

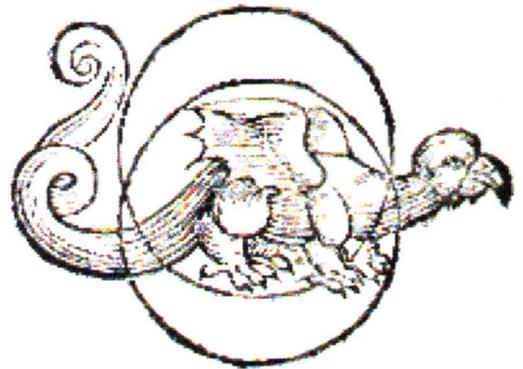
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# **SYMBOLISM** - Representation, Meaning and Apprehension

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*A Research Thesis submitted for the fulfillment of the Master of Design Degree*

*The Moon Dragon 1510*  
A serpent with a hawk's head situated between the circles of air and fire  
and symbolically representing the Greek capital letter theta.  
Agrippa of Nettesheim



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## **ABSTRACT**

What are symbols and how are they, as well as icons, perceived and used in New Zealand design? The key theme behind this study is to investigate whether icons and symbols, as logos, can be said to ideally represent the core concept of an organisation or company. It is suggested by semioticians, such as Pierce and Barthes, that the reading and apprehension of symbols is bound by social convention and cultural custom. Their meaning is apprehended through the configuration, or syntax, of design elements, or semes, such as colour, shape, line, and axial construction, and through situational context. In design praxis these graphic conventions reinforce the connection of the symbol with its referent, or object, and in semantic terms are described as imputed qualities. This definition questions the accepted practice in which the symbol/logo is designed to ideally represent the summative functions and core concepts of an organisation or company in an immediately recognisable way.

Historically, symbols have been used to structurally codify a set of beliefs, or social practices, or customs. This practice has identified them as marks, or brands, of identity which "ideally" signify those core attributes with which they have been associated. It is by association with these conventions that symbols, such as the Swastika, have been intentionally imbued with mythological values (different from the original meaning) which encapsulate the philosophical or ideological concerns of an organisation. The uprooted, historical example of the Swastika illustrates the capacity of symbols to act as powerful mnemonic signifiers functioning as gestalts, and capable of arousing considerable emotive reaction and identification.

With this contention in mind the aim of this study was to evaluate the hypothesis which questions whether the symbol/logo/icon is an effective conveyor of meaning. In order to test this proposition with some sort of rigour, both qualitative and interpretive methods have been used to assess the representation, meaning and apprehension of two dominant New Zealand icons, the silver fern/fernleaf and the kiwi, as well as six contemporary corporate logos symbol/logos. The methods included:

1. An in depth literature review
2. A questionnaire
3. In depth interviews
4. A focus group

The research study consisted of a questionnaire survey to evaluate the icons and the symbol/logos in terms of their significance, service or product, and preferred visual image from 50 participants. A focus group discussion was held with 7 individuals to determine their attitudinal responses to the same icons and symbol/logos. Three key informant interviews were conducted with two designers and one

communications consultant to discover how meaningful the use of symbolism was for them in the design process.

While research into the literary and theoretical analysis of the semantic function of symbols is necessary in considering their linguistic significance these issues are held to be secondary to the qualitative and interpretive evaluation of the visual representation of the symbol/logo/icon. Subsequently the application of this hermeneutic component as part of this study has enabled an interpretive and indicative reading and response to the symbol/logos/icons under investigation. In the case of the symbol/logos this has been achieved independent of the signifying typography which would literally contextualise and "name" them. It is this interpretive evaluation which has tested the representation and meaning of the symbol in its communicative capacity for the designatum.

The findings that arose as a result of this research methodology, while not conclusive, suggest that while symbols, alone, are not effective conveyors of meaning in their denotative function (in the contexts examined) they are effective to a degree in connoting the attributes which allude to the experiential activities with which the corporation or organisation is involved. While these meanings are not obvious, as in the case of indexical signs, the shape, form and colour of the symbols suggest certain attributes on closer inspection.

Finally, the branding of identity and the use of symbolism in that process is not just a contractual relationship between two parties rather it is an eternal triangle. Those involved in this three-way communication are the designer, the client and the customer, or recipient. What significance does this have for business, commerce and education? From the research study results and taking into account the reading of contemporary theory it is suggested that the use of symbolism is very much linked to the mythic structure of a corporation or organisation. It is this mythic structure, the narrative, which provides the framework from which the connotative meanings, the inherent qualities, are derived. It is suggested that this is the area which need to be developed prior to formulating the symbol/logo as the main denotative signifier. If not the symbol/logo runs the risk of being an empty vessel.

Further research into the correlation of symbols with their associated suggestive and emotive attributes and how those are perceived by a wider group than the one surveyed, systematically, would be of value not only for visual communication design but also for information design.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This study into the representation and meaning of symbolism as it applies to the design and communication of identity could not have been achieved without the kind help and support of the many people, friends, colleagues, students, and those involved in the various organisations have all made this work possible. As anyone who has been involved in research knows this network of support is of inestimable value.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for their ongoing encouragement and interest in the achievement of this investigation into the representation, meaning and apprehension of symbolism in design.

## GLOSSARY

*Bricolage* ..... A term introduced by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in which new structures are pieced together from a combination of either heterogeneous or disparate elements.

*Connote* ..... The implication of meaning/s which are secondary to the primary meaning which, in this study, is signified by the denotata, name or designatum. These meanings or connotations are described as qualities or attributes.

*Deconstruction* ..... A theory associated with Jacques Derrida whereby the dominant reading of the text was subverted to become secondary. Rather than having a primary meaning the text was read as having many meanings that were dependent on the "gaps" and "supplements" in construction.

*Denote* ..... To signify as name for, to identify, to stand in for. In this case the symbol/logo once recognised can become a stand alone such as the Red Cross, or the Nike swash, or the golden arches of McDonalds.

*Designatum* ..... The name of the referent or the object. As it applies to this study it is defined as the organisation or corporation or product.

*Eponymous* ..... The Oxford Dictionary definition for this term is "one who gives his name to a people, place, or institution", for example, Kiwi.

*Fylfot* ..... Another name given to the swastika which is also known as the gammadion, or cross cramponnee. It denotes the path of peripheral forces.

*Gestalt* ..... This is defined as the configuration of shape, pattern or form which is more than the sum of its parts. In psychology it is used to describe the perceptions, reactions and responses which are determined by yet secondary to the stimuli.

*Hermeneutics* ..... This study is concerned with discovering and understanding the essential meaning of subject matter and its significance, whether that be human actions, utterances, products or institutions.

*Icon* ..... Sebeok describes the icon as having "topological similarity between a signifier and its denotata." The icon resembles the denotata in shape, colour, form. These Sebeok defined as "likenesses."

*Kaumātua* ..... A Maori elder.

*Kowhaiwhai* ..... A pattern of decoration featuring a branching form terminating in a koru.

*Logo* ..... The badge or emblem of an organisation, company or product which signifies as its mark of identity.

*Metonymy* ..... A linguistic term where the represented meaning of a subject or object is substituted with an attribute or part. For example the symbol of the crown for the Queen, the symbol of the hand for the worker, the symbol of the finger print for the individual.

*Ontology* ..... A metaphysical philosophy which seeks to answer the nature of being.

*Poststructuralism* ..... A theory which questions the dogma of subjectivity and language, and presents an alternative view in which difference and otherness as they apply to the subject/object relationship are valued.

*Praxis* ..... Accepted practice or custom, or practicing of an art particularly as it applies to representation.

*Rhetoric* ..... The art of persuasive and impressive speaking or writing which was purposefully designed with intention to impress or persuade the recipient. Aristotle classifies the art of oratory into the *deliberative*, which addresses the future; *judicial*, which addresses the past; and *evaluative*, which addresses issues of honour and disgrace.

*Semiotics* ..... The theory and analysis of signs and signification originating from the study of linguistics and its application to social and cultural conventions.

*Sign* ..... These Sebeok describes as indexical in that they are contiguous to, or on a continuance with, the signifier or are a sample of it. For example the direction of the weather vane with the wind; a directional arrow pointing out the intended flow of traffic.

*Structuralism* ..... A theory which investigates cultures and their social phenomena in terms of reading the symbolic interrelationships that are determined by the conventions and customs of that culture.

*Symbol* ..... These are described by Sebeok as signs having neither similarity or contiguity with the signifier. Symbols are defined by convention, by laws, by learnt association from which a consensus of meaning is evolved. For example the lion typifies courage and strength; the cross resumes the idea of sacrifice.

*Ur form* ..... The original or earliest form of representation of a thing or idea, a prototype. Possibly derived from the earliest known civilisation the Ur of the Chaldees. Chaldea is acknowledged by anthropologists to have existed in what we now know as present day Iraq.

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# SYMBOLISM - Representation, Meaning and Apprehension

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*"You who read me, are you sure of understanding my language?"*

**Jorge Luis Borges, Labyrinths.**

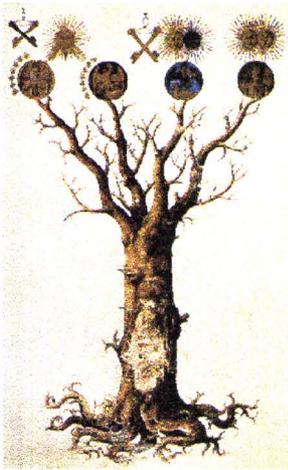


Image 1. *The Philosophical Tree* c. 1470

Why should we be interested in the meaning and usage of symbolism in design? What purpose does it serve in a world already teeming with symbols, signs and icons? In Venice, in the dungeons of the Doge's Palace, there exists the symbol of a tree, carved in marble by one of the condemned. This carefully constructed image created in the 1500s, so different from the usual graffiti that testifies as "having been there", remains etched in my memory as symbolising life. Its meaning probably has little significance for us today but at that particular historical time certain symbols alluded to the practice of certain metaphysical philosophies which were considered to be heretical by the established political and religious powers. If one was discovered to be a practitioner of these beliefs the consequences were most often death. Where ever we go we leave some trace of our identification in the form of a mark, a sign, a token or a symbol. The poststructuralist Barthes lucidly observes that,

"...this symbolics has been, in general, carefully studied for past societies, in the works of art through which it functions, but do we really study it or even prepare ourselves to study it in our present-day society?"

He continues with the statement that "even in the prosaic order of advertising, the organisation of this very ancient symbolics must be explored."<sup>1</sup> Why should this be so? Because it is in

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<sup>1</sup> BARTHES, Roland. (trans., by Richard Howard) *The Semiotic Challenge*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1988. pp 185-186.

the branding of identity that symbols are preminent. Culture itself is not static but a continually melding tapestry. As a result, the way in which symbols are used to convey meaning and how that meaning is apprehended has been of increasing significance to me as a design educator.

Communication is at the very heart of visual communication design, a practice which includes information design as well as logo design, and symbols are, along with indexical signs and icons, one of the semantic tools used in that communicative process. This method of communicating identity, place, affiliation, practice and product, through the signification of brand, mark, logo, emblem, and insignia has been evident as a key social and cultural practice for millenia.

For thousands of years human beings have been engaged in richly coded dialogue conveyed through the vehicle of symbols.<sup>2</sup> As a language, it has evolved as the primary visual means by which human beings have defined and continue to define themselves. The earliest vestigial evidence being the figurative and symbolic representations of wo/man, beast, and such astronomical forms as the sun, that were engraved, painted, impressed and carved on to various materials by the peoples of the paleolithic period. That these prehistoric *ur* symbols have



significance in this study, as brands of identity, is that they constitute the earliest recognised evidence of symbolic language as a means of self representation. To illustrate this point a comparison is made between the paleolithic hand (c. 25,000 b.c.) from the Grotte de Gargas, and the fingerprint logo of Te Papa.<sup>3</sup> Both are an impression, a mark that

Image 2. Hand print from the Grotte de Gargas



Image 3. Logo of Te Papa

symbolically denotes the ontological concept of man and of man's historical position in context with place, significantly "our place", as in the case of Te Papa. Further to this they act as metonymic devices that signify the designation, human, as a pluralistic identity.<sup>4</sup> Although, in the case of Te Papa, this has become a contentious issue as not all people, as the generic logo would

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<sup>2</sup> I use the word "dialogue" here to suggest that all interaction takes the form of conversation even when it is most one sided as in the case of rhetoric, propaganda and the so called "captive audience."

<sup>3</sup> The Pleistocene epoch of mankind's evolution (600,000 b.c. to 11,000 b.c.) is divided into three paleolithic periods. The upper paleolithic in which this signage flourished is determined as having existed between what is known as the perigordian (35,000 b.c.) and the proto-magdalenian (22,000 b.c.) periods.

<sup>4</sup> One might also recall the cosmically ambitious Seti project which optimistically makes use of symbols as a universal means of representing mankind in form, abstract language and in spatial context, to whomever or whatever might be out there. Should they be able to read them.

suggest, regard Te Papa as being representative of their identity. It does not speak for them.



Image 4. Cover design *Graphis Logo 1*

It should be no wonder then that historically, the finger print, has been ratified as a timeless indexical sign. An identifying mark that signifies place as well as symbolising "me", "us", "them" and "we". A point which is illustrated by the cover design of *Graphis Logo 1*, featuring the work of two graphic designers, Rex Petet and Ken Cato, as part of a universal survey of logo design. The following editorial statement made by Pedersen is that,

"The logo is the core of any company's identity; from the largest corporations to the smallest firms, the logo ideally offers immediate recognition in the customer's mind, offering an entire identity in one small symbol."<sup>5</sup>

That "the logo ideally offers immediate recognition" is based on conjecture for it presumes a degree of clarity in interpretation which is, as this study suggests, fallacious. For it is based on the premise that there is a commonality of comprehension in that disparate group, the "customer", to whom the logo is directed. While this assertion might indeed be so for those symbols such as the + which, historically, have had a significant profile, this argument does not necessarily follow



Image 5. Logo of Learning Media

through to those symbols that are more obscure, as illustrated by the logo of Learning Media. Obscure, that is, when they are represented as images only without their accompanying typography. The qualifying adjective,

"ideally", emphasises the desired purpose of the logo, as the all-significant vehicle, but seems somewhat optimistic in intention. As this research study will show that the purport, or ostensible meaning, is far from obvious. This elusiveness or ambiguity of meaning raises a number of considerations for the practice of design that this study intends to address, namely:

1. how effectively and to what degree do symbols communicate their intended meaning?
2. how does that communication differ in meaning from its original intention?
3. to what degree are the results transparent or ambiguous?

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<sup>5</sup> PEDERSEN, B. Martin, ed., *Graphis Logo 1*. Zurich, Graphic Press Co., 1991. Inside cover.

4. do men and women perceive symbols differently?
5. how do design criteria such as shape, colour, as well as figurative representation or abstraction assist in visual apprehension?
6. to what extent is this symbolic/visual language a learnt code?
7. is illustrative representation favoured over abstraction?

It is the evaluation of symbols in logo design and their ability or inability to communicate certain imputed qualities, or attributes, that this study seeks to investigate. Communication, in this sense, is conducted through the design praxis of visual representation, which uses a language that is an amalgam of the metaphoric and the linguistic by which ideas are made visible. While the subject of semiotics and contemporary theory will be considered as they apply to the use of symbolism it is the concerns of communication theory, of how graphic images are perceived, which will provide the main context of this thesis. The aim is to discover whether certain symbols and icons, as used in contemporary New Zealand design, have ongoing significance in terms of cultural identity; whether their form, as defined by the integrated design elements of shape, colour, and line, are appropriate for their function; whether they have validity, in other words how powerful a tool are they; whether they can be recognised as having worth in the present climate, given that the demographic mix of the population is continually changing.

For the purposes of this study culture is regarded not only as the product of nationalistic and social custom and conditioning but also applies to the formulation of corporate and organisational identity in terms of visual language. On the one hand symbols and icons operate within a localised field as well as having meaning within a wider context. Corporate and organisational cultures are internally constructed around products, functions, or services that are promoted to and interact within the wider community. For indigenous cultures the use of symbols, as a graphic language, have a different level of significance as these are held to be part of the *wairua*, the spiritual heritage, and require the consent of a *kaumatua* for their use. For those that are more generic such as the *patiki*, the stairway to heaven pattern, consent is not required.

Further to the issues of culture the issues of gender were also raised with the question as to whether men and women perceive icons and symbol/logos differently. The generalised viewpoint taken that men are considered to have a more rational and objective appreciation while women

respond from a more subjectively felt level of awareness. If this is so the argument is that they would be able to intuitively apprehend the meaning of the symbol/logos and icons under investigation. In addition it was asked whether there was a gender bias for one type of depicted image over another, whether there was a preference for abstraction over figurative representation. Rather than taking a feminist standpoint these issues are considered to be more of interest in discovering just to what extent symbol/logos and icons are visually apprehended by all groups.

Petet (1991, 9) makes the claim that for him logos "...endeavor to capture the essence of a business...".<sup>6</sup> For Cato (1991, 23) "...the most important attribute is ineffable-spirit."<sup>7</sup> These rather romantic notions, this thesis argues, do not always equate with reality, and are the most difficult to communicate successfully as well as to apprehend. As Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 11) maintain "Communication requires that participants make their message maximally understandable in a particular context. They [the "sign-makers"] therefore choose forms of expression which they believe to be maximally transparent to other participants."<sup>8</sup> The fact that logos operate within a continually changing environment would suggest that, in design terms, they are not as universal as the philosophical definition would allow. Whether symbols are effectual at communicating the imputed attributes, the "essence" or the "ineffable-spirit" that they are invested with will determine how successful the symbols and icons under discussion are as signifiers.

In order to substantiate these views a programme of research study was conducted into the representation, meaning and apprehension of two New Zealand icons and six contemporary corporate logos. This interpretive and qualitative study comprised: a focus group of seven participants, a questionnaire surveying the responses of 50 subjects to the symbol/logos and icons, and key informant interviews with two designers and one communications consultant. This research method was selected not only to ascertain the degree to which the communicative capacity of the symbol/logos and icons was apprehended, but also to determine their value as ontological signifiers for those organisations as well as possessing cultural significance.

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<sup>6</sup> PEDERSEN, B. Martin, ed., Graphis Logo 1. Zurich, Graphic Press Co., 1991. p 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p 23.

<sup>8</sup> KRESS, Gunter and VAN LEEUWEN, Theo. Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design. London, Routledge, 1996. p 11.

## 1.1 Discussion

In an age where visual transparency into the operation and end products of various systems within society is under increasing scrutiny it follows that this should also apply to the practice of visual communication design. A provocative statement made by Easterby in his preface to "Information Design" is that,

"...those trained in visual expression find it difficult or unfruitful to expound in words what they actually did - the design itself is, in their view, both the statement of what they wanted to achieve *and* how they did it..."<sup>9</sup>

These comments are not without validity but they are also written with a degree of myopic bias that would suggest that designers are pathologically shy of the analytical process. This is certainly not the case and never has been with those who are involved in the practice of design and design education. It can certainly be argued that design solutions are quite often the result of "gut feelings", for example the development of the Nike swash and the name Nike, but this does not suggest that designers are unaware of the design process or incapable of transcribing the results of that process into words. However, words are one thing and practice is another. Part of this analytical process involves the ongoing evaluation of design as it functions as a communicative tool within the discipline of visual communication design, as well as in the wider community. As a consequence to this, the results of that process go to inform the paradigms by which design solutions are then modified, or accepted, as the *status quo*. It is only by this consultative process that progress will be made in design as a language.

There is the suggestion that a more rational and empirical approach should be taken with the use of symbolism in design. While it is agreed that this rational and scientific mode is of use in analysing the end result, if used as the sole parameter it could ultimately stifle that very creative process as has been evidenced by the application of Bauhaus theory to design. Often, as the designers themselves claim, the creative solution is an intuitive response to the problem. The inference is that on one level the creative response is intuitive and emotive, and that on another level it is rational, it is known through analysis. The suggestion is that both "liberal art" and

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<sup>9</sup> EASTERBY, R. and ZWAGA, H., eds., Information Design. Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 1984. p xxvi.

"social science" are required in the formulation of design solutions and that they are not mutually exclusive of one another.<sup>10</sup> This also supports the notion forwarded by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 39) that "...affective aspects of human behaviour and being are not discrete from other cognitive activity; and therefore never separate from representational and communicative behaviour."<sup>11</sup> This thesis explores both these aspects and contends that design, as a process, is both pragmatic, or rational, and aesthetic, or affective, for the use of symbolism in one context might be totally inappropriate for another.

## 1.2 Thesis Format

The format of the thesis will be as follows:

- ◆ Chapter one will provide an introduction outlining the parameters of this thesis.
- ◆ Chapter two will define the meaning of symbols according to semiotic theory by making reference to McKeon (1964) Sebeok (1994) and Barthes (1988). Links will be made with that theory to the commentary on information design by Easterby and Zwaga *et al* (1984) .
- ◆ Chapter three will consider the position of the logo in relation to poststructuralist theory by making reference to Norris (1991) and Bertens (1995) with the recommendation that design, as a practice, is ultimately a mixture of aesthetics as well as pragmatism.
- ◆ Chapters four and five will focus on the analysis of the research findings which are compiled from the results of the questionnaire put to the general public, and the views of the designers interviewed as key informants. The transcripts of these interviews is included in the appendix.
- ◆ Chapter six will discuss the findings of that analysis in terms of perceived significance incorporating comments from the focus group regarding the symbols/logos/icons under discussion.
- ◆ Chapter seven will conclude by reflecting on the implications for design practice and education, as well as having significance for the organisations involved in this study through the representation of their logos.

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<sup>10</sup>STRICKLER, Zoe. 'Elicitation Methods in Experimental Design Research', Design Issues Vol 15, Number 2 , Summer 1999. p 27.

<sup>11</sup>KRESS, Gunter and VAN LEEUWEN, Theo. Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design. London, Routledge, 1996. p 39.

## 2 DEFINING THE SYMBOL

*"We are symbols and inhabit symbols."* Ralph Waldo Emerson. xiii *The Poet, from the Essays*



Image 6. *Drawing of a Treefern*

What is a symbol and what is the function of that "thing" as it operates as a tool of communication in design? First, we need to consider the definition of the word - symbol. According to McKeon (1964, 13-38) symbols, in their primary definition of the Greek *symbolon*, suggest tallies in that they were the means by which two parties could identify each other in a contractual relationship.<sup>12</sup> A bone or similar object was broken into two halves each signifying a form of identification for presentation, one to the other, thereby forming a tally.

The representation of that "thing", then, was perceived to be the value of that "thing".

The additional meaning, token, has evolved generally to signify as being proof of identity in terms of mankind's affairs and relations, both in terms of the particular and the universal, a view that was to inform and be challenged by the structuralist theorists such as Lévi-Strauss.<sup>13</sup> McKeon, writing from a more essentialist view states that,

"The particularity and the universality of the symbol are inseparably conjoined; it is the mark, immediately and unmistakably recognisable, of a relation which requires, without question or argument, actions of a particular kind."<sup>14</sup>



Image 7. *Neil Dawson Fernball*

This definition raises certain issues which require analysis in terms of this discussion, and which will be linked to other areas of theoretical and practical study. For instance, can it be said to be true that the symbol, as a mark,

implies an unmistakable recognition? Perhaps and perhaps not. For example, the image featuring Neil Dawson's fernball suspended above Wellington's Civic Square could be said to illustrate the claim made above by McKeon, given that the fernleaf has been and continues to be promoted as one of the key, if not the key symbol in New Zealand's iconography.

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<sup>12</sup>BRYSON, L. FINKELSTEIN, L. MACIVER, R. M. McKEON, R., eds., *Symbols and Values: An Initial Study*. New York, Cooper Square Pub., Inc., 1964. p 21.

<sup>13</sup>STURROCK, J., ed., *Structuralism and Since*. From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979. pp 46-51.

<sup>14</sup>BRYSON, L. FINKELSTEIN, L. MACIVER, R. M. McKEON, R., eds., *Symbols and Values: An Initial Study*. New York, Cooper Square Pub., Inc., 1964. p 21.

The fernleaf, both figuratively and physically, has been incorporated as an unmistakable element into the structure of our symbolic language. It is both particular to New Zealand and, possibly, warrants the claim of being universally recognised through its metonymic association with the All Blacks and the Silver Ferns. Historically, the fern leaf has served to function as a significant design component, within New Zealand, in terms of our cultural identity. This is corroborated by the wide range of logos to which it is applied, some of which are evaluated in this study.

This then, equates with the definition of the symbol made by structuralist theory and by McKeon (1964, 33) that symbols, as they are used in society, are part and parcel of the formation of the myths of that particular society.<sup>15</sup> He alludes specifically to the symbolic use of mythic stories in commercial advertising, as does Barthes (1988, 177) and it can be argued that symbols, as a means of branding identity, are an adjunct of that grander visualisation.<sup>16</sup> Symbols exist as an essential part within the internal and external transactions of that society, organisation, or culture.<sup>17</sup>

That is within that culture's internal psychology, if it can be defined as such, and by the external realisation of that through the use of various graphic marks, signs, symbols and images by which it brands itself. As such, symbols, as they are used in logos, are expressive of the internal diachronic relationship between structure, function, and form, that "ideally" represent the qualities and concepts behind that culture or organisation. This definition of ideal representation, though, is dependent upon a degree of universal cognizance and appreciation of symbols to be visually coherent which raises the question - can the theoretical proposition of universality be applied to logo design in even the most mundane and particular of situations?

## **2.1 Immediacy of Ideas**

This thesis suggests that McKeon's idea of immediacy, or rather direct interpretation, as it applies to the perception of symbols is not entirely valid. This argument having been suggested now will

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p 33.

<sup>16</sup>BARTHES, Roland. (trans. by R. Howard) *The Semiotic Challenge*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1988. p 177

<sup>17</sup>For a more extensive definition of the differences between sign, symbols and icons refer to SEBEOK, Thomas A. *An Introduction to Semiotics*. Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1994. pp 17 - 41.



Image 8. *The Sun*

be taken up in chapters five and six and explored in further detail. Perhaps in some cases, such as this image of the sun, it could be claimed that as an iconic symbol it is an immediately and universally recognised cosmological object.

That it can be recognised as a solar body is suggested by the depiction of the sun's characteristic denotative or literal properties, which are: the portrayal of its round shape, which alludes to the physical form of a sphere; the inclusion of a halo thus indicating the possession of the property of radiance, thereby signifying light and life. In addition to this, it can be said to express symbolically those mythical virtues that are historically ascribed to the sun, namely, benevolence by the colours yellow/gold, colours which are attributed to value and wealth; and by potentially connoting a host of inherent qualities and concepts, such as royalty, splendour, benevolence and deification, through the combination of all these aspects. As a symbol it is both denotatively and connotatively comprehensible, that is, it demonstrates both literal and metaphorical aspects.

## 2.2 Meaning

But, in referring back to McKeon's statement, how do we recognise the particular type of action that is required by this image? And further to this, what in fact is meant by his statement that this mark indisputably arouses in the recipient "actions of a particular kind"?<sup>18</sup> Until the symbol is placed in context we don't know, and even if it were to be sited within a related context its meaning could still be obscured by its relation to the surrounding elements. Similarly McKeon's definition that, "Symbols are immediate bonds by which men are conscious of being joined to each other" results in issues for the designer.<sup>19</sup> For all intents and purposes this statement tends to be specific and exclusive, which tends to essentialism, rather than generic and embracing, which conversely tends to the poststructuralist view. While he is careful to omit the inclusive adverb, all, his usage of "men" tends to signify a pluralistic identity that does not necessarily equate the language of symbolism with its wider audience. It could be argued that this conscious identification is generally true in a cultural sense, although, even this is a debatable proposition given the use of symbols within the context of the global community.<sup>20</sup> This is particularly so

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p 21.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p 24.

<sup>20</sup>For a more in depth reading of the ideological and socio/political issues regarding the use of symbolism,

when a symbol, such as a national icon, having been encoded according to a particular mythic cultural expression, is taken out of one context and sited in another, as in the case of the logo of the New Zealand Tourism Board. An informal discussion with an employee of this organisation provided some interesting insights into the formation of that organisation's logo. According to this person, the logo was originally designed by business men (Keith Myers for one) in managerial,



Images 9, 10, 11 Permutations of the logo of New Zealand Tourism Board

marketing and directorate positions, and trialed in New Zealand but without regard as to how that logo was to operate internationally. It has since been found that the perception of New

Zealand overseas is identified by the colours blue and green signifying the clean and green qualities of the country's natural "essence". These were, at one stage, incorporated into the logo illustrated on the left (described by another employee as the "lipstick logo") which had a certain elegance. The fact that the present logo is also represented in the colours that act as the signifiers for New Zealand's naturalism enhances the otherwise conservative design of this iconic logo.

Conservatism, though, need not be traditional and dull. McKeon again defines the symbol by asserting that "...symbols as they serve as bonds of unity are sources at once of myths and arguments and of credibility attached to both."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the most compelling image to illustrate this point is the infamous but highly successful symbol, the swastika.

### 2.3 The Swastika



The swastika, the *Hakenkreuz*, was the pivotal graphic element in the design of the flag of the National Socialist Workers Party (the Nazis). According to Heller (1992, 39) this most ancient of symbols, once signifying good fortune, has now been bismirched through its connotation with one of mankind's

Image 12. *The Swastika*

identity and culture, I refer the reader to the writings of the political scientist Benjamin Barber. His work *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995) explores in a detached, lucid and non biased way the effects of global consumerism and its counteraction from fundamentalist idealism. These views are similarly expoused, although without the fundamentalist perspective in *The Location of Culture* (1994) by Homi Bhabha.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p 35.

most heinous acts of barbarity.<sup>22</sup> As a result it can still be argued that the psychological impact of the powerful design of the Nazi's symbolic trademark has lost none of its potency, nor has the indelible, perverted meaning of the swastika lessened in any regard.<sup>23</sup> The man, Hitler, and the symbol have become one in the eyes of many. They have become conflated. Heller (1995, 82) quotes Quinn, in his analysis of Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of Will", observing that when Hitler is absent his presence is assumed by the swastika, "which, like the image of the Führer, becomes a switching station for personal and national identities."<sup>24</sup> This thesis maintains, that in the practice of design, it is imperative to be aware of how powerfully the language of symbols can serve in defining and constructing national and organisational identities, and how they can enhance or annul that identity. For once strongly identified with, as exemplified by the swastika, that image and its associated credibility can be hard to erase. They work, hence their legacy. One only has to compare, perhaps unfairly, the symbol above with the logo of the Tourism Board to determine which is the more memorable. This argument though it might be provocative is meant to be so for, as designers, we can learn, even from those examples that are historically the most contentious.

## 2.4 Symbol and Language

*"Look: through the rip in my cape you can see a vermilion tattoo on my stomach.*

*It is the second symbol, Beth."* **Jorge Luis Borges. Labyrinths**

As this study is concerned with the meaning and apprehension of symbols, as one of the key tools in the language of visual communication design, it follows that their usage according to semiotic theory needs to be considered. One of the bones of contention that this investigation has with theory, is that it is just that - theory, most of which has been written in terms of linguistics and literary criticism, with very little comment made as to how that theory might apply to the practice of design. It is acknowledged that theory has resulted from the analysis of the spoken and written word, or text, and its application and use in society but in the field of visual communication

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<sup>22</sup>HELLER, Steven. 'Symbol of the Century', *Print* XLVI:I, January/February, 1992. pp 39-47.

<sup>23</sup>A friend of mine was bequeathed a blue frame whose corners are decorated with swastikas. She finds the symbol and its historicism so repugnant, that she has hidden the object away rather than put it to use.

<sup>24</sup>QUINN, Malcolm. (reviewed by S. Heller) *The Swastika*. Constructing the Symbol in *Design Issues* Vol 11, Number 3. Autumn, 1995.

design, and for the designer or student of design, the transformation of theory into practice is not so evident.<sup>25</sup>

For the purposes of this study, language is approached from the view of communication through visual representation. In linguistics it is the semiotic function of language to convey information, directions, beliefs, values, concepts, descriptions, rhetoric, discourse, all the constituent elements that make up the spoken word, both analytical and metaphorical, through a highly organised syntactical structure. That structure is then organised according to a set of grammatical and linguistic rules. In the case of visual language the semantic function of images to represent the above is organised according to colour, shape, form and line which may be defined as visual

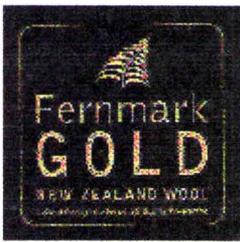


Image 13. Logo of Fernmark Gold

discourse, as in the case of advertising, or visual rhetoric, as in the branding of cultural or organisational identity or product. A case in point is the logo of Fernmark Gold. The semantic structure of this logo privileges, that is it gives special preference to, the discourse of classicism, tradition, premium quality and status through the use of the colours gold and black, and by the selection of sans-serif type with its "pure" reduced forms.

## 2.5 Rhetoric

Rhetorically, it visibly delineates the statement or claim, suggested by the iconic fern and sans-serif typography as the hallmark of assay, or quality, that New Zealand wool is marked by the standard of excellence. Subsequent to this, it is proposed that in terms of branding identity, the visual "I am", it is symbols, rather than signs, which are the main communicative element within this semantic structure. As an organisation or company is concerned with the visual promotion of its identity, or in ontological terms, beingness, it is the symbol, as object, which subsumes the equivalence of that culture's subjectivity. The individual logo, as a semantic praxis, is not contextualised as syntax with the focus on the interaction between the subject/object, but represents a concentrated visual précis of the particular expression, activity and attitude that is the hallmark of an enterprise, organisation or culture. The symbol/logo is the visible I am.

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<sup>25</sup>The study by Per Mollerup into the semiotic structure and organisation of trademarks succinctly positions the formulation and organisation of trademarks within semiotic theory.

## 2.6 Semiotic Theory

Current literature on semiotic theory suggests that most of the emphasis is placed on the referential function of signs and of the function of the subject and the object within the theories around language and speech. Discussion on the use of symbols as a language, with the exception of Easterby and Zwaga (1984) and Anceschi (1996) is almost non evident.<sup>26</sup> Sebeok (1994, 28) writes that Peirce (1867) defined symbols in their respective relationship to their object as possessing an "imputed quality" which, he further defined as "... 'laws', meaning conventions, habits, or natural dispositions of its interpretant or of the field of the interpretant."<sup>27</sup> He goes on to define the symbol as being different from the sign in that the symbol is connected between its signifier and denotata only through convention. These conventions are the means by which the properties assigned to that symbol act as the "propositional function" of that designatum, or distinctive mark of name or office. It is these historical conventions, or traditions, that Sebeok, as well as Barthes (1988, 185) surmise have resulted in the symbol being neglected in theoretical terms.<sup>28</sup> The neglect is due to the continuing perception that symbols are too laden with meaning, or too generalised, or in effect redundant to be valid and hence have become marginalised. It was these issues that this thesis sought to examine as it is self evident that symbols are the predominant semantic device in the structuring of identity in visual communication design. The not inconsiderable costs involved in the construction of this language can range from the paltry, \$35.00 (American) stated by Goldman and Papson (1998, 17) as the payment for the Nike symbol/logo to the alledged \$30,000 (New Zealand) for the symbol/logo of Te Papa.<sup>29</sup> In this sense they should not be relegated, as Sebeok would have them, to a subspecies of the dominant genera signs. Their purpose, as heraldic devices, is very different from the written word. However he does defer that,

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<sup>26</sup>EASTERBY, R. and ZWAGA, H., eds., Information Design. Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 1984. ANCESCHI, Giovanni. (trans., by John Cullars)'Visibility in Progress', Design Issues Vol 12, Number 3, Autumn, 1996. pp 3-13.

<sup>27</sup>SEBEOK, Thomas A. An Introduction to Semiotics. Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1994. p 28.

<sup>28</sup>BARTHES, Roland. (trans., by R. Howard) The Semiotic Challenge. New York, Hill and Wang, 1988. p 185.

<sup>29</sup>GOLDMAN, R. and PAPSON, S. Nike Culture. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Sage Publications Ltd., 1998. p 17.

"A number of important symbol subspecies - whose semiotic import, however, has seldom been properly analysed - are in more or less common use, at least in contemporary English. Such subordinate terms, with increasing intension, include: *allegory, badge, brand, device...*"<sup>30</sup>

Sebeok also criticises as hyperbole the claim made by White that "The symbol is the universe of humanity...the key to this world and the means of participation in it is - the symbol."<sup>31</sup> This may indeed be a grand and idealistic statement, one which is open to the question of reification but, in visual communication, symbols are integral to the rhetoric of design as it relates to human expression. As a rider to this, Barnard and Marcel (1984, 38,39) express the view that "... few forms of expression can match the communicative power and flexibility of natural language..." but can that natural language be universally comprehended?<sup>32</sup> The answer is no, as any person who has visited a foreign country has found out to their sense of alienation. It can therefore be argued that the performance of linguistic language contains the same problems that are levelled at the use of symbolism.

Just to what degree of alienation with respect to the perception and understanding of commonly used icon and symbols as used in New Zealand was one of the key predicates that this research study set out to measure. If they were not recognised as having particular significance they could then be described as alienating in terms of their communicative capacity.

## **2.7 Symbols, Conventions, and Imputed Character**

There are two points outlined by semiotic theory that need to be considered here in connection with the symbol as it is used to brand identity. One, is the notion of "imputed quality" and the other, is the associated designation of convention - this being the most contentious. These semiotic definitions, as they apply to this study, will be considered according to the practice of visual communication design rather than social theory.

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<sup>30</sup>SEBEOK, Thomas A. An Introduction to Semiotics. Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1994. p 35.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p 34.

<sup>32</sup>EASTERBY, R and ZWAGA, H., eds., Information Design. Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 1984. pp 38-39.

What is meant by "imputed quality" within the context of visual communication design? It is no doubt, as is described by the designers quoted in the introduction and those interviewed, those attributes that are ascribed as signifying the essence or spirit of an organisation's identity, or product, or function. To quote Petet (1991,9) "...the quality that makes a mark most memorable and magical is the most difficult and elusive of all."<sup>33</sup> These somewhat indefinable abstractions are hard to qualify but need to be if that symbol is to be recognised as having any worth. In an interview with Cassels (1999) she makes the point that if the organisation or the product do not have integrity the logo itself will not have validity.<sup>34</sup> Once these subjective values, such as spirit, security and integrity; together with ideas, such as motion, or stability are recognised that image can then be identified by, or be said to possess these qualities, or have them ascribed to it. In the practice of design these emotional values and cognitive attributes are given visual expression by the formal properties of colour, shape, line, abstraction and figuration. They are integral to the operation of the logo and, if well considered, come to function as an *aide-memoire*, a mnemonic of that organisation or enterprise's activity, as has been identified by the previous example of the swastika in the introduction. Perhaps the logo of the Life Flight, an organisation which performs a highly specialised service will serve to highlight these points.



Image. 14. *The logo of Life Flight* Structurally this logo is the synthesis of several symbols figuring the colour red, the reversed out cross and the four diametrically opposed arms in the shape of wings/hands. At its core it incorporates one of the "great anthropological symbols", the cross, flanked by an abstract representation of the physical properties of aviation technology. The connoted qualities and inferences that are summarised by these abstract shapes and colour are: support, service, rescue, aid, assistance, cooperation, as well as the attributions of motion, mobility and technology.<sup>35</sup> The implication being that the imputed attributes signified by this symbol combine to identify the humanist integrity of that company with its associated operation of helicopter-assisted rescue. This logo, or figure, or device, is an example of what Anceschi describes as "*visible metaphor*".<sup>36</sup> It is one small image, loaded with meaning which, in the language of pictorial symbolism, has the potential to

<sup>33</sup>PEDERSEN, B. Martin., ed., *Graphis Logo 1*. Zurich, Graphic Press Co., 1991. p 9.

<sup>34</sup>D. Cassels, Head Designer, Siren (1999). Personal communication.

<sup>35</sup>BARTHES, Roland. (trans., by R. Howard) *The Semiotic Challenge*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1988. p 185.

<sup>36</sup>ANCESCHI, Giovanni. (trans., by John Cullars) 'Visibility in Progress', *Design Issues* Vol 12, Number 3, Autumn, 1996. p 10.

speak straight to the subconscious mind. That is the symbol's intended purpose, as it applies to logos, that they are immediately recognisable. It remains to be seen though whether these attributes can be interpreted by the viewer and whether symbols do indeed warrant the definition of being universal and transparent. In this case Anceschi's claim that the world is optical and visual but not visible is another way of stating the same concern. These statements address the issues outlined in the research questions (see p 3) into representation and meaning in terms of semiotic function.

## 2.8 Conventions

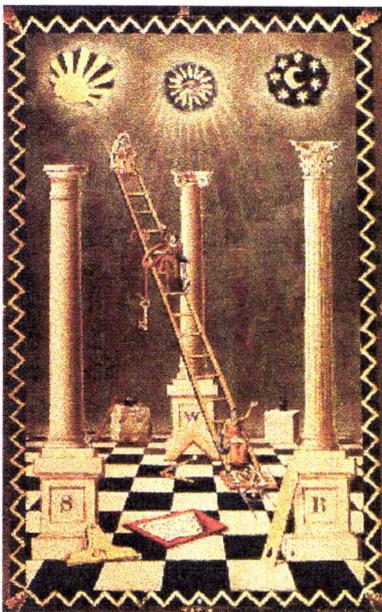


Image 15. *Freemasons' First Degree Board, 1819*

Symbols, as they function in the form of logos, are without doubt designed according to specific conventions, which in the case of design, have to do with the orientation of the organisation, enterprise or product within the local or global community. For a symbol to be recognised as potentially conveying meaning, or significance, conventions are required. Conventions are defined as laws, the purpose of which is to provide a framework or field of limitation, whereby one thing conforms to another. They may be defined by culture, lifestyle, conservatism, tradition, fashion, cutting edge, sophistication, and so forth. The example shown illustrates the complexity to which symbols can be constructed according to the conventions and representational mode of a particular philosophical practice. The implication is that language is a learnt code whether it be constructed orally or graphically.

In the field of visual communication design symbols provide a structural set from which logos are constructed. By this, convention, as it is used in design is defined according to its legitimate formal function of communication, one that does not necessarily equate with tradition but moves with the "field of the interpretent." Or to quote Lee (1964, 79) "The symbol is not a thing, but that it

is rather a point in a creative process, that of symbolisation...".<sup>37</sup> Symbols then are reappraised according to the narrative or myth of that particular culture as conventions themselves change. This link then allows for a greater receptivity between the symbol, the denotative, and the perceived connoted meaning. To illustrate this point a comparison will be made between the logo of the New Zealand Insurance Company with that of "Buy N.Z. Made".

An appraisal of the design elements used in these two examples informs us as to how the kiwi has been stylistically represented in accordance with the particular ethos of the period in which it was formulated. The parameters of the logo of the New Zealand Insurance Company are defined by a



Image 16. *New Zealand Insurance Company window transfer*



Image 17. *"Buy N.Z. Made"*

figurative representation which is in sympathy with the colonialist discourse of the late 1800's and of a period which favoured mimetic representation rather than abstraction. What is indicative of this design is the iconic privilege given to the kiwi and the tree fern as symbolising New Zealand's uniqueness and natural heritage. This is myth in the

making, a narrative which was to provide the dominant framework for the branding of New Zealand's identity. Once the codes of that narrative have been recognised they can be reduced to their essence and still maintain their integrity as in the example of the "Buy N.Z. Made" logo. Here the imagery has been reduced to abstract form and encoded with the heraldic colours of the New Zealand ensign. The kiwi being unique stands independent of other supporting devices. This is a visual example of what Sebeok (1994,35) defines as "increasing intension" whereby allegory resolves into brand.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup>LEE, Dorothy, D. *Symbolisation and Value* in BRYSON, L. FINKELSTEIN, L. MACIVER, R. M. McKEON, R. eds., *Symbols and Values: An Initial Study*. New York, Cooper Square Pub., Inc., 1964. p 79.

<sup>38</sup>SEBEOK, Thomas A. *An Introduction to Semiotics*. Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1994. p 35.

## 2.9 Symbols, Semiotics and Information

Barnard and Marcel (1984, 38) make the comment that,

"Visual representation in symbolic or pictographic form can obviously serve many functions. It may, for example, be considered both as a tool for thought and as a form of communication. As a form of communication, it must convey information as clearly as possible. In this respect symbolic and pictographic representations must fulfill at least some of the communicative properties and functions of language."<sup>39</sup>

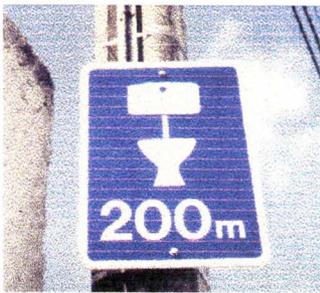


Image 18. *Public toilet sign*

This of course is an ideal proposition and one that is most necessary in the visual depiction of information pertaining to signage for road users, manual and technical operations, public directions such as are found in airports, railway stations, flow charts and so on. Here signs and symbols, as they operate as indexical devices and pictograms, perform the dominant function of directional stimuli. In this instance the overriding imperative is that of maximum legibility and readability in the operation of the message. One does not want to be mistaken, for example, as to what an indexical sign such as an ↪ might mean when driving or when operating machinery. Here the inherent and ideal aim of the communication is to elicit an immediate response. Comprehensible simplicity, in terms of meaning, is the universal aim of information design a solution, which it is argued, differs from the use of symbols in the branding of identity. What is meant by this is that in regard to information design the symbol or sign must be visual, visible and legible. In this field of design symbols and signs operate as figures of stimulus rather than as a figures of metaphor and rhetoric. The prescriptive function of the symbol in this area is to visibly and clearly explain, direct, instruct, or incite to action, rather than to allude, to infer, to suggest, to connote as it is with branding. While there might be similar semantic concerns in using symbols to effectively communicate as simply as possible the intended message of signification or identification, through placement, size, colour and form, the inherent meaning of the logo works on quite another level. Its function is to represent the structure of the philosophy, the ideology, of the organisation. As such the symbol is figuratively more autonomous

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<sup>39</sup>EASTERBY, R and ZWAGA, H., eds., *Information Design*. Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 1984. p 38.

consequently its meaning is less overt and what meaning there is, is conferred upon it through repeated association with its image and that supported by context.

The reception of the symbol is not without problems, particularly when it is abstract and devoid of any clues as to its meaning. As Barnard and Marcel (1984, 42) claim the referent can become ambiguous or lose its meaning when the situational context is lacking (a claim that this research study examined). Yet, as they explain further, the main objective of the use of symbols is "to convey information independently of specific languages."<sup>40</sup> In this regard the symbol does not have to follow the syntactical structure and grammatical rules of what they describe as natural language. What is meant by natural language is not elaborated on although the inference, no doubt, is being made to human language, as defined by Saussure (1994, 150-152).<sup>41</sup> It could be argued that natural language is in fact pictorial rather than spoken and that both referential systems are habitually learnt or acquired. As a consequence language cannot be presumed to be natural it is in fact cultural. Subsequent to this the perceived interpretation, they suggest, is dependent on "pre-existing knowledge, situational knowledge and inference" which can be defined as conventions.

The semantic concerns of reference and instruction are highlighted by Barnard and Marcel as the attempt to comprehend the "relationships between the requirements of a communicative process on the one hand and the constraints imposed by the restricted framework on the other."<sup>42</sup> In this instance natural language provides the basis for their suggestion that symbols, at least, perform to a degree that is in accordance with cognitive perception and comprehension. Essentially the difference between the use of symbolic language in information design and logo design is that in instruction and information the concerns of equating or substituting the written word with the appropriate symbol is most necessary but in the case of logo design it the essential or core concept or theme that is being portrayed *in toto*. Therefore, as alluded to above, the language of symbolism in design as a means of communication is not without problems for the designer. However, this must not be taken as an excuse to circumvent the problems inherent in the use of

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<sup>40</sup>EASTERBY, R and ZWAGA, H., eds., Information Design. Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 1984. p 42.

<sup>41</sup>LECHTE, John. Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers. From structuralism to postmodernity. London and New York, Routledge, 1994. pp 150-152.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p 42.

symbolism. It is argued that it is important that designers and organisations comprehend the multidimensional issues involved in the communication, function, and image to be communicated through qualitative and quantitative research rather than depending wholly on the conventional intuitive decision of the designer.

This research study into the representation, meaning and apprehension of symbol/logos and icons used in New Zealand is regarded to be opportune as it highlights the assumptions made by designers that the message inherent in the design is recognisably perceived and understood by the recipients. It also examines the original proposition which questions the effectiveness of symbols as transparent and recognisable vehicles of identity. It validates this claim by examining the perception of certain symbol/logos and icons as definitive brands in terms of their significance and visual meaning. These views and the elicited results gathered from user participation will be developed in the following chapters.

### 3 SYMBOLS, STRUCTURALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

*"...and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone."* Lewis Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

This quote, from what is arguably one of the most deconstructionist texts, is used to illustrate the idea that symbols as they are used in the branding of identity represent the core concept of the designatum, the name of the "thing" in a single form. However, that representation can also be elusive and ambiguous. That logos are a visual praxis of symbolic form, designed for a particular function, most obviously as a communicative device, brings to mind the modernist dictum that form follows function. The function of language, whether it be transcribed into linguistic, pictorial, musical or symbolic form, is to communicate. This communication takes place in what Sturrock (1979, 12) describes as "the Symbolic order".<sup>43</sup> In this instance symbols are the outer visual representative form or figure, successful or otherwise, of an idealised, or abstract, concept, belief, or convention. In her review of the analysis and compilation of Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks by Nedo, Schwemer-Scheddin quotes Nedo as saying "Many people believe that graphics are something different from letters and symbols. But an image is just as much an individual symbol as a letter."<sup>44</sup> Linguistically this is so, however, it is argued that no letter, with the exception of the letter **x**, can maximise the significance of its message to the effect that a



Image 19. *Tav*

visual symbol, once learnt, can. This letter which has its origins in the Hebrew letter *tav* has been used as the signifying mark for those who had not acquired the skills of literacy, who were not learned in reading and writing. Consequently it has come to



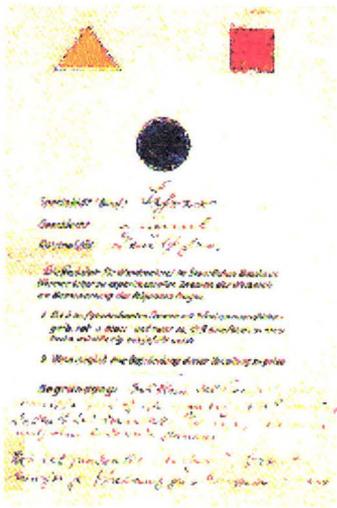
Image 20. *The Jolly Roger*

be regarded as a pejorative signifier, particularly by those whose culture is oral. For example, it is questionable whether the two words "Jolly Roger" would have had the same import, psychologically, as the black ensign surmounted by the skull and cross bones when it was raised into view. The inherent meanings of death and danger imparted by such an object was and still is visibly evident and unambiguous.

<sup>43</sup>STURROCK, J., ed., *Structuralism and Since*. From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979. p 12.

<sup>44</sup>SCHWEMER-SCHEDDIN, Yvonne. 'From Notebook to Hyperbook', *Eye* volume 8. Summer, 1999. p 61.

According to Sturrock, the poststructuralist iconoclast and individualist, Barthes, derided any form of essentialist and therefore formalist unity, most notably expressed in design terms by the



pedagogical theories of the Bauhaus. The theories established by the Bauhaus as their *corps d'esprit*, or in contemporary parlance, mission statement, were formalised by resolving all concepts and figurations to the common denomination of the square, the circle and the triangle, and by the association of those elementary forms with the primary colours red, yellow and blue. This, it can be argued, is the use of symbolism carried to its nth degree, one which has a certain seductiveness but which is ultimately bound to stasis, to redundancy, in that there is no room for a more organic or individualised

Image 21. Questionnaire designed by Wassily Kandinsky expression. Sturrock states this as

"A more considerable loss of individuality is incurred when the Symbolic order to which we yield is not the primary language as such, but the secondary one of literature, or of discourse in general, where further, frequently severe, restrictions by way of conventions are placed on us to prevent us using language with the freedom we might like."<sup>45</sup>

As a theoretical and design discourse the dogma of the Bauhaus serves as an expression of essentialism so abhorred by Barthes. The essentially determinist philosophy by which this movement sought to enlighten society with "good design" was formed on the idealistic, and perhaps romantic predicate that people recognise, subconsciously, certain gestalts and so identify with their expression thereby resulting in transubstantiation through design. This is the use of symbols in their purist and most abstract sense, and it is this very redundancy of meaning that the poststructuralists sought to call into question, as well as the notion that there is a perceived totality of meaning (a concept which will be examined in more depth in chapter six). The consideration of structuralist and poststructuralist movements highlights the relationship of these theories with the use of symbolism in design. For the poststructuralists the transmitted meaning of symbols and signs involved an unlimited semiosis through what Barthes describes as the infinitely "polysemic

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<sup>45</sup>STURROCK, J., ed., Structuralism and Since. From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979. pp 12-13.

sign".<sup>46</sup> As a consequence it was deemed necessary to resort to the surrounding context, in which the sign or symbol was sited, for meaning to be legible. This is no doubt so particularly in the establishment of the symbol as the device of identification. Once that essential organisational mode has been defined, established and learned then the assumed integrity of that symbolic



Image 22. *The logo of Nike*

expression is able to be autonomous, to stand alone. The contemporary symbol which most represents this concept, in the branding of identity, is the classic example of the Nike swash. This symbol is design as object which like the cross, or the crescent can be said, if we take McKeon's definition, to function as the "immediate bonds by which men are conscious of being joined to each other".<sup>47</sup> In making reference to the statement of perceived totality above, this logo, like the golden arches of McDonalds, has evolved to become one of the universally recognised identifiers within the modern mythic lexicon. In this sense it has, like its other American counterpart, become a most economical symbol.

Barthes observed that the object, like the sign, "is at the intersection of two coordinates, two definitions."<sup>48</sup> According to him, one coordinate is symbolic in that it has metaphorical depth by which "it refers to a signified", or rather a single signified. The second coordinate he describes as being within the criteria of classification in that it exists within an order, a structure, a hierarchy,



Image 23. *Postcard for the Red Cross Kosovo Refugee Appeal*

hence symbolic order. By positioning this description within the context of visual communication we can see how symbols, as objects, are used to define the myth or narrative of that culture, which is in itself a structure, a hierarchy. An example of one of the dominant symbols of the Western world, the logo of the Red Cross, as used in this contemporary design will serve to illustrate this point.

<sup>46</sup>BARTHES, Roland. (trans. by Richard Howard) *The Semiotic Challenge*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1988. p 63.

<sup>47</sup>BRYSON, L. FINKELSTEIN, L. MACIVER, R. M. McKEON, R., eds., *Symbols and Values: An Initial Study*. New York, Cooper Square Pub., Inc., 1964. p 26.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p 183.

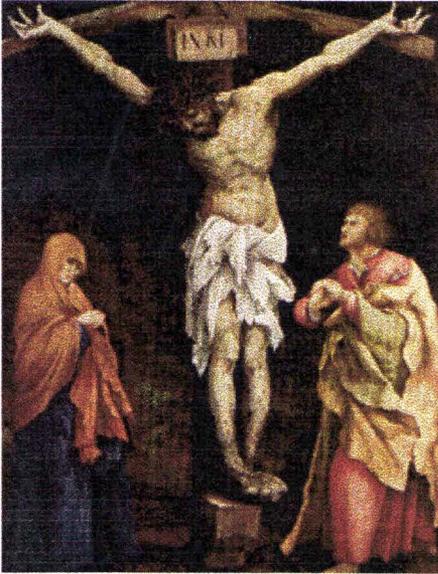


Image 24. *Crucifixion by Grünewald*

This image realises Barthes' definition of coordinates whereby the universal symbol of the cross, in this instance, metaphorically denotes the Christ, as the single signified, within the superstructure of the meta-narrative, or symbolic order of Christianity. It is arguably one of the most perceptibly dominant symbols of the Western world, even without the framework of religion, and in cultural terms connotes, symbolically, the associated qualities of compassion, sacrifice, suffering, humanity and caring which resolve into various modes of action, identification and exchange. In this case it can be argued that the symbol of the cross authenticates reality, both mystically and physically, and symbolises the inner psychological response at which this message is aimed. In this example the figure of the cross can, in Aneschi's terms, be said to have resolved all referential meaning into abstract form whereby all extraneous and excessive imagery has been dissolved, or abstracted. It is an example of what Felix Guattari, as described by Aneschi (1992, 4) defines as "elements of diagrammatic efficiency" whereby content becomes stimuli, which is exactly the intended purpose of the logo, albeit in the example used, sited within the pictorial context of a specific event.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.1 Structuralism and the Symbol as Logo

*"She ought to know her way to the ticket-office, even if she doesn't know her alphabet!"*

Lewis Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Structuralism, the theoretical model of social interaction and exchange examined and defined by the French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, is proposed as the conceptual paradigm by which symbols, as a language, are universally used to brand identity. This is due to the fact that organisations, institutions, enterprises, and corporations exist as social structures within a wider cultural framework and are continually involved in the process of constructing their own "kinship"

<sup>49</sup> ANCESCHI, Giovanni. (trans., by John Cullars) 'Visibility in Progress', *Design Issues* Vol 12, Number 3, Autumn, 1996. p 4.

myths or narratives. Sperber explains Lévi-Strauss' innovative theory in this way "...he has attempted to show that the first (human nature) lies behind the second (cultural variety) as a unified, abstract structure governing concrete, observable variations."<sup>50</sup> These social interactions of exchange involve the use of symbols which, in the case of structuralism, are regarded not as being fixed and universal, as is the case with modernist discourse, but are dependent for meaning upon the context in which they are framed. According to structuralist theory spoken language is held to be a code which, by its structure, determines the content of the message to be communicated to the recipient within the order of the social network. Munz (1973, 14) writes that for Lévi-Strauss, "language is a method of exchanging information" and that "since all social and cultural relations are forms of exchange, they are forms of language."<sup>51</sup> These concepts can be applied equally to the use of the symbol in the construction of the logo in that the logo's structural form is determined by the cultural or conceptual ethos of the organisation which could be said to have its own particular gestalt. In the case of logo design this concept of language is resolved into visible form. It can be argued that, visually and symbolically, it functions as an element in the rhetoric ratified by that organisation as part of its own conceptualisation.

In the field of design the language of symbolism is continually adapting to and being reassembled into useful form, although this statement needs to be qualified by the adjunct, ideally. Each organisation or corporation will, out of necessity, frame its identity according to its own particular perspective and use and promote those images that best suit its purpose for recognition. What is significant for Cassels, in this design process, is that it is important to look "at the company, how they want to be seen, what it is that they stand for, where are they going, what is the flavour of that company". It is essential that the "style of the mark" takes into account not only "the core personality of the company", which might be framed by symbolic reference to nostalgia, ideas, digital, low key, high tech, but also the historical considerations based on previous logos.<sup>52</sup> This process of adaptation could be likened to the concept of *bricolage*. The term, coined by Lévi-Strauss, which compares the eclectic activity of the human mind with that of a *bricoleur*,

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<sup>50</sup>SPERBER, Dan. Claude Lévi-Strauss in STURROCK, J., ed., Structuralism and Since. From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979. p 20.

<sup>51</sup>MUNZ, Peter. When the Golden Bough Breaks. Structuralism or Typology? London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1973. p 14.

<sup>52</sup>D. Cassels, Head Designer, Siren (1999). Personal communication.

a man who collects odd items and assembles them into a more or less useful object, seems self evident in this pluralistic millennial period. In the structuring of identity, symbols, are in effect being readapted and, in some cases, appropriated with all the attendant cultural problems resulting from that perceived possession. However, for a symbol, to serve as being proof of identity, of value, of significant worth, in this contractual relationship, it must be able to reflect some recognisable quality. To illustrate this point, though, the logo designed by Gavin Bradley and Len Cheeseman of Saatchi and Saatchi for Te Papa will be discussed.



Image 25. Logo of Te Papa

The development of this symbol, which can also be read as an indexical sign, serves as a telling example of the difficulties in evolving a new mark for a new institution that does not have historical precedence, at least within New Zealand. The associated problems were brought to the fore in Gaylene

Preston's documentary on the making of Te Papa, "Getting to Our Place". The footage of the designers and the members of the board proved to be most illuminating as to how both parties reacted to the process and responded to the designs. What seemed to be most evident, in this portrayal of myth making, was that the board itself did not seem to have a unified and concretely developed notion of the museum's identity. Nor, it seemed, did they even have an idea of the audience at which the logo was aimed. Out of the seventy to eighty designs conceived for presentation the painterly cross, focused on by the documentary, brought significant response from the board, significant in terms of this thesis. Len Cheeseman is quoted as saying of this design "See what you can in it." This offhand statement hardly equates with the designers' claim that there was a need for an identity that would work and have integrity in the marketplace. The response from the board when presented with this design was a resounding silence, which then instigated a search for meaning. This search to "See what you can in it" happened to resolve into a figurative description of the potential logo, rather than an identification with the key concept behind the image, that of "soaring". Another revealing comment made by a board member was that, for her, brands were considered to be hard-edged, like McDonalds. A contrary view provided by a *kaumatua* on the significance, for him, of the painterly cross design will be discussed in the following section. Such is the problem when the symbol carries the burden of being all things to all people.

### 3.2 Deconstruction -- Agent Provocateur

Cassels describes the process of establishing and developing identity, within the contemporary context of New Zealand design, as the owning of stories which, in turn, become the ideological coin of ownership.<sup>53</sup> This raises complex issues if there are different perceptions of that identity and how it should be formed. To return to the scenario above the *kaumatua*, Apirana Mahutia, held that the **x** was a failed brand sign and he is quoted as having said that, for him, it stood for the "English symbol of failure." Significantly, the response of Bradley to this dissenting opinion, was that he could not comprehend how this symbol, the painted cross, came to be regarded as being so contentious. Any designer aware of the issues in contemporary social and linguistic theory will know that the **x** signifies negation and therefore denotes symbolic marginalisation. One only has to refer to the allegory of Cain and Abel in Genesis chapter four to recognise how the significance of this narrative has been semiotically disseminated. The referential context which, in this case, has been defined by cultural convention results in the symbol, in this myth, as being imparted with a very different meaning altogether. To this effect Bhabha (1997, 44) quotes the comment made by Fanon that "What is often called the black soul is a white man's artefact."<sup>54</sup>

This thesis puts forward the argument that while deconstruction, as a linguistic and social theory, has served to expose the legitimacy and sanction of the "Logos", and its usage and representation as an instrument of power, it does not necessarily provide an adequate answer for those organisational systems that require a more formal mode of expression. The agenda of

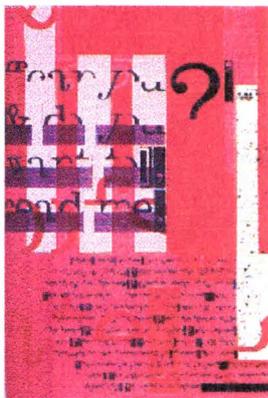


Image 26. Poster, Fuse

deconstruction, it is argued, does not always serve the purpose of logo design, although it has certainly functioned effectively in the other areas of graphic design, most notably those concerned with typography and layout, a movement which has rapidly evolved into style. A stylistic interpretation which in the example illustrated conforms to and legitimises a new set of rules. The intention of this study is not to provide an either/or argument but rather to suggest that in selecting the essential components for the design solution deconstruction is one of

<sup>53</sup>D. Cassels, Head Designer, Siren (1999). Personal communication.

<sup>54</sup>BHABHA, Homi K. The Location of Culture. London and New York, Routledge, 1994. p 44.

the conceptual tools used in the design process to define identity. The logo then, not only adapts to the present moment, as in the example of the Nike swash, but also looks back to the attendant associations within historical tradition.

Norris (1991, 3) states that according to the structuralist dispensation language, traditionally as text, functions as the "bearer of stable (if complicated) meanings..."<sup>55</sup> By this "structures of meaning correspond to some deep-laid mental 'set' or pattern of mind which determines the limits of intelligibility."<sup>56</sup> What has been discovered, through analysing the findings into the apprehension of meaning of symbols, is that there are noticeably quantifiable clusters of perception, despite racial, gender and age differences. This would resonate with Norris' analysis of Lévi-Strauss which determines that there exists a commonality in the interpretation of thematic content beneath the manifold surface expression. But this could also indicate that perception and recognition of meaning is based on learnt knowledge gained through association.

For Norris, structure is regarded as "a totalising order of thought."<sup>57</sup> The question that needs to be asked in relation to this is, is this necessarily detrimental? Surely this depends on the circumstance and the context for, as has been discussed previously, the language of symbolism is most effective as a vehicle of meaning when it has a particular structure to adhere to for its meaning. This, however, is dependent on the efficacy of that structure for the purport of the symbol/logo can be perceived in a way altogether different from the original intention. Cassels describes it this way, "Often the logo is not going to help the company if it is a sick company with bad management and over priced products, all those associations go into it as well, it is a symbol of what is actually going on within the company or product."<sup>58</sup>

Earlier in this chapter it was mentioned that symbols, as logos, operate as rhetorical devices in the practice of visual communication. This is in accord with the view, held by Norris, that structuralism is synonymous with rhetoric while deconstruction is synonymous with "the concept *dialectic*."<sup>59</sup> The meaning inferred by this statement is that the principle of dialectic embraces

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<sup>55</sup>NORRIS, Christopher. Deconstruction Theory and Practice. Rev. ed. London and New York, Routledge, 1991. p 3.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p 3.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p 10.

<sup>58</sup>D. Cassels, Head Designer, Siren (1999). Personal communication.

<sup>59</sup>NORRIS, Christopher. Deconstruction Theory and Practice. Rev. ed. London and New York, Routledge



Image 21. *The Zealand Festival 2000 Icon*

is to suggest, whether successfully or not, individuality, locality and creativity. The nikau ferns making reference to Wellington's Civic Square, synonymous with culture and the kiwi denoting both national and cultural identity.

What significance then does this have for the practice of design? Argument would suggest that while the constitution of the logo requires a symbolic structure to be effective as an emblem of status and power, deconstruction, provides the means whereby corporate narratives are vivified. It is a theory that is formed on the premise that meaning is not defined in accordance to an objective "set" or fixed pattern, it is not stable, rather it is subject to variance of reading depending on the circumstance. Norris describes it in these terms,

"Metaphor and symbol would then correspond to the *mauvais fou* of accepting human nature as something fixed and self-determined, its meaning given in advance, Deconstruction would set itself to prove, in the contrary, that meaning is produced (like Sartrean authenticity) only through a constant self-critique which always *defers* the sense of achieved identity."<sup>60</sup>

It is argued that to follow any one theory could result in an equally self-determined dead end. One which leads to stasis and the other to disintegration. Both theoretical principles have validity in the construction and branding of identity, and even more so in this pluralistic moment. Both have significance in apprehending the hermeneutic meanings of symbolism as it figures in design, and which will be described in detail in the following chapters.

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1991. p 50.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p 104.

#### 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

*"...the lottery is an interpolation of chance in the order of the world and that to accept errors*

*is not to contradict chance: it is to corroborate it."* **Jorge Luis Borges. Labyrinths**

In introducing this chapter reference is made to the issues regarding the meaning and apprehension of symbols that have been explored in the previous chapters while focusing on their communicative function as key signifiers of identity. An identity which is shaped by the constitution of the organisation or company, and which, as symbol/logo conforms to and is, as defined by Peirce in Sebeok (1994) bound by convention.<sup>61</sup> Those conventions, or laws, of representation and interpretation are determined by society, culture, gender, ethnicity and age. The corollary to this is that the ostensible meaning, the purport, of the symbol/logo while visual is not always evident, or legible, or transparent. The inference being that the symbol cannot be relied upon for its meaning to be definitive, it is dependent on chance, upon association and upon context. But should that context, the supporting signifiers, which in this research is taken to be the identifying typography, the nomen, be removed how recognisable is that meaning?

The view that paradoxically contends with the mutability of meaning is that symbols, as they are used in the branding of identity are vehicles, conveyors of significance, invested with what Cato (1991, 23) describes as the "ineffable-spirit" or essence.<sup>62</sup> This indefinable quality is that "something" which might mean all things to all people but which also runs the risk of being random in its association with its referent, the referent being the object to which the symbol alludes. These issues were raised in chapter two (see p 10).

While the previous chapters focus primarily on literary and theoretical analysis they remain secondary to the main concerns of this research which uses qualitative and interpretive methods to investigate the symbolic properties and worthiness of commonly used logos and icons in New Zealand. Barthes (see p 1) proposes that symbolism, both visual and verbal, has been examined in the past with particular reference to its use in the practice of art, but he questions our propensity to study it today. The issue that he raises is fundamental to this research and has ramifications not

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<sup>61</sup>SEBEOK, Thomas A. An Introduction to Semiotics. Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1994.

<sup>62</sup>PEDERSEN, B. Martin, ed., Graphis Logo 1. Zurich, Graphic Press Co., 1991. p 9.

only for the professional practice of design but also for design education and all organisations and enterprises that depend on them.<sup>63</sup>

Prosser writes that "We use images [symbols/icons] not only as representations of the objective world but also to communicate our deepest feelings".<sup>64</sup> If communication is regarded as central to a culture, and it would seem that much of that communication in our culture is primarily visual, it follows that the efficacy of that transaction should be able to be measured. The formal testing of commonly used symbols/logos/icons would evaluate what Prosser describes as the issues of " 'representation', 'trustworthiness', 'interpretation', 'reflexivity' that are central to the qualitative research enterprise..." as it applies to this study.<sup>65</sup> To frame these issues within the context of this research the questions prescribed in the introduction are restated.

1. how effectively and to what degree do symbols communicate their intended meaning?
2. how does that communication differ in meaning from its original intention?
3. to what degree are the results transparent or ambiguous?
4. do men and women perceive symbols differently?
5. how do design criteria such as shape, colour, as well as figurative representation or abstraction assist in visual apprehension?
6. to what extent is this symbolic/visual language a learnt code?
7. is illustrative representation favoured over abstraction?

The resulting evidence, which is acknowledged to be limited due to the systematic sampling of the questionnaire respondents, will at least be comparatively indicative of the degree to which the designed symbols/logos represent the intended meaning of the organisation or company.

The response collection elicited by the survey is aimed at answering the divergent views regarding the use and meaning of symbols which have been discovered in the reading of the literature.

The areas of divergence that tend to emerge and which provide alternative interpretations, dependent on the perspective of the author, as to the effectiveness of the symbol/logo are:

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<sup>63</sup>As a design educator it has been of interest to me to discover the lack of knowledge that first year students have regarding the use of symbols as well as the symbolic use of design elements such as shape, colour and line. Those that have a strong cultural history or some education in the arts and the humanities are much better served in this matter.

<sup>64</sup>PROSSER, Jon, ed., Image-based Research. A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers. London, Falmer Press, 1998. p 1.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p 1.

- ◆ on the one hand, that the logo, as symbol, icon or image, is immediately identifiable
- ◆ on the other, that symbols are unstable bearers of meaning and only meaningful when sited in context

From this it could be assumed that if a symbol or icon, as logo, is designed to signify particular imputed qualities these could be intuitively identified while at the same time allowing for a certain degree of ambiguity or misapprehension. Prosser contends that

"...images are, by their nature, ambiguous and do not in themselves convey meanings which are supplied serendipitally by those who perceive them; contextual and reflexive data which are central to the interpretation of images is insufficiently presented; and analysis of images raises complex methodological and theoretical issues."<sup>66</sup>

While his argument applies mainly to the anthropological, and ethnographical documenting of data through the visual and time based media of film, video and photography the issues raised resonate with those in this study. These issues provided the theoretical framework for the following research design which is primarily hermeneutic and qualitative but which also sets out to measure that response as to the efficacy of symbols and icons as conveyors of meaning.

#### **4.1 Research Context**

This research is positioned within the Interpretive or Hermeneutic tradition of Communication Theory which, along with the Critical, Sociocultural and Phenomenological traditions, seeks to examine the meaning and interpretation of signs, symbols, language and communication through a variety of interactive and empathic means. Consequently the variables selected for this research, which in Quantitative Analysis are taken as the concrete measurements to determine an inference in support of a hypothesis, cannot be said to be conclusively or statistically true, they are indicative of a pattern of association. In the "social domain" language and communication are considered to be contingent on and coloured by the association with multivalent variables which continuously affect interpretation so that, according to Griffin (2000, 482) "reality is a conferred status."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p 98.

<sup>67</sup>GRIFFIN, Em. A First Look at Communication Theory. Fourth ed. Boston, New York, London, Delhi,

Given the nature of the research proposition and the complexity of the variables that would have been involved in determining the research objectively, this interpretive model was considered to be the most appropriate for the research study undertaken. It also supports the subjective involvement in the design process and the manner in which the attributes were ascribed.

#### **4.2 Selection of Symbols, Images and Icons for the Study**

The symbol/logos and icons that are widely represented in New Zealand design and which were selected to be analysed in terms of their communicative capacity were:

##### *Icons*

- ◆ the silver fern/fernleaf
- ◆ the kiwi

##### *Logos*

- ◆ Life Flight
- ◆ Fusion Insurance Services
- ◆ Trilogy Computer Services
- ◆ Learning Media
- ◆ Te Papa
- ◆ Air New Zealand

The original intention was to focus the research on five key symbols that have preeminence in the branding of New Zealand identity. However, it was decided to incorporate those symbols, such as the logo for Trilogy Computer Services, that are purely abstract, graphic representations, but which are still widely recognised by the community. It was considered that the degree of visible meaning, in terms of conceptual significance, would be more ambiguous when the typography identifying the organisation, company, or enterprise was removed. The purpose behind this was to test whether symbols, in their most abstract and pure form and devoid of other contextual signifiers, which poststructuralist thinking claims enhances interpretation, could indeed be perceived as having recognisable meaning. Or, could they be recognised as having increasing intension or conceptual significance. These issues being reflected in research question three. Indeed one of the participants commented on the difficulty of identifying certain symbols/logos as possessing the attributes and concepts that were attributed to them.

To link these ideas with the issues of representation, communication, perception, and ambiguity highlighted by the research questions those symbol/logos, icons and images that were chosen to be evaluated in this study were selected for the following reasons.

- i. formal and abstract properties of shape, colour, and form
- ii. pictorial and figurative representation with an emphasis on realism
- iii. indigenous cultural association
- iv. historical affiliation
- v. degree of familiarity

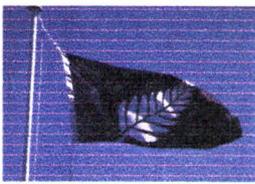


Image 28. *The All Black flag*



Image 29. *The logo of Kiwi lager*



Image 30. *The logo for the R. N. Z. A. F.*

The kiwi and silver fern/fernleaf are indubitably New Zealand's most recognised iconic signifiers having continuing historical and contemporary significance in the branding and promotion of cultural and national identity. To evaluate their representation in terms of illustrative or abstract figuration eight images of the silver fern/fernleaf and ten images of the kiwi were selected. Several of the depicted images of the kiwi and the silver fern/fernleaf, such as the logo of Kiwi lager, are no longer in use but it was decided to include them as they form a valid link in the historical development of the design of New Zealand's cultural identity, and how that identity has been branded. Their inclusion was also to determine how a traditional and historical, pictorial representation performed when placed in conjunction with a more formalised, abstract, and contemporary resolution. Further to this, these icons were selected to discover whether they continue to have ongoing validity, or reflexivity, as symbolic vehicles as exemplified by the use of the R. N. Z. A. F. kiwi in the roundel logo.<sup>68</sup>

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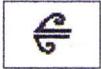
<sup>68</sup>Anecdotal comments regarding this logo observe it to be a kiwi in a bullseye, with all the associated connotations of being a sitting duck for target practice.

#### 4.2.1 Contemporary Symbol/Logos

The six contemporary symbol/logos that were selected for evaluation were:



Lifeflight



Air New Zealand



Fusion Insurance Services



Learning Media Ltd.



Te Papa



Trilogy Computer Services

##### 4.2.1.1 Application of Consent for the Use of Logos

As this investigation centres on the logos from some of the largest corporations in New Zealand, it was imperative to gain consent from them for the inclusion of their logos in this study. Initially, contact was made by phone in order to introduce the area of interest involved in the research, and to seek permission to use that company's/organisation's logo. Contact with Trilogy Computer Services, Kiwi Mail, and the New Zealand Wool Group was made in person. This preliminary contact was followed up by written letters which were requested by Life Flight, Te Papa, Air New Zealand, and Learning Media Ltd., stating the intentions and concerns of the research. The content of the letters outlined the intended aims embodied in the investigation while clearly stipulating that the logo was to be used, expressedly, for the purpose of research alone and no other. Following this a copy of the questionnaire, including the research statement, was sent to those who requested to see the design and content of the questionnaire before consenting to approve the inclusion of their company or organisation's logo in the research process. Those companies/organisations that requested this information were: Life Flight,

Te Papa, Air New Zealand, Fusion Insurance Services, Learning Media Ltd., and the New Zealand Wool Group. Air New Zealand, Te Papa, and Learning Media Ltd., were the most chary regarding their "property", although Learning Media Ltd. has since changed its identity.

What was of interest during this process was the profound, almost hermetic, sense of ownership that some organisations, notably Te Papa and Air New Zealand, held towards their logos. While other companies, such as the New Zealand Wool Group, and surprisingly the defence ministry, the R. N. Z. A. F., made access to their logos more readily available. Overall, those that were contacted expressed interest in the research, and most particularly asked to be informed as to how their logos performed as a communicative vehicle of identity.

### **4.3 Methodology**

As the focus of this research study is on the use of symbolism and the communication of its ontology, its beingness, or sense of "I'ness", both interpretive and qualitative methods were used to determine the various views with which it was perceived. The qualitative method is one which has been used by "the human disciplines" to observe and interpret the mores, traditions, rites, narratives, myths, customs and habits of the human race in general and in particular.<sup>69</sup> According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) this method, like its subject matter, is multifarious and multivalent in its attempts to discover how people make sense of or interpret phenomena. They claim that the "modernist or golden age (1950 - 1970)" of this methodology was impinged on by "...hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, cultural studies, and feminism."<sup>70</sup> The perspectives of hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, culture and feminism, as gender, have bearing on this study in that the logo is the symbolic vehicle in the branding myth. In order to test the proposition which questions whether symbols, as logos, ideally represent the core concept of an organisation or corporation, with reliability and validity, it was decided to formulate a research design that was comprised of three parts:

- i. questionnaire
- ii. focus group, and

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<sup>69</sup>DENZIN, Norman K. and LINCOLN, Yvonna S., eds., Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1994. p 1.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p 2.

### iii. key informant interviews

These methods taking into account the need, in terms of qualitative research, to survey a range of views that reflect a more comprehensive understanding of the problem. Or as Denzin and Lincoln suggest "The combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation."<sup>71</sup> These research methods combine to form a "triangulation" that was considered to be the most effective way to collect data that was both reliable and valid to support the hypothesis. It lessens the degree of specificity or bias which would otherwise be the case if only one process was used to gather information. These issues have been raised in the introduction (see pp 4-5).

## 4.4 Questionnaire Design

If, as this thesis suggests, symbolism is regarded in visual communication design as both a visible and visual language, and that its semantic function is, to a degree, synonymous with linguistics then the meanings communicated by it should be able to be apprehended. To test this theory a nine page questionnaire was designed as part of this investigation to ascertain whether the core concepts conveyed were perceived to be visibly transparent or ambiguous. The questionnaire used a seven point scale to evaluate the perception and preferential ranking of two icons, and six symbol/logos commonly used in New Zealand. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996, 465) describe the use of the Likert scale as an effective means of determining the attitudes of the respondents to the "items" compiled by the researcher.<sup>72</sup> These "items ... express a wide range of attitudes, from extremely positive to extremely negative" requiring the respondent to measure one attitude against another.<sup>73</sup> Numerical values are accorded to each attitude to position the relative nature of the response in terms of "favourableness or unfavourableness".<sup>74</sup> By incorporating this scale into the questionnaire it enabled the interpretative responses of the participants to be quantified according to degree of attitude, or preference, rather than being fixed as an either/or

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p 2.

<sup>72</sup>FRANKFORT-NACHMIAS, Chava and NACHMIAS, David. Research Methods in the Social Sciences. Fifth ed. Great Britain, Arnold, 1996, p 465.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p 465.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p 465.

answer. The questionnaire which was developed and used in the survey is attached to the end of this chapter, see pp 56-64.

The questionnaire was designed in response to a subjective reading to evaluate the denotative and connotative meanings, the imputed qualities, or attributes, expressed by the symbol/logo and icon. These attributes, being regarded as the essence or spirit, are conveyed by the symbol in its linguistic function as the referent through the design elements of figurative shape, line and colour. The degree to which these symbols, icons and images were judged to be either effective, or successful, or significant in terms of their referential function was also evaluated using the Likert seven point scale. This method which is both reflexive and representative (in qualitative terms) links the relationship between the image with its inherent attributes so that the interpreted results can be quantified and indicate patterns of response.

#### **4.4.1 Choice of Ascribed Attributes**

To test the referential validity of the symbol, as logo, as an ideal signifier of the core concepts of an organisation or company certain qualities, or attributes, were ascribed to each icon and symbol/logo to be evaluated. Consequent to the implementation of the interpretive strategy the selection of these attributes was made subjectively and was predicated by an interest in discovering whether that subjective response to the symbol/logo resonated with the findings of the respondents. Rather than be constrained by any corporate bias as to the inherent message behind these contemporary commercial symbol/logos, a subjective interpretation was made of each and those attributes that best represented the symbol/logo were ascribed to each. Because the symbol/logos of Life Flight, Fusion Insurance Services, and Trilogy Computer Services, share similar formal design properties as well as similar functions at the conceptual level, some of these attributes were assigned to more than one symbol/logo. The attributes that were interpreted as belonging to the commercial symbol/logos as part of this study signify both the designated denotatives, the functions or services, as well as the connotations suggested by the experiential activities of that company or organisation. This analysis and interpretation was similarly carried out for the icons of the silver fern/fernleaf and the kiwi.

## 4.4.2 Attributes

Each symbol/logo and icon was accorded a list of attributes which were to be identified and evaluated by the participants as to their degree of connotation. For example the attributes that were ascribed to the fernleaf were: *unique, clean and green, historicity, growth and expansion, superior quality and excellence, and significance*. These attributes took into account the historical usage of the fernleaf in visual communication design as well as its contemporary associations with the promotion of excellence and achievement. A list of those attributes follows.

### 4.4.2.1 List of Ascribed Attributes

The attributes ascribed to the silver fern/fernleaf were:



*unique and clean and green*  
*history and growth and expansion*  
*quality and excellence and symbolic significance*  
*indigenous culture and local and global identity*

The attributes ascribed to the kiwi were:



*unique and strength and stability*  
*symbolic significance and tradition*  
*individuality and stamina and endurance*  
*R. N. Z. A. F. iconic symbol and cultural and national identity*

The attributes ascribed to Life Flight were:



*rescue and cooperation*  
*aviation and strength and stability*  
*trust and symbolic communicative ability*

The attributes ascribed to Fusion Insurance Services were:



*integration and care management*  
*health services and financial security*  
*cooperation and symbolic communicative ability*

The attributes ascribed to Trilogy Computer Services were:



*information systems and digital engineering*  
*computer services and strength and security*  
*dynamism and symbolic communicative ability*

#### **4.5 Scale of Preference**

The attributes that were assigned to each icon and symbol/logo were rated using the Likert seven point scale with the most preferred descriptors, such as "extremely significant" and "extremely insignificant", at either end of the scale. This model regarded as the most effective way of eliciting the preferences of the participants as to how they rated or indeed recognised the qualitative properties and concepts connoted by the symbols, icons and images represented. These preferences were then able to be quantified, or ranked accordingly as detailed in chapter five. The Likert seven point scale was constructed using both numerals and verbal qualifiers.

For example: **1** extremely effective

**2** very effective

**3** effective

**4** indifferent

**5** ineffective

**6** very ineffective

**7** extremely ineffective

The selected verbal qualifiers were applied to determine how "significant or insignificant"; "effective or ineffective"; "successful or unsuccessful"; "appropriate or inappropriate"; "highly or poorly"; "strongly or weakly"; "evident or obscure" the icons, and symbol/logos were as conveyors of meaning.

## 4.6 Questionnaire Format

The questionnaire consisted of three parts:

**Part 1** focused on the interpretation and evaluation of the icons of the silver fern/fernleaf and the kiwi in terms of their validity as cultural and national signifiers. It can be argued that as icons their meaning as referential signifiers is, as alluded to (see p. 4) a learnt code that has been reinforced by their traditionally historical associations with the land and the people. The denotative and connotative meanings of these icons is also informed by figurative representation which, historically, has been literal and has evolved into abstraction. To evaluate this eight images of the silver fern/fernleaf and ten images of the kiwi were used to determine the preference for the illustrative over the abstract. The depicted images made use of both contemporary and historic designs.

**Part 2** centred on the analysis of three out of the six corporate symbol/logos. These featured the logos of Life Flight, Fusion Insurance Services, and Trilogy Computer Services. The first question evaluated the ability of the participants to identify the designatum, the core service, or the industry/organisation that the logo denoted. The following questions evaluated the attitudes of the participants in their perception and recognition of the attributes connoted by the symbol/logos. These questions were designed to gather data to show the effectiveness and intention behind the communication.

**Part 3** included a section requesting participants to associate the depicted symbol/logos with a list of services or functions. The services or functions that were listed were:

research	education
food	finance
health	insurance
sport	science
engineering	commerce
travel	



Image 31. *The logo of the National Library*



Image 32. *The logo of Air New Zealand*



Image 33. *The logo of Learning Media*

This list incorporated those products and services for which the logos had been designed as well as those that the logos could also be said to denote. For example the logo of the National Library, designed to represent an opened book, could also be said to make inference to the military through its chevron shape, as well as alluding to engineering and science. From this it can be inferred that while certain logos such as the Air New Zealand koru are immediately recognisable through their exposure others, such as the logo of Learning Media Ltd., are not so widely known. Therefore it became of interest to discover whether the reading of such abstract symbol/logos could be identified as belonging to other services and if so how many. And, to what degree that interpretation was different from the intended function.

The logo for the National Library was not included in the evaluation but was used as an example to illustrate how a symbol/logo might signify other denotations. In other words how one symbol could be read as signifying, or standing for, more than one service or product. The category "don't know" was also included rather than the participants second guess their responses.

#### **4.7 Trialling the Questionnaire**

Prior to proceeding with the questionnaire survey a pilot study was conducted as a precursor to the main research. The questionnaire was given to ten participants who had been selected according to their age, gender, employment status and ethnicity, to test the appropriateness and clarity of the design. This group included three students in year one of Massey University's School of Design programme, a second year design student, a participant who was unemployed (at the time of the test) two participants currently employed, and three who were retired, although involved in various areas of interest. Of these one is currently undertaking a Masters in Classics, one is involved in the study and collecting of micro-minerals, and one whose interests are in the area of military history.

The questionnaire was supported by a covering statement outlining the topic and the objective of the research. In addition to this a section was included requesting the participants to identify their age group, ethnicity/nationality, employment status or activity, and gender, so as to be able to quantify the demographic mix of those surveyed. Personal details such as names, contact numbers and addresses were not asked to be supplied.

The participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire and to make any recommendations towards improving the format of the design, the clarity of the instructions, the content of the questions, and the images of the symbol/logos and icons. One participant asked about the inclusion of a mixed race group but it was decided that this could be signified from selecting more than one of the ethnic groupings. For example by choosing Maori and Pakeha/European. The following figure represents the demographic makeup of this group.

<b>PILOT STUDY</b>		
<b>categories</b>	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>
<b>age</b>		
20 - 30	☆☆	◆◆
30 - 40	☆	
40 - 50		◆
50 - 60		◆
60 - 70		
70 - 80	☆☆	◆
<b>ethnicity</b>		
Asian		
Pakeha/European	☆☆☆☆	◆◆◆◆
Maori	☆	
Pacific Islander		
<b>field or activity</b>		
education	☆☆☆	◆◆◆◆
unemployed	☆	
commerce	☆	
science/technology		
public service	☆	◆◆
retired	☆☆	

Fig 1. Details of the 10 participants who took part in the pilot study

From this trial and the discussions following four amendments were incorporated into the design. These were:

- i. to alter the ethnic/nationality groupings from Asian, Indian, Pakeha, Maori, Pacific Islander and European to that of Asian, Maori, Pakeha/European and Pacific Islander.
- ii. the request to carefully investigate both the images and the verbal content of the questionnaire by making some of images and instructions clearer.
- iii. to redesign the layout of the questionnaire so that all the questions fall on the same page as the symbol/logo.
- iv. to simplify the wording of the topic of the research on the cover paper from: *symbolism and communication: an investigation into the meaning of symbols in New Zealand* to *the evaluation of symbols in logo design*.

Apart from this the comments on the design were that it was clear and the instructions were easily comprehended. The results of the pilot study confirmed the effectiveness of the design in that all the questionnaires were successfully answered according to the instructions and without confusion. This being done the survey of the 50 participants was carried out.

#### **4.8 Questionnaire Participants Surveyed**

The following figures summarise the participants gender, age, ethnicity and activity.

The participants surveyed were systematically rather than randomly selected, as the selection was made through association and therefore cannot be said to be statistically pulled. (This and other issues regarding the research methodology will be discussed in the section titled "Limitations of the Research Project"). While the demographic makeup of this survey group tends to represent the attitudinal responses of more women than men the results of the findings, which are detailed in chapter five and commented on in chapter six, seem to indicate that there is a bias in preference, albeit a minor one, according to gender.

gender	male	female
		

Fig 2. Representation of gender of the 50 participants

The demographic objective was to select a range of participants that would represent, as fairly as possible, a cross section of the population for the study. So as to be in accord with the parameters outlined by the research questions it was decided to evaluate the responses of both groups as to how they perceived and apprehended the meaning of the symbols/logos and icons. And also to determine whether there was a significant preference for the abstract over the figurative by either gender. Initially friends, family and neighbours constituted the core group. Other participants were recruited from those connected with the core group either through business associations or through family contact. This was necessary in order to incorporate a wider cultural diversity. This endeavour was not entirely successful with the ethnic and gender based group, European female, dominating in terms of numbers. As a result the gender mix of the survey group comprised 20 men and 30 women as the figure above illustrates. What was successful was that when approached all participants, bar one, agreed to taking part in the survey.

age	male	female
20 - 30		
30 - 40		
40 - 50		
50 - 60		
60 - 70		
70 - 80		

Fig 3. Representation of age of the 50 participants

It was decided to survey those aged between 20 - 80. Apart from establishing boundaries for the survey, it was felt that those aged 20 - 30 are of the generation that is most permeated by symbolism as branding, while those aged 70 - 80 could be said to have a more traditional appreciation of the symbol. However, finding potential participants in the age brackets of 60 - 80 proved to be difficult. In design education most students fall into the 20 - 30 group. For them the language of symbolism as it applies to design and the branding of identity is an integral component of that learning with resultant ramifications for outside practice.



symbol/logos that form the visual aspect of this research are represented by the categories: education, commerce, science/technology, and public service listed in the figure above. The premise is that these should be able to be recognised and assessed by the participants.

field or activity other than specified	male	female
mother		◆
consultancy		◆◆
graphic design	◆◆	◆
horticulture	◆◆	◆
manufacturing	◆◆	
unidentified		◆
office administration		◆◆
media		◆

Fig 6. Representation of other occupations or fields of activity

The areas of activity or field of employment that were not incorporated by the categories listed were able to be identified by the participant by a space left for this purpose. The reason given for this was that the questionnaire be inclusive rather than excluding those who were either care givers or occupied in other areas. It is argued that these participants would also come into contact with the symbol/logos represented if not necessarily directly in terms of field of employment or activity. Otherwise the design would be what Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996, 182) describe as an incomplete frame which would therefore lead to invalid findings.<sup>76</sup>

#### 4.8.1 Procedure

All participants were either contacted initially by phone or by a person who was already involved as a participant in the questionnaire survey. It was emphasised to each potential participant that the research was part of a thesis in design investigating the representation, perception and understanding of certain commonly used symbol/logos and icons in New Zealand design, and that at no time was any personal information requested of them other than those categories listed

<sup>76</sup>FRANKFORT-NACHMIAS, Chava and NACHMIAS, David. Research Methods in the Social Sciences. Fifth ed. Great Britain, Arnold, 1996, p 182.

in the covering statement. If those asked to take part in the questionnaire survey felt, for whatever reason, that they could not do so then their view was respected.

#### **4.9 Key Informant Interviews**

Denzin and Lincoln make the comment that "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry."<sup>77</sup> Any study that proposes to investigate the final output of a process, in this case the final designs of commonly used logos and icons, also needs to examine the views of those who are involved with that process at its inception. As has been discussed in the introduction (see pp. 2-3) the language of symbolism, as used in identity design, involves a two way contract between the designer and the public with communication being the intended aim. An aim which, it is suggested, is one that is often taken for granted.<sup>78</sup> But what do designers themselves think about the use of symbolism? How important a tool is it for them in the construction and branding of an identity? As they perform a significant role in this interaction their views cannot be precluded in this research. To discover just what views were held about the use of symbolism in the practice of design interviews were conducted with two designers and one communications consultant.

The designers and consultant were contacted by phone to determine whether they were willing to be key informants in this research. As with the participants involved in the questionnaire, the statement outlining the parameters of the content of the research, as well as the objectives, was discussed with each subject. Further discussion focused on the questions which would be put to them in the interview. The communications consultant had already participated in the questionnaire and expressed her desire to be part of a more in depth discussion as to her views of the use of symbolism in her field of expertise.

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<sup>77</sup>DENZIN, Norman K. and LINCOLN, Yvonna S., eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1994. p 4.

<sup>78</sup>In the interview with Arnold Hill it was mentioned that at a hui, held in Rotorua in 1998, the fernleaf was presented as being the symbol or icon for all New Zealanders. This statement brought a considerable amount of comment from Maori in that they did not recognise the fernleaf as significantly representing them.

As stated those selected to be interviewed are employed in different activities within the profession of visual communication design. The decision to make the selection accordingly was informed by the consideration that these subjects would best provide an *overview* of those involved in design practice, as well as in the construction of identity, which involves not only formal practice but also theoretical and conceptual components. As the construction of identity is, at times, intimately connected with cultural roots (as illuminated by Gaylene Preston in the documented formation of Te Papa) it was considered important to discuss these issues as well. Of these three key informants one has a background in the formal practice of design and the application of that design to various organisations; one, being Maori, is specifically informed by the issues of *whakapapa* and the use of symbolism in contemporary Maori design; and one uses her background in poststructuralist literary theory in establishing branding and identity through visual and verbal symbolism. The three interviewees were:

- ◆ Deidre Cassels, Head Designer of the Wellington based design group Siren.
- ◆ Stephanie Pietkiewicz, Communications Consultant for various corporates.
- ◆ Arnold Hill, Freelance Designer working specifically for Maori.

The interview with the key informants was conducted on an informal basis that was structured around the following questions:

1. How important is the use of symbolism for you as a designer?
2. What factors do you consider to be the most relevant in the creation of a logo design?  
By factors I mean the formal design properties that comprise the physical structure of the logo, as well as the inherent concepts which are suggested by the concrete form of that abstract or figurative symbol.
3. How relevant to you is semiotic theory in contemporary design practice? In other words is your design solution dependent on knowing and analysing the operation of signs and symbols and their referential function, or are your solutions driven by intuition?
4. Do you think that symbolic language can function independently, as in the case of the Nike swash, or does it require additional support for comprehension?
5. How significant is the issue of the appropriation of cultural symbolism?

The questions were conceived in recognition of the fact that designers are one of the partners in the eternal triangle of design. While some of these questions were formulated to support the key

research questions as to the use of design criteria, abstraction and figuration, in making the apprehended message transparent or ambiguous, they were also designed to provide another facet to the study. It is presupposed that semiotic theory as well as the concepts involved in structuralism and deconstructionism have informed design but to what extent they are considered and intentionally used by the key informants warranted questioning. That is, did they approach design from an intuitive level of awareness or did they incorporate semiotic and critical theory into the final solution. All the interviews were recorded and the content was then transcribed. The outcomes of these findings will be discussed in greater length in chapter six.

#### **4.10 Focus Group**

Krueger (1994, p 29) states that focus groups are a useful component of qualitative research in gathering information regarding the perceptions, feelings and responses of a group of individuals towards a particular research problem.<sup>79</sup> He suggests that when used before the quantitative procedures they can assist in establishing the framework for the questions supporting the quantitative analysis. As used afterwards focus groups can be useful in illuminating the problems with the verbal content of the questionnaire and the quantitative procedure. As this methodology applies to this study it was decided to conduct a focus group at the end of the questionnaire survey to elicit further responses to the meaning of symbolism in design. The purpose was to add another dimension to substantiate the findings that were the result of the questionnaire and, to assess whether those findings into the meaning of symbolism were commensurate with the perceptions of the participants in the focus group.

The criteria used to select each participant were:

- ◆ interest and knowledge of design
- ◆ age of participant and knowledge of symbol/logos through access to the media
- ◆ cultural association

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<sup>79</sup>KRUEGER, Richard. *Focus Groups*. A Practical Guide for Applied Research. Sage Publications Inc., Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi, 1994. p 29.

#### 4.10.1 Focus Group Participants

The group was made up of seven individuals from different backgrounds, ethnicity, age, occupation and gender. Each participant was approached either in person or contacted by phone and invited to be part of this group. An outline of the research question, the investigation into the representation, meaning and apprehension of symbols, and an explanation of the reason for the study were discussed with each individual as well indicating the length of time that the discussion would take. It was made clear to each participant that the aim of this part of the research was to discover individual perceptions and attitudinal responses to the meanings of the icons and symbol/logos presented to the group. The individuals approached were free to decide to participate or not, and no duress was placed on those who selected not to take part. One participant had taken part in the pilot study but had no knowledge of the symbol/logos and icons that were to be the focal point in this group discussion.

The initial intention was to include in the focus group a similar demographic makeup consistent with the survey group involved in the questionnaire so as to corroborate those findings with the attitudes of the focus group. This was not entirely successful and was affected by the logistical problems of gathering a group of individuals together at the same time for a specific purpose. One potential participant, a Phillipina, who had taken part in the questionnaire and had expressed a desire to be further involved was unable to do so due to family commitments.



Image 34. Focus group participants

The focus group consisted of four men and three women. Of the four men two were fourth year Industrial Design students, one was a retired general practitioner, and one a practicing artist. One participant was eighty, two participants were in their thirties and one was in his twenties. All male participants were European in ethnicity. The female component included three women: a Flamenco dancer and dance teacher, an ESOL secondary school teacher, and a housewife. Of these two were in their forties and one was in her fifties. The ethnic mix of the female participants consisted of two European and one Vietnamese.

#### 4.10.2 Symbol/logos and Icons Presented for Discussion

The focus group was presented with eight symbol/logos and two icons to discover how effectively these signified their intended meaning; to ascertain how transparent or ambiguous that meaning was; to verify the use of design elements and their relationship with visible meaning. The symbol/logos and icons, apart from the Swastika and the logo of the Aquatic Centre, were the same images used in parts one, two and three of the questionnaire. These were:

- ♦ the logo of the Black Ferns
- ♦ the logo of the R.N.Z.A.F.
- ♦ the logo of Life Flight
- ♦ the logo of Fusion Insurance Services
- ♦ the logo of Trilogy Computer Services
- ♦ the logo of Learning Media Ltd.
- ♦ the logo of Te Papa
- ♦ the koru of Air New Zealand



Image 35. *The logo for the Aquatic Centre*

The logo of the Aquatic Centre was included in this part of the research as the design of this symbol/logo is atypical of the more traditional symbol/logos used in this study. It equates more with the symbol/logo of Te Papa as being suggestive of experiential activity.

#### 4.10.3 Procedure

The focus group was conducted at the Willis street campus of Massey University's Basic Design programme as it afforded a suitable venue for the group to be held as well as providing adequate space for the sequential display of all the images for discussion. Separate images of the two icons and the six symbol/logos were printed onto A4 sheets and mounted side by side on a display board. This was to generate discussion by focusing on the symbol/logos shared properties as well as assessing them individually in relation to their signifying capacity.

The aims of the research, that is the investigation into the representation, meaning and apprehension of symbols as used in contemporary New Zealand design, were introduced verbally.

The proposition put to the group was that symbol/logos as they are used in the branding of identity ideally represent the core concept of an organisation or company but, if the identifying typography and the situational context is eliminated what significance could they then be said to possess. It was explained that what was required from the discussion were individual responses to the images displayed which would then suggest whether symbol/logos and icons were either effective and transparent or ambiguous conveyors of meaning.

#### **4.10.4 Directed Questions/Prompts**

While the focus group was structured so that comments were kept directed to the image under discussion the participants were at liberty to express their individual views and thoughts. In order that the focus of the discussion was maintained participants were asked to consider the images according to the following questions:

- ◆ what are the meanings suggested by the configuration of the design elements of colour, line, shape of this symbol/logo?
- ◆ from those inferred meanings what company or organisation is identified by this symbol/logo?
- ◆ in your opinion do you think that this is a successful symbol/logo/icon?
- ◆ the koru of Air New Zealand signifies travel, what other function could it represent?

Notes from the comments arising during the discussion into the perceived meanings and suggested connotations of the symbol/logos and icons were taken. These have been included in detail in chapter six as part of the data analysis and to substantiate the findings of the questionnaire survey.

#### **4.11 Limitations of the Research Project**

This section addresses some of the limitations in the research design and the methodology used to test the proposition. It can be argued that the attributes ascribed to the symbol/logos and icons are overly deterministic and therefore the findings, according to quantitative analysis lack objective

rigour and are not conclusive. One solution to this would have been to have used the focus group at the beginning of the research to generate discussion as to what the symbol/logos and icons might suggest in terms of meaning. Another option, one which was considered, would have been to have initially trialled a list of attributes with a population sample, and asked those respondents to correlate those words with the images of the symbol/logos and icons. The argument made to these valid objections is that it can be claimed that all interpretation of language, whether it be visual or verbal, is subjective. Given this, it was of interest in formulating the proposition behind the research, and as a designer of that process, to interpret the symbol/logos and icons subjectively and then to discover whether that interpretation resonated with the respondents. The application of the Likert model was then used to quantify those interpretations so that that hermeneutic analysis could be substantiated and the patterns of perception could be ascertained.

It is acknowledged that meaning according to poststructuralist thinking is contingent on context and that therefore there are many variables which can colour the reading. However it was of interest to find out whether the symbol/logo/icon was in any way marginalised as a referent when the context, the typography, was removed. Or whether meaning could be apprehended through the elements of shape, colour, line and form which comprise the key syntactical components of the designer.

Although these limitations are seen to be part of the research design and while the data collected can be judged to be tentative and indicative, and cannot be argued to be statistically valid, it does provide an insight into the way in which these symbol/logos and icons, which are so much taken for granted, are perceived. The research method while generalised nevertheless opens up the subject for a more in depth investigation into the specificity of symbols/icons and the variables impinging on their representation and meaning.

## Research Study Questionnaire

As a lecturer in Design, at Massey University, Wellington, I am involved in study and research towards a Master of Design. The topic of my research is: *symbolism and communication: an investigation into the meaning of symbols in New Zealand*. This questionnaire has been designed to investigate the meaning of symbolism as used in contemporary New Zealand design. The focus is centred on logos that are both figurative and abstract. The objective is to assess whether the communication of intended meanings can be demonstrably identified.

As a participant in this study could you please answer the following by placing a tick in the appropriate box provided.

1. Please indicate your age from one of the following age groups.

20 - 30	30 - 40	40 - 50	50 - 60	60 - 70	70 - 80

2. Please indicate your nationality from one of the following groups.

Asian	Maori	Pakeha European	Pacific Islander

If you do not identify with any of the above please write your nationality in the space below.

.....

3. Please indicate which of the following fields or activities you are involved in.

Education	Unemployed	Commerce	Science Technology	Public Service	Retired

If none of the above could you please write in the space below which area you are involved in.

.....

4. Please circle whether you are Male or Female.

*The fernleaf has historically been associated with a range of products and sporting activities.*

*The following questions are designed to evaluate the way in which this symbol communicates certain ideas. Please study the image carefully and put a tick in the box of the word/phrase that you are most in agreement with.*

*(Please try not to tick "indifferent" if you can help it.)*



**1.** How do you think/feel that the silver fern communicates New Zealand as being unique.

Extremely Effectively	Very Effectively	Effectively	Indifferent	Ineffectively	Very Ineffectively	Extremely Ineffectively

**2.** How would you rate the fernleaf as portraying New Zealand and its products as being clean and green.

Extremely Successful	Very Successful	Successful	Indifferent	Unsuccessful	Very Unsuccessful	Extremely Unsuccessful

**3.** How would you associate the silver fern with New Zealand's historical ties to the land.

Extremely Significant	Very Significant	Significant	Indifferent	Insignificant	Very Insignificant	Extremely Insignificant

**4.** How effective or ineffective is the fernleaf at communicating the ideas of growth and expansion.

Extremely Effective	Very Effective	Effective	Indifferent	Ineffective	Very Ineffective	Extremely Ineffective

**5.** How would you rate the fernleaf as conveying the ideas of superior quality and excellence.

Extremely Highly	Very Highly	Highly	Indifferent	Low	Very Low	Extremely Low

**6.** How would you rate the fernleaf in terms of its significance as a symbol.

Extremely Significant	Very Significant	Significant	Indifferent	Insignificant	Very Insignificant	Extremely Insignificant

7. To what degree do you associate the fernleaf with the indigenous culture of New Zealand.

Extremely Significant	Very Significant	Significant	Indifferent	Insignificant	Very Insignificant	Extremely Insignificant

8. How would you rate the fernleaf as a trademark for promoting New Zealand's cultural and national identity both locally and globally.

Extremely Highly	Very Highly	Highly	Indifferent	Poorly	Very Poor	Extremely Poor

9. Please rank the following 8 logos/images according to your preference in the box provided. 1 = the most preferred. 8 = the least preferred.

*The kiwi, as an icon, has been used to symbolise New Zealand's identity for many years.*

*The following questions are designed to evaluate the way in which this symbol is perceived.*

*Please study the image carefully and put a tick in the box of*

*the word/phrase that you are most in agreement with.*

*(Please try not to tick "indifferent" if you can help it.)*



1. How would you rate the kiwi as communicating the idea of New Zealand and its products as being unique.

Extremely Appropriate	Very Appropriate	Appropriate	Indifferent	Inappropriate	Very Inappropriate	Extremely Inappropriate

2. How would you rate this icon's capacity to promote the ideas of strength and stability.

Extremely Highly	Very Highly	Highly	Indifferent	Poorly	Very Poorly	Extremely Poorly

3. How would you rate the kiwi in terms of its significance as a symbol.

Extremely Significant	Very Significant	Significant	Indifferent	Insignificant	Very Insignificant	Extremely Insignificant

4. How would you rate this symbol as being associated with tradition.

Extremely Highly	Very Highly	Highly	Indifferent	Poorly	Very Poorly	Extremely Poorly

5. How does the symbol of the kiwi communicate the idea of individuality.

Extremely Effectively	Very Effectively	Effectively	Indifferent	Ineffectively	Very Ineffectively	Extremely Ineffectively

6. How would you rate this symbol as signifying stamina and endurance.

Extremely Appropriate	Very Appropriate	Appropriate	Indifferent	Inappropriate	Very Inappropriate	Extremely Inappropriate

7. How would you rate the kiwi as an icon of the Royal New Zealand Airforce.

Extremely Appropriate	Very Appropriate	Appropriate	Indifferent	Inappropriate	Very Inappropriate	Extremely Inappropriate

8. How would you rate the kiwi's effectiveness in promoting New Zealand's cultural and national identity.

Extremely Effective	Very Effective	Effective	Indifferent	Ineffective	Very Ineffective	Extremely Ineffective

9. Please rank the following 10 images/logos according to your preference in the box provided.  
1 = your most preferred. 10 = your least preferred.

*This logo has been designed for an organisation involved in a particular type of rescue service.*

*The following questions are designed to evaluate the way this logo is perceived.*

*Please study the logo carefully and put a tick in the box of the word/phrase that you are most in agreement with.*



*(Please try not to tick "indifferent" if you can help it.)*

**1.** What type of rescue service do you think that this logo represents.

Mountain Rescue	Aviation Rescue	Ambulance Service	Marine Rescue	Fire Service	Earthquake Rescue	Industrial Safety

**2.** How would you rate this logo at expressing the idea of rescue.

Extremely Effectively	Very Effectively	Effectively	Indifferent	Ineffectively	Very Ineffectively	Extremely Ineffectively

**3.** How does this logo convey the concept of cooperation.

Extremely Strongly	Very Strongly	Strongly	Indifferent	Weakly	Very Weakly	Extremely Weakly

**4.** How would you rate this logo as signifying aviation.

Extremely Significant	Very Significant	Significant	Indifferent	Insignificant	Very Insignificant	Extremely Insignificant

**5.** To what degree are the qualities of strength and stability evident in this logo.

Extremely Evident	Very Evident	Evident	Indifferent	Obscure	Very Obscure	Extremely Obscure

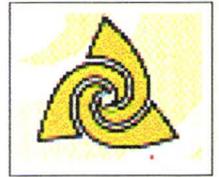
**6.** To what degree is the concept of trust portrayed by this logo.

Extremely Strongly	Very Strongly	Strongly	Indifferent	Weakly	Very Weakly	Extremely Weakly

**7.** How would you rate this symbol as communicating all the ideas above.

Extremely Appropriate	Very Appropriate	Appropriate	Indifferent	Inappropriate	Very Inappropriate	Extremely Inappropriate

*This logo has been designed as an integrated identify for certain organisations.  
The following questions are designed to evaluate the way this logo is perceived.  
Please study the logo carefully and put a tick in the box of the word/phrase  
that you are most in agreement with.*



*(Please try not to tick "indifferent" if you can help it.)*

1. Which of the following industries/organisations do you think that this logo represents.

Information Technology	Aviation	Health	Insurance	Education	Engineering	Commerce

2. How would you rate this logo as signifying the idea of integration.

Extremely Appropriate	Very Appropriate	Appropriate	Indifferent	Inappropriate	Very Inappropriate	Extremely Inappropriate

3. To what degree does this logo suggest the concept of care management.

Extremely Strongly	Very Strongly	Strongly	Indifferent	Weakly	Very Weakly	Extremely Weakly

4. To what degree would you associate this symbol with health services.

Extremely Strongly	Very Strongly	Strongly	Indifferent	Weakly	Very Weakly	Extremely Weakly

5. How would you rate this logo at communicating the concept of financial security.

Extremely Effective	Very Effective	Effective	Indifferent	Ineffective	Very Ineffective	Extremely Ineffective

6. How would you rate this logo as expressing the idea of co-operation.

Extremely Appropriate	Very Appropriate	Appropriate	Indifferent	Inappropriate	Very Inappropriate	Extremely Inappropriate

7. How would you rate this symbol as communicating all the ideas above.

Extremely Highly	Very Highly	Highly	Indifferent	Poorly	Very Poorly	Extremely Poorly

*This logo has been designed for a company that is involved with a particular technology.*

*The following questions are designed to evaluate the way this logo is perceived.*

*Please study the logo carefully and put a tick in the box of the word/phrase that you are most in agreement with.*

*(Please try not to tick "indifferent" if you can help it.)*



**1.** Which of the following industries/organisations do you think that this logo represents.

Information Technology	Aviation	Health	Insurance	Education	Engineering	Commerce

**2.** How would you rate this logo as signifying the idea of information systems.

Extremely Appropriate	Very Appropriate	Appropriate	Indifferent	Inappropriate	Very Inappropriate	Extremely Inappropriate

**3.** To what degree does this logo suggest the concept of digital engineering.

Extremely Strongly	Very Strongly	Strongly	Indifferent	Weakly	Very Weakly	Extremely Weakly

**4.** To what degree would you associate this symbol with computer services.

Extremely Strongly	Very Strongly	Strongly	Indifferent	Weakly	Very Weakly	Extremely Weakly

**5.** How would you rate this logo at communicating the concepts of strength and security.

Extremely Effective	Very Effective	Effective	Indifferent	Ineffective	Very Ineffective	Extremely Ineffective

**6.** How would you rate this logo as expressing the idea of dynamism.

Extremely Highly	Very Highly	Highly	Indifferent	Poorly	Very Poorly	Extremely Poorly

**7.** How would you rate this symbol as communicating all the ideas above.

Extremely Appropriate	Very Appropriate	Appropriate	Indifferent	Inappropriate	Very Inappropriate	Extremely Inappropriate

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
							
library							
research							✓
food							
health							
finance							
insurance							
sport							
engineering							
travel							✓
education							
science							✓
commerce							
don't know							

*These logos have been designed for particular companies or organisations to represent their products or services.*

*For the 6 logos shown above (A-F) please tick the functions or services you think the image represents.*

*For example if you think that the logo "G" symbolises science, research and travel, you would tick the appropriate columns as shown.*

*If you do not know please place a tick in the box labelled "don't know".*

*(Please try not to tick "don't know" if you can help it.)*

## 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

*"Throughout the earth there are ancient forms, forms incorruptible and eternal;*

*any one of them could be the symbol I sought."* **Jorge Luis Borges. Labyrinths**

This chapter begins by restating the claim made, in chapter two, by McKeon (see p 8) that the function of symbols is to signify a token of identity within a contractual relationship between two parties.<sup>80</sup> What is implied by this claim is that there is an unmistakable recognition by the recipient of the inherent meaning, the import, that is being both denoted and connoted by the symbol. An interesting observation, in this regard, was made by Cassels that "Often the logo is not going to help the company if it is a sick company with bad management and over-priced products, those associations go into it [the logo] as well. It is only a symbol of what is actually going on within the company or product."<sup>81</sup> This claim brings us back to the key statement that this thesis is founded on which is, *can symbols, as logos, be said to ideally represent the core concept of an organisation or company?* The primary focus being that the perception and apprehension of symbols has been and still is regarded as arbitrary due to the claim made by Peirce (see p 14) that meaning is defined by convention<sup>82</sup>.

While it is recognised that the use of symbolism is most effective as a communicative tool when it has undergone a developmental period in which it has been supported by additional visual, rhetorical devices, this does not suggest that certain forms cannot be recognised or valued as expressing specific inherent qualities or attributes. This is borne out by the results of the questionnaire survey which are offered as evidence to support the argument that while the discernment of particular imputed qualities can be read to a degree the meaning of symbol/logos is not altogether transparent. This, despite the symbol/logos under discussion being removed from their surrounding context and typographic identifiers. The reading of the imputed qualities which have been ascribed to, and are said to be possessed by that shape or form, have been measured by quantitative method although, it must be added, those interpretations cannot be

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<sup>80</sup>BRYSON, L. FINKELSTEIN, L. MACIVER, R. M. McKEON, R. eds., Symbols and Values: An Initial Study. New York, Cooper Square Pub., Inc., 1964. p 21.

<sup>81</sup>D. Cassels, Head Designer, Siren (1999). Personal communication.

<sup>82</sup>SEBEOK, Thomas A. An Introduction to Semiotics. Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1994, p 28.

deemed to be conclusive. The degree of transparency in interpretation which is suggested by this is summed up by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p 32) who state that "Visual communication is always coded. It *seems* transparent only because we know the code already, at least passively - but without knowing what it is we know...".<sup>83</sup> As the choice of icons and symbol/logos for this study has been mentioned in chapter four (see pp. 34 - 36) the reader is referred back to this section for the discussion on that selection.

### **5.1 Findings of the Use of the Symbol/Logo/Icon/Image**

The questionnaire surveyed contemporary and historical images of two New Zealand icons, the silver fern/fernleaf, and the kiwi. This, as has been discussed in chapter four, was to test the validity and appropriateness of these icons as signifiers of nationalistic identity. In addition six contemporary symbol/logos were chosen for their graphic resonance with elements used in Maori design as well as with the abstract forms of neoplatonism, the circle, the square, and the triangle, that have informed modernism. These contemporary logos can be described by the modernist ethos that form follows function while also alluding to certain states or experiences that are more subjective and intuitive. In this sense they function as *gestalts*.

The following tables represent the attitudinal responses relating to the perception and preference of the attributes for the icons and the symbol/logos under discussion. These results are of the survey group inclusive of age, ethnicity, gender and employment status. Not all findings are representative of the entire survey group as some of the questionnaires were not answered in full. However out of the 50 participants surveyed this accounts for only one person (2%).

Tables **1, 2, 3** and **4** summarise the findings for:

- ◆ the evaluation in preference for the attributes of the silver fern/fernleaf
- ◆ the preferred ranked order of the visual representation of the silver fern/fernleaf
- ◆ the evaluation in preference for the attributes of the kiwi
- ◆ the preferred ranked order of the visual representation of the kiwi

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<sup>83</sup>KRESS, G. and VAN LEEUWEN, T. The Grammar of Visual Design. London, Routledge, 1996. p 32.

**Table I**

Combined responses of 50 participants indicating the evaluation of the attributes assigned to the silver fern/fernleaf

<b>1. unique</b>							
Qualifier	extremely effectively	very effectively	effectively	indifferent	ineffectively	very ineffectively	extremely ineffectively
"n"	3	23	18	1	4	1	0
%	6	46	36	2	8	2	0
<b>2. clean and green</b>							
Qualifier	extremely successful	very successful	successful	indifferent	unsuccessful	very successful	extremely unsuccessful
"n"	3	17	22	1	4	0	1
%	6	34	44	2	8	0	2
<b>3. historical ties to the land</b>							
Qualifier	extremely significant	very significant	significant	indifferent	insignificant	very insignificant	extremely insignificant
"n"	3	16	22	3	6	0	1
%	6	32	44	6	12	0	2
<b>4. growth and expansion</b>							
Qualifier	extremely effective	very effective	effective	indifferent	ineffective	very ineffective	extremely ineffective
"n"	2	10	20	4	12	2	1
%	4	20	40	8	24	4	2
<b>5. superior quality and excellence</b>							
Qualifier	extremely highly	very highly	highly	indifferent	low	very low	extremely low
"n"	3	13	15	5	12	1	1
%	6	26	30	10	24	2	2
<b>6. symbolic significance</b>							
Qualifier	extremely significant	very significant	significant	indifferent	insignificant	very insignificant	extremely insignificant
"n"	15	20	11	1	3	0	0
%	30	40	22	2	6	0	0
<b>7. indigenous culture</b>							
Qualifier	extremely significant	very significant	significant	indifferent	insignificant	very insignificant	extremely insignificant
"n"	5	15	17	3	7	2	1
%	10	30	34	6	14	4	2
<b>8. local and global identity</b>							
Qualifier	extremely significant	very significant	significant	indifferent	insignificant	very insignificant	extremely insignificant
"n"	11	16	17	2	3	0	0
%	22	32	34	4	6	0	0

## 5.2 The Silver fern/Fernleaf

The findings indicate that the silver fern/fernleaf is recognised as having a high level of referential status, if not to to an extremely high degree overall. Of the 50 participants surveyed 88% judged

this icon to be "effective" in connoting the attribute *unique*. It was similarly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, rated by 84% of the participants as "successfully" conveying the attributes *clean and green*. This pattern of response and appreciation was also found for the nationalistic concept of *historical ties to the land*. From the elicited responses 82% of those surveyed indicate a recognition between the form of the silver fern/fernleaf and the inherent meaning of this attribution. While these evaluations privileged the icon of the silver fern/fernleaf the preference for the attribute of *superior quality and excellence* was held in less regard. 62% of those surveyed rated this attribute as being evident while 28% did not. 10% of the respondents remained "indifferent". These findings were similarly accorded for the attributes *growth and expansion*. Of the fifty 64% perceived this icon as expressing these attributes with any degree of "effectiveness". This perception was not shared, however, by 30% of the respondents who found this icon to be "ineffective" in its referential function where this attribution was concerned. 8% were "indifferent" in their response. While the silver fern/fernleaf was not significantly valued in communicating either *superior quality and excellence* or *growth and expansion* it was perceived more positively in connoting *symbolic significance*. Of those surveyed 92% rated this icon as possessing a high level of validity. 74% of the participants rated this icon and the associated attribution with *indigenous culture* as being "significant". By comparison 88% rated the fernleaf as a privileged trademark in the promotion of New Zealand's cultural and national identity both locally and globally.

The silver fern/fernleaf is regarded, for the most part, as a successful vehicle in connoting the attributes assigned it as part of this survey. It could be judged then to have a significant status as a primary iconic identifier in the mythology of New Zealand. The findings validate the use of icon of the silver fern/fernleaf as an ontological signifier of identity which is no doubt due to its significant visual presence with various products, services and activities. The associated meanings derived from it can be said to be part of the symbolic/visual language, the learnt code, used to define New Zealand's mythology. However, it is curious to find that while the silver fern/fernleaf is regarded as a symbol of significance this appreciation does not translate across to the attributes of *superior quality and excellence*. The inference drawn from this response is that the silver fern/fernleaf is perceived as marginally effective as a signifier in this regard, the communication differing from its original intention. Therefore the meaning can be said to be ambiguous.

### 5.2.1 Visual Representation and Appreciation

Further to the questionnaire survey on the history, uniqueness, quality and culture of the silver fern/fernleaf participants were also asked to rank the following images, used by various organisations, of the silver fern/fernleaf according to visual preference. This was to determine which of the depicted forms of visual representation was regarded as being the most effective. For this purpose eight images of the fernleaf were nominally selected ranging from illustrative, pictorial, representation of the late nineteenth century, and photographs, through to contemporary, stylised, graphic expression. Accordingly an eight point rank order of **1 - 8** was used with **1** signifying the best, or *most preferred*, and **8** signifying the worst, or *least preferred* of the eight image. Participants were asked to compare these depicted images and rank them in terms of their preferred visual representation. These preferences are detailed on page 68. The logos/ images have been arranged from top to bottom in the same sequential order as they were presented in the questionnaire.

One of the areas of interest in forming the research was whether there would be a predisposition towards the abstract or the figurative as regards graphic representation. This was the reason for the formulation of this particular piece of research. What the results show without any doubt is that there has indeed been a shift away from the historical illustrative portrayal of this icon to the most preferred abstract graphic solution as exemplified by the logo of the Black Ferns. That this stylised representation of the fern is privileged by the participants attests to the influence of modernism over historicism.

The results validate the statement made by the designers in the introduction (see p. 4) that the symbol/logo expresses the core essence of the "thing" that it is designed to portray. As it applies in this instance the core essence of the silver fern/fernleaf's physicality is realised by the figurative aspects of the design. It is argued then that the simplicity of the abstract solution, rather than the embellishment of detail, assists in the identification and reading of the silver fern/fernleaf with the consequence that it becomes a recognisable mark. The recognition given this icon is no doubt due to the high level of visual exposure with which it has been graphically represented over time.

**Table 2**

Combined responses of 50 participants indicating the ranked order of the silver fern/fernleaf according to preference

Qualifier	<i>most preferred</i> <span style="float: right;"><i>least preferred</i></span>								
Ranking		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
Image	Participant Number and Percentage								
	"n" %	7 14%	3 6%	2 4%	3 6%	4 8%	4 8%	12 24%	13 26%
	"n" %	6 12%	11 22%	5 10%	5 10%	9 18%	7 14%	4 8%	1 2%
	"n" %	3 6%	1 2%	0 0	3 6%	8 16%	15 30%	12 24%	7 14%
	"n" %	3 6%	9 18%	7 14%	12 24%	7 14%	7 14%	2 4%	1 2%
	"n" %	3 6%	3 6%	7 14%	3 6%	4 8%	3 6%	8 16%	18 36%
	"n" %	6 12%	7 14%	6 12%	3 6%	10 20%	7 14%	4 8%	5 10%
	"n" %	5 10%	9 18%	11 22%	12 24%	5 10%	5 10%	2 4%	0 0
	"n" %	15 30%	6 12%	9 18%	7 14%	1 2%	5 10%	5 10%	1 2%

### **5.2.2 Order of Visual Preference for the Silver Fern/Fernleaf**

If we could make the assumption that the criterion for **1 - 4** is defined as "favourable" and that **5 - 8** is defined as "unfavourable" the results are as follows. The logo of the Black Ferns was ranked "favourably" by **74%** of the participants. The black and white logo of the New Zealand Tourism Board was ranked similarly. Next in terms of ranked order was the black and white logo of Wools of New Zealand with **62%** of the participants rating this representation as "favourable". For **54%** their preference was for the photographic image of the silver fern. Of the eight images surveyed those that were the most preferred are:

- i. the logo of the Black Ferns (**74%**)
- ii. the black and white logo of the New Zealand Tourism Board (**74%**)
- iii. the black and white logo of Wools of New Zealand (**62%**)
- iv. a photograph of the silver fern (**54%**)

Conversely those images of the silver fern/fernleaf that were ranked as "unfavourable" when combining the responses from **5 - 8** were found to be the following. The logo for Fernmark Gold was ranked by **84%** of the participants as "unfavourable". **66%** ranked the image of Neil Dawson's Fernball as not being "favourable" and **64%** of the participants judged the lithographic illustration in a similar fashion. **52%** rated the green and blue logo of the New Zealand Tourism Board as "unfavourable". Of the eight images surveyed those that were the least preferred are:

- v the blue and green logo of the New Zealand Tourism Board (**52%**)
- vi the lithographic illustration featuring the tree fern (**64%**)
- vii Neil Dawson's fernball (**66%**)
- viii the logo of Fernmark Gold (**84%**)

These results of these findings and their connection with the research questions will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

### 5.3 The Kiwi

The icon which has come to have synonymous status with the silver fern/fernleaf in the symbolic mythology of New Zealand is that of the kiwi. It is the nationalistic "pet" name that New Zealanders, in general, have chosen to identify themselves by. It was noted in the focus group that it is quite extraordinary that New Zealanders, as a people, identify themselves with a marginalised avian species that is teetering on the borders of extinction. Although ecologically endangered the kiwi is making a resurgence in a form that is regarded as both questionable, and controversial. It is a form that has been described as genetically modified. True to deconstructed postmodern fashion the contemporary version of the kiwi, the logo of New Zealand Festival 2000, now sports the palm fronds of the Nikau for tail feathers. However it is read this hybrid icon has certainly breathed life into an otherwise conservative form. But, fashion aside, how have the more acceptable graphic forms of the kiwi been apprehended regarding the communication of certain attributes.

The attributes that were chosen for this study were not based on any prior research but rather a subjective, holistic, and popular interpretation of this icon. This perceived interpretation taking into consideration the historical and traditional use of the kiwi as an heraldic emblem in the promotion of New Zealand's national identity. As a consequence the accepted literal and metaphorical meanings imparted to the kiwi are able to be quantified in terms of their validity, their significance. The following table presents these findings.

**Table 3**

Combined responses of 50 participants indicating the evaluation of the attributes assigned to the kiwi as an icon

<b>1. unique</b>							
Qualifier	extremely appropriate	very appropriate	appropriate	indifferent	inappropriate	very inappropriate	extremely inappropriate
"n"	19	19	9	1	0	1	1
%	38	38	18	2	0	2	2
<b>2. strength and stability</b>							
Qualifier	extremely highly	very highly	highly	indifferent	poorly	very poorly	extremely poorly
"n"	3	7	14	3	15	3	4
%	6	14	28	6	30	6	8
<b>3. symbolic significance</b>							
Qualifier	extremely significant	very significant	significant	indifferent	insignificant	very insignificant	extremely insignificant
"n"	22	16	8	1	2	1	0
%	44	32	16	2	4	2	0
<b>4. tradition</b>							
Qualifier	extremely highly	very highly	highly	indifferent	poorly	very poorly	extremely poorly
"n"	7	8	19	4	10	2	1
%	14	16	38	6	20	4	2
<b>5. individuality</b>							
Qualifier	extremely effectively	very effectively	effectively	indifferent	ineffectively	very ineffectively	extremely ineffectively
"n"	11	13	14	2	8	1	1
%	22	26	28	4	16	2	2
<b>6. stamina and endurance</b>							
Qualifier	extremely appropriate	very appropriate	appropriate	indifferent	inappropriate	very inappropriate	extremely inappropriate
"n"	0	10	16	3	13	5	3
%	0	20	32	6	26	10	6
<b>7. icon of the Royal New Zealand Airforce</b>							
Qualifier	extremely appropriate	very appropriate	appropriate	indifferent	inappropriate	very inappropriate	extremely inappropriate
"n"	3	5	13	3	11	5	9
%	6	10	26	6	22	10	18
<b>8. cultural and national identity</b>							
Qualifier	extremely effective	very effective	effective	indifferent	ineffective	very ineffective	extremely ineffective
"n"	17	14	13	2	1	1	2
%	34	28	26	4	2	2	4

Adding the findings of the preferred end of the scale ("extremely appropriate" to "appropriate") together resulted in 94% of the respondents valuing the icon of the kiwi as an "appropriate" vehicle for communicating the attribute *unique*. In connoting the attributes *strength and stability* 28%

rated the capacity of this icon as "high". This result was mitigated by the views of **44%** of the respondents who rated the significance of these attributes as "poor". **6%** were "indifferent". As an icon having *symbolic significance* the kiwi was rated by **92%** as being preferred to a high degree. It was perceived to be less successful in its association with the attribute *tradition*. **68%** of the participants rated the icon of the kiwi "highly" with this attribute compared with **26%** who rated it as being "poor". **8%** were "indifferent". **76%** of those surveyed regarded the icon of the kiwi as "effectively" conveying the attribute *individuality*. Which can be construed as a curious result given that *individuality* and *uniqueness* could be regarded as synonymous descriptors.<sup>84</sup> **52%** of those surveyed rated the kiwi as being "appropriate" in signifying the attributes *stamina and endurance*. The perception of **42%** was that it was "inappropriate" which would suggest that this icon is a marginal or ambiguous conveyor of meaning in this regard. **6%** were indifferent. Given this result it is not surprising that the preferences for the kiwi's role as an icon of the R.N.Z.A.F. should be as they are. The results show that **42%** rated the kiwi as an "appropriate" icon of the R.N.Z.A.F. However this preference was mitigated by **50%** who judged it to be "inappropriate". If the findings of the last two attributes suggest that this icon is perceived to be marginal in that the responses to it are ambivalent it is still perceived to be effective in "promoting New Zealand's cultural and national identity." Of the 50 participants surveyed for this study **88%** rated the kiwi as being strongly associated with this function.

The results indicate that in terms of symbolic significance the kiwi is an identifiable conveyor or meaning and that those meanings are able to be perceived. A similar conclusion to those of the silver fern/fernleaf is drawn with the suggestion that the reading and preference of the associated attributes is informed by historical, cultural and social convention. Those conventions, or the way in which we define ourselves, comprises the learnt code. That learnt code having been generated from the accumulated emotional, psychological, historical and conceptual perceptions arising from the interaction with this icon. Those variables forming the various parameters of the reception context which have impact on the specificity of this icon.

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<sup>84</sup>The definition is that that which marks a "thing" as *individual* and *unique* are those qualities that set it apart from all other "things".

### 5.3.1 Visual Representation and Appreciation of the Kiwi

In addition to the interpretation and evaluation of the attributes listed (see pp 72-73) participants were asked to rank contemporary and historical images of the kiwi in order of preference.

As with the study of the silver fern/fernleaf this was to ascertain whether there was a preference for the modernist abstract and stylised image over the illustrative and more pictorially realised mode of representation. Stylistically design is shaped by the theories surrounding it at the time of its conceptual development, modernism for one having cast its long shadow over the design of the graphic solutions represented. As nationalistic and cultural signifiers icons are configured according to those design conventions which, at their inception, require supporting imagery for the establishment of meaning and once learnt require less. It has been said that a picture contains a thousand words and by extension an abstract version of the same image can be said to figuratively represent a visual *précis* of those same words.

For this part of the study ten images of the kiwi were chosen that best represented the historical and contemporary use of the kiwi in design. Included in this selection were images that were photographic and realistic, earlier historical representations, through to contemporary modernist stylisation. The reason being that, at this present moment in New Zealand design, historically retro images that signify identity and place are as prevalent as modernist contemporary solutions. These images were not presented in the questionnaire in the historical order in which they were designed, instead the order of presentation was random.

A rank order of **1** to **10** was used with **1** signifying the best, or *most preferred*, and **10** signifying the worst, or *least preferred*. Participants were asked to compare the depicted images of the kiwi and rank them in terms of visual preference. For the purpose of this analysis the logos/images have been arranged from top to bottom in the same sequential order as they were presented in the questionnaire. These preferences are represented in the following table.

**Table 4**

Combined responses of 50 participants indicating the ranked order of the kiwi according to preference

Qualifier	<i>most preferred</i>										<i>least preferred</i>
Ranking		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
Image	Participant Number and Percentage										
	"n" %	2 4%	1 2%	2 4%	5 10%	2 4%	5 10%	2 4%	11 22%	5 10%	14 28%
	"n" %	5 10%	2 4%	6 12%	2 4%	5 10%	2 4%	10 20%	6 12%	6 12%	5 10%
	"n" %	7 14%	8 16%	3 6%	6 12%	4 8%	4 8%	6 12%	6 12%	4 8%	2 4%
	"n" %	1 2%	5 10%	11 22%	10 20%	10 20%	7 14%	3 6%	2 4%	1 2%	0 0
	"n" %	11 22%	10 20%	6 12%	6 12%	5 10%	2 4%	1 2%	5 10%	3 6%	0 0
	"n" %	1 2%	1 2%	4 8%	4 8%	5 10%	4 8%	8 16%	5 10%	11 22%	6 12%
	"n" %	3 6%	2 4%	4 8%	2 4%	5 10%	4 8%	5 10%	5 10%	7 14%	12 24%
	"n" %	9 18%	7 14%	5 10%	4 8%	3 6%	9 18%	7 14%	4 8%	2 4%	0 0
	"n" %	2 4%	1 2%	6 12%	8 16%	6 12%	5 10%	4 8%	5 10%	4 8%	8 16%
	"n" %	10 20%	11 22%	2 4%	2 4%	3 6%	9 18%	3 6%	4 8%	4 8%	1 2%

### **5.3.2 Order of Visual Preference of the Kiwi**

From the evidence presented in the previous table **76%** of the participants ranked the image of the "Buy N.Z. Made" kiwi as the most preferred. The percentage of participants who valued the image of the kiwi in the Well Made New Zealand logo totalled **74%**. The third preferred representation was the stylised kiwi cropped from the logo of the New Zealand Lawn Tennis Association. **56%** of the respondents ranked this image as preferable. Summarising the findings of the 50 participants from "favourable" (**1 - 5**) end of the ten point scale indicates that the abstract and stylised images of the kiwi that rank highest, or that are most appreciated are:

- i. "Buy N.Z. Made" (**76%**)
- ii. Well Made New Zealand (**74%**)
- iii. The kiwi cropped from the logo of the New Zealand Lawn Tennis Association (**56%**)

However, the abstract and stylised representation of the kiwi was not privileged over the illustrative. In adding the findings from the "favourable" end of the scale (**1 - 5**) together both images of the kiwi were found to rate equally with **56%** of the respondents favouring this form of expression. **40%** considered the lithographic image of the kiwi to be "favourable". Of the three images that fall into this category, the lithograph from The London Illustrated News, the New Zealand Insurance Company Ltd., and Kiwi Boot Polish, those that were rated most highly are:

- iv. New Zealand Insurance Company Ltd. (**56%**)
- v. Kiwi Boot Polish (**56%**)
- vi. The London Illustrated News (**40%**)

The images that were rated between **6 - 10** include:

- vii the photographic image of the kiwi (**60%**)
- viii the logo of New Zealand Lager (**66%**)
- ix the logo of Kiwi Mail (**68%**)

What the findings indicate is that none of these images are significantly privileged in any way to the detriment of the others. While a preference has been indicated by the survey group for one form of representation of the kiwi over another it is not to a marked degree. The image of the kiwi that is preferred overall is that of "Buy N.Z. Made". Further discussion relating to these preferences will be made in chapter six.

#### **5.4 Logos in Common Usage**

The investigation into the kiwi and the silver fern/fernleaf was not only to evaluate whether they could be identified as possessing particular attributes but also to determine whether they maintained a degree of recognised value as icons. Not only are these important considerations in the development and establishment of identity within the culture of the national myth but they also pertain to the corporate arena as well. This is where the apprehension of the symbol is even more challenged and which according to communications consultant, Pietkiewicz, is the result of an even more unconscious process on the part of the recipient. In her view the responsibility for meaning is "the onus" of the corporation or product, a view that contends with poststructuralist opinion. Pietkiewicz defines it this way,

"... most consumers don't actually do that active analysis of what the message is trying to present to them and so the corporation, or the product, or whatever has to be much more intelligent in order to convey those patterns of meaning through reinforcing symbolism whether that symbolism is visual or verbal."<sup>85</sup>

##### **5.4.1 Comparative Evaluation of Three Logos in Common Usage**

To extend the test into the communicative effectiveness of symbols, three corporate symbol/logos were evaluated using the same methodology by which the icons had been rated. The objective was to discover and identify their degree of meaning or communicative capacity which would answer the issues of transparency or ambiguity, and perceived meaning or apprehension, stated in the research questions. The symbol/logos that are included are the

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<sup>85</sup>S. Pietkiewicz, Communications Counsel, From Saying to Singing (1999) Personal communication.

identifying marks of the companies Trilogy Computer Services, Life Flight, and Fusion Insurance Services. While Fusion Insurance Services and their combined products have been recently promoted through the media that of Trilogy, and Life Flight have not.<sup>86</sup> Only in the latter part of 1999 has the profile of Life Flight been more visually apparent. The abstract and stylistic manner in which these contemporary symbol/logos are depicted equates them visually with the true representation of symbols. Their geometric form makes reference to the Platonic solids of the circle, the square and the triangle. Because of this they could be described as signifying in a manner which is more ambiguous than transparent in that these forms, bar one, do not possess physical properties which are equivalent to the object that they represent.

As each symbol/logo has been designed to encode the summative activities or services of that organisation, or company, these identifiers, along with other suggested services were selected to test the denotative capacity of that form. In addition each symbol/logo was assigned a list of attributes such as: *strength and stability, cooperation, trust, rescue, integration, care management, health services, and financial security*, for example, that were suggested by the nature of that organisation in order to test the transparency or ambiguity in terms of recognised meaning. (For the list of attributes ascribed to each symbol/logo see pp 40-41). Not only were these attributes defined according to this criteria but they were also suggested by the forms of the symbol/logos themselves. The reason behind the selection of these descriptors was to ascertain whether an independent and subjective reading would have similar correlations with those surveyed

Of the 50 participants comprising the survey group only one person (2%) chose not to fill in the section testing the attributes and services for all three symbol/logos. As for the symbol/logo of Life Flight 4% of the participants stated that they could not decide which of the services it represented. These findings are presented in the following tables in which the display of the content is commensurate with the content and context of the questionnaire. The symbol/logo presented first is that of Life Flight followed by Fusion Insurance Services and then by the symbol/logo for Trilogy Computer Services.

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<sup>86</sup> Although it must be added that since the time when this study was initiated there has been a televised campaign for funding which has perhaps raised the profile of this organisation although it is argued that even the message behind this advertisement is not clear.

**Table 5**

Combined responses of 50 participants indicating the degree of perception and meaning of the function/services and attributes of the Life Flight symbol/logo



<b>1. service</b>							
Identifier	mountain rescue	aviation rescue	ambulance service	marine rescue	fire service	earthquake rescue	industrial safety
"n"	2	31	0	5	2	0	7
%	4	62	0	10	4	0	14
<b>2. rescue</b>							
Qualifier	extremely effectively	very effectively	effectively	indifferent	ineffectively	very ineffectively	extremely effectively
"n"	0	8	17	0	15	5	5
%	0	16	34	0	30	10	10
<b>3. cooperation</b>							
Qualifier	extremely strongly	very strongly	strongly	indifferent	weakly	very weakly	extremely weakly
"n"	1	6	23	1	11	0	3
%	2	12	46	2	22	0	6
<b>4. aviation</b>							
Qualifier	extremely significant	very significant	significant	indifferent	insignificant	very insignificant	extremely insignificant
"n"	4	9	20	1	11	1	2
%	8	18	40	2	22	2	4
<b>5. strength and stability</b>							
Qualifier	extremely evident	very evident	evident	indifferent	obscure	very obscure	extremely obscure
"n"	2	5	21	0	15	3	2
%	4	10	42	0	30	6	4
<b>6. trust</b>							
Qualifier	extremely strongly	very strongly	strongly	indifferent	weakly	very weakly	extremely weakly
"n"	0	11	17	2	14	2	2
%	0	22	34	4	28	4	4
<b>7. symbolic communication</b>							
Qualifier	extremely appropriate	very appropriate	appropriate	indifferent	inappropriate	very inappropriate	extremely inappropriate
"n"	2	6	21	4	9	2	2
%	4	12	42	8	18	4	4

## 5.5 Perceived Meaning of the Logo for Life Flight

Of the 50 respondents **62%** associated this symbol/logo with the service of *aviation rescue*, a perception that was also validated by the focus group which regarded it, figuratively, as the most identifiable referent. The attributes that were assigned to the symbol/logo of Life Flight are recognised if, it must be added, to not an extremely significant degree. While **50%** of the respondents rated this symbol/logo as "effectively" expressing the concept of *rescue* **50%** equally felt that this service was "ineffectively" communicated. **60%** considered that the attribute of *cooperation* was "strongly" conveyed compared with **28%** who rated this symbol/logo as being *weak*. **66%** rated it as signifying *aviation* to a "significant" degree while **28%** of the respondents judged it as "insignificant". The attributes of *strength and stability* were rated by **56%** of the participants as being "evident" compared with **40%** who rated them as being "obscure". **56%** of the survey group considered the attribute of *trust* to be "strongly" possessed by this symbol/logo while **36%** rated it as "weak". In terms of signifying *symbolic communication* **58%** rated it as "appropriate" and **26%** considered this symbol/logo to be "inappropriate". The order of perceived function is:

- i. *aviation* (**66%**)
- ii. *cooperation* (**60%**)
- iii. *symbolic communication* (**58%**)
- iv. *strength and stability* (**56%**)
- v. *trust* (**56%**)
- vi. *rescue* (**50%**)

The findings suggest, from the survey into the representation and meaning of the symbol/logo of Life Flight, that the inherent attributes that are perceived to be symbolised by it can be said to have been apprehended but only to a degree. Both denotative and connotative aspects of its symbolism are recognised with the denotative function being more perceived. In this sense the symbol/logo of Life Flight is an effective referent. Only in connoting the attribute *rescue* could its meaning be described as being ambiguous.

**Table 6**

Combined responses of 50 participants indicating the degree of perception and meaning of the function/services and attributes of the symbol/logo for Fusion Insurance Services



<b>1. industries/organisations</b>							
Identifier	information technology	aviation	health	insurance	education	engineering	commerce
"n"	5	0	16	9	7	10	6
%	10	0	32	18	14	20	12
<b>2. integration</b>							
Qualifier	extremely appropriate	very appropriate	appropriate	indifferent	inappropriate	very inappropriate	extremely inappropriate
"n"	6	17	18	2	4	1	0
%	12	34	36	4	8	2	0
<b>3. care management</b>							
Qualifier	extremely strongly	very strongly	strongly	indifferent	weakly	very weakly	extremely weakly
"n"	1	9	13	1	18	2	3
%	2	18	26	2	36	4	6
<b>4. health services</b>							
Qualifier	extremely strongly	very strongly	strongly	indifferent	weakly	very weakly	extremely weakly
"n"	1	8	10	1	18	4	6
%	2	16	20	2	36	8	12
<b>5. financial security</b>							
Qualifier	extremely effective	very effective	effective	indifferent	ineffective	very ineffective	extremely ineffective
"n"	1	9	13	4	16	5	5
%	2	18	26	8	32	10	10
<b>6. cooperation</b>							
Qualifier	extremely appropriate	very appropriate	appropriate	indifferent	inappropriate	very inappropriate	extremely inappropriate
"n"	6	19	16	2	3	0	2
%	12	38	32	4	6	0	4
<b>7. symbolic communication</b>							
Qualifier	extremely highly	very highly	highly	indifferent	poorly	very poorly	extremely poorly
"n"	1	8	14	3	17	1	4
%	2	16	28	6	34	2	8

## 5.6 Perceived Meaning of the Logo for Fusion Insurance Services

These evaluations indicate that in its denotative capacity the symbol/logo for Fusion Insurance Services is perceived as signifying four organisational services. **32%** of the respondents recognised it as representing *health*, **20%** associated it with *engineering*, **18%** with *insurance* and **14%** selected this symbol/logo as denoting *education*. Of the 50 participants surveyed **4%** selected more than one service and **4%** were undecided as to the industry or organisation that this symbol/logo represented.

**82%** of the respondents rated this symbol/logo as "appropriate" while only **10%** rated it as being "inappropriate" in conveying the attribute *integration*. The results for the attribute of *care management* reflect a different pattern of association. While **46%** of those surveyed rated this symbol/logo as "strongly" conveying this attribute **46%** did not. This resonates with the analysis of the findings for the variable *rescue* (see p 80) and would seem to support the argument (outlined in chapter two) that there is an element of ambiguity in the perception of this symbol/logo with this denotation. **38%** rated the attribute of *health services* as being "strongly" associated with this symbol/logo while **56%** considered this attribution to be "weak". **46%** of the respondents judged the symbol/logo of Fusion Insurance Services to be "effective" in communicating the attribute of *financial security*. However, the remaining **52%** rated this symbol/logo as "ineffective" in this capacity. **82%** rated the association of this symbol/logo with the attribute *cooperation* as "appropriate" compared with **10%**. **4%** were "indifferent". The capacity of this symbol/logo to communicate, symbolically, all of the attributes was rated "highly" by **46%** of the respondents compared with **44%** who judged it "poorly". The order of perceived function is:

- i. *integration* (**82%**)
- ii. *cooperation* (**82%**)
- iii. *care management* (**46%**)
- iv. *financial security* (**46%**)
- v. *symbolic communication* (**46%**)
- vi. *health services* (**38%**)

**Table 7**

Combined responses of 50 participants indicating the degree of perception and meaning of the functions/services and attributes of the symbol/logo for Trilogy Computer Services



<b>1. industries/organisations</b>							
Identifier	information technology	aviation	health	insurance	education	engineering	commerce
"n"	18	0	0	3	1	18	7
%	36	0	0	6	2	36	14
<b>2. information systems</b>							
Qualifier	extremely appropriate	very appropriate	appropriate	indifferent	inappropriate	very inappropriate	extremely inappropriate
"n"	0	6	17	4	15	3	2
%	0	12	34	8	30	6	4
<b>3. digital engineering</b>							
Qualifier	extremely strongly	very strongly	strongly	indifferent	weakly	very weakly	extremely weakly
"n"	0	1	19	4	19	2	3
%	0	2	38	8	38	4	6
<b>4. computer services</b>							
Qualifier	extremely strongly	very strongly	strongly	indifferent	weakly	very weakly	extremely weakly
"n"	1	7	15	1	16	4	5
%	2	14	30	2	32	8	10
<b>5. strength and security</b>							
Qualifier	extremely effective	very effective	effective	indifferent	ineffective	very ineffective	extremely ineffective
"n"	0	7	26	2	9	2	1
%	0	14	52	4	18	4	2
<b>6. dynamism</b>							
Qualifier	extremely highly	very highly	highly	indifferent	poorly	very poorly	extremely poorly
"n"	1	4	20	4	15	1	3
%	2	8	40	8	30	2	6
<b>7. symbolic communication</b>							
Qualifier	extremely appropriate	very appropriate	appropriate	indifferent	inappropriate	very inappropriate	extremely inappropriate
"n"	0	1	25	2	13	3	3
%	0	2	50	4	26	6	6

## 5.7 Perceived Meaning of the Logo for Trilogy Computer Services

Of the industries/organisations that the form of the symbol/logo of Trilogy Computer Services might denote 36% of the 50 respondents considered it to represent equally *information technology* and *engineering*. In evaluating the attributes ascribed to this symbol/logo the results show that while 46% of the respondents rated this symbol/logo as "appropriate" in signifying *information systems* 40% judged it "inappropriate". 10% were "indifferent". 40% rated the attribute of *digital engineering* as being "strongly" suggested by this symbol/logo. Correspondingly 48% rated this attribution as "weak". 44% "strongly" associated the symbol/logo of Trilogy Computer Services with the attribute *computer services* while 50% of the respondents judged this association as "weak". 68% rated this symbol/logo as "effective" in communicating the attributes *strength and security*, only 24% judged it to be "ineffective". The attribute of *dynamism* was rated by 50% of the respondents as being "highly" expressed. For 38% this expression was judged to be "poorly" conveyed by this symbol. 52% rated its capacity for *symbolic communication* as "appropriate" while 38% judged this capacity as "inappropriate". The order of perceived function is:

- i. *strength and security* (68%)
- ii. *symbolic communication* (52%)
- iii. *dynamism* (50%)
- iv. *information systems* (46%)
- v. *computer services* (44%)
- vi. *digital engineering* (40%)

The results of these findings indicate that the shape and colour of these graphic representations have a certain resonance with some attributes more than others. Those attributes which are perceived as more recognisable are those which equate with the emotive, experiential and suggested aspects alluded to by the service rather than the service as an overall concept. There is a perceived recognition between shape and attribution that can be demonstrably identified which links these findings with the question raised as to whether design criteria such as shape, colour, as well as figurative representation assist in visual apprehension. The results would suggest, that despite the communicative tendency for symbols to be ambiguous, most of the time meaning can be apprehended, even if subconsciously. This links back to the comments made by Kress and van

Leeuwen (1996, 32) that perceived meaning in the language of visual communication is dependent on a learnt code even if that code has been absorbed "passively" so that we know "but without knowing what it is that we know...".<sup>87</sup> Historically this is how the symbol has been designed to perform.

### **5.8 Gender Comparison of Associated Perception**

As an extension to the previous analysis of these three symbol/logos, three other contemporary and commonly used symbol/logos were added to further investigate the general apprehension of meaning on a relative basis. These were the logos of Te Papa and Air New Zealand, as well as the logo of Learning Media. The intention was to determine what other services these six symbol/logos could be said to represent apart from their designed purpose. The findings referred to by Barnard and Marcel (1984, 50) of Provins, Stockbridge, Forrest and Anderson (1957) and Davis (1961) are that certain shapes in their most abstract form allude to particular classifications of suggested meaning.<sup>88</sup> In connection with this study it has been found that it is the connotative function of the symbol/logo and its imputed attributes rather than the denotative which is the most apprehended. Because of this perception of suggested meaning it is argued that symbol/logos which share similar formal properties, be they organic or inorganic, could be perceived as referents for more than one designatum.

The services, functions and activities selected for identification was determined by those that the symbol/logos represented denote as well as those that are suggested by the formal properties of their design and colour. As has been mentioned (see p. 43) the symbol/logo of the National Library by its chevron shape makes reference to an opened book as well as alluding to the military.

In addition to this was the question as to whether there was a recognised gender preference in the association of these symbol/logos with a particular function or service. In other words was there a bias in the perception and interpretation by males and females of the inherent meaning that

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<sup>87</sup>KRESS, G. and VAN LEEUWEN, T. The Grammar of Visual Design. London, Routledge, 1996. p 32.

<sup>88</sup>BARNARD, P. and MARCEL, T. Representation and understanding in the use of symbols and pictograms in EASTERBY, R. and ZWAGA, H. (eds.) Information Design. Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto, Singapore, John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 1984. pp 37-70.

these symbol/logos denote. The denotation implied by the construction and integration of the design elements of colour, shape, and axial configuration which operate graphically as a mode of representation. These modes of representation having the potential for more than one meaning depending on the subjective evaluation of the viewer. The following tables represent these findings.

**Table 8**

The comparative responses of 20 men and 30 women on the services/functions of six contemporary symbol/logos.

service/function						
<b>library</b>						
"n" women	1	3	5	13	6	0
% women	2	6	10	26	12	0
"n" men	1	0	4	11	5	0
% men	2	0	8	22	10	0
<b>research</b>						
"n" women	5	14	6	14	9	0
% women	10	28	12	28	18	0
"n" men	0	11	4	9	5	0
% men	0	22	8	18	10	0
<b>food</b>						
"n" women	2	1	0	1	2	2
% women	4	2	0	2	4	4
"n" men	0	2	2	1	2	1
% men	0	4	4	2	4	2
<b>health</b>						
"n" women	13	1	15	5	4	2
% women	26	2	30	10	8	4
"n" men	9	2	10	3	4	0
% men	18	4	20	6	8	0
<b>finance</b>						
"n" women	1	5	7	0	5	0
% women	2	10	14	0	10	0
"n" men	0	3	8	2	4	2
% men	0	6	16	4	8	4
<b>insurance</b>						
"n" women	4	2	7	0	5	2
% women	8	4	14	0	10	4
"n" men	4	4	8	2	4	2
% men	8	8	16	4	8	4
<b>sport</b>						
"n" women	4	2	7	0	5	2
% women	8	4	14	0	10	4
"n" men	4	4	8	2	4	2
% men	8	8	16	4	8	4

**Table 9**

The comparative responses of 20 men and 30 women on the services/functions of six contemporary symbol/logos.

service/function						
<b>engineering</b>						
"n" women	5	19	5	2	3	2
% women	10	38	10	4	6	4
"n" men	6	18	7	1	2	3
% men	12	36	14	2	4	6
<b>travel</b>						
"n" women	11	0	1	3	3	29
% women	22	0	2	6	6	58
"n" men	9	0	1	1	2	16
% men	18	0	2	2	4	32
<b>education</b>						
"n" women	2	4	14	19	18	0
% women	4	8	28	38	36	0
"n" men	1	4	6	14	10	2
% men	2	8	12	28	20	4
<b>science</b>						
"n" women	4	16	6	16	2	0
% women	8	32	12	32	4	0
"n" men	6	11	4	6	4	0
% men	12	22	8	12	8	0
<b>commerce</b>						
"n" women	1	11	4	2	6	3
% women	2	22	8	4	12	6
"n" men	0	5	3	0	2	4
% men	0	10	6	0	4	8
<b>don't know</b>						
"n" women	2	2	1	0	1	0
% women	4	4	2	0	2	0
"n" men	1	1	1	1	2	0
% men	2	2	2	2	4	0

### 5.8.1 Comparison of Responses

What becomes apparent when comparing the results of the responses presented in the previous tables is that there does seem to be a marginal difference in the perceived association of the represented symbol/logos with various functions or services. Each symbol/logo that was used in this part of the study will be comparatively analysed individually according to its order of presentation. Only those denotative associations that have elicited the most responses will be ranked in the following tables.

### 5.8.2 Comparison of Correlated Functions and Services

	male	female
health	18%	26%
travel	18%	22%
engineering	12%	10%
science	12%	8%
insurance	8%	8%

Fig 7. Percentage comparison of male and female associations with the Life Flight logo.

From all the functions or services listed in the questionnaire those perceived as being denoted by this symbol/logo were the service of *health*, and the services of *travel* and *engineering*. These were identified by both men and women as being the primary designators signified by this symbol/logo. Of the 30 women and 20 men surveyed **26%** of the women compared with **18%** of the men associated this logo with the service *health*. **12%** of the men associated it with the service of *engineering* compared with **10%** of the women. A result which suggests that in this instance there is a gender difference in the perception of the form of the Life Flight logo, that form making reference to machinery. However **22%** of women associated this symbol/logo with the service of *travel*, through the configuration of the design elements which imply flight, compared to **18%** of men. The other areas of significance for both groups were: *insurance*, and *science*. **8%** of both men and women made the association with the service *insurance*, while **12%** of men, compared with **8%** of women, connected this symbol/logo with the service of *science*.

	male	female
<b>engineering</b>	36%	38%
<b>science</b>	22%	32%
<b>research</b>	22%	28%
<b>commerce</b>	10%	22%

Fig 8. Percentage comparison of male and female associations with the Trilogy Computer Services logo.

The service areas that were primarily perceived as being associated with this symbol were: *engineering, science* and *research*. Of those surveyed **28%** of women and **22%** of men associated this symbol with *research*. *Engineering* was almost equally identified by **38%** of women and **36%** of men as being significantly expressed by this symbol/logo. Correspondingly **32%** of women compared with **22%** of men identified it with the service of *science*. A finding that suggests a difference in perception, one that has possibly been elicited due to the rationalist and functional form of this design. This logo was also associated by women, if not significantly by men, with the service of *commerce*.

	male	female
<b>health</b>	20%	30%
<b>finance</b>	16%	14%
<b>insurance</b>	12%	14%
<b>education</b>	12%	28%
<b>engineering</b>	14%	10%

Fig 9. Percentage comparison of male and female associations with the Fusion Insurance Services logo.

The areas that are perceived as being denoted by this logo are: the services of *health* and *education*, with the services of *finance*, and *insurance*, being secondary in meaning. Taking the responses for the associations with *health* and *finance* first, the results indicate that for the service *health* **30%** of women and **20%** of men made this their first preference. Significantly **28%** of women associated this symbol/logo with the service of *education* compared with **12%** of men. A finding which points to a marked difference in response and which is possibly due to its non-threatening and inclusive

form, as described by the focus group. The responses for the service of *finance* show that **16%** of men associated this symbol with this service compared with **14%** of women. **14%** of women compared with **12%** of men credited this symbol with the service of *insurance*. The other area that featured in this survey was the service of *engineering* with **14%** of men making the connection between this symbol/logo and this service. The findings would suggest that the identification of this symbol is known.

	male	female
<b>education</b>	28%	38%
<b>library</b>	22%	26%
<b>research</b>	18%	28%
<b>science</b>	12%	32%

Fig 10. Percentage comparison of male and female associations with the Te Papa logo.

The services identified as symbolised by this symbol/logo are: *education*, *science*, *research* and *library*. Given that the logo and the establishment of Te Papa, as an institution, has been well publicised it is not surprising that the services it represents are well identified. The survey results significantly indicate a preference for the services tabulated. Of these *education* is ranked by **38%** of women and by **28%** of men. **32%** of women compared with **12%** of men associated this symbol/logo with *science*. **28%** of women compared to **18%** of men identified it with the service of *research*. The results for *library* were more even in comparison with **26%** of women and **22%** of men considering that this symbol/logo represented this service. The findings of the responses to the symbol/logo of Te Papa, according to gender, suggest that women more than men have been able to deduce the core essence of the services that are signified by this symbol/logo.

	male	female
education	20%	36%
research	10%	18%
library	10%	12%
finance	8%	10%
commerce	4%	12%

Fig 11. Percentage comparison of male and female associations with the Learning Media logo.

The areas that are perceived as being denoted by this logo are: the services of *education*, *research*, *library* and to a lesser degree the services of *finance* and *commerce*. These results show that this symbol/logo was ranked by **36%** of women compared with **20%** of men as representing the service that it has been designed to denote, namely *education*. This perception was substantiated by the focus group in which the suggestion was made that the interlocking shape of this symbol/logo was suggestive of shared communication and interaction which could be said to be expressed by education. It was also accorded a higher rating by **18%** of women compared with **10%** of men for denoting *research*.

	male	female
travel	32%	58%
sport		10%
commerce	8%	6%

Fig 12. Percentage comparison of male and female associations with the Air New Zealand logo.

The service that was predominantly perceived by the respondents as signified by this symbol/logo was that of *travel*. The other services that were also selected as being denoted were *sport* and *commerce*. It is not surprising that such a well known symbol/logo should be associated accordingly. Despite the instructions in the questionnaire to make selections other than the service or function that the symbol/logo signified most of the respondents made the association with the service *travel*. These findings would also indicate a bias in terms of choice with women more than men associating this symbol/logo with its denotative. However, it is interesting to

note that neither gender equated the symbol/logo of Air New Zealand with its key function to be more than **58%** in the case of women and **32%** in the case of men. While women more than men identified this symbol/logo correctly the results call into question the inference that symbol/logos are recognisably established semiotic elements in the national psyche. However, this is not to suggest that once they are established they are able to act as powerful mnemonic vehicles which characterise the graphic language of identity. It would be of interest to conduct a comparative evaluation into the meaning of the Pacific Wave, designed by the London based design team Davies/Baron as a supporting signifier to the koru. The reason given is that the conventions by which the Pacific Wave has been defined and constructed possibly originate from a different perception.

The conclusion that arises from these findings, gathered from the respondents in the systematic sample, is that there is a recognised perception of the symbols, as logos, and the designators, the core services and functions, that they denote. In this case argument can be made that the meaning behind these symbols has been apprehended even if those findings are indicative and tentative rather than "true" according to quantitative methodology. As the results indicate, in terms of gender, it is women rather than men who have perceived and apprehended that meaning correctly. This evidence will be supported by further discussion incorporating comments from the focus group in the following chapter.

## 6.0 ANALYSIS OF DATA

*"...no new work of art comes into existence (whether consciously or unconsciously) without an organic link to what went before."* Solzhenitsyn. **The relentless cult of novelty and how it wrecked the century, 1993.**

This chapter discusses the findings presented in the previous chapter concerning the perception, interpretation and significance of the use of symbolism in the branding of identity and its ramifications for the practice of design as well as design education. The structuralist and deconstructionist theories supporting the use of symbolism as a language have been discussed in chapters two and three, with the suggestion that theory is all very well but for the practice and business of design these theories need to be tested. Not only are the results of these findings of merit for those intimately concerned with the design process but they are also of significance for the general public who are the recipients of that communicative transaction. And it is ultimately the public, the end consumers of design who, through apprehending the meaning of these symbols, attribute to them their validity, their ongoing meaning which can assume mythical proportions.

What can be understood from this research as it applies to the creation of identity within the wider community, both local and global, as well as to the practice of Design? Guba and Lincoln write that "Human behaviour, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities."<sup>89</sup>

However, for the purpose of this study symbols, as objects, are the outer manifestation of that human activity. Even in their most abstract representation, such as the Nike swash, they are objects of communication. In this sense symbols act, within the field of graphic design, as visual referents which represent the denotative function of an organisation, as well as its connotative qualities or attributes. Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994, 466) describe the denotative meaning to be the connection that exists, mentally, between form and function. Connotative meaning is defined as those attributes or qualities which are inferred by the visual form of the symbol. These, they suggest, can make reference to a higher level or "status" of meaning which is described as "mythical". Identity is symbolised by the logo as one of the dominant signifiers in

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<sup>89</sup>GUBA, Egon G. and LINCOLN, Yvonna S. *Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research.* in DENZIN, Norman K. and LINCOLN, Yvonna S. eds., Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, Sage Publications, Inc., 1994. p 106.

the interaction between the abstract and the material. That is, between the ideology surrounding an organisation, or corporation, or enterprise, its mythic structure, and its perceived function in actual practice. In the case of the silverfern its association with the All Blacks awarded this icon premium status, until recently, within the conventions of the national cultural code.<sup>90</sup>

Anceschi (1996, 10) describes this production of representation as a "general principle" which, he explains, is defined by Eco as "ostentation".<sup>91</sup> This is the general principle whereby an object, symbol, or image, is differentiated in terms of status from another. He also likens this to Satre's concept of reduction where "It is not possible to show the entirety of the object meant for representation. Whether we know it or not; and whether we intend it or not; a view is selected, and an appearance isolated."<sup>92</sup> This idea of reduction, of manipulated, or constructed, ostentation



Image 36. *The Pacific Wave*

is best illustrated by the symbol of the logo. In the example portrayed, the revamping of the branding of the logo of Air New Zealand, an additional design element the "Pacific Wave" has been introduced by the London based design team, Davies and Baron. The reason they give for this is that "The Koru should be seen as a precious jewel mark to be used sparingly to increase the perceived value."<sup>93</sup>

This is the beginning in the shift of the signifier from one form to another which needs to be questioned. The question concerning the reality of how this selected view which has been defined by the designers as denoting New Zealand would be visually interpreted by the recipients. The koru as it stands is already a privileged symbol, one which could be said to be synonymous in status to those icons represented in this study, the silver fern/fernleaf and the kiwi.

It can certainly be argued that an object (read symbol) neither is, or is not, depending on the context in which it is sited. This opinion (discussed in chapter two) has defined the nature of symbols in their communication function with the result that they are determined as being

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<sup>90</sup>Not only is this icon the heraldic symbol of the All Blacks but perversely it also decorates the black jerseys of the seven's rugby team, the Kiwis.

<sup>91</sup>ANCESCHI, Giovanni. (trans., by John Cullars) 'Visibility in Progress', *Design Issues* Volume 12, Number 3 Autumn 1996. p 10.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>TYACK, Kerry R. 'A New Look for Air New Zealand', *Prodesign* August/September 96. p 54.

arbitrary. They are said to derive their associated meanings from whatever context, whether it be social, cultural, behavioural, political, or ideological, that surrounds them and colours their sense accordingly. Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994, 466) observe that the connection between a sign, and its meaning is "social and arbitrary, so that many kinds of links can be argued to exist between expression and content."<sup>94</sup> The inference that is made from this dominant semiotic view is that the inherent symbolic meaning is dependent on the perspective of the recipient. Anceschi claims that,

"For each of the clients or partners, however, every encounter, every contact, every message received from the firm represents the addition of a characteristic; a subtle shading or a minute brush stroke to the sender's interior portrait that they are building in their minds."<sup>95</sup>

This argument validates the position held by cultural groups towards the use, and ownership, of certain symbols even if that position is unappreciated by those of another culture, for example, the consequent debate arising from the proposal for the **x** as the logo of Te Papa (commented on in chapter three). This is where problems in perception arise particularly when one cultural group reifies the content of a symbol according to a different praxis than that held by another.<sup>96</sup>

The symbol which historically carries the greatest associated burden in this regard is the swastika. For Maori Designer, Hill, this is described as the reification of the *wairua*,

"... spiritually, the wairua, always stays there. So, whatever you do and how you apply that in terms of abstraction, say of the koru, the wairua within that koru stays no matter how or where you apply the symbol. So the patiki design has been created in the contemporary way but it still has the mana, the meaning, the korero, the speaking, the story."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>MANNING, Peter K. and CULLUM-SWAN, Betsey. Narrative, Content, and Semiotic Analysis in DENZIN, Norman K. and LINCOLN, Yvonna S. eds., Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, Sage Publications, Inc., 1994. p 106.

<sup>95</sup>ANCESCHI, Giovanni. (trans., by John Cullars) 'Visibility in Progress', Design Issues Volume 12, Number 3 Autumn 1996. p 12.

<sup>96</sup>This thesis does not seek to discuss in detail the issues surrounding the use and appropriation of indigenous symbols but rather to discover how people, in general, view the use of symbolism. For a more in depth elucidation of these contentious issues the reader is referred to Maori Art on the World Scene by Sidney Moko Mead.

<sup>97</sup>A. Hill, Designer, Maori Design (1999). Personal communication.

## 6.1 The Reading and Interpretation of Two Icons

Visual rhetoric is an integral tool in the promotion of identity, most particularly cultural identity. Triggs (1995, 82) writes that the art of verbal rhetoric is a form of oratory which favours emotive and persuasive argument delivered with a high degree of "organization and presentation."<sup>98</sup> Poggenpohl (1998, 222) cites Bonsiepe as recontextualising this verbal form into two figurative categories defined as syntactic and semantic.<sup>99</sup> The "*syntactic*" category is formulated from the organisation of design elements or, "formal visual construction". The "*semantic*" category is where meaning or identification is particularised by a "person, place, thing or event."<sup>100</sup> In the case of visual rhetoric symbols, as logos, are the singular or end point in that organisation and presentation. They represent the means whereby formal design elements such as colour, shape, line, image and typography, described by Moles (1989, 121) as "*symbol atoms (semes)*" have been selected and reduced to a single essence.<sup>101</sup> The graphic essence represented, in this case, by the symbol/logo "whose meaning is dependent on the active participation of a reader."<sup>102</sup>

To contextualise this theory within the findings of this study the logo of Life Flight is used as an example (see p 80). Despite the incorporation of four stylised hands suggesting wings into the form of this logo the key signifier *rescue* was interpreted as being ambiguous. This was not the only symbol/logo which was weak in its referential capacity to convey certain concepts. The logo of Fusion Insurance Services (see p 82) was equally ambiguous in denoting *care management*. Similar ambiguities in perception were discovered for the logo of Trilogy Computer Services (see p 84) in representing *information systems, digital engineering* and *computer services*. These services were not successfully conveyed by the configuration of this design with the consequence that they were not perceived and apprehended to any significant degree. In this instance the symbol as logo cannot be described as ideally representing the core concept of the organisation, it remains ambiguous.

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<sup>98</sup>TRIGGS, Edward. Visual Rhetoric and Semiotics in Communicating Design. Essays in Visual Communication. Triggs, Teal ed., London, B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1995. p 82.

<sup>99</sup>POGGENPOHL, Sharon Helmer. 'Doubly Damned. Rhetorical and Visual', Visible Language 32.3 Rhode Island, Rhode Island School of Design. 1998. p 222.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>MOLES, Abraham. The Legibility of the World: A project of Graphic Design in Design Discourse. History, Theory and Criticism. Victor Margolin ed., London, The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1989. p 121.

<sup>102</sup>TRIGGS, Edward. Visual Rhetoric and Semiotics in Communicating Design. Essays in Visual Communication. Triggs, Teal ed., London, B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1995. p 82.

While there were certain limitations with the participants' receptivity to the content of the questionnaire, on the whole anecdotal comment was that it engendered a great deal of thought and discussion. An individual comment from a participant was to the effect that the meanings of the abstract symbol/logos of the three organisations of Life Flight, Fusion Insurance Services, and Trilogy Computer Services were indeed difficult to ascertain. This supports the question, one that this study sought to investigate, as to how effective symbols are as conveyors of identity; how transparent is their meaning. Another participant, ethnically Indian although resident of New Zealand, thought that she might not be able to comprehend the content of the questionnaire and as a consequence she might show her "ignorance". Despite this fear of being "ignorant", of being shown up, she agreed to take part. A number of unsolicited responses arising from informal discussions were to the effect that the participants had never really considered the meaning of symbols, they had taken them for granted, or not considered them at all.

The comments made to the effect that the meaning of symbols had not been considered, or that they were taken for granted, raises issues for the designer, the design educator, as well as the organisation, company or enterprise for whom the symbol/logo is the identifying signifier. These issues and their potential solutions were identified by communications consultant, Stephanie Pietkiewicz (see chapter 5) as the "onus" of the organisation or company. In the practice of visual communication design the responsibility is to continue to develop representational modes that have ongoing significance for the world of the customer.

The process by which certain symbols are privileged over others is most certainly connected with an evolving social perception from which all cultures can be said to draw their own mythology. In the case of New Zealand, generally speaking, two icons have been accorded privileged status over others, for example the kotuku, the miha, the cabbage tree, and the spiral as the main identifiers of national identity. These are the ubiquitous silver fern/fernleaf and the, now, ecologically threatened kiwi.

### 6.1.1 The Silver Fern/Fernleaf



Image 31. The 1905 All Blacks

finding, the results for communicating the mythical connotations of *quality* and *excellence* were somewhat equivocal. It can only be surmised from this that the integrity of an icon is dependent on whatever social, cultural, or political events are occurring at the time in which that icon is the major signifier.<sup>103</sup> This verifies the question as to the degree by which representation and meaning are derived from learnt codes which, in the case of this icon, are informed and reinforced by cultural and social convention.

The contemporary packaging of Fernleaf Semi-Soft Butter includes a quote from the 1920's Minister in Charge of Publicity endorsing this icon as the collective cultural symbolic identifier for N.Z. butter. Should the silver fern/fernleaf continue to be acting as a hallmark signifier for New Zealand's identity? The other findings of this study suggest that it should. The association of the silver fern/fernleaf with the concept *unique* marks this icon as having a hidden meaning, that of "belonging" in terms of its referential status; it is similarly regarded as a signifier of the qualities *clean* and *green*. Contrarily, these descriptors conjure up the symbolic colours of blue and green, rather the black and white which seem to be the more prevalent emblematic colours popularised by the media. The silver fern/fernleaf is highly rated in its effectiveness to represent New

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<sup>103</sup>From the televised advertising of the All Blacks at the moment it seems that this logo is about to be superseded by the logo of Adidas which as an icon carries none of the symbolic connotations that the silver fern evokes. The symbol/logo of Adidas was designed for a different purpose, namely as the mark of a company, and as such is does not possess national and cultural significance.

Zealand's ties to the land and in conveying the concept of *historical significance*. This, despite the botanical fact that ferns, and the tree fern, are not only endemic to these shores. It is also similarly regarded in its capacity to denote *local* and *global identity* although, in representing *indigenous culture*, this icon is not valued, by some, to the same degree. The suggestion derived from the evidence of this study is that while this icon might display significant ethnocentric associations, in terms of its symbolic praxis, it does not perform the same function for the indigenous people. The inference being that the symbolic hierarchical code differs. For example, Hill states that when using symbolism in Maori design, "You have to know what sort of design or symbol that you use first such as the koru. The koru is found in quite a lot of designs, Air New Zealand for one, you can say that it is a koru but Maori reckon that it isn't."<sup>104</sup>

Over all the findings indicate that this icon is alive and is regarded as having ongoing validity in



Image 38. *The spiral of the National Library*

the development of New Zealand's mythologic symbolism.

While it might not be recognised by all ethnic groups as visibly communicating the concepts of *growth* and *expansion* (possibly better expressed visually by the spiral) the silver fern/femleaf maintains its privileged status within the visual rhetoric of New

Zealand's symbolic language. Historically, the silver fern/femleaf has come to be established as an integral part of the symbolic vernacular. This is being made ever more evident by its inclusion



Images 39 and 40. *Historical and contemporary phone boxes*

into various contemporary design forms such as the surface patterning on Telecom's blue and yellow phone box. A solution which imparts the design with an expression that is more distinctly New Zealand in flavour than the imperialistic red box of the dominions. Or, perhaps, even more so than the predominant black and white image we have become so accustomed to.

<sup>104</sup>A. Hill, *Designer in Maori Design* (1999). Personal communication.

### 6.1.1.1 Preferred Image

The earlier illustratively realised representations of the silver fern/fernleaf have given way to the formalised, ordered, abstract form which, according to the findings (see pp 68-70) and in answer to the question of figurative portrayal, is ranked as the most preferred image. While the colonial illustration of the tree fern is not preferred to any marked degree the photographic image of a fernleaf is selected as having greater visual significance. The possible reason for this is that the participants are more attuned to this form of representation, due to familiarisation with contemporary technology, than with a more figurative and traditional convention. Moreover, in this instance, the photographic image manages to convey the illusion of realism while alluding to abstraction. It can be argued accordingly that it is more graphic in its simplicity which, does not suggest though, that a more illustrative solution is inappropriate. Whichever figurative solution is used is dependent on the criteria for which the logo is being designed. The contemporary logos of the New Zealand Tourism Board, and the Black Ferns were similarly ranked in terms of representational privilege with the form of the Black Ferns logo accorded the highest ranking. The least preferred image was that of Fernmark Gold. However, this could be due to the limitations of reproducing this image for the purposes of this survey rather than its appearance in reality. The same conclusion is drawn for the image of Neil Dawson's fernball.

The inference that can be made from these results suggests that graphic simplicity as opposed to complexity equates with impact or, what the designers quoted in the introduction, describe as "essence" or "spirit". As Cassels states,

"If I am designing a logo which might be a classic button logo that might be used on a package, simplicity, the simpler the better. I actually prefer logos that are just black and white, and very simple as a stamp, a seal, a unique signature. To me logos are take away, take away, take away and get it right back to the essence of what it is they are about."<sup>105</sup>

Hill concurs with this statement. For him "... it is important to keep it [the design] simple, as in those logos the fern, the mighty tick [Nike]. That is the same in Maori design with the poutama, the patiki, or the tukutuku."<sup>106</sup> It substantiates the view that, despite the ethnic diversity of the

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<sup>105</sup>D. Cassels, Head Designer, Siren (1999). Personal communication.

<sup>106</sup>A. Hill, Designer, Maori Design (1999). Personal communication.

participants surveyed, the inherent meaning that the icon/symbol/logo possesses is able to be apprehended and appreciated. This answers the research question as to whether criteria such as shape, colour, as well as figurative representation or abstraction assist in visual apprehension.

### 6.1.2 The Kiwi

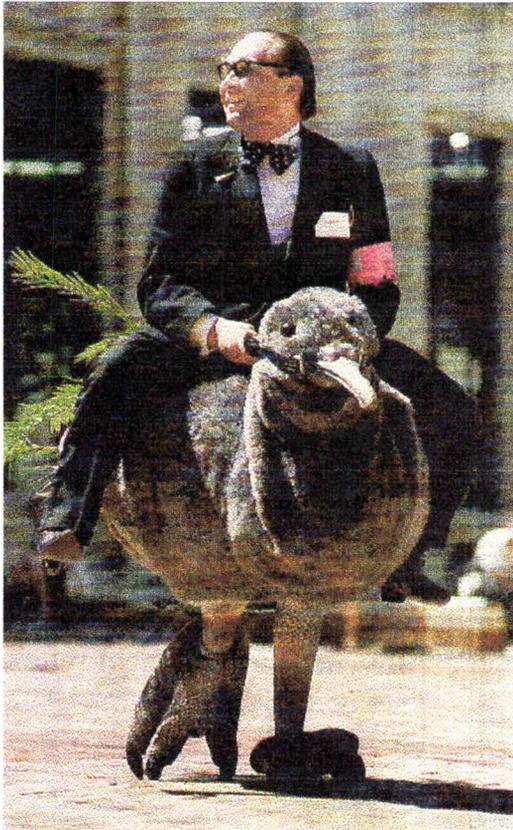


Image 41. Street performer Tim Denton New Zealand Festival 2000

The other equally notable New Zealand icon is the eponymous kiwi. This icon brought the immediate response from one participant in the focus group that no other nation refers to themselves as a bird or other animal. Only New Zealanders refer to themselves as Kiwis. Comments were also to the effect that the kiwi was an endangered bird, precious, treasured, to be treated with respect. Consequently, that the majority of the participants read this icon as visibly expressing the concept *unique* can hardly be said to be unexpected. The kiwi has been conferred a degree of mythical status in terms of its *symbolic significance* that is synonymous with the silver fern/fernleaf, and is also judged to be highly significant in its capacity to denote *cultural* and *national identity*. Where the icon of the kiwi

is effectively marginal is in its capacity to communicate the idea of *tradition*, as well as the attributes of *strength* and *stability*. While the findings for representing *strength* and *stability* are understandable, given the kiwi's endangered status, the results are more curious for communicating the concept of *tradition*. Somehow the link between *cultural* and *national identity* in which there is an element of *tradition* is not made. Similarly in its role as an icon of the R.N.Z.A.F. the kiwi is accorded doubtful value. This evidence suggests that, despite its aggressiveness, the indubitable physical reality is that the kiwi is flightless and helpless in the face of predators. In this case reality, no matter how unique, does not assist in the perception of this icon's referential status as an identifier



Image 42. R.N.Z.A.F. Kiwis Fly sticker

for a service of the military. The paradox that this flightless, nocturnal bird has been the heraldic icon of the R.N.Z.A.F. is no less ironic when compared with other similar metaphoric, zoological, and mythical, creatures such as the lion of Scotland or the dragon of Wales, although it can be argued that while the lion of Scotland and the dragon of Wales are mythological creatures, the kiwi is not.

### 6.1.2.1 Preferred Image

In this instance, the photographic image of the kiwi is not held to be as successful a representation in comparison with that of the fern. This, it is suggested, could be due to the selection of the image rather than to the representative means of photography *per se*. Of the logos and images selected for this study in which the kiwi was a major, if not the key figurative emblem, two are chosen as the most preferred. These are the logo of "Buy N.Z. Made" and the kiwi cropped from the logo of New Zealand Tennis Inc. The graphic forms of these kiwis are not unlike in appearance and it could be said that the icon featured in the "Buy N.Z. Made" logo is figuratively a graphic extension of both New Zealand Tennis Inc. and the logo of Well Made New Zealand. It has captured the essential form and characteristics of the kiwi which is the intended aim of logo design.



Image 43. Logo of the New Zealand Insurance Company

Although the evidence supports a preference for the depiction of the kiwi in a more abstract and simplified form, the traditional, illustrative solution is not unappreciated. Of the logos/images surveyed in this study two fall into this illustrative category. These are: Kiwi Boot Polish and the formative logo of the New Zealand Insurance Company. True to earlier historical forms of cultural and national identity they incorporate supporting elements, such as the tree fern in the case of the logo of the New Zealand Insurance Company, into their design.<sup>107</sup> Both these logos

<sup>107</sup>The contemporary logo design of "New Zealand Insurance" is primarily typographical but features the

are historic and consequently have been designed in accordance with the more traditional style of the period. Graphically, they are more elaborate compared with contemporary images such as



Image 44. *The logo of Kiwi Mail*

the logo of Kiwi Mail. In this case the modernist tenet of less is more is invalid. While this dictum might, with good reason, inform the practice of information design it does not necessarily follow through for the branding of identity for that image to be recognised as being valid.

The evidential findings for the contemporary logo Kiwi Mail tend to bear this out. This abstract image provides the most extreme solution next to the awkward alliance of the kiwi and fernleaf of the logo of Kiwi Lager. Similarly to that logo it was rated by the participants as the least preferred. The traditional symbolic colours are read as fad colours while the tilted image adds distortion to abstraction. A speedy flightless bird or a contorted envelope? Abstraction and distortion are two different things; the former seeks to maintain a degree of resemblance while the latter aims to misrepresent. A comparison of the evidence for the designs of "Buy N.Z. Made" with that of Kiwi Mail indicates that there is a preference for the abstract over the distorted. This evidence supports the view held by Cassels that,

"The physical structure of the logo is always good if it is contained in a circle, or a square, or a rectangle or in a basic shape because you never know where it is going to be used and if it is contained it can still keep its essence no matter where it is applied. Trends in logo design that rely on trickery and whistles and bells just don't work."<sup>108</sup>

## 6.2 The Reading of Three Contemporary Symbol/Logos

If nationalistic icons are bound by social, historical and cultural convention the same parameters can also be said to operate in the formation of corporate identity, although perhaps not to such an entrenched degree. To test the proposition that symbols, as logos, ideally represent the core concept of an organisation or company, and to discover whether symbols as a semantic device were as transparent or ambiguous as they are contested to be, three commonly used logos were

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fernleaf in a supporting role.

<sup>108</sup>D. Cassels, Head Designer, Siren (1999). Personal communication.

selected to be read. These were picked at random, although the original intention was to select those that shared a similar physical likeness to the symbols identified as "belonging" to New Zealand. Although these contemporary logos are graphically reduced to their most abstract form one, that of Lifeflight, retains elements of figurative representation.

Icons, it can be argued, are more culturally peculiar and therefore more particular. The original intention was to ascertain whether they still retain their significance as valid mythological identifiers. Contrary to this belief symbols, as was disseminated by the totalising philosophy and practices of the Bauhaus, are maintained to be universal in meaning. If symbols are universal to this extent they should then have the capacity to be recognised as having meaning in the visual, if prosaic, world of corporate identity.

### 6.2.1 The Evaluation of the Life Flight Logo

This logo is formed from the graphic synthesis of three component parts: the figurative if stylised hands, the propeller, and the symbolic colour red. As a design element, colour is one of the key devices used in the construction and establishment of identity. One of the meanings that is



attributed to the colour red in the language of symbolism is that of action, in this case aid. In this sense the logo of Life Flight resonates, in a subliminal way, with the logo of the Red Cross. Not only are there similarities through the use of the primary colour

Image 45. *The logo of the Red Cross*

red, but also through the use of shape, in that the four hands can be interpreted as a winged cross. A further, and possibly provocative, association can be made by correlating these four hands with the shape of the swastika. That is the *ur* symbol, the fylfot, as it was used in early Christianity and Eastern myticism before its spurious connections with aryan supremacy.



Images 46 and 47. *Symbols of the Sun Wheel and the Swastika*

This abstruse connection was pointed out during the focus group discussion where one participant made the observation that the symbol/logo of Life Flight was a modification of the swastika. It was also perceived as being a "softened cross" and representing "four circles inside a square".<sup>109</sup> These attitudinal responses substantiate the research

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<sup>109</sup>Focus group discussion March 2000.

question that the meaning of visual language is a learnt code and as such achieves its own self-determination through visibility.



Image 48. *The Life Flight logo*

What is significant though is that the evidence provided by the questionnaire survey suggests that the association of the symbol's shape and colour with the concept of aid was not made, they were not read to any significant degree.

If the case was otherwise then a greater proportion than half of the participants would have made the connection between the Life Flight logo and the concept *rescue*. As a corollary to this finding, the definition of ambiguity can be said to apply to this particular aspect of ostentation. If this logo is ambiguous in this regard, its ability to strongly convey the concept of *cooperation* is recognised. This seems to contradict the finding above for surely the idea of *rescue* involves the idea of *cooperation* at the conceptual level, as well as the physical reality. This is where the intended meaning of the symbol becomes elusive through the mitigation of one preference against another. However, the association of this symbol as signifying the service of *aviation* was significantly identified by the allusion to the propeller shape in the centre of the logo. But again this finding has to be qualified by the evidence which indicates that this identification was not made to a highly preferred degree. So far this logo is read as possessing only two attributes to any degree. Evidential analysis also indicates that in its capacity to convey the concepts of *strength* and *stability*, and *trust* the symbol of the Life Flight logo cannot be said to be a markedly strong signifier. Taking these findings into account it was surprising to discover that this logo was rated as being successful in its *symbolic communicative ability*.

The representation of the findings (see p 80) show a cautious reading of this symbol/logo with the results being fairly evenly spread. While the evidence supports a certain degree of apprehension into this symbol's meaning it is not to the degree where it could be described as immediately recognisable.<sup>110</sup> As this relates to the research questions it can be said of the Life Flight symbol/logo that its symbolic communication is not consonant with the original intention, that the perceived meanings are ambiguous rather than transparent. In addition to this while the configuration of design elements allude to the core activities signified by this logo they are not in any way made more overt. Contrary to these findings the focus group made more associations

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<sup>110</sup>Since commencing this study the services of the Life Flight Air Ambulance, and the Westpac Trust Helicopter, have featured in televised advertisements. No doubt this will assist to raise the profile of that organisation and the logo identifying it accordingly.

with the Life Flight symbol/logo that were synonymous with the attributes ascribed to it in the survey. Of the symbol/logos presented for reading it was the most apprehended in terms of significance and meaning.

## 6.2.2 The Evaluation of the Logo of Fusion Insurance Services



Image 49. The Fusion Insurance Service logo

Similar to the design of the Life Flight logo in that it is suggestive of movement, the logo of Fusion Insurance Services is created from three equal interlocking shapes. While the logo of Life Flight symbolises rotation, that of Fusion Services is symbolic of interaction. Linguistically the noun, fusion, signifies coalition, at the conceptual level, as well as implying implosion and explosion. The "essence", or purport, of this coalition is graphically translated into the configuration of this symbol which alludes to the alliance of the three companies: Royal and SunAlliance, GMV Associates, and Southern Cross Healthcare. The shape itself also makes reference to the spiral form of the embryonic fern with all the symbolic connotations of new growth, of inception, of expansion. This meaning was perceived during the focus group which engendered the statements that it was "suggestive of the koru, of a fern opening" and that it was "ancient, inclusive".<sup>111</sup>



Image 50. The Chi Rho illuminated page from the Book of Kells

The use of this organic spiral shape is not unknown in the practice of graphic design with the most ornate, and thematically beautiful, portrayal being represented in the Book of Kells. This is the logo, if it can be described as such, of the *Chi Rho*, XP. This prototype of the logo has been, to frame it in the context of the most mundane terms, designed in accord with the mythology of the time, one which was structured in sympathy with the predominant spiritual rhetoric influencing design of that time. The symbol/logo of Fusion Insurance Services is equally resolved in the aesthetic of the graphic vernacular of the contemporary, secular world. To this degree it is

<sup>111</sup>Focus group discussion March 2000.

supported by the responses elicited during the focus group which were that it suggested the connotations "sunlight and movement" and "unity". Equally, the shape of this symbol/logo was perceived by both men and women as "open ended" and "dynamic" with the result that it was identified as "not oppressive". These deduced hidden meanings answer the question posed as to whether the configuration of design criteria and abstraction assist in visual apprehension.

To answer the research question as to how effectively and to what degree symbols, as logos, communicate their intended meaning the typography designating their identity was removed. If the ostensible meaning of the logo of Fusion Insurance Services is identified as the coalition of services how, then, is that meaning read and apprehended when the typographic designatum is removed? For the purposes of this survey coalition was redefined as *integration*. The evidence presented (see p 83) indicates that this symbol is recognised in its capacity to denote the concept of *integration* to a significant degree. Of those surveyed, the greater majority read the shape of this logo as graphically and conceptually conveying this core meaning. While the logo was strongly identified within this representative capacity it failed in conveying the concept of *care management*. The results indicate that in this case the symbol neither was or was not, by a preferential split in terms of rated appreciation. The inference that was consequently suggested by these results was that the meaning was not apprehended, it remained elusive, and at the best ambiguous. The logo was even more marginally regarded in denoting *health services* and *financial security*. The results of the preferential ratings for both of these variables were basically synonymous and tended significantly towards the symbol being inappropriate and ineffective in portraying these activities. In this sense it was not valued. If this logo has been found wanting in symbolising the ideas of *care management*, *health services* and *financial security* this is not so for the concept of *cooperation*. The evidential results are commensurable with those for representing *integration*; which suggests that the figurative syntax of this symbol, on its own, is recognised as conveying certain attributes with which it has been ascribed. But when it comes to alluding to particular functions that that company can be said to be involved in the results tend to favour ambiguity.

The conclusion is that while this symbol figures highly in communicating the most obvious concepts, those of *integration* and *cooperation*, it is militated against by the other results. Quinn (1994, 60) writes that "... normally the job of the symbol is not to draw attention to itself but to

the message which it adorns...".<sup>112</sup> In this case the logo needs the additional support of other visual material to raise the level of awareness and, to quote Cassels, "emotional association."<sup>113</sup>

### 6.2.3 The Evaluation of the Logo of Trilogy Computer Services

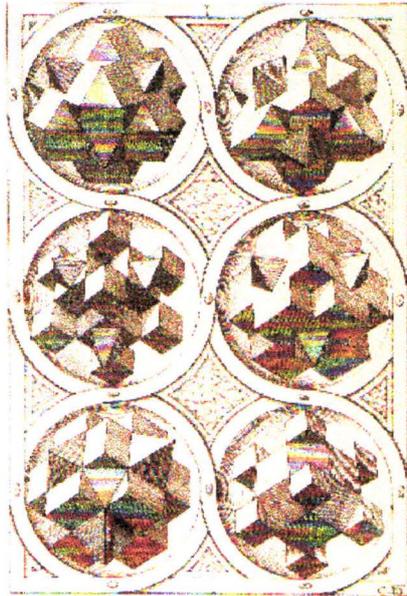


Image 51. *Perspectiva Corporum Regularium*

The symbol that characterises this logo is, like that of Fusion Insurance Services, more purely abstract in configuration and modernist in representation. The physical properties of its shape make reference to the themes of classicism, to symmetry, to geometry, to logic, and to order, rather than alluding to organic naturalism. It seems to resonate with the abstract forms of the Platonic solids, the elements of Euclid, and the proportional geometric systems formulated from them. It also seems emblematic of the forms of engineering, and possesses a Moebius modality which seems appropriate given that it has been designed for a computer services company.



Image 52. *Trilogy Computer Services logo*

The combination of the colours grey and burgundy have the visual effect of being more cerebral than the dynamic and primary red and yellow featured in the previous two logos. Their coolness seems to emphasise the conservative, the technical, and are suggestive of intellectual activity and enquiry, rather than symbolising emotive or kinetic appeal. The outer hexagonal shape symbolises balance while the inwardly pointing triangles allude to problem solving and to systems networking. From this interpretation certain attributes were ascribed to this symbol/logo to be ascertained and compared. Similarly to the research questions used to analyse the previous two logos it was asked: could this symbol as an independent, abstract, form

<sup>112</sup>QUINN, Malcolm. *The Swastika*. Constructing the Symbol. London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p 60.

<sup>113</sup>D. Cassels. Head Designer, Siren (1999). Personal communication.

realise these ideas; is it transparent or ambiguous; does abstraction assist in the apprehension of meaning; how is this symbol consonant with or different to its original intended meaning.

From the evidence provided (see p 85) it appears that in denoting the concept of *information systems* this symbol/logo is regarded as ambiguous as there was almost a complete split in terms of preference. The results proved to be similarly equivocal, if a little more weighted in favour of this symbol being weak, when representing *digital engineering*. The inference indicated by this is that while similar symbols are used to represent engineering in other areas this symbol/logo is not recognised as signifying the referent *digital engineering* in this study. Similarly the function of *computer services* was not judged to be strongly conveyed by this logo. However the interpenetrating form of this symbol was equated with the emotive associations of *strength and security* to a higher degree than was measured for the logo of Life Flight.

The possible reasons given for this identification are the choice of colour and the hexagonal form with inwardly moving triangles used in the design of this symbol/logo. These have the visual effect of signifying enclosure and stability. These connotations are visibly reinforced by the fact that the graphic design of this symbol/logo is constructed on a vertical/horizontal axis with the corresponding result that it is static in appearance. Conversely the symbol/logo of Life Flight is mobile. The form is dominated by an axis but that axis is aligned to the diagonal rather than to right angled. The implementation of the diagonal axis in the syntax of design language has long been associated with the amplification of movement. Mobility and rotation are further reinforced by the intimation that this symbol is contained within a circle, which in itself signifies unity and as a consequence *cooperation*. This interpretation of the configuration of colour and shape was also perceived during the focus group with comments to the effect that this symbol/logo was "robust", "industrial, functional and straightforward", that it was "binding like a lock and suggested security".<sup>114</sup> Further to this it was perceived as "violent and heavy", "internal and inward", and that it was interpreted as "creative in that it is suggestive of making something", "like origami".<sup>115</sup>

The inference seems to be that the more indeterminate the function or service of an organisation the more difficult it is to make the association between the symbol/logo and the purport. Indeed

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<sup>114</sup>Focus group discussion March 2000.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

it could be said of the symbol/logo of Trilogy Computer Services that, stripped of its identifying typography, it could be all things to all people, or equally nothing, depending on the context in which it is sited. Two of the focus group participants validated this by commenting on how hard they found it to attribute meaning to the symbols under discussion, particularly when those symbols verged on pure abstraction. That is, those symbol/logos which, graphically, are pure shape rather than those such as Life Flight which contain representational qualities. Although this is so, further investigation into the correlation of the formal properties of the symbol/logo with certain attributes would probably result in an intuitive response regarding association. For example, the correspondence of the circle, as a shape, with the imputed characteristics that allude to unity, wholeness, completeness, oneness.

### **6.3 Symbolic Correspondences According to Gender**

In the preceding paragraph it is mentioned that further investigation into the matching of symbols with certain attributes would prove interesting in evaluating the meanings behind their graphic form, whether they could be recognised as being visually consonant with the literal equivalent of certain states, or connotations. Moles (1989, 119) observes that "Our existence then becomes more and more symbolic because it is lived more and more inside an ideographic world where we prepare our actions not with the objects themselves, but with the signs that designate them."<sup>116</sup> As part of this study the test, to discover how valid and effective certain contemporary symbols/logos were as identifiers goes some way towards this (see pp. 88-89) Of the designs selected some, such as emblem of the national flag carrier, the koru, are historically well known whereas others, the logo for Learning Media for example, do not possess that same degree of recognisable ostentation.

Taking these findings individually and comparatively, it was found that on the whole similar connections were made between both men and women regarding shape and function. Where this tended to differ was in the associations made between symbol and services for the Life Flight logo (see p 90). While women regarded this symbol as potentially denoting all the services categorised,

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<sup>116</sup>MOLES, Abraham. *The Legibility of the World: A project of Graphic Design in Design Discourse. History, Theory and Criticism.* Victor Margolin ed., London, The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1989. p 119.

men, perceived it otherwise. Contrary to women they omitted this symbol from signifying the services of *research, food, finance, and commerce*. For both groups, however, the services of *health and travel* featured highly, which tends to imply that the design elements of shape and colour used in this logo are understood symbolically. In this instance there is, in Mole's terms, a correspondence of legibility between the signifier and the signified.

If the logo of Trilogy Computer Services (see p 91) was not recognised as strongly signifying *digital engineering* in a singular context, this interpretation altered when placed within this comparative framework. For both genders this symbol/logo corresponded significantly with the designator *engineering*. True to the conservative nature of this design it was also read as signifying *research, science* and to a greater degree for women, *commerce*. From this, inference can be made that symbols/logos may fail to communicate their meaning in an individual setting, but when placed in conjunction with other such abstract shapes the perception of their meaning alters. This finding follows the semiotic argument that context provides the stimuli for content to be apprehended, a view which will be discussed in the chapter seven.

Although the symbol/logo of Fusion Insurance Services (see p 91) was identified by women as being correlated with all service categories, except that of *food*, those designators accorded the most significance were *health and education*. The finding for *health*, similar to *engineering* for Trilogy

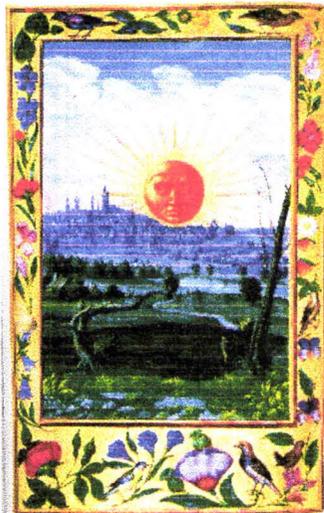


Image 53. *Splendour Solis*

Computer Services, contradicts the data when the logo is read as a stand alone. The fact that it was also selected to represent *education* is not surprising given that the design, comprised of three inter-connecting shapes, has already been linked with the connotative *cooperation*. The colour gold, a symbol of warmth and life, amplifies and vivifies the message of this visual component. Consequently it has a similar resonance with the historical use of colour in the language of symbolism. The symbol/logo of Fusion Insurance Services was not perceived by either men or women to represent the category of *insurance* to any significant degree. The correlation with the denotative *health* was similarly determined by the men, although

*finance* was selected as an identifier rather than *insurance*. Curiously a small percentage of men linked the symbol/logo of Fusion Insurance Services with food! This substantiates the question as

to whether men and women perceive symbols differently. In this case the functionality of this symbol/logo is perceived differently with women apprehending its meaning as consonant with services that are interactive, social and nurturing compared to men.

The categories with which the symbol/logo of Te Papa has been identified is no doubt due to the majority of the survey group residing in Wellington. It is acknowledged that these findings could be regarded as biased due to this factor. While these finding may be "true" of Wellington further comparison of these results with another survey group from the South Island, for example, could be used to validate the reliability of the findings.



Image 54. The logo of Te Papa

From the services listed several were selected by both groups as signifying the dominant designators for the symbol/logo of Te Papa (see p 92). These were *library, research, education* and, for women, *science*. The service category that was primarily associated by both men and women with this symbol/logo above all others was *education*.

Although this symbol/logo was described by the designer as implicitly connoting a cloud, a fish, Tongariro, which in his terms resonated with layers of meaning, it is in effect a mark. The question is could those forms have been recognised independently and without instruction? They certainly were not perceived by the focus group when asked to see what they could in it. The first comment made in relation to this symbol/logo during the focus group discussion was "Who does that logo belong to?".<sup>117</sup> As mentioned in the introduction (see



Image 55. Record Cover

p 2) the fingerprint signifies one of the earliest *ur* forms of identification irregardless of gender, ethnicity, creed, age, or class, as the record cover designed for the rock group, Chicago, illustrates. The Vietnamese participant in the focus group commented that the finger print was used in Vietnam, where a number of the population are illiterate, as a form of identification. In this sense it occupies a similar position to those symbols of abstract configuration in that it is generic. Perhaps a better definition

of this symbol is as a designator of experience, rather than signifying the naturalistic forms read into its shape by the designer. By according it this definition the symbol/logo of Te Papa avails itself to the activity of experience which is learnt through the sense of touch. A suggestion which resonates with a participant's observation that although it is suggestive of "multiple thoughts and

<sup>117</sup>Focus group discussion March 2000. A pertinent comment given that this participant resides in Wellington and in the vicinity of Te Papa.

associations I wouldn't associate it with a museum".<sup>118</sup> This would credit this symbol/ logo with the "*ideoscenarios*" that Te Papa is endeavouring to exemplify through its educational experience.<sup>119</sup>



Image 56. *The logo of Learning Media*

The symbol/logo of Learning Media (see p 93) was associated by both men and women as potentially signifying all the categorised designators except, for men, with the service of *insurance*. For both groups it was read as signifying the service of *education* above all others. Secondary to this, for women, was its correlation with the service of *research*. The inference that can be made from this is that it is a recognised logo, although one Maori respondent made the observation that, for him, the use of Maori designs was often equated with education. A further corollary can be made by comparing these findings with those for the symbol/logo of Fusion Insurance Services. An analysis of this symbol/logo suggested that the interacting shapes alluded to *cooperation* and as a consequence could be used to imply *education* substantiating the concept that shape and colour assist in perception. The suggestion is that this interpretation is in accord with the way in which the symbol/logo of Learning Media is apprehended. In this case the design is formed from two interlocking *kowhainbai* forming the illusion of perpetual movement, this movement symbolically emphasising the activities of interaction, dialogue, communication.<sup>120</sup> These meanings were perceived by the focus group who regarded this symbol/logo as symbolising the interaction between two cultures. The concept of culture was suggested by the "greenstone" colour and by the shape which, reminiscent of a "knot for shipping" signified "community" and "interlinking".<sup>121</sup> However this symbol/logo was also perceived as being "tight and closed with not a lot of give" and as not being "aesthetic" or "dynamic".<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>MOLES, Abraham. *The Legibility of the World: A project of Graphic Design in Design Discourse. History, Theory and Criticism.* Victor Margolin ed., London, The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1989. p 120.

<sup>120</sup>It must be added to this, though, that this logo has been replaced by one whose graphic form is a synthesis of the opened pages of a book and a spiral or *koru*. The branding colours have been replaced by buff, ochre and sienna.

<sup>121</sup>Focus group discussion March 2000.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.



Image 57. The logo of Air New Zealand

The final symbol/logo to be analysed is the koru of Air New Zealand (see p 93). Given its high level of ostentation it is not unexpected that it is identified by both groups as signifying *travel*. It is acknowledged that this is a limitation with this survey. Although the questionnaire requested the participants to select designators other than that with which this symbol was identified the conscious link with *travel* was so

dominant that it subverted choice. This tendency was most evident in the questionnaire results of the female participants and to a lesser degree with the men. Due to its privileged status as a symbol of high profile it has come to have achieved its greatest degree of definition within the learnt code of New Zealand's symbolic identity.

Of more significance, in terms of this study, are the other correlations made by both groups between the referent, the koru, and the designators, the services. *Travel* aside, the categories of *sport* and *commerce* were identified as having the next level of significance. Women, over men,



Image 58. The Nike Swash

chose the designator *sport* while both groups regarded this symbol/logo as denoting *commerce*, if only marginally. The connection with sport could be due to the koru's visual similarity to the Nike swash. Both forms incorporate

a diagonal axis suggestive of speed, movement, and direction. The koru also differs from the other symbol/logos surveyed in that it is, like the Nike logo, not an enclosed form. It is not centred so consequently it is moving. This idea was reinforced by comments elicited during the focus group discussion where the Air New Zealand koru was described as an "arrow" and suggested "the idea of flight and the movement of air over wings".<sup>123</sup> More curious is the connection made with the designator *commerce*. The interpretation put forward is that it is the suggestion of movement in this form that has resulted in this symbol/logo being a stand in for this service.

#### 6.4 The Effectiveness of the Use of Symbols in Design

To conclude then, from the analysis of the evidence presented it appears that symbols, as logos, are questionable referents in conveying the meaning of the core concepts of an organisation or

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

company. Consequently, they can hardly be said to ideally represent the essence of the "thing" that they are objects for. The research findings suggests that symbols as a stand alone graphic form are not always effective in denoting the corporation, organisation or product that they are signifiers for. The inference that can be drawn from this is that the function or the service of the organisation or company, as a concept, exists as an abstract in terms of meaning. In this sense the inherent meaning, the import, of the symbol/logo which stands for the "name" of the organisation, company or product, is not transparent. It is as if their quantity is not known which suggests that their meaning is ambiguous and implies that as signifiers symbols are, as the poststructuralists contest, unstable carriers of meaning. They cannot be said to be reliable in this capacity.

However, symbols/logos are recognised as signifying particular actions, states, qualities or attributes that are equated with the interactive experience of that function or service. In this regard they can be said to connote the experiential essence or spirit of the corporation, organisation or product. These imputed qualities are, it is suggested, more recognisable and identified with through the construction of the design elements, the design elements being devices or "semes" in the visual inventory by which those connotations are elaborated upon and made visible.<sup>124</sup> To illustrate these points the symbol/logo for the Wellington Regional Aquatic Centre might serve as an example.



Image 59. *The logo of the Aquatic Centre*

As a visual referent for the services and facilities of the Aquatic Centre it possibly serves its "name". But, in terms of representing the interactive experience to be had at this facility, of which swimming is only one of the many activities, the inherent message is more suggestive. Those activities are figuratively qualified, or in Moles' words, amplified, by the design elements selected to reconfigure concept into form. As a multifunctional and generic symbol/logo it is a visual holism where linear expression and shape become metaphors and the human figure a visual metonymic device.

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<sup>124</sup>MOLES, Abraham. *The Legibility of the World: A project of Graphic Design in Design Discourse. History, Theory and Criticism.* Victor Margolin ed., London, The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1989. p 121.

Symbols, then, can be said to have both semantic and aesthetic meanings, the one able to reinforce the other. As the symbol/logo gains presence through exposure and through the initial support of other metaphorical devices the association with that symbol/logo becomes more powerful. As Cassels states "...a lot of our work after this has been to put the emotion, the personality, into it and the symbol is starting to gather more and more emotion because of the other material associated with it."<sup>125</sup> This degree of emotional identification was also used in the restyling of the koru of Air New Zealand. Tyack (1996, 54) writes that "It was suggested the philosophy behind the use of the Koru should change. The Koru was to be seen as a precious jewel mark to be used sparingly to increase the perceived value."<sup>126</sup> It suggests that once the symbol/logo has been learnt it is a powerful mnemonic device that gathers increasing meaning and recognition. As a participant in the focus group stated "icons are recognised as emotional, symbols they are not keys to recognition, recognition is dependent on repetition for identification."<sup>127</sup>

For the designers and consultant working in this area (the reader is referred to the appendix pp. 125-142 for the transcriptions of the interviews) Pietkiewicz is cognizant of the mutability of meaning. The methodology which her company is based on recognises and applies poststructuralist thinking to the redesigning of both the company and the product. For Cassels the formulation and the use of symbols in the branding of identity uses similar devices of story telling, and the application of archetypes, but her solutions are more driven by an intuitive response which equates with the statements of the designers quoted in the introduction. She also acknowledges the use of modernist theory in the formatting of some designs but insists on the symbol/logo being integral to the vision of the company in its simplicity. Again, and in support of poststructuralist thinking, she acknowledges that meaning is contingent on the context in which the symbol/logo/icon is sited. This is not quite the case for Hill, working in the area of Maori Design. For him the *whakapapa*, the ownership of the symbol and the consideration of the *wairua* are vitally important in the development of identity. In this instance it can be said that meaning does reside in the text with the consequence that the symbols used in that language can have a underlying significance that far outweighs their initial reception.

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<sup>125</sup>D. Cassels, Head Designer, Siren. (Personal communication). 1999.

<sup>126</sup>TYACK, K. 'A New Look for Air New Zealand', *Prodesign*. August/September 1996. Auckland, AGM Publishing Ltd., 1996. p 54.

<sup>127</sup>Focus group discussion March 2000.

Overall it has been found that while the suggested meanings of these symbol/logos are perceived and apprehended they are only to a degree. In this the findings, which are no way conclusive, support the poststructuralist position which claims that meaning does not reside in the text itself. This would suggest that for the symbol/logo not to be so ambiguous in meaning more research is required into formulating the structure of the organisation or company. The application of the term structure is not so much as it relates to internal order but how that organisation or company conceives of interacting and communicating with the external cultures with which it deals. In this sense the use of symbolism in identity involves understanding the language of mythic narratives, with correlations to the theory of structuralism, and the evolution and reinterpretation of those through the inevitable impact with cultural variables.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

*"The fact that the logo exists ... is itself a form of communication"* Wally Olins, 1989.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the proposition that symbols, as logos, can be said to ideally represent the core concept of an organisation or company. In addition to this, it was of interest to discover whether there was a correlation between the respondents' perception of the symbols/logos and icons under discussion and the subjective interpretation made by the researcher. In a culture that is increasingly wallpapered with visual noise, it set out to determine how commonly used abstract and figurative symbol/logos in contemporary New Zealand design were perceived, apprehended and evaluated. Not only was it of significance to discover how symbol/logos were apprehended but to also ascertain the privilege and validity of the silver fern/fernleaf and kiwi as the dominant icons of New Zealand. The aim was to test the ability of both symbols and icons to act as visual referents for the organisation, enterprise, or product with which they are associated. In semiotic parlance could their referential significance be perceived and interpreted according to a qualitative model? Could that interpretive meaning be evaluated and found to have significance? If these symbol/logos could, with any reliability, be read as conveying those particular ideas or attributes to what degree was that communication valued? To state it another way, how significant and stable is the symbol/logo/icon as bearer of cultural import as well as corporate identifier?

Symbolism, in the total order of signifying languages, is considered by the semioticians to be secondary in significance due to its arbitrariness in communication. Indeed the branding of identity relies on conventions for meaning to be transparent. It can certainly be said of symbols that in their abstract and purist form, and devoid of context, that they can be ambiguous or marginal conveyors of meaning. However, the evidence provided by this study, which is acknowledged to be tentative and indicative, suggests that symbols are indeed recognisable as graphic vehicles of condensed and complex meaning. Those hermeneutic meanings are recognised and accorded as having value, even if that value is not to a significant degree.

As one of the dominant graphic languages in visual communication design, symbolism, is transcribed in an encoded visual form. A code made visual and which, according to Anceschi

(1996) can also be said to be visible. This argument concurs with the statement made by Gombrich (1982, 16) that "The power of recall of symbols varies of course enormously, but thanks to their economy of elements, symbols are much more amenable to availability in storage."<sup>128</sup>

Poggenpohl (1998, 34) observes that

"There seems to be a tantalizing relationship between the structure of spoken language and that of visual imagery; perhaps this is true only if language is taken metaphorically as a system of signification. But if language is understood to be what linguists study - spoken language - then, as they have argued, the structure doesn't translate."<sup>129</sup>

The position that she takes is that theory (to put it simply, a set of values) organised according to the structure and logic of one particular type of communication does not necessarily suit another and therefore the meaning or "truth" differs with the reading. "The problem is once again that of using truth as the measure of usefulness - as if what we call reality were a given, stable situation that we can behold if only we cast off certain habits of mind or use only 'pure' language."<sup>130</sup>

This statement reflects the issues raised in the development of the logo for Te Papa where the perception and interpretation of one design solution, a colonising sign, differed in its ontological validity. The problems of transcribing spoken language into visual language have also been commented on by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996).<sup>131</sup>

She further writes that "The presumption is that full knowledge cannot come through images, and that those who create or use images instead of words or numbers are somehow deficient."<sup>132</sup>

As mentioned in the introduction it is indeed helpful to have signs that are to all intents and purposes able to apprehended and acted upon. The significance of the symbol/logo/icon as the

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<sup>128</sup>GOMBRICH, E. H. The Image and the Eye. Further studies in the psychology of pictorial representation. London, Phaidon, 1982. p 16.

<sup>129</sup>POGGENPOHL, Sharon Helmer. Doubly Damned, Rhetorical and Visual in Visible Language. 32.3. Rhode Island, Rhode Island School of Design, 1998. p 34.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>KRESS, G. and VAN LEEUWEN, T. Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design. London, Routledge, 1996.

<sup>132</sup>POGGENPOHL, Sharon Helmer. Doubly Damned, Rhetorical and Visual in Visible Language. 32.3. Rhode Island, Rhode Island School of Design, 1998. p 34.

symbolic vehicle of identity though differs in its performance and while it has been found to be deficient in some areas it is on the whole recognisable, if it must be added, not always memorable. In investigating the literature into the use of symbolism as a design language, it was found that there has been little research into and discussion of the use of symbolism in design in New Zealand. Rather the subject of that content was superficially concerned with the aesthetics of the designer and the client rather than the effect of the design on the recipient, the customer. Information as to why certain design decisions were selected were glossed over with the result that the content was promotional rather than informative. Strickler (1999, 28) states that design research has been primarily focused on resolving the needs of the client and their products or services. As a consequence she writes that,

"Remarkably, questions regarding how an end user might interpret, interact with, and act on designed communication objects generally have been presumed to be addressed adequately by the designer's intuition."<sup>133</sup>

Strickler quotes Winkler as saying "What most designers understand as research is information gathering, sometimes information synthesis and analysis, but rarely as the testing of conceptual models, or the testing of data from the findings in sociology or psychology."<sup>134</sup> This research study into symbolism rather than signage has, in some way, addressed some of these limitations and highlighted the need for an ongoing analysis of design using the traditions of Communication Theory which include an interpretive or hermeneutic approach. The argument made for this interpretive methodology is due to the complexity of the variables impinging on the nature of this research, and the fact that it is recognised that the researcher is not objectively detached from that process. This method supports the subjective presence in the research design. However a recommendation is made for more in depth analysis of the use of symbolism in design which, it is suggested, would not only suit the needs of the client but also those involved in the field of design education.

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<sup>133</sup>STRICKLER, Zoe. 'Elicitation Methods in Experimental Design Research', *Design Issues* Volume 15, Number 2 Summer 1999. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. p 28.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p 28.

Argument was also made in support of the poststructuralist position in the construction of the symbol/logo/icon as a vehicle of identity. Norris (1991, 3) in his criticism of Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (1975) defines deconstruction as

"avowedly 'post-structuralist' in its refusal to accept the idea of structure as in any sense given or objectively 'there' in a text. Above all it questions the assumption - so crucial to Culler - that structures of meaning correspond to some deep-laid mental 'set' or pattern of mind which determines the limits of intelligibility."<sup>135</sup>

Norris continues that structuralism, in his view, is a "totalising order of thought".<sup>136</sup> This notion of structuralism as being conservatively one-eyed has indeed been a valid definition, given the multi-perspectival viewpoint of deconstructionism, with the inference that it is inflexible.

He argues that structuralism is "an outlook that lends support to traditional ideas of the text as a bearer of stable (if complicated) meanings."<sup>137</sup> Indeed this is the problematic function of symbols, as logos, for they are the primary visual vehicle for an organisation and its inherent "essence" or "spirit". Representation is central to the meaning of the symbol/logo/icon. Their construction and communicative



Image 60. *The logo of the National Westminster Bank PLC*



Image 61. *The logo of the Banque Paribas*

success depends on an awareness of the relationship that exists between the organisation and that diverse group the customer. As the two examples indicate the symbolism used by both is determined by the mythic ideology of the corporation, one which is modernist and one which is traditional and historicist.

In conclusion then it can be said that symbols/logos/icons have a degree of apprehension that is based on the configuration of the design elements of colour, line, shape and form. These assist in communicating the hidden meanings or imputed attributes that are connoted by the symbol/logo/icon. These are in turn the visual representations of the structure,

<sup>135</sup>NORRIS, Christopher. *Deconstruction Theory and Practice*. Rev., ed. London and New York, Routledge, 1991. p 3.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p 10.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p 3.

the mythic conception, of the organisation or company. Their visible success or failure is dependent on the perceived conceptual and subjective framework by which the organisation or company defines itself for they are part of the language belonging to that organisation or company. From the research carried out as part of this study it has been discovered that while the symbol/logo/icon does not necessarily communicate the denotata, the function, service, or activity, of the organisations and companies surveyed, the associated connotations or qualities and attributes are perceived. From this it can be concluded that symbols/logos/icons evoke a subjective response which then leads to a recognition of their inherent meanings which in turn, to quote Gombrich, makes them memorable. The corollary to this is that it is these aspects within the mythic structure, or narrative, of that organisation or company which need to be enhanced, as in the Life Flight symbol/logo, for the visual to be made visible.

The findings of this research study into the representation, meaning and apprehension of symbolism, are regarded as tentative and indicative rather than conclusive, which could be seen to be a limitation of the methodology. This has been acknowledged in the content of the thesis but is in no way considered to detract from the results which provide an insight into how the symbols/logos and icons under investigation have been perceived. What these findings do indicate is that there is a degree of recognition by which they are valued. Perhaps the most revealing comment that was made by more than one participant was that icons and symbols/logos are taken for granted. Given that this is so it is proposed that further investigation into the area of symbolic communication and associated meaning could be developed as an extension of the research already undertaken in this study.

## APPENDIX

What follows are the transcripts of the key informant interviews which comprise the qualitative component of the design methodology. The first transcript records the interview with Deidre Cassels, Head Designer at Siren, followed by the documentation of the interviews with Stephanie Pietkiewicz and Arnold Hill respectively.

### **1 Interview with Deidre Cassels - Head Designer at Siren**

- *How important is the use of symbolism for you as a designer?*

Good question. A lot of it is purely intuitive for me, using symbols in design. I do like to do work that is quite bold and distinctive. So often a symbol, one key symbol, or form, or idea is what I'm aiming to communicate but it often depends on the end use of that communication whether it be a logo, a poster, an ad, a profile. It depends on what the key idea is what the form of the communication will use.

- *In your design is the design dependent on the use of both abstract and figurative symbols?*

That one [the logo for the Wellington Regional Aquatic Centre] was a sign balanced between two or quite a few symbols. It is read on quite a few different levels and it is quite interesting seeing people's response to it. The people who commissioned it are getting emotional about the logo and are actually very passionate about the use of it now and they are reading a lot into it that I probably didn't put into it in the first place. To me it was very simple. The Aquatic Centre is all about people, it is all about water, and also it is about being in New Zealand so the symbol basically did that. It used a human form. I didn't want to show any particular race, age, sex, or even activity, because they swim there but they also eat there, do aerobics there, have kid's creches there, so it [the logo] is just an energy sort of movement. Also the spiraling out in the design is partly using the Maori koru, but not really. I didn't want it [to be] too specific, just the way in which it also came out of looking at wind in Wellington and waves. So it is just combining those elements and creating an interesting shape. I produced it pretty quickly using a liquid brush format, using the medium of the actual facility and it kind of just evolved. So a lot of the analysis of that logo has come out way after it was produced. It is an interesting shape using bold

positive/negative forms and keeping it as simple as possible, quite loose, but almost illustrative rather than symbolic, although you can read a lot of different things into it.

- *I am interested in that it is multifunctional. Would you therefore be choosing images, or forms, or shapes that are more unifyingly representative than specifically oriented?*

The facility [the Wellington Regional Aquatic Centre] is such a big place with a lot going on that you cannot illustrate one particular thing that they do and to show water, or people, or any specific activity kills the emotional part of it. So a lot of our work after this has been to put the emotion, the personality, into it and the symbol is starting to gather more and more emotion because of the other material associated with it.

- *How old is the logo?*

It is about 3 years old now and it has been chosen to be the symbol for all the swimming pools in Wellington. So that is another issue, because before it was the symbol for one place and now it is the symbol for everything aquatic in Wellington. So we're getting over that hurdle now of how to separate them when yet, they are somehow combined. The logo is the same as saying that they are a member of the Aquatic Facilities Department of Council. So what is the difference if you want to swim at Freyburg or you want to swim at the Kilbirnie Wellington Regional Aquatic Centre, how do you differentiate them if they both have the same logo? So the importance then becomes more an issue of material and the different things that they offer.

- *What factors do you consider to be the most relevant in the creation of logo design? By factors I mean the formal design properties that comprise the physical structure of the logo, as well as the inherent concepts which are suggested by the concrete form of that abstract and figurative symbol.*

It is really interesting the whole change in logo design. The logo is not so much the message any more it is part of a whole big branding process. The logo is linked in with metaphoric, photographic images, devices, to load it up with the emotional associations and often all these logos do need a lot of back up material, especially when they are new. A new logo needs a lot of time to get settled depending on who it is for. It is the service of the people. For instance if the symbol is for Te Papa, it is not until 2 or 3 years down the track when that institution is known for being an outstanding facility and an interesting place to go that the association then comes

with that and the logo becomes linked to that. Whereas focussing on that little symbol you are not going to see anything, you can read whatever you like into it.

- *One of the definitions of the symbol is that its meaning is arbitrary, that it can mean anything you like it to be or that meaning is dependent on learnt experience and the interaction with that particular symbol.*

Factors that are considered most relevant in the creation of the logo design are: number 1, before you look at any concepts or scribbles or anything it is the brief. It is finding out what this thing is supposed to do and a lot of this is looking at the audience, looking at the company, how they want to be seen, what it is that they stand for, where are they going, who are their competitors, how is this logo going to be used. Are they in the digital medium, what is the flavour of that company, are they nostalgic, forward thinking, low-key, high-tech, all these sorts of personages. It is the brief that gets the core personality of the company. Then you create a symbol that bundles up all those associations as a vehicle to go out and hang on their publicity, stationery, letterheads through to advertising, t. shirts, it really depends on the organisation. Don't even look at the style of that mark until you really get a good idea of what that company is about. So there is a lot of words and research before you even consider what is appropriate, and often there are previous logos and a lot of history with companies that has to be considered as well. So you don't often get the chance of starting from scratch, often you are evolving off something that has gone before and the client often has some very key ideas themselves of the sort of thing that they want. It is a matter of working out what they want to say. If I am designing a logo that might be a classic button logo that might be used on a package, simplicity, the simpler the better. I actually prefer logos that are just black and white and very simple [such] as a stamp, a seal, a unique signature. To me logos are take away, take away, take away and get it right back to the essence of what it is they are about. The physical structure of the logo is always good if it is contained in a circle, or a square, or a rectangle or in a basic shape because you never know where it is going to be used and if it is contained it can still keep its essence no matter where it is applied. Trends in logo design that rely on trickery and whistles and bells just don't work. It is really interesting that you often set up little grids and forms, often you just naturally go back to the golden mean. I just subconsciously use this balance, this formula.

- *So, in that instance, could you say that in designing the logo it is possible to take it back, as the Bauhaus did, to the Platonic solids of the circle, the triangle and the square?*

Definitely. I don't know if it is just because of my training, I'm used to that, but it is really interesting watching clients respond to things. When you provide them with three options there will always be one that stands out that you have as a favourite and more often than not they will pick that one that as well. I don't know if that is natural law and order of balance which I tend to think it is. I think that people just inherently know what feels right. It would be interesting to see if it was different in a different culture for we, being Anglo-Saxon kiwis, have similar backgrounds so it would be really interesting to see how Muslims respond to this for they may have a different way of looking at things.

- *How relevant to you is semiotic theory in contemporary design practice? In other words is your design solution dependent on knowing and analysing the operation of signs and symbols and their referential function, or are your solutions driven by intuition?*

I'd say on the whole driven by intuition. It is really interesting, like I was saying before often when you go back and analyse it [the symbol] you actually can get a lot more meaning out of it and it is interesting that other people get a lot more meaning out of it as well. I rely a lot on gut instinct and the "wow" feeling. I love beautiful design and design from the head, I love seeing some of the Swiss design. We have one at the moment from P & O Nedlloyd and it is a design style guide and it is so anal, it is gridded and ordered, and if  $x = 2x$  then the height and the width of the photo fits in this grid here, and all this sort of stuff. Great in theory but when you are actually trying to follow it doesn't work. We are doing quite a bit of advertising as well and that purely relies on people's gut feelings and what it is that makes people excited, or passionate about something, or intrigued, or turn them off, or whatever is reliant on basic human desires. Identities and logos are the same thing, they are being perceived by people who don't have design degrees so what is it that is going into the eyes and what is it that the head is saying about that thing. I get more and more amazed about the public out there and just how much they do respond to things. I think so much is thought that the general public is naive and stupid whereas everyone has an opinion and often it is a gut feeling and they have a whole range of emotions that they read into things. I think that it is pretty stupid to ignore just everyday people's opinions out there because they respond to things in a very basic way and it is really powerful and so often you could give them a symbol that is a little bit obscure, that is intriguing, and not a black and white road sign.

The thing is to educate people what that symbol means and the problem with so many clients, on an instant response to that symbol, is that they are not prepared to build it up and build meaning to it over the years. It takes at least 2 or 3 years for a logo to be known. Often the logo is not going to help the company if it is a sick company with bad management and over priced products, all those associations go into it as well. It is only a symbol of what is actually going on within the company or product.

- *Do you think that symbolic language can function independently, as in the case of the Nike swash, or does it require additional support for comprehension?*

The Nike swash has only developed its presence because of all the brilliant advertising and packaging and products.

- *How significant is the issue of the appropriation of cultural symbolism?*

It is really interesting. The koru is in nature anyway, the spiral is a natural form and it is just that we are so bloody scared of using it now because the Maoris have been so nasty that you think right, I'm not going to use that anymore I'll find my own one. I get really pissed off about the whole thing about the ownership of symbols because they mean different things to different people and they don't just belong to one culture. You'll often see them somewhere else, it could be a koru in Egypt, I'm sure that South America has got korus happening. Wherever there are ferns growing there will be cultures that have illustrated the koru. I love Maori art and I was really proud to see Clinton come off the plane and they had the Polynesian thing there, and I thought "yeah" this is fantastic. It's colours, the clothes, the sounds, the whole thing, I thought let's push it. The thing is that I'm very wary of using anything that looks remotely Maori now. I'm after more of a New Zealand uniqueness and that is what I'm trying to explore, a New Zealand way of doing things.

- *How would you define that?*

It is the can do attitude I think. It might be seen as slightly white, as European, but it is more about a humanness, a quirkiness, a style that is not slick Italian, it is more can do. You can see it coming out more and more in the nostalgia of the 50s, the Britten bike, all those sort of heroes are coming out. And if you can merge a bit of that with the nature of New Zealand and even look at the Pacific sort of area there are some fantastic images, people, ways of doing things that

are so unique compared to the rest of the world. There is a real fusion of Pacifica, high-tech, it is happening anyway and sometimes by defining it ruins it. I think that if you look back in fifty years time you will find that something was definitely happening because you can sense that there is a huge change happening now. Why stop and analyse it why not just go with it and be part of it.

## **2 Interview with Stephanie Pietkiewicz - Communications Counsel**

- *How important is the use of symbolism for you as a designer, or in your role as an identity consultant?*

Identity is where I start and I suppose for me to think about symbolism is like thinking about identity, which I associate with almost like the deep, deep fundamental levels of the concept of the self. Those that are often related to archetypes in the Jungian sense of deep, deep symbolism that we all carry within us, the hero or whatever. My design is one of the outputs of figuring out that core sense of identity and looking at the core archetypes that seem to occur through a series of overviews that I take my clients through. So that at the end of it I can with clarity for me, and with certainty and understanding at a deep level, relate a design, or a communications piece, or a web site to the symbols at that fundamental identity level.

Maybe I should take you through my process with Telecom Network Development, they were a client about a year and a half ago. They came to me saying "We want a marketing brochure, we need to rebrand ourselves" as they were perceived within Telecom as the brown cardy brigade - they weren't leading edge and that was where they wanted to be. Network Development is where all of the new developments within the Telecom Network that we know as services like Xtra, all the leading edge comes from. Network Development is the seed bed of all that leading edge stuff that Telecom does but the people within the group were perceived as the exactly the opposite of that kind of cutting edge. So their whole brief to me was, "We need a brochure to try and help us market ourselves more coherently and powerfully to not only our internal audiences but the suppliers and the relationships that we have outside the Telecommunications company". I said to them that I don't think that this is a good place to start because you may want to say certain things but that may not necessarily be who you are. So what you are actually doing is potentially saying something that is contradictory to what you are all about and spreading that contradiction throughout everything else that you do, say, act.

So I took them about 3 steps back and firstly I analysed the linguistic and visual symbols. I get them to give me everything that they have as an output whether it's notes or documents on network development, or anything that they have in terms of marketing themselves to begin with and I run a visual and verbal audit over them. Basically my process is that I read it as if I were reading a literary text and that is where my methodology has come from, through my academic work. I'm looking for patterns of resonance by recurring words, recurring images, things like that which are actually saying to me that these are meaningful symbols for these people because they are repeating them again and again and again, often unconsciously. Or, repeating clusters of related words which actually equate to one mega symbol. So what I do, as a first output through this methodology, is present to them this visual and verbal audit which is like a current state of where they are. The key message is both visual and verbal and often that is like a huge revelation to them because they are often saying the things that they think are most contradictory to what they want to say. So that is our starting point.

Then I run a series of workshops which basically pull together not just the senior management, who can give me the big words and the big ideas, but everyone within either the group or the organisation however big it is or however small it is depending on what client I'm looking at. I ask them a series of seemingly inane questions and stuff that isn't specifically left brain, logical, rational. I'm actually get inside not only the head but looking for, through that series of questions, the actual recurring symbolism that not only defines the ideal state, where they want to be, but also what is really going on. Not what they're saying is going on but what is really going on in their collective minds. That becomes what I call an identity blueprint and that blueprint has the fundamental archetypes, the essence of the thing itself both visually and verbally, that is what I base all of my other stuff on. So that for them it started off by ... I actually came up with the whole concept that these guys were Renaissance men and women because they were talking in terms of the person they thought that Network development was most like, Leonardo da Vinci. The fact that he could turn his hands to everything, he was the artist as well as the scientist and all of that. So I came up with almost like a visual vocabulary for them which was the starting point and at the centre of that visual vocabulary was Leonardo's man. I basically had the rationale to relate it back to what they were actually telling me in those fundamental core archetypes that are almost like that starting point for anything that is communicated visually or verbally. I had clusters of other images surrounding that, architectural perspectives and various other things, and

that became almost like the symbolic visual form that then translated into the intranet site I designed for them, the hard copy brochure, even so much as the artwork that they had on their walls. It was like giving them the symbols that they had fundamentally but that they were not in tune with and then turning that into forms that other people could relate to.

- *What factors do you consider to be the most relevant in the creation of logo design? By factors I mean the formal design properties that comprise the physical structure of the logo, as well as the inherent concepts which are suggested by the concrete form of that abstract and figurative symbol.*

When I'm not working with corporate clients, when I'm doing one on one things with individuals within the corporation or just in the company, then I do what I call self-portraits. Which is literally taking the same methodology but changing the questions so that they are actually much more personally focused. What I produce for these people is literally a mythic narrative, it is like this is your own personal symbolism. And to come back to your idea of symbolism, in the use of design, I suppose my personal take on it is that you pull, externally, symbols that are out there into a design if it is appropriate, but my key talent would be to find the innate symbol of the thing itself. So that we actually look at that conceptual level and we analyse it for what is really being articulated by the words or the images and then we try and crystalise that into the symbol that is the most appropriate essence.

- *If the company is unable to analyse and define itself as to its core essence would you regard the resulting image as to be totally ineffective?*

It is like going back to the esoteric maxim "know thyself" in order to communicate as powerfully as possible to those people who have most akin feelings to you, which are those audiences that in a corporate environment you want to really get close to, because there is a natural synergy between marketer and marketee. Also you have to be able to speak truly to them in the sense that you have to know yourself and speak as powerfully from that centre. And that is where it is funny as it is almost antithetical to a lot of marketing speak which is that you have actually got to understand your customer. By not sieving all that information about the customer through your own sense of self you are actually just producing the image like it is, which your customers don't believe in ultimately. It is almost as if they have to recognise themselves in what you're saying but also recognise the integrity of what you're saying as a true reflection of who you are and if that doesn't work then you've got an identity problem. Especially as consumers become more aware

of the manipulation in advertising and are going to be less likely to buy into a slick message that they know doesn't come from the heart.

- *How relevant to you is semiotic theory in contemporary design practice? In other words is your design solution dependent on knowing and analysing the operation of signs and symbols and their referential function, or are your solutions driven by intuition.*

I think back to when my own methodology was born and that was at University when I was struggling with the whole idea of how to find meaning in text. Not only for myself but how to teach that to my students in the sense that how could they get to the essence of what the text was all about. I looked at the whole poststructural thing and the death of the author. I think that had a profound effect on me in the sense that for the first time something that I intuited as my own right way of approaching text which was - as long as I can rationalise why I am making this connection within a text then it is a true response to it, without any intention by the authors themselves to convey that message. But having said that I think, and this is to go back, as long as you understand their rationalised view of responses to text and the essence of meaning that you see in it then that is a perfectly valid out take.

I am always doing the opposite now in the sense that I'm actually saying OK we've got to figure out the essence of our clients, my clients, and communicate that in a way that people can instantly see as patterns of reverberation and resonance that that is what the essence is about. So you are actually asking people to see a certain delivered message, in a sense, rather than them interpreting what they will out of it. Having said that I don't think that there is a contradiction because as an intelligent reader of text I perceive the connections that are in the text either through my own interpretation which I can rationalise, or the connections that the author has made one or the other. But most consumers don't actually do that active analysis of what the message is trying to present to them and so the corporation, or the product, or whatever has to be much more intelligent in order to convey those patterns of meaning through reinforcing symbolism, whether that symbolism is visual or verbal. And so it is almost like the onus is much more on the person, or corporation, or product, whatever, trying to do that communication than having active, intelligent readers coming the other way. Also I think that as consumers become more and more actively aware of what the corporation is trying to do so to will their understanding of that increase, in the sense that at the moment I think that it is a very unconscious process. Whereas

the more jaded that whole, traditional, advertising message becomes the more people will actually cast a critical eye on what is being said, what is true, what is real and therefore you have to fall back on that real sense of identity and the personal symbol which is true to the thing itself, rather than adopt it because you want the look. In fact I couldn't do justice to my design work if I didn't actually think in those concepts because I'd be shooting from the hip.

When I was at Van de Roer design I worked with the senior designer. I would give him the rationale from the brief, from the client and he would take all of those words, the spoken words or the written brief, and he would come up with a design which was almost the intuitive response to what I had done. I suppose the best design for me works at that sort of intuitive, symbolic level as well as the rational, the sort of "what messages are we trying to convey" level. And it has to be based on a thorough understanding, agreed to by the client, understanding by the conveyor of the messages, the designer.

- *One of the definitions of the symbol is that its meaning is arbitrary, that it can mean anything you like it to be or that meaning is dependent on learnt experience and the interaction with that particular symbol.*

The best way to ensure that they are not arbitrary is to reinforce at every communication opportunity, whether that is visual or verbal, those same concepts. Not necessarily the same thing hammered over and over again but those intricate words that are interrelated into symbols and interdependent symbols which actually reinforce the same core message. If it is a decent symbol, in the sense that I don't think that symbols are necessarily arbitrary if you can get to that deep level that we have been talking about, it should speak quite clearly to people who are actively reading it not just necessarily passively observing. But the true key, like my company's name "From Saying to Singing", is that saying is one level of communication but singing is like being in harmonics. It is like the whole idea that you are singing the message through a number of melodies, if you like, or singing the symbols through a number of vehicles so that you are actually getting the resonance, the patterns, almost like a vibration that people are actually picking up on much more clearly than just the one rendition.

- *How significant is the issue of the appropriation of cultural symbolism?*

It is a huge hot potato. Thinking about what I just said, the only way that you could appropriate a cultural symbol is to actually have to buy in from the culture that you are appropriating from.

In the sense that OK the koru was OK maybe back in the sixties or seventies whenever it was created because the whole cultural awareness between Maori and Pakeha wasn't necessarily developed in the cultural consciousness. Now that it is you could never do that kind of thing because it is not your symbol, in the sense that what I've been talking about here is actually finding the symbol most appropriate for the thing itself. So you are adopting something else and if you don't have claims to it in the sense that it isn't your personal symbol then I think that you have got problems.

- *So in questioning the issue of ownership, of using something that is not authentically yours, the question remains where do symbols come from anyway?*

Exactly, that is exactly it. At the deeper level, the archetypal level, the koru is like a spring growth, a shoot. At a much deeper level you could actually see how it could be used in a completely non Maori way but only if it were sensitive to the fact that there was a huge cultural group that has adopted this as their symbol. It is a tricky one. Part of the way I deal with that not wanting to appropriate symbols can happen on different levels, in the sense that you have to when you are dealing with the identity of a group within a company or a corporation. You are talking about a whole lot of people who have individual sets of symbolisms all working for this one organisation. So in order for me to be able to do something that is meaningful for all of them it is like you have to validate each individual's response but then say what is common to them all. So with the appropriation of cultural symbolism, if you were to be in an environment where you could actually validate why you have used a certain symbol and it's actually OK with the cultural group that you are appropriating from, because they have been part of that process of like mutual symbol making, then I think it goes down to that deeper archetypal level rather than a them and us or his and mine. But that has to be handled incredibly sensitively otherwise it leaves people thinking like "how dare they". It is like rape in one sense, violating my symbols that I hold to be sacred. It is interesting too that the whole world is becoming much more culturally aware so that there is not the homogenous western blanket approach and I don't know what that will mean.

- *I describe it as heterogenous homogeneity.*

Yes, whiter than white. But I wonder where that will lead though in the sense that as cultural awareness develops and these things, like the koru and Air New Zealand's claims, are no longer appropriate then it will actually come full circle. So that anyone person's, or anyone culture's

symbols - they almost go into the symbol pool and I suppose that is the collective unconscious. And as people/cultures become more culturally self aware, and self confident, the need to hang on to a particular symbol will become less important to them and therefore they will more freely share that image. If they can see that the group that has adopted it are using it not necessarily in a valid way because who's to say what's valid, but in a way which is appropriate to their own culture. So that the emergent understanding of oneself and one's own culture will free one up to be able to appreciate how those symbols are being use by other people, whether visual or verbal. At the moment I think that symbols within cultures are used mostly like weapons, psychological weapons, rather than actually almost bridges.

### **3 Interview with Arnold Hill - Freelance Designer**

- *How important is the use of symbolism for you as a designer, or in your role as a Maori designer?*

The use of symbolism in Maori is important, it's important to know your iwi, what sort of design you are going to be using. There is quite a variety or a whole group of Maori design that you can use with consent from whatever organisation that you are working with or within. You have to know what sort of design or symbol that you use first, such as the koru. The koru is found in quite a lot of designs, the Air New Zealand logo for one, you can say that it is a koru but Maori reckon that it isn't.

- *Why is that, can you just elaborate a bit more on that?*

Someone approached me about what I thought of the Air New Zealand logo as a koru. When you look at it closely the design of it doesn't really form a koru, it is like a round hoop with a little circle in there. It is an abstract of a koru, they say that it is a koru but it is not. Those are the sort of things that you have got to be aware of and along with the koru there are all sorts of shapes, such as the tukutuku panels which are found in meeting houses, and they are all triangular shapes. There is a series of triangular shape designs that you can use but again you have to research and see if that fits with the criteria of the client or of yourself. Say if someone wants a design for the fishing industry and wants to relate that design with a symbol or design which uses Maori design, I like to take a design from the tukutuku panels in which there is a symbol such as the patiki which represents a fish, the flounder fish.

Sealords, which deals with the seafood industry, has a Maori design which is the patiki and that is a generic symbol. A lot of Maori have patiki in their meeting houses throughout New Zealand so you can incorporate that for your design in an abstract way, but again you will be consulting with your kaumatua, your local iwi, your local hapu. This process is important for whatever design that you choose, especially in Maori design. The safest thing is to keep it as simple as possible.

If you intend to go on you can drift in the design and that can create something else. Which is that you might have patiki and then you might have a series of patiki which represents the whole sea. But when you put it together and you look at it you could make a whole design which in Maoridom signifies that these are my children and these are passed on with the use of the colours that you've got. The use of colour is also important. In Maoridom iwis and hapus have their own colours and that is another issue as well. It can get really confusing as it can create tension amongst others and you don't want that, you want to trial the design first and you get the reactions straight away. It's good to have a kaumatua on board because then you know that you are safe, it sort of protects you.

- *So then you could say that the kaumatua guides you in the use of symbolism?*

Yes, in the use of symbolism, how it is constructed, he is the guide.

- *I believe that if a design is done well enough the underlying meaning should be able to be intuitively recognised and understood. What do you think?*

Yes, that is in Maori as well. For example at the moment I am doing a book cover for a law firm and the book is written for Maori, they want Maori to pick the book up. So the symbolism that I used for the design is poutama. Poutama is stairways to heaven and again it is in tukutuku panels and wall paintings and it is generic, neutral, everyone can use that design. And the design that I have created for this book, because it means that it is for their company's and director's duties, uses poutama. There is a light from the bottom of the poutama and it is shining up the stairs and it is guiding the way and at the top there is a kowhaiwhai design, just kowhaiwhai. They are neutral as well and that symbol [poutama] represents the issues that are discussed of going upwards, most people in business organisations like to go to the top. And the poutama signifies going to the top and in Maori they will see that, they will know that they can relate to it, they can see that upwards sort of thing that there is nothing down. Or you start down there and you move up and again there is some nice, beautifully designed kowhaiwhai, which again sets that spiritual

side of things. It is designed in a subtle way, it's not harsh, as Maori like to see a subtle sort of feeling within a design, in Maori design. They don't want to see the sharp, jagged, blotchy whatever. They can read a design straight out like in the whares where there are those tukutuku panels and kowhaiwhai on the rafters, or hekes. And the koru they are flowing, there is a story, there is movement.

- *And so is that something that you as a designer endeavour to bring into your graphic design?*

Yes, I show a lot of movement in the design which is not static, not too static, it branches out like a koru. I can draw a big koru on this page and wherever it goes Maori will see it flow. Maori see the design as growing and not contained by the page. Again you can go into the deeper meaning of the patiki which has got four corners and they represent the four winds.

- *What factors do you consider to be the most relevant in the creation of logo design? By factors I mean the formal design properties that comprise the physical structure of the logo, as well as the inherent concepts which are suggested by the concrete form of that abstract and figurative symbol.*

I think that the most relevant process, for myself, is the consultation and the research with the client and myself. There is a lot of research especially in Maori design. There is also what I think I spoke of before - that of bringing on board a kaumatua, for which I am lucky because he is an artist himself and that helps. He is Puwa Katene, he is Ngati Toa and he guides me so for myself it's safe, I feel safe, I'm not treading on anybody's toes. Or I'm not creating a design that may offend people that are not local but are from somewhere up north or down south. That to me is important and when you consultate [sic] with whoever and you come up with the design, say for fisheries, I'll do a series of different designs, I'll have a variety of whatever the symbol can relate to the topic that was given, again you'll be consulting with the kaumatua. When I come up with an end product, and I feel good within myself, that is how I know where it came from. Actually it came from within myself, like when you start out you know automatically where the idea is coming from. Like in Maori design, I can relate to that design, I feel that it is something that I used to do in my childhood. There is a lot of whakapapa, a lot of genealogy, so that when you go about creating a design in its simplistic way the idea is already there.

I just did a patiki for Sealord Industries, it was only supposed to be a Maori design for a certificate and now they want to use it for their corporate work, their corporate identity, because they knew

how I went about the design, the use of the symbol and how it applies to their industry. It is Maori and every time I deal in Maori culture the design comes from my heart, which opens up to my family and my local iwi, hapu. Here is this patiki design which I've come up with and now I have to think about incorporating this design into Sealord's. I'll have to study this patiki design, where it fits, who has it, how is it incorporated within the local iwi or local hapu and not to use it in a way that offends. For the local iwi or hapu might have it represented in some form with the use of colours. From inside myself I am thinking how can I do that, how can I get it away from this organisation and bring it over here. For me I relate this design process to my childhood experiences where I used to go fishing quite a lot and the surroundings, the ocean was blue, green and white. That is how I am trying to develop my colours and sometimes an organisation will have colours, their corporate colours which help too, but the representation of this patiki in this organisation will be something you yourself have experienced or what your ancestors used to do. If they went fishing what tools did they use, what sort of materials did they have and that can be represented as an abstraction from its original form. So in terms of the usage of the design, identity is going to be mass produced so the design should be small patiki within a big patiki which represents the whole industry. So you've got all these little designs within a big design.

- *The design then not only has significance in terms of spirit and usage in Maori culture but the significance of the original message has been extended by its translation into contemporary corporate culture.*

Yes, you are still representing it spiritually, the wairua always stays there. So whatever you do and how you apply that in terms of abstraction, say of the koru, the wairua within that koru stays no matter where or how you apply the symbol. So the patiki design has been created in the contemporary way but it still has the mana, the meaning, the korero, the speaking, the story.

- *How relevant to you is semiotic theory in contemporary design practice? In other words is your design solution dependent on knowing and analysing the operation of signs and symbols and their referential function, or are your solutions driven by intuition.*

It is like the Police, they have got a brand, the Maori department have got their own tohu and it is their tohu and they can apply that tohu to whatever material they've got. What's happened is that they were wanting to change it a little bit and I came up with a series of issues before they actually went about it. They didn't realise what the process would be just to do something like that.

Another one is the patiki design for Sealords. They wanted to have ownership of it and

ownership of the meaning and I dispute that. If you do a design you can have ownership of the design but you can't have ownership of the mana, no one can own that. Most people think that they own it but a lot of Maori don't own it, it's amongst our people, it's our people that own it and our people go for miles. It's not an individual ownership sort of thing and that is like when these organisations try and get the ownership of Maoridom and especially Maori design. They can go for it and try and get it but I don't think that they'll have a good chance of doing it. That's where again, before you actually commence the design and have written out that you are going to own the meaning, if you don't give it kaupapa you don't give it a meaning. It's not from us and that is different. Again it is important in the process you set out. In the process I am relating to this design, it's coming up to the end product where a lot of genealogy has been put into the design, a lot of researching and a lot of meaning through the korero where people can relate to it and, hello, they want to take possession of that. You can't. The story is there, you have the copyright to own that symbol but to take the mana and the meaning of that symbol is another issue. What happens in a lot of my design work, especially in Maori symbolism, is that they either own it with no mana, no meaning, or they own it with the kaupapa and it is those who go on and on and make changes - maybe it's optional with colour. Colour will be the only element in which there is no problem at all, but in terms of shapes you've got the patiki there and if you take the shape away and add another shape to it the meaning is gone. Colour again is optional in terms of representing the design, but when it comes to symbols if you put another symbol in the design or take a symbol out you are actually changing the mana, the meaning, the korero that went with it. That is where it is important for Maori design work in that you have to be aware of how you are going to give it a story.

- *Does this relate to the idea of integrity?*

Yes. Symbolism is going out but the wairua still stays as it is actually the kaupapa, the story that was given this design. Some Maori would like a story because they like to hear the story of how you completed it. So yes, sure you give it and now they want to take possession of that story in the design and now it is going to stay like this for the rest of their lives, or whatever, and they say yes, yes, yes and you pass it over. I give a brief explanation on how I prepared this design and the process and the story and when they have it they can see it, they can relate to it, they get blown away and they don't want to buy the mana, they know that they can't. The Sealords' Industry don't own patiki, it is a generic design, a neutral design. But patiki in the wairua, the mana within

that patiki, they don't own that. It is the same with poutama. There is the Poutama Trust, they have got a little poutama logo and people ask questions, "how come you've got poutama on your book?" The Poutama Trust don't own the word poutama, it is a neutral thing, a poutama is seen in many instances and it is how you apply it that really counts and you've got to be careful. So, then it gets into taking the mana, the meaning or the myth.

- *Do you think that symbolic language can function independently, as in the case of the Nike swash, or does it require additional support for comprehension?*

Well I think that it can stand alone such as the koru. In Maori they can see it, the koru originates from the fern and when it grows you see the end parts and they come out as little rounds which in Maori represent the kaki and the kaki is in the kowhaiwhai. But just the koru on its own - it is a stand alone because you can get the spiral form as well which is usually used on a waka.

- *How significant is the issue of the appropriation of cultural symbolism?*

It is important that you represent the design in a way that will have meaning and that you've gone through the process of how it represents everybody. It can represent people in general as well as Maori. Say that Sealords have got their patiki and ten years later they go and present it again, it is important to have the story, the myth just in case in ten years time it changes.

- *I know that there have been issues around one culture having taken up the symbols that belong to another and have used them indiscriminantly and one of my reasons for putting this question in is that for certain people symbols are regarded as sacred.*

That's another thing too in Maori, that if I put a koru, or a whare, on a Samoan cloak it can cause quite a big hiccup. I think that it is important to study the history of symbols in different cultures as it does make you aware of how everything goes out and how you can get around issues like that. I think that it is important right from the start when you create something within Maoridom, or create a Maori design, that you use a generic, or neutral logo, or identity, and it is important how you go about it.

- *So it's important to acknowledge the source?*

Yes that is an interesting point. I think that it is important to keep the design simple as in those logos the fern and the mighty tick [Nike]. That is the same in Maori design with the poutama, the patiki, or the tukutuku.

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