The professional project of graphic designers and universities' visual identities

Turid Moldenæs[†] and Hilde Marie Pettersen[*,†]

Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø 9037, Norway
*Corresponding author. Email: hilde.pettersen@uit.no
[†]These authors contributed equally to this work.

ABSTRACT

Contrary to earlier research on why universities change their visual identities from traditional to more abstract ones, resting on a demand-side approach, we offer an explanation based on a supply-side approach. We argue that universities' change of visual identities toward abstract symbols reflects a professional logic shared by graphic designers and discuss the mechanisms and institutional agents that have fueled the professional project of graphic designers and the institutionalization of their professional logic. Simultaneously, we make visible the role of a professional group—the graphic designers—that have escaped the gaze of earlier organizational research.

KEYWORDS: graphic designers; professional project; institutional agents; visual identities; logo-design; universities

INTRODUCTION

Research on how and why universities change their visual identities has shown an almost global transition from emblem to (branded) logo style; from figurative, distinct, and traditional symbols to more abstract, general, and modern ones (Drori, Delmestri and Oberg 2013, 2016; Delmestri, Oberg and Drori 2015). The logo style is claimed to be a symbol of universities as formal organizations, and as such no different from any other organization (cf. Krücken and Meier 2006), as well as marking the incorporation of universities into a globalized marketing culture and the brand society (Drori, Delmestri and Oberg 2013, 2016). Such a perception of the university is primarily rooted in what we denote as the demand-side; the universities request for external branding services as a competitive 'tool'. However, this explanation overlooks the professional logic of the external experts in visual identity. We therefore offer a supplementary explanation based on neoinstitutional theory and a supply-side approach emphasizing the significance of these experts and the dynamics between demand and supply (cf. Scott 2008b).

In parallel with universities becoming more like any other organization and the emergence of 'the brand society' and a society where the visual infuse our everyday lives through social media, web pages, films, photographs, logos, etc., a new professional group has entered the scene; external communication consultants as well as a fast-growing group of 'in-house' communication personnel (cf. Drori,

Delmestri and Oberg 2013). Within this group of professionals, graphic designers have a central position, as perhaps the most professionalized group within a community of experts which loosely can be denoted as the communication profession. Graphic designers represent a new form of expert labor that proliferates in the so-called knowledge economy (Muzio et al. 2011; see also Brock, Leblebici and Muzio 2014).

There is a widespread belief that various experts pursue different logics 'and therefore live in different "thought worlds"' (Sutter and Kieser 2015: 2); they develop common perceptions, values and beliefs about how their work should be carried out (cf. Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton and Ocasio 1999; Freidson 2001). Such logics are institutionalized and taken for granted and disseminated within organizational fields through professionals (cf. DiMaggio and Powell 1991). According to Scott professionals are 'the preeminent institutional agents of our time' (Scott 2008a: 19), and 'the most influential, contemporary crafters of institutions' (Scott 2008a: 223). Therefore, professionalization and institutionalization are closely interwoven (Suddaby and Viale 2011). Furthermore, Scott claims that institutional agents base their legitimacy on different elements; cultural cognitive, normative, and regulative. They also enact different roles, as creators, carriers, and clinicals.

Building on Scott, Suddaby and Viale (2011) have identified four strategies that professionals use to promote their projects: they define a space for their expert skills, populate this space with actors, recreate the boundaries of the field, and reproduce their professional capital. However, Suddaby and Viale have not distinguished between different types of agents and their roles and as such their legitimacy, which are of significance to understand the degree to which professional projects become institutionalized. By combining these two analytical frameworks for studying professional agency, we argue that universities' change of visual identities toward the logo style largely reflects a strongly institutionalized professional logic shared by graphic designers. Universities are particularly interesting because they are more global as well as more strongly institutionalized than most organizations. A study of the transformation of their visual symbols into the abstract logo style can

therefore tell us something about how widespread and powerful this professional logic has become.

This article generates substantial knowledge on a new group of experts, which has taken on an increasingly important role in modern organizations, however, has escaped the gaze of organizational researchers—despite a visual turn in organizational studies (see, e.g. Meyer et al. 2013; Boxenbaum et al. 2018). By unpacking the complex relationship between the supply- and demand-side factors, it also contributes to knowledge on the characteristics of institutional agents that succeed in institutionalizing their professional project. This still remains underexamined despite the amount of works that have followed in t,he wake of Scott's seminal work (cf. Muzio, Brock and Suddaby 2013; Brock, Leblebici and Muzio 2014). Furthermore, this article contributes to knowledge on design and change of visual identities of academic institutions. In several works, graphic designers are claimed to have played a crucial role in the design of universities' visual identities (Baker and Balmer 1997; Melewar and Akel 2005; Drori, Delmestri and Oberg 2013; Aula, Tienari and Wæraas 2015; Oberg, Drori and Delmestri 2017); however, none of them have documented their alleged impact of universities' visual identities.

In the first section, we elaborate on the demand-side argument as reflected in the works of Drori et al., which however, is also valid for organizations in general, followed by a supply-side argument based on Scott (2008a) and Suddaby and Viale (2011). In the empirical section, we present a historical narrative of how the professional logic of graphic designers has infused the visual identities of modern organizations and become taken-for-granted as the appropriate visual identity symbol for all types of organizations. In the Discussion section, we emphasize the types of institutional agents, their roles, and the strategies they have applied to fuel the professional logic of graphic designers.

THE DEMAND SIDE

The demand-side argument rests on organizations demand for certain services, or as Scott has put it: 'institutions are crafted by actors in response to recurrent problems for which no existing "off-the shelf" solutions are available' (Scott 2008a: 104). A similar

argument is implicitly reflected in the work of Drori and her colleagues. The incorporation of academic institutions into a globalized culture and 'the brand society' has according to them led universities to distance themselves from their sector-specific features, presenting themselves as formal organizations just like any other. The essence of the 'branding logic' is a market and media orientation, which refers to increased competition between universities, with a focus on self-promotion and reputation (cf. Drori, Delmestri and Oberg 2013). From this perspective, the observed change in the visual identity of universities is seen as a result of this generic organizational identity. The new visual identities are described as boundless, text-free, and colorful, reflecting a 'branded' identity and as disembedded icons reflecting a 'disembedded and universalistic identity' (Drori, Delmestri and Oberg 2013: 141).

In parallel, universities like most other organizations have established communication departments with an ever-growing group of communication personnel (Drori, Delmestri and Oberg 2013; Bromley and Meyer 2015). As such, the communication logic has 'grown into' the university structures and created a demand for communication services, including a demand for services in visual design. Bromley and Meyer (2015) have introduced the concept of 'hyper-organization', which indicates that the internal structures of modern organizations, especially their staff functions, often have little impact on the core activities and the achievement of the goals. One example of such structures is units having a particular responsibility for external communication. These units are, however, natural and legitimate in modern organizations.

THE SUPPLY SIDE

The supply-side argument emphasizes the pressure from institutional environments, creating marked for specific services and suppliers of these services. It emphasizes the role of actors, particularly those in sciences and professions as institutional agents promoting a certain logic in time and space (cf. Meyer 1994; Scott 2008a). In order to capture the agents and the strategies they have used to propel the institutionalization of the professional project of graphic designers, we employ the typology of agency developed by Scott (2008a) and the strategies identified by Suddaby and Viale (2011). While the framework of Suddaby and Viale captures the strategies that professionals use to promote their project, Scott's typology captures the legitimacy basis of the professionals, and may therefore shed light on why they succeed in institutionalizing their project.

Scott's typology of agency is based on the distinction among cultural cognitive, normative, and regulatory agents—individual as well as collective. Scott also claims that professionals as agents occupy different generic roles, as creators, carriers, and clinicals (appliers). Of these, the creators are the fewest and those with the highest status, while most of the agents are clinicals. The carriers are disseminators of ideas in time and space and important to make these relevant to the 'real world' (Scott 2008a: 227).

While cultural-cognitive agents create institutions by inventing ideas that define reality; distinctions, typifications, and general principles taken for granted, normative agents create institutions by developing and communicating principles, standards, and best practices that specify what individuals, groups, and organizations should do. Regulatory agents, in turn, create institutions by influencing the design of regulations. Scott's framework further implies that while the legitimacy of cultural-cognitive agents is based on culturally accepted beliefs that their knowledge is superior when it comes to defining the problem, how it can be solved, and what constitutes a solution, the legitimacy of normative agents is based on a moral obligation to perform the daily work in a certain way. The legitimacy of regulatory agents, on the other hand, is based on their authority to impose sanctions if rules are broken.

The first strategy of Suddaby and Viale (2011) stems from the assumption that professionals, based on their expertise and legitimacy, are able to define and conquer new spaces or market segments. By redefining their professional project, they are 'creating or opening up new spaces for their expertise' (Muzio, Brock and Suddaby 2013: 707). Muzio, Brock and Suddaby (2013) refer, among other things, to the establishment of new institutions (cf. DiMaggio 1991) and new practicesCorporate Social Responsibility(CSR), as examples of professionals conquering new spaces for their expertise, and in turn promoting field-level changes.

The second strategy is based on the assumption that professionals fill existing social spaces with new categories of legitimate actors and identities, be they professional roles or organizational forms. An example of the first is Human Resource Experts (HRM), while an example of the second is the multidisciplinary partnership (Suddaby and Viale 2011; Muzio, Brock and Suddaby 2013).

The third strategy is based on the assumption that professionals disseminate knowledge about new logics that redefine the boundaries of the field—they expand their knowledge base and jurisdiction by establishing rule systems that only the professionals themselves understand (Suddaby and Viale 2011). Thus, the profession consolidates its power and status.

The final strategy stems from the assumption that professionals control the reproduction of their own profession, by deciding who qualify for membership. Suddaby and Viale (2011) highlight two ways professionals use to reproduce their own profession, rhetoric, and categorization. Language is 'a crucial weapon' and professionals are 'skilled rhetoricians' (Suddaby and Viale 2011: 435). Furthermore, with reference to Abbot (1988), they point to the professionals' unique skills in creating and enforcing categories, particularly when it comes to diagnosing client problems. Here, they refer to a study by Lawrence (1999) of how forensic accountants applied both member strategies and quality standards for what is normal practice (on which they based their assessment), in order to define who had the right expertise, who was inside, and who was outside.

METHOD AND DATA

To identify how the professional logic of graphic designers has emerged and developed in time and space, we conducted a genealogical (re)construction of the process. Thus, we used a historical approach to understand why universities worldwide have changed their visual identity from emblem to logo style. In that regard, we focused on past events and their retrospective interpretation (cf. Suddaby and Greenwood 2009). This was done by reviewing a variety of texts, both research-based articles and books, and texts produced by actors and institutions that are described as central to the process. The texts and contributions were identified by using the snowballing method, starting with a fairly random selection of texts, expanding the search by systematically following up names of persons and institutions which appeared in several of the texts. We did not end the search process before no new names, references, or stories turned up.

The texts include, among others, the two most widely used books in the teaching of graphic design history, one published in the USA (Meggs and Purvis, first edition in 1989) and the other in UK (Hollis, first edition in 1993). We also went through the websites of relevant and well-known designers and consultants, their published texts, interviews with designers (text and film), film material found on YouTube, and on the consultants' websites, as well as conducting broad and repeated Google searches. The sources are listed in the reference list under the headline 'other sources'. In addition, we reviewed the websites of the US' oldest and largest association for graphic designers, American Institute of Graphic Arts - AIGA, and the websites of educational institutions in the USA, UK, Germany, Switzerland, France, and Norway that offer courses in graphic design.

Early in the process, we became aware of the German Bauhaus School as well as the American designer Paul Rand. While the Bauhaus-thinking within architecture and design, as we will show, has had considerable impact on the development of European and later American graphic design, Rand is described as one of the most leading American graphic designers, and as one who strongly influenced organizations' perception of the appropriate corporate identity (see, e.g. Hollis 2016; Meggs and Purvis 2016). Thus, we included texts about the Bauhaus-thinking and texts written by and about Rand. Through reading the texts of Rand, we identified a specific logo standard. The various texts have partly overlapped and partly supplemented each other. The large scope of texts that we collected, read, and compared, as well as the fact that we both read the texts several times, strengthened the validity of the historical reconstruction of the process.

The historical approach has made it possible to perform a process analysis of the professional project of graphic designers, as well as to capture some of the complex relations that often characterize such

processes. This means that we tried to identify the agents and uncover if and how the various strategies identified by Suddaby and Viale (2011) were expressed in the historical account we constructed of the professionalization project of graphic designers. The historical approach has also made it possible to show that the visual identities of current universities are shaped by past events; that they are a result of path dependence (cf. Krasner 1984). Regarding that, we have compared the history of the development of the abstract logo and its travel between different types of companies, with the history of when it was first identified among universities. Path-dependency is thus a mechanism that explains why and how founders of new institutions and their followers, have acted as creators, carriers, and appliers of specific ideas and logics. However, a challenge with historical approaches is periodization, the choice of start and end points. We mainly followed the periodization that had already been established through previous narratives of the graphic design history and the history of the corporate identity field.

To capture the professional logic of recent graphic designers, we interviewed members of two external consultant teams engaged in designing the new visual identities of two Norwegian universities. The two teams included five graphic designers, trained in Norway, UK, and USA. Two of them had also been engaged in designing the visual identities of other Norwegian universities. As such, we believe that the professional logic we have uncovered through our interviews is fairly representative of that encountered by other Norwegian academic institutions when (re)designing their visual identities. We also interviewed members of the universities' internal communication staff, who collaborated closely with the external consultants in the change process, and reviewed several documents concerning the process.

THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUPPLY SIDE

In this part, we present the professional logic of graphic designers and how this logic has traveled in time and space, from its origination in the early 1900 Germany, via the postwar US to the recent entry into organizations worldwide, including universities. The presentation also includes a specific logo-standard that follows from the professional logic of graphic designers. Finally, it includes a presentation of how this logo-standard has infused the process of designing the visual identities of two Norwegian universities.

The Graphic Design Logic

Graphic design, which is a subdiscipline of the broader design discipline, is about arranging text, images, and symbols to illustrate, amplify, and communicate a message. According to Hollis (2016: 7), it is 'the business of marking or choosing marks and arranging them on a surface to convey an idea'. It is understood as a discipline, which unites craft and art, and therefore seen as an applied art.

The fundamental debates within the design discipline are centered on two issues. One is the relationship between art and design, whether design is an art form or not (cf. Coles 2007). The designer provides a service demanded by and paid for by a client. As such, his artistic freedom is more limited than that of the genuine artist. Potter (1969) therefore compares the designer to a medical doctor responsible for accurate diagnoses (problem analysis) and for a relevant prescription of a cure (design proposals). For the designer thus, there is always a client (sender) and some stakeholders (recipients): 'In design your goals are partly determined by others, the stakeholders, because the things you create must fulfill some practical purpose in the wider world. In art, this is not the case. An artist determines his or her own goals' (Dorst 2003: 88). There is thus a latent conflict in any design between the client's wishes and the designer's professional logic (cf. Rand 1991). The other debate pertains to the relationship between form and function. While form refers to the aesthetics and is oriented toward the look or design of an object, function refers to the object's usability and is—as such—more pragmatically oriented.

However, as we will show in the next section, the professional logic of graphic designers became strongly inspired by modernism and functionalism. It is a discipline born out of modernism . Modernism is an art-historical flow, which essentially rejected earlier traditions, while the core of functionalism is that the object's purpose and function should determine its form; to a given function, there is a

correct form making aesthetics and user preferences, irrelevant.

From Bauhaus to corporate identity

In order to understand the emergence and development of the professional logic of graphic designers, we turn to the philosophy of the German Bauhaus School. This was a design and art school founded in 1919 by the architect Walter Gropius. The objective of the school was to unite arts (fine art) and crafts (applied art), emphasizing the close collaboration between engineers, architects, and visual artists. Furthermore, the school was based on a functionalist thinking, inherent in slogans such as simplicity, usefulness, and efficiency. Décor was seen as superfluous, and the abstract form preferred to the figurative. The school searched for an objective design language to overcome what was perceived as the drawbacks of previous styles and personal tastes (Meggs and Purvis 2016). It is therefore, inextricably linked to modernism.

It was, however, closed by the Nazi-regime in 1933 and several of the teachers emigrated to the USA. While Gropius was teaching architecture at Harvard from 1937, Moholy-Nagy who had been teaching the foundation course, established the New Bauhaus in Chicago in 1939 (Meggs and Purvis 2016).[1] In the early 1950s, Albers, who had been teaching the preliminary course, became central in developing the first American university degree program in graphic design at Yale University in New Haven, and as chairman of the new Department of design. The reason given for this new department was 'to disassociate the new program from the existing one in fine art, and to better identify it with architecture' (Kelly 2001: 3). Initially, the program was described as an education in 'graphic arts'. It was soon changed to 'graphic design', to separate graphic design from printmaking (Kelly 2001). However, the name change can also be seen as a way to separate graphic design, which at that time was called 'commercial art', from art as such. The program, established in 1950–1, was strongly inspired by the thinking and pedagogy of the Bauhaus school. It was the dean of the College of Fine Arts, Charles Sawyer, who invited Albers to Yale. According to Kelly (2001), Sawyer was influenced by this thinking 'through his interaction with the Bauhaus principals

who had emigrated to the United States' (Kelly 2001: 4). Furthermore, several of the teachers were educated in Europe and some had even taught at Bauhaus in Germany. Meggs and Purvis (2016) claim that this transatlantic flight influenced American design after World War II, which helped create a modern design movement spanning disciplines, such as architecture, product design, and visual communication.

The Bauhaus-thinking was otherwise an answer to the housing shortage after World War I, where the luxurious had to give way to the functional. In the USA, however, there was a thriving graphic design market of companies that needed trademarks to identify and differentiate their products. In a market where competition between companies increased, design became a tool for marketing and sales purposes. It was in the 1950s that the gradual shift toward abstract visual expressions to identify businesses started (Hughes-Stanton 1968), and in the 1960s that graphic design developed into a national and genuine profession (Meggs and Purvis 2016), or as Kelly (2001) has put it: 'Before the 1960s in America, graphic design was perhaps more of a label than a profession, but by the 1960s, graphic design was clearly a profession' (Kelly 2001: 3; see also Hollis 2016).

In 1956, the mostly self-taught American designer Paul Rand, started teaching at Yale (cf. Heller 1997; Kelly 2001; Meggs and Purvis 2016). He too was strongly inspired by European modernism and the Bauhaus-thinking; however, the only one among the teachers who had a strong connection to the advertising industry (Kelly 2001). Rand's teaching and design work are particularly relevant in order to understand the logic of recent graphic designers working with logo design. He is described as 'The key figure in the corporate design movement' (Pracejus et al. 2006: 84) and as the first to bring minimalism to Madison Avenue (Meggs and Purvis 2016); the street in New York which has been associated with the American advertising industry since the 1920s.

Inspired by modernism and functionalism, Rand considered design as problem-solving motivated by art. To him graphic design was not good design if it was irrelevant (Rand 1947). He stated that even if a work coincides with the principles of form and is

perceived as beautiful, it is useless if it does not communicate. From the late 1930s until his death in 1996, he used the Bauhaus principles in his advertising and logo design and was among the first to initiate what was to become 'design consultancy' (Argent 1996). The American designer Louis Danziger has described Rand's influence as follows: 'He almost singlehandedly convinced business that design was an effective tool ... We went from being commercial artists to being graphic designers largely on his merits' (Heller 1997: 106–9).[2]

Rand designed logos for a variety of large American firms, such as ABC Television (1965), NEXT Computer (1986), and Enron (1986), to name but a few (cf. Meggs and Purvis 2016). However, he is best known for his collaboration with IBM and the IBM logo (1956). This logo was something new and unique compared to past trademark traditions and became a model for other organizations. It is frequently referred to in the literature on graphic design and corporate identity (cf. Lippincott and Margulies 1957; Olins 1989; Allen and Simmons 2006; Hollis 2016; Meggs and Purvis 2016; Foroudi et al., 2017). When Rand, in 1956 (the same year as he started teaching at Yale), was hired by IBM to improve the company's written materials, he drafted a report on the lack of consistency between IBM's various visual elements and in 1956 he published the first edition of 'The IBM Design Guide', which contained a number of rules and principles IBM designers should follow. Until 1990, he was responsible for designing packaging design as well as computer products for IBM (Allen and Simmons 2006). Thus, the visual identity systems that emerged in the 1950s went far beyond designing trademarks. It was about developing identity programs for a coherent and consistent visual expression, embracing all aspects of the company's visual communication. The Design Guide that Rand designed for IBM was otherwise one of the first in a series of such identity manuals, which today is considered a natural ingredient of the work on visual identities (Hollis 2016). Olins (1989) has described IBM's significance to the design of visual identities in the IT industry as follows: 'And yet today, with very few examples, it seems as though there is only one way for computers to look ... To be in computers you had to look like IBM' (Olins 1989: 67).

Despite the fact that this part of the professional project of graphic designers, in particular, was led by Rand, it was largely the demand side that laid the foundation for the emergence of a new supply side, professional logo designers, or as Allen and Simmons (2006) have put it, 'American corporations were largely responsible for establishing the professional role of corporate design ...' (Allen and Simmons 2006: 117).

In the wake of the Yale educational program and in parallel with Rand's groundbreaking logo design work, the modernist and functionalist design logic disseminated in the USA. First, during the 1960s, through educational programs established throughout the country (cf. Kelly 2001). In the mid-1990s, they were estimated to be about 2000 (Swanson 1994). Second, through the launching of design magazines that came to play a key role in defining the profession and its standards (Meggs and Purvis 2016), and through the associations for designers that were founded in all major cities in the USA (Hollis 2016). Third, through the Yale students that came to work with what was later denoted as corporate identity, despite initially not seeing the Yale program as preparing them for a career in the advertising industry (Kelly 2001). For them, graphic design was first and foremost about solving problems and about communication, and as something different from advertising. Fourth, the modernist and functionalist design logic spread through the advertising agencies, which increased rapidly in number.

One of the best known, agencies is Lippincott and Margulies, established in New York in 1946 and which in the late 1950s reoriented their business from product design to visual identity design. Moreover, Lippincott and Margulies are attributed to have invented the concept of 'corporate identity' (Balmer 1998; Cornelissen and Elving 2003), as a label of the way a company presents itself outwardly. In a short article published in 1957, they referred to this corporate look as follows: 'Little by little, came the concept of the "corporate look," by which we mean the *visual expression of the corporate personality* ... It is also referred to as "corporate identity" or "company appearance"' (Lippincott and Margulies 1957: 4). They further referred to corporate identity as a visual program that included everything from

packaging, advertisements, trademarks, posters, logos to the product itself, and the factory.

Another of the well-known advertising agencies at that time was Chermayeff and Geismar, established in 1957, also in New York, by the two former Yale students Ivan Chermayeff and Tom Geismar. Today, both of these agencies operate on several continents. Lippincott and Margulies established their London office as early as the 1970s, during a period that marked the beginning of the golden era of corporate identity consultancy, which lasted until about the year 2000 (Baker 2014). The 1980s was particularly significant as mass marketing dramatically increased the importance of logo design (Foroudi, Melewar and Gupta 2017). A third agency is Unimark International, which had a strong influence on American design, despite its relatively short lifespan. This Chicago-based agency was established in 1965 with the Yale student James K. Fogleman as one of the partners and the Bauhaus-designer Herbert Bayer as a board member but went bankrupt in 1977 (Conradi 2010; Meggs and Purvis 2016). For a while it was the world's largest advertising agency. According to Meggs and Purvis (2016), Unimark's philosophy lived on as their founders and many of the designers they trained, continued to follow this philosophy. Together with Chermayeff and Geismar, Unimark was a pioneer in situating logo design within the modernist approach (Meggs and Purvis 2016).

Chermayeff and Geismar designed a number of iconic logos. However, they are probably best known for the abstract logo they designed for The Chase Manhattan Bank in 1960 (cf. Meggs and Purvis 2016). This logo broke with the strong heraldic traditions of the banking sector and became a model for other banks and the financial sector in general, not only in the USA, but also in UK and other European countries (cf. Olins 1989; Meggs and Purvis 2016): 'The Chase Manhattan Bank corporate identification system became a prototype for the genre. Other financial institutions seriously evaluated their corporate image and the need for an effective visual identity' (Meggs and Purvis 2016: 449). According to Olins (1989), the majority of banks in the 1960s were recommended by their design consultants to discard eagles, lions, tigers, and the like in favor of what he has called 'American banking

symbolism' meaning more simple and abstract symbols (Olins 1989: 59). The same happened to the universities. Baruch (2006) claims that as early as the 1960s, the English universities that were then established chose simpler symbols and more modern letter types than the older ones, and some of the logos consisted only of the university's name or an abbreviation of the name. Baruch also points out that the new polytechnic universities that came into being in 1992 imitated the simple university logos of the 1960s—described as 'the lookalike higher education sector' (Allen and Simmons 2006: 120).

Rand's generation of graphic designers working with corporate identity, represents what Allen and Simmons (2006) denote as a design-driven approach. This means that it was the business leaders, who engaged talented designers to design the visual symbols of their companies. In the 1970s, however, the focus on marketing increased and the responsibility for the corporate visual identity was transferred to marketing departments (Hollis 2016). What followed was a strategy-driven approach (Allen and Simmons 2006). The logo was no longer just a corporate signature or an identity card but should serve as an expression of the company's strategy. The visual symbols thus became instruments for building brands and strengthening the reputation of organizations and their products.

The logo standard

Rand wrote several books on graphic design, including the logo's function and the requirements for a good logo. Because of his position and authoritative influence on the graphic design profession in general and those working with logo design in particular, we suggest that these requirements constitute a professional standard, which graphic designers should adhere to when designing organizational logos.

In a book published in 1947, which is described as a 'classic text on graphics, influential on successive generations of designers' (Argent 1996), we find a clear link between graphic design as problem-solving and communication on the one hand and advertising on the other, as well as the seed of what was to become an explicitly formulated logo standard, in a short article from 1991. Thus, the development of the logo standard extended over a long period of time and went on in parallel with the other processes

that helped to promote the professionalization project of graphic designers.

In his 1947 book, Rand stated that simple symbols are the best and that it is not the aesthetics of the symbol, but 'what it does', its effectiveness, which is important for advertising purposes: 'The fact that some of the best symbols are simplified images merely points to the effectiveness of simplicity but not to the meaning of the word per se. In essence, it is not what it looks like but what it does that defines a symbol' (Rand 1947: 13). In the same book, there is also a reference to the versatility or flexibility and duration of symbols.

Furthermore, Rand stated that the logo is rarely a description of a business. It acquires its meaning from the quality of what it identifies or symbolizes— a product or an organization. Only then can the logo function as planned (Rand 1993). He used the IBM logo as an illustrative example: 'There is nothing about the IBM symbol, . . ., that suggest computers, except what the viewer reads in it. Stripes are now associated with computers because the initials of a great computer company happen to be striped' (Rand 1993: 80). He also stated that the logos' appeal or effectiveness is about more than aesthetics. Authenticity is required should the logo be a real guarantee for the quality of a company's products and services.

In the 1991, article Rand summed up the requirements of the good or effective logo as the following: the effectiveness of a logo depends on it being distinct, visible, useful (easy to adapt), recognizable, universal, and timeless (see also Rand 1993: 58). Distinctiveness and visibility are important in order to be recognized and noticed. In that regard Rand claimed that the logo's 'effectiveness is largely dependent on its exposure, how often and how well it is used' (Rand 1993: 111). Useful symbols, in turn, refer to their functionality; that they should solve the client's problems (be noticed and remembered by specific target groups) and be readily adaptable to a variety of situations, be they new products and services or different presentation contexts. That a logo should be easy to remember implies simplicity: 'Simplicity implies not only aesthetic ideal, but a meaningful idea, either of content or form, that can be easily recalled' (Rand 1985: 34). Complex symbols are not functional because it takes time to

understand and remember them. Simple symbols imply abstract symbols. So do the requirement of timelessness and the fact that a logo should be universal. Abstract symbols are resistant to changes such as mergers, because they are more flexible than concrete symbols, and therefore more useful and durable. They will also make sense in different cultural contexts.

The supply side encounters the demand side: a report from two Norwegian universities

In our conversations with the graphic designers involved in the process of designing the visual identities of the two Norwegian universities, their description of good logos was largely consistent with the ideas of modernism that have been so prominent in shaping the work of the graphic design profession. So were their perception of what constitutes modern university logos. These were generally described as simple and abstract, often designed in letter format. As such, they should not refer to the traditional and sector specific university symbols. According to one of the designers, the logo should represent 'something new and different'. He believed in 'the impure, the transboundary and the visible violations', a view entirely in line with the ideas of modernism.

Regarding the specific logo standard, distinctness, visibility, and recognition were claimed by all our respondents to be the basic characteristics of good logos. Perhaps, not surprising, both universities initially had situated their work in a branding context. What is interesting, however, is their strong accentuation of good logo design as having nothing to do with aesthetics but with function. The logo should 'do a job' as they put it. Thus, the functional logic or the emphasis on applicability or usability was very clear. According to the graphic designers involved, the main purpose of the logos was to differentiate the university from other universities in order to ensure visibility. For example, one of the designers claimed that it was more important that the visual symbol was 'remembered rather than immediately understood'. Another pointed out that 'it is immaterial if you like it or not'. While a third argued that 'it is important to keep it away from taste, it is not about what is ugly or pretty, but about what is

functional' and that 'the external audiences need to quickly understand the symbol'.

The graphic designers were also concerned about keeping an authentic connection between the core of the organization and the visual symbol. For example, one claimed that a young university should not choose a symbol of classical columns. It would not be 'honest' as he put it, adding the following explanation: 'Columns as symbols are only authentic in Rome and Athens'. The same designer also emphasized that a logo should not signal a desired identity, but an actual one: 'the uniqueness comes from what the organization are, not from what it wants to be'. Another designer formulated the authentic connection between the organizational core and the symbol as follows: 'Good visuals are rather about substance than style . . . They must convey the story of the institution, not ours . . ., it's about finding the core of the university.' The identified logo standard was also reflected in a strong emphasis on the logos being durable and timeless, as well as simple, '. . . they should not be dated'.

A third designer claimed that logos should be 'eternal', whereas a fourth articulated the rationale for simple symbols as follows: 'The logo . . . has many layers and does many jobs at the same time . . . It is like a Swiss army knife.' To him, simplicity was about flexibility because of the many possible interpretations of the logo, and therefore about the likelihood of it being recognized by a wider audience, internally as well as externally.

The reason for changing the visual identities of the two universities was to ensure 'brand recognition' (design manual) and that the university should emerge as a 'unique brand being visible and easily recognizable externally' (home page). Therefore, the process started with exploring which organizational identities the visual symbols should communicate. Related to this, we also found strong similarities between the methods used by the two advertising agencies. The method was based on positioning maps, which consisted of four-to-four tables where the universities were positioned in relation to other universities, both nationally and internationally. The categories in the tables were also almost identical. For example, the positioning map used at one of the universities was based on a scale from 'traditional-modern' on one axis and 'university (like)-

differentiating' on the other, while the one used at the other university was based on a scale from 'modern-traditional' and 'academia-corporation (like)'.

While the first university mentioned above chose to position itself as a 'new and modern university', the other chose to position itself as a 'modern academic' institution. The meaning of 'modern' was not explicitly expressed. The positioning maps, however, indicate that 'modern' was associated with something cross-sectoral and not university-like. Some of the examples used were the Norwegian National Broadcasting Service (NRK) and one of the world's largest petroleum companies, the British–American BP. These examples were intended to convince the university staff that traditional institutions can renew their visual identities without 'losing their soul'. This became particularly important at one of the universities where the rector initially wanted to keep the existing logo. The external professionals succeeded in persuading the rector, supported by their internal colleagues. Both universities had departments that worked with external communication and designers on both sides of the table, which found each other in a common understanding that the abstract logo was best suited to ensure visibility and recognizability.

DISCUSSION

Our narrative of the emergence and development of the supply side of the logo design 'business' shows that the professional project of graphic designers was founded on a modernist logic, which originated in Europe and was exported to the USA in the wake of the World War II. This is a rather unusual travel route since it is often the USA that has been identified as the primary source of popular organizational ideas; the so-called Americanization (cf. Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002). It is however obvious that it was in the USA the logic gained its authoritative power and developed into a taken-for-granted perception of what characterizes good design. It is also obvious that graphic design early on was tightly infiltrated with high-status design disciplines as architecture. In the USA, the logic disseminated to the advertising industry, including the design of corporate logos, and later to the communications industry and the design of organizational logos in general.

Our narrative also shows that this professional project was propelled by all four strategies identified by Suddaby and Viale (2011). A new space or practice field was conquered and delineated as well as populated by logo design experts, a rule-like system, the logo standard, was created and disseminated, and the professional capital of graphic designers was reproduced through the growth of advertising agencies, that recruited from their own professional group, including those trained at Yale. However, the strategies were not enacted sequentially, as Suddaby and Viale (2011) claim, but in parallel, and thus interfered with and reinforced each other in a dynamic process.

Most importantly, however, our narrative shows that the strong institutionalization of the professional project of graphic designers is a result of the legitimacy of the identified institutional agents, individual as well as collective ones, which was based on culturally accepted perceptions of what characterizes good design in general, and the obligation to perform a professional activity in a specific way. The agents acted as cultural cognitive as well as normative agents. It also shows that several of these both created, disseminated, and applied the professional logic. As such, they took on the role of creators, carriers as well as clinical professionals (cf. Scott 2008a). Often, they took on several roles simultaneously, as actors from the educational field and the practice field partly overlapped and sometimes closely intertwined. We believe that this double agency and triple roles are of great importance to understand the strong institutionalization of the professional logic of graphic designers, and ultimately for the abstract logo style becoming a rationalized myth (cf. Meyer and Rowan 1977). We elaborate on this in the following.

The conquering of a new practice field, started with the educational program at Yale, which through the Dean and his hiring of earlier Bauhaus teachers, came to be based on the Bauhaus-thinking. When the program was renamed graphic design early on, the aspiring profession tore itself loose from and marked a (symbolic) distance to the art field. This again, opened the possibility of linking graphic design to new areas of use. Via Rand graphic design became associated with the advertising industry and greatly influenced the logic of this new area; the corporate identity field, where several of the Yale students came to work. Put differently, the Bauhaus school's modernist logic was institutionalized in this educational program, contributing to a new group of professionals dedicated to this logic, thus expanding the commercial practice field for designers.

Rand's professional authority was based on that he was considered the very creator of the American approach to modern graphic design and as such a specific professional logic; graphic design as a problem-solving activity and of the superiority of the abstract logo, which was eventually taken for granted. However, it was also based on that he linked the education at Yale with the upcoming market for logo design. As a border crosser, he mediated between different fields and as a cultural-cognitive and normative agents he not only created, but also disseminated and applied these ideas. As such he was activating the role as creator, carrier and as a clinical professional.

However, the partnership between Rand and IBM had an independent role in authorizing and disseminating the abstract logo from one company to the next through imitation, initially within the same industry, then across industries, nationally as well as internationally. The partnership was successful largely because IBM represented a modern and innovative industry, which had achieved such a high standing in the computer industry that its name became synonymous with this industry. The same goes for the logo that Chermayeff and Geismar designed for Manhattan Chase Bank.

The collaboration of famous graphic designers and advertising agencies with renowned companies, which led to the creation of breakthrough logos and best practices, legitimized the profession and made the abstract logo a generic visual expression that was deemed appropriate for all types of organizations. Included in this picture are the identity manuals that became commonplace to secure what Hollis (2016) has described as 'visual discipline' throughout the organization. These manuals contributed to the rapid dissemination and imitation of professional standards (Allen and Simmons 2006). The identity manuals may, however, also be understood as a way of protecting the boundaries of graphic designers' professional expertise.

When it comes to populating the new practice field with the new professional group of graphic designers, well-established agencies like Lippincott and Margulies that changed their approach to advertising, and the rapid growth of such agencies in the late 1950s and early 1960s, became crucial. The advertising agencies functioned as carriers of the logo-standard as well as clinicals because they followed this standard in their practical work. They also caused the profession to reproduce itself by increasingly hiring those who were educated in graphic design, which again delineated their professional turf against other more well-established areas for professional designers.

However, so did the Lippincott and Margulies' label, corporate identity. As creators of a label, they made it possible to identify who was inside and who was outside (cf. Lawrence 1999), and as such worthy of working with logo design. Labeling also suggests with what an idea 'is to be compared and define the perspective from which it will be viewed and evaluated' (Edelman 1964/1976: 131). In this case, the label made it evident that the unique competence of these agencies was expertise in how to visualize the corporate personality (cf. Lippincott and Margulies 1957). The new label also became a category that made it possible to diagnose companies; in order to be visible in a competitive market, the outward presentation of the corporation would matter. Finally, the new label made the idea of the importance of organizations' external presentation easy to disseminate (cf. Røvik 2002; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002). Regarding this it is worth noting that the corporate identity label later was integrated in the academic literature. The marketing literature refers to visual expressions as outward symbols, while the organizational literature tends to see them as reflecting the distinctive internal characteristics and core activities of the organization (Cornelissen and Elving 2003).

To sum up, in parallel with graphic designers conquering and delineating a new space for their expertise, populating this space with experts and at the same time reproducing themselves, they created and disseminated the logo standard, which has become the gold standard for the modern logo in general, including university logos. Our study of the process of designing new visual identities at two Norwegian universities indicates that the identified logo standard is highly institutionalized also among recent graphic designers. It further indicates that the most prominent rule is the functional argument for the abstract logo. The external and internal professionals found each other in this argument and stood out as a strong professional community that the university core staff found hard to challenge and resist. This illustrates the dynamics between the supply and demand side.

Otherwise, our study shows that graphic designers still use rhetoric as well as categorization and thus continue to reproduce themselves. The aforementioned positioning maps are powerful rhetorical tools and tools for categorizing different visual identities. Regarding this, the use of the term 'modern' appears as a strong rhetorical device, because it indicates an up to date, future-oriented, and innovative organization. This also applies to the use of the seductive concept evidence-based analysis, which gives the impression of using a scientific approach where advices are based on empirical knowledge and professional expertise.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our first contribution is that we have made visible the professional logic of a group that has come to play an important role in modern organizations.Furthermore the fact that the logo style has penetrated, the still so strongly institutionalized universities indicate that the generic design logic has become very powerful. Our study of the two Norwegian universities indicates that this logic also has become widespread, as we found that it dominated the process of adopting the logo style. Furthermore, our study of the two universities shows that the supply-side logic has been adopted by like-minded professionals within the universities. At one of the universities, the rectorate was loosely coupled to the design process and at the other, the professionals succeeded in convincing the rector of the functionality of abstract symbols. This implicates that their boundaries have become more porous, and their autonomy vis-à-vis the professionals more restricted. Put differently, the external and internal professionals together seem to have limited their autonomy (cf. Bromley and Meyer 2015).

The strong institutionalization of this professional logic is however a result of institutional agents having occupied the triple roles of creators, carriers as well as clinicals combined with a cultural-cognitive and a normative legitimacy bases. The fact that the professional logic they built on and disseminated already had a high status, has strengthened the institutionalization. We have also added empirical 'clout' to the work of Suddaby and Viale (2011) in that we have found that the strategies professionals use to promote their projects are parallel instead of sequential. This has been possible because we have followed the strategies of one and the same professional group in time and space.

Our second contribution is that we documented that there is a supplementary and partly alternative explanation to that of the demand-side approach to the question of why universities change their visual identities from emblem to logo style. By this we have illuminated the complex interplay between the demand and the supply side and how they have reinforced each other. We agree with Drori and her colleagues that the changing visual identities of universities are demand-driven, to some extent. However, if the abstract logo style had been the only 'logical' or natural visual symbols of a formal organizational identity, we would have expected that the professionals, the graphic designers, as well as other communication professionals—were carriers of such ideas on organizational identity. According to our study, this is not the case as it shows that the abstract logo style is primarily a result of a particular professional logic and a logo standard that has been developed and institutionalized over time. To support our conclusion, it is worth noting that the universities' transitions toward the logo style started well before the university reforms in the early 1980s and thus before the universities' movement toward the formal organizational identity (e.g. Krücken and Meier 2006). However, these reforms coincided in time with a strong growth in advertising agencies in both the USA and Europe, and with the profession's increased legitimacy (Foroudi et al. 2017). This in turn, may have made it both obvious and legitimate for universities to turn to advertising agencies when designing new visual identities. More recently the use of such agencies has been reinforced by the universities' incorporation into the brand society and by the fact that they have become increasingly like any other formal organization.

By reconstructing the emergence and institutionalization of the graphic design profession, we have also shown that there exists a common logic among designers in general, which has become relevant and valid for all recent design, from products, furniture, buildings to organizational logos. For further research, we recommend to follow-up on the dissemination of this professional logic, as it once again seems to conquer a novel space and fill it with experts—service designers referred to as experts in solving wicked problems (Cooper 2019). In the same way as Lippincott and Margulies in the 1950s reoriented their design activity toward the design of visual identities, recent advertising and communication companies seem to reorient or expand their design activity toward the design of services.

ENDNOTES

1. Today The Illinois Institute of Design. Due to economic problems the school was closed in 1938; however, reopened as The Chicago School of design in 1939.
2. Commercial art refers to art created for a commercial purpose, as advertising, while graphic design in this context goes far beyond advertising.

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