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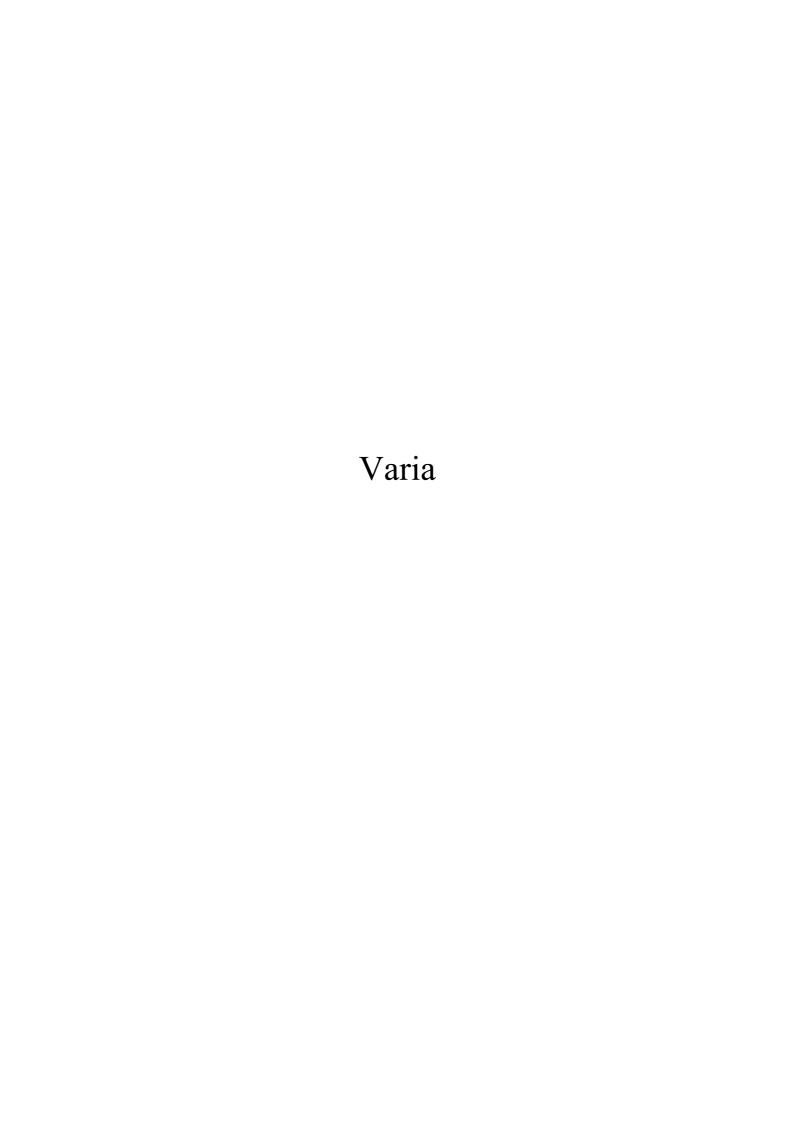
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The Design Turn for the Management of Public Relations: Emerging Challenges for Communication Professionals using Design Practices

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Abstract: Design as a profession differs from other communication practices in its sociopsychological and epistemological features. These features need to be considered to understand recent public relations strategies (Taylor & Botan, 2004). We analyze design practices and identify the five essential features which should be taken into account in the management of public relations: 1) the aspect of (necessarily) tolerated randomness; 2) the rejection of explicit methods and theory; 3) emotions as

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a constant, but implicit, background disposition of practices, and as a finality via the desirability paradigm; 4) a tendency towards auto-centered working perspectives; and 5) a large share of determined logics contrasting with creative sparks. We demonstrate that these features are implicit in the discourses and practices of designers, and we confront these features with our assumption that design practices are grounded in the *Dasein* (referring to Heidegger, 1963/1927) of designers. These features raise management challenges. The rationalization of design practices and the democratization of design tools make design more easily realizable by non-designers like communication professionals; consequently, other communication professionals are also pushed to consider these features of design practices. In the future, design and communication professionals will collaborate even further. The results of this research represent an ongoing challenge for socioeconomic actors to ensure the effective management of public relations.

Keywords: Public relations, communication, design, emotion, grounded cognition

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Le tournant du design pour la gestion des relations publiques : Nouveaux défis pour les professionnels de la communication utilisant des pratiques de design

Résumé : Le design en tant que profession se distingue des autres pratiques de communication par ses caractéristiques sociopsychologiques et épistémologiques. Ces caractéristiques doivent être prises en compte pour comprendre les stratégies récentes de management des relations publiques (Taylor & Botan, 2004). Nous analysons les pratiques de conception et identifions les cinq caractéristiques essentielles qui doivent être prises en compte dans la gestion des relations publiques : 1) la dimension aléatoire (nécessairement) toléré ; 2) le rejet des méthodes et des théories explicites ; 3) les émotions comme préoccupation constante, mais implicite, dans les pratiques, et comme finalité via le paradigme de désirabilité ; 4) une tendance à des pratiques de travail du designer ego-centrées ; et 5) une grande part de logiques déterminées contrastant avec les étincelles créatives. Nous démontrons que ces caractéristiques sont implicites dans les discours et les pratiques des designers, et nous les confrontons à notre hypothèse selon laquelle les pratiques de design sont fondées sur le *Dasein* (en référence à Heidegger, 1963/1927) des designers. Ces caractéristiques soulèvent des défis de management des projets. La rationalisation des pratiques de design et la démocratisation des outils de design rendent le design plus facilement réalisable par des non-designers comme les professionnels de la communication ; par conséquent, les autres professionnels de la communication sont également poussés à considérer ces caractéristiques des pratiques de design. À l'avenir, les professionnels du design et de la communication devront collaborer davantage. Les résultats de cette recherche représentent un défi permanent pour les

acteurs socio-économiques afin d'assurer un management effectif des relations publiques.

Mots-clés : Relations publiques, communication, conception, émotion, cognition ancrée

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Introduction: Understanding the Rising Socioeconomic Importance of Design Practices

Communication professionals see themselves as confronted with the rising importance of design practices for constructing and maintaining public relations. In this paper, we present the historical dynamics that we identify behind this: firstly, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are blending with the cultural industries (Miège, 2017; 2020). Secondly, audiovisual artefacts and the Internet of Things (IoT) are now omnipresent in private, professional, and public life (Vorderer, 2015). And thirdly, the saturation of modern Western economies pushes actors to search for means to differentiate themselves and gain competitive advantages. These dynamics are not independent; instead, they are closely related, and are located in the broader dynamic of modernity that is the convergence of science, industry, and technology (Habermas, 1974; 2013). This alliance promotes a technoscientific rationality – one that guides contemporary design practices in industrial contexts.

The 20th century, and especially its end, was marked by the rising socioeconomic importance of information, communication, and knowledge (Weller, 2007; Mattelart, 2009; 2011; Gleick, 2011; Miège, 2020).[1] This was an evolution that shaped the mechanisms of the so called *"Attention Economy"* (Franck, 1998; Davenport & Beck, 2001; Citton, 2014). The omnipresence of ICT and cultural artefacts created a complex infocommunicational environment – a state that has been referred to as *"Permanently Online, Permanently Connected (POPC)"* (Vorderer, 2015). This means that the perception of industrially designed communication is an omnipresent and permanent state in modern societies. Automated communication necessitates a rationalized kind of design that allows the anticipation, shaping, and assurance of successful communication between actors. In such a complex info-communicational environment, design has become vital in attracting attention, differentiating messages, defining identities, addressing emotions, and *"re-enchanting"* communication (Stiegler, 2014/2008) – in short, rationalized design is an important tool in the effective construction of public relations.

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[1] See the rising share of the tertiary sector in Western economies (Aghion & Durlauf, 2014) – a trend that has led to the conceptualization of Western societies as: *Information Society, Communication Society, Network Society,* etc. (Mattelart, 2009; Redwitz, 2010).

Motivated by these dynamics, design has evolved as a profession, becoming an educational branch and finally a research discipline of its own (Petit, 2017). Nowadays, design as a research discipline has to be divided into research about, via, or for design. More specifically, this means that design is referred to as a research object (research *about* design), as a method (research *via* design) or as the final research goal (research *for* design). In this article we will analyze design as a research object.

Scientific modeling of practices has moved away from Stimulus-Response approaches (Mattelart & Mattelart, 2002). The evolution of the User-Centered Turn has integrated recent research that considers the anthropological complexity of users, their emotions, and in a broader sense, affects,[2] as a relevant part of embodied communication (Martin-Juchat, 2008; Norman, 2004, 2013/1988; Walter, 2019/2011). Design practices have shown an extraordinary capacity to conditionate the affective dimension of communication (Picard, 1997; Norman, 2004; Martin-Juchat & Marynower, 2008; Koskinen et al., 2011; Walter, 2019/2011).

The saturation and tertiarization of modern, Western markets represent the most fundamental dynamic that we identify behind the increasing importance of design. In saturated markets, design represents the potential of communicational differentiation that creates value, and hence economic advantages. These dynamics cause the rising presence of communicational artefacts in private, professional, and public life.[3] Communicational artefacts are (either implicitly or explicitly) the results of design processes. Consequently, the characteristics of these processes affect private, professional, and public life, motivating us to analyze the daily practices of designers in more detail. Design practices are becoming more and more intertwined with those of other communication professionals. As Miège (2017, p. 30) points out, a modern designer does not work in isolation alone in their room,[4] but is instead integrated in rationalized workflows, which are constantly in exchange with other communication professionals.

Based on these dynamics, we will demonstrate that design practices challenge communication professionals in an implicit way. We will identify the consequences for public relations managers confronted with the need to combine design and communication skills. To analyze design practices, we apply a theoretical framework

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[2] Through an understanding of *affects* as a term encompassing emotions, feelings, and moods, we mainly address *affects* in the following sections. Our research takes into account the joint impact of affective experiences. Hence, we talk about *affects* instead of emotions because our purpose is not to differentiate them. See Martin-Juchat (2008) for further details.

[3] See Trentmann (2016) for the history of industrialized products, and Mattelart (2009; 2011) for the history of ICT.

[4] Exceptions include design practices that are closer to the definition of "design d'auteur" (Zacklad, 2017). Examples are the design studios of Eike König (www.hort.org.uk) or Stefan Sagmeister (www.sagmeisterwalsh.com). Such design practices are employed for their proper communicational style and can be compared to art. They are rare cases among the majority of industrialized design professionals.

which helps us to demonstrate that the cognitive processes of design practitioners are grounded in their physiological structure (Niedenthal, 2007). The cognitive, physiological, and affective spheres can be considered as interwoven, which explains our focus on the role of affects and their corporality in the daily practices of designers. We aim to identify their implicit role in affecting communication and public relations in the future.

Our research is guided by two hypotheses. As has been outlined, design skills and knowledge are constituent parts of public relations. They show the potential to address the pragmatic, ontological, prescriptive, and especially the affective dimension of communication. We hypothesize that design addresses these dimensions in a tacit manner (hypothesis 1).[5] Following our theoretical perspective, we assume design practices to be grounded in the *Dasein*[6] of the designer (hypothesis 2).[7] We suppose that design and communication professionals share these features to some degree, but that they show different temporal peculiarities. In the following sections, we examine daily design practices and point out their most striking features in order to contrast them with those of other communication professionals.

2. Mixed-Method: Interviews, Online Survey and Participative Observations

We will draw a picture of design practices based on the following three sources. Firstly, we used semi-structured interviews ($N = 21$) conducted for 55 minutes each on average, with designers from France, Germany, Norway, and the United States. Secondly, these interviews were complemented by an online survey ($N = 22$) that took respondents ten to 15 minutes and was shared with designers based in France and Germany. Thirdly, we matched these insights with our own design experience as a User Interface (UI) designer in the French innovation agency IXIADE.[8] The online

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[5] The tacit dimension, in the terms of Polanyi (2009/1966), is defined by the perspective that "we can know more than we can tell" (p. 4).

[6] We understand *Dasein* according to Heidegger (1963/1927) as the holistic existence of the designer, including all its physiological, affective, cognitive, social, and temporal dimensions. Heidegger understands *Dasein* as processual – therefore, we consider the designer not only as a combination of the mentioned dimensions, but as its capacity to embody past and future: "Dasein *is* its past in its way of its being, which, crudely put, *happens* in each case from its future." Our translation. Original citation: "Das Dasein *ist* seine Vergangenheit in der Weise *seines* Seins, das, roh gesagt, jeweils aus seiner Zukunft her *geschieht*" (Heidegger, 1963/1927, p. 20).

[7] Following the grounding of knowledge and skill in the human body (Niedenthal, 2007; Glenberg, 2010; Martin-Juchat, 2008; 2020) – or as we propose to label it, as grounded in the designers' *Dasein*.

[8] The UI-Design practice is based on a Ph.D. thesis realized as a CIFRE convention at the Grenoble based innovation agency IXIADE. IXIADE's approach is human-centered and led by the "User Experience at the Heart of Innovation" (www.ixiade.com/?lang=en). Recently, IXIADE was integrated into the ABSISKEY agency (www.absiskey.com). For more details about the CIFRE convention, see: https://rio.jrc.ec.europa.eu/library/industrial-contracts-training-through-research-cifre-convention

survey was based on eight key questions that summarized the guide with which we conducted the semi-structured interviews.

The average age of the surveyed designers was 38.5 years (in some cases, the age was not stated, in which case we estimated it). From the total of 43 consulted designers, 14 worked as freelancers, 13 worked in small agencies with two to ten employees, six in agencies with between 10 and 100 employees, and ten worked in bigger firms with more than 100 employees.[9] To gain a broad picture of design practices, we addressed a diverse range of designers.[10] The variety of their profiles allowed us to identify fundamental principles of design practices that are not limited to one design branch. We asked about their daily working routines, the most common course of their projects, their sources of inspiration, their judgment of design quality, their methods, the role of creativity in their daily work, and the link between form and function. We further asked them about their perceptions of the characteristics between different ICT, as well as the perceived role of affects and the human body in their daily practices.

With regard to our first hypothesis, we observed how the affective dimension of communication is operationalized in practice (e.g., via specific methods). To address the second hypothesis, we analyzed the role of affects and the human body in design practices. Furthermore, we identified which elements, situations, or inspirations were responsible for the course taken by a design project. Based on this mixed methodology, a detailed picture of design practices has been obtained.

3. Results: Design Practices

Most of our respondents worked closely together with multiple other communication professionals, either in interdisciplinary teams in companies and agencies, or when freelancing. In all cases, design practices were strongly linked to other communication disciplines. Age, gender, and nationality were less influential variables to our research questions than personality, educational background, experience, and the individual's position in the company. The interviews showed that the role of affects and the human body were more explicitly present for those in higher positions in a company hierarchy (e.g., Professor of Interior Design, Head of Color-and-Trim Design, or Head of Agency).

The most prominent sources of inspiration were the social context, daily life and its serendipities, the project content itself, its technological and historical context, meetings with the client, and selective individual experiences. To synthesize these

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[9] In that regard, the working situation of the questioned designers is equivalent to the distribution presented by Dribble (2019). Their study is based on 17,107 consulted designers.

[10] To mention just a few examples, their official profiles were: Communication Designer, Web Designer, Product Designer, UI-Designer, UX-Designer, Stage Designer, Animation Designer, Creative Director, Eco-Designer, Head of Color-and-Trim Design, Professor of Interior Design, and Professor of Corporate Identity.

influencing inputs, we found that designs were constituted by the respective project characteristics, the temporary, material, and monetary limitations of the project, the sociopsychological dynamics of the involved team, and to a certain level by randomness. This unexplainable part played by randomness seems to have a more important role than companies themselves would like to suggest, given their objective of increasing productivity via understanding, rationalizing, and controlling all influential elements. We identified the aspect of randomness as a notable feature of design practices. Communication professionals, as further rationalized, seemed to show this feature to a lesser degree.

The majority of designers stated that they did not apply formal structured methods in their daily working practices (see Appendix: Quote A). The indicated quote explained that these methods are not regarded as necessary, and are replaced by affects. Thus, daily working practices are guided by intuition and experience. The application of methods was mostly selective; the surveyed designers listed methods which were also used by other communication professionals. No surveyed designer mentioned using methods that allowed them to verify perceptions of their final designs. The variety of identified design practices can be described as ranging from more improvised or intuitive towards more structured, rigid, and rationalized ones. Even more striking than the rejection of formal structured methods was the rejection of scientific theory. None of the surveyed designers claimed the notable impact of any theory on their daily working practices. This is especially striking given the mounting academic interest in theorizing design. This gave rise to the question of whether the mounting academic production of design theories could be found in the practices of designers at all – which seems not to be the case. Mostly, we observed an absence, an ignorance, or even an aversion towards, theory. Hence, the second feature is the dislike of structured methods and theory in favor of intuition and creativity.

When asking designers about the link between design and affects, the two were closely associated (see Appendix: Quote B). The indicated quote represents a key tendency – of taking the affective dimension of a design as an indicator of its quality. It was considered to be an objective for a design to evoke affects, which are taken to represent the desirability paradigm. The quote shows further that defining design quality appeared to be a difficult task for the surveyed designers, who often emphasized its subjective dimension. In some cases, design and affects were even seen as tautological. On the other hand, we observed designers who aim to strictly separate design and affects. Nonetheless, the main tendency was to perceive affects as an inherent part of the communicational performance of design. Given that affects were seen as such an important dimension of design, we asked whether designers explicitly applied methods to assure the impact of affects on their design practices, and we did not find this to be the case. The vast majority of designers said that they do not apply methods that specifically aim to take affects and their communication effects into account; instead, affects were mostly taken into account in an implicit way. They were also implicit in the relation between the designers and their designs. The *Dasein* of the designer is enough to express affects by themselves. The majority

of the surveyed designers worked until the results felt right. This represents the third feature: that design and affects are taken as interwoven, and sometimes even as tautological, but no structured methods are applied to explicitly take them into account.

Furthermore, we asked about the role of the user in design practices. The perspectives that we identified ranged from user-centered (Appendix: Quote C) to auto-centered (see Appendix: Quote D) ones. The first quote indicates that the designers' affects and opinions may not represent the user. In extreme cases, even market research in general was rejected as a waste of time (see Appendix: Quote E). It was instead considered the task of the designer to transcend the feedback of the user. Some designers worked by listening to the user, and attributing an essential value to what they heard. In contrast, other designers preferred not to listen to users, stating that it was up to them to come up with new insights and ideas. The majority of designers focused on their proper perception of their work, while only a few designers focused on user feedback. This tendency towards auto-centered working perspectives is the fourth feature that we identified here. However, the outlined quotes C & D show extreme positions; several designers expressed themselves more moderately.

We observed aspects of design practices that follow causal logics, defined by the characteristics of the project and which do not leave space for interpretation or creativity. But, in parallel to these determined logics exists a creative dimension: moments of sparking ideas, creativity, and randomness. Even as an industrialized profession, design does not entirely follow if-A-then-B logics. The reality of each design depends on the specific project characteristics, the sociopsychological dynamics of the involved team, the specific context, and the afore mentioned randomness. This represents the fifth elementary feature of design practices: design takes place in a field of tensions between determined logics and creative sparks. Determined logics comprise the biggest share, and creative sparks represent punctual interventions.[11]

To conclude, we identified five features of design practices that differentiate designers from other communication professionals. Firstly, a necessarily tolerated randomness. Secondly, a dislike of structured methods and theory to prioritise intuition and creativity. Thirdly, the close association of design and affects without notable approaches to take affects or their specific communicational functions explicitly into account. Fourthly, a tendency towards auto-centered working attitudes following the underlying assumption that the designer's *Dasein* is enough to understand the user. And fifthly, a large share of determined logics contrasting with creativity and randomness. This fifth feature (the large share of determined logics) stands in contrast to the first (the aspect of randomness). This creates a field of

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[11] Again, we speak of the identified major tendency and of design branches in industrialized contexts. This does not address the practices of signature designers or "design d'auteur" (following the definition of Zacklad, 2017).

tensions in which we locate design as a profession. In the following sections, we further discuss these features.

4. Discussion

a. *Necessarily tolerated randomness*

The key elements that play a role during design projects (e.g. project characteristics, budget, and material constraints, and the sociopsychological dynamics involved) still cannot entirely explain design outcomes, due to the residual randomness of design outcomes relating to the concept of "aura" described by Benjamin (2015/1936), which relates to design as applied art. Even as a rationalized profession in industrial contexts, design integrates an artistic dimension. Companies have a motivation to reduce uncertainty via design methods that are meant to assure outcomes and make design as precisely manageable as possible. The residual randomness of outcomes is necessarily tolerated. Therefore, we locate design in the field of tensions between artistic expressions and their applications in industrial contexts.

b. *Rejection of method and theory*

As has been outlined, the goal of design methods is to assure outcomes and make design plannable for industrialized contexts. The most prominent example is Design Thinking, a method widely popularized by Stanford, IDEO, the Hasso-Plattner-Institute, and the British Design Council since the 1970s. Design methods have become known for their value in industrial contexts. Despite this, when observing the actual daily practices of designers, we found an absence of explicit methods. The majority of the consulted designers rarely applied formally structured methods or scientific theories. The daily working practices in our sample were guided instead by intuition and experience. This aspect of design practice is closely related to Polanyi's (2009/1966) "tacit dimension", Gentes's (2017) "projective abduction", and Cross's (2006) "designerly ways of knowing". The designers in our sample worked mainly guided by tacit knowledge until the results felt right. Such tacit knowledge represents a subjective and affective phenomenon. Compared with other communication professionals, the apparent dislike of methods and theory was a notable feature. Other communication professionals tend to apply more structure to their routines and to show a stronger rationalization of their practices. While our survey still indicates a rationalization of practices in design, as with other communication professionals, it appears less dominant. This feature of design practices indicates that design has its own epistemology, which differs from that of other communication professions. Regarding ongoing collaboration between designers and communication professionals, we anticipate different options: design takes on the approaches of communication professionals, communication professionals adapt the approaches of design practices, or their collaboration results in a new approach to design-communication practices. The last option seems the most likely and pragmatic to us.

Furthermore, we identified a parallel between the role of design professionals today and communication professionals at the end of the last century in the sense that both were identified for their potential in creating economic value through constructing and maintaining public relations. At the same time, communication professionals are to a large extent legitimized in industrial contexts, which is a difference with modern design professionals since they are still partly in a demand of legitimization. We see historical dynamics indicating that this is about to change. Therefore, we identify a temporary difference in legitimization between design and communication professionals at present. The ongoing collaboration of design and communication practices is accelerating the acceptance of design features. This is one of the main results of this article. More research is needed to analyze this further. Other communication professionals are aware of the potential of design for public relations, creating a tolerance towards the features of design. We can observe this tendency since the User-Centered Turn at the end of the last century, which underlines the importance of design and affects with respect to successful product development and innovation practices (Norman, 2004; 2013/1988).

c. Affects as a constant but implicit background disposition

Designers perceive affects as an inherent part of design without explicating their role in communication. Often, the affective dimension of design is even used as an indicator of its quality and as an objective via the desirability paradigm. With such importance associated to affects, we expected to find explicit methods assuring the impact of affects on design practices, but this was not the case. Instead, affects are taken into account implicitly, firstly via qualitative approaches (e.g. user interviews), and secondly as constant background noise guiding design practices. Designers work in a continuous but implicit dialogue between the design and their affective reactions to it.

The perspective of Embodiment (Niedenthal, 2007) claims that psychological processes are grounded in the physiological structure of an individual. In the light of this perspective, we conjecture that the knowledge and skill of designers are grounded in their entire being.[12] However, when asked about the role of the human body in their work,[13] designers attributed little importance to it with respect to their practices (see Appendix: Quote F). The few designers who did so (see Appendix: Quote G)

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[12] The idea of Embodiment equals "*Enactivism*" (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 2016/1991) and the "*corps affectif*" (Martin-Juchat, 2008), indicating the imbrication of the human body, cognition, and affects. Therefore, questioning the role of affects necessarily includes questioning the human body – affects and cognition as "*grounded*" (Barsalou, 2008) in the human body.

[13] In order to be comprehensible, we used the term the *human body* instead of *Dasein* in the professional interviews. We did not limit the *Embodiment* of knowledge and skill to "body morphology, sensory systems, motor systems" (Glenberg, 2010), "bodily states, and situated action" (Barsalou, 2008), or "facial expressions, … bodily expression, … posture" (Niedenthal, 2007), but we understand it as grounded in the entire *Dasein* of a designer. We chose the term of *Embodied in his Being* to strengthen this in the following sections.

specialized in Interior Design, Product Design and in Color-and-Trim and Design, all of which are design branches in which attributing importance to the human body is relatively obvious.[14] Designers who work on a merely visual level were rather puzzled by the question, and Quote F visualizes this in a radical manner. More often, a role was attributed to the body as being responsible for perception via the five senses and linked to affective experiences (see Appendix: Quote H). Linking the body and design via the human senses was a common means of association. The human body was perceived partly as a kind of interface between a design and the brain.[15]

Firstly, following Dourish (2001; 2017), ICT have to be seen as grounded in their material conditions. Secondly, according to Quinton (2002), design practices ought to be understood as a semiotic dialogue between the designer and the physicality of their tools. And thirdly, following Embodiment (Glenberg, 2010), a designer's cognition can be understood as being grounded in their body – or even in their entire *Dasein* (Heidegger, 1963/1927). These three approaches have in common the understanding of a phenomenon via its materiality. Linking this to our research question means grounding public relations in the physical materiality of the participating actors, i.e., the people involved and the tools they apply. According to the Actor-Network-Theory (Latour, 2005; Bencherki, 2016), the materialities involved can be interpreted as actors that constitute a design result and therefore shape public relations. In a design project, the participating communication professionals function as design actors, along with the physical materiality of the utilized ICT (McMaster & Wastell, 2005). This approach can be applied to other communication and PR professionals too, but is more important to design practices since they represent activities based on creativity. The materialities involved impact outcomes and are therefore essential to the achievements of the discipline. The ongoing collaboration in design and communication practices indicates a substantial awareness on the part of communication professionals regarding the materialities involved.

d. Tendency towards auto-centered perspectives

We also outlined a distinction between auto-centered and user-centered working perspectives. In the first case, designers take themselves as archetypical users, assuming that their perceptions and affective reactions are representative of the targeted customers or users. They largely ignore user research in the name of creativity and their proper ingenuity. It is up to the designer to find ideas, solutions, and innovations. The latter case can be schematized as focused on the user and as perceiving the essential value of their work via user research. It follows an approach that is often labeled "*You're not the user*", which claims that designers' perceptions are not representative of target groups and therefore lead to less adapted results.

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[14] Interior Design as a discipline is close to architecture; Product Design has its inherent ergonomic dimension, and Color-and-Trim is a design discipline that deals with the look and feel of materials and surfaces – so by definition, these are more physical design branches.

[15] The underlying conceptions often resembled Cartesian dualisms.

Even though we observed positions across this spectrum, we saw a tendency towards auto-centered perspectives. Other communication professionals generally show a higher application of user-centered approaches, indicating motivational differences between designers and other communication professionals. We observed enthusiasm for aesthetics, functionality, and habitability as motivations.[16] This presents design as a profession with a relatively intimate personal attachment, which is grounded in the *Dasein* of the designer.

e. Determined logics contrasting with creative sparks

In contrast to the described feature of randomness, we observed a high share of determined logics in design practices. A large part of these is guided by causal necessities, while moments of creativity seem relatively rare.[17] Design can be localized in the tensions between these opposing features: on the one hand are the factors of human ingenuity, creativity, and randomness,[18] and on the other hand, rationalized logics that can be seen as realized by algorithms and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The latter are easily realizable by other professionals, as is already the case. Design is already partly done not by designers but by other communication professionals: Strategists, Communication Officers, Project Managers, engineers, etc. We propose to label this situation: *"Distributed Design Practices"*.[19] The distribution of design practices is facilitated by the rationalization of design, and especially by the democratization of design tools.[20] We see an important role of these practices in the aesthetization of private, professional, and public life in modern, Western societies (Michaud, 2011/2003).

The increasing democratization of design tools is allowing ever-easier access to becoming a designer. These tools make it relatively simple to achieve a high formal quality and to execute the majority of design tasks. Thereby, designers have become more easily replaceable. The creative or genuine part of this profession seems often relatively small. Therefore, as we have outlined, design can be located in the field of tensions between artistic expressions and their rationalized application in industrial contexts. The rationalization of practices allied to the democratization of tools make design easily integrable by communication and PR professionals. Communication professionals have already taken over design practices in order to exploit their socioeconomic potential. This leads to the question of whether design as a profession will disappear, having been absorbed by other communication professionals. This scenario is perhaps unlikely, because design serves as a modern justification of

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[16] Just as Adorno, 1992/1973 (p. 21) has already proclaimed that a motivation behind artistic expressions is the amelioration of the habitability of the world.

[17] Depending on the profile of each designer, the specific project and its context.

[18] Which are, no matter how small their share, inherent characteristics of design practices.

[19] Similar to the logic of "Distributed Cognition" described by Hutchins (1995).

[20] See the easy access – in terms of price and necessary learning – of the Adobe Creative Suite, which opens up unlimited horizons in textual, auditive, visual, and audiovisual modeling.

industrial processes. Communication professionals have an interest in applying design as a modern justification of their PR activities. More precisely, the design turn in relation to the management of public relations exploits design for the sociopsychological and epistemological features that we have outlined in this article. These features are not explicitly perceived as such by designers, as we demonstrated via our mixed methods research. They are features that explain the interest of communication professionals in design, without playing an explicit role in designers' daily routines.

Conclusion

The design and communication professionals play an essential role in the Return of Investments (ROI) in public relations. The socioeconomic importance of design is rising, and companies have to take it into account in order to effectively manage their public relations. We situated this phenomenon in its historic dynamics[21] before analyzing today's design practices in order to contrast them with those of the other communication professionals. Together, they constitute contemporary marketing, branding, and public relations management. Design as a profession includes sociopsychological and epistemological features that are, to some degree, shared by other communication professionals, but which notably differ in their temporal justifications – design practices, even though they are rising in socioeconomic importance, still seem less integrated in industrial contexts compared to other communication professionals. This appears to be a temporal difference, which we expect to shrink in the years to come. We identified an ongoing collaboration between design and communication professionals that shapes public relations.

After analyzing design practices, we described the following five features: 1) (necessarily) tolerated randomness; 2) a rejection of explicit method and theory; 3) affects as a finality, and as a constant, implicit, background disposition; 4) a tendency towards auto-centered working perspectives; and 5) a large share of determined logics contrasting with creative sparks. Synthesizing these features, we located design in a field of tensions between artistic expressions and their industrial applications. This differentiates design from other communication professionals. Nevertheless, designers and other communication professionals are working more and more closely together in order to construct and maintain public relations, meaning that linked professionals are also impacted by the described design features.

The rationalization of design practices and the democratization of design tools make design easily accessible to other communication professionals. A large share of design practices can be realized by other professionals, a trend which is already observable today. The aspects of design practices that are most easily transferable to

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[21] Firstly, the blending of ICT and the cultural industries; secondly, the omnipresence of audiovisual artefacts and IoT in private, professional, and public life; and thirdly, the saturation and tertiarization of modern, Western markets.

other professionals or AI[22] most notably include its determined logics, which represent a large share of design practices. The relatively smaller other aspects are human ingenuity, creativity, and randomness. These features seem to be closely linked to the affective and tacit dialogue between a designer and their work. Following an Embodiment (Niedenthal, 2007) perspective, creativity can be understood as grounded in the human body, and design practices as grounded in the *Dasein* of the designer. However, this perception is not shared by designers, who attribute little importance to the human body despite its ergonomic means or responsibility for human perception via the five senses. A similar phenomenon accounts for the role of affects, which are closely associated with design, but no structured methods are applied to explicitly take them into account. Instead, they play a role as an implicit background disposition during design practices.[23] Designers work in a constant dialogue with their affects – a situation which consequently represents a dialogue with their corporality. This is not an explicit but an implicit reality of design practices. This feature differentiates design from other professions, and is more difficult to rationalize or transfer to other agents. Initially, we hypothesized design in the terms of Heidegger (1963/1927), as grounded in the *Dasein* of the designer. This is the case in an implicit manner, but not an explicit one. The design turn in the management of public relations is marked by the distribution of design practices between a variety of actors (designers and other communication professionals), and the materialities involved. Design serves as a modern justification for public relation practices, in that communication professionals use design for its socioeconomic potential, constituted via its sociopsychological and epistemological features in an implicit manner.

We understand the future of public relations to be marked by an ongoing collaboration between design and communication professionals. Meanwhile, socioeconomic actors must take the design features highlighted here into account in order to effectively manage these new relationships.

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[22] Currently, AI is rapidly advancing in the field of creativity (Mazzone & Elgammal, 2019). Prospectively, we expect this trend to impact design further.

[23] Following this logic, affects and the human body, play a constituting role for other communication professionals as well. But design professionals seem to represent a particular relation to affects and the human body – notably via the feature of creativity, randomness, and auto-centered working methods, that differs from other communication professionals.

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Appendices: Designer Quotes

Quote A, Game Designer) "Mhh … (very long pause) … Well I don't have like methods. I'm not checking it. I'm not checking it for the reason that I'm quite confident in seeing it somehow. … Or it's just you know when you do something that in yourself brings up a certain feel towards the artwork then there's a truth to that."

Quote B, Head of User Lab) "Design is emotion. Because you see something and it does something with you by the looks. And yeah everyone reacts differently towards it but yeah the feeling you create from the looks. Emotions, you actually communicate through the graphic design, through the product design. Because if you talk about design it's always already the objectives you use they are emotional. If you say like: "Well, is it serious?" That is basically an emotion. "Is it playful? Is it fun? Is it a happy design?" you know. Emotions. Yeah that's why it's so hard. Because it's not objective. That's the downfall of design that you cannot measure design as it is linked to emotions. Everyone has a different take on them. That's why everyone thinks: "Well, I can also design" Every manager thinks he can judge design and say what's good or right because it's about emotions and it's not any data scale that you can say: "Oh yeah this design is good". Because it is emotional and highly subjective."

Quote C, Web Designer) "... I read somewhere: "You are not the user". And in fact, when

talking about UX, it's ... I think it's a very important sentence, because we know it, but we don't necessarily keep it in mind ... for example, many times, when we create persons or things ... you know what it is? ... to represent the user ... while we sometimes create, we forget a little bit about the real user. Either because we don't know him or her well enough, or we forget him or her because time is running out. And ... we easily fall into stereotypes, for exemple we say: "Yes, yes, but Nathan he wants that! ». But maybe Nathant doesn't, we don't know if he wants that. Often, for example, when we design together, we discuss among ourselves and we don't agree on the function and we will use this persona or ourselves to say: "But, yes, if that's what it takes". Because that's what he wants. And the other one says: "But no, I don't agree". "And in fact all this is made up. We don't know anything about it. In fact, we have to forget that the real user is neither us, nor a fictitious persona that we have created ... but we must not forget to ask the real users, because ... we project things on them, and we easily fall into stereotypes ... that it is important to meet real users, during the beginning and even to meet them perhaps several times to test ... to make iterations."

Quote D, Product Designer) "But I do stuff, if I like it, there's a good chance that users will like it. Because I'm an average guy, so, as I'm quite average in everything, so I... there you go... No, I'm exaggerating, I'm joking a bit, but it's true that I rely a lot on my own uh... my own feelings to know if a shape will please users."

Quote E, Professor of Communication Design & Strategy) "The target group never knows what it wants. They simply don't know what they want. So in other words: I'm clearly always on the side of supply marketing and I think: Don't listen to people. Yes? It's also a complete waste of time - market research is a complete waste of time from my point of view. Surveys, consumer surveys, focus group tests."

Quote F, Creative Director) "The role of the human body? No role. I think. I don't see what role that could play. Or are you somehow referring to sex sells? (Laughter)."

Quote G, Head of Color-and-Trim) "So that means the human body always plays a big role, of course. When it comes to things I can touch - materiality, haptics naturally play a huge role. Yes, and I would say the overestimation of the visual in general on this planet, or the preference for the visual over the written and the linguistic in particular. That's a truism. But it is also clear that the reason for this is laziness of thought. Yes?"

Quote H, Strategy Director) "So to the extent that brands today are of course increasingly trying to design communicative spaces of experience. And mhh ... and communication doesn't just refer to ... two-dimensional channels alone, it is of course something that we have to take into account or that we have to have in mind at least on its sensual levels mhh … The human body does not play such an explicit role for us, but I think it is more the different human senses that we can address."