myth-man's role as a specialist obviously involves privileges[12] and responsibilities that relate directly to his status". In other words, some members of the tribe are set apart and recognised by the community as experts in myth-making. This privileged position of power tends to be defended and is often exploited. Burke's discussion of the function of myth-making is thus accompanied by a warning: "[t]hough the myth-man may contribute much to the patterns of tribal thinking as a whole, one should also examine myth for traces of its role in furthering the myth-man's special interests as distinct from the interests of the group" (1971a:117). This concern for the potential abuse of power by using myth as resource is, of course, a central theme in ideological critique.

Burke argues that myths can become dangerous when some members of a group benefit from an orientation at the expense of others. Under such circumstances, some members of the group may become disillusioned and start to question the mythic social structure. Burke explains how, under such circumstances, two distinct characters emerge, namely the *priest* and the *prophet*. Burke describes the purpose of the 'priest' as follows:

> The members of a group specifically charged with upholding a given orientation may be said to perform a *priesthood function*. If we define a priesthood in this technical sense, we find that in the priesthood of today the clergy take a minor part: The function is mainly performed by our college professors, journalists, public relations counsellors, sales promoters, writers of advertising copy,

[12] For Burke (1971a:106), these privileges and responsibilities point towards the fact that "the very nature of the mythic vocation is *prima facie* evidence that the tribe is no longer homogeneous, though such specialized rites may help hold it together".

> many of whom will usually fume at the hypocrisy of the medieval Church while excusing their own position on the grounds of necessity (PC:179).

Here Burke clearly refers to marketing and advertising as serving a social priesthood function, in upholding dominant ideologies. He illustrates the manner in which priests inform the everyday stimulation of consumption:

> […] we may behold the rise of a new priesthood, in the purveyors of propaganda. To every man engaged in producing a commodity, there are at least a hundred engaged in selling it. We can make anything, but getting it into the home is another matter. There is publicity, there is 'educational advertising', there is lobbying. For there is more money in the swaying of opinion than ever before (Burke 1930:335).

If the commercial priesthood function was important in Burke's era, it is exponentially so in ours. Burke continues to explain how "[t]he decay of a priesthood (when they more or less definitely resent the work that is asked of them) leads to a division between *priests* and *prophets"*. Whereas "priests devote their efforts to maintaining the vestigial structure; the prophets seek new perspectives whereby this vestigial structure may be criticized and a new one established in its place" (PC:179). For Burke, "Marx could be said to have performed a prophecy-function, as distinct from a priesthood-function" (PC:179). He thus distinguishes between the roles of *priest* and *prophet* in relation to their differing attitudes towards the dominant mythic (ideological) structure.

While both artists and designers work in creative industries, designers (as serving commercial interests) tend to be characterised as *priests*, whereas artists (in their perceived autonomy) are considered more readily as *prophets*. This characterization is likely to be shared by Burke, who continuously highlights the role of the artist in bringing about social change. However, this is arguably a highly idealised or romaticised notion of the artist. In reality, an artist may just as likely be caught up in a priestly scheme if it proves lucrative. Just as artists can fill either of these roles, so can designers. Whereas many designer 'priests' contribute towards maintaining the *status quo*, many other designer 'prophets' have also 'come to resent the work that is asked of them' and have sought alternatives to mainstream industry. As for the trend industry in particular, there seems to be a paradoxical relation in terms of these roles. Depending on one's perspective, the designer of a new trend can be considered an aesthetic 'prophet' or a commercial 'priest'. While trendforecasters are frequently characterised as 'prophets' guiding us in new directions, they also embody something akin to the Burkean priesthood function: they support the social, cultural and economic *status quo*, even as they promote (pseudo) innovation, revolution and change. From this perspective, it is possible to argue that these cultural 'priests' are masquerading as 'prophets'.

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It is possible to interpret dominant visual styles or design philosophies as institutionalised myths. Whenever a particular visual aesthetic becomes the natural, dominant design response, it does so on powerful mythic grounds. As mentioned before, the most common example is the myth of modernism. Theorists such as Jan Michl (2007) speak about a 'modernist apartheid regime' that is still firmly in place. Michl acknowledges that

this modernist regime applies mostly to industrial design and architecture, and he believes that graphic design tends to be more inclusive of other aesthetic responses. However, in areas of communication and information design practice, where usability and functionality are important values, modernist conventions are arguably still the norm. Jessica Helfand and William Drenttel (2006:204) comment on the mystifying role of modernist aesthetics in information design practice:

> Label it information design and it looks serious. Number it and it looks scientific. But it's a false authority, particularly because we buy into the form so unquestioningly. Perhaps this is why so much information design looks alike, ratified by an alarmingly robust strain of Swiss modernism that obliterates the chance for a more expressive design idiom, a more content-driven form […] Information design has become its own legitimizing force, regardless of its content or context. It's modernism run amok: form masquerading as content.

While Helfand and Drenttel make quite a dramatic overstatement, their argument illustrates a critical awareness of the way in which Swiss typographic modernism offers a prescriptive and enduring design myth, particularly in an information design context. However, it is possible to interpret the whole design history canon as a series of myths, available to designers as rhetorical resources. Furthermore, design trend rhetorics often tap into established design myths as a means of gaining legitimacy. Origin myths[13] (for example the Bauhaus school), design heroes and sages (for example Dieter Rams), and well-known design aphorisms (for example 'form follows function') are frequently evoked as part of a rhetorical strategy for supporting new design directions. There is a certain 'rhetorical commonplace' or familiarity to be found in these myths that offers a reassuring legitimacy to designers. For instance, in the previously mentioned interface aesthetic shift towards 'flat design', reference is made to the modernist Bauhaus movement of the 1920s and 30s, as part of the stylistic justification. Sam Moreau, the user experience director at Microsoft, refers to Bauhaus design as influence behind the flat *Metro* style, stating that "[r]educing down to the most beautiful form and function – that's what the Bauhaus was all about" (in Carr 2014).

At this point it may be worthwhile to reiterate the links in theory between Burke and Roland Barthes, specifically since Barthes' main interest lies in myth in relation to the rhetoric of style and fashion.[14] Barthes explores how popular culture and fashion meaning needs to be constructed through myth-making narratives. Barthes (2013:49-50) also describes a duplicity in the fashion system, whereby fashion discourse functions as a 'metalanguage' in establishing a mythology of fashion. Similarly, in the context of our 'attention economy', Richard Lanham (2006:50) refers to the role of the 'interpretive bureaucracy', to provide 'seriousness' to creative action through discursive practices. Otherwise put, creative practice needs to be sanctified by a 'critical class' in order to gain cultural capital. In terms of the previously mentioned style/substance dialectic, style needs to be given substance in order to receive attention and thrive in the popular cultural landscape.

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[13] As Carter (1997:356) points out, "myths of origin can be used to mystify the exercise of power. Virtually every society attempts to temporize the essence of its ideological domination. The point here is not the historical validity of such myths but their rhetorical effectiveness – as evidenced by their widespread abuse".

[14] However, as Coupe (2005) points out, there are also notable differences between Burke and Barthes' theories on myth. Coupe argues that Burke's notion of myth extends beyond the service of ideological critique, towards a vision for developing constructive myths for the future.

This 'duplicity' relates back to Burke's notion of ritual doubling or symbolic rounding-out, whereby symbolic artifacts become sanctified.

Once cultural symbols have become sanctified, they demand a certain piety. Burke (1971a:108) provides a useful distinction in explaining how "a sense of conformity" might be called "'piety' with regard to religion and 'propriety' with regard to art". For Burke, piety is a vestigial trait, or "residual reverence that we can still trace back to the infancy of humanity, even when we wish to assert that piety makes no rational sense" (Coupe 2005:66). In a design context, conforming to a 'sanctified' style or trend is often considered the appropriate or fitting response. As explored in the previous chapter, these demands, along with the possibility to fail or fall short, form part of the larger meta-rhetorical scenario.

The rhetoric of rebirth and the magic of the new

Burke's previously mentioned *guilt-purification-redemption* cycle has already been described from a sociological / dramatistic perspective but, as Burke wishes to highlight, these processes can also be interpreted as rhetorical; as a *rhetoric of rebirth*. Burke's *guilt-purification-redemption* cycle helps to explain how inevitable feelings of guilt or shame continuously drive desire for the new. The possibility of assuaging guilt or overcoming shame is, of course, frequently exploited in the advertising industry. In other words, this sociological tendency offers rhetorical resources that designers and marketers can tap into.

Assigning and processing guilt, through scapegoating and self-mortification, can be considered rhetorical processes insofar as they alter meanings through symbolic action. They are common rhetorical processes whereby favour can be gained or regained, especially in a time of instability or crisis. Stevenson (1999:204) provides a useful summary of the previously discussed processes of scapegoating and mortification:

> Scapegoating is a symbolic projection of pollution onto some external object or person; it is a defensive denial of guilt by which we attempt to feel pure, hierarchically elevated above others […] Self-mortification, on the other hand, involves implicitly taking responsibility for guilt. To eliminate guilt by self-mortification we symbolically punish and purify ourselves, we deny ourselves pleasures in order to hierarchically elevate and make ourselves desirable. We may inflict the symbolic punishments of self-mortification through language, as with self-denigration, or by engaging in symbolic physical acts.

When inwardly directed, we convince ourselves, and hope to convince others, of our restored value (purity) through mortification. Mortification can also be used as a rhetorical device in public discourse, for example, when a politician performs an act of self-punishment to appease the public. The processes of acknowledging 'guilt' and working towards purification and redemption are visible in identity make-overs of all kinds, both personal and corporate.

Whereas outwardly directed victimization and scapegoating are common strategies in politics and law, one might not expect to find such devious tactics in design contexts. However, it is possible to identify subtler[15] forms of victimization and scapegoating in competitive design tactics as part of the overall strategy to gain

[15] On a less subtle level, it is not uncommon for corporations (or designers) to directly scapegoat their competitors. This is seen as a natural part of the competitive environment.

advantage. For instance, an entire stylistic movement can be scapegoated as part of a rhetorical strategy. A modernist approach could gain traction through clear distantiation, for example, by equating 'ornament and crime' as Adolf Loos[16] has done. Ornamentation and decoration are scapegoated as degenerate design approaches and, by extension, those who continue to decorate are scapegoated as well. As another example, particular typefaces (along with their designers) can be scapegoated, as seen in the previously referred to *Comic Sans* (Figure 6) and *Papyrus* (Figure 7) examples. This scapegoating, as communally endorsed criticism, may serve to elevate one's status simply by virtue of (verbally) distancing oneself.

The previously discussed criticism of Apple's excessively realistic 'skeuomorphic' interface aesthetic also provides a useful illustration of the dealing of shame or guilt via scapegoating. Amidst the heated debate and increasing criticism directed at Apple, a particular designer, namely Scott Forstall, could be singled out and scapegoated as part of their recovery (purgation or purification) strategy. An article in *The Economist* suggests that Forstall was ousted because the "tendency to use various finishes and functionally irrelevant elements increased under his watch" (G.F. 2012). Here Forstall receives the blame for some of the most heavily criticized skeuomorphic effects, including the paging animation in ebooks and the torn edges in the calendar app. Whether these accusations are accurate is hard to ascertain, but it is nonetheless clear that scapegoating becomes a part of the larger unfolding drama.

> Now that Mr Forstall is gone, some of this penchant for skeuomorphism may be reined in. Jonathan Ive, Apple's experienced hardware-design supremo who takes over from Mr Forstall, has publicly but politely expressed his disdain for the approach (G.F. 2012).

Jony Ive, as one of the most prominent celebrity designers of our era, is an apt choice. Along with Steve Jobs (co-founder and long-time CEO of Apple Inc – now deceased), Ive is considered a major asset to Apple's brand image. In Burkean terms, Apple could redeem themselves by employing an internal symbolic purging of sorts; by presenting a 'rebirth' in the form of a prominent design hero.

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Stevenson (1999:204) reminds us that while "we may experience enhanced desirability through symbolic improvement of our hierarchic status, the resulting redemption is always short-lived". Burke's rhetoric of rebirth thus offers a way of understanding oscillating trend dynamics, insofar as new trends offer symbolic opportunities for continuous 'rebirth'. As Stuart Ewen (1999:242) explains in *All consuming images*, the design and advertising industry has come to define itself as both "the destroyer and creator in the process of the ever-evolving new". Symbolic purging thus serves a valuable commercial purpose, whether inwardly or outwardly directed. Simply put, it is often easier to assert the legitimacy of something new by undermining that which came before.

[16] Adolf Loos made the following argument in *Ornament and crime* (1908): "[t]he Papuan tattoos his skin, his boat, his rudder, his oars; in short, everything he can get his hands on. He is no criminal. The modern man who tattoos himself is a criminal or a degenerate…What is natural for a Papuan and a child, is degenerate for modern man. I have discovered the following truth and present it to the world: cultural evolution is equivalent to the removal of ornament from articles in daily use" (Greenhalgh 1993:14-15).

Lanham (2006) explains how, from a rhetorical perspective, continued oscillation serves a powerful persuasive purpose. Lanham explores the principle of oscillation in relation to creating attention in our highly information-saturated environment. He explains how twentieth century avant-garde movements, such as Dada, "aimed at restoration of balance not through synthesis but […] through oscillation between opposites" (Lanham 2006:72). It is possible to argue that attempts at synthesis leads to 'luke-warm' in-between positions that do not attract the same level of attention as extreme positions. Put otherwise, to 'tip the scales' garners greater attention than to balance them. This relates to Julier's (2008:89;91) notion of "wilful acts of destabilization" whereby designers reflexively "calculate avant-gardist positions". He continues to explain how

> risk becomes aestheticized, reflexive and often deliberate. It has become firmly entrenched into the rhetoric of high design whether in its objects or in their mediation. Thus 'cutting edge', 'experimental' and 'intuitive' have become familiar descriptive terms among designers, design students and design writers of the 1990s. This attitude finds its way into mainstream design practice too" (Julier 2008:89).

Rhetorics of risk, which emphasise the dangers of leaving the mainstream, thus accompany experimental high design practices. However, as Julier notes, these supposed risks take place within safe and conservative commercial institutions and parameters of the market.

Barthes (2013) also refers to stylistic trend trajectories of oscillation. He speaks about the importance of understanding new fashions in terms of oppositional value, and not necessarily philosophical or psychological meaning. In other words, a new style merely needs to be sufficiently divergent in order to be effective.[17] Barthes believes the discussion or justification of the new style's values can be interpreted as post-rationalisation. While such post-rationalisations are of great rhetorical significance, it is worth reiterating that *mere difference* is also a powerful, albeit unacknowledged, rhetorical force. As Lorraine Wild (2006:160) argues, "[v]isual boredom and generational contrariness are underacknowledged as motivators for formal mutation in graphic design". However, since boredom and contrariness are not considered worthy motivations for change, more 'substantial' motives are frequently devised in retrospect.

It is unsurprising that objections and suspicions are directed at trend industries for duping people into buying into new 'fads' in what seems like the absence of good reason to do so. A consistent critique surrounds the fashion system, with regards to new trends being 'made up out of thin air'; where symbols that are essentially meaningless or empty are 'magically' imbued with meaning. For Burke this is not much different from constructing symbolic vocabularies in general. Burke identifies a connection between *magic* and rhetoric insofar as vocabularies can exert power. He explains:

> The magical decree is implicit in all language; for the mere act of naming an object or situation decrees that it is to be singled out as such-and-such rather than as something other. Hence, I think

[17] Barthes (2013) uses the example of long hair as trend in the late 1960s as being influenced by the Beatles' style. However, he explains how this style derives its power primarily from being the opposite of what came before, and not on such cited values as 'femininity'.

> that an attempt to eliminate magic,[18] in this sense, would involve us in the elimination of vocabulary itself as a way of sizing up reality (PLF:4).

In other words, for symbol systems to function, meaning needs to be constructed, and this is often done arbitrarily. The 'magic' is found in the decree, or the process of naming.

In the context of this study, the decree of naming supports the reification of a design trend (a bringing-into-being) that relates back to the notion of cultural sanctification. In such a way a discernable visual stylistic tendency becomes a nameable trend; it becomes *a thing* (something worth paying attention to).

In the trend industry one finds myriad catchy neologisms describing new trends. The invention of neologisms is rhetorically effective insofar as a new word clearly signals an innovation. It is currently popular for trendy neologisms to be constructed as *portmanteaus*, combining two words into a new word, such as 'staycation' (meaning stay-at-home-vacation) or 'normcore' (combining normal and hardcore). It is possible to argue that these trend neologisms created by juxtaposing contradicting terms are highly effective in attracting attention, because their ambiguity adds an additional layer of mystery. The use of incongruous juxtapositions can be highly rhetorically effective, insofar as it encourages greater interpretive engagement. This relates to a process Burke refers to as 'perspective by incongruity', which I explore in greater depth in Chapter Six.

Design god-terms and god-phrases

God-terms are those powerfully persuasive terms, so high in the symbolic hierarchy that they are not easily questioned or scrutinised. God-terms and phrases thus tend to be received as common knowledge; they obtain, through consistent reinforcement, an air of authority. Burke explains how god-terms are not only found in religious discourse, but in secular realms too, when a term becomes "an overall title of titles" or, in other words, a concept meant to encompass overall purpose (RR:25). Burke mentions a few terms, some of which are still prevalent, for example 'liberty' and 'freedom'. God-terms are not easily scrutinised or opposed and their mere inclusion in a discursive motivation may create a favourable impression of the rhetor. Kevin Johnson (2007:123) believes the notion of a Burkean 'god-term' can be interpreted as Lacanian 'signifier without the signified' insofar as it tends to be an 'empty' term that serves a powerful performative function.[19] In other words, what the term *means* becomes less significant (the actual meanings is often left unquestioned) than what it *does*.

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[18] Burke sees primitive magic, not as the opposite of science, but rather as a symbolic act rooted in human beings' rhetorical nature. Burke (RM:42) argues that primitive magic could be considered a kind of misguided rhetorical process, insofar as the fully realistic hortatory ability of language is employed in the attempt to move inanimate things. He points out how anthropologists are indirectly acknowledging the rhetorical power of magic, by recognising it as a "pragmatic device that greatly assisted the survival of cultures by promoting social cohesion" (RM:43).

[19] As Matthew Sharpe [sa] explains, "Lacan's idea about these [master] signifiers is that their primary importance is less any positive content that they add to the subject's field of symbolic sense. It is rather the efficacy they have in reorienting the subject with respect to all of the other signifiers which structure his/her sense of herself and the world. It is precisely this primarily structural or formal function that underlies the crucial Lacanian claim that master signifiers are actually 'empty signifiers' or 'signifiers without a signified'".

Burke pays particular attention to 'technology' as a god-term in his era. By extension there are a number of ways in which technological terms and arguments can be used as rhetorical resources. Burke considers how the rhetorics of technology or 'technological topoi' are invoked in all areas of society, as a powerful persuasive mechanism. Mike Hübler (2005) highlights the ease with which one can appeal to the human fascination with technological inventions, even in situations that are not overtly concerned with technology. As an example he cites the relative ease of finding funding for IT equipment (as opposed to human resources), as if their "very proximity" will lead to enhanced results. From a design perspective, this fascination with 'technology' resulted in a range of visual tropes, reaching a peak in the 'high-tech' aesthetics of late 1970s and 80s architecture.[20] While the term 'technology' still carries much weight, it is possible to argue that the term 'innovation' seems to have supplanted it as contemporary god-term. 'Technology' alone is not enough; the technology needs to be 'innovative'.

'Innovation' is also one of the design community's most prominent god-terms. The modernist vocabulary, which includes the terms 'functionality', 'efficiency' and 'minimalism', remain powerfully persuasive in their god-term status. Other examples of currently popular design god-terms include 'authenticity', 'transparency' and 'sustainability'. It is also possible to interpret the common genre of design aphorisms or maxims as 'god-phrases'. Robert Riley (2005:[sp]) suggests that "the design world has used aphorisms more that other fields", with expressions such as as 'form follows function,' or 'less is more' being "merchandising slogans for visual frameworks or styles". While these well-known aphorisms are frequently contested (as part of design's 'willful destabilization'), as familiar catch-phrases they tend to remain persuasive in practice. It is also possible to conceive of 'devil-terms', which in a design context refers to those terms that are particularly ill-received or taboo. As mentioned previously, the anti-modernist values of 'ornamentation' or 'decoration' could serve as examples of recurring 'devil-terms'.

In relation to the previously mentioned stylistic shift towards 'flat design' interface aesthetics, a variety of god- and devil-terms were used on either side of the debate. The most notable is the way in which 'skeuomorphism' became a widely used 'devil-term' to describe the aesthetic direction being rejected. As Sam Judah (2013) explains how 'skeuomorphism' is used as "a dirty word by many in the design community". Chris Baraniuk (2012) believes that the use of "outlandish words like 'skeuomorphism'" is used as a strategic resource in online debates. He believes it is used to create an impression of being "one step ahead of the many people for whom the term was completely alien. Hence the popularity of this attractive yet somewhat irrelevant word in the most popular design debate of recent years". Baraniuk continues to explain how the term 'skeuomorphism' is used inappropriately or inaccurately, but how it contains vast rhetorical power nonetheless. Baraniuk (2012) believes "the 'skeuomorphism' debate has shown […] that fashions can blind us when fancy words and popular discourse overtake the impetus to evaluate on a more molecular level".

[20] The architecture of Richard Rogers, including the Pompidou center in Paris, is considered emblematic of high-tech style.

It is important to understand that god-term status is not absolutely stable and that these terms also follow trend cycles. Highly effective contemporary terms such as 'Design Thinking' and 'Human-Centered Design' have recently come under scrutiny. For instance, Don Norman (2005:14) argues that "Human-Centered Design has become such a dominant theme in design that it is now accepted by interface and application designers automatically, without thought, let alone criticism". Instead, Norman proposes a shift to 'Activity-Centered Design' (ACD). He argues that "[a] deep understanding of people is still a part of ACD. But ACD is more: it also requires a deep understanding of the technology, of the tools, and of the reasons for the activities" (Norman 2005:16). What yet another terminological shift illustrates is how easy it is for a god-term to be replaced by the next best thing.

It is important to acknowledge that critical design discourse has a good track record of calling out the conjuring and exploitation of design god terms. For instance, Jongerius and Schouwenberg (2015:4) argue that "[t]erms like 'authenticity' and 'sustainability' become empty verbiage when the hidden agenda is still, as usual, economic returns". This is precisely how mystifying god-terms operate. While they are largely 'empty' in content, they are highly effective in creating a favourable impression of whoever uses it, at least for a period.

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To consider design trends from a rhetorical perspective, within the context of design as drama, *mystery*, *mystification*, *myth* and *magic* become useful terms to describe persuasive processes that may not be immediately visible. This relates to Coyne and Snodgrass' suggestion that we need to understand various 'systems of [design] legitimation' in a larger 'post-rationalist' context. Coyne and Snodgrass (1995:48) situate contemporary approaches to design within a 'post-rationalist' problem regime, where we find "a renewed interest in the roles of rhetoric, narrative and myth; as opposed to logic". This renewed interest in myth seems to be well aligned with Burke's approach.

The most common critical interrogations of myth (in the Marxist tradition still popular in cultural studies) encourage demystification of ideologies. Burke believes this attitude, to rid society from mythic (and therefore false) kinds of thinking, is thoroughly modernist in its aspiration towards rationality. He wishes to show how modern science and politics – which aim to enlighten and demystify – still contain mythic qualities in much the same way as primitive rituals and institutionalised religion. Burke thus emphasises that one can never get away from myth; that modern, rational programs of enlightenment are equally dependent on 'mythic' rhetoric, even as they seek to rid society of mystification. For Burke, all demystifying discourses are of themselves also mystifying rhetorical resources. Burke (PC:11), for instance, highlights how using the term 'scapegoating' (as well as 'rationalizing'[21]) has a high emotive value in designating supposedly erroneous processes. As Burke (PC:11) points out, there is "in all orientations the process of linkage (involving certain linkages which, because we do not accept them as valid, we call scapegoat)". Labelling other's orientations or

[21] Burke (PC:17) explains how the term 'rationalization' seems to have emerged in the context of Freudian psychoanalysis to designate a patient's motives that are faulty and partly concealed from the patient himself.

motives as invalid or deluded can, of course, become a powerful rhetorical tactic to secure allies for one's own position.

While Burke is, like other critics of ideology of his time, eager to highlight the damaging potential of mystification, he proposes a more complex and nuanced acceptance of mythic practice as an inevitable part of human nature. In his 1935 article, *Revolutionary symbolism in America*,[22] Burke provides a thorough description of how he understands the dynamics of myth:

> 'Myths' may be wrong, or they may be used to bad ends – but they cannot be dispensed with. […] they are our basic psychological tools for working together. A hammer is a carpenter's tool; a wrench is a mechanic's tool; and a 'myth' is the social tool for welding the sense of interrelationship by which the carpenter and the mechanic, though differently occupied, can work together for common social ends. In this sense a myth that works well is as real as food, tools, and shelter are. As compared with the reality of material objects, however, we might say that the myth deals with a *secondary* order of reality. Totem, race, godhead, nationality, class, lodge, guild – all such are the 'myths' that have made various ranges and kinds of social coöperation possible. They are not 'illusions', since they perform a very real and necessary social function in the organizing of the mind. But they may look illusory when they survive as fossils from the situations for which they were adapted into changed situations for which they are not adapted (Burke 1989:267-8).

What Burke understood, long before his Marxist contemporaries, was that "one cannot challenge an ideology unless one has a distinct and positive view of mythology" as a productive mechanism towards establishing social cohesion (Coupe 2005:9).[23] Otherwise put, Burke believes we should maintain "a healthy interest in the inevitably mythic dimension of culture" and promote "the progressive potential of myth" (Coupe 2005:21). While Burke is critical of how myths can be used towards ideological domination, he acknowledges that, since myths can never be dispensed with, we need to develop (or at least align ourselves with) more constructive myths. Instead of seeking to rid society of its myths, Burke emphasises the positive potential of myth to mobilise people towards a shared goal. This belief in the transcendent power of myth is explored in greater depth towards the end of this study.

Motivational propriety (piety & sacrilege)

As explained previously, designers are under the 'dramatistic' obligation to justify – or at least *position* – their past and future design actions. Designers defend their decisions when accounting to clients, but they also rationalise their decisions to themselves. As Richard Buchanan (1985:10) explains, "design is an art of communication on two levels: it attempts to persuade audiences not only that a given design is useful, but also that the designer's premises or attitudes and values regarding practical life or the proper role of technology are important, as well". In other words, designers need to account for their *motives*, and these motives should be appropriately aligned with those they are addressing. As mentioned previously, both the selection of a stylistic application and the verbal motivation of action are evaluated in terms of 'propriety'.

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[22] This paper was presented at The League of American Writers' event, which promoted politically progressive literature in the Marxist spirit (Coupe 2005:8). Coupe (2005:9) explains how Burke's definition of myth, presented at this essentially Marxist event, implied that Marxism too should be considered a kind of social myth. Understandably, his presentation was unfavourably received amidst orthodox Marxists who treated myth "as synonymous with the illusory"; as deceptive ideology.
[23] It is for this reason that Burke felt the need to distinguish between myth and ideology, especially since the two concepts were frequently treated synonymously in mid-twentieth century cultural critique.

Some motivational justifications are more salient or rhetorically powerful than others, because they are ideologically aligned or supported by entrenched myths. This relates to Burke's notion of *piety*,[24] which he describes as "the sense of what properly goes with what" (PC:74).

As an example, one can look again at the heated debate generated by the use of the "world's most-hated font" (Dowling 2014), *Comic Sans*. Designers – as well as an increasingly typographically literate public – are highly critical of how this typeface is used in everyday society, especially in general corporate communications. For designers, it is acceptable to use *Comic Sans* in comic strip speech bubbles, since this was the original purpose for the typeface. The common disapproval thus stems from the idea that the typeface is used out of its conventional and 'proper' context. However, it is interesting to see recent shifts in some designers' attitudes towards *Comic Sans*. Recent research conducted supports a wider usage of the typeface, proven for its high readability in a large population (including children and those with reading disabilities). Under such circumstances it is reasonable to expect the valuation of *Comic Sans* amongst designers to shift, since its usage can be functionally legitimated. In other words, the use of *Comic Sans* outside of the comic strip context can now be considered acceptable, since the *motives* for using it are acceptable. *Comic Sans* can now 'properly go with' other kinds of communications, particularly those aimed at children and those with reading disabilities. The website *Comic Sans Criminal* (Dempsey [sa]) reflects these new 'pieties' when offering advice on "how to use Comic Sans appropriately" (Figure 8).

Figure 8: *Comic Sans Criminal* website (Dempsey [sa]).

[24] As mentioned previously, Burke sees *piety* as translated into the secular realm as 'propriety'.

Motivational pieties impact how designers are expected to speak about their practice: *why* they are making certain aesthetic decisions; as well as whether they are following a stylistic trend or not (and again *why)*. It is important to acknowledge that one finds different attitudes towards new design trends in general. Not all designers or consumers concern themselves with the latest trends. There are those who, out of principle, deliberately avoid following trends; to not be seen as 'jumping onto trend bandwagons'. However, regardless of whether a trend is followed or not, this decision is frequently communicated as part of a rhetorical strategy. For instance, expressing a decision *not* to follow a trend may serve to emphasise individuality or authorial distinction.

One does nonetheless find general motivational pieties in various design sectors that influence how designers are expected to justify their relation to the new. In the fashion industry, for instance, it is a common and legitimate motive for fashions simply to change for the sake of change. This makes sense, since the main purpose of fashion is to attract attention, primarily through mere difference. It is possible to argue that while graphic design tends to be more closely aligned with visual fashions and graphic fads, communication or information design is perhaps more concerned with enduring or 'universal' design values. In this design sector, the following of a new trend needs to be accompanied by a particular kind of verbal reasoning, to justify or legitimate the necessity for change. In other words, while designers may follow new trends in communication and information design industries, they are usually expected to provide more 'substantial' reasons for doing so. Especially in light of increasing concerns over unsustainable design practice, designers are under tremendous pressure to justify the need for the new.

In sectors less concerned with mere 'fashion', a different set of discursive motivational proprieties exist, even if practice in these sectors seems to reflect similar obsessions with 'the new for newness sake'. As Boris Groys (2014) explains:

> In the natural sciences or technology, popular opinion has it that innovation is dictated by objective economic or scientific needs. The idea that here, too, newness is produced for newness' sake will seem far-fetched to many. Yet it could of course be shown – indeed, already has been repeatedly shown – that the utilitarian nature of the new in the natural sciences and technology is an illusion, and that technology itself engenders the new needs that it goes on to satisfy in new ways" (Groys 2014:59).

In other words, science and technology (and by extension design) claim to create new things in response to (new) needs, but very often the reverse is true. This reflects Thorstein Veblen's well-known reversed aphorism, "invention is the mother of necessity", which Burke also refers to in his work.

The main issue to be explored here thus relates to the apparent demand to characterise innovations as necessary responses. When proposing something new, something that significantly breaks with the current 'order', there usually needs to be some statement of intent, to assist in the adoption of a new approach as still 'orderly' or somehow meaningful. A rationale is thus offered to help people accept the new. It is worth pointing out that it is possible for a rationale of 'the new' to be a radical rejection of 'order'. For instance, in

the case of Andy Warhol's art, the discursive art community, or "interpretive bureaucracy," could find the logic and genius in reproduced images, insofar as they challenge traditional artistic norms (Lanham 2006:50).

From a communication design perspective, the interpretation of 'deconstructionist' typographic[25] work, by designers such as David Carson (as shown in Figure 5), could serve as another example. Carson was heavily criticised for breaking with typographic tradition, but through effective discursive legitimation he could justify his approach as appropriate in context. Furthermore, the design community could justify and 'sanctify' such work by aligning it with theories of philosophical deconstruction.[26] As Chuck Byrne and Martha Witte (2001[1990]:248) argue, "[f]ar from being the mere application of style […] deconstructionist design potentially clarifies or extends certain aspects of communication that the uniform treatment of elements inherent in Modernism has a tendency to obscure". Similarly, Ellen Lupton and J Abbott Miller (1994) describe deconstruction in design not as a stylistic movement, but an approach or attitude towards challenging the traditional relationship between form and content: "[a] history of typography informed by deconstruction would show how graphic design has revealed, challenged or transformed the accepted rules of communication" (Lupton & Miller 1994:363). Byrne and Witte (2001[1990]:250) believe

> Deconstruction brings into question and reshapes the entire typographic vocabulary, the orientation of the page, whether there should be a page, and whether type itself should do more than perform its basic historical function of being readable. […] While saying so might seem heretical to some, type can have purposes which are illustrative, atmospheric, interruptive, and expressive in addition to, or beyond, mere legibility.

However, they refer to well-known designer Paula Scher's assertion that "[t]he legibility of type is dependent upon the goal: If it's supposed to be legible, it should be. If it's not supposed to be, it shouldn't be" (Scher in Byrne & Witte 2001[1990]:250). In other words, they believe it is important "for the designer to understand the reason for a particular approach rather than merely engaging in meaningless stylistic mimicry" (Byrne & Witte 2001[1990]:250).

The double-book *The ten commandments of typography/Type heresy*, by Paul Felton (2006) serves as a useful illustration of the manner in which rule-breaking is allowed and even encouraged in design practice. The book (as shown in Figure 9) is described as follows:

> One side of this sharp-witted, cleverly designed guide presents the ten main rules, or 'commandments', of type design, addressing such aspects of typographic doctrine as legibility, alignment and capitalization; the other shows how type can successfully subvert these rules, presenting 'sacrilegious' visual alternatives. In support of the commandments Felton includes a list of twelve 'disciples', those internationally renowned graphic designers whom he identifies as abiding by the rules, including such figures as Eric Gill, Jan Tschichold and Erik Spiekermann. Confronting these are his 'fallen angels', which include such experimental typographers as David Carson, Jeffery Keedy, Phil Baines and Jonathan Barnbrook (Merrell Publishers 2014).

[25] Julier (2008:87) highlights how there is a particular scholarly context or intellectual legitimacy found in design discourse on typography, as well as a canon of typographic heroes.

[26] The articles *A brave new world: understanding deconstruction*, by Chuck Byrne and Martha Witte (1990) and *Deconstruction and graphic design: history meets theory*, by Ellen Lupton and J Abbott Miller (1994) offer explanations of the connections between the philosophical deconstruction of Jacques Derrida and the deconstructive work of graphic designers.

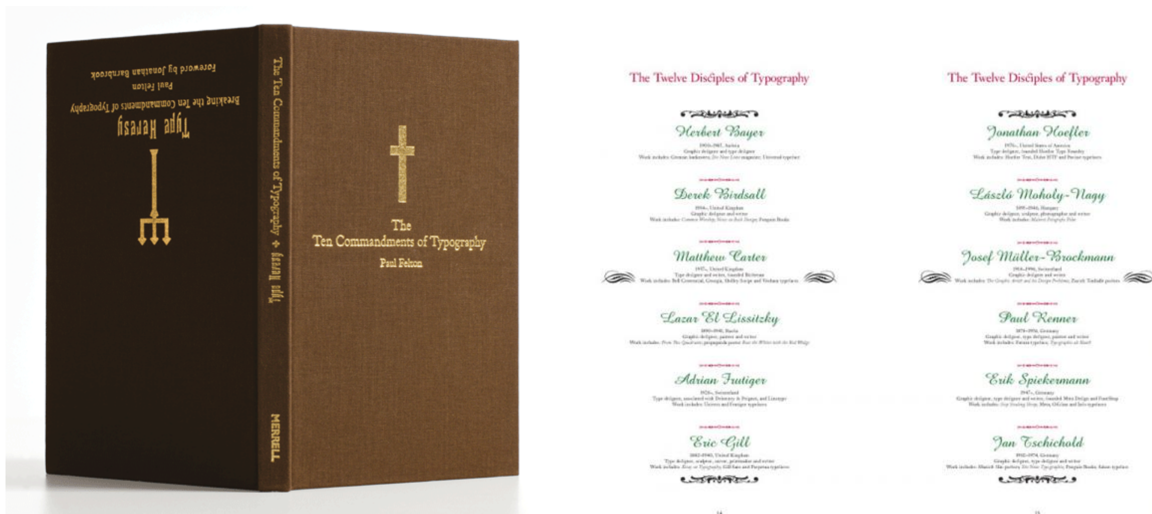

Figure 9: *The ten commandments of typography/Type heresy*, by Paul Felton (Merrell Publishers 2014).

The extended religious metaphor employed throughout Felton's book reflects the seriousness with which many designers treat typographic rules and conventions. However, it also points towards the possibility and celebration of 'appropriate heresy'. While we find visual, stylistic conventions in various areas of design practice, these conventions or rules can be challenged as long as the 'proper' justifications accompany the change. In Burkean terms, motivation is about selecting certain relationships or contingencies as logical, meaningful and appropriate. However, Burke (PC:35) emphasises how these relationships are not *realities*, but *interpretations*. Motivational pieties are socially constructed and communally subscribed to by various groups. Since not all groups select the same motives as legitimate, the potential for conflict is always present. It is therefore through rhetorical communication that motivational disagreements need to be negotiated.

Pentadic pieties

While different groups subscribe to different motivational pieties, there are some common varieties that I wish to explore here, with the help of Burke's *dramatistic pentad.* To reiterate, through five terms derived from drama – *act, scene, agent, agency* and *purpose* – along with ratios between them, Burke's 'grammar' offers a means for interrogating the locus of design motives. This locating of motives relates back to Nelson and Stolterman's notion of 'guarantors of design' (g.o.d.), whereby designers can justify their decisions on external grounds, or 'in terms of' something else. While I do not present a thorough pentadic analysis here, a generalised identification of commonly emphasised positions may shed some light onto motivational pieties (and impieties) when it comes to visual stylistic trend justifications in design discourse.

In the context of this study, I consider the selection or application of a design style or visual aesthetic as the pentadic *act*.[27] Various motives can be cited in justifying the chosen aesthetic approach. In Burkean terms, an *act*-emphasis would simply highlight the value of the *act* itself, for its own sake. From a design perspective, it is possible to find such emphases, for instance, in the celebration of the design object's intrinsic, formal

[27] I do not mean to suggest that aesthetic decisions are the only decisions designers make. However, in the context of this study, where I examine visual or stylistic design trend dynamics, these are the decisions that I am most interested in exploring.

qualities. When highly successful, such design *acts* might be found as pieces in design museums. However, it is perhaps more common to find other pentadic emphases which support or justify the *act* in relation to other factors. This relates to Anne Burdick's (1992) belief that designers regularly make decisions based on aesthetic appeal, but they tend to keep this fact to themselves:

> To openly embrace our very own sumptuous surfaces solely for their formal qualities dilutes the authority we have contrived through the mandates of Rational Functionalism. This does not keep us from making decisions based on aesthetics alone, it just means we keep quiet about it (Burdick 1992).

Other design authors offer similar views. Rick Poynor (2006a:45) explains how "[i]t is not that the commitment to form went away – it just went unspoken, like beauty itself. We are surrounded by it, but can't bring ourselves to say what it is". Poynor (2006a:44) thus suggests that 'beauty' as design motive seems to be impious, despite the fact that "graphic design is a profession wholly in thrall to its own visions of formal beauty. Beauty is the single quality designers most value and crave". Similarly, Jeffery Keedy (2006a:94) highlights how "[a]nimosity towards style is pretty much a given in the design rhetoric of the twentieth century".[28] He explains how designers are still interested in style, they are just reluctant to admit it. It is for this reason that modernism remains the go-to style for the serious designer: "Modernism made the issue of style much easier for designers to deal with, since it gave them a style that they could pretend was not a style" (Keedy 2006a:101). From this perspective, modernism remains 'timeless' because it is perceived as an international, neutral style. Paradoxically then, modernist design remains piously 'stylish' precisely because it is considered devoid of style. Keedy (2006a:102) argues that although designers "are unlikely to admit it, [they] are implicit stylists and tastemakers. […] Culture is expressed and understood through style, which is mostly created and evaluated by designers". Burdick, Poynor and Keedy are thus critical of the motivational deflection away from formal aesthetics, suggesting that under the dominant 'motivational system' the actual purpose of style and beauty cannot be fully understood.

Nonetheless, it is clear from the above observations, that a 'proper' design motive usually frames form and style as subordinate to function (in Burkean terms, the *act* would be subordinate to *purpose*). It is possible to argue that in a design context, there are certain acceptable (pious) ways of speaking about style, which usually involves an appropriate subordinate relation to other design values or motives. This relates to the previous example of discursive legitimations of deconstructionist design. Lupton and Abbott Miller (1994) could more easily argue for an intellectual legitimacy of deconstructionist design by arguing that it is *not* merely a style, but rather a critical attitude towards the relationship between form and content. In other words, the deconstructionist design act serves a greater critical purpose and is not merely a self-indulgent stylistic act for its own sake. The extent to which the visual aesthetic *act* can be framed in relation to other factors, is briefly explored by referring to the ratios between the act and the other four pentadic terms.

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[28] Keedy (2006a:98), in reference to the work of Virginia Postrel, believes such an attitude towards style is indicative of a puritanical mindset whereby aesthetic pleasure is closely related to evil.

It is not uncommon in contemporary design practice for *agent*-centered motives to be criticised, as ego-driven and self-indulgent. As mentioned previously, there is the common understanding that "the designer must never become the story [as] it would get in the way of the client's message" (Shaughnessy 2006:168). However, celebrity designers such as David Carson and Stefan Sagmeister ignore this rule and promote themselves shamelessly. As Shaughnessy (2006:168) explains, these designer auteurs "published monographs and they were endlessly profiled in magazines. In the end, they become more famous than the work they produced". In such instances, the celebrity designer or auteur, may be perceived as fulfilling a higher *purpose* via personal expression. In other words, in scenarios where design authorship is considered appropriate or valuable, such as when celebrity designers are involved, the stylistic *act* is considered a unique product of a design *agent*. In such *agent-act* scenarios the designer has a tremendous amount of expressive freedom, and the act may not need to be supported by other justifications. Under such circumstances design authorship and designer identity (as embodied in a personal style) are valued above other design motives, and the will of the designer as super-agent will not be questioned. However, not all design scenarios find such motivational framing appropriate. For instance, design students are not typically allowed to justify design actions based on personal agent-appeals. Unless the project at hand is meant to be self-expressive, students are required to put their personal interests and stylistic preferences aside in order to focus on the communication goal or purpose at hand.

It is fairly common for design acts, including visual aesthetic decisions, to be based on external grounds or *scene*-centered motives. As mentioned previously, Burke sees *scenic* motives as highly pervasive and effective, insofar as reasons for action can be rooted in contextual or circumstantial factors. In such a way, personal responsibility is easily evaded. Some common scenic motives for stylistic decisions may include anything from budget constraints and deadlines, to client preferences and design research findings. Research can include the investigation of market demographics, consumer preferences, product usability, or any other facet related to the design product context. For instance, research can provide evidence regarding consumers' aesthetic preferences. It is very difficult to argue against such evidence. As Reyburn and Kirstein (2015) explain, "[a]ny information of the designer's choosing is packaged as authoritative with the simple words 'our research indicates …'". The mere mention of 'research' as external motivation for design action is rhetorically powerful because it aligns well with the common pious devotion to scientific method (whether this method was employed 'scientifically' or not). Nelson and Stolterman also explore this tendency in their discussion of 'guarantors of design'. They explain how 'scientific method' as a design approach is used to "show that the result of a design process is based on something that is not negotiable, or subjective, but is, instead, something truly universal". In this manner, "responsibility has been effectively removed" (Nelson & Stolterman 2012:208). This dynamic could also be interpreted as a faith in specific kinds of design methods or *agency*.

In terms of the investigation at hand, which considers the *act* as the visual aesthetic solution, *agency* could be considered any means by which the act is achieved, or any means that impact or dictate that outcome. There are, once again, various scenarios that may call for different pieties with regards to design *agency*. In some

instances the designer's technologies, instruments or tools (including software, media channels or platforms) may be cited as reasons for specific aesthetic choices. This *agency-act* ratio, whereby an agency dictates the outcome, is often considered less appropriate than a reversed *act-agency* ratio, whereby the means are considered subservient to the desired or envisioned outcome. As a related example from a design education context, one finds schools that prohibit the use of computers in the early phases of design education precisely because there is concern over the digital tools too heavily impacting design decision-making.[29] Students who are not yet skilled in operating design software applications routinely settle on what they are able to create, rather than what they initially envisioned. However, it is possible to argue that such concerns are becoming increasingly rare, since digital technologies have come to dominate design practice in many ways. As digital design products become more pervasive, the possibilities and limitations of digital tools cannot be ignored. As an example, to justify the look of a website by referring to the possibilities and limitations of web platforms, may be considered legitimate (although there are others who lament this state of affairs).

In many ways, *agency*-centered arguments which emphasise the pragmatic, are easily considered valid in practice. However, *agency*-centered design is not always appreciated from more critical, philosophical perspectives. For instance, Byrne and Witte (2001[1990]:245) question the use of the primary tool or agency in modernist design, namely the typographic grid. They argue that "[t]oday's seemingly boundless freedom precludes the need for many typographic conventions and even brings into question the need for that most sacrosanct of mid-twentieth-century graphic design devices – the grid" (Byrne & Witte 2001[1990]:245). They continue to explain how "[g]rids are but one means of organizing visual material – a means to an end, not an end in themselves" (Byrne & Witte 2001[1990]:245). Byrne and Witte are, in other words, suggesting that the grid as *agency* should not determine the solution or become an end in itself. In general, *agency*-arguments are considered acceptable when they offer a means to an end, but do not dictate the ends *(purposes)* themselves. In other words, just as the visual aesthetic *act* should be subservient to other values, the use of tools *(agency)* should be subservient to overall design *purpose*.

Throughout the above discussion it is possible to identify the repeated motivational piety in directing design decisions towards *purpose*. In acceptable design discourse, all motives can be considered as supporting overall *purpose*, whether explicitly or implicitly. However, different design scenarios and different design stakeholders may call for different conceptions of design *purpose*. For a client, design *purpose* might be enhancing their brand's reputation and increasing commercial profit. For the consumer or user, *purpose* might mean functional use value and/or symbolic status-value. Designers, as mediators, probably refer to design *purpose* as a complex combination of these motives. In the context of this study, visual design form is frequently, and quite effectively, legitimated in terms of *purpose*.

[29] These concerns have much in common with other critiques of technology, where the manner in which technologies influence behaviour is severly distrusted.

There are many ways in which design *purpose*-appeals are present implicitly, through the other pentadic terms. For instance, the characteristics of the *scene* or design context may be used as justification for particular design decisions, but only insofar as these scenic qualifications enable appropriate design action towards ultimate purpose. The emphasis on a celebrity designer *agent* can be considered appropriate if implicitly supported by a *purpose*-motive (i.e. increased media exposure or favourable celebrity-brand association). Similarly, *agency*-based arguments – where tools, processes or technologies are cited as reasons behind design decisions – are only considered legitimate insofar as these 'agencies' are aligned with overall purpose. As mentioned previously, design research may also be considered a means to an end (an *agency* in support of a *purpose*). As these examples indicate, many different motivational framings can be considered acceptable, as long as ultimate design purpose (usually functional, utilitarian or commercial) can be supported.

While an emphasis on functionality may still be deemed highly significant or sacred in terms of design *purpose*, practices at the fringes of mainstream design practice may embody different conceptions of purpose. For instance, the products of the movement labelled *Critical Design*[30] closely resembles artistic works, insofar as they do not comply with traditional notions of functional utility. These works nonetheless serve very particular purposes (for example, design *for* provocation or debate). Critical Design works are able to generate intense debate, precisely because they violate the traditional notion of what design products ought to be and do. I examine the phenomenon of Critical Design in greater depth in chapter six, where I consider the potential of critical re-framing strategies.

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Insofar as some design actions or motives are considered pious, it follows that others may be considered impious. Particular perceptions of design piety and sacrilege will change over time. This relates to Burke's idea that heresies and orthodoxies are forever changing places. However, it is possible to argue that the most heretical or sacrilegious design actions are usually those that seem entirely unconcerned with purpose. While artistic works are frequently and legitimately framed as 'functionless' (i.e. via Kant's theory on aesthetic disinterestedness), it is considered against design's nature to do so. While 'Critical Design' products may be dysfunctional in the utilitarian sense, they are still regarded as 'design' products (as opposed to artworks), insofar as they effectively communicate intentional, albeit alternative, functions. Whether a design's purpose needs to relate to traditional functionality or utility is thus debateable, but a designer's complete disinterest in purpose seems truly impious; a going against the *essence* of design.

It is for this reason that perceived intentionality is highly important in judgements of design quality. The haphazard, arbitrary or accidental is considered taboo. Just as 'our research indicates' can be interpreted as a *god-phrase*, 'playing around with' could be considered a *devil-phrase*. The reason why this motive is so

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[30] The main proponents for *Critical Design*, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (2001:58), explain how typical design practice is mostly affirmative, as it "reinforces how things are now, it conforms to cultural, social, technical and economic expectation". As an alternative, *Critical Design* practice challenges the *status quo* and critiques "the prevailing situation through designs that embody alternative social, cultural, technical or economic values" (Dunne & Raby 2001:58).

unpalatable to many designers (and design educators) is, of course, related to the idea that design should be a logical and rational process. 'Playing' is too unintentional and uncontrolled. While the design process may involve intuitive or uncontrolled 'accidents', the extent to which these processes are allowed is limited. As mentioned previously, McLachlan and Coyne (2001) describe how some level of arbitrary experimentation may be allowed in the very early stages of idea generation, but only as part of an intentional innovation strategy. Without injecting intentional, rational decisions towards purposive goals, a process cannot legitimately be considered *design*.

Design bullshit

At various points throughout the previous discussion, the possibility of inaccurate or insincere motivation has been highlighted. The rhetorical potential, to verbally convince others of good design practice, can of course be exploited. It is because certain 'pious' motives are so effective, that they are easily used to mystify various design stakeholders. These kinds of mystifying tactics do sometimes create suspicion in the industry, as Reyburn and Kirstein (2015:80) point out:

> clients are often suspicious of design solutions, scrutinising and second-guessing the proferred design narrative. This […] turns out not to be an indictment against the clients. After all, it appears that their suspicions are often well-founded, considering the insubstantial ways in which many design decisions are justified.

Reyburn and Kirstein (2015:78) refer specifically to the common practice of "reverse rationalization" – for instance, where pseudo-research is used to justify actions already taken, instead of informing those actions in the first place. Robert Riley (2015:[sp]) also observes this practice, in architecture specifically, arguing that very often "pseudotheory follows form and seeks to justify it". In other words, the theorising comes after the designing. Riley (2015) highlights how the "proponents of a new design style […] particularly in situations where its acceptance depends on publicity, justify it in terms of larger social or intellectual profundities". A new form thus requires a profound theory – either selected or constructed – in order to justify the proposed course of action. By labelling such motivational practices as *deus ex machina* – that which "is inserted somewhat abruptly and clumsily at the end of a drama to 'resolve plot complications' that would otherwise be left hanging" – Reyburn and Kirstein (2015:71) are clearly highlighting the questionable basis of such argumentation. Very often, the *deus ex machina* takes on the form of "so-called research" which acts as a "source of external authority whereby the design results can be corroborated. It may even temporarily assuage the fears of the distrustful client" (Reyburn & Kirstein 2015). This relates to Julier's (2008:50) belief that "[t]here is a manifest contradiction between the *realpolitik* of the design profession and some of the discourses which are mustered to explain and legitimate itself".

Reyburn and Kirstein (2015:79) acknowledge the deeper-rooted ideological dimension of post-rationalisation, used not only to convince clients, but also the designers themselves. In many instances this process is more-or-less unconsciously employed. Designers are under the obligation to account for every step of their process, but are frequently unable to narrate their highly intuitive processes. It is only natural, especially since most other designers are also doing it, to fabricate 'pious' motivational correlations.

However, while the practice of 'post-rationalisation' is common, it is clearly not ideal. Insincere, inflated or misleading motivations, as a routine part of the design strategy, have become somewhat of a negative stereotype. Whenever a designer's justification is labelled a 'post-rationalisation' (or even just a 'rationalisation' as opposed to a 'reason'), the motive is likely to be perceived as fabricated and therefore insincere.

This practice, to present a false motive as a façade to conceal actual motive, is of course the standard, derogatory definition of 'rhetoric'. The term 'rhetoric' is frequently equated with manipulative tactics or 'bullshitting'. As Harry G Frankfurt argues in his influential essay *On bullshit*:

> The realms of advertising and of public relations, and the nowadays closely related realm of politics, are replete with instances of bullshit so unmitigated that they can serve among the most indisputable and classic paradigms of the concept. And in these realms there are exquisitely sophisticated craftsmen who – with the help of advanced and demanding techniques of market research, of public opinion polling, of psychological testing, and so forth – dedicate themselves tirelessly to getting every word and image they produce exactly right (Frankfurt 1988:122).

Similarly, rhetoric is distrusted because it is understood as meticulously crafted or fabricated as opposed to being spontaneous. More specifically, Lanham (2006) explains how a display of stylistic self-consciousness is distrusted and how calculated speech is considered less sincere than spontaneous utterance: "[a]s soon as our audience thinks we are considering how we are speaking, paying attention to style instead of substance, they start feeling their pockets to make sure their wallets are safe" (Lanham 2006:142).

As mentioned previously, Michael Bierut (2007:176), in reference to Frankfurt's essay, explains how "[e]very design presentation is inevitably, at least in part, an exercise in bullshit". He sees the issue as rooted in the fact that "the design process always combines the pursuit of functional goals with countless intuitive, even irrational decisions". Whereas the functional decisions tend to be "concrete and measurable", the intuitive decisions "are more or less beyond honest explanation" (Bierut 2007:176).

> In discussing design work with their clients, designers are direct about the functional parts of their solutions and obfuscate like mad about the intuitive parts, having learned early on that telling the simple truth – 'I don't know, I just like it that way' – simply won't do. […] So into this vacuum rushes the bullshit: theories about the symbolic qualities of colors or typefaces; unprovable claims about the historical inevitability of certain shapes, fanciful forced marriages of arbitrary design elements to hard-headed business goals (Bierut 2007:176).

As Frankfurt and Bierut point out, bullshit is a particular category of rhetorical action where a rhetor is characterised as disinterested in reality or 'the truth', but highly interested in self-promotion. From a design perspective this might amount to the designer not caring about actual 'research', 'functionality', 'user response', or whatever else is cited as part of the rational design motive. Instead the designer cares only about projecting a desirable image, of competence and professionalism. Design bullshit requires no conviction about truth or falsity, it only requires "the desire to conceal one's private intentions in the service of the larger goal: getting your client to do it the way you like it" (Bierut 2007:176).

In Burkean terms, bullshitting could be considered the superficial exploitation of motivational pieties. Design bullshitting occurs when designers rationalise their work by drawing on mystifying discursive conventions (such as *god-terms* or popular aphoristic design phrases), without any regard for whether these motivations accurately reflect reality. There is, of course, a fine and indistinct line between 'bullshitting' and 'rationalisation'; with the difference impossible to ascertain without entering the other's mind. It is perhaps this awareness that allows for design bullshit to be tolerated. As Rick Poynor (2006b:150) argues, there is a high level of "collective tolerance for bullshit amongst those in the design community: an acceptance that BS is an inevitable part of the design process". He further points out, what is most concerning is not whether designers believe in their own motives or rationales, but rather the fact that they "accept that some bullshit will creep in and they don't seem to mind" (Poynor 2006b:150). However, Poynor (2006b:151) believes

> [a]ny sign of tolerance for bullshit in public life should concern us. The last thing we can afford is to view the bullshitter indulgently as a source of amusement. In communication, as in all our social relationships, there has to be a basis for trust, and trust is grounded in a sense of what is real or unreal, reliable or unreliable, true or false. Those who aim to create an effect on the listener or viewer without regard for the truth of what they say contribute to a climate of vagueness and confusion that eats into everything. […] Lost in a haze of wishful thinking there can be no sensible basis for action, no way of making a rational choice. Bullshit leads only to even more bullshit.

Poynor echoes Frankfurt's assertion that 'bullshit' as a damaging, careless and self-serving practice, should actively be called out and combatted. While discursive rationalisation is a natural part of a design process, intentionally insincere motivation should not be condoned. As Keedy (2006b:198) argues, "[w]e need to have more designers talking about design honestly and intelligently without the usual self-promotion and moral posturing".

It is possible to argue that this critical attitude towards bullshit motivation is much needed in the design and trend industries, not only in terms of designer motivations, but the larger motivations put forward by clients, corporations or brands. There is a suspicion that trend oscillations (like fashions) initiate change for the sake of attracting attention, while concealing this fact behind a veneer of rational motivation. As pointed out previously, some design industries require more 'substantial' reasons for change and if these motives are not there to begin with, they need to be fabricated. As also pointed out previously, the intuitive and mysterious nature of the design process makes the logical evaluation of design motives trickier. This all contributes to a situation in which design trend justifications or motivations may be suspected as fabricated, insincere 'bullshit', but for it to be tolerated nonetheless.

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Burke is aware of the cunning and potentially devious ends to which rhetorical skills can be directed and he addresses these concerns throughout his work. When a rhetor seeks to present his personal cause as equally favourable to the audience, there is always the "possibility of malice and the lie" (RM:45). However, Burke chooses to frame rhetoric in more positive terms, even if the possibility of being employed towards deceitful ends is always present. By framing rhetoric as an essential and inevitable function of language and by

emphasising rhetoric's function primarily in terms of identification and human cooperation, Burke moves away from traditional pejorative connotations surrounding rhetoric.

Burke supports a generous hermeneutic approach, whereby people are not blamed for employing rhetorically effective motives. For instance, to invoke a *god-term* is a pious act; it is playing by the discursive rules of the game. Burke always emphasises how motives are socialised products: "to discover in oneself the motives accepted by one's group is much the same thing as to use the language of one's group" (PC:20-21).

> To explain one's conduct by the vocabulary of motives current among one's group is about as self-deceptive as giving the area of a field in the accepted terms of measurement. One is simply interpreting with the only vocabulary he knows. One is stating his orientation, which involves a vocabulary of ought and ought-not, with attendant vocabulary of praiseworthy and blameworthy (PC:21).

Burke (PC:21) believes we need to critique orientations and motives in relation to whether the 'duties' and 'virtues' referred to are valid and serviceable. Similarly, we should question whether the accepted design pieties in a particular professional design milieu are constructive. To follow Burke's advice, we should not blame designers for their socialised discursive rhetorics, but we should nonetheless remain vigilant and critical of the validity of those positions.

Content is always 'packaged', regardless of our level of self-consciousness about it. Becoming more conscious of rhetoric and more self-conscious of how we employ it is vital in developing responsible citizenship. As Lanham (2006:27) explains, the study of rhetoric affords to people "a self-consciousness about how expression affect[s] content, about how knowledge should be held with an awareness of its container". Burke's ethical proposal, to develop greater rhetorical consciousness through rhetorical education, is explored in greater depth in Chapter Six.

To reiterate, the expression of design motives is the rhetorical or strategic framing of a design situation, in relation to perceived design pieties. Burke frequently comments on how 'orientations', 'perspectives' and what he refers to as *terministic screens,* influence the way we interpret and frame reality. His discussion of terministic screens forms a major part of his rhetorical critique and is also highly significant for a critique of design motives.

Terministic screens & design frames

The *terministic screen* is Burke's term for referring to the way in which attention is directed towards something, but consequently also away from something else.[31] Burke (LSA:45) explains that "any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality". The notion of a 'terministic screen' clearly relates to the dialectical

[31] Burke's terministic screen, as related to the notion of symbolic framing, is echoed in Lakoff and Johnson's theory of metaphor. They explain that "[t]o highlight certain properties is necessarily to downplay or hide others, which is what happens whenever we categorise something. Focusing on one set of properties shifts our attention away from others" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:163).

nature of language or symbol usage in general. Although Burke refers to the 'terms' or 'terminologies', terministic screens are not only comprised of linguistic terminologies, but symbolic expressions of various kinds. In the context of this study, terministic screens can be interpreted as any discernable symbolic lens which is influenced by, and also influences, perspectives. From a visual symbolic perspective, it is possible to argue that communication design or information design are essentially 'terministic screening' disciplines, insofar as their main purpose is to frame or package content and to direct attention through graphic devices. Terministic screens can thus be visual/stylistic as well as verbal/discursive.

As explained previously, all representation (visual or discursive) takes place through the metaphorical processes of substitution, whereby something is presented in terms of something else. Any stylistic decision is necessarily a selection, aimed at reflecting content, context, and so on. But insofar as the selection of a stylistic metaphor or idiom is a kind of visual framing it contains a specific meaning *because* it deflects other meanings. A single style cannot visually embody all dialectical design values. While some design styles may be blended in meaningful new ways, to combine a variety of different styles would produce a visual cacophony that would probably be interpreted as ecclectic or chaotic. In other words, it would be impossible to combine a myriad of competing design styles in a way that would communicate all meanings simultaneously and coherently. Strategically speaking, a selection (which always includes a deflection) needs to be made. From a discursive perspective, a designer also needs to select the 'right' motive to justify a decision. The deflection that takes place as an inevitable part of selecting a particular motive is usually not something the designer will be consciously aware of. However, verbal deflections can, of course, be used as a strategic resource. Nelson and Stolterman (2012:207) clearly show an awareness of the rhetorical deflections designers employ in their discussion of 'guarantors of design'.

It is important to understand that terministic screens are unavoidable, since it is impossible to "say anything without [… directing] the attention to one field rather than another" (Burke LSA:50). However, although Burke sees specific orientations or terministic screens as a necessary function in filtering reality, it is a flawed and potentially harmful resource insofar as it provides both a way of seeing and of *not* seeing (Beach 2012:28). All orientations, whether considered constructive or destructive, should thus be recognised as limited in scope. Every perspective is necessarily a limited perspective, simply because it is impossible to speak about, or show, *everything* in its entirety simultaneously. Burke acknowledges that this is a rather obvious mechanism – as when a textbook focuses on one specific subject instead of another – yet he argues that the broader implications of terministic screens often go unnoticed. He adds, "much that we take as observations of 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms" (LSA:46).

In his discussion of terministic screens, Burke draws particular attention to the rhetorical nature of neutral-seeming contexts, or so-called objective discourse, since these symbols have particularly powerful hierarchic effects. Burke uses the example of a laboratory experiment to illustrate how a designed context shapes the outcome. A major problem with a terministic screen (and indeed the main reason for identifying terministic screens in the first place), is that it does not present itself as a screen, but rather as unmediated reality. The

selection of a terministic screen is based on our perceptions as well as our agenda. The 'terministic screen' thus highlights the subjective motives in language since all definitions can be seen as 'tools' that are created by individuals for specific purposes (Hildebrand 1995:633-634).

From a design perspective, modernist aesthetics could be considered a good example of a terministic screen, both visually and verbally. It is a particularly powerful screen precisely because it is not usually perceived as a screen, but rather as the neutral, rational, objective or 'proper' way in which to approach communication or information design tasks. As Michl (2007) argues, the "majority of present day design schools still seem to be in the grip of a hundred years old modernist vision of one true, all-embracing, authentic, historically necessary, modern style". As explained previously, this is also why modernist aesthetics may be interpreted as a 'myth'. Robin Kinross' (1985) investigation of a 'rhetoric of neutrality' in information design products, such as train timetables (Figure 10), offers some useful insights. Kinross explains how mid-century modernist instructional design, as developed by the Ulm school, became the dominant aesthetic treatment for such information design products. This 'neutral' style provided a "sense of efficiency, sobriety [and] seriousness" and came to be perceived as "free of rhetoric" (Kinross 1985:29). In other words, these objects seem to convey only objective facts.

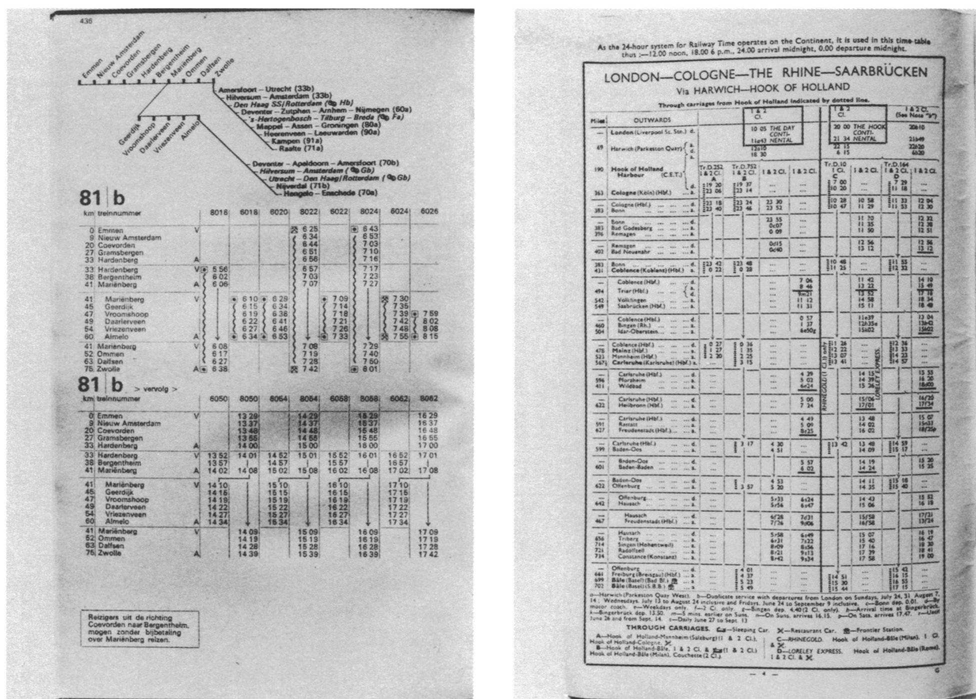

Figure 10: Train timetables for the Dutch National Railway (left) and British Railways (right) (Kinross 1985:22).

However, as Kinross points out, the fact that train timetables are meticulously designed and re-designed points toward an awareness that they also 'persuade' people of the legitimacy or authority of the organisations for which they are designed. Nonetheless, while the aesthetic differences between the timetables, for the Dutch National Railway and British Railways respectively, reflect subtle organisational differences, both timetables employ a powerful modernist 'rhetoric of neutrality'.

To recognise modernist aesthetics as a 'terministic screen' is to ask "what is being deflected?" Theorists such as Michl believe that a variety of local visual idioms and alternative design voices are supressed or sidelined by modernist design. On a more fundamental level, as Kinross highlights, attention is deflected away from the act of design itself, insofar as modernist design appears objectively 'undesigned'. To recognise that even a train timetable is a 'terministic screen' is to recognise that it is consciously crafted from a particular perspective and with a particular rhetorical agenda.

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As mentioned previously, the 'terministic screen' is an important concept used in Burke's socio-cultural critique. Burke's notion of a 'terministic screen' serves to expose naturalised perspectives that may be problematic. Terministic screens impact social orientations in terms of what is perceived as "reigning symbols of authority" (PLF:108). Burke (PC:14) further describes an *orientation* as

> a bundle of judgements as to how things were, how they are, and how they may be. The act of response, as implicated in the character which an event has for us, shows clearly the integral relationship between our metaphysics and our conduct. For in a statement as to how the world is, we have implicit judgements not only as to how the world may become but also as to what means we should employ to make it so.

In other words, an orientation "largely involves matters of expectancy, and affects our choice of means with reference to the future" (PC:18). While we all have orientations for engaging with the world, some orientations are more harmful than others. For example, racist or sexist orientations are clearly erroneous, and lead to discriminatory behaviour. As his most frequently used example, Burke refers again to the practice of scapegoating, where a particular linkage can be seen as deceptive in nature (PC:16). Burke (PC:17) believes that such "[f]aulty means-selecting, on the basis of an inadequate orientation" accounts for many of the world's ills. Burke wishes to highlight how even positive or constructive orientations may become flawed owing to their necessary limitations. Furthermore, because we tend to evaluate other orientations from our own entrenched perspectives, we often do not recognise our own perspectives as screens. As Burke points out, "one school's reason is another school's rationalization" (PC:20). To this end, Burke promotes a rhetorical education, as a means to avoid dogmatic thinking by learning to perceive all perspectives as limited terministic screens, even if they appear natural, obvious or complete.

It is important to acknowledge that the Burkean meta-rhetorical perspective proposed in this study is also a terministic screen. Burke is aware that his particular 'dramatistic' approach[32] to language is also a terministic screen. However, he is able to make a pragmatic argument[33] for the benefits and ethical import of framing human behaviour in dramatistic terms of 'symbolic action'. His chosen *dramatistic screen* enables the kind of meta-criticism that allows for the recognition of terministic screens in the first place. In this manner, Burke's

[32] Burke acknowledges that the *dramatistic* and *scientistic* approaches are not mutually exclusive, but the two approaches nevertheless direct attention in different ways and thus influence human worldviews significantly.
[33] While Burke (LSA:53) acknowledges he will never be able to 'prove' his intuition that humans 'act' instead of merely 'move', he still maintains that "illusion or not, the human race cannot possibly get along with itself on the basis of any other intuition". In other words, Burke's chosen *dramatistic screen* serves a purpose. His insistence on human agency is particularly important for any ethical critique, and for developing greater rhetorical awareness.

particular perspective may also be described as a meta-perspective. His approach acknowledges that while it is possible to frame and re-frame reality, it is not possible to entirely de-frame it. Burke thus encourages us to develop broader perspectives, to widen our terministic screens, while remaining humbly aware that even the widest screens cannot reflect the entire, transhistorical picture.

It is possible to interpret fluctuating design trends as a process of shifting design screens or frames. To some extent, new trends serve to counteract either faulty or merely incomplete orientations. In other words, new design movements or trends are born out of the fact that one design screen is (inevitably) incomplete, and that an alternative approach can compensate for any ideals left unfulfilled. Therefore, design trend dynamics can be described in terms of the oscillation of terministic design screens. The part of the design dialectic that was previously deflected (suppressed, sidelined or merely neglected) re-emerges as something that we ought to pay attention to. Trend rhetorics frequently argue for the necessity of a new approach, merely because it embodies values that had been neglected previously. This new approach will, of course, still be a terministic screen. While it is possible to change the screen, it is impossible to do away with the screen altogether. As I have argued throughout this study, this translates into the continued perpetuation of trend dynamics.

On a higher level of abstraction one could also interpret the current 'trendiness' of trends as part of a contemporary terministic screen. Pamela Trought Klein (2008:408) explains how "trend spotting and trend forecasting have themselves become a trend in advertising, marketing, and retail". The emphasis on constant innovation, along with the associated confusion and anxiety, has created the need for trend mediators[34] to help various stakeholders identify and implement whatever is 'trending right now'. This particular orientation towards trends treats 'innovation' as one of its god-terms and places a premium on mass popularity. By seeing this orientation as a terministic screen one can acknowledge that it is not the only perspective, even if it seems inevitable or unavoidable. Furthermore, this awareness also allows for reflecting on what may be deflected. For instance, a preoccupation with stylistic trends deflects attention away from other forms of design engagement. As Stuart Walker (2004:322) argues,

> [t]he wonder of our modern world is not that we can purchase a radio in hi-tech style, retro style or wood veneer but that we can purchase such an extraordinary thing as a radio at all. Choices of styles are not only trivial compared to the marvel of the product itself, they also detract and distract one from the beauty, ingenuity and sheer inventiveness, and also from the true costs of our manufactured products. This devaluing of our material world is only too evident today.

By recognising the dominant attitude towards trends as a terministic screen, alternative perspectives can actively be sought out. This returns us to the opening argument of this study. Since the contemporary attitude towards trends is perceived as contributing towards unsustainable production and consumption behaviour, it becomes worthwhile to question the naturalised order and explore re-framed alternatives.

[34] The trend mediation industry is big business, with an increasing variety of platforms such as *Coolhunter.com*, *Trendtablet.com* and *Trendhunter.com* surveying the popular cultural landscape for the next 'hot' thing.

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As part of the meta-rhetorical approach proposed in this study, this chapter considered the potential of Burke's theory for thinking about the rhetorical strategies found in both visual and verbal design action. I have argued that combined visual-verbal translation dynamics are employed throughout the design process, and that the indeterminate nature of these translations provides ample opportunity for rhetorical invention. Throughout this chapter I have argued that designers are both producers and consumers of design and trend rhetorics. Since this often takes place through less overtly argumentative means, the Burkean concept of 'identification' proves valuable for interrogating more subtle rhetorical processes. Design in general and trends in particular may be described as highly concerned with the strategic alignment of identity, which often involves the strategic distantiation from undesirable identity.

This chapter included Burke's ideas on rhetorical mystification, as offering valuable insight into trend dynamics, specifically with regards to how cultural hierarchies are formed and sustained. As part of this exploration I considered how the perception of 'mystical' and 'magical' aspects of design and trend practice may be rhetorically exploited. I also elaborated on how the 'rhetoric of rebirth' cycle is used as a transitional rhetorical strategy, through such processes as scapegoating. I introduced Burke's notion of 'god-terms', as a useful concept in considering how particularly powerful design terminologies, phrases and even styles may be evoked to great rhetorical effect.

Burke's perspective on motivational piety helps to explain how, even in an industry that seems to value rule breaking, certain codes of conduct, as well as conventions of discursive motivation remain in place. These pieties or proprieties are aligned with deeper ideological beliefs about design practice and by analysing motivational frames, one may come to recognise what the most prominent underlying values are. I have highlighted the general significance of the motivational locus of 'purpose', as underpinning legitimate design motivations, either explicitly or implicitly. Simply put, there is a general understanding that a design product should fulfil a purpose, and decisions and statements made throughout the design process should reflect this.

Lastly, this chapter presented Burke's notion of 'the terministic screen' as a useful concept for summarising the overall mechanics of rhetorical framing. By emphasising the deflections that necessarily form part of any utterance, Burke acknowledges that it is possible to frame and re-frame, but not to de-frame entirely. In other words, there can be no rhetorically neutral communication. The terministic screen thus reveals Burke's aim to expose all orientations as limited; to promote the re-framing of problematic screens and a deliberate attitude of widening perspectives whenever possible. Before getting to the culminating chapter of this study, which presents Burke's proposed strategies for re-framing and widening perspectives, the following chapter provides an overview of Burke's critique of perspectival 'disorders'.

CHAPTER FIVE: A CRITIQUE OF DESIGN (DIS)ORDERS

In the opening argument of this study I referred to a variety of problems associated with contemporary design trend dynamics. These relate to some of the most common problems associated with design practice in general, namely design's role in overstimulating consumption by manufacturing desire, and increasing waste through aesthetic obsolescence. These problems are considered increasingly urgent amidst accelerated trend dynamics. As mentioned previously, theorists such as Jongerius and Schouwenberg (2015) attribute accelerated aesthetic obsolescence to the widespread obsession with 'the new', which they perceive as fueled by the use of 'inflated' or 'overblown' design rhetoric. There is, in other words, a perception that manipulative rhetorical tactics contribute to this desire for 'the new', which leads to the premature discarding of functional products. I have argued that a meta-rhetorical perspective, which considers rhetorical argumentation in relation to a variety of socio-linguistic factors, may shed light on the conditions that contribute to the above dynamic.

As part of this meta-rhetorical approach to understanding contestable design practice and trend dynamics, this chapter turns to Burke's socio-cultural criticism. I thus aim to explore the above design and trend issues in greater depth, by drawing on Burke's critical vocabulary surrounding a number of problems he identifies during his time. Throughout his career, Burke highlights a number of symbolic 'disorders' or 'psychoses', which he considers the source of problematic attitudes and behaviours, and by extension the cause of destructive systems. It is my argument here that Burke's understanding of these pathological linguistic/symbolic tendencies may shed light on design attitudes and behaviours that become problematic.

Some design theorists trace the above-mentioned design problems back to designer-specific orientations or attitudes. For instance, Tonkinwise (2014) highlights common "design disorders," while Nelson and Stolterman (2012) explore some of the most pressing concerns surrounding design practice by referring to necessary "design evils". These theorists explore the extent to which design practice becomes problematic, owing to specific characteristics of design practice that may become corrupted or imbalanced. As Nelson and Stolterman (2012:185) argue, 'evil' design work "disrupts balance, harmony, order, and other meaning-making qualities of human existence". They acknowledge different kinds of 'evil' found in design practice: "when that which is not desired nevertheless is made manifest because of design activity – whether by chance, necessity, or intention – and becomes part of the world" (Nelson & Stolterman 2012:185). In other words, design products or processes often result in negative byproducts that designers may not have foreseen.

Burke is similarly aware of the less overt ways in which people merely behave 'symbol-foolishly'. In other words, ignorant perspectives may cause harm even when intentions are noble. It is for this reason that Burke emphasises the importance of developing greater rhetorical (self)consciousness, or symbol-wisdom. Burke's ethical vision for developing symbol-wisdom, through rhetorical education, is explored in Chapter Six. In

other words, whereas this chapter presents Burke's critique of disorders, the following chapter presents his proposed correctives.

This chapter begins with a brief contextual overview of Burke's approach to criticism. Thereafter the chapter is divided into four key disorders, as identified by Burke: the *hierarchic psychosis*; the *technological psychosis*; *trained incapacity* (and *occupational psychosis*) and *bureaucratisation of the imaginative*. In each of these sections I discuss related problems in design practice and trend dynamics, as expressed in critical design discourse. It is worth mentioning that many of these design critiques tend to display a rather polemical and reductionist attitude towards design problems. While I do not agree with all of these critical statements, I include them here for two reasons. Firstly, as extreme arguments they provide an effective means for illustrating critical Burkean concepts and terminologies in a design context, and secondly, these arguments serve to illustrate this common rhetorical tone found in popular design discourse. It is also worth pointing out that while my main aim is to present a critical perspective on design practice and trend dynamics, it would not be in the Burkean spirit to present a one-sided critique. Burke always considers the dual possibility of constructively using and destructively misusing symbols. I thus attempt to highlight how design practice and trend dynamics are both functional and dysfunctional, valuable and potentially pathological.

Background

As mentioned previously, Burke is highly critical of the modern condition and his socio-linguistic approach to criticism is therefore considered proto-postmodernist in nature. His critical position is also considered in line with some Marxist thought, insofar as critiques social, cultural and economic hierarchies, the division of labour and alienation caused by increased specialisation, as well as the inequalities found in capitalism.[1] However, Burke finds traditional Marxist critique inadequate in offering solutions, since it does not consider the linguistic origins or deeper *symbolic* roots of structural problems. Burke's 'definition of man' (1968),[2] hints at the potential for human symbolic behaviour to become dysfunctional:

> Man is
> the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal
> inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative)
> separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making
> goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)
> and rotten with perfection (LSA:16).

Burke starts his definition by referring to symbol-using, along with the possibility to misuse symbols, as the basis for other essential human qualities. As mentioned previously, Burke sees symbol-using as a prerequisite for the human tendency to moralise, via the negative. Symbolicity also enables the communication and collaboration required in the creation of a variety of 'instruments', whether these are technological tools or

[1] However, Burke's critique also deviates from Marxist critique in a number of ways. For instance, Burke is more critical of technology and tries "to make sense of the relation between the exploitation of people and the exploitation of the planet" (Coupe 2005:3). Burke is also critical of any philosophical system, such as Marxism, that claims to offer 'ultimate' solutions.
[2] The 'definition of man', which brings together ideas from a number of his works, is comprehensively discussed in Burke's later work, *Language as symbolic action* (1968).

socio-political systems. Burke's assertion that humans are separated from their natural condition by instruments of their own making refers to culture in a general sense, but also the vast technological environment, which becomes a major target of his critique. Next, Burke's claim that people are "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)" summarises his concerns over the way in which people tend to submit to social, cultural or political orders (or ideologies) without questioning their validity. Lastly, Burke's assertion that humans are "rotten with perfection" reiterates his belief in a persistent *entelechial* drive whereby people are compelled to take whatever they do, to 'the end of the line'. Burke's 'definition of man', along with his extended discussion around it, is clearly meant to function as admonition, as opposed to mere definition. He believes the same symbolic abilities that make us constructive, functional human beings, provide the potential for developing destructive and dysfunctional perspectives or attitudes.

Burke thus offers a warning about the way in which symbolic orders may develop into a range of pathologies or psychoses, if left unchecked. Put otherwise, Burke sees symbolic disorders as functional 'orders' that become pathological through imbalance. For Burke, there is a dialectical relation between order and disorder and symbol usage enables the creation of order(s), but it simultaneously has the ability to cause disorder(s). I aim to show how design as symbolic ordering practice, and design trends as symbolically mediated products, can become similarly destructive or pathological, if left unchecked.

Hierarchic psychosis

For Burke, a *hierarchic psychosis* is one of the most basic negative consequences of human symbolicity. He sees the "hierarchal psychosis" as "both a universal condition and a historical pattern [...] inevitable to social order" (Giamo 2009). While the pursuit of order and hierarchy is in itself not problematic, an overdeveloped or obsessive fixation with hierarchy or ranking tends to cause some problems. For instance, it is considered unethical to employ ruthless hierarchic maneuvering to better one's status at the expense of others (through manipulation or exploitation). However, there is clearly a degree to which competitive, self-interested behaviour is considered permissible or even celebrated. As discussed previously, cooperation and competition are in dialectical relation, leading to endless possibility of rhetorical framing. In other words, the boundary between rational hierarchic order and pathological hierarchic disorder is unclear precisely because it can be drawn in different places.

It is possible to argue that the *entelechial* drive or 'perfectionist tendency' is the root cause of pathologies or psychoses. In other words, an excessive, extremist, or absolutist 'order' tends to turn into a 'disorder'. According to Rueckert (1982:38), the entelechial principle explains how certain characteristics in an orientation are overemphasised or 'perfected' at expense of other important values, leading to the development of a psychosis. As mentioned previously, the 'perfectionist tendency' could be considered a natural extension of symbolic ordering propensities. The desire to perfectly express oneself in language is, for Burke, the basic underlying process for seeking 'perfection' in other areas. However, his definition of

man as "*rotten* with perfection"[3] (emphasis added), clearly reveals his critical stance towards this tendency. Burke (RR:298) describes how absolutist, reductionist and exaggerated claims are all instances of the drive towards symbolic perfection. It is clear, throughout his work, that Burke is highly sceptical of the lengths people go to in order to achieve greater perfection. For instance, Burke considers the practice of scapegoating – "the *telos* of orthodoxy" (Wess 1996:227) – as one of the most problematic by-products of the entelechial psychoses. This is why Burke clearly "seeks to undermine the appeal of perfectionism through the adoption of many terminologies or terministic screens, played off one another" (Foss *et al* 2002:207).

In his later work, Burke speaks about the circular nature of the hierarchic psychosis; what he refers to as a 'circular order'. As an analogy for the "endless round of wanting", he speaks about how a 'cure' can reinvigorate the 'disease' (RR:234). He explains how the "principle of wanting is never satisfied with getting, since by its very nature as a principle it transcends all mere material things, even while being encouraged to think that material things are what it wants. So, no matter how much it gets, it will in the end be frustrated because it cannot get still more" (RR:234).[4] As Stevenson (1999:202) summarises:

> Each hierarchy has a godhead or point of highest perfection. However, were we to symbolically achieve, in our own eyes, the highest level of a given hierarchy – to reach that which has symbolized perfection – the hierarchy would inevitably shift and grow such that there would be a new godhead, misrepresenting in new ways desire, which remains out of reach. Because the perfection we see in a godhead exists only in the symbolic, it is a misrepresentation, false cognate for desire; therefore, reaching hierarchic perfection cannot provide fulfilment of desire. To come to terms with the feeling of unworthiness that persists in spite of our achievements, we adjust hierarchies, we set new terms for perfection, new symbolic goals to re-present the possibility that desire is attainable. […] The unattainable nature of true perfection ensures the perpetuation of guilt.

As explained previously, the human drama is often propelled by pervasive feelings of shame or guilt in a variety of forms. From a design perspective one could interpret the above dynamic as an inherent part of the continued drive to 'perfect' design products. The obsessive adjustment of minute details is a common design activity and the 'perfectionist designer' is somewhat of a cultural stereotype. Tonkinwise (2014) believes *Obsessive Compulsiveness* is the "least disputable" of designers' psychological disorders. He argues that the "excessive concern for detailing derives from design's craft origins. But where […] craftsman celebrate the idiosyncrasies that result from each act of handiwork, including the inevitable imperfections, designers, being the makers of the models that would then be mass manufactured, are fastidious about perfection" (Tonkinwise 2014). On a formal design level, an obsession with perfectionism may be interpreted as a waste of intellectual resources; resources that could be better applied to addressing more important issues. Terri Irwin (2008), articulates why aesthetic or formal perfectionism is problematic, from her perspective as a design educator: "Can I, in good conscience, continue to teach my students to be concerned about fractions of millimeters between letters, given what's going on in the world? Is it the design equivalent of rearranging

[3] Burke means to draw attention to the possibilities of both honorific and ironic types of perfection. In the ironic sense, Burke (LSA:18) provides the example of "a perfect enemy", to illustrate that 'perfection' does not imply a positive valuation.
[4] While this kind of critique is not new, it is clearly still relevant (reflected in contemporary behavioural economics concepts such as the 'hedonic treadmill').

the deck chairs on the Titanic?" (Irwin 2008:3). In Burkean terms, an obsessive compulsive concern for formal perfection is a *deflection* worth reflecting on.

Tonkinwise (2015) further characterises designers as essentially optimistic and "motivated by perfectibility, despite the evidence of every design project. They therefore often generate idealistically utopian futures". Tonkinwise seems to echo Burke's sceptical tone in highlighting how design's function borders on dysfunction. While a desire towards greater functional, formal or symbolic 'perfection' may be seen as a noble pursuit in design practice, an overdeveloped perfectionist tendency can also be perceived as a disorder. Aiming to produce or own 'better' design products is not problematic *per se*, however, an excessively hierarchised understanding of design value contributes to the discontent with products that may be 'good enough'.

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It is also worth investigating the extent to which socio-political hierarchies in the 'design drama' may be perceived as pathological (obsessive or excessive). As mentioned previously, design operates within a cooperative-competitive space where hierarchies naturally arise. These socio-political hierarchies are both extra-disciplinary (between designers and other stakeholders) and intra-disciplinary (between various design actors). That designers are positioned within a extra-disciplinary social hierarchy is not always obvious, possibly because the power relations within the hierarchy are not fixed. But insofar as designers are separated from other 'classes' or groups within the design drama – through their expertise and use of discipline-specific terminologies – hierarchic negotiations will naturally take place.

The designer's position within the socio-political hierarchy is a continuous source of debate. For instance, the condescending designer, acting as superior judge of propriety and taste, is not an uncommon stereotype. Bruce Nussbaum's provocative piece *Are designers the enemy of design?* (2007) highlights a common disapproval of such design personas. He explains how "[t]here's a big backlash against design going on today and it's because designers suck. […] Designers suck because they are arrogant". While Nussbaum's argument is highly generalised and reductive, it serves as an example of an increasingly common critique directed at designers. Designers are criticised for considering themselves in a special, elite class, above their clients or ordinary citizens or consumers. It is in this context that 'participatory design' or 'co-design' approaches offer alternative, more democratic relations, where users and other stakeholders are treated as equal partners throughout the design process. Of course not everyone welcomes the democratisation of design practice. For instance, some argue that designers as trained professionals need to educate those who disagree with them in order to achieve the best results.

Nonetheless, in light of the perceived threat to their expertise, it is not uncommon for designers to defend their professional status. As Nussbaum (2007) argues,

> The blogs and websites are full of designers shouting how awful it is that now, thanks to Macs, Web 2.0, even YouTube, EVERYONE is a designer. […] Designers are saying that Design is

> everywhere, done by everyone. So Design is debased, eroded, insulted. The subtext, of course, is that Real design can only be done by great star designers.

Nussbaum suggests that the democratisation of design is feared precisely because it threatens to level a hierarchy from which designers gain not only their professional livelihoods, but also their personal identity. He implies that there are two distinct attitudes when it comes to the extra-disciplinary design hierarchy: there are those who wish to preserve designers' special status, and those who encourage more democratic design relations. However, from a different perspective it is possible to argue in favour of disciplinary hierarchies, where trained experts are set apart for their ability to produce high quality work. In other words, it is important to highlight that extra-disciplinary hierarchies need not be problematic *per se*. Experts should be allowed to be experts. Burke's position is not anti-hierarchy, but rather anti-*hierarchal psychosis*. In other words, Burke is critical of manifestations of hierarchy that become unreasonable.

From an intra-disciplinary perspective, the hierarchic ranking of designers or agencies is common practice, as seen in design and advertising award schemes. As Lizette Spangenberg (2015:20) explains, the role of advertising award shows seem to serve one main purpose, namely to provide a system whereby advertising agencies and individual creatives can be ranked. As mentioned previously, design industries are highly competitive and the status and prestige afforded by winning awards is a valuable currency for acquiring new clients, earning promotions, and so on. Spangenberg (2015) explores how the desire for creative prestige is a strong enough motivator for ethical boundaries to be crossed in the award scheme arena.[5] She highlights how the dubious practice of creating fake or scam advertisements, purely for entry into awards shows (as opposed to client-serving commercial purposes) often proves lucrative enough for agencies to risk the potentially negative consequences. It is possible to argue that these practices provide evidence of a hierarchic psychosis (reaching the top at all costs) present in the design industry. In addition to fueling unethically competitive behaviour, the process of ranking creative work and workers could be considered on a more fundamental level. It encourages an oversimplified means for judging value, associated with a certain kind of binary logic. For instance, awards scheme rankings are published as lists where one can be either 'on' or 'of', in addition to being numerical ranked. It is possible to argue that this method of framing neglects and devalues a large portion of design culture.

The above example points towards the prominence of lists in contemporary popular culture, along with the extended 'listicle' (an article presented in the form of a list). Alice Twemlow (2006) explores this phenomenon in relation to design culture, arguing that these kinds of curated lists have come to "dominate visual culture". She explains how the demand for such lists stems from "a consumer society obsessed as much with the metalanguage of consumerism as it is with actually buying things" (Twemlow 2006:32). She continues to describe how "[a] list – especially one that ranks or categorizes – can be a salve for the anxiety of living in an era of information overload: an authoritative knife with which to slice through the morass of extraneous data" (Twemlow 2006:32). However, Twemlow (2006:32) also notes how "the relief is short-

[5] Spangenberg's (2015) study examines the ethics surrounding South African design and advertising award schemes, but her findings are globally relevant.

lived; soon the accumulated lists begin to add to the overload themselves".[6] Twemlow (2006:38) is critical of the "binary mentality of the A-list – where you can be 'on' or 'off', 'in' or 'out', but nothing much in between". It is also in this binary spirit, in the current attention economy, that new design trends are labelled either 'hot' or 'not'. Again, while this logic may serve a valuable purpose in ordering evaluations, it can clearly become problematically reductionist in directing attention.

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As mentioned previously, design trends can be considered as hierarchic attention structures. Hierarchic logic plays a central part in design trend dynamics, both from production and consumption perspectives. Trends enable the signalling of socio-cultural status, whether for designers, their clients, or end consumers. While being a trend-setter might place you on the highest level of a cultural hierarchy, following a trend also offers an easy way of signalling cultural capital and status, simply by being in-the-know or being up-to-date. Even if a new stylistic trend is not clearly situated as specifically lower or higher in the stylistic hierarchy, the rhetoric surrounding trend discourse clearly indicates a preoccupation with 'the new' as 'better'. Ed van Hinte (2004:69) considers the idea of product or possession hierarchies "on a personal level", where "brand-new things" are situated at the top of the hierarchy. While there may be some exceptions, there is an intuitive understanding that having something new is better than having something old.

The 'rhetoric of the new' used in both modern and postmodern design promotion is still thoroughly hierarchic in terms of this particular kind of competitiveness. As Natalya Ilyin (2006:117) explains, "Modernism – pre, post, or neo – idealizes the cutting edge, the hot, the cool, the killer. The idea that something is hot means that something else is tepid. […] The idea of one thing being cooler or hotter than another is the idea that there is a hierarchy in good design".

The binary logic of trends is further exasperated by "the centripetal gaze" of our "attention economy". As Lanham (2006:51-2) explains, "the flow of energy from the margins of a society to its center of attention, creates by its nature the winner-takes-all society". The often irrational manner in which the 'winner-takes-all' regardless of whether it deserves all (based on functional value, for instance) could be considered a perspectival disorder. If design trends are a product of a hierarchic drive, it is possible to argue that the level of unwarranted trend hype, which leads to the unsustainable acceleration of aesthetic obsolescence, is a product of a *hierarchic psychosis*.

At this point it is important to point out that there is a common perception that we have moved away from a hierarchic social order towards a networked order. It is thus worth questioning whether Burke's emphasis on hierarchies, as fundamental to human nature, is as valid today as it was in the mid-twentieth century. It is possible to argue that our weblike, networked society does, to a large extent, enable and encourage less pyramidal power structures. However, it is also possible to argue that the network has not replaced the

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[6] As a parody of this 'list fever' Twemlow (2006:38) praises the "lists of mundane found data assembled each week on the McSweeney's web site". McSweeney's lists are a good example of Burke's idea on satire as corrective; as taking a phenomenon all the way to it's entelechial absurdity. I provide a more in-depth discussion of Burke's ideas on satire in the following chapter.

hierarchy; that it is merely a different kind of hierarchy. For instance, while many corporations may have moved away from traditional pyramidal structures, these structures still support differences in wealth, power, and social status. If anything, our increasingly unequal society attests to the principle of hierarchy being alive and well.

Similarly, it is possible to argue that postmodern design hierarchies still exist, albeit in a different form. From a postmodern design perspective, the notion of aesthetic pluralism challenges the rigid hierarchy of modernist superiority. As Blauvelt (2006:9) argues,

> [s]ignificant aesthetic debates have been superseded by consensus: not a fight over which style but agreement on all styles. The bedrock principle of pluralism asks not in what style we should design, but rather says that we design stylishly. A plethora of these benign styles exists to mix and match according to the logic of the marketplace.

However, while all styles may be considered equally valid in principle, the logic of the marketplace dictates that only some styles are considered appropriate or desirable at a particular moment in time. The ability to design 'stylishly' then relates, largely, to the ability to design within the parameters of what is considered either 'timeless' (which frequently translates to 'stylelessly' modern) or 'trendy'. As Julier (2008:91) explains, postmodern 'high design' continues to offer an "apparent radicalism within the structure of deeply conservative institutions". In this context, 'radical design change' tends to mean the fairly superficial aesthetic deviation which gains value in the established logic of the design marketplace. Similarly, popular new trends may turn the previous aesthetic order on its head, but it does so by following the same hierarchic logic or mechanism.

Burke reminds us that hierarchies are not necessarily stable, and though they operate powerfully, they can be challenged and transformed. Accordingly, "[t]o say that hierarchy is inevitable is not to say that any *particular* hierarchy is inevitable; the crumbling of hierarchies is as true a fact about them as their formation" (RM:141, emphasis added). It is possible to argue that hierarchies are particularly unstable and fleeting in contemporary popular culture, but this does not mean they are any less powerful or persuasive. While it is possible to argue that designers are experts in challenging or destroying dominant or mainstream orders, it is safe to say that designers continue to be goaded by the general hierarchic principle (which is in itself also mainstream order).

Technological psychosis

A major part of Burke's social critique is concerned with technology or hyper-technologism. Burke believes that "man's entelechy is technology", meaning that "the symbol-using animal will perfect himself in his technology; or, that the perfect realization of man as man will be his technology" (Rueckert 1982:274). This does not mean Burke harbours utopian visions of technology creating a 'perfect world', but rather that he identifies the compulsive technological drive as the 'ultimate' realisation or outlet of the human capacity for

symbolicity. While Burke's critique of technology is not entirely unique,[7] his investigation brings together a number of useful ideas for interrogating the relationship between attitudes toward technology[8] and attitudes toward design. It is possible to argue that design practice is an inherently technological endeavour. James Wang (2013), for instance, presents the argument that design practice can be understood in relation to Aristotle's concept of *techné*, or "knowing by making". Wang (2013:6) believes this fundamental understanding of design as technological making provides insight on "why designers are the way they are and why they act the way they act".

The 'perfectionist' technological drive is highly visible in a continued emphasis on advancement and innovation. We can identify this drive in the constant striving towards greater efficiency, better usability and increased convenience, as facilitated by increased processing capacity, quicker response-time, more storage, and so on. However, as argued previously, this entelechial drive tends to convert an order into a disorder. The entelechial impulse turns the functional human ability to make instruments into a dysfunctional compulsion or obsession. Burke (PC:44) describes this tendency as a *technological psychosis*, which he situates "at the center of our glories and our distress". In the satirical essay *Towards Helhaven* (1971b), Burke characterises technology as compulsion:

> I enroll myself among those who take it for granted that the compulsiveness of man's technologic genius, as compulsively implemented by the vast compulsions of our vast technologic grid, makes for a self-perpetuating cycle quite beyond our ability to adopt any major reforms in our ways of doing things. We are happiest when we can plunge on and on. And any thought of turning back, of curbing rather than aggravating our cult of 'new needs', seems to us suicidal, even though the situation is actually the reverse, and it is our mounting technologic clutter that threatens us.

The technological psychosis, as an obsessive compulsion, means that people become 'technologically goaded' or 'moved' by technology. This relates to one of Burke's "ironic aphorisms" whereby we become "the instruments of our instruments" (Rueckert 1982:274).

By referencing Veblen's well-known phrase, "invention is the mother of necessity", Burke (PC:5) highlights how technologies tend to provide solutions to problems that do not yet exist. This is problematic since "[a] culture committed to technical necessity brings about technical solutions to problems that may never arise, pushing the boundaries of the possible without concern for practical consequences. Such a worldview values advancement for its own sake" (Hübler 2005).[9] From a design perspective, Tonkinwise (2015) similarly explains how designers have "a perverse ability to not see what is there, but instead see what else could or should be there". Tonkinwise again hints at the possibility of dysfunction within design's most fundamental creative function.

[7] Many of Burke's concerns are shared by other philosophers of technology such as Jacques Ellul, Martin Heidegger, Neil Postman and Langdon Winner (Hill 2009; Hübler 2005).
[8] The Kenneth Burke Society's conference theme for 2014 is "Attitudes toward technology/technology's attitudes" (Rivers 2013).
[9] Burke's theory of technological entelechy has much in common with Ellul's concept of 'technological necessity', describing the compulsion under which "what can be produced must be produced" (Ellul in Hübler 2005). Hübler compares Burke and Ellul's views, explaining how both identify the manner in which "[t]he technical possibility becomes the technical imperative".

Burke further critiques the unbridled faith in *more* technology to neutralise technological problems. He argues that while "the tinkerings of Technology […] are constantly getting out of order, at the same time there is always an equal profusion of hopeful assurances that, with but a bit more tinkering, all will be in order (Burke 1981:164-5). Otherwise put, Burke is particularly sceptical of the excessively optimistic attitude that science and technology will solve all of humanity's problems (Giamo 2009). It is possible to argue that the various design industries contribute to this technological optimism. The continued faith in *more* design or *better* design to counter-act the negative byproducts of design can be diagnosed as a type of technological psychosis.

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For Burke, the negative effect of the entelechial drive towards perfection is most significant in the arena of applied techno-science.[10] In this arena, the *instrumentalist fallacy,* whereby "any improvement in instruments or methods is to be evaluated solely in terms of its nature as that improvement" (Burke 1981:165) is most profound. Burke, in other words, critiques the hyper-instrumentalism found in techno-scientific fields, and challenges the prioritisation of utility and functional efficiency. Hill (2009) interprets Burke's critique of technology as a "rejection of the instrumental attitude, owing to its reliance on dangerous 'terministic screens'". These terministic screens over-emphasise the technical and instrumental aspects of an object or system, while de-emphasising the human, social context. As Hübler (2005) explains, an attitude of hyper-instrumentalism transforms all areas of human society into "laboratories that test for the efficiency of processes[11] without investigating whether the processes themselves lead to a more civil society, or a happier employee, or a student of greater integrity". Burke is particularly concerned over the threat this attitude poses to the arts, in that it operates outside the realm of utilitarian function.

It is unsurprising that designers, concerned with both the technical and the aesthetic, would object to a purely utilitarian or hyper-instrumentalist attitudes. As mentioned previously, designers are forever juggling the dialectical purposes of aesthetics and functionality. Furthermore, design theorists such as John Ehrenfeld (2013), Tony Fry (2003) and Cameron Tonkinwise (2015) argue that the highly reductive reasoning found in hyper-instrumentalism is directly related to unsustainable design. As Fry (2011:127) argues, "[i]nstrumental reason is pragmatic reasoning without critically reflective or relational thought. It is the culmination of the reduction of action to ends without adequately contemplating non-linear consequences". He further argues that "[t]echno-scientific understandings of 'environmental problems' come nowhere near understanding" the crisis we are currently facing (Fry 2011:3). Similarly Tonkinwise (2015) argues that "[p]utting technology at the center of anything is profoundly conservative. […] Market penetration of this or that technology is an

[10] While Burke frequently seems to critique the 'sciences' in general, it is possible to argue that his main concerns relate to applied techno-science. In some ways Burke is quite sympathetic towards pure science, voicing his concerns over how "[i]n these utilitarian days, pure science must earn its way by serving applied science" (PLF:65). He continues to explain how an emphasis on "applied science" paves the way for overproduction, which he believes is "the most menacing condition our modern civilization has had to face" (CS:31).

[11] Hübler (2005) refers to Ellul's notion of *la technique* as the "sociological drive to transform every human purpose and practice into a systematic and preferably quantitative method that can be measured in terms of its efficiency". The problem with *la technique*'s emphasis on the efficiency of technologies lies in the tendency to value *means* over human *ends*.

appalling proxy for societal change". These authors argue that the instrumentalist belief that a new technology will solve a human problem is often a misplaced and harmful conviction. Ehrenfeld's (2013:17) poignant summary of the above concerns clearly echo Burke's thinking:

> As long as efforts designed to create sustainability arise within the current way of thinking and action – the normal modern societal paradigm – the best we can hope for is some reduction in unsustainability. […] Efficiency in general is only a temporary remedy. The lowered impacts it produces will eventually be overtaken by growth and any associated economic savings will be channeled into other consumptive ends, creating new or exacerbating old damaging patterns. We are so accustomed to this way of problem solving that we ignore a few important pathologies that arise when routine actions become so familiar that we are blind to outcomes other than those that were intended.

Ehrenfeld (2013:17-8) describes the above pattern of behaviour as a characteristic of compulsive addiction, whereby one applies "the same ineffective solutions without regard to the underlying problem and without consciousness of other negative consequences that the unreflective repetition creates".

The above design theorists suggest that de-materialized or non-material design action offers a step in the right direction. Contemporary design approaches such as 'design thinking', 'service design', 'elimination design' and so on, deliberately deemphasise material production, in favour of 'designing' systems or behaviours. The idea here is that design skills and processes should be used to restructure institutions or environments and encourage behaviour change, instead of producing more stuff. However, while the materialist techno-utopian vision is increasingly criticised in academic design discourse, a more 'conservative' approach to produce technological objects is still widespread in the design industry. Furthermore, it is worth noting that many of the above design movements still promote technological invention as solution, even if these solutions are 'dematerialised'. In other words, the tendency to 'technologise' remains, which is to conform to the same instrumentalist logic.

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A major reason why Burke is so critical of the hyper-instrumentalist attitude of the technological psychosis relates to the interconnected process of de-humanisation. For instance, he attributes the wartime atrocities to the de-humanising or impersonal terminology of science, which inevitably treats 'persons' as 'things'. Burke believes "[i]t is not a great step from the purely professional poisoning of harmful insects to the purely professional blasting and poisoning of human beings, as viewed in similarly 'impersonal terms'" (RM:34). From this perspective, the instrumentalist attitude, whereby consumers are considered as 'consumers' as opposed to 'persons', further exacerbates unsustainable production. As design theorists Stuart Walker and Jacques Giard (2013:4) explain, within the current "model of consumerism, people themselves become instrumentalized, being regarded not as whole persons but merely as units of spending power – that is, consumers, an increasingly distasteful term that is fundamentally linked to destructive, unsustainable lifestyles but which, nevertheless, remains prevalent today". Under this model, actual human needs are treated as insignificant and new needs are constructed through sophisticated marketing techniques.

The ability, to essentially not care about people or the environment, is exasperated by de-humanising instrumentalist attitudes and rhetorics.

In addition to de-humanisation, another negative byproduct of the technological psychosis is alienation. Burke's (LSA:16) characterisation of 'man' as "*separated* from his natural condition by instruments of his own making" (emphasis added) could be interpreted as hinting at the alienating consequences of technology. The philosophy of technology frequently investigates the manner in which technologies may cause separation or alienation, along with the broader implications thereof. For instance, Ehrenfeld (2013:23) explains how "many forms of modern technology separate the actor from the act in time and space. The separation increases the possibility of unintended consequences, as the actor cannot recognize outcomes beyond the horizon". Ehrenfeld refers specifically to the use of drones in military operations as an extreme example of the harmful effects of such separation.

From a contemporary communication design perspective, it is possible to argue that separation or alienation occurs as a result of digital visual technology. Sandywell (2011) refers to the current 'light economy' where "the rise of visual machines" such as televisual media, can be seen as "the defining point where human beings become totally alienated from nature".[12] Sandywell (2011:23) believes

> "[o]ne psychological correlate of this new order [of digital hyperreality[13]] is the cultivation of personal and collective mind-sets defined predominantly in apparitional terms: the development of character formations tuned to the demands of mobile, ephemeral appearances, status image, promotional staging, consumer identification, branding, image-pleasures and instant gratification.

In other words, digital image technologies significantly alter human reality and behaviour. For Sandywell (2011:15), it is important to recognise how "the overwhelming reliance upon visual media is transforming human consciousness and cultural memory" towards an increased significance of 'metacultures'. This is a significant point to ponder insofar as design trends can be considered prime examples of such metacultures. To reiterate a previous argument, trends are highly mediated, meta-cultural products. It is also possible to argue that the products created by contemporary visual designers amplify a meta-cultural 'separation' at a rate which becomes disorienting. As Sandywell (2011:18) explains, a major part of the new *light economy* is the "phenomenon of permanent change and revolution".[14] In other words, visual technologies contribute to a shift in meaning; towards meta-cultural products that are increasingly fluid or fleeting. Douglas Rushkoff (2013:[sp]) refers to a current state of "present shock" in which "we tend to exist in a distracted present" where "[i]nstead of finding a stable foothold in the here and now, we end up reacting to the ever-present assault of simultaneous impulses and commands". It is not difficult to see the vast commercial potential of

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[12] Sandywell (2011:14) discusses "the universe of ubiquitous media", arguing that "[t]he history of the visual regimes of modernity begins when the senses are disassociated and visuality is differentiated from the sensory plenum as *the* privileged sensory modality".

[13] Sandywell (2011:22) refers to Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality where "what used to be called reality has been progressively transformed into a series of fragmented, decontextualized, decentralized display sites constructed from layers of *simulacra"*.

[14] Sandywell (2011:18) refers to Zygmunt Bauman's notion of 'liquid modernity', insofar as permanent change alters or 'liquefies' "the very fabric and rhythms of everyday life".

this condition. As Sandywell (2011: 231) explains, contemporary consumer culture "is organized around [this system] of impermanence, cyclical fashion and planned obsolescence".

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Burke shows an early critical awareness of the problematic practice of planned obsolescence. He laments the Fordist mode of production as exploiting the economic value of waste, explaining how "[t]he more we learn to use what we do not need, the greater our consumption; the greater our consumption, the greater our production; and the greater our production, the greater our prosperity" (Burke 1930:331). He adds that although "*there is a limit to what a man can use, there is no limit whatever to what he can waste*. The amount of production possible in a properly wasteful society is thus seen to be enormous" (Burke 1930:332). He explains how "[p]roduction can be further increased […] by developing better methods of deterioration […] deterioration as an aid to prosperity, and thus indirectly to culture" (Burke 1930:332-3).

The contemporary manifestation of such deterioration takes place through *aesthetic obsolescence* whereby a desire for a new product iteration is stimulated, via styling, before the old version becomes functionally obsolete. As Meredith Davis (2012:172) explains, "[c]onsumers purchased the latest product to signify their participation in the display of the most recent cultural trends, even though older versions of the same objects were still serviceable". Similarly, Walker (2004:308-9) explains how, "in our contemporary market system, product aesthetics are often reduced to the superficial styling of an outer casing, a façade that gives the impression of newness and progress even though the hidden, functional parts remain unchanged". It is possible to argue that while the concept of planned obsolescence is not new, "it now moves with unprecedented speed" (Burdick 1992). Aesthetic obsolescence contributes to a substantial amount of material waste in a variety of design industries. While some sectors (for example digital design) do not produce material waste, considerable time and resources are still required when designing and marketing new iterations.

As part of his critique, Burke questions how such a tremendous amount of waste is rhetorically legitimated. As Hill (2009) explains, "[b]linded by technological spectacle, instrumentalists tend to excuse the 'unintended byproducts of technology' as necessary to 'progress'". 'Progress' is used here as a *god-term* insofar as it trumps any other motive or concern. By using an equally powerful American *god-term* – 'freedom' – Burke wishes to draw attention to the ever-present dialectical dynamic: development is interconnected with deterioration; creation necessitates destruction; and freedom in one area requires dependence or restriction in another:

> Above all, there is the problem of its FREEDOM. In two hundred years our nation became technologically the greatest on earth, thanks to THREE FREEDOMS, namely: THE FREEDOM TO WASTE, THE FREEDOM TO POLLUTE, THE FREEDOM NOT TO GIVE A DAMN (Burke 1981:183).

It is possible to argue that the current pace of aesthetic obsolescence is a logical extension of this perverted type of freedom: the freedom to produce (and consume) the new; the freedom to provide inaccurate

'bullshit' reasons for doing so; and the freedom from accountability for the consequences. The inflated rhetorical claims made about the value or necessity of new design responses hide the fact that, very often, the new is simply valued for being new. It is possible to argue that this practice of 'bullshit' post-rationalisation supports the accelerated rate of trend transitions and perpetuates unsustainable aesthetic obsolescence. While there are, of course, counter-movements in the design community that call for more sustainable forms of production and consumption, these movements struggle to gain wider traction precisely because they go against the dominant logic of the contemporary market.

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Although some would consider Burke a Luddite or technophobe, it is important to point out that Burke mainly seeks to highlight the dual nature of technology as both creative and potentially destructive. He argues, "[m]ore and more people, in recent years, are coming to realize that technology can be as ominous as it is promising. Such fear, if properly rationalized, is but the kind of discretion a society should have with regard to all new powers" (CS:xiii). Coupe (2001:423) argues that when one "ponders [Burke's] position more carefully, one discovers that his object of attack is a particular 'attitude', one of naive faith in the capacity of unbridled 'industrialism' to save humanity even as it wastes and pollutes humanity's earthly household". In other words, Burke encourages the continuous critical reflection on the negative impact of the naturalised, overly-optimistic attitude towards technology. Burke is under no illusion that we can simply reject technology, since we cannot get away from our 'second-nature'. Similarly, it would be unhelpful to suggest that designers should simply cease to design things; livelihoods of individuals and corporations depend on the design and production of new things. However, it is possible to argue that a shift in attitude could assist in the development of more sustainable design solutions.

While our instruments or technologies are an inescapable part of humanity, Burke believes the *technological psychosis* is "an aberration, a kind of mechanistic monomania which, absorbed in itself and intent upon its own distorted view of the world, man, and human purpose, could not satisfy some of man's basic, permanent needs, and could not lead toward that better life for which all men yearn" (Rueckert 1982:38). A major part of Burke's proposed solution to the technological psychosis is an increased emphasis on the humanistic, aesthetic and poetic, to counter-balance the techno-scientific (Rueckert 1982:38). An awareness of the value of humanistic and aesthetic emphases are reflected in the human-centered design discourse of Richard Buchanan, Jorge Frascara and Victor Margolin, amongst others. The humanistic-aesthetic response as corrective to techno-scientific orientations is explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

Trained incapacity and occupational psychosis

At the heart of Burke's social critique is his concern over the dangers of asserting and accepting limited perspectives as whole realities. He considers this a negative byproduct of the dialectical-rhetorical situation: a situation in which only partial perspectives can be held, yet are asserted as absolute truth with great rhetorical force. Burke investigates the manner in which limited orientational perspectives, or *terministic*

screens, become ingrained through training and habit via the concepts of *trained incapacity* and *occupational psychosis*. Both these concepts refer to the way in which people become incapable of looking at situations from other perspectives, and are used to consider the potentially negative consequences thereof.

Occupational psychosis is a term Burke borrows from John Dewey (PC:38). Originally used in an anthropological context, the term refers to the manner in which the main sustenance-providing activity (occupation) extends or translates into other aspects of tribal culture. Although the concept originally refers to orientations entrenched through specialised areas of work, it could be used in reference to other habitual activities. Burke connects the notion of occupational psychosis with Thorstein Veblen's concept of *trained incapacity*. Trained incapacity describes the way in which education or training may lead to situations where "one's very abilities can function as blindnessess" (PC:7). Burke (PC:49) connects the two concepts by explaining how "[a] way of seeing is also a way of not seeing – a focus upon object *A* involves a neglect of object *B*. It is for this reason that we consider Dewey's and Veblen's terms as interchangeable". In other words, whatever is an occupation (in the broadest sense), becomes a preoccupation. While Burke tends to use the terms 'occupational psychosis' and 'trained incapacity' interchangebly, he does find Veblen's "explicitly ambivalent concept" of 'trained incapacity' more serviceable insofar as it presents the good and bad as "obverse and reverse of the same coin" (PC:49). This also illustrates Burke's preference of oddly incongruous terminologies as a means to highlight dialectical and paradoxical qualities of discursive reality.

To reiterate, both occupational psychosis and trained incapacity are used to describe the automatic perpetuation of certain kinds of thought,[15] whether instilled through education or merely through regular practice. As mentioned previously, Burke is particularly critical of the effects of specialisation within disciplines, along with the construction of worldviews that over-emphasise certain aspects of reality. Burke sees any specialisation as an over-specialisation.[16] The manner in which specialisation, as essentially biased thinking, can lead to negative consequences is a concern Burke explores throughout his work.

It is important to highlight that Burke's critique of disciplinary specialisation should be interpreted within the context of his larger critique. Burke is not suggesting that all training is inherently problematic and that it should be avoided. It is possible to argue that Burke does not need to emphasise the threat of 'untrained incapacity' (where a lack of training leads to a lack of capacity), because the threat is well-known. I thus interpret Burke's main aim as an attempt to correct an imbalance in what he perceives to be an over-emphasis on the techno-scientific disciplines during his time. Nonetheless, Burke believes that any disciplinary perspective could become over-emphasised and he therefore wishes to warn against the potential dangers of imbalanced perspectives in general. Burke (1955:264), for instance, acknowledges his own 'occupational psychosis' as a literary critic and how this has influenced his emphasis on textual analysis.

[15] These concepts also relate to Abraham Kaplan's 'law of the instrument', further clarified by Abraham Maslow in the popular phrase, "if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail". Other related concepts include 'tunnel vision', where people may be reluctant to consider alternatives to their current line of thought; and 'confirmation bias', where ideas are only accepted if they are aligned with existing beliefs.

[16] While Burke believes philosophy might offer a *generalised* definition of man, any other specialised discipline that attempts to offer such a definition "would necessarily be 'over-socialized', or 'over-biologized', or 'over-psychologized', or 'over-physicized' or 'over-poetized', and so on" (LSA:52).

For Burke, a specialisation should not be seen as inherently problematic, but rather as having the potential to become problematic when too rigidly accepted as the only perspective worth paying attention to. It is possible to imagine that had Burke noticed an emphasis on 'generalisation' during his time, that his critique would be directed at addressing the dangers of 'over-generalisation'.

Burke (PC:242-3) describes one of the main problems with occupational psychosis and trained incapacity as the tendency for a person to "*state the problem in such a way that his particular aptitude becomes the 'solution' for it* [italics in original]". In other words, instead of choosing solutions based on the characteristics or context of the problem, personal knowledge, strengths or abilities dictate the response. Training and familiarity are of course useful resources in completing tasks efficiently, but negative consequences arise when a bias determines a 'solution' without due consideration of the specific context. Burke thus seeks to point out how people can become "victims of a trained incapacity…[when] the very authority of their earlier ways interferes with the adoption of new ones (Beach 2012:37).

Hill (2009) points out how, although everyone suffers from trained incapacities and occupational psychoses, Burke sees those of engineers, technocrats and capitalists as most threatening insofar as they have a "relentless entelechial demand for technological progress at the expense of humaneness and the environment". Burke (RM:30) ascribes this attitude to "the characteristically liberal principle of occupational autonomy" in which one finds the "naively pragmatist notion that practical specialized work is a sufficient grounding for morality". This is according to Burke a particular problem in the area of techno-science, where an expert's success merely depends on applying him- or herself to a task as effectively as possible (RM:30). From a design perspective, Wang (2013:14) echoes this idea in arguing that designers as 'makers', as opposed to 'doers',"typically care for nothing but the intrinsic excellence of their actions". He does not see this as a criticism, but rather as a useful explanation for why attempts to transform designers "into public servants is often difficult, if not impossible" (Wang 2013:15). However, as mentioned previously, Burke is not very sympathetic to those who separate their immediate, specialised acts from wider societal impacts. He argues that "one's morality as a specialist cannot be allowed to do duty for one's morality as a citizen. Insofar as the two roles are at odds, a speciality at the service of sinister interests will itself become sinister". For Burke, any activity is "part of a larger unit of action" (RM:27), for which an agent should be held accountable.

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Designers, by virtue of being specialists, also have specific occupational orientations or terministic screens. This means that there are some things that designers tend to fixate on (and therefore also neglect) because of their professional constitution. From a design industry perspective one finds frequent criticism with regards to how designers trained in specific tools or media may force solutions based on what they are proficient in. For example, a web designer may propose a website as the ideal solution for marketing a product, regardless of whether print or television media may have been a more suitable means for reaching a

specific target audience. This phenomenon is often cited when arguing for more integrated research in design practice, whereby decisions can be based on contextual evidence instead of designer proficiencies.

So what are designers' specific proficiencies, which may become incapacities? As mentioned previously, designers can be characterised as excessively compulsive in their perfectionism (Tonkinwise 2015). Designers are trained to identify and appreciate minute aesthetic details and it is therefore understandable that minor aesthetic deviations should be treated as significant. However, to pay attention to minor deviations is to neglect or ignore what is largely the same. Those who do not share this 'trained incapacity', or who do not find the same value in minor aesthetic deviation, may thus perceive a promotion of 'pseudo-difference' in shifting design directions. As Sandywell (2011:40-1) argues:

> Often under further analysis the surface differences between practices turn out to be much less significant than the unavowed similarities, the latter often dictated by an unconscious commitment to an unacknowledged rhetorical schema. This is particularly true for the semantics of visuality in the world transformations we conveniently group under the title of *modernity*.

This relates to another obvious example of a designerly incapacity, namely the commitment towards a modernist aesthetic, as equated with 'good design'. Design theorists like Jan Michl (2007) see modernist design education as problematic in its pervasiveness, insofar as it prescribes a particularly western visual aesthetic order. In other words, the predominantly modernist bent of design education can be perceived as instilling an incapacity to imagine alternative aesthetic responses.

It is worth pointing out that many practicing designers and prominent design theorists share Burke's critical views on (over-)specialisation. While specialisation makes good practical sense there seems to be a perception that the current professional climate places an imbalanced emphasis on specialisation, which can lead to detrimental consequences. Crouch and Pearce (2013:42-3), for instance, argue that "[s]pecialization is a useful strategy for ensuring the perpetuation of skills, but the separation of different skill sets from one another can lead to lopsided development in the material world where, for example, the development of attractive consumer packaging might be in direct conflict with concerns for the environment". Terri Irwin (2008:13) also explains how

> [d]esign education is often sub-divided into the specialties of architecture, interior, product and graphic design […] Students spend so much time concentrating on their particular area of specialty that they are not taught the important art of collaboration and the need to look outside one's own discourse for vital information. An over emphasis on specialization may be rendering us unable to distinguish shades of grey and the subtle ambiguities that are characteristic of our world and of complex, interrelated problems.

Similarly, Nelson and Stolterman (2012:220-2) refer to the pitfalls of the 'abandoned center' resulting from specialisation. Instead they promote a 'liquid center' approach, which could be interpreted as more in line with Burke's anti-disciplinary stance. In general, the recent call for more inter-disciplinary collaborations in design seems to reflect an awareness of the dangers of isolated, specialised practice. For instance, Robert Young (2013:185) believes contemporary design practice should serve a mediating role "between different branches of the social sciences and hard sciences" and design thus becomes "an 'inter-discipline', in a way

that the reductionist approach of those disciplines might not allow". From a Burkean perspective, this may be considered a more sensible and ethical approach to designing.

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From an aesthetic/creative perspective there also seems to be a level of awareness about the perils of trained incapacity in design. For instance, it is not uncommon for self-taught designers, or those educated in less academic programmes, to be sceptical of the kind of design education found at formal institutions. This stems from a perception that formal design education may lead to a kind of indoctrination that goes directly against the innovative spirit of design. David Carson, for instance, used his lack of formal training as proof of his independence and a source of his creative 'edge'. When asked to describe his design approach, Carson answers:

> experimental, intuitive and personal. I have no formal training, which I'm sure helped a lot as I never learned all the things I'm not supposed to do. […] since I knew nothing about grids, formulas, schools of thought, etc. I just did what felt right. My starting point was and is, always to first read the brief, article or whatever it is I'm given. That sends me off in a direction design-wise (Butler 2013).

This response can, of course, be interpreted as a rhetorical tactic, tapping into the notion that training can 'incapacitate'. It is possible to argue (albeit paradoxically), that contemporary design education aims to train designers to *avoid* 'trained incapacity'. The imperative is to avoid formulaic or clichéd responses. Designers place a high premium on novelty and experimentation, which often translates into a rebellion against convention. Furthermore, contemporary design approaches, such as those found in Human-Centered Design, tend to challenge technically-focussed responses that may have been part of conventional design training, opting instead for research-driven, context-specific and custom-made solutions. In other words, designers are taught to be highly reflective practitioners with an inherent aversion to conventional thinking. All of this could be considered a direct antithesis to trained-incapacity and occupational psychosis.

However, there is also a counter-argument to be made here. It is possible to argue that alternative responses to dominant aesthetic norms and conventions still perpetuate a particular kind of designerly psychosis, namely the obsessive production of newness. The design industries are perhaps more preoccupied with change and newness than others, owing to particular training as well as occupational demands. As Anne Burdick (1992) explains, "[t]he pressures of neomania[17] are compounded by the design establishment's system of rewards and rhetoric".

For Burke (PC:39) a "psychotic openness to fads, the great cry for innovation engendered by competitive capitalism" is a type of occupational psychosis linked to the archetypal occupation of the hunter. He suggests how an artist may exhibit a 'hunt psychosis' to discover "all of the possible devices by which [to] suggest the experiencing of newness" (PC:39). Designers share the occupational function to produce newness with artists as well as other creatives. However, the accelerated fluctuation of visual aesthetic

[17] Burdick (1992) references Roland Barthes' notion of 'neomania', as the perpetual obsession with novelty.

trends, despite the harmful consequences, is perhaps a more specific professional design psychosis or trained incapacity.

The ability of stylistic trends to oscillate or be repeated over time while still appearing novel requires historical amnesia on both the designer and the consumer's side. As Peter Bilak (2006:173) explains, "[p]roclaiming novelty today can seem like historical ignorance on a designer's part". This historically ignorant perspective of design experimentation could be considered a type of incapacity, whereby whatever differs from the current mainstream is automatically assumed to be original. This ignorance seems to pay off, as Keedy (2006b:202) explains:

> The criteria for being new are only based on the past few years, but the criteria for being good are based on everything we have learned since the beginning of time. However, you actually have to know history before you can use it as a criterion for judgment. By working 'intuitively' rather than intellectually, designers can convince themselves and their clients that they are creating 'new' work, and newness is exactly what clients want to make boring products seem interesting. In this respect designers are rewarded more for their ignorance than for their insight. That's why many designers don't bother with the past beyond what they have experienced themselves. When was the last time you heard a designer bragging about doing the 'oldest' thing? (Keedy 2006b:202)

In other words, an 'occupational psychosis' particular to designers is their obsessiveness about the new, without actually knowing what has already been done. Richard Buchanan (2001a:68) supports this diagnosis, explaining how "design often appears to lurch from one fad to another, with too little cumulative memory and knowledge to show for it".

Bureaucratization of the imaginative

Burke sees bureaucracy as a natural extension of the human tendency to create order, hierarchy and perfection. Bureaucracies are pragmatic systems intended to create and enforce order, through specialised division of labour, hierarchal structuring and rigid protocols. Richard Sennett (2006:29) explains, "[a]s in an army, so in a big domestic bureaucracy, effective power is shaped like a pyramid. The pyramid is 'rationalized', that is, each office, each part, has a defined function. […] You are good at your job by doing that job and no other". Bureaucracies are useful in many respects, but also create a variety of frustrations. As Burke (ATH:314) argues, "government necessarily means bureaucratization; and bureaucratization eventually produces a preponderance of unwanted by-products".

Burke (ATH:225) discusses his concerns over bureaucracy by devising the concept *bureaucratization of the imaginative*. He delights in the unwieldly, onomatopoeic nature of the term, "since it sounds as bungling as the situation it would characterize". The term is, according to Burke (ATH:vii), "designed to name the vexing things that happen when men try to translate some pure aim or vision into terms of its corresponding material embodiment, thus necessarily involving elements alien to the original, 'spiritual' ('imaginative') motive".

> An imaginative possibility (usually at the start Utopian) is bureaucratized when it is embodied in the realities of a social texture, in all the complexity of language and habits, in the property

> relationships, the methods of government, production and distribution, and in the development of rituals that re-enforce the same emphasis (ATH:225).

Burke thus explains how the initial 'imaginative pliancy' of a plan or project becomes rigidified when institutionalised. Bureaucratic systems fail because "we necessarily come upon the necessity of compromise, since human beings are not a perfect fit for *any* historic texture. A given order must, in stressing certain emphases, neglect others" (ATH:225). Because bureaucratic systems are inflexible, utopian ideals quickly turn into dystopian reality, despite original good intentions. An obvious example is the translation of Marx's socialist vision into a dysfunctional communist political system. Since bureaucratic systems provide unreasonable amounts of power to a select few, this vision was further warped into Stalinist totalitarianism (Coupe 2001:423). Sennett (2006:180) believes the greatest mistake made by the Soviet empire was to see profits and markets as the enemy, instead of bureaucracy.

Burke explains how, when 'unintended byproducts' come to overshadow original purpose, the bureaucratic order becomes alienating (ATH:225-6).[18] For instance, extensive administrative systems are bureaucratic by-products that reduce human labour to monotonous and banal routine. This type of labour often leads to feelings of alienation. This is because bureaucratic systems reduce human agency by demanding *motion* over *action*. This tendency can prove dangerous, as when inhumane acts are justified in terms of obedience to a system. For instance, the Holocaust atrocities could be committed unthinkingly, since perpetrators saw themselves as merely following orders; as small cogs in the larger war machine.[19] Bureaucratic (un)thinking is of course not solely responsible for such extreme evils, but it does create an environment in which atrocious acts can be committed through blind duty. From such a perspective, "bureaucracy is itself a force of violence rather than being a neutral instrument of administration" (Sandywell 2011:7).[20] Sennett (2006:179) similarly argues that "bureaucracy can bind as well as oppress".

Once again, it is important to interpret Burke's critique of bureaucracy in context. It is not his aim to suggest that bureaucracies serve no valuable purpose nor that they should be disposed of entirely. Burke merely tries to draw attention to the inevitable shortcomings of bureaucracies, insofar as they are rigid structures that, by nature, do not take nuance or specificity into procedural account. In other words, we should not be surprised when bureaucracies fall short and frustrate us, as individuals. Most importantly, Burke aims to encourage us to question bureaucracies, and to update systems when they become unreasonable or dysfunctional.

While there seems to be an increased contemporary resistance towards bureaucracies, one can find ample examples of new bureaucratic systems causing discontent. For instance, within the academy one finds heated debates surrounding proposed new 'edumetrics'[21] and academic impact factor measurement. The idea that

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[18] Although Burke (ATH:227) sees *bureaucratization of the imaginative* as a recurrent process throughout history he believes that "the accumulated by-products leading to 'alienation' are greater in some periods than in others". In other words, some systems are perceived as more dysfunctional than others.
[19] The way in which the Holocaust was made possible by the unthining following of orders is echoed in Hannah Arendt's theory of the banality of evil.
[20] Sandywell refers here to the theories of Max Weber.
[21] Tim Lacy (2014) describes 'edumetrics' as the attempt to measure and quantify all teaching and learning outcomes.

the academy should have greater impact is noble (the *imaginative*), but when such an idea is rigidified into an administrative system for measurement (the *bureaucratic*), it tends to result in negative by-products. The administrative load created by such processes are also alienating, insofar as it consumes time that could be spent on more important and meaningful academic work. It is unsurprising that many academics, especially in the humanities, are opposed to the implementation of such systems.

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From a design perspective, it is worth considering the extent to which the imaginative may become bureaucratized. Design, as opposed to art or craft, operates within institutionalised systems of industrial production. The alienation caused by industrialised production has been a major source of critique in the history of design and decorative arts, via figures like William Morris. However, the acceptance of a certain level of bureaucracy may depend on the specific design sector or ultimate purpose of the design product. For instance, in some design sectors there is a high level of standardisation, for pragmatic (and in some cases safety) purposes. Web design standards ensure that online content can be viewed effectively on a range of digital devices, while wayfinding and signage conventions are rigidly enforced to make information immediately accessible. In such industries one would expect a higher level of bureaucracy with regards to processes and procedures, to ensure that all standards are met. However, in other design sectors such standardisation would be considered antithetical to creative design practice. Any prescriptions regarding 'good design practice' tends to be challenged, at least by some. Indeed, the history of design is basically a narrative outlining the rejections of prescribed ways of making.

From this perspective one could argue that design trend oscillations operate as dynamic opposition to dominant aesthetic orders, and are therefore by nature, anti-bureaucratic. In other words, there seems to be a built-in mechanism whereby a new aesthetic tendency loses its value if it becomes the mainstream, standard or norm. One could thus argue that design trend dynamics are an indication of a healthy, non-bureaucratized, creative industry. This dynamic could be considered a positive self-regulating mechanism, whereby no order or system is allowed to 'outstay its welcome'. But this is, arguably, only partly true. The paradoxical notion of a 'creative bureaucracy' is perhaps useful to explain the extent to which the design industry, as a 'machine', produces 'newness' in a way that can resemble mindless unthinking (mere *motion*).

It is possible to argue that the fashion or design trend 'system' operates by *bureaucratising the imaginative*. Fashions or trends require alternative (imaginative) design responses to the mainstream, but these innovations are soon 'hijacked' (bureaucratised) by the commercial system. As mentioned previously, the nature of this system is circular and self-destructive: when a trend reaches a certain level of popularity it starts to lose its value. As mentioned previously, there are negative consequences to this self-destructive trend dynamic. The process is responsible for a tremendous amount of material and mental waste. But in addition to a waste of resources, the process also means that truly significant 'imaginative' ideas become less effective via widespread 'unthinking' application. For instance, 'green' or sustainable approaches in design could be considered significant 'imaginative' ideas that have become 'bureaucratized'. One could argue that a

set of demands and expectations around 'green design' has led to widespread attempts to comply, but also an increasingly widespread suspicion. Under such circumstances, it is unsurprising that many environmentally or socially conscious counter-movements end up being passing trends. It is possible to argue that when critiques or counter-movements become trends, they are doomed to lose critical longevity. The lifecycle dynamic of trends dictates that just as rapidly as a movement gains interest, it must be discarded for the next 'best thing'.

Burke believes the process of *bureaucratisation of the imaginative* "gives the dynamic of history its agonistic shape" (Wess 1996:92). In other words, the institutionalisation of an order tends to create discontent and lead to revolution. This process has taken place throughout history, but it is possible to argue that in a late-capitalist commercial design context this process has speeded up dramatically.

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While many designers (and design educational programs) aim to prevent the development of rigid approaches or attitudes, very often the working environment rewards more conventional or conservative approaches. As Tonkinwise (2015) explains, "[d]esigners are distinct from other kinds of people because they can see how things could be otherwise. But they do not always see things otherwise enough; they slip back into the coping with how things are that we all (have to) do to get on". Krippendorff (2006:11) also explains how communities of discourse seek solidarity, which often "means resisting change, complying with what community members are accustomed to, and preserving their habits, traditions, and conventions".

This relates to the manner in which design *action* can start to resemble *motion* (or be framed as such) within institutionalised settings of design practice. Nelson and Stolterman (2012) refer to the possibility of an 'administrative slough-off', whereby the designer can hide behind a complex web of processes and relations. The designer is merely following 'procedure'. As Nelson and Stolterman (2012:206) explain, "a designer can use a prescriptive method" throughout the design process. In such a way,

> the method is the sole bearer of responsibility. […] The designer can show that the method was followed and if something is to be judged critically, it is the method, not the designer. By following this route, the role of the designer is transformed into something more along the lines of a simple operant (Nelson & Stolterman 2012:206).

Alternatively, "[a] designer can always argue that he or she is only trying to satisfy someone else. It could be a client, a decision maker, a customer, a stakeholder, or an end user" (Nelson and Stolterman 2012:206). In either case, the system allows the designer to evade responsibility.

While the rhetorics surrounding design trends seem to capitalise on the awareness that static orders are undesirable, they nonetheless support the perpetuation of a more general, and much more static, commercial order. It is possible to argue that the 'design bureaucracy' (institutionalised design practice instilled through education and commercial service) forces designers to 'toe the line'. In such a way, design action contributes to the naturalization of a particular position, namely that of design as in service of the (commercial) *status*

quo. As Fry (2011:76) argues, "the design profession, in all its diversity, is unambiguously a service industry bonded to the economic status quo".

This scenario may create a tremendous amount of tension (and guilt) amongst designers. Many design education programmes today aim to instill a greater sense of critical thinking around the role of design, specifically with regards to issues of sustainability and social justice. This often leads to tension, clearly visible in the disillusionment that many design graduates experience once they enter the industry. Where they expected 'imaginative' work, they tend to do more 'bureaucratic' work. As Ralph Caplan (2006:235) explains, "much of the dissatisfaction with professional design life is rooted in the disparity between what attracted [designers] to the practice of design and what [they] now spend most of [their] days doing".

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It is important to acknowledge the dialectical possibilities when evaluating design practice and how I have framed design practice from a particularly critical perspective. Functional design practice for one person might seem dysfunctional or destructive to another. A designer's particular proficiency could, from a different perspective, be seen as a 'trained incapacity'. Any occupational capacity can be described as an incapacity when using a different set of criteria. To redirect or re-frame the criteria of evaluation is, of course, a common rhetorical practice. As Burke explains (PC:49):

> Any performance is discussible either from the standpoint of what it *attains* or what it *misses*. Comprehensiveness can be discussed as superficiality, intensiveness as stricture, tolerance as uncertainty – and the poor *pedestrian* abilities of a fish are clearly explainable in terms of his excellence as a *swimmer*.

Burke seeks to highlight how performance can be framed either positively or negatively, depending on one's point of view. Although I have attempted to show the interconnections between design orders and disorders, I have primarily focussed on dysfunctional aspects of practice throughout this chapter – what design *misses*. In other words, I have adopted a critical Burkean terministic screen, which has deflected attention from what design *attains*. From a different perspective, one could discuss design hierarchy, perfection, technology and occupational training, in more positive terms. It is worth mentioning that I do consider the unique ways in which design can be used to address the problems explored here in the following chapter. Nonetheless, as Burke's fish anecdote also highlights, it is important not to develop unrealistic expectations about what design can achieve. In other words, design should not be deified as the solution to all humanity's problems.

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To summarise, this chapter presented a critical Burkean vocabulary as a means to explore problematic design practices in general and trend dynamics in particular. Throughout this chapter I highlighted how many of Burke's concerns surrounding symbolic 'disorders' are reflected in critical design discourse. In reference to Burke's notion of a 'hierarchic psychosis', one can identify hierarchies in design relations, products, styles

and rhetorics. The presence of socio-political hierarchies in the design industry is not problematic *per se*, but an obsession with hierarchic status may result in unethical practice Similarly, while there is nothing wrong with design product or style hierarchies as such, an excessive emphasis on what is 'new' and 'better' may contribute to premature obsolescence. Burke's critique of a 'technological psychosis' may also be applied to design contexts, insofar as design and trend rhetorics are thoroughly influenced by an instrumental 'rhetoric of technology'. A discussion of the Burkean concepts 'trained incapacity' and 'occupational psychosis' sought to highlight the way in which designers' particular training and proficiencies may also become blindnesses that exacerbate problematic design practices and reinforce particular kinds of trend dynamics. The last Burkean 'disorder' explored in this chapter is that of 'bureaucratisation of the imaginative'. Here I considered the paradox of a creative design bureaucracy, where continuous creative design change can also be interpreted as a cultural and commercial *status quo*.

A major theme that develops throughout this chapter is the way in which Burke attempts to draw attention to perceived perspectival imbalances. While he critiques hierarchy, instrumental thinking, specialisation, disciplinary training and bureaucracy, he is not oblivious to the practical value of these human propensities. What Burke aims to illustrate, is how any of these propensities may become over-emphasised, resulting in extremist perspectives and unquestioned systems. Whereas this chapter explored the problems caused by unreflective or foolish symbol-usage, the following chapter considers Burke's proposed correctives via more symbol-wise approaches.

CHAPTER SIX: META-RHETORICAL DESIGN RE-FRAMING

This chapter introduces some of Burke's recommended correctives to the symbolic disorders explored in the previous chapter. For Burke, these problems are rooted in a widespread 'symbol-foolishness' and he believes a linguistic-rhetorical education may enable people to become more 'symbol-wise'. It is possible to argue that the problems surrounding unsustainable design trend dynamics are also rooted in this symbol-foolishness. I thus aim to show how a Burkean meta-rhetorical perspective may offer alternative ways of framing trends and provide steps towards more deliberate and 'wise' trend engagements. This chapter thus finally brings us to the main aim of this study, namely to re-frame design trends by adopting a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach. To reiterate, by 'meta-rhetorical' I mean a reflexive, second-level (self)consciousness about the rhetorical nature of visual and verbal design action. This meta-rhetorical perspective builds on all of Burke's dialectical, dramatistic and rhetorical theory explored throughout this study.

This chapter consists of three sections, related to the main facets of Burkean meta-rhetorical re-framing. In other words, I explore three interrelated aspects of Burke's approach to developing symbol-wisdom, namely 1) rhetorical (self)consciousness; 2) proposed strategies for re-framing; and 3) an attitude of neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism.

The first facet of symbol-wisdom, namely developing greater rhetorical (self)consciousness, relates to becoming more cognisant of linguistic and rhetorical framing. This allows one to become more aware of the manipulative or subtly seductive rhetorics in everyday life in order to make more well-informed decisions. The aim here echoes traditional ideological critique,[1] whereby persuasive positions can be recognised as rhetorically constructed and therefore critiqued or demystified. However, in following a Burkean approach, one would also become more reflexively *self*-conscious of the rhetoric found in personal biases or 'trained incapacities,' to consider how any supposedly 'demystified' position remains rhetorical and therefore open to further critique.

The second part of this chapter presents some of Burke's proposed strategies for drawing attention to symbolic framing in order to enable more critical positions to develop. For Burke, one can draw attention to 'terministic screens' (which always involve over-emphasised and de-emphasised perspectives), by employing certain kinds of literary or artistic techniques. These re-framing or perspective-adjusting strategies include what Burke refers to as 'perspective by incongruity', as well as the use of irony and 'comic framing'. These creative re-framing techniques are particularly valuable insofar as they allow one to avoid falling into the trap of valorising a new (and inevitably inadequate) frame. In other words, Burke shows us how to draw attention to a frame by offering a re-framed perspective, but to do so without presenting a supposedly 'de-framed' universal or absolute perspective. Throughout this section I consider contemporary design examples

[1] As argued previously, Burke develops his own version of ideological critique, even if he chooses to avoid the term 'ideological critique' to describe his work.

that could, from this Burkean perspective, be interpreted as instances of re-framing both design practice and design trends.

The last section of this chapter considers Burke's proposed cultivation of a particular attitude, which he describes as a 'neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism'. Burke sees this attitude as the only viable response to the negative byproduct of the dialectical-rhetorical situation: a situation in which only partial perspectives can be held, yet are frequently asserted as absolute truth and with great rhetorical force. In other words, this attitude seeks to diffuse partisan or polemical rhetorics by acknowledging the dialectical nature of symbolic reality as well as the inevitable limitations of any particular rhetorical perspective. As an advanced form of symbol-wisdom, this attitude is characterised by an appreciation of dialectical complexity and paradox, resulting in more humble and emphatic engagements. I aim to show how this Burkean attitude may prove valuable in responding to some of the problems associated with contemporary design trend dynamics.

Rhetorical (self)consciousness

For Burke, the first step towards becoming symbol-wise is to become more conscious of the significance of language or symbol usage in framing or structuring experiences of reality and therefore also in influencing thought and behaviour. Burke (1958:63) believes we should study the human "tendency to misjudge reality as inspirited by the troublous genius of symbolism". Burke (RR:274) argues that "[w]ith language, a whole new realm of purpose arises, endless in scope, as contrasted with the few rudimentary purposes we derive from our bodies". People become driven by 'doctrine', which means "they derive purposes from language, which tells them what they 'ought' to want to do, tells them how to do it, and in the telling goads them with great threats and promises" (RR:274). Burke (RR:275) thus explains how "civilization *invents* purposes" where through symbolic activities and artefacts, what is "made *possible* by language, become *necessary".* Similarly, through the symbolic/rhetorical framing of design products, what is made available is made desirable and even irresistible. Burke (1955:263) further describes how symbolism enables "a 'pageantry' in objects, a 'socioanagogic' [hierarchic ordering] element imposed upon them". In other words, the hierarchal psychosis, as a symbolic disorder, impacts how we value certain objects more than others, for what are purely symbolic, meta-cultural reasons. This is, as argued previously, the mechanism by which trends operate.

Burke (1955:289) thus believes we are capable of enhancing our perception of the manner in which symbolic orders (along with particular metaphors) fabricate socio-cultural expectations and ambitions. To become aware of these invisible (symbolic) 'goads', is to be less susceptible to manipulation and gain greater agency for deliberate and thoughtful action. Burke aims to show us that "if we can become aware of the entelechial compulsion, then we can also to some extent loosen its hold on us […] Instead of 'going with it', we can resist it, through self-reflection" (Crusius 1999:172). Burke's theory thus aims at developing a greater awareness of symbolic framing, in order for us to identify, demystify and potentially resist 'false ambitions' or 'symbolic goads'. This awareness allows us to be more discerning in our engagements with rhetorical

propositions. From a design perspective, we can prepare and protect ourselves against overt manipulation and seduction and become more vigilant of rhetorical design 'bullshit'.

In order to become more conscious of linguistic or symbolic framing, Burke suggests one needs to practice a process of *discounting*. On a basic level, this entails that one understands that "whatever *correspondence* there is between a *word* and the *thing* it names, the word is *not* the thing. The *word* tree is *not* the tree. And just as effects that can be got with the thing can't be got with the word, so effects that can be got with the word can't be got with the thing" (RR:18). Burke acknowledges that, for practical reasons, we tend to "gravitate spontaneously toward naïve verbal realism", where we treat the *word* and the *thing* as interchangeable. However, he encourages a certain kind of linguistic scepticism through which we may come to question symbols that initially appear 'natural', 'objective' or 'neutral' to us.

Burke encourages the process of 'discounting' insofar as it offers an alternative to the process of 'debunking', which he finds problematic. To 'debunk' a particular perspective simply leads to the assertion of some supposedly 'correct' or superior position, which will necessarily also be faulty in its limitation.[2] Burke thus encourages a practice of 'discounting' *all* perspectives, including one's own, since all perspectives are essentially limited 'terministic screens'. This is an important way in which Burke tries to distinguish his approach to critique from other instances of ideological critique. His particular approach thus aims to develop greater reflexive insight about subtle forms of self-persuasion including personal bias or 'trained incapacities'. In other words, through rhetorical self-awareness, we are also protected against ourselves. Burke (GM:442) expresses his hope that this will "temper the extreme rawness of our ambitions, once we become aware of the ways in which we are the victims of our own and one another's magic". He thus proposes we nurture a "distrustful admiration of all symbolism" in order to systematically question "the many symbolically-stimulated goads that are now accepted too often without question" (Burke 1955:287).

Burke believes the "false ambitions that symbolism so readily encourages" are at the root of the unsustainable behaviours whereby we are "ruining this handsome planet and its plenitude" (Burke 1958:63). These ambitions become unsustainable behaviours as a result of the entelechial drive, 'hierarchal psychosis' and 'technological psychosis', as explored in the previous chapter. As mentioned previously, Burke is highly critical of techno-scientific disciplines with their hyper-instrumentalist attitudes. It is for this reason that Burke tends to identify correctives in the field of humanities. Whereas the sciences tend to frame reality as objective, the arts and humanities pay attention to the ways in which language, including scientific language, constructs subjective experiences of reality and impacts attitudes and behaviours. As Giamo (2009) argues:

> Burke's preeminent concern with technology is connected to modes of acquiring knowledge. He distinguishes between the physical sciences, setting the pace for technological production and

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[2] Groys (2014) shares Burke's stance on the problems with 'debunking' frames such as those found in common ideological critique. He believes "[c]ritical theory today assumes that devalorization without valorization is possible and that one can make fun of everything, deconstruct everything, and treat everything ironically without simultanesously valorizing something else" (Groys 2014:188). He believes critical theory and philosophy in general are valorized in the process of de-valuing any particular position.

> deployment, the social sciences whose emphasis is toward regulation, and the humanities, which provide the symbols to put the vicious cycle into perspective.

It is possible to argue that design, as an in-between discipline (between engineering and art; concerned with both functionality and aesthetics) has a natural inclination towards putting technical processes and technological objects into humanistic perspective. Furthermore, one finds a distinctive turn towards more humanistic, linguistic and rhetorical[3] approaches in various design disciplines towards the end of the twentieth century. Contemporary design discourse seems drawn to linguistic meta-perspectives, as a means to reflect on design praxis.

There is, in other words, an awareness within design discourse regarding the importance of the linguistic framing of design practice. There are a number of theorists who support meta-discursive practice in design, since they understand that language plays a role in design process and outcome. For instance, Coyne and Snodgrass (1995) describe how linguistic metaphors guide design problem formulation and by extension, influence design response. In reference to the work of Donald Schön, they describe how "[m]etaphors provide the means by which problems are defined and resolved, but if we are uncritical of the metaphors that prompt our actions, we may miss opportunities for useful action" (Coyne & Snodgrass 1995:31). They continue to explain how an awareness of the metaphorical construction of problems may expose 'problems' as 'pseudo-problems', or in other words, "they can be shown to have little basis in human experience other than through the force of a particular dominant metaphor" (Coyne & Snodgrass 1995:32). This notion of 'pseudo-problems', as domineering metaphorical constructions, has much in common with Burke's notion of 'symbolic goads' or 'false ambitions'.

John Wood's research explicitly promotes meta-perspectives of design as a means to address current problems with praxis. Wood's (2010:111) version of '*meta-design'* explores 'languaging' (including renaming practices) as a "promising way to initiate a paradigm shift".[4] Wood (2010:111) argues that "many designers underestimate the importance of language in informing beliefs and actions". As an example, he explains how a shift in thinking can occur if certain design practices are renamed. For instance, renaming 'fashion design' as 'clothing design', or labeling 'architecture' as 'housing', would shift the emphasis away from sophisticated disciplinary specialisations towards addressing more basic human needs (Wood 2015). This proposal for re-framing design practice, via renaming, could be interpreted as a corrective response to the perceived trained incapacities and occupational psychoses of specialised designers, as identified previously. While this 'meta-design' approach can be criticised for instrumentalising language and offering reductionist solutions, it nonetheless serves as an example of an advanced awareness of the potential of linguistic re-framing for design praxis.

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[3] As mentioned previously, various design theorists also support rhetorical approaches in design, as well as rhetorical design education, for reasons similar to those of Burke. The most notable of these is, of course, Richard Buchanan, being trained in both rhetoric and design.

[4] Wood (2010:111) draws on the work of Wittgenstein, Kuhn, Lakoff & Johnson and Sperber & Wilson, arguing that "by steering the appropriate metaphors we can revise the conditions that create what is 'real' to us".

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Burke believes aesthetic activity, combined with rhetorical skill, offers the necessary counter-balance for the various psychoses of his age. Although Burke clearly understands that the aesthetic and practical are not polar opposites, he suggests that artistic practice should challenge the modern obsession with the purely practical. He thus argues that "the aesthetic must serve as anti-mechanization, the corrective of the practical" (CS:111).[5] He believes

> society might well be benefited by the corrective of a disintegrating art, which converts each simplicity into a complexity, which ruins the possibility of ready hierarchies, which concerns itself with the problematical, the experimental, and thus by implication works corrosively upon those expansionistic certainties preparing the way for our social cataclysms. An art may be of value purely through preventing a society from becoming too assertively, too hopelessly, itself. (CS:104-5).

Burke believes absolute positions or dogmatisms need to be continually challenged, and that art fulfills this role in society to challenge the *status quo*.

Richard Lanham (2006:165), as influenced by Burke, offers a valuable perspective on how artistic practice may assist in defamiliarizing experience, by helping us "look *at* what we usually look *through*".[6] Lanham believes this shift in perspective enables an enhanced symbolic consciousness, which he sees as highly valuable in the current 'attention economy'. Similar to Burke, Lanham believes this approach, to look *at* symbols, instead of merely *through* them, can also be cultivated through rhetorical education. It is important to understand that all symbols can be looked 'at', even if they do not overtly invite or encourage it. As mentioned previously, newspaper text set in Times New Roman does not draw attention to itself, but this does not mean it is stylistically or rhetorically insignificant.

In the context of this study, Burke's advice, via Lanham, could be translated as a call to look more closely *at* how we design and how we talk about design. In other words, we need to extend our perspective beyond getting things done *through* designing (visual design rhetorics) and talking (verbal design rhetorics), and look more closely *at* how we are designing and talking. From a consumer perspective, one can consume a trend *through* rhetorical identification or take a more active interpretive role to look *at* the rhetoric being employed. From a designer's perspective, to work *through* trend rhetoric is to employ rhetorical strategies fairly unconsciously or automatically, whereas to look *at* trend rhetoric is to become more (self)conscious of the rhetorical mechanisms involved in the creation, following and rationalisation of design trends. It is my argument that designers need to look *at* particular trend rationalisations and also *at* trend rhetoric in general.

While greater rhetorical awareness may enable a designer to toggle their perspective between 'through' and 'at' modes, subversive creative design action may enable this shift in perspective to be shared or communicated with others. In other words designers can, through their creative practice, draw more explicit

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[5] It is possible to interpret this proposal not as the absolute or unchanging purpose of aesthetic practice, but merely as the required response to the mid-twentieth century cluster of conditions.

[6] More generally, Lanham (2006) proposes what he refers to as a bi-stable approach to viewing texts, where one can toggle between *at* and *through* modes of perception, depending on what the situation requires.

attention to the rhetorical framing of design products and trends, to encourage others to look *at* them, instead of merely *through* them. Designers can make design rhetorics less 'invisible' as a critical response towards unethical or unsustainable design practices.

It is possible to argue that the most effective way of adjusting problematic attitudes or re-shaping unsustainable behaviours is to understand and expose the role of symbolic framing. By extension, it may be possible to develop an alternative perspective on contemporary design trend dynamics by acknowledging the centrality of language and rhetoric, not only in capitalising on or exploiting existing socio-cultural 'goads', but in the construction of these socio-cultural ambitions in the first place. From a visual cultural perspective, Sandywell (2011:9) echoes Burke's position that the first step towards critical reflection and progressive transformation of the visual cultural landscape, is to recall "that none of these modern marvels would be possible without the resources of language and the rhetorical creativity that modern visual culture has hijacked for its own ends". To extend this line of thought, one could say that contemporary trend dynamics have 'highjacked' the resources of design language and rhetoric, but also that these resources remain available, and effective, for critical reflection and transformation. For designers who believe there is something harmful about contemporary design trend dynamics, there are ways in which they can utilise their creative design skills to expose trend rhetorics and illustrate the possibility of alternative framing.

Carter (1992:17) explains how Burke "accepts that language itself furnishes many of the motives for the absurdist theater of human emotions, but he does not resign himself to the suspicion that there is nothing to be done". Language is both the cause of man's fallen state, and the means for his salvation through symbolic action. In other words, language establishes the conditions, makes redemption possible, and is the means of the redemption (Rueckert 1982:133). Burke thus envisions a way in which ideologies, solidified through rhetorical means, can be subverted through the strategic deployment of rhetoric itself. Some of Burke's proposed strategies for utilising rhetoric to expose rhetorical framing is explored in the following section. I also consider some examples of designers exposing design frames via creative design practice and how Burkean terminologies may be used to describe the process.

Burkean strategies for re-framing

Throughout his work Burke offers suggestions on drawing attention to dominant 'terministic screens' as well as shifting or expanding these inherently limited perspectives. As mentioned previously, Burke consistently questions the *status quo* and encourages the search for alternative perspectives via rhetorically effective aesthetic practice. Some of the strategies he employs, to be discussed here, include what Burke refers to as *perspective by incongruity* and *comic framing.* As part of these re-framing strategies, I also refer to Burke's emphasis on irony as a dialectical device for altering perspective. These strategies can all be interpreted as meta-rhetorical, insofar as their main purpose is to draw attention to the rhetorical framing of dominant discourses and practices. Through creative re-framing, these practices serve primarily to reveal or expose frames that tend to appear 'natural' and are left unquestioned as a result. Burke's various inter-related suggestions for re-framing are explored here in some depth, after which I consider the way in which selected

contemporary design examples reflect these Burkean ideas. In other words, I consider how these design examples can be interpreted as working towards developing meta-perspectives on design practice and trend dynamics in general.

One strategy for re-framing is Burke's method of *perspective by incongruity*, whereby a different perspective is gained through creative meta-discursive practice. New perspectives are devised and communicated through the juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous or conflicting ideas. Burke believes these jarring, surprising and often comically incongruous assertions are capable to bring about a change in perspective. The notion of 'perspective by incongruity' is echoed in Lanham's previously mentioned proposal to develop a meta-perspective through 'defamiliarizing experience'. In other words, 'perspective by incongruity' is a method of turning a familiar idea into something unfamiliar, and in so doing, creating an alternative perspective on this idea.

Burke (2003b:350) refers to some of his favourite phrases as examples of 'perspective by incongruity', including Veblen's 'trained incapacity' and 'invention is the mother of necessity'. Such phrases are rhetorically effective in how they draw attention to neglected or unnoticed effects, through their use of incongruity and irony. The term 'trained incapacity' seems like an oxymoron at first, but on further consideration it offers an effective way of describing the negative side-effects of specialised education, which makes a person less capable to think in ways outside of this training. Burke (ATH:309) explains how *perspective by incongruity* is a "positive cards-face-up-on-the-table" strategy, "designed to 'remoralize' by accurately naming a situation already demoralized by inaccuracy". For instance, a situation characterised by 'trained incapacity' is demoralising insofar as the opposite of the training intention transpires. However, the critique of this situation, through comically incongruous re-categorisation, offers a more positive or 'moralising' function.

Burke uses *perspective by incongruity* to draw attention to various symbolic disorders, most specifically the 'technological psychosis'. He finds the use of incongruous, yet astute, assertions useful in creating perspective on the modern attitude of hyper-instrumentalism. It is a mechanism whereby Burke seeks to break the spell of technology, which is commonly perceived as 'natural', 'neutral' or 'objective' in its goals. He thus aims to highlight and question this attitude by highlighting the ironies and absurdities surrounding the technological environment.

Throughout his work Burke refers to the use of *irony* as a particularly apt literary mechanism for creating perspective. Burke sees irony as closely associated with verbal dialectic, insofar as both are concerned with contradictions and reversals in meaning. As Burke (GM:517) explains, the ironic formula can be described as, "what goes forth as A returns as non-A". Burke thus finds in irony the potential to bring about dialectical shifts in perspective.

It is important to differentiate Burke's irony from the common postmodern understanding and usage of ironic distancing. Considering the common misconceptions of, and current contempt for, irony, it is perhaps

worthwhile to consider the context of the device in greater depth. Zoe Williams (2003) laments how "[p]retty much everything is ironic these days. Irony is used as a synonym for cool, for cynicism, for detachment, for intelligence". In particular, postmodern irony seems to be associated with a detached or disengaged radical relativism. However, Williams explains how this current perception surrounding irony is largely rooted in a misunderstanding of what true irony is. Williams (2003) explains how irony has its roots in Socratic dialogue whereby one says "the opposite of what is true in order to underline the truth". According to Williams (2003), irony became a popular tool for dissent during the first world war, whereby the "gross disjunction between patriotic rhetoric and the reality of the war itself led to a widespread use of irony as a means of puncturing deceitful propaganda". It is also in this context that Burke recognises the critical value of irony in public discourse.

Williams (2003) continues to explain how irony is used to wade "through the mulch of accepted wisdom" and expose its fraudulence.

> Where irony springs up as a response to being lied to (by authority, or prevailing culture, or whatever), […] it states the lie in order to expose the lie, and is therefore a route to truth. It has some moral import. It may say 'This belief is wrong', but it doesn't say 'All belief is wrong'. When people call ours the Age of Irony, that is not the kind of irony they are on about.

Williams thus wishes to draw attention to a different kind of irony prevalent in postmodern culture. This type of irony focuses on but a small aspect of irony, namely self-consciousness or self-referentiality. She explains how postmodern 'distanced' irony "is not there to lance a boil of duplicity, but rather to undermine sincerity altogether, to beggar the mere possibility of a meaningful moral position. In this sense it is, indeed, indivisible from cynicism". The contemporary disdain for irony thus stems from a weariness of this distanced or disengaged attitude where no position is taken whatsoever. Williams (2003) describes it as a scenario in which "I'm not saying what you think I'm saying, but I'm not saying its opposite, either. In fact, I'm not saying anything at all". Whereas "old-fashioned protest waits until it knows it has been lied to before it unleashes its irony," contemporary irony ridicules someone "for their sheer unironic-ness in holding a position in the first place" (Williams 2003). Hence irony's association with radical relativism.

Similar to Williams, but from a design perspective, Tim Parsons, in *The Design Comedy: In Defence of Irony* (2010), interrogates the reasons behind the current contempt for 'ironic design'. Parsons (2010) agrees with Williams that "much so-called ironic design is actually based upon a misunderstanding of the term and the kind of work it should apply to. Of the glut of kitsch and whimsical joke-products we are naturally tired of, many are not ironic at all, and those that are, do not use irony intelligently". He believes there is a vacuous and 'narcissistic' overuse of irony in design, as well as the overexposure of pseudo-irony[7] in the design media. However, while Parsons (2010) explains how "irony is [often] painted as anti-progressive" he believes it has the "ability to offer cutting critique is a positive when aimed at the right targets". He outlines historical design examples, such as the "outrageous objects of Memphis,[8] [where] irony proved itself to be a pointed

[7] Parsons (2010) believes much of postmodern so-called ironic design, does not feature the actual use of irony. He argues that designers can reaffirm the value of irony by being careful not to misuse the term.
[8] Memphis refers to a group of Italian designers, primarily from Milan, that came to prominence during the early 1980s.

and effective weapon to puncture Modernism's sanctimonious superiority". The work of Memphis designers, such as Ettore Sottsass (Figure 11), "were concerned with the ironic, playful and colourful re-rendering of the exterior of household products" (Julier 2008:106). These objects can be described as starkly anti-modernist in how they incorporate decorative (non-functional) effects.

Figure 11: Ettore Sottsass designs: *Tahiti lamp* (left); *Beverly sideboard* (middle); *Carlton bookcase* (right), 1981. (Howarth 2015).

Parsons (2010) believes "irony in design need not be an empty gesture and can, instead, enrich and stimulate the landscape of objects we live with". However, in order to do so, designers need to apply 'real irony', which "requires more than stating the opposite to what is desirable". Similarly, a design product needs to do more than merely apply unexpected visual metaphors. For Parsons, the key to effective ironic design lies in using "the 'inappropriate' language in a knowing and therefore 'appropriate' way". Most crucially, true irony (in the sense Burke also uses it),

> requires a recognition of something (a state of affairs, people with shared values, a sign, a symbol etc.) so that by being presented with its opposite in particular circumstances, its ridiculousness is somehow revealed. It is only when something comes into collective focus (such as Modernism's determination to turn our houses into machines or laboratories) that it becomes possible to use ironic design to lampoon it. It is the perfect tool for puncturing excess (Parsons 2010).

There is a common thread to be identified in these various discussions of irony, namely how it may be applied to expose hubris; 'fraudulence' (Williams 2003), 'sanctimonious superiority' or 'excess' (Parsons 2010). As Williams also notes, "[i]rony can deflate a windbag in the way that very little else can". Irony is, in other words, a powerful weapon against inflated rhetorics, exposing the 'inflatedness' of the position through 'impious' meta-discourse. This is similar to the formula by which Burke's 'perspective by incongruity' operates. As Hill (2009) explains, 'perspective by incongruity' is "[c]orrective symbolism derive[d] from an impious appropriation of the problematic symbolism".

There is another crucial benefit to the use of irony worth highlighting. Burke describes irony as contributory to a humble and charitable attitude based on kinship, allowing for the development of broader perspectives (GM:514). Williams offers a similar interpretation in stating that "[i]rony allows you to launch a challenge without being dragged into [an] orbit of self-regarding sentiment" or overblown emotional language. In

other words, irony can 'expose a windbag', but it does so from a position that need not be morally superior or sanctimonious in itself. It is for this reason that Burke refers to the value of irony as creating a *perspective of perspectives*. Put otherwise, irony is highly effective at creating a meta-perspective.

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Both perspective by incongruity and irony are closely related to Burke's notion of a *comic frame*. Whereas Burke describes irony as offering a 'perspective of perspectives', he refers to the *comic frame* as the *attitude of attitudes* (ATH:vii). The *comic frame* could thus be interpreted primarily as an attitude towards framing, rather than a literary device *per se*. As an approach to framing, it is essentially a manifestation of Burke's dialectical thinking; a 'reconcilliatory dialectics' (Simons 2009).[9]

Burke (ATH:vii) explains how the *comic frame* offers a way of interpreting "human antics as a comedy, albeit as a comedy ever on the verge of the most disastrous tragedy".[10] He believes that

> [h]uman enlightenment can go no further than in picturing people not as vicious, but as mistaken. When you add that people are *necessarily* mistaken, that *all* people are exposed to situations in which they must act as fools, that *every* insight contains its own special kind of blindness, you complete the comic circle, returning again to the lesson of humility that underlies great tragedy (ATH:41).

Herbert Simons (2009) explains how Burke's notion of comedy can be seen as the antithesis to 'melodrama'. Melodramatic storytelling is, according to Simons (2009) characterised by "its excessive simplicity. All good on one side, all evil on the other. No in-betweens. The enemy's leaders are devils incarnate; its followers are puppets and dupes". Gregory Desilet and Edward C Appel (2011:347) similarly describe how "[m]elodrama aligns conflict according to highly polarized, value-weighted extremes consistent with traditionally clear dichotomies between good and evil, right and wrong, innocent and guilty". Melodramatic framing is appealing "precisely because of its clarity and simplicity in assigning wrong predominantly to one side" (Desilet & Appel 2011:348). Because it can be so energising, melodramatic rhetoric is a major ingredient of populist politics (Simons 2009).

An obvious danger with melodramatic rhetoric is its oversimplification and vilification of other positions. Desilet and Appel (2011:348) explain how melodramatic villains "function as scapegoats for the projection of ills that lie buried within motivations and situations that are far more complex than would appear to be the case on superficial viewing". In other words, melodramatic framing is characterised by overblown praise as well as blame, with little nuance to capture the complexity of reality. It is for this reason that Simons (2009) describes melodrama as the "enemy of understanding, including self-understanding". Burke's suggestion to cultivate humility via comic framing is thus offered as an antidote to overblown, dogmatic or fundamentalist perspectives.

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[9] Rueckert (1982:56) also likens Burke's comic framing with a dialectical methodology, both being methodologies of 'exposure'. Both methodologies aim to show how what is seen on the surface is not the full reality.

[10] Desilet and Appel (2011:343) explain how Burke's notions of "comedy and tragedy, as dramatic productions, resemble each other in warning against the dangers of pride, but in comedy the emphasis shifts from crime to stupidity".

However, Simons (2009) wishes to highlight a potential problem with Burke's comic frame, namely that it may be perceived as encouraging relativism, detachment or indifference.[11] He explains how "Burke's method of humble, comic irony renders all of us into fools, thus greatly weakening the capacity of good people to stand up for what we believe". Desilet and Appel (2011:344) also explore this potential problem explaining how, "if the comic frame, as paradigmatic modeling of attitude toward conflict, presents the poles of conflict as equal in the role of 'fool' – equal in blind mistakenness – then action and choice have in effect been reduced to a matter of indifference in blameworthiness". Such an attitude may pose a problem in scenarios where outrage is warranted; where serious transgression or injustice calls for more decisive action.

In Burke's defense, as Simons (2009) as well as Desilet and Appel (2011:345) point out, 'comic framing' is not intended to prevent judgement altogether, but rather to "slow the rush to judgement". The main aim of the 'comic frame' is to prevent damaging scapegoating practices. In other words, it seeks to reduce the automatic or unfounded projection of blame. In Burke's words, the comic frame "should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting*. Its ultimate would not be *passiveness*, but *maximum consciousness*.[12] One would 'transcend' himself by noting his own foibles" (ATH:171). While Burke usually steps aside from the melodrama, at times he does condemn perspectives he deems harmful (such as hyper-technologism). He is not incapable of or opposed to taking a moral position.[13] According to Simons (2009), this should not be interpreted as an inconsistency in Burke.

> What remains consistent in Burke is his distaste for polemic – of melodrama. […] one gets a sense that the initial impulse to primal outrage needed to be checked, not that the passion that remained after the self-examination had been conducted needed also to be kept to oneself. Rather, that outrage, now a warranted outrage, needed more appropriate expression (Simons 2009).[14]

Burke's comic frame thus serves primarily to encourage more constructive expressions of dissent based on a humble and charitable attitude. These expressions are meant to defuse a damaging conflict cycle by avoiding self-righteous, knee-jerk reactions. Whereas melodrama and scapegoating amplifies "division and inflame hostility", the values of the 'comic frame are "inclusive and cooperative" (Desilet & Appel 2011:358). For Burke, the power of a comic corrective lies in how it contains "two-way attributes lacking in polemical, one-way approaches"; it "is neither wholly euphemistic, nor wholly debunking – hence it provides the *charitable*

[11] Objections towards Burke's 'comic frame' are similar to those directed at postmodern deconstruction, as making all positions relative and thus prohibiting effective action.
[12] Desilet and Appel (2011:345) explain how "maximum consciousness may in many cases be the close ally of passiveness – as when heightened vigilance leads to the paralysis of indecision or self-doubt". In other words, a zealous practice of 'comic framing' may lead to a kind of 'inaction' characterised by "behaviours ranging from avoidance to asceticism" (Desilet & Appel 2011:345).
[13] As Desilet and Appel (2011:350) explain, "Burke manifestly does not view everyone (for example, Hitler) to be equal in blindness". This is an important point. Some actions that result from 'blindness' are more harmful than others. While we are all blind to some extent, we are not all blind to the same things or to the same degree.
[14] Simons (2009) believes Burke's 'comic frame' should be seen as but one part of a larger process of effective ideological critique: "to proceed intellectually from righteous indignation, through comedic self-examination, to warrantable outrage. Correspondingly, it is to move rhetorically from melodrama to high comedy to ideology critique". From Simons' perspective, this kind of humble ideological critique does not require one to sit on the fence, but rather to thoroughly examine both sides, before presenting a more modest position when a side is finally chosen.

attitude towards people that is required for purposes of persuasion and co-operation" (ATH:166). However, it is 'charitable' without being irresponsible (Coupe 2005:95).

Desilet and Appel (2011:350-1) describe the 'comic frame' as a "meta-perspective exposing meta-error", with the 'meta-error' being "blindness toward the inevitable limitation of human discernment, blindness toward the pervasive condition of blindness. This error believes in the possibility of a type of certainty – a fanatical clarity of mind and emotion". In other words, this meta-error is not 'wrong' about a particular fact or issue, but rather it is a faulty attitude: it is ignorant of its own overconfidence. It is for this reason that Coupe (2005:69) describes the comic frame as a necessary corrective for dealing with arrogance. Carter (in Coupe 2005:134) offers an eloquent summary:

> Comedy, according to Burke, encourages us to reassess our notions of infallibility. Given the dialectical permutations of language, culture, and personality, Burke recommends that we hold our beliefs tentatively and that we consider those who hold other views, not as irredeemably evil or malicious, but as misguided souls who are actually our partners in the building of knowledge […] The comic approach deflects overly passionate linguistic dynamics, specifically the tendency to deify allies and demonize opponents […] Specializing in incongruity is offered by Burke as an antidote to the desire to adopt a final attitude towards self and society.

Burke is charitable when he pardons people's perspectival errors (their blindnesses), but he does not condone problematic perspectival attitudes. He believes we can, and ought to, acknowledge our blindnesses and strive to extend or broaden our perspectives wherever possible. This is, of course, a lifelong, ongoing process of becoming more humble and wise.

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The use of satire, for Burke, serves a similar critical role as irony. Irony is, of course, a major ingredient in much satire. However, whereas dramatic comedy employs what Burke refers to as an 'acceptance frame', *satire* may be classified as utilising a 'rejection frame'. General ideological critique, which seeks to 'debunk' others' positions, can also be characterised as 'rejection frame'. Simons explains how Burke's 'high comedy' is characterised by a sense of balance. Satire, while employing humor, is arguably not balanced in the same manner. Simons agrees with Ann George (in Simons 2009) that satire tends to fall into the "category of factional comedy. It has a definite target and it does nothing in terms of balance". Much satire, specifically the contemporary political satire of late night television,[15] tends to be quite polemical. While the satirist behaves like a fool, only 'the other' is treated as mistaken. In other words, satire tends to reinforce our own beliefs and allows us to perpetuate partisan politics by laughing at 'the other'. This kind of practice is not very productive in developing widened perspectives or fostering cooperation amongst conflicting parties.

Burke nonetheless employs satire in his work, specifically in the satirical piece *Towards Helhaven* (1971b), which warns against a dystopian future. Jodie Nicotra (2017) explains how Burke's "own solution for correcting the technological psychosis" is found primarily in satire. For Burke (2003a[1974]:74) satire is

[15] Late night comedy satire in the United States of America, such as *Last week tonight* with John Oliver, uses satire in ways that often come across as sarcastic and snarky.

effective because it embodies the entelechial principle, "[b]ut it does so perversely, by tracking down possibilities or implications to the point where the result is a kind of Utopia-in-reverse". In other words, through satire one can satisfy a need to 'go to the end of the line' by going to the ridiculous extreme, while simultaneously being critical of that very impulse. As David Cratis Williams (1989:213) explains, "[t]he ironic mode is itself perfected in satire" as when the strategic reversal of irony serves the purpose of demonstrating "the adverse entellechial implications which may also be lurking in the text".

However, Nicotra believes this satirical solution (indicating in essence a *rejection* of technology) is contrary to Burke's more general advice when it comes to dealing with symbolic dysfunctions. In other words, the satire Burke endorses contradicts his support for frames of acceptance. Nicotra (2017) sees Burke's cynical,[16] tragic attitude towards technology as a "peculiar blind spot" in his work. She believes this is short-sighted on Burke's part and that 'acceptance frames' or "strategies of affirmation" are needed if any viable solutions to technological problems, such as climate change, are to be devised. In other words, merely bashing technology with satire is not the solution; it is too passive or paralysing in its cynicism.

Coupe (2001:430-1) offers a slightly different interpretation and more generous appraisal of Burke's use of satire:

> What is interesting is that [Burke] advocates satire as the appropriate genre for our age not only because there is so much that needs rejecting but also because it, too, goes to 'the end of the line', imaginatively, exaggerating what is already the case so that we might be alerted to its consequences: its terminological ambition parallels and parodies the technological.
> If both comedy and tragedy are 'frames of acceptance', then satire, according to Burke's model of literary creation, arises from radical disaffection.

In other words, Coupe believes a 'rejection frame' may in certain instances be warranted. He further points out how Burke's satire, as "dedicated as it is to 'rejection', […] cannot in our time retain its traditional privilege of superior wisdom: ecological catastrophe implicates us all" (Coupe 2001:431). In other words, this dystopia features no clear 'villains' and Burke includes himself in the communal guilt or foolishness. According to Coupe (2001:430) Burke's techno-satire thus "gestures, paradoxically and painfully, beyond tragic resignation and towards the potential of the 'comic frame'".

As mentioned previously, there is a fine line between Burke's 'comic frame' and a tragic 'humble irony'. One often finds the combined ingredients of the comedic and the tragic in true irony. Desilet and Appel (2011:349) explain how "[u]niversal tragedy and high or universal comedy offer similar experiences of humble irony" through the application of theatrical 'double vision'.

> The audience, from its vantage point, sees the operation of errors that the characters of the play cannot see; thus seeing from two angles at once, it is chastened by dramatic irony; it is admonished to remember that when intelligence means wisdom […] it requires fear, resignation, the sense of limits, as an important ingredient (ATH:41-42).

[16] Burke's satirical essays on technology can be described as highly cynical in their "apocalyptic overtones" (Hill 2009).

This wisdom is achieved by developing an astute awareness of one's personal 'blindnesses' or limitations, and therefore one would be less judgemental or condemning of others' blindnesses. It is for this reason that "Burke emphasizes the comic frame and its inducement of humble irony as the model for human relations and conflict […] From within comic framing of conflict, each person identifies the internal blindness before it reaches the volume of emotion that might trigger the escalation to victimage and tragic scapegoating" (Desilet & Appel 2011:349).

By framing design relations as drama, and trend rhetorics as melodrama, the designer-critic can take up multiple positions, as both participant and observer. This means that the seriousness with which various design stakeholders make rhetorical claims can be questioned. Furthermore, from this altered perspective the comedy and the tragedy playing out in the contemporary design scene can be observed. However, as Desilet and Appel (2011:360) point out, "[v]ery often, as in high tragic or comic drama, it seems only an audience or a third party to a conflict can readily achieve the kind of distance and analysis that might enable insightful double vision". Similarly, those who are invested in particular design positions may struggle to find the kind of distance needed to develop a meta-perspective on what they are doing.

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I have already touched on some of the ways in which re-framing strategies form part of design practice and discourse. Design, as in-between discipline, tends to exhibit a greater humanistic awareness of the dangers in developing entrenched techniques or worldviews. Various designers and design theorists have actively sought to challenge assumed design 'absolutes' whenever they arise. Furthermore, these absolutes are often challenged through creative, aesthetic strategies. From a formal design perspective, creative design responses routinely present alternatives to established ways of making. As mentioned previously, Julier (2008:89-91) refers to "wilful acts of destabilization" as a driving force in the production of *avant-garde* design. It is possible to argue that designers routinely employ strategies of incongruity (involving irony) to produce new and surprising work.

Design theorist Prasad Boradkar (2006:5) believes Burke's notion of *perspective by incongruity,* which amalgamates "seemingly opposing views," allows for incongruous concepts to be used together to form new understandings about design products. While Burke often utilises 'perspective by incongruity' in verbal turns of phrase, it is possible to identify the mechanism in other non-verbal actions. As an obvious example, postmodern design movements (including the work of previously mentioned Memphis group, shown in Figure 11), subvert dominant modernist values through a deliberate anti-functionality.[17] In other words, by deliberately incorporating non-functional attributes in a design product, such as superfluous decoration, a critical statement is made about the supposedly purely functionalist approach. Whimsical decoration is utilised as a subversive strategy in reaction against the prevailing modernist 'form follows function'

[17] The power of anti-functional design can be linked to what Ian Hill (2009) calls Burke's "anti-instrumental instrumentalism". Such an approach is a pragmatic application of 'perspective by incongruity', whereby something anti-instrumental is used as a corrective 'instrument'.

philosophy. Memphis was particularly successful at incorporating incongruous, non-functional decoration and is therefore often described as highly anti-modernist. It is possible to argue that this playful incongruity produces a new perspective or insight on, what tend to be very serious, prescriptive and restrictive modernist aesthetics.

As discussed previously, acts of design destabilisation are often accompanied by verbal rationalisations of 'correcting' the shortcomings of the mainstream. In such instances designers may also employ 'perspective by incongruity' in a discursive sense. Robert Venturi's aphorism "less is a bore" is a prime example of an unexpected twist on the common modernist phrase "less is more". It is possible to argue that this comment does more than merely critique a minimalist aesthetic sensibility (by calling it boring); it draws attention to the problematic perception, or received wisdom, that modernist minimalism is morally superior. In other words, as a 'perspective by incongruity', it also critiques the pretentiousness of modernist framing.

It is worth reiterating that the above examples of destabilising design acts still take place within the conservative parameters of the market. It is, arguably, more difficult to utilise design action in presenting alternative perspectives on the design market itself, as such products would have to operate outside the established design system of incentives and profits. This relates to Jan Van Toorn's (1994) critique of what he refers to as symbolic reproduction through design. He proposes a more subversive, reflexive design practice – a "struggle against design in the form of design" – whereby designers would produce "commentaries rather than confirm[ing] self-referential fictions". In order to do so, he suggests that designers would have to recognise style as ideological construction offering "restricted choices that only show a small sliver of reality in mediation". In other words, he proposes a more radical rethinking of design beyond the deflections created by aesthetic or stylistic variations.

It is in this sphere where *Critical Design* offers a response. Critical Design does not critique a dominant aesthetic regime, but rather challenges preconceived ideas about the role and function of design in society. As mentioned previously, traditional 'affirmative' design practice reinforces design's established position, whereas Critical Design critiques "the prevailing situation through designs that embody alternative social, cultural, technical or economic values" (Dunne & Raby 2001:58). For Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (2001:59) this alternative approach offers a means for design "to establish an intellectual stance of its own" instead of being "viewed simply as an agent of capitalism".

Whereas postmodern aesthetic movements subverted notions of 'good design' by incorporating non-functional values, Critical Design can be described as 'dysfunctional' on a whole other level. Critical Design products violate the traditional notion of what design products ought to be and do. These products are not used in a utilitarian sense, but are rather meant to provoke thought or generate debate. Very often boundaries between art and design seem to be blurred when it comes to Critical Design, where products are more likely to be found in art galleries than user settings.

From a Burkean perspective, Critical Design can be interpreted as a highly reflective practice aimed at creating *perspective by incongruity*. Matt Malpass (2012) offers extensive insights on how Critical Design challenges design orthodoxies. As a non-commercial practice it tends to be "free from the demands of the client and not constrained by market practicalities" (Malpass 2012:168). Furthermore, since Critical Design projects are experimental and conceptual in nature, they tend to be facilitated by academic or educational institutions and are "closely linked to pedagogic activity" (Malpass 2012:168; 175). Because of its highly self-reflexive nature, Critical Design is often perceived as 'design for designers'. However, the fact that it is directed at a *niche* design audience need not be seen as problematic. It is possible to argue that designers ought to engage in, and be exposed to, these practices as a means to develop greater critical insight into what they do. From this perspective, Critical Design serves a valuable purpose by holding up a critical mirror to the design industry.

A major ingredient of Critical Design, as identified by Malpass (2012), is the use of satire.[18] He explains how satire is interconnected with "critique and corrective purpose, expressed through a critical mode that ridicules or otherwise challenges conditions needing reformation in the opinion of the satirist (Malpass 2012:233).

> Satire is the art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation toward it. […] A function of critical design practice, in line with the function of satire is constructive social criticism. In achieving this, the designers use wit as an instrument to afford critical reflection. Design functioning in this way holds vices, abuses, and shortcomings found in orthodox product design, scientific developments or socio-cultural conditions up to ridicule. This is done with the intent of shaming individuals, the discipline and society into improvement (Malpass 2012:187).

As mentioned previously, satire utilises humor and irony in a mocking or shaming manner that is classified by Burke as 'rejection frame'.[19] It is this cynical quality of Critical Design that some theorists have come to criticise as unproductive in providing future alternatives.

However, in some ways Critical Design can also be seen as offering an 'acceptance frame', insofar as design practice is strategically used towards its own critique. In other words, design is not being rejected altogether. In Critical Design, designers "embed defamiliarising effects in the objects they produce, but at the same time, honour design principles" (Malpass 2012:232). Malpass (2012:187) points out how a Critical Design project "often takes the form of the genre it spoofs. This is important as critical design practice functions as a commentary by subverting product design, while at the same time refusing to abandon design principles". Critical Design is, in other words, not wholly cynical of design *per se*. It does not make design itself to be the

[18] While Malpass (2012) does not explicitly explore the role of irony in Critical Design, it is possible to argue that irony is a sub-ingredient in the use of satire.
[19] Malpass' own taxonomy for critical design practices seems to make a similar connection, insofar as he makes a distinction between 'Critical Design' and 'Associative Design'. Malpass (2012:188) explains how Critical Design employs a particular kind of satire that works "to attack erroneous thinking" by evoking "feelings of contempt, shock, and righteous indignation in the mind of the user". As a different strand of design practice 'Associative Design' is less dark or cynical and functions through a type of satire or parody that makes a "serious purpose, or an object with reputable characteristics […] look ridiculous by infusing it with incongruous ideas".

'villain', but shows a certain optimism that design practice can be utilised in alternative ways. This echoes Burke's proposal that problematic rhetorics be subverted through the strategic deployment of rhetoric itself.

It is also possible to interpret Critical Design practice in relation to Burke's notion of *comic framing*. Critical Design can be interpreted as an 'attitude' rather than a 'movement' or 'method'. As an attitude, it embraces ambiguity and resists absolutist finality. Through the creation of ambiguity, Critical Design "sets out to ask more questions than it aims to answer" (Malpass 2012:34). Malpass (2012:59) seems to share Burke's attitude when arguing "ambiguity is a powerful tool for designers to raise topics or ask questions while renouncing the possibility of dictating their answers". By offering an incongruous (and impractical) design 'solution', Critical Design does not aim to prescribe a new 'better' way of designing. It "embraces the relational open-ended product design [… reinforcing] relational qualities through ambiguity and paradox that encourage the user to interpret the object" (Malpass 2012:55).

The Critical Design attitude encourages multiple interpretations and does not prescribe what is 'right' or 'wrong'. What it does do is draw attention to accepted design frames or perspectives by presenting 'defamiliarised' (often ludicrous or shocking) alternatives. As Malpass (2012:56) explains, "[t]he use of ambiguity is essential in critical design practice to overcome a conditioned familiarity with design and use. […] when objects are made unusual and ambiguous, what was invisible and lost in the familiarity of the everyday is made visible". In other words, Critical Design can be interpreted as a re-framing practice aimed at exposing our 'blindnesses'.

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The discussion of a particular design example may prove instructive at this point. While most Critical Design objects are industrial design products, this communication design piece can be interpreted as critical in a similar manner. In the poster titled *I cried making this poster,* an Information Design student[20] chose to approach the brief, to visualise an issue using standard infographic devices, in an unusually self-reflexive manner. While the poster contains fairly standard infographic graphs and charts, "[t]he self-deprecating tone and the self-referential title are already enough to spark a slightly different reading" (Bowie & Reyburn 2014). In the article, *Expanding the terministic screen: a Burkean critique of information visualization in the context of design education* (Bowie & Reyburn 2014), I argue, with Duncan Reyburn, that this poster can be interpreted as "a challenge to and the expansion of a particular kind of terministic screen".

On a formal or aesthetic level the infographic genre, as terministic screen, employs something akin to the 'rhetoric of neutrality' (Kinross 1985) discussed previously. A visual emphasis on numbers and statistics, as represented through graphs and charts, contributes to an overall rhetoric of objective/scientific factuality. Furthermore, as Charles Kostelnick (2004:216) explains, information visualisation conventions are rooted in modernist aesthetics that appear "economical and perceptually transparent". Kostelnick (2004:225) further

[20] This infographic poster was created in 2012 by a third year BA: Information Design student in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria. Nick Hlozek was the project leader for this particular project.

explains how "readers come to regard [these] conventional forms as natural, direct representations of fact unmediated by the artificial lens of design". Michael Bierut and Jessica Helfand (2016) are critical of the increased popularity of infographics, owing to their "weird and compelling authority".

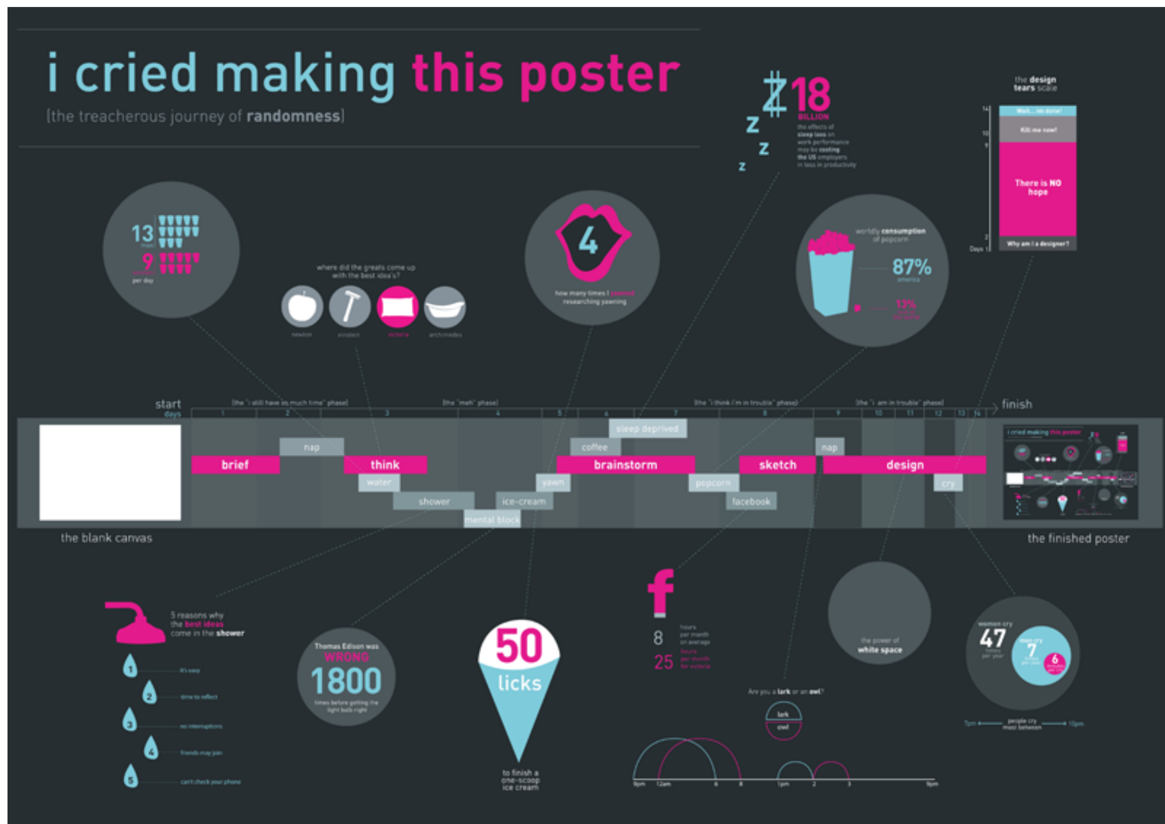

Figure 12: *I cried making this poster,* by BA: Information Design student, University of Pretoria, 2012.

What makes the *I cried making this poster* infographic different, is that the designer provides clues about their particular communicative motives and subjective point-of-view, thus exposing their work as a rhetorical argument. In doing so they are also exposing the rhetorical nature of the infographic genre in general. In other words, this infographic poster draws attention to a particular rhetorical framing convention that has largely gone unnoticed and unchallenged. By 'making up' much of the statistical data, by including whimsical personal anecdotes, and various other reflexive subversions of infographic conventions, the designer inserts a certain satirical 'dysfunction' into the work. This infographic utilises the typical 'neutral' modernist aesthetic of information design,[21] but as a means to present an ironic, tongue-in-cheek interpretation. This ironic gesture creates 'perspective by incongruity' and exposes the process of designing infographics as anything but neutral or objective. We argue that "[t]he impracticality of the infographic, being less objective and 'useful' in teaching us something about the world, could […] be seen as a deliberate 'corrective' in a world where objectivity and functionality is valued above all else" (Bowie & Reyburn 2014).

[21] To a large extent, modernist aesthetics remains the dominant visual style in the application of information design products such as maps, wayfinding systems and information visualisations. In these areas of practice one does not find the same strategies of destabilisation or the same appetitite for *avant-garde* aesthetics.

From a Burkean perspective, this critical design piece embodies a 'comic frame' with a humble tragic-comic attitude. While the designer is undoubtedly critiquing infographic design practice, it is done from an inside perspective that is non-demonising and tragically 'appreciative'. Furthermore, the ambiguity in re-framing intention "allows for an opening up of meaning, rather than a closing down" (Bowie & Reyburn 2014). In other words, the designer does not prescribe a particular way of reading nor offers a solution to dealing with the 'problem' of infographics. As we have argued, this poster "presents the image as a drama that invites participation, rather than as a static picture to be believed or rejected" (Bowie & Reyburn 2014).

This kind of re-framing strategy via 'auto-critique' serves as a valuable self-reflexive exercise, particularly in design education settings. We believe "[s]tudents should not simply go through the motions of placing graphs and charts on a page, but need think more critically about their actions and the medium itself" (Bowie & Reyburn 2014). This kind of practice may alert students to the shortcomings or limitations of information visualsation, as well as the danger it poses by being perceived as neutral or objective. Perhaps most importantly, in using creative design practice to question design rhetorics, students can become more humbly aware of their (future) role in the rhetorical landscape and strive to become more responsible rhetorical design citizens.

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It is important to acknowledge that Burke's original critique, as well as his strategies for critical re-framing, were developed in reaction to a deeply entrenched modernist worldview in need of 'discounting'. In this context the strategies of design projects that challenge modernist aesthetic values can easily be linked to Burke's proposal. However, more broadly speaking, creative and aesthetic reactions against the established convention or mainstream is a major part of design practice, as seen in the continuous creation of the new. The mechanisms employed as part of this process often involves reflexive, destabilising actions, which includes the strategic use of irony and the creation of 'perspective by incongruity'. From this perspective, fluctuating design trends can be considered a product of continuous re-framing.

This continuous re-framing, as seen in accelerated trend dynamics, is arguably not the kind of intended ends Burke has in mind. As Wolin (2001:58) explains "Burke supports the cult of vacillation as a counterpart of the cult of the absolute; vacillate when faced with absolutes, not for the sake of vacillation itself. They are not separate choices for Burke, but a dialectical pair in which vacillation is a response to absolutism".

The problems we face today, including aesthetic obsolescence and the waste caused by rapidly fluctuating trends, offer challenges different to those Burke targeted. The problem now seems not to be perspectival stasis, but rather perspectival schizophrenia. On the other hand, there may be an overarching, unchanging trend logic or system in need of being 'discounted'. It is worth considering whether Burke's strategies may assist in highlighting and questioning this logic. Perhaps Burke's theory on developing a greater 'perspective of perspectives', or 'attitude of attitudes,' may be employed to not only challenge a particular style, but to re-frame trend dynamics in general.

Even as design trends fluctuate faster than ever before, contemporary trend argumentation still contains 'modernist' rhetoric of progress and universalism (or absolutistism). In other words, postmodern relativism does not seem to feature in popular trend discourse. Furthermore, contemporary trend rhetorics (as well as contemporary politics in general) continue to employ melodramatic framing. As mentioned previously, this is a highly effective populist strategy, because it offers a simplistic and confident argument for 'good' or against 'bad' design. In particular, the scapegoating of a preceeding 'mainstream' design aesthetic is a highly effective rhetorical tactic when promoting a new style. In other words, the inflated praise of the new is complimented by the unwarranted bashing of something existing. Both designers and consumers can get caught up in such excessively simplistic trend excitement. This dynamic is problematic not only because it causes the premature discarding of functional products due to proclaimed aesthetic obsolescence, but it deflects attention away from the more complex, underlying reality that no design product or stylistic aesthetic can offer a 'perfect' solution. In other words, trend rhetorics tend to lack a nuanced understanding of the inevitable limitation of any particular design perspective. Overblown, melodramatic rhetorics ensure a cycle of discontent by offering simplistic arguments that cannot remain relevant in the long run.

It is thus possible to argue that what we need is less melodramatic rhetorics, and more thoroughly considered, balanced responses. It is worth considering whether Burke's re-framing strategies and in particular the 'comic frame' could assist in the attitudinal transcendence of trend melodrama. Through a charitably critical 'double-visioning', the attitude of comic framing may serve to apply the brake to, or at least slow down, the destructive cycle of competitive trend rhetorics. Such a re-framing of trend dynamics serves to shift attention to broader perspectives, which includes a 'long view' of dialectical design change.

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One way in which people have come to cope with the rapid fluctuation of contemporary trends is through irony, albeit the kind of postmodern ironic distancing discussed previously. This attitude is explored in Alexander Stern's article, *Is that even a thing* (2016):

> Speakers and writers of American English have recently taken to identifying a staggering and constantly changing array of trends, events, memes, products, lifestyle choices and phenomena of nearly every kind with a single label – a thing. In conversation, mention of a surprising fad, behavior or event is now often met with the question, 'Is that actually a thing?' Or 'When did that become a thing?' Or 'How is that even a thing?' Calling something 'a thing' is, in this sense, itself a thing.

Stern (2016) explains how the label 'a thing' provides a cataloguing function, offering an abbreviated version of the nearly redundant "the coolest/newest/latest thing". The cultural reification[22] whereby something is made into 'a thing' is of course a basic mechanism at the heart of trend dynamics. However, the label 'a thing' also provides additional clues about the current context in which these 'things' are found, as well as attitudes about them. Stern thus speculates about the reasons for using such a homogenous term to describe a variety of 'fads', 'trends' and 'rages'. He argues that the "flood of content into the cultural sphere" has led

[22] Reification, or 'thingification', as a Marxist concept considers the way in which objects or concepts are imbued with socio-cultural significance within a specific context.

to an “absurd excess of things”, which in turn necessitates an ironic detachment, to cope with the barrage of marketing and promotion surrounding these new things. Stern (2016) explains how the “designator ‘a thing’ is […] almost always tinged with ironic detachment. It puts the thing at arm’s length. You can hardly say ‘a thing’ without a wary glint in your eye. The volume, particularity and inanity of the phenomena effectively force us to take up this detachment”.

Lastly, Stern (2016) also explains how the label ‘a thing’ has much to do with “the growing sense that all these phenomena are all the same”. In principle, the ‘substance’ of all these ‘things’ lies in media hype, particularly as distributed via online and social media.[23] He believes using the term ‘a thing’ “corresponds to a real need we have, to catalog and group together the items of cultural experience, while keeping them at a sufficient distance so that we can at least feign unified consciousness in the face of a world gone to pieces”. Stern adopts a somewhat cynical view here, suggesting that this way of looking at trends does nothing to change the way we consume them. In other words, there seems to be a discernable awareness of the absurdity surrounding trend hype, rooted in an understanding that all of these ‘things’ are virtually the same, yet the urge to participate and consume remains intact. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1997:167) identify this tendency when arguing that “[t]he triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them”. In other words, while a detached kind of irony is present when re-framing a trend as ‘a thing’, this re-framing seems critically impotent in addressing the problem of trend dynamics. To some extent, this scenario seems to justify the recent criticism surrounding the use of irony.

While the above example illustrates a type of re-framing, this is arguably not the kind of deliberate aesthetic-rhetorical strategy Burke has in mind. As mentioned previously, Burke does not see passivity or detachment as the preferred result of developing broader perspectives.

It is possible to interpret the promotional animation and interactive game, *Flat Design vs. Realism* (Figure 13), created by the design agency InTacto, as a more deliberate and strategic example of trend re-framing. In the animation and game the previously mentioned ‘skeuomorphic/realistic design’ and ‘flat design’ movements are humurously personified as characters in streetfighter-style combat. The Realism character is depicted as an evil king who “dominated the world of digital design… an empire based on realistic textures, luminosity and ostentatious effects!” Flat design is depicted as a hipster-style hero; “a rationalist leader… [who] imagined that the design of that world could be changed…”. The drama depicted in this narrative mirrors the design community’s debate surrounding the stylistic shift from skeuomorphic aesthetics to flat design, but it does so in what can be interpreted as a Burkean ‘comic frame’. As a ‘comic frame’ it serves to expose the absurdity of the intensity of the design debate. In other words, through rhetorical exaggeration it offers a satirical critique of the melodramatic nature of the debate itself, but without vilifying or shaming any

[23] As Stern (2016) explains, even if this vast array of things “arise outside it, things owe their existence as things to the Internet”.

particular party who participates in it. As mentioned previously, Burke's approach to comic framing serves to expose a doctrine or dogma as comically mistaken in its extremism.

Figure 13: *Flat Design vs. Realism*. Interactive game (InTacto 2013). Screen shots by author.

The genius of this particular meta-critical design product lies in how it re-frames trend rhetorics, as a promotional strategy. In other words, it reflects on how designers tend to employ polemical rhetorical argumentation when debating between these stylistic trends, and aims to show how a reconciliation is not

only possible, but preferable. After playing the game, InTacto reveals their promotional intention via a closing animation (Figure 14) which reads: "It doesn't matter what style wins… because we like both flat and realistic design… But what we like most of all are awesome stories. In 2014, let's tell some great stories… in the digital world and… in real life… Happy New Year".

Figure 14: Closing animation for *Flat Design vs. Realism*. Interactive game (InTacto 2013). Screen shot by author.

What InTacto does here is promote themselves as highly reflective and capable to transcend the debate, by drawing attention to similarities or shared motives between proponents of different stylistic movements. They imply that instead of getting caught up in the debate (like other designers are), they choose to focus on more important design goals. In other words, InTacto aims here to boost their professional image by claiming that trend rhetorics do not deflect their attention from core design functions.

It is also possible to consider the previously shown satirical infographic poster, *I cried making this poster* (Figure 12), as a critique of design trends in a more general sense. This is because the use of infographics has become such a prominent recent trend in information visualisation practice. Michael Bierut and Jessica Helfand (2016), for instance, refer to "a deluge of infographics" where "every publication and think tank, it seems, told the story of last year in charts". In other words, one could interpret the student's critique as directed at a more general tendency to employ and revere design trends. By presenting an irreverent attitude towards what has become an extremely popular sub-genre of visualisation, the designer seems to be 'discounting' the very popularity or 'trendiness' of the practice itself. It is because the infographic convention has become so ubiquitous, to the point of being somewhat overused, that the meta-referential or meta-critical 'comic framing' approach becomes intelligible and highly effective. The designer is also poking fun at herself for employing the popular trend in the critique of the popular trend. This allows an astute observer to notice the absurdity, not only of the supposed authority of infographics, but also of their continued, unquestioned popularity.

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To summarise, *perspective by incongruity* does well to challenge entrenched design conventions or 'terministic screens', whether these relate to aesthetic, material, functional or economic values. While postmodern *avant-garde* design has utilised *perspective by incongruity* and irony to challenge modernist aesthetic values, Critical Design shifts the attention to critique the greater functional role of design, by utilising satire in particular. Critical Design can be situated outside of the design market insofar as its objects are not to be mass-produced or consumed. From this perspective Critical Design can be interpreted as 'rejection', however, since design methods and processes are used in this critique, design practice itself is not 'rejected'. Since designers are utilising design to critique design, these satirical products gesture, as Burke's techno-satire also does, "paradoxically and painfully, beyond tragic resignation and towards the potential of the 'comic frame'" (Coupe 2001:430).

It is worth pointing out that 'comic framing' does not mean we should pardon those who participate in harmful design rhetorics, especially if there seems to be an element of deliberate manipulation or harm. For instance, we should not pardon the design trend spin doctors who knowingly 'bullshit' others as a means to market new products, or those who collude in the deliberate creation of perceived obsolescences as a means to sell pseudo-innovations. These actors are not merely 'mistaken' or 'foolish' and their behaviour may legitimately warrant outrage. However, even under these circumstances, one could opt to move through a stage of 'comic framing' as a means to check reactive impulses, to ensure responses are modest enough to encourage unifying identification, instead of perpetuating divisive melodramatic conflict. In the following section I elaborate further on this attitude Burke proposes we adopt, as a means to responding to destructive rhetorical dynamics.

Burkean neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism

Burke's meta-rhetorical theory, as presented throughout this study, points towards his general ethical position. However, the ethical position he hints at over the course of his career is never fully developed as an ethical theory. As Coupe (2005:7) notes, "Burke was consistent in his very suspicion of the value of finality", even when it came to developing his own theory. Wolin (2001:77) believes this is where "Burke's genius as an ethical theorist lies", namely, "in his refusal to supplant traditional ethics with another system equally fixed. He offers instead a basic position *toward* ethics, a flexible *attitude* or *approach"*. This flexible attitude or approach is characterised by a number of qualities Burke refers to throughout his work. I have already mentioned Burke's emphasis on cultivating perspectival humility, through such mechanisms as irony and comic framing, as well as practicing a 'charitable' consideration of others' perspectives.

The closest Burke comes to describing an overall ethics is when he suggests we turn "in the direction of neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism, with ideals of tolerance" (GM:318). Neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism is a useful descriptor of Burke's ethic insofar as it incorporates many of the virtues he supports as part of his larger intellectual and educational project. I thus aim to show how an attitude of Burkean neo-Stoic

cosmopolitanism may be employed in dealing with contemporary trend dynamics. As a flexible approach that is non-prescriptive, it offers suggestions on how alternative ways of trend framing may encourage a more sustainable design ethic.

To reiterate, a number of problems are associated with contemporary trend dynamics, as mentioned at various points throughout this study. One frequently finds the use of inflated or overblown rhetorics in the promotion or justification of new trends. Very often trend rationalisations come across as 'bullshit', made up to convince people to consume new, but practically identical, iterations of products. There is a level of discursive dishonesty, or at least motivational deflection, in many of these rationalisations. Mystifying rhetorics are employed to justify pseudo-differences in form or style, for instance, by referring to such god-terms as 'functionality'. Furthermore, the employment of these 'melodramatic' rhetorical tactics often leads to unwarranted 'aesthetic scapegoating' and 'purgation', whereby serviceable designs are discarded for symbolic purification purposes. This means that one finds an increase in waste owing to, what is essentially, perceived aesthetic obsolescence. This dynamic has arguably accelerated, leading to highly unsustainable design production and consumption behaviour.

It is possible to argue that a Burkean attitude of neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism may 'deflate' or 'discount' trend rhetorics via contemplative practice and adjusted rhetorical reasoning. Such an attitude could potentially reduce the anxiety and urgency surrounding trend engagements and encourage participation in design dialogues that are less reactionary. It also consider how Burke's attitude is particularly beneficial insofar as it serves to 'discount' trend rhetorics without rejecting or 'vilifying' design trends altogether. Burke's attitude is both critical and appreciative and offers a more productive or feasible way forward.

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Burke proposes neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism in the face of divisive politics and devastating acts of scapegoating during and after the world wars. He identifies 'congregations by segregations' of various kinds and seeks a philosophical worldview capable of transcending the polemical political rhetorics of his time. As Burke explains, "the more strident our journalists, politicians, and alas! even many of our churchmen become, the more convinced we are that books should be written for tolerance and contemplation" (RM:xv). Burke's vision of cosmopolitanism is rooted in the principle that all perspectives are worthy of consideration. This does not mean that Burke considers all perspectives equally valid, but rather that greater understanding may come from also paying attention to perspectives one may not agree with. For instance, Burke positions his essay "The rhetoric of Hitler's battle" as a response to other simplistically 'vandalistic' reviews of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* at the time. As Garth Pauley (2009) notes, most of the reviews of Hitler's book merely presented "Hitler as delusional, insane, vulgar, and psychotic", ignoring the broader context and social psychology which impacted his thought and the German public's reception thereof. Burke thus believes it is the critic's obligation to pay closer attention to a text and critique it in its complexity:

> Hitler's 'Battle' is exasperating, even nauseating; yet the fact remains: If the reviewer but knocks off a few adverse attitudinizings and calls it a day, with a guaranty in advance that his article will have a

> favorable reception among the decent members of our population, he is contributing more to our gratification than to our enlightenment (PLF:191).

In other words, Burke does not suggest that Hitler's argument should be considered for its validity, but rather for how, in its effectiveness, it may serve as an illuminating text when analysed more thoroughly.

Cosmopolitanism does not ignore difference, nor does it seek homogeneity; it celebrates unity in diversity. Very importantly, a cosmopolitan attitude opposes 'congregation by segregation' and the discriminatory scapegoating that results from such rhetorics. Massimo Pigliucci (2017) explains how the "Stoic idea [of cosmopolitanism] was simple and elegant: all humans inhabit the same big city, indeed we are so interconnected and interdependent that we are really an extended family". The cosmopolitan attitude thus opposes any fanatical tribalism that seeks to strengthen identity through exclusionary rhetorics. It is possible to argue that one finds a kind of fanatical tribalism surrounding design trends, with inflated and polarising rhetorics. It may thus be possible to use Burke's vision of neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism as inspiration for engaging with such rhetorics in a more balanced and considered manner.

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Burke aims to highlight how any perspective is but one of many 'different voices' in the larger dialogue. Burke explains how, in any dialectic, "none of the participating 'sub-perspectives' can be treated as either precisely right or precisely wrong. They are all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another. When the dialectic is properly formed, they are the number of characters needed to produce the total development". Crusius (1999:179) refers to this 'dialectic of many voices' as a 'dialectical dialogics'. As part of a dialectical perspective, perspectives are also treated as temporally limited insofar as the dialogue takes place over a larger period of time. Burke (PLF:110-1) offers a metaphor of an 'unending conversation' to illustrate:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress (PLF:110-1).

This anecdote of the 'unending conversation' effectively illustrates how we participate in only a fraction of the larger historical debate. One does not know which ideas have been tried and tested before and how one's own perspective fails to take the larger context into consideration. For Burke, this realisation encourages greater perspectival humility.

This illustration is useful in a design context to remind designers that the conversation started long before they arrived and will continue long after they have departed. From this dialectical/dialogical perspective, one can recognise any particular design response or trend as a voice in an ongoing dialogue. This may reduce the

urgency and pressure to adopt 'the new' without thoroughly considering the existing. In other words, a greater temporal awareness of design dialectics may assist designers in developing a more sustainable 'long view'. Furthermore, this realisation may encourage more modest discursive design rhetorics. What may appear radically new, is more likely to be merely different from other responses at that particular point in time.

Jessica Barness (2016) offers an aptly creative representation of historical discursive design dialectics in her experimental piece for the inaugural issue of a new design education journal, *Dialectic*. Barness (2016:51) describes her 'provotype', *Vision in the making* (Figure 15), as "an intertextual composition of editors' introductions to first issues of design periodicals [… which] manifests as an interplay of the voices that shepherd ongoing dialogue concerning what design is, does, and might become".

(a "provotype")

vision in *the* making

Jessica Barness

The first issue of a new journal is a moment for celebration and a time for reflection[1] (and) Our inaugural issue has no theme other than courage.[2] Is this a utopian endeavour? Perhaps.[3] (Our project) **is not a sudden venture**[4] (and) it belongs to no single person or entity.[5] It is always a special time when a new product is launched, a time like the dawn of a new day when the darkness of struggles past gives way to the bright hope of the future.[6] (We are) on the verge of tremendous growth.[7] Design has entered a golden age[8] (and) there is no scarcity of fresh thinking and new ideas being generated in this field.[9] **The launch of this new journal emerges from an extraordinary range of**[10] vision, sweat, and perseverance.[11] **There are already enough constraints imposed on our ability to think and to write fresh and creative work without inventing any new ones.**[12] speaking against power is always dangerous and repression breeds invention in the repressed.[13] ***Before the paint is dry on the protest poster, the issue has shifted—so much has our rate of communication changed.***[14] (Our project) **is a springboard** (...) **an incitement** (...) **a laboratory**. It is an experiment in how we think.[15] As a designer (in a previous life) I was never really aware of the moral obligation imposed on me to act in a way that brought no harm to the world, let alone to promote good.[16] **It is time for a fresh approach.**[17] ***Good design is no longer a matter of good taste and intelligence alone***,[18] for all too often design is seen as a prettifying profession.[19]

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1 Ken Friedman, Yongqi Lou, and Jin Ma, "Editorial," *Shè Jì: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*, 1.1 (2015): p. 1.

2 Pamela Johnson, "From the Editor," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 1.1 (1986): p. 5.

3 Editor(s), "Editorial," *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1 (2002): p. 5.

4 Stuart Macdonald, "Editorial," *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 1 (1982): p. 2.

5 Charlie Breindahl, Ida Engholm, Judith Gregory, Erik Stolterman, "The Computer and Design," *Artifact*, 1 (2007): p. 3.

6 Blair Little, "The Dawn of a New Journal," *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 1.1 (1984): p. 1.

7 Marty Neumeier, "Welcome," *Critique*, 1 (1996): n.p.

8 Elizabeth Guffey, "Editorial Introduction," *Design and Culture*, 1.1 (2009): p. 5.

9 Merald Wrolstad, "A Prefactory Note to the First Number," *Journal of Typographic Research*, 1.1 (1967): n.p. Later published as *Visible Language*.

10 Editor(s), untitled, *Material Culture*, 1.1 (1996): p. 5.

11 Little, "The Dawn of a New Journal," 1.

12 Editor(s), untitled, *Material Culture*, 6.

13 Simon Downs, "Editorial," *The Poster*, 1.1 (2010): p. 6.

14 Robert Malone, "Editorial," *Dot Zero*, 1.1 (1966): n.p.

15 Editor(s), "Editorial," *Journal of Visual Culture*, pgs. 5–6.

16 Downs, "Editorial," 6.

17 John Wozencroft, "Fuse," *Fuse*, 1.1 (1991): n.p.

18 Malone, "Editorial," n.p.

19 Max Bruinsma, "Iridescent: A Prism on Design Research," *Iridescent*, 1 (2009): p. 10. Later published as *Communication Design*.

Figure 15: First page of *Vision in the making (a 'provotype')* by Jessica Barness (2016:53).

The genius of Barness' approach, which reflects Burke's suggested attitude, lies in how she presents a broadened perspective while appreciating and preserving individual voices. The various voices are made visible by retaining the original texts' physical typographic properties as well as citing their sources with footnotes. Furthermore, Barness makes a critical point about revolutionary design rhetorics through creative recontextualisation, without descending into cynicism. As she points out, "*Vision in the making* strives to inspire. It demonstrates that nearly every editor's words allude to the same desire as the readers and authors – to engage in practice through writing, theory, education, designed things, or something else entirely" (Barness 2016:52). In other words, Barness shows an advanced meta-critical awareness of discursive design change rhetorics in a critical yet appreciative manner.

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James Zappen divises another holistic term to describe Burke's general ethical position, namely 'dialectical-rhetorical transcendence'. Zappen (2009:281) describes how Burke's dialectical method combined with his rhetorical insight, leads to an approach that seeks to "encompass a diversity of individual voices in larger unities that preserve, but transcend, any one of them". The aim is neither "to exacerbate or to eradicate differences through the exercise of more persuasion (or mere persuasion)" (Zappen 2009:297). According to Zappen, this 'dialectical-rhetorical transcendence' is one of Burke's most important contributions developed over the course of his career:

> This dialectical-rhetorical transcendence is significant for rhetorical theory because it challenges rhetoric as a socially responsible endeavour to view not individual discourses alone but individual discourses in relationship to each other, to act as well as to study these discourses, and thus to intervene by seeking not only to persuade others in their own best interest but also to create larger communities of interest that transcend individual and group ideologies and interests.[24]

In other words, Burke aims to instill a certain kind of rhetorical citizenship through his large body of meta-rhetorical theory. This approach to rhetoric includes a thorough consideration of oppositional perspectives in a dialectic, which allows for the development of a broader perspective. Through dialectical-rhetorical transcendence, common ground between different perspectives may be identified and in such a way differences become de-emphasised. This does not mean differences disappear, but they no longer feature as the most important factor to consider.

A dialectical-rhetorical transcendence of design rhetorics would entail a unified consideration of opposing perspectives. This process of transcendence functions by looking for similarities between design approaches and de-emphasising the design differences. To emphasise similarities could be considered a more cooperative way of framing design options. For instance, different versions of a product may employ contrasting aesthetic treatments but still achieve similar functional goals. It is possible to argue that when the significance of differences are 'discounted' or put into perspective, the unsustainable cycle of hierarchised, hyper-competitive design rhetorics may be broken or transcended. In other words, this perspective would

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[24] This is, of course, an utopian ideal, but on a pragmatic level Burke imagines how a lifelong educational program could work towards promoting such transcendence (Zappen 2009:295).

reduce the need for rhetorical one-upmanship. This process of deflating hierarchised differences becomes possible through an acceptance of the dialectical design condition, which is characterised by inevitable tensions or paradoxes.

Throughout Burke's work one is confronted with ambiguity and paradox as necessary conditions of symbol using. To think dialectically is to enable non-dualistic modes of thinking, to become more comfortable with ambiguity. This acceptance of paradox and ambiguity could be considered a prerequisite for living well in a world of diversity and complexity, and a major ingredient of the neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism.

Various design theorists, such as Adam (2016), Crouch and Pearce (2013) Nelson and Stolterman (2012) and Reyburn (2008), speak about the ability to accept paradoxes and dwell in ambivalence as an important move towards a more mature and ethical design practice. As explored in Chapter Two, there are a number of design dialectics, paradoxes or tensions that cannot be resolved in any definitive or final manner. These oppositional values ensure the continuous debate about what design is and what it should look like. Reyburn (2008:11) argues that it is within "the tension between […] paradoxes that the ethical practice[25] of design is best understood". He believes the existence of these tensions "ought to encourage designers to constantly reflect on and review their assumptions concerning design praxis" (Reyburn 2008:9). In other words, an ethical design practice would not subscribe to one universal notion of good design, but rather seek to find 'appropriate' responses depending on the situation or context.

As mentioned previously, a significant way in which designers have come to terms with the paradoxes and ambiguities that are necessarily part of their practice, is through Rittel and Webber's (1973) notion of 'wicked problems'. An awareness of the 'wicked' nature of design problems echoes Burke's view that 'everything is more complicated' than it seems. Such an approach to design can be interpreted as a profoundly humble attitude about the limitations of design action. It is worth pointing out that the concept of 'wicked problems' has also been instrumental in establishing more humanistic and rhetorical approaches to design, insofar as these perspectives take into consideration the role of discursive conflict resolution as part of the design process.[26]

While the acknowledgement of 'wicked problems' in design indicates a more humble attitude, it should not be interpreted as cynical or defeatist. To address a design problem as a 'wicked problem' merely promotes an attempt to widen perspectives and seek to understand, as far as possible, the complexities in the larger design drama. This often includes involving others' perspectives in the design process, as seen in 'participatory design' and 'co-design' practice. It is possible to consider this humble 'wicked problems' perspective on the dialectical design scenario as quite liberating. There is a certain freedom in admitting that

[25] Reyburn (2008) suggests that an ethical framework for design praxis can be illustrated by hypothesising on what may result when "one facet of each paradox is absent or disproportionately present".
[26] Various design theorists, such as Buchanan (1992), Halstrøm and Galle (2014), Krippendorff (2006), Rith and Dubberly (2006), have expanded on Rittel and Webber's work, articulating the need for rhetorical perspectives in addressing 'wicked problems'. Krippendorff (2006:27) for instance, explains how, since design problems are never really solved, conflicts are merely resolved temporarily, by reaching consensus. It is for this reason that an awareness of argumentation or rhetoric becomes of central importance in the design process.

a design response is constructed from a limited perspective and therefore necessarily flawed (when looking at it from another perspective, for instance). In other words, designers need not feel guilty or disillusioned when they inevitably fall short; a more nuanced dialectical perspective explains why perfection is unachievable. This humble attitude reflects the Stoic idea that we should concern ourselves only with those things we can control.[27] This perspective is not aimed at reducing a designer's accountability, but rather to break a destructive cycle of unachievable perfectionism. A more widespread uptake of such a perspective may also reduce the incentives for inflating design rationales. Since nobody would expect perfection, there would be no need for exaggerated or overblown rhetorical claims. This relates to Burke's championing of a humble attitude whereby there would be "less incentives to be overprompt at feeling exalted with moral indignation" (Burke 1955:301).

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Burke seems to suggest that the humility of inwardly acknowledging the limitations of one's perspective may result in greater honesty when outwardly expressing one's motives. In other words, greater perspectival humility leads to greater discursive honesty. However, this is perhaps only true in instances where people are initially ignorant of their perspectival hubris. There are, of course, those who knowingly conceal their perspectival limitations or deliberately misrepresent their perspectives as absolute. As JM Beach (2012:79) explains, "[t]he honest thing is to be up front and to reveal as much as possible the 'ultimate motivations' of our symbolic acts" but, he also points out that people rarely are this upfront or honest. While Burke encourages more honest or transparent rhetorical behaviour, he remains aware of the dubious ends to which rhetoric is often employed. Similarly, from a design perspective, we can hope for a greater honesty or transparency about rhetorical design motives while acknowledging that there will always be those who deliberately manipulate. In those instances a Burkean approach remains valuable for becoming more rhetorically discerning, as well as for divising rhetorically effective responses.

For Burke, the ideal is that people are "honestly rhetorical rather than dishonestly neutral" (Beach 2012:79). In other words, Burke believes we ought to be more upfront or transparent about the rhetorical language we routinely employ; to not pretend that our motives are 'objective'. From a design trend perspective, there are perhaps two interconnected ways in which designers can aim to be more honest and transparent about their stylistic rhetorical action.

The first kind of honesty or transparency would mean that designers are upfront about the fact that a major part of their work is concerned with visual styling. This is important in discussions of trends, where very often attention is diverted away from the surface value of stylistic novelty and appeal, to suggest that more 'substantial' features have been updated, i.e. functionality. It may be worth following Anne Burdick's advice on accurately articulating the role of aesthetics or style in design:

[27] Epictetus (2014) begins his well-known Stoic text, the *Enchiridion*, with the statement that "[t]here are things which are within our power, and there are things which are beyond our power".

> To admit that graphic design is bound to personal style and fashion as much as to client communication; to reveal that our system of professional recognition says one thing (appropriate communication) while acting out another (beautiful, cool, gorgeous); to confess that we revel in expressive artifice might be considered self-defeating when attempting to justify design's relevance to industry. Yet in the internal dialogue of the profession, these acknowledgements are necessary when assessing the forces influential to our work. […] Few attempts have been made to evaluate what we suspect is an obsession with stylistic fashion, although its prevalence is frequently denounced (Burdick 1992).

Burdick thus suggests that aesthetics or style plays a much larger role in design practice than designers are willing to admit. She specifically highlights how designers seem obsessed with stylistic fashion, yet denounce this fact. As explained previously, style is frequently treated as inferior to other design factors. However, a greater awareness and appreciation of the value of style may enable more truthful discussions to take place, amongst designers and consumers. In such a scenario designers would not need to conceal that decisions are frequently based on stylistic factors. Furthermore, a consumer would be able to decide whether to buy into a new product iteration based on this information, without feeling their motivation would be judged as 'superficial'.

The second kind of rhetorical design transparency relates to revealing the rhetorical framing capabilities of specific visual styles, most notably the perceived neutrality of modernist aesthetics. However, to encourage designers to actively expose the rhetorical workings of naturalised terministic screens, is a tall order and not something that can be achieved in any commercial design project. As explained previously, this kind of subversive re-framing practice is more commonly found in pedagogical 'critical design' projects. However, this kind of transparency is very useful in pedagogic settings, to allow designers to reflect on their rhetorical power and ethical responsibility.

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Muir (1999:57) explains how Burke's neo-Stoicism is not only contemplative, but "strongly pedagogical". This is an important point to emphasise, insofar as Burke sees himself as neo-Stoic in his role as educator.[28] This kind of neo-Stoicism fosters a combined critical-appreciative attitude and does not offer a neat formula for future practice. Instead Burke's educational aim is to promote the development of a meta-perspective on the use of language and rhetoric. Lanham (2006) shares Burke's belief in this approach to education, not only to enable greater discernment when confronted with rhetorical argumentation, but to enhance an awareness of one's perspectival interpretation of reality. As Kris Rutten and Ronald Soetaert (2012:740) explain, a Burkean rhetorical education "offers a method for analysing our interpretations of reality (and this way, it offers a metaperspective about language and culture)". Lanham describes this kind of rhetorical education as highly beneficial insofar as it teaches a particular way of holding knowledge:

> tentatively, aware of your motives in holding it, aware of your audience and of the arguments that oppose your own. Aware, above all, that under different circumstances, you might be arguing the opposite case. Such training in rhetoric as has survived into our time usually justifies itself by

[28] As mentioned previously, Burke does not always seem to live by this attitude, particularly in his cynicism towards, or 'rejection' of technology. However, it would be unreasonable to expect a perfectly consistent neo-Stoic attitude, especially in the face of issues where outrage is warranted.

> arguing that you need to learn the methods of argument to defend yourself against your opponents. But, more importantly, it allows you to defend yourself against yourself, to cultivate an interior countercheck. The more odious you might find that opposing opinion, the more you should seek to know what would make someone hold such an opinion. And the more you should examine the grounds on which you hold your own. This self-examination is, and ought to be, a humbling experience (2006:26).[29]

Burke thus supports the Stoic virtues of temperance and humility, cultivated in the spirit of civic duty. For Lanham, as for Burke, rhetorical education becomes a means towards more mature and responsible citizenship. As Rutten and Soetaert (2012:730) explain, rhetorical education "cultivates a character that is aimed at civic engagement".

Burke believes 'neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism' stands as the only viable option in contrast to 'fanaticism' and 'dissipation'. Burke (GM:318) sees fanaticism as "the effort to impose one doctrine of motives abruptly upon a world composed of many different motivational situations". Dissipation, on the other hand, is an "isolationist tendency to surrender, as one finds the issues of world adjustment so complex that he merely turns to the satisfactions nearest at hand […] in general taking whatever opportunities of gratification or advancement happen to present themselves and letting all else take care of itself" (GM:318). Burke (GM:443) believes we "must aim somehow to to avoid these two extremes" and adopt instead a 'speculative attitude'. In other words, Burke suggests a third way: an active mode of engagement between fanatically fighting and simply resigning. This involves developing a highly reflective, relational attitude that continues to question, but in a spirit of cooperative unity.

Burke (GM:443) describes the neo-Stoic attitude as a kind of hypochondriasis, where a patient "makes peace with his symptoms by becoming interested in them". This relates to Burke's general advice on adopting attitudes that are critical-appreciative. Burke believes the mere criticism or rejection of a system won't help to alleviate its problems. Instead he proposes how the 'appreciation' of a system's mechanisms might lead to a deeper understanding required to affect change (GM:xvii). More specifically, he suggests that an attempt to reject or banish rhetorical action would be futile, since there is no getting away from rhetorical communication. Again, this reflects Stoic practical wisdom in accepting that which is not in one's control. Burke thus proposes the study and appreciation of rhetorical mechanisms, towards engaging in more virtuous and ethical communication. This, Burke believes, is at least partly, within our control.

This critical-appreciative attitude is useful for describing a more productive mode of engaging with design trends and trend rhetorics. It would be unproductive to argue that 'trends are bad' and that we ought to reject them. For practical reasons, we cannot reject design trends, just as we cannot reject 'the new'. As Groys (2014:41) highlights, "[a] normally functioning cultural mechanism constantly produces newness". He continues to explain how "[t]here is no path leading beyond the new, for such a path would itself be new. There is no possible way of breaking the rules of the new, for these rules demand, precisely, to be broken" (Groys 2014:7). Groys thus highlights the impossibility of proposing a 'new' way of designing that does not

[29] It is possible to argue that Burke's influence on Lanham's thinking is particularly clear in this passage.

valorise the 'new'. Furthermore, to propose a new way of producing or consuming design outside of the 'trend system' would merely become a trend in itself, if it were to gain any traction.

While the fluctuations caused by melodramatic trend rhetorics exacerbate the problem of aesthetic obsolescence and waste, it is important to acknowledge that change isn't a negative process *per se*. The ability of designers to continually question the *status quo* and suggest alternative practices and products is a valuable quality. As Bruce Sterling (2004:192) explains, "[t]o desire the eternal doesn't seem entirely healthy […] That forecloses too many possibilities; that has the smell of the tomb. Sustainable is a good word, stale is not a good word, static is not a good word".

At the heart of the issue of trend dynamics lies the dialectical tension between 'timeless' and 'temporal' (or temporary) design. Creating 'timeless' design products is, according to Nelson and Stolterman (2012:197) a designer's "lifelong challenge". However, while creating 'timeless' design is considered the ideal worth striving for, Nelson and Stolterman (2012:197) explain how timeless designs are not only "immensely difficult to realize" but they are often "a result of luck rather than exceptional skills". In other words, to create something that will be perceived by others as timeless is not necessarily in the designer's control. It is not possible for a designer to foresee how a new approach (an outlier) may potentially become part of a trend, or perhaps even part of a longer lasting design movement. While we tend to associate 'trends' with short-lived 'fads', design trends also impact how some products become cherished 'timeless' pieces.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that 'temporal' or temporary design also serves a valuable cultural purpose. Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham (2004:262) refer to this purpose within the paradoxical values of the fashion industry:

> In its worst forms fashion feeds insecurity, peer pressure, consumerism, cynicism, solipsism and homogeneity, fuelled by the globalization of fashion, described as 'McFashion'. The glorious side of fashion is its potential to empower individuals and groups, to mediate communication, to fuel creativity and to experience 'in tune-ness' with both oneself and a large group of beings.

In other words, instead of rejecting the purpose of trends or fashions altogether, we should aim to understand their socio-cultural purpose and devise more appropriate responses and outlets. A dialectical critical-appreciative attitude towards trends is important in cultivating a more nuanced response to dealing with trend problems.

Trends serve the valuable purpose of enabling various socio-cultural identifications via differentiations, however, it may be possible to resist the kinds of damaging 'congregation by segregation' identification whereby vast portions of design culture are 'scapegoated' *en masse* and prematurely discarded. In other words, trends become problematic when they employ polarising, melodramatic rhetorics. The solution here is not to 'reject' trend rhetorics, but rather again, to adopt a critical-appreciative attitude as the most ethically sensible way forward.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that an advanced Burkean symbol-wisdom, via an attitude of neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism, is highly idealistic and unlikely to be perfectly fulfilled, particularly for those working in competitive design industries. Nonetheless, a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach in design education may provide a step towards nurturing responsible rhetorical design citizenship. This rhetorical design citizenship would be characterised by greater degrees of perspectival humility (seeing one's own perspective as limited) and empathy (seeing from others' perspectives). As an ideal, this rhetorical design citizenship would encourage greater discursive honesty or sincerity, and more rhetorically transparent practice wherever possible. I believe these values are vital in working towards a more sustainable design future.

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This chapter can be considered a culmination and application of the Burkean meta-rhetorical approach to re-framing design trends. As argued throughout this study, design trends are highly symbolic meta-cultural products, which implies that symbolic readjustment should theoretically be possible. This chapter thus considers how Burke's ethical vision for cultivating greater symbol-wisdom may assist in addressing some of the problems associated with design trend dynamics and rhetorics.

The first part of the chapter argues for the value of Burke's theory, as explored throughout this study, for developing greater 'symbol-wisdom' or rhetorical (self)consciousness. The main argument here is that more reflective and ethically conscious trend engagements can take place when designers are able to 'discount' dominant positions and consider alternative options. In other words, by being more rhetorically savvy, designers may exhibit greater agency in decision-making and be more able to resist 'symbolic goads' that may not be aligned with their goals or values. It also means that through greater *self*-consciousness, designers can develop an awareness of their own rhetorical biases and endeavour to participate in more honest, transparent and responsible rhetorical practice.

The second part of this chapter presented Burke's proposed strategies for re-framing problematic or limited perspectives, most notably through creating 'perspective by incongruity' and through 'comic framing'. I aimed to show how a number of creative design projects can be interpreted as examples of these Burkean strategies, used towards addressing problematic design perspectives. I thus aimed to show how designers can employ creative design strategies to expose and expand naturalised or accepted design frames.

Lastly, this chapter presented Burke's suggested ethical attitude, namely a 'neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism', in dealing with problematic design dynamics and rhetorics. Burke's proposed attitude seeks to widen narrow and dogmatic perspectives and to diffuse melodramatic or polemical argumentation through dialectical-rhetorical transcendence. This attitude can be described as open to others perspectives as well as more accepting of ambiguity and paradox, but without becoming radically relativist. In other words, it promotes perspectival humility while still encouraging an ethical stance. The main argument here is that such an attitude may produce more thoroughly considered or balanced trend engagements and rhetorics, potentially leading to less anxious or urgent trend consumption and reduced aesthetic obsolescence.

In order to become symbol-wise, Burke promotes a combined critical-appreciative attitude of rhetoric. While rhetoric may be used in harmful ways, it is also a valuable resource to be used towards ameliorating societal problems. It is clear throughout the chapter that Burke envisions improved ethical citizenship through a program of rhetorical education. I have similarly argued that greater rhetorical (self)consciousness be nurtured in design education and that creative re-framing strategies be explored in design educational settings. As part of this rhetorical design education, a 'neo-Stoic cosmopolitan' attitude may also be encouraged, as a means towards more balanced rhetorical design citizenship.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This study originated from my noticing criticism directed at rhetorical justifications surrounding popular new design trends. At the start of this study I highlighted how various design theorists lament the use of 'empty' hype as contributing to the unsustainable production of a "depressing cornucopia of pointless products" (Jongerius & Schouwenberg 2015:6). There seems to be an increasing disdain for design that creates "newness for its own sake", while concealing this fact behind "overblown rhetoric to fill it with meaning" (Jongerius & Schouwenberg 2015:2-5). In other words, frequent criticism is directed at the way in which the purely commercial motives behind accelerated design trend dynamics are concealed by pretentious rhetorical arguments. The suspicion that marketing and advertising industries dupe people into believing new product iterations are more significant or meaningful than they truly are, is, of course, not a new concern. However, it is possible that escalating concern over environmental degradation and waste is reflected in the increased criticism of aesthetic obsolescence as enabled by rhetorical argumentation. It stands to reason that one would need to combat these rhetorical practices if one were to tackle unsustainable design trend dynamics.

In order to investigate the above phenomenon, I have developed a meta-rhetorical approach, based on the theory of Kenneth Burke. Burke's specific approach (which I have conceptualised as meta-rhetorical) transcends narrow disciplinary confines and provides, through a set of rich concepts and terminologies, a valuable perspective on design practice in general, and design trends in particular. The Burkean meta-rhetorical approach proposed in this study was thus aimed at interrogating the issue of 'mystifying' trend rhetorics by adopting a more broad-based view of the entire communicative context in which these rhetorics are found. As part of this approach, I investigated the underlying dialectical design conditions and socio-political design relations that underpin rhetorical design communication. Furthermore, Burke's theory proved useful for investigating ethical implications of rhetorical design practice, while also offering suggestions for addressing problematic trend dynamics and rhetorics. I thus argued that a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach may be used to *re-frame* design trends. This has meant, in essence, looking at design trends from new perspectives and contemplating alternative ways of engaging with them.

This concluding chapter is structured as follows: I first provide summaries of the various chapters, highlighting some of the key insights gained along the way. I then proceed to outline the research contribution made by this thesis, after which I consider the study's limitations and make recommendations regarding potential directions for further research. I close with some brief concluding remarks.

Summary of chapters

Chapter One provided background on the research issue, namely the perceived problematic nature of design trend rhetorics as contributing to unsustainable design trend dynamics. I provided a rationale on why a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach was chosen as a framework for interrogating this issue while also briefly introducing Burke's theory by means of a biographical sketch, literature review, and an overview of main

themes explored in his work. In this chapter I outlined the main study aim: to re-frame design trends from a Burkean meta-rhetorical perspective, with two underlying objectives: 1) to develop a hermeneutic framework, which I refer to as a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach and 2) to illustrate the proposed framework by referring to visual design examples as well as verbal discourse surrounding prominent historical and contemporary design movements or trends.

Each of the subsequent chapters (Two to Six) presented a different Burkean theoretical 'angle' to form part of the overall meta-rhetorical framework. These themes may be described as including Burke's dialectics, dramatism, rhetoric, criticism and ethics. While Burke never categorised his vast range of interconnected ideas in such a systematic manner, I needed to organise his theory in a way that would facilitate systematic design inquiry. In each of these chapters I presented Burke's theory alongside relevant design discourses, weaving these ideas together to form a Burkean framework specific to the task of interrogating design trends. I referred to visual design examples as well as discursive design motivations at various points in these chapters, as and when I considered them useful for illustrating the more abstract ideas developed throughout.

Chapter Two dealt with 'dialectical design conditions'. I argued that a Burkean dialectical perspective on design trends offers foundational insights on the way in which symbolic language creates dialectical design conditions (or design dialectics), which translate into dynamic design change over time. I first aimed to show how, on a 'static' level, oppositional conceptions of design (which provide different options for discursive framing and visual making) may be understood in relation to the dialectical and paradoxical mechanics of language. Here I introduced Burke's notion of the *paradox of substance* to explain the displacement that inevitably forms part of the linguistic/symbolic translation process. This relates to the basic linguistic mechanism whereby we frame something 'in terms of' something else. In other words, to define something (to speak about its essence or substance) requires contextual reference to what it is substantially *not*. Symbols can therefore only provide selective or partial expressions of experience, insofar as the expression does *not equal* the experience. This makes linguistic expression ambiguous and malleable and allows for the possibility of selective and strategic rhetorical framing. I proceeded to consider this linguistic framing in relation to the basic human tendency to create 'symbolic order', in particular 'dialectical' (polar oppositions or relations) and hierarchal ordering strategies, which enable us to make sense of our experiences in the world. These concepts help to explain why design positions are frequently framed in terms of tensions or paradoxes, such as *form versus function,* that need to be resolved or rhetorically negotiated. I argued that designers, as operating in a position perceived as between art and engineering, are confronted with particularly complex motivational paradoxes. The paradox of substance allows for paradoxical linguistic concepts, whereby dualistically framed positions are equally valid, even if they are usually not *considered* equally valid at a particular point in time. Rhetorical strategies are used towards framing design conceptions in hierarchic terms (to position a product or style not only as new, but also 'better'). Although the postmodern consumer environment is pluralistic in stylistic possibility, trends continue to employ hierarchic argumentation. This brought us to the 'dynamic' level, where I argued for a dialectical understanding of design change; in other

words, seeing design trend dynamics as enabled through shifting dialectical positions. I provided some examples of how trends are often framed in oppositional terms. For instance, 'flat design' was positioned as a direct antithesis or antidote to the previous aesthetic direction known in retrospect as 'skeuomorphism'. I proceeded to discuss some common 'design dialectics' that offer competing conceptions of 'good design' that are continuously (re)negotiated throughout design history. Towards the end of the chapter, I explained how contemporary design discourse tends to show an awareness of the dialectical and paradoxical nature of design values. Instead of treating oppositions as irreconcilable dualities, there seems to be an attempt to 'transcend' or dissolve tensions, at least in more academic design research or critical design discourse (i.e. Adam 2016; Boradkar 2006; Coyne & Snodgrass 1995; Findeli 1994). In everyday design practice and especially trend rhetorics, design positions still tend to be framed in oppositional and hierarchic terms, as seen in highly polemical 'revolutionary' trend arguments.

Chapter Three considered 'the drama of design relations' as a valuable part of a meta-rhetorical approach to interrogating design trends. Throughout this chapter I positioned design practice (visual and verbal) in terms of Burke's notion of *symbolic action*. Burke sees this as an essential perspective to adopt if one is to consider the rhetorical nature of communication, which is concerned with performative aspects, as opposed to the mere conveying of information. In other words, visual design products and discourses are simultaneously considered for what they enable designers (and other involved stakeholders) to symbolically *say* and *do*. I further proposed that visual stylistic design trends and rhetorics should be considered in terms of socio-cultural design dynamics. I have argued that design trends need to be understood as highly mediated meta-cultural products where symbolic meaning and hierarchic design value are collectively created and reinforced in the culture of design. I argued that, insofar as designers, their clients and audiences are human beings with social dimensions and political agendas, such a perspective is important to consider. I also argued that a view of design as drama acknowledges the performative significance and persuasive import of the presentation (or packaging) of both the design and the designer. Here I explained how of a variety of softer human factors, not directly design-related, influence design practice in general, as well as trend dynamics and rhetorics. These factors may be described as various combinations of cooperative and competitive motives, insofar as designers collaborate with other stakeholders, but also harbour their own agendas. For instance, a designer may wish to present a certain kind of ethos of professionalism and competence, in dealings with a client. As part of this strategy the designer may choose to adopt a new trend and proceed to justify this direction in strategic ways, devised to make the client feel confident in the designer's reasoning. The designer wishes to collaborate with the client but, in order to do so, may need to enter into a 'battle of wits'. Designers are, like everyone else, required to 'frame' or justify their actions. They must account for their behaviour to others, and rationalise their decisions to themselves. Burke explains how the ability to motivate, to frame *action* in terms of *motion*, is *the* basic rhetorical resource. In other words, when accounting for an action, one does so by referring to a 'moving principle' outside the action, thus framing the action as a logical reaction. Burke also teaches us that the act of motivation, via the strategic selection of motives, is a thoroughly relational or socialised process. In other words, the motives that the designer provides throughout the design process need to be considered in relational terms, within what is communally

accepted as legitimate or appropriate. Towards the end of this chapter I introduced Burke's methodology, the *dramatistic pentad*, for interrogating discursively expressed motives, with the aim to show how motives become rhetorical resources, in Chapter Four.

Together Chapters Two and Three can be interpreted as providing a background or context for more traditional rhetorical inquiry to take place, that is, the interrogation of strategies used toward the creation of persuasive appeal. I argued that it is possible to interpret the 'drama' that unfolds in stylistic design shifts as dialectical design values played out over time, as 'voices' in a dialogue over time. How these 'voices' become persuasive, through the use of rhetorical strategies, is the subject of Chapter Four.

Chapter Four thus considered 'the rhetorical design situation' in which designers are both producers and consumers of design and trend rhetorics. This chapter sought to develop greater awareness of design trend rhetorics; to consider *how* design trend rhetorics persuade. I started the chapter by highlighting the interconnected nature of visual and verbal rhetorics as part of general design practice, and as highly relevant in trend dynamics. I proceeded to highlight how the rhetorical process of *identification*, which also involves division, plays a central role in design appeals as well as in the way in which trends develop and spread. I then explored Burke's ideas regarding the rhetorical power of symbolic mystery, magic and mystification, which include employing *rhetorics of rebirth* and the use of *god-terms*. The 'rhetoric of rebirth' is based on what Burke calls the *guilt-purification-redemption* cycle, and involves the symbolic purging of 'polluted' values (often through scapegoating) as a rhetorical strategy. I continued to explain how god-terms are particularly persuasive yet 'empty' terms that, in a design context, enable the projection of an image of good design practice. These powerful terms are not scrutinised for their validity, making them useful for disguising poor reasoning and facilitating bullshitting. I then moved on to consider the issue of motivational propriety, as related to design 'piety' and 'sacrilege'. In terms of design trends, a stylistic design approach can be framed as *better* (whether more fitting, relevant, 'hot' or desirable than others) by referring to a variety of 'outside' factors to substantiate such claims. As an example I referred to the highly effective rhetorical power of citing 'research' as motive. To cite 'research' as design justification does not require additional explanation because the motive is so powerful in its automatically assumed legitimacy. I argued that the most effective or persuasive design motives, in Burkean *pentadic* terms, tend to be *purpose*-dominant. This means that motivations concerned with design 'functionality' and 'usability' tend to trump other kinds of justifications (such as the role of designer expression or the influence of design tools). I ended the chapter by presenting Burke's notion of the *terministic screen*, which provides a useful summary of rhetorical framing (as selective and deflective), thus also highlighting the potentially problematic perspectival limitation that results from framing. Burke continually aims to expose limited terministic screens, but also seeks to emphasise that no de-framed alternatives can replace them. This is to a large extent the core of Burke's cultural critique, dealt with in the following chapter.

Chapter Five presented 'a critique of design (dis)orders'. The aim of this chapter was to develop a critical awareness of design perspectives, attitudes and behaviours that may become problematic if left to become imbalanced. I specifically aimed to highlight how these 'disorders' potentially contribute to or exacerbate

problematic trend dynamics and rhetorics. I explored four key disorders as identified by Burke. Firstly, the *hierarchic psychosis* describes the manner in which the human tendency to create symbolic and hierarchic order becomes excessively implemented (via what Burke refers to as an entelechial impulse), to the detriment of certain stakeholders or the environment. I argued that the hierarchic tendency enables the 'centripetal gaze' necessary for trends to gain currency in the 'attention economy', and how the extreme levels of trend hype, which leads to the unsustainable acceleration of aesthetic obsolescence, may be considered a product of *hierarchic psychosis*. I explained how the other symbolic disorders are rooted in the basic hierarchic psychosis, insofar as other tendencies become excessive or imbalanced, owing to this impulse to go to 'the end of the line'. The *technological psychosis* is thus an extension of the hierarchic psychosis, but is used by Burke to describe the excessively optimistic attitude towards technology to solve human problems, which he identifies in his own time. He is particularly critical of the manner in which technologies produce unforeseen by-products and how these by-products are ignored or excused in the name of 'progress'. I argued that rhetorics of technology are still prevalent in design, although there is perhaps a shift in emphasis towards innovation. In this section I also highlighted how Burke's concerns over planned obsolescence may be considered in relation to contemporary aesthetic obsolescence. Technological industries need to perpetuate a trajectory of producing new things, and if functional needs have been fulfilled, socio-cultural needs can be fabricated via aesthetic differentiation and rhetorical argumentation. I proceed to consider Burke's notions of *trained incapacity* and *occupational psychosis*, specifically with regards to how design training and industry experience tends to produce specific ways of thinking and making, which could lead to certain blindnesses. I argued that designers are trained to notice and value minor aesthetic deviations and, of course, to constantly produce 'newness'. These tendencies may easily exacerbate problematic trend dynamics, if designers do not stop to reflect on the necessity of these practices. Lastly, I considered Burke's notion of *bureaucratisation of the imaginative*. While Burke acknowledges that bureaucratic systems serve valid purposes, he believes the rigidity of these systems cause problems and make them prone to outlive their usefulness. He therefore encourages that bureaucracies be continually questioned and updated, to reflect changing circumstances and needs. I explained how, paradoxically, shifting design trends signal designers' ability to avoid entrenched ways of making, while the trend industry may itself be considered a creative bureaucracy (a conservative commercial system producing newness). Throughout this chapter I referred to related design critiques, to illustrate the high level of critical awareness found in design discourse. However, the fact that the same concerns are continuously voiced, attests to the fact that these problems have by no means disappeared. Insofar as these disorders have not been cured, I believe an additional perspective, such as presented by Burke, remains useful.

To some extent, all of the disorders identified by Burke highlight the problems that arise from accepting limited perspectives as whole realities. These perspectival deficiencies are, according to Burke, due to a widespread symbol-foolishness or rhetorical ignorance. Burke's rather sceptical attitude about human nature and the state of the world is visible throughout his work, but it can be described as criticism rooted in

optimism: he is remarkably hopeful in the human capacity to work 'towards a better life'.[1] Burke's basic recommendation is that greater symbol-wisdom is needed, which he believed could be developed through rhetorical education. Whereas Chapter Five presented symbolic disorders related to design and trend problems, Chapter Six thus considered potential symbolic solutions.

Chapter Six considers the possibility of 'meta-rhetorical design re-framing'. This chapter started from the position that if design trends are symbolically mediated meta-cultural products, symbolic readjustment should theoretically be possible. In other words, this chapter explored the possibility to re-frame dominant perspectives and attitudes about trends and form alternative responses that may be more in line with sustainable design values. Burke's proposed correctives are explored in terms of nurturing greater rhetorical (self)consciousness, employing creative strategies of re-framing, as well as adopting an attitude of *neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism*. Firstly, greater rhetorical (self)consciousness involves the ability to 'discount' naturalised positions and become more cognisant of 'symbolic goads', or symbolically-constructed ambitions, that influence our thinking and actions. I argued that such an awareness may assist designers in reflecting on, and potentially resisting, design trends that may not be aligned with their professional values. Burke's proposal may be identified as encouraging ideological critique insofar as he encourages that one becomes less ignorant of cultural forces and develop greater agency in decision-making. However, Burke also encourages the meta-critical reflection on the practice of ideological critique, consistently warning against supposedly 'demystified' positions. I argued that greater self-awareness of one's limited perspective may reduce the tendency to make inflated or absolutist design claims. In the second part of the chapter I considered Burke's proposed strategies for re-framing, most significantly via creating *perspective by incongruity*, and *comic framing*. I aimed to show how creative design action can be used towards ameliorating the perspectival disorders identified previously, particularly by drawing attention to design frames as rhetorical constructs. I argued that those design projects that embody a Burkean comic attitude, chararcterised by humble irony and the encouragement of non-prescriptive reading, are most successful in widening perspectives instead of merely criticising a particular approach. I thus sought to highlight how Burke's proposed correctives may be identified in design practice, albeit in more academic or critical design domains. Lastly, I considered Burke's proposed 'neo-Stoic cosmopolitan' attitude as part of developing advanced symbol-wisdom. This attitude essentially involves the consideration of a variety of perspectives and to develop perspectival humility without becoming radically relativist in one's outlook. As part of this attitude Burke promotes an 'appreciation' of rhetoric as more useful than a 'banishment'. Since rhetoric is inescapable, insofar as all communication or symbolic action is rhetorical, a 'rejection' of rhetoric is not only futile, but impossible. This last chapter thus sought to explore the possibility to develop more ethical and sustainable trend engagements via strategic rhetorical intervention. This means developing and consuming new design trends in more deliberate and mindful ways, as well as producing and disseminating more honest and responsible (less polemical or melodramatic) trend rhetorics.

[1] As mentioned previously, Burke's 1932 novel is titled 'Towards a better life' and the phrase 'towards a better life' appears frequently in relation to his other work.

Contributions

This study offers an original contribution to design research and knowledge in its development of a new theoretical framework, a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach, for interrogating design trends. This framework may be considered as contributing to existing knowledge on a number of levels, which are stated below.

Firstly, this framework offers an in-depth presentation and application of Kenneth Burke's theory in a design studies context. Despite Burke being considered a forerunner in the study of visual rhetoric,[2] he is rarely mentioned in design studies. As mentioned previously, there are a number of design theorists who refer to the significant influence of Burke – including Blair-Early and Zender (2008); Boradkar (2006); Buchanan (1995; 2001a), Ehses (1984), Engbers (2013), Gallagher, Martin and Ma (2011), and Joost and Scheuermann (2006) – but these references are brief. In other words, until now, there has been no sustained inquiry into, or application of, Burke's theory specifically for design.

This study also contributes to design research by offering a more in-depth investigation of design trend dynamics. Throughout the research process I did not encounter much written, from a design perspective, on trends or transition dynamics. While design theorists do, of course, acknowledge the significance of change as part of creative design practice, the dialectical dynamics or rhetorical aspects thereof is not explored in much depth. One notable exception is Tomes and Armstrong's (2010) article *Dialectics of design: how ideas of 'good design' change*, which proved immensely valuable in connecting Burke's dialectics to dialectical design change. While this article provided inspiration to make such a connection, it is worth mentioning that Tomes and Armstrong do not refer to Burke's theory; nor do they consider more contemporary design trends. Their emphasis, instead, is on prominent historical design movements.

Another theoretical contribution of this framework is in its particular conceptualisation of *meta-rhetorical* inquiry. I have argued that a meta-rhetorical approach extends the scope of inquiry beyond traditional rhetorical analysis or critique, most notably by considering dialectical and 'dramatistic' aspects of the communication situation. This is in keeping with Nelson and Stolterman's (2012:218) argument that designers need to "engage in metadesign issues, to understand the larger context within which design is practiced". I believe the meta-design inquiry offered here answers this call by considering the underlying dialectical conditions and broader socio-political dynamics of design praxis.

Insofar as this design study is situated, more broadly, in the humanities (as opposed to a more technically focussed design domain), it is aligned with research goals found in the humanities. Rónán McDonald (2011:283) explains how it is in the domain of the humanities to investigate and question values, by studying meanings, both in terms of symbols and messages, as well as significance and purpose. McDonald (2011:290) thus refers to the importance of meta-value critique since he believes "[t]he values our society embraces are too important not to be given serious academic investigation and reflection". This goal is

[2] Authors such as Sonja Foss (2005) and Barry Brummet (2008) who do consider Burke's contribution to visual rhetoric, usually do so from a broader communication and media studies perspective, and not specifically as related to design discourse and practice.

clearly in line with Burke's approach in general as well as the meta-rhetorical approach developed in this study, which essentially seeks to offer a meta-value critique of design culture.

The interdisciplinary nature of this study allows also for contributions to knowledge in other disciplinary areas. For instance, I believe the theoretical application offered here may prove valuable to rhetoric scholars with a particular interest in Burke's theory, as well as those interested in visual rhetoric more generally. This study contributes, on a more general level, to a growing body of knowledge on rhetoric as applied to visual cultural contexts. As mentioned previously, rhetorical theory has traditionally been applied in the analysis and critique of overtly argumentative verbal discourses and have only recently been utilised in other areas. This study thus adds to this growing line of inquiry. It is possible to argue that various aspects of the meta-rhetorical approach developed here may potentially be applied in Burkean or visual rhetorical inquiries less specifically design or trend-related. Also, it is worth mentioning that by examining examples from visual design and popular culture, this study assists in making Burke's abstract ideas somewhat more tangible. I believe those new in studying Burke may find this particularly helpful.

While this study, like Burke's theory, is situated in the tradition of rhetorical critique or rhetorical hermeneutics, it may be possible to apply some of the insights developed in this study towards strategic rhetorical invention. In other words, designers or marketers interested in developing and applying skills in persuasive design argumentation may find some of the strategies or tactics discussed throughout the study of practical value. From a critical perspective, one might object to such an exploitation of Burke's theory towards perpetuating problematic design rhetorics, instead of exposing and altering these practices. However, from a more generous Burkean critical-appreciative perspective one could accept that design trend rhetorics will continue to be used towards commercial profit, and hope that something of a Burkean attitude might 'rub off' and lead to more reflective and ethical rhetorical practice.

I consider these contributions my humble attempt to participate in a number of ongoing conversations. These conversations, as Burke reminds us, started long before we arrived and will continue long after we depart. All we can do is offer our own perspective. I would like to think that I have brought together some ideas that are usually considered separately and hope I have provided a new angle in the midst of heated design trend debates.

Limitations

As Burke's notion of the 'terministic screen' teaches us, every perspective is a selection but also a deflection. Insofar as I have adopted a specific perspective, there will necessarily be a number of deflections, or limitations in this study. It is worth mentioning that while a Burkean meta-rhetorical approach is a terministic screen, it is one that seeks to provide a widened birds-eye view. This framework sheds light on the larger design scenario, providing a high-level or general view, particularly on design trend dynamics. While it may be possible to utilise aspects of this Burkean framework for more narrow or specific purposes, this is arguably not the main strength of a Burkean approach. Burke's approach can be described as more

generalist or 'anti-disciplinary' and his ideas are well-suited to shed light onto the bigger picture. Nonetheless, it is in the Burkean spirit to reflect on what is deflected, even in this wide view.

Firstly, by rooting the investigation in the work of one specific theorist I have necessarily neglected various other theoretical perspectives on design rhetoric and trend dynamics. While I have attempted to link Burke's ideas with those of prominent design theorists throughout the study, the emphasis was always on Burke's perspective rather than the other way around. There would, of course, be myriad other perspectives from which to explore design trends. However, as I have argued, this design-informed Burkean perspective offers valuable contributions to both design research and Burkean scholarship.

On a related note, it is worth acknowledging that there is a significant amount of overlap in Burke's thought and those of other cultural theorists. As mentioned previously, Burke's work may be variously classified as "[a] revised Marxism, a revised Freudianism, hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, reader-response theory, theory of ritual, speech-act theory, even a kind of deconstructionism, and much else that is called postmodernism" (Southwell 1987:1). I have, however, refrained from elaborating on these theoretical overlaps, largely for practical reasons. While I do, on occasion, acknowledge related theories in footnotes, my main aim has always been to present a Burkean perspective. However, it is worth reiterating that it was not my aim to present Burke as unique in his views. While it may be possible to reach similar meta-rhetorical insights via other routes, I do believe Burke's particular combination of interests and insights have provided a valuable scope for design trend inquiry.

It is also worth reiterating that my particular interpretation of Burke can be interpreted as a specific 'terministic screen', as well as a product of my specific 'trained incapacity' and 'occupational psychosis'. I have presented a subjective selection of what I perceive to be Burke's most relevant theory for design, which necessarily means that I have de-emphasised many other ideas. Most notably, I have not paid much attention to Burke's literary criticism, which forms a major part of most of his works. Whereas Burke illustrates his ideas via references to literature, I have opted to illustrate these ideas through visual design examples and references to design discourse. Just as Burke (1955:264) acknowledged his occupational psychosis as literary critic, I need to acknowledge the influence of my particular occupational orientation. My focus and interpretation are influenced by my experience as a design educator, meaning my perspective will differ from those working in the design industry. Furthermore, my experience as an educator and researcher, at a Visual Arts Department, in a Faculty of Humanities, has necessarily influenced my approach to design in general and to trend dynamics in particular. For instance, when reflecting on my particular training and occupation, I could say that I have over-emphasised humanistic and aesthetic values above technical or commercial design concerns. This (over)emphasis is, of course, also visible throughout Burke's work, which explains the intellectual affinity I felt throughout my engagement with his work. In Burkean terms, any emphasis is also an over-emphasis. There is no getting away from this. However, an awareness of terministic screens and occupational psychoses does at least encourage one to attempt meta-critical reflection.

It is therefore also important to acknowledge that I have not taken a particularly critical stance on Burke's theory throughout this study. This does not mean I find Burke's work flawless, but rather that I have chosen to take a more generous approach in my reading of him. As mentioned previously, I have followed William Rueckert's (1982:6) advice on engaging with Burke's theory, to "by a deliberate act of will, [withhold] judgement until the sanity of distance can be combined with the power of commitment". I believe this generous and patient attitude has enabled me to more fully exploit the potential of Burke's highly suggestive ideas,[3] in the development of a Burkean framework. This meant that I attempted to draw mainly positive comparisons between Burke's theory and those of seminal design theorists. And whenever gaps or contradictions emerged, my main aim was to supplement and expand on Burke's ideas, rather than critique them.

As mentioned in the first chapter, my approach can be described as a 'partial purification' of Burke,[4] insofar as I have filtered and refined his ideas for my own purposes. I agree with Rueckert (1982:5), who believes that "[w]hen one has purified Burke to the extent of being able to apprehend the ideas and methods and, finally, the whole coherent system, one discovers a systematic view of man and the drama of human relations, and a methodology for its application, of great power, beauty, and persuasiveness".

Suggestions for further research

Owing to the wide range of dense Burkean ideas explored in this study, a variety of directions and opportunities for future research have become apparent throughout. Insofar as I provided brief explanations or illustrations of how Burkean concepts relate to design issues, many of these discussions could be extended into more in-depth investigations. While it is not possible to mention all of these ideas here, I attempt here to outline some of the most prominent or obvious directions for further research.

As mentioned previously, the Burkean meta-rhetorical framework may potentially be used, as a whole or in part, in the interrogation of other visual cultural or rhetoric-related subjects. While I have argued that this framework is particularly useful in developing a holistic view of design trend dynamics and rhetorics, this framework may potentially be used towards other ends. One possibility would be to use this framework in a more sustained analysis of a particular design trend or movement. This could, for instance, involve a more thorough investigation of underlying design dialectics as well as specific visual and verbal rhetorical tactics employed, as relevant to the trend case study. On an even smaller scale, particular design products or arguments could be analysed by means of some of the concepts explored as part of the larger framework. Although I have focussed on information or communication design products in this study (with a few

[3] As Bygrave (1993:7) points out, reading Burke is (as Burke also said of reading Freud) "suggestive to the point of bewilderment".

[4] As mentioned previously, Rueckert (1982:4) describes his approach to Burke as a 'partial purification' which systematically eliminates some ideas in order to make Burke's theory more usable. He chooses this phrase in reference to Burke's conception of rhetoric as working towards the purification of war.

mentions of product design or architecture), I believe the Burkean framework developed here can be just as effectively used in other design disciplines.

This study emphasised rhetorical aspects of visual aesthetic or stylistic design trends, which I have argued should include the interrogation of the verbal justifications of stylistic directions. However, it would be possible to use this Burkean framework to examine more intellectual or methodological trends in design discourse and practice as well. While I have referred to some examples throughout the study, such as 'Design Thinking, 'Human-centered Design' or 'Critical Design', I have not considered in much depth how these approaches may also be analysed as trends from a Burkean meta-rhetorical perspective.

Another obvious opportunity for study would be to apply Burke's 'pentad' or 'grammar' in a more thorough interrogation of the verbal rhetorical expression of design motives. This could involve primary research into how designers motivate their actions in commercial industry scenarios (such as client presentations), as well as pedagogic settings (such as studio consultation sessions).[5] While I presented brief and fairly general applications of Burke's grammar of motives, as a means to illustrate how the mechanics of motivation influence trend dynamics, I believe more sustained inquiries into discursive rhetorical design practices may prove valuable.

Lastly, it may be worth extending this research to consider how to incorporate the proposed Burkean meta-rhetorical approach into a design educational setting. As mentioned in the latter parts of this study, Burke envisioned a programme of rhetorical education as a means towards more engaged and responsible citizenship. Burke did not provide much guidance on exactly what such a curriculum would look like, other than the fact that it would include a linguistic-rhetorical approach. However, theorists such as Kris Rutten and Ronald Soetaert (2012) have made compelling arguments for incorporating a Burkean perspective into the educational curriculum. In other words, while I have hinted at the potential of utilising the theory explored here for design education purposes, it would be worthwhile to consider how one would go about such a task.

Concluding remarks

I embarked on this study with a particularly critical attitude towards design trend dynamics and rhetorics. I perceived the hype around popular new design trends to be empty and overblown and became increasingly aware of the simplistic generalisations and polemical diatribes found in contemporary design trend controversies. I rolled my eyes at what I perceived to be pretentious claims justifying superficial pseudo-innovations and aimed to offer a rhetorical critique to expose these practices.

From my critical perspective, I aimed to argue that trends ought to be rejected insofar as they encourage modes of passive consumption and thoughtless creation. The continuous updating of visual style merely

[5] One such study is found in the article *Rhetoric of landscape architecture and interior design discourses: preparation for cross-disciplinary practic*, by G Lawson, J Franz and B Adkins (2005). A similar approach to analysing discourse could be valuable in communication design educational settings.

creates the illusion of innovation and, along with it, the illusion of choice. I hoped to show how this pseudo-choice provides a false sense of agency in constructing identity and expose how a rhetoric of difference is utilised to deflect attention away from the vast uniformity of options. All of these factors contribute to the overproduction of things and the premature discarding of functional products owing to perceived aesthetic obsolescence.

Through my initial engagements with Burke's work I found justification for my critical attitude, as well as a set of tools to employ in my criticism. However, a more thorough engagement with Burke's ideas led to a gradual transformation in attitude, best described, in Burkean terms, as from purely critical to critical-appreciative. Although accelerated design trend dynamics undoubtedly cause problems, I no longer believe a simple dismissal of trends to be the answer. While my meta-rhetorical investigation explained the prevalence and perpetuation of trend dynamics, it also highlighted the paradoxes or ambiguities in evaluating and criticising trend dynamics. In other words, I developed an appreciation of design trends I did not originally foresee.

From an appreciative perspective, design trends can be understood as a functional ordering mechanism in the dramatic economy of attention. Insofar as the myriad choices available to contemporary consumers (and designers) can be stifling, trends help to reduce cognitive workload and offer some assurance by being part of a community of followers. Furthermore, within the culture of design, trends offer opportunities for identification and differentiation via 'the new', which further assist in the formation of social status via cultural capital. From this perspective trends fulfill basic human needs, to create symbolic and hierarchic order, to establish and communicate identity as a part of a community, and to aspire to greater status in the socio-cultural hierarchy.

I have, in other words, developed a kind of Burkean neo-Stoic cosmopolitanism throughout my engagement with this research topic. This has allowed me to reflect on my critical stance and reconsider how one can go about tackling problematic design practices in a more mature and balanced manner. As explained in Chapter Six, Burke's proposed neo-Stoic attitude does not entail resignation or passivity in the face of problems, but rather a humble and patient approach that seeks to understand first before rushing to judgement. I agree that this is a more sensible way to engage with melodramatic design rhetorics, insofar as it enables more thoughtful dialogue. I therefore have come to believe the main benefit of the Burkean meta-rhetorical approach developed here lies in its ability to encourage more responsible rhetorical design citizenship.

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