Futuring Craft: New Zealand Studio Furniture, 1979-2008

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Futuring Craft: New Zealand Studio Furniture, 1979-2008

Abstract

This thesis investigates the practice and culture of studio furniture in New Zealand and its national craft context, in light of prevailing economic, educational, social and cultural parameters. The author uses an autoethnographical approach to the research, functioning as a subjective and reflective studio furniture practitioner, to establish fruitful ongoing relationships with the New Zealand furniture community and six leading makers. This aligns with Tim Ingold’s argument regarding the inextricability of the maker, the making process and what is made. At the core of the thesis are six case studies whose interviews and visual documentation attest to the diversity of practitioners and strength of the community in New Zealand.

The thesis begins by establishing the theoretical lens through which the research on studio furniture was viewed: holism, the reflective practitioner, narrative, autoethnography, design anthropology, and the ethics of care. This is followed by three chapters dedicated to craft and furniture in New Zealand. In 1965, a handful of largely amateur makers joined the World Crafts Council. Chapter 2 documents this pivotal event and subsequent progress toward inauguration of the Crafts Council of New Zealand (CCNZ). The history of the CCNZ from 1977 to 1992—its key players, and major issues including advocacy, education, standards, and professionalism—provides the context in which crafted furniture became visible and matured. Chapter 3 begins with a definition of studio furniture, followed by documentation of the practice’s collectivity, exhibitions, educational opportunities, resources, and international connections. Then, moving from the macro to the micro, Chapter 4 comprises in-depth case studies of five men and one woman whose contributions established and advanced the studio furniture community.

This thesis supports Tony Fry’s arguments for craft as care and designer/makers as critical implements in the sustainment of planet Earth. As a consequence, the document concludes in Chapter 5 with three proposals for the futuring of studio furniture and craft in New Zealand: craft’s advocacy at the international level, national education, and rescripting of furniture and craft.
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CHAPTER 1

Crafting a Thesis

One look is worth a thousand words.

This phrase originated in *Printer's Ink* in December 1921 where it was used as the title of an article about the efficacy of illustrated advertisements (“Picture’). Although I am loath to invoke an axiom coined to sell mass-market products in its opposite context—this dissertation is about one-of-a-kind handmade objects—its suitability cannot be denied. As a consequence I will introduce my thesis, devoted to studio furniture, by a look at the topic.

Before you are two images of freestanding room dividers (Figure 1). The title of the divider on the left, *Screen of Indifference*, highlights its functional failure: design and materials preclude the screen’s capacity to provide environmental or social shelter. Its inspiration was Eileen Gray’s lacquer screen, whose pivoting panels demonstrated the precariousness of public and private, openness and secrecy. *Screen* pays homage to Gray’s notion without abandoning function altogether: it is still a physical divider or barrier and has not moved into the realm of sculpture. *Screen* is an object that questions functional form and engages in ideas; it is one-of-a-kind; and it explores materials and techniques. You are looking at studio furniture, and while this designation will be elaborated later (page 83-86), the picture above is a sufficient starting point from which to proceed.

I could relate a good deal more about *Screen of Indifference* because I made it, in collaboration with a glass artist, Todd Safronovich, when we were both undergraduate students in a school of craft and design. But I will refrain, because this is not a thesis about my studio practice. This thesis is about the phenomenon of studio furniture in New Zealand, its precedents, participants and community. Nevertheless, my design and manufacture of a goodly portion of this room divider is relevant: my training

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1 Gray (1878-1976) was an Irish furniture designer and architect who spent most of her life in Paris. She is regarded as one of the most important female designers of the early 20th century.
in, and experience of studio furniture plays a significant part in my research and this thesis. These circumstances will be fully explored later in this chapter.

For now, I have introduced my topic and my first-person presence in it. My acknowledgement of design history, through Eileen Gray’s inspiration, indicates the larger theatre which studio furniture inhabits—my research is embedded in and a contribution to New Zealand and international design history. I have also drawn attention to the roles of females in that history, a circumstance that will surface repeatedly herewith. Finally, it is important to note that accredited scholars have never investigated studio furniture in New Zealand. Academics in the United States and England have documented the practice, but in this country, even the genus ‘craft’, of which studio furniture is a part, has been examined in only a handful of scholarly publications (Daly; Gardner-Gee; Scotts and Mounsey; Wiggs).²

The Thesis Journey in Context

The plan or “often customary method . . . ” (“Plan”) for undertaking a thesis is to compile a literature review, defined as a summation of what has been written on a particular topic by accredited scholars and researchers (Taylor). The literature review records what came before and the author’s critical assessment of it. In anticipating this portion of my thesis, it seemed that the lack of scholarship on New Zealand furniture and craft precluded a customary method; in addition, as a craftsperson, I have learned to trust process more than plans.

Process requires paying attention to what is happening; everything in the course of process has validity. As a furniture maker, process involves being open to what is given to you—mistakes, advice, life outside the studio. Frequently, the outcome will be something you never could have imagined. Donald Schön, employing the phrase ‘reflection-in-action’ for process, describes the same circumstance: “When intuitive, spontaneous performance yields nothing more than the results expected for it, then we tend not to think about it. But when intuitive performance leads to surprises, pleasing and promising or unwanted, we may respond by reflecting-in-action” (56).

As an example of how this might affect a furniture practitioner, I cite timber choice: your supplier may not have the envisaged species. Rather than balk and spend days searching for rimu (dacyrydium cupressinum), say, previous experience reminds you to accept a substitute and proceed. Rimu’s replacement will certainly engender a different and, often, a better result. And because process is sequential, cumulative and continuous, unexpected circumstances necessitate a return to the beginning to re-view what is in place, with adaptation as needed. Schön captures this situation for the generic designer but it is appropriate to the studio furniture maker:

A designer makes things. Sometimes he [sic] makes the final product. . . . He works in particular situations, uses particular materials, and employs a distinctive medium and language. Typically his making process is complex. There are more variables—kinds of possible moves, norms, and interrelationships of these—than can be represented in a finite model. Because of this complexity, the designer’s moves tend, happily or unhappily, to produce consequences other than those intended. When this happens, the designer may take account of the unintended changes he has made in the situation by forming new appreciations and understandings and making new moves. He shapes the situation, in accordance with his initial appreciation of it, the situation “talks back,” and he responds to the situation’s back-talk (78-79).

Schön describes reflective practitioners’ immersion in object-making, and their instantaneous and continual response during the making process.

Knowing that process is applicable to object-making, I wondered whether it applied to thesis-making? Instead of just compiling a literature review, what if the process of compilation came under scrutiny too? Schön notes that reflection-in-action provides solutions to unique problems (49), and my

² The first doctoral thesis on the New Zealand craft movement was written by Vic Evans at Massey University and submitted in 2011.
topic had demonstrated itself to be exceptional. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to consider ‘process’—vigilance of, reflection on and adjustment to the doing of the thesis—as my research method. Tim Ingold calls this ‘wayfaring’: “[t]he perceiver-producer is thus a wayfarer, and the mode of production itself a trail blazed or a path followed. Along such paths, lives are lived, skills developed, observations made and understandings grown. The path, and not the place, is the primary condition of being, or rather of becoming” (Being 12). With respect to the thesis, its coming into being would be a record of my wayfaring.

Ingold states (“Drawing” 299), and it is evident from his work (“Making” in 2000; “Walking” 2006; “Anthropology” 2008), that over the last decades he has been devoted to restoring ‘life’ to anthropological inquiry. Whereas his colleagues have minimised the human component in their studies, his definition of anthropology embraces “the conditions and potentials of human life” (“Drawing” 299). Life’s conditions include unpredictability and the ever-present need for adaptation, for both observer and observed. In order to honour this reality of life, the researcher must adopt a ‘processual’ methodology (Davidson) whereby fluidity allows—and necessitates—adjustment, as needed, to particularities of the research project. Later in this chapter, I discuss the relevance of anthropology to design research but, for the moment, I will devote attention to the process of the thesis.

I will recount my literature review process starting in August 2010, 18 months after my candidature was formalised. By this stage, the threads of my research had extended beyond New Zealand’s geographical and artistic borders when an unexpected discovery provided a new lens with which to look at the research to date. An ongoing curiosity about worldwide craft practices unearthed a series of articles about Finland. Initially they seemed to be simply an accounting of craft education, but in a piece by Sinikka Pöllänen I encountered a compelling phrase. The phrase Pöllänen uses is “holistic craft,” and she provides a detailed description of what holistic craft entails within the National Core Curriculum (“National Core”) in Finnish comprehensive schools. This type of craft, distinguished from ordinary craft, is one in which the maker, acting alone or in a group, is responsible for every aspect of the craft process: inaugural ideas, design development and resolution, procurement of tools and materials, choice of techniques, construction, refinement, and evaluation of product and process. In Finland, “[h]olistic craft comprises all the phases of the craft process, so that if some phase is left out it becomes ordinary craft” (251). Ordinary craft, in this context, means copying an existing design, instructions or techniques.

Holistic craft is what practitioners of studio furniture do: their production involves the many phases and intellectual rigour iterated by the Finnish definition and tradition. A client may want a chair, a request that will inaugurate ideas, based on factors such as the dedicated space, aesthetic of existing furniture, budget, ergonomics, and preferred material. Designer and client will explore the possibilities until a solution is determined and construction begins. The solution determines the construction and while the designer may have signature motifs, like a leg shape, that recur in their work—part of his or her design toolkit—that leg is not a standardised component but rather adapted (or not, depending on the form) to the particular chair. The chair is completed and delivered, and even then adheres to the “holistic” definition: it is refined as the maker adjusts the legs so they do not wobble on the owner’s floor. And all the while, through the process, the designer/maker is taking mental or physical notes about how a technique or a finish or a profile could be improved in the future. This is only one of the ways—others will be discussed later in the thesis—in which, as Fry asserts, “design always goes on designing” (“Introduction” 10); for the designer/maker, the design process never starts at ground zero.

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3 “... generations of theorists, throughout the history of the discipline, have been at pains to banish life from their accounts, or to treat it as merely consequential, the derivative and fragmentary output of patterns, codes, structures, or systems, variously labeled genetic or cultural, natural or social, that are already assembled and joined up” (Ingold “Drawing” 299).
4 Officially begun 1 March 2009.
5 Pöllänen cites Kojonkoski-Rännäli as her source. The article is in Finnish so I am reliant on Pöllänen’s translation.
The desirability of studio furniture is due to its one-of-a-kindness—pieces are never repeated. Unlike “ordinary” furniture that replicates a design, instructions or techniques, studio furniture is holistic, bringing the maker’s experience and creativity to bear on the individual situation.

I sensed that the discovery of the Finnish craft dichotomy, which could be described as a moment of clarity, had implications for the entire thesis. I had to confirm what holistic and holism truly meant. I quote two dictionary sources:

1. holism: the view that an organic or integrated whole has an independent reality which cannot be understood simply through an understanding of its parts (Webster’s).
2. holism: anthropological concept denoting a "totalizing, all-encompassing perspective."

A holistic analysis will take the social whole into consideration—the context—that surrounds the phenomena. In the history of anthropology, holism is associated in part with a methodological ideal (to see as many connections as possible), in part with a theoretical ideal in structural functionalism, where social phenomena a priori were assumed to "maintain the whole" (Dictionary of Anthropology).

Webster’s states that an entity cannot be fully understood by analysis of its separate parts. In other words, an entity is its parts and then some; the very union of individual parts contributes to the whole. Within the realm of furniture one need only consider ‘chair,’ a form that is, in essence, an assemblage of legs, seat and back. The variance in the chair genre throughout history attests to humanity’s ability to surpass a basic unification of components (Figure 2). Next, the Dictionary of Anthropology stresses the whole and its situation in a larger picture. The anthropologist's task is to identify and explore as many connections as possible between the whole and its peripherals, because the functioning of society—anthropology’s primary domain—is a consequence of the integration of all the components (i.e. functionalism). Using a furniture analogy again, a chair is the product of such factors as fashion,

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Figure 2. Chairs
This selection of chairs by American studio furniture makers demonstrates the variety in the form ‘chair’. From left: Wendy Maruyama Mickey Mackintosh Chair; Tom Loeser One Folding Chair; John Dunnigan Slipper Chair; Judy Kensley McKie Monkey Chair; Alphonse Mattia Architect’s Valet. The makers reference a range of influences, and employ various materials.

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6 The exception is elements in a series—12 dining chairs, for example. Jigs or templates are created so that each chair is the same. Rosanne Somerson (see page 18) also related (Personal observation) that if she is commissioned to make an item she will produce its mirror image with sufficient changes—materials, decorative detailing—to guarantee uniqueness for each. The commission goes into a private space whereas the alternate is speculative for a gallery exhibition. This practice enables the design development component of the cost to be spread over two items.
economy, skills, and social norms that bear on its realisation. Cooke’s study of 18th-century furniture in Connecticut (Making) convincingly demonstrates how analysis of the social economy of two towns explains the difference in the furniture of their respective homes.

In the midst of the exploration of holism I recalled that while Pöllänén was unusual in combining holistic with craft, the notion of holism was not alien to my research. One of the early literature threads led to the writings of Tony Fry. In the 1990s Fry, an Australian design critic and educator, wrote several essays about the future of design in which craft played a significant role. He asserted that the designer/maker had to be cognisant of humanism, defined as man in nature not man over nature. Western society’s subjection of nature was part of the ethos of modernism, and Fry argued that the severely compromised state of nature must be addressed for our very survival. He extended the crisis beyond the physical world: “the breakdown of biophysical systems leads to a social and psychological breakdown” (“Sacred I” 192). Chaos will ensue if re-creation of design is not understood and implemented; so important is this re-creation that he termed it “sacred” (“Sacred I” 193).

The term sacred derives from George Bataille’s “sacred sociology” (quoted in “Sacred I” 194; “Sacred II” 116), which is not a religious concept but an intangible collective sensibility at the core of being human. Being sacred could be described as having meaning; post-modern culture, in its meaningless-ness, needs rescue or re-creation. Fry added that sacredness does not happen by itself, it occurs by the intervention of an artificial device, which he identified as “craft as care” (“Green” 264). He arrived at this conclusion by invoking Martin Heidegger—“the substance of man is existence” (“Sacred I” 206)—and argued that care is the required emotion to ensure continued existence of self, community and the globe. Sacred design evolved out of caring and Fry believed: “[i]t is by the hand, with care as craft, that the sacred can be made” (“Sacred I” 211). When I summarised this article, in March 2009, I wrote “craft is holistic.” Pöllänén had not only identified studio furniture as holistic craft, but reiterated a theme.

When I combine the dictionary definitions and apply holism to a generic research project there are three levels of analysis: the component parts of the whole; the whole; and the whole in context. In terms of studio furniture in New Zealand, this format is seen diagrammatically in Figure 3. As a form for the diagram I use the cross-section of a tree, a holistically appropriate metaphor for the furniture medium. At the centre, the pith, is the furniture and its makers; the pith is the ‘soft tissue’ that transports nutrients for the entity to grow. Encircling the pith is heartwood, which although comprising dead cells, supports the tree trunk: the tradition of woodworking is appropriately placed here. Next comes the sapwood, the conduit for water and minerals. For New Zealand studio furniture, the sapwood is its community including training opportunities, exhibitions and publications. Because the sapwood’s yearly growth is

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evident as annual rings, there are other nutrient-supplying layers: the national layer and the international layer. And just as the kauri, oak, cherry or *Pinus radiata* has to deal with negative circumstances, like disease, fire and insect infestation, so studio furniture has to adapt to negatives like diminishing resources and environmental impacts. Finally, the bark is the outer protective layer, whose significance I will return to in a moment.

Where does the literature review belong in this model? Since the discovery of the phrase ‘holistic craft’ was an event in an ongoing research journey, I had to design a way to incorporate the literature review that would acknowledge it, too, as a component of process. The review had to become part of the narrative, not separate from it. And in investigating narratives, the possibility of ‘crafting’ my own approach was suggested by Susan Chase. She describes narrative as centred on the narrator’s biography, and can be (1) a short particular story about an event and people; (2) a lengthier story about some aspect of one’s life; or (3) a description of one’s entire life (59). She adds: “Researchers new to this field [narrative] will find a rich but diffuse tradition, multiple methodologies in various stages of development, and plenty of opportunities for exploring new ideas, methods, and questions” (58). Chase’s overview about the narrative canon implied a multiplicity of investigative and reporting possibilities; it sanctioned adoption of a narrative and individual style.

In addition, Chase’s assertion of opportunity for innovation encouraged me to bring research results into the literature review, thereby corroborating the narrative where it was needed. The thesis became a personal narrative of discovery. Given that my research is about one-of-a-kind objects, I adopted a one-of-a-kind documentation approach. Precedent for such unorthodoxy exists in the autobiographical genre (I. Cook; Gwyther and Possamai-Inesedy; Moss; Wirth Brentini) and the newly evolving field of practice-based art theses (Williamson; Four Arrows).

The following account of my research process is seen graphically in Figure 4. I return to the tree trunk, this time in three dimensions both visually and metaphorically. The pith, representing the furniture and its makers, is soft tissue. Similarly, the soft human tissue of the makers and their intangible design ideas contribute to the practice’s existence and nurturing. The mature heartwood, a metaphor for the tradition of woodworking and furniture-making, is the necessary historic support on which contemporary makers rely; additionally as contemporary makers age they are absorbed as heartwood and reliant on new sap/blood to replace them. The annual rings of sapwood are analogous to the studio furniture community, the New Zealand environment—arts funding, education policies, geography and politics—and the international layer with its art/craft networks, technology and global economy. Like in the tree, these layers sustain and enhance existence.

The three-dimensionality of the tree trunk signifies that studio furniture—as a practice and a product—exists over time and in space. It is affected by years of phenomena that determine its integrity. Because the thesis combines autobiography (me) and my active participation in its development, I cannot help but permeate all facets of its realisation. As a result, within the tree context, the vascular rays, which carry nutrients horizontally through the trunk, symbolise my presence and what I generate through my research. This metaphor places me within the research, not separate from it: I am disseminated through all the layers—with varying degrees of visibility.

I now return to the bark, the outer protective layer. As a tree grows, the old bark splits, is sloughed off, and replaced by new bark. This repeating process attests to adaptation through time; and a protective layer is always present, in some form or another. The bark does not disappear as the tree ages but plays a significant role in perpetuity. And ultimately, it is the bark metaphor that provides the question of this thesis: what is the necessary protective layer that will ensure that studio furniture will thrive and survive?

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8 Four Arrows identifies a number of award-winning dissertations that have used alternative formats—fiction, poetry, performance, film.
9 I cannot take all the credit. I rely heavily on the synchronicities, chance happenings, detours and dreams that are unexpectedly provided along my life’s journey. My contribution is being proactive when these opportunities arise. Examples will be provided in the coming narrative.
in New Zealand, and possibly, worldwide? This question was a direct consequence of the choice of ‘tree’ as a diagrammatic metaphor. Its birth is another affirmation of the value of reliance on process.

The thesis process began when I was born, but for the sake of brevity I start the clock in 2007 at the inauguration of the project. It will be necessary, within the narrative, to regress to events pre-2007 and I will explain the relevancy of those detours. I will proceed holistically, using the process identified previously by Pöllänen—inagural ideas, design development and resolution, procurement of tools and materials, choice of techniques, construction, refinement, and evaluation of product and process. In the section below I start with the idea/seed for the research project, followed by its development/growth and the figurative “procurement of tools and materials.” At the end of this chapter comes the project’s structure, identifying the steps to the completion of the written document: this equates to choice of techniques. Metaphorically, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are devoted to construction; Chapter 5, the conclusion, concerns refinement, and evaluation.

The Journey Begins: the Seed

In October 2007 I attended a day-long seminar, ShowTell, at the Auckland gallery, Objectspace. The seminar served as the climax to a furniture exhibition called ShowRoom (Figure 5) curated by Rigel Sorzano and Katy Wallace. In his introductory remarks to the catalogue Philip Clarke, Objectspace’s Director, noted that it had been ten years since the last furniture exhibition in New Zealand. As well as giving the exhibiting makers a chance to talk about their work, ShowTell brought together a number of practitioners from all parts of New Zealand.

Apart from being able to see this rare display of studio furniture, ShowTell afforded me two significant opportunities. The first was meeting Phil Osborne, a furniture graduate from the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT). We talked about the exhibit and our respective backgrounds until I felt comfortable enough to ask: “what do you think of the idea of writing a book

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10 Objectspace is the only public gallery dedicated to craft, applied arts and design in New Zealand. It is a charitable trust that receives the majority of its funding from Creative New Zealand (Objectspace).
about New Zealand furniture?” Phil replied that he had had the same idea himself but did not think he would get around to it; he generously offered access to his boxes of furniture ephemera—newspaper and magazine articles, exhibition catalogues. The second opportunity was a presentation by a representative of Creative New Zealand (CNZ). She talked about funding possibilities for practitioners and inquired whether CNZ would be amenable to an investigation of the furniture medium. Her response was enthusiastic due to her agency’s commitment to research, and she encouraged me to submit an application in the next funding round.

These two encounters, as well as seeing evidence of an approachable furniture community, provoked me to submit a research proposal to my then employer, the Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec); concurrently I forwarded a grant application to Creative New Zealand. Both had outcomes that were relevant to the subsequent research. First, approval of the research project by Wintec produced enabling funds to launch the project. Secondly, the denial of CNZ funding gave me insight into the obstacles facing craftspeople when it comes to getting finance for development.

My research began in January of 2008 with a two-week South Island road trip (Figure 6) to investigate studio furniture. Phil Osborne, in Nelson, was the first contact. Not only was Osborne a maker, but he had curated five biennial furniture exhibitions at the Suter Gallery in Nelson, 1996-2004, and taught in the furniture programmes at NMIT and the Centre for Fine Woodworking, also in Nelson. After two days I had a list of significant makers and an outline of the topics the research might pursue, based on Osborne’s knowledge of studio furniture’s parameters in New Zealand.

Initially it seemed straightforward: find and interview people like John Shaw, David Haig, and Marc Zuckerman (names identified by Osborne), take notes on their careers, and write. But even in the early days I confronted an issue. I had been given *Nelson Guide Book: Art in its Own Place* (Nelson Bay) (Figure 7) and the section “Woodwork, ironwork and furniture” contained names that Osborne had not raised. Why had they not been mentioned? Could I rely solely on Osborne’s list? And if Osborne’s list was not inclusive, how would I discover other makers, given that publications like *Nelson Guide Book* were neither numerous nor current throughout the country?

Answers to these questions could be found in only one way: go into the field. This methodology necessitated observation, talking, following threads, visiting galleries and gift stores, consulting the Yellow Pages, doing Internet searches in public libraries, travelling gravel roads, tolerating detours, and drinking many cups of tea. By these means I attempted to track down the scattered population of furniture makers.

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11 The CNZ representative gave a presentation and distributed brochures as part of ShowTell, 6 October 2007.
12 After the failure of my first application, I was told to resubmit on the grounds that the Review Committee would recognise my name and look favourably on this evidence of commitment. The second application was also rejected. I attempted to determine the grounds for rejection and was told that in camera discussions could not be divulged.
I proceeded from Nelson to Westport to Greymouth to Darfield to Christchurch (Figure 8), talking to men in studios and small manufacturing outlets, investigating any indication (sign, business card, work in a gallery or store) of hand-crafted furniture.

At the Arts Centre in Christchurch I happened upon an office of Creative New Zealand. By coincidence the same presenter I had met at Objectspace was visiting and I tried to capitalise on her presence by asking for a list of local furniture makers. Even though the CNZ representative knew me and the legitimacy of my request, contact information (if it did exist, which she was not sure about) could not be divulged for privacy reasons. This frustration caused me to question an organisation that is purportedly dedicated to advocacy of the arts community at the same time as denying its constituents the potential for recognition. I would learn later that from 1978 to 1992 it was possible to access a list, from the Crafts Council of New Zealand (CCNZ), similar to the one I needed. The fact that CNZ was one of the agencies that replaced the CCNZ further reflected a reduction of resources for furniture makers.

Creative New Zealand’s privacy policy strengthened my resolve that only an ethnographic approach would garner the relevant information. My subsequent route included Oamaru, Kakanui, Dunedin, Lawrence, Kurow and Waimate (Figure 8), and by the end of three weeks I had interviewed and/or visited about 30 furniture makers (Figure 9) and other craftspeople.

Although I had leads to more names and could have supplemented the roster, my employment called me back to Wintec. Thus, by the beginning of February 2008 I knew I had a worthy and do-able project, yet it was more than mere documentation of the career paths and studio practices of studio furniture makers. I had encountered profound stories and emotions: a man who had gone against the grain of a stolid professional family to pursue a passion for baskets; a former aircraft engineer whose body, formerly riddled with tumours, was tumour-free as he made furniture; a new-ager whose furniture was housed in a self-sustaining “earth-ship” (Figure 10); a furniture and jewellery maker who was battling multiple sclerosis; a 60-year-old Scotsman who had just abandoned woodworking to write a play about Leonardo da Vinci, John Coltrane and the saxophone; and a German master cabinetmaker who was fulfilling a teenage dream to live in New Zealand (Figure 11). These stories were rich, individual, authentic, intimate, and demonstrated the importance of creativity for wellbeing.

Figure 6. Research Wheels
The rental van used for my three week journey, finding and interviewing furniture makers.

Figure 7. Nelson Guide Book: Art in its Own Place
Although similar guides have been published in other centres—eg. Otago and Canterbury—the Nelson Guide is updated and reprinted regularly. This is the 2006 version; the 2011-2013 guide is projected to reach stores in September 2011 to coincide with the influx of visitors for the Rugby World Cup (Young). The full-colour production on glossy paper provides information for the Nelson area visitor and is a souvenir. As a tool for marketing regional attractions, art and craft, it is commendable; it also reflects the consolidation of efforts by the Nelson community to benefit itself.

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13 Creative New Zealand is obligated to honour the New Zealand Privacy Act, 1993; Principle Ten concerns release of private information without an individual’s permission (“Privacy”).
14 For instance, Michael O’Brien, a bookbinder with readily-accessible premises in the historic district of Oamaru, was able to provide names of furniture makers in the vicinity.
I noted that I was not the arms-length observer of the facts of an occupation, namely making furniture. I was interacting with people in a defined community that pursued a meaningful, successful (defined as providing shelter, clothing and food) occupation while dealing with the conditions of life. The stories spoke to me of alternative ways of being, of attitudes that put lifestyle, sustainability, nature, the hand, caring and creativity before materialism. The men, and they were all men at this stage, pursued lives that were the antithesis of the commodification (Held 111; Metcalf quoted in Leigh\textsuperscript{15}) that characterises Western society. Though I did not name it at the time, these were holistic lives devoted to “sacred design” as defined by Tony Fry.

During 2008, in addition to submitting an application to undertake a PhD about studio furniture at the University of Otago, I took advantage of visits to the Wellington region to conduct interviews with North Island makers. By October 2008 my Otago candidacy was confirmed and before relocating to Dunedin I interviewed a maker in the Coromandel and made connections in Whangarei (Figure 12). In March 2009 I again visited Whangarei and Auckland for more interviews.

Like the previous interviews, the stories were deeply felt—causing tears in at least one case—and deeply felt by me, the listener. The stories, as well as the facts, were arising as an integral part of the research and I had to consider why. What factors were responsible for generating such unique anecdotal

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\textsuperscript{15} Bruce Metcalf, an American jewellery craftsman and writer, elaborates on commodification: “For both makers and users, [chronomanual craft] stands as a critique of 20\textsuperscript{th} Century culture in the West. If we have come to value immediate results over patience and hard work; if we value the easy over the difficult; if we value the ‘hyper-reality’ of music, television and CNN news broadcasts over the mundane existences most of us live – then, patient work has meaning. It embodies resistance to all those values” (Leigh quoting personal correspondence with Metcalf, 37). Chronomanual is Leigh's synthesis of “chrono” (time) and “manual” (by hand) for time-invested handicraft.
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**Figure 9. Studio Furniture Makers Contacted**

This list of 50+ names is an indication of the minimum extent of studio furniture practice in New Zealand. More research would unearth more names—a register of contemporary furniture makers in New Zealand would be a valuable design resource. William Cottrell’s *Furniture of the New Zealand Colonial Era* (to be discussed in Chapter 3) recorded thousands of names of colonial makers that were hitherto unknown. Since registers exist in North America and England (Norbury), it is timely to undertake such a task here. The Christchurch earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 demonstrated the difficulty in simply finding artisans with appropriate skills to assist in restoration of historic buildings. A register would assist in identifying and locating practitioners.

* contacted on initial research trip, 2008
In 2008 when I met him, Jenkins was attempting to build a sustainable and self-sufficient habitat for himself and other artists. Jenkins sees his experiments with construction, energy, water supply, crops and lifestyle as models of world-wide interest.

Andreas Niemann immigrated from Germany in 1994 as a master cabinetmaker. He opened Rare Creations in 2006 as a gallery adjacent to his workshop. He envisaged the space as a showcase for his own work, as well as that of other New Zealand furniture makers. He juxtaposes furniture of European design with the locally-made to demonstrate their compatibility. In 2011, he moved from this location to another close by.

Distances on New Zealand maps are deceptive. Super highways are concentrated around the major centres and the remainder of roads are 'carriageways' with a single lane in each direction. Roads widen, periodically, to accommodate passing lanes. The journey from Hamilton to Coromandel proceeds through farmlands to the Firth of Thames, adjacent to which the road is frequently not even two lanes wide. The Hamilton to Whangarei route consists of motorway in the suburbs south and north of Auckland and then reverts to a standard carriageway.
and emotional feedback to queries regarding what was, essentially, an occupation? Did my interview strategies or settings foster the depth of feeling to which I was witness? Had I encountered a particularly forthcoming segment of the population? Did my role as facilitator influence the outcomes? In the coming sections I examine the context of the data gathering.

Development/Growth: Identification of Methods

My initial research method was oral history. Oral history entails recording of eyewitness accounts of events, by means of note-taking, audio- or video-taping (P. Thompson). Not only does the oral historian supplement and enhance extant published accounts, she listens to the men and women who might otherwise be regarded as insignificant. It goes without saying that the resulting perspectives are personal, imbued with experiences and feelings of the past. The mind's eye sees with a nostalgia that filters the memories, thereby eliciting the ones that are most memorable. Memorable events, therefore, contain emotional factors, positive or negative, that make them worth remembering. Daniel Schacter states: “...we do not store judgement-free snapshots of our past experiences but rather hold on to the meaning, sense, and emotions these experiences provided us” (5).

Unstructured interviews (Opie) allow the interviewee to express emotion. They begin with a query—tell me how you became a furniture maker—and the answer determines the direction of the interchange. Unstructured encounters require the interviewer to listen; she picks up on statements made by her participant and pursues them. There is data—nationality, education or training, practice, longevity in the field—that she knows she wants to collect yet there is not a rigid structured survey that needs completion. Such an informal procedure permits autobiography by the interviewees, and the interviewer's active listening conveys that each episode is relevant; the time frame is at the interviewee's behest. The gradual establishment of trust enables rich description to evolve.

Oral history, by its very nature, evokes emotions. So my choice of research method, including allowance for dialogue to take its own course, was bound to engender stories that contained passion, but I was encountering little reticence to divulge intimate biographical details. Had I fortuitously gathered a sentimental cohort? I didn't think so, given that I knew something of the nature of the New Zealand male as a consequence of having lived in the country, on and off, since 1968.

My search provided me with the names of only four women, a circumstance to which I will return in a moment. My interviewees were therefore men who were born in New Zealand or had lived a substantial portion of their lives there. New Zealanders, both men and women, have a reputation for being strong, capable and resourceful (Phillips “The New”)—the country's topography and distance from its global neighbours required pioneers and their successors to solve problems with whatever was at hand. The myth of the tough, resilient rural male was reinforced by New Zealand's international reputation as a rugby nation, and a brave fighting force in war (Phillips Man's); in 1985, the country's refusal to admit American nuclear-powered or -armed vessels into its waters added to the caricature of the fearless David standing up to Goliath (“Nuclear-free”). Accompanying this notion of the strong capable bloke reliant on himself and his mates was the belief that any show of emotion was wimpy, effeminate, or unmanly. By extension men who engaged in activities such as art and higher learning were suspect, and sons were deterred from pursuit of such abnormal careers (Phillips Man’s 282).

From the mid-1960s the stereotype of the New Zealand male was increasingly questioned: a shift in population from country to city, women entering the workforce, and consequent changes in family life meant that “the male traditions of drinking, fighting and rucking” (Phillips Man’s 272) were frowned upon. Yet it was within this acculturation that some of my furniture makers were raised: it was safe to
assume that these men were disinclined to be emotional. And whereas furniture-making is a means of expressing creativity, it is a gendered art. The accoutrements of woodworking—power tools, dust, heavy materials, noise, danger—are masculine and the mate-ship of the woodworking shop is comparable to the rugby or battle field. I could not attribute the outpouring of stories to having encountered unusually emotional practitioners.

I came to the final factor in the research strategy: me. Were my demographics—age, gender, education, experience, character—significant to the results I was achieving? And, if they were, was it appropriate that I account for myself as a parameter in the project? In order to come to grips with this dilemma I searched the literature on anthropology and autobiography.

Postmodern anthropological writing encompasses autoethnography, which has been interpreted in a number of ways (Reed-Danahay; Wall). Reed-Danahay assembles the various interpretations in her Introduction and summarises autoethnography as: “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text . . .” (9). Denzin’s list of biographical methods includes autobiography, autoethnography, narrative, oral history and case study (27). He rejects the notion of the objective observer of classical ethnography, and states that the genre incorporates elements of the researcher’s own life experience and is “descriptive and interpretive” (34). Michael Carrithers echoes Denzin’s eschewal of the distanced fieldworker and advocates engagement in moral relationships: “…it is the openness to others and the establishment of fruitful and enlightening relationships that not only make fieldwork possible but also constitute much of both its pith and its pain” (437).

Thus, the existence of autobiography within postmodern anthropology legitimates its adoption as a research method. Furthermore, facilitating fruitful relationships contains the possibility of enhanced reporting. Another aspect to autoethnography is stated plainly by Judith Okely and Helen Callaway: “…the ‘race’, nationality, gender, age, and personal history of the fieldworker affect the process, interaction and emergent material” (“Preface” xi). It was now no longer a question of whether I affected the process but an inevitable consequence. I was bound to influence the context of the interviews.

In elucidating the statement above, Okely adds “class origins” and “persona” to the list of factors affecting the ethnography outcome (14). I will now use Okely and Callaway’s seven agents to position me in relation to my topic, studio furniture. The order is altered—class, gender, nationality, race, age, personal history, persona—to reflect their relative significance with respect to this research. From class through to personal history the agents are of diminishing priority; the seventh, persona, concludes the list with a substantive discussion the inclusion of which honours the research process.

Tools and Materials: the Researcher

1. Class

Okely invokes “class origins,” referring to rank or status within society, as capable of having an impact on research. That meaning of class is not relevant in this instance but another definition has strong bearing. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, class is “a number of individuals (persons or things) possessing common attributes, and grouped together under a general or ‘class’ name; a kind, sort, division” (“Class”). Under this rubric I propose that there is a class called ‘woodworker.’ I am aware that it would be more academically correct to call woodworkers a “community of practice” (Wenger). The indicators Wenger lists (125-126) undoubtedly identify furniture-making as a community of practice, but adoption of ‘class’ better suits this narrative.

Use of class in this way aligns with the tradition of trade guilds, beginning in 14th-century Britain (“Guild”), which were craft brother/sisterhoods or associations with common interests and purposes. As much as serving economic agendas, the guilds were fellowships of like-minded practitioners, whose connection, originating in occupation, extended to lifestyle and worldview (Hobsbawm; Sennett; Upton).

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18 Ethnography: “the branch of anthropology that deals descriptively with specific cultures” (“Ethnography”).
19 Feminist scholars have used this definition to nominate women as a class that cuts across class structures (Kelly-Gadol 18). The relevance of feminism to this thesis will be addressed fully in this chapter’s subsection ‘Persona’.
Current manifestations of such fellowship classes can be seen in associations like the Furniture Society (primarily North American), and the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers. The latter, headquartered in London and open to all employed and formerly employed furniture makers in Britain, upholds the relevance of such organisations today. The Worshipful Company’s aims are “to support the highest standards of design, manufacturing, marketing and retailing of every type of furniture throughout the United Kingdom” (Furniture Makers). These aims are accomplished by promoting training courses, supporting newcomers through financial assistance, prize-giving, liaison with industry bodies and tree-planting. Unlike the Furniture Society, which is dedicated to one-of-a-kind makers, the Worshipful Company’s Guild Marks programme identifies a broader range of membership: “Guild Marks [recognise] excellence in three categories: Bespoke for the finest commissions of craftsman made furniture, Manufacturing for the highest standards of production process in furniture manufacturing companies, and Design recently introduced for designers of manufactured furniture” (Furniture Makers). The existence of formal class fellowship for furniture-making in New Zealand will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Internationally, woodworkers share training regimes, techniques, materials, tools, environments, methods, concerns and even manner of dress: the stereotype of the woodworker is a person wearing a plaid shirt! Within the woodworker class are subcategories: furniture maker, woodturner, carver. In New Zealand’s contemporary history about woodworkers, the subcategories intermingled collegially but that is not the case in all jurisdictions.20

There is a language specific to the class that gets further complicated by each subcategory. A brief A to Z of common terms in furniture-making serves my point: apron (not a garment), biscuit joint, chuck, dovetail, epoxy, featherboard, gouge, hardwood, infeed, jelutong, kerf, laminate, mortise, newell, orbital sander, padauk, quarter sawn, rabbet, scraper, tenon, upholstery, veneer, wane edge, x-acto knife, yew, zebrawood. Included in this list are tools, procedures and timber species that are the specialised technical language of the workshop and often alien to outsiders.

Traditional anthropology/ethnography was premised on observation of class by an ‘other’ to ensure objectivity; postmodern anthropology welcomes autoethnography that is observation of one’s own class. With respect to this type of autoethnography, I am a furniture maker observing furniture makers. I learned furniture design and making, at the undergraduate level in Canada and at the graduate level in the United States.21 I functioned as a furniture-making student for six years, completing projects for assignments and two commissions for private institutions. Since that time my furniture production has been sporadic (Figure 13) but my knowledge has permitted me to engage in freelance writing in several respected American journals devoted to woodworking.22 Because I am of this class I understand the language and do not have to interrupt the flow of an interview to ask for clarification of basic terms.

Part of my knowledge is the history of the field, including names of makers who have been influential around the world. I knew who Colin Slade meant when he mentioned international furniture makers like Alan Peters, James Krenov, John Makepeace, and Wendell Castle:

... it wasn’t that we were ignorant of what was going on in the rest of the world because people, I mean in 1983 James Krenov came out. Others came out, they tended to be more traditional. Alan Peters came from England, Art Carpenter came from the States, people from Australia and so on. And we knew about Wendell Castle and, you know, those ones doing much more, and Makepeace and so on doing stuff which was more decorative than functional. And all ranges in between (Slade Personal 2008).

20 Edward Cooke pointed out (Skype) that in the United States woodturning and furniture-making are exclusive. Lathe-turned elements are within the furniture maker's repertoire but turners are considered inferior because of their limited range of skills. While some practitioners cross the line, collective activities are entirely separate. It was therefore noteworthy to Cooke that New Zealand's first woodworking magazine, catering to all woodworkers, was instigated and edited by a turner, Noeline Brokenshire.

21 I have a Diploma in Crafts and Design (Furniture) from Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario (1997) and a Master of Fine Arts (Furniture Design) from the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island (2000).

22 American Woodturner, Fine Woodworking, Woodcraft and Woodwork.
My experience also allows me to engage in specialised commentary. The following dialogue concerns Alby Hall’s design presentations at woodturning clubs. Hall (Figure 14) works professionally as a furniture designer and maker; his expertise in turning means that he incorporates sizeable lathe-turned elements in his designs. He derives inspiration from the natural world and his presentations try to encourage others to do likewise. A question, based on my membership in a woodworking club, provoked Hall’s recollection of the long-term pleasure that these visits can bring:

AH: So it's development of ideas from seeing things around you, life's experiences — get an idea, how you develop that idea, how you let your brain, your subconscious, tell you what to do and never ignore it. Write that note down! Always, never ignore your eurekas, if you like. If you ignore your eurekas you're not helping to develop your creative side of yourself. You've gotta take notice of them all.

DW: How do you — my experience in woodturning clubs, it’s a lot of elderly men, retired men. How do they respond to this kind of touchy feely?

AH: Ah, well, you can see the ones, you know. They’ve nodded off, over their head, gone. I don’t even think they hear what I’m saying. And then the others, they’re wide open and they’re alert and they [say to themselves], “ahh, I can see that, yes. I know what he’s talking about. I got this thing the other day and I would love to do something but I don’t know how.” So I’m trying to teach them how and they come up to you after [saying], “that was really good, man. I know what I’m gonna do, I’m gonna go home and do it now, soon as I get home.” And then next time you visit there they bring you up the stuff and show you what they’ve done. Not only that, then all of a sudden they become competitors in the competitions and that’s really nice that somebody who was a banker is now competing...
against you in national competitions and that’s really, really good to think that I helped them get there (A. Hall).

Finally, my ‘class’ socialisation includes the economic parameters of furniture-making, its lifestyle and even, sometimes, dire consequences. The scar on my right hand affords me kinship when I observe missing digits on the hands of professional craftsmen, like David Haig. I have first-hand empathy for power-saw injuries and took particular interest in Haig’s public analysis of his circular saw accident in a 1987 issue of Touch Wood. Rather than keep it secret, Haig wrote about his lack of infallibility for the benefit of colleagues. His advice was: “remember that the state of mind of the operator is by far the best guarantee of accident-free machining” (18). Reading Haig’s article caused me to reflect on my table saw accident and a similar attempt to use it instructively.23

2. Gender

As mentioned previously, my findings have been that studio furniture in New Zealand is a predominantly male-gendered activity. This fact might give a female researcher pause, especially in light of the epithet: “if you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.” 24 However, my entry into this kitchen began in 1994 and was undoubtedly facilitated by my worldview as a feminist. Feminist ideology posits that equal rights (where legislated) allow women access to male occupations and, at the outset, my entry into woodworking was as simply motivated as that. Circumstances, which will be delineated shortly, made this a comfortable, do-able choice; lengthy immersion in the field gave me no pause at all about researching in male-dominated territory for my PhD.

What is entailed in order to function successfully in a male environment? Social scientists have observed that women need to adapt their behaviour (Fine “One”) and/or develop coping strategies (G. Miller; Lumsden),25 like being one of the boys and repressing female stereotypes of emotional weakness and physical helplessness. Some male-gendered spaces remain unaltered by the presence of women: the police (Rabe-Hemp), the military (Barrett), sports journalism (Hardin et al.), and information technology (Demaiter and Adams). In these environments, female coping strategies, while providing short term gains, also condone the masculine system thereby prolonging inequality.

Gloria Miller sums up the reality for women in male-gendered workplaces: “carrying a purse is an indicator of female helplessness; equipment necessary for dealing with female biology is unwelcome in the field; clothing used to gender females is unsuitable for work in the field . . .” (54). My own experience confirms that these sanctions also apply to the woodworking shop (feminine accessories, clothes and hygiene were not in evidence), but the masculine system has gradually eroded, especially in North America where studio furniture training is in tertiary institutions.26 There is no question that women are physically capable (Kirkham)27 of making even large pieces like a dining room table. However, the psychological and emotional barriers to doing so depend on the atmosphere in individual shops. My education reflects the ups and downs that most women tolerate in order to pursue woodworking goals.

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23 The accident, which involved kickback from a piece of timber in a table saw, opened a wound that extends from the fingernail to the web on the inside of my right pinky. A week later I offered instructors the opportunity to gather all students (about 30 undergraduates and graduates) for a re-creation of the accident. Initially seen as a safety reminder by faculty and me, one student used it as a forum to blame and shame. Such exposure is not always received in the way it was intended.
24 Attributed to President Harry Truman in 1949.
25 Fine examined the presence of female chefs in Minnesota restaurants; Miller investigated female engineers in the Alberta oil industry; Lumsden surveyed ‘girl racers’ in the car subculture of Aberdeen.
26 Wendy Maruyama and Gail Fredell were two of the first female graduate students at the School for American Craftsmen at the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1978. Their arrival was not greeted warmly by the male students, and the women had to deal with locker room antics directed at them (Wood). Despite the misogynist environment, Maruyama’s Writing Desk (1980), from her final year, was published in Fine Woodworking and both women have since headed woodworking programs (Maruyama is Professor, Woodworking and Furniture Design Program at San Diego State University; Fredell was formerly Director, Woodworking and Furniture Program at Anderson Ranch Arts Center).
27 In her brief history of furniture-making in Britain, Kirkham notes that as late as the twentieth century men believed that women “should not be allowed” (111) as furniture makers because of the physical demands of the work.
When I embarked on my Canadian undergraduate studies in furniture in September 1994, about a third of my classmates were female. The class got smaller as we proceeded through second and third years but the percentage of women remained the same. Instructors welcomed the presence of women because the social atmosphere in the studio was less bawdy, and I encountered no discrimination either at school or when buying materials from timber retailers or speciality shops. There were a small number of women woodworkers in the Toronto region; Patty Johnson occasionally taught at Sheridan. It is also noteworthy that we were advised during the first weeks of first year that if we intended to be furniture makers we should read Edward Cooke’s *New American Furniture: the Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers* (Figure 15). I did, and it highlighted five women. By acquiring the names of female practitioners I was able to learn about them during research for coursework assignments. It was confidence-building to realise that there were female furniture-making role models.

I advanced to graduate school at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth with expectations that gender ratios would be the same, but was disappointed to find myself as one of two women in a class of 13 that was predominantly macho. I suffered the discomfort of this atmosphere for a year, taking more pleasure from the academic courses populated by graduates of both sexes in all media, than the studio component. My work, which had been entirely three-dimensional as an undergraduate, inexplicably became wall-hung (Figure 16); in critiques I had to defend my feminist-inspired content before an unreceptive male studio. Thanks to female supporters in jewellery and textiles, I recognised the wall panels as metaphorical: I was up against the wall when I faced my hostile peers.

For a variety of reasons, I transferred to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in 1998 to complete my degree. At RISD both undergraduate and graduate furniture programmes are taught in the same facility, so the visible number of women rose considerably and half of the graduate students were women. In addition, the Head of School was Rosanne Somerson, one of America’s recognised studio furniture leaders and educators.

Following graduation in 2000 I visited New Zealand with the partial aim of finding a job. I was offered a part-time position to draft curriculum for a new bachelor’s degree in furniture-making at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology; at the same time I would instruct the final year of diploma students. I did not take the offer but saw it as a sign that women were ‘normal’ in woodworking in New Zealand.

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28 This programme was for graduate students only, with undergraduates occasionally present for elective courses.
29 A check of student numbers for the 2010/2011 academic year shows male/female ratios as 50/50 at RISD (Grear). At the University of Wisconsin Madison, undergraduate woodworking is about 65% female; in a class of 5-7 graduate students, 1-3 are female (Loeser). At Sheridan Institute (Oakville, Canada) roughly 20-25% are women (Diemert).
Zealand. When I returned to the country in 2006 I discovered that they were not normal in terms of numbers of professional practitioners: they were, and are, rare. I have met only one woman, Wendy Neale, whose career is comparable to that of women in North America; she will reappear in this thesis as a case study in Chapter 4. Other women, such as Katy Wallace, Marilyn Sainty, and Diana Firth are identified as designers, whose work may be made by others and/or intended for industrial manufacture. Consequently, it is pertinent to consider the dearth of female furniture makers in New Zealand.

2.1 Gender Difference in New Zealand Studio Furniture

Why the lack of women? This is not a phenomenon that has been studied in New Zealand, firstly because the medium, itself, is under-researched, and secondly because the status quo—that is, almost no women furniture makers—has never been questioned. However, in Finland, a country which has been compared with New Zealand because of similarities in size, population, and economy (Frame; Easton; C. Thompson), studies have sought reasons for the lack of women in what are termed the technical arts (Kokko; Kokko & Dillon). Although Finnish legislation made the compulsory teaching of crafts gender-neutral in 1970, the research shows that girls choose textiles and boys choose wood and metals. The authors conclude that female and male children learn gender roles in family and community; within the home, women knit and weave, and men make boats, build saunas and fix bicycles. So when it comes to selecting a course of study in craft, the familiar is readily adopted; at the same time boys and girls are fulfilling the cultural expectations of their gender as dictated by society. Kokko records that girls who selected technical work suffered negatives: teasing by girls for chasing boys, teasing by boys for having inferior skills, being alone in a male class (including instructor), and missing out on the collegiality of the female textile circle. Thus, even in a country where craft education is entrenched and revered, the traditional gender divisions occur.

In New Zealand the polarity of women/soft materials, men/hard materials arose out of the rural agricultural culture. Spinning, weaving, dressmaking, knitting and lacemaking were required of women in pioneering households and they became cultural norms. Several excerpts from the historical craft overview of Mau Mahara address this point: 1770-1860 – “Women’s skills such as needlecraft are essential for everyday living” (Crafts Council Mau 109); 1860-1900 – “Both functional and decorative needlecraft are very widely practised” (112); 1900-1945 – female potters set up studios, and “Members of the CWI [Country Women’s Institute], for example, exhibit weaving, basketwork, knitting, crochet, embroidery and other handicrafts regularly” (114). The first national crafts association, formed in 1935, was the New Zealand Guild of Weavers, Spinners, and Dyers (“Here”).

In secondary schools, where handcraft traditions have never been as rigorously maintained as in Finland, O’Neill and Jolley delineate the situation: “Taught from 1905 through the co-educational Technical High Schools . . . [technology education] provided vocational courses in homecraft,

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30 Mau Mahara: Our Stories in Craft was a national touring exhibition created to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Crafts Council of New Zealand and the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1990 (Crafts Council Mau). It will be discussed further in Chapter 2.
commercial, industrial and trades subjects. Like the early primary school courses in domesticity for girls and wood/metal-work for boys, such courses were intended to develop practical gender-differentiated life and vocational skills” (179). In a 1983 report for the Vocational Training Council, Abigail stated that while technical subjects—technical drawing, woodwork, metalwork, home crafts and typing—in 17 Wellington schools were available to boys and girls, the number of girls who took wood- and metalwork were “negligible” (23).

Carrie Paechter notes that culturally-constructed masculine and feminine behaviours vary depending on where they are constructed, and that genders are not restricted to activities considered ‘normal’ to their biological identification. But she concludes: “having a male or female body makes it almost certain that an individual will be regarded . . . as a legitimate peripheral participant in a practice of masculinity or femininity, respectively, and expected to conform, at least in part, to the behavioral norms of that community” (543). Women in New Zealand, like those in Finland, opted for soft materials, because that is what women did.

Certainly some women in New Zealand chose and choose ‘abnormal’ pastimes and vocations—in this context, furniture-making—but not in sufficient numbers to generate teachers and role models. A literature search of magazine and newspaper articles from 1960 to 2000 revealed fewer than a dozen articles on female furniture designers; none were designer/makers. A young woman training as an apprentice under the Furniture Industry Training and Educational Council (FITEC) was mentioned (“Smarter” 24) but her certificate modules were industry-related. If the construction of furniture is not visible, women do not see it as an option either in the studio or commercial setting.

Having established that it is extraordinary to find a female furniture maker in this country, it is necessary to consider whether that fact has any bearing on the progress of this thesis. It will be recalled that my interviews elicited sufficient emotional response that I began to question my influence on the interviews. Being of the same class certainly had an impact. What about my gender?

2.2 Female Fieldworker/ Male Furniture Makers

Authors addressing the issue of the masculine and feminine voice acknowledge that there is a difference in research methodologies (Davis). Their findings can be summarised succinctly: men are concerned with maintaining independence whereas women feel the need to connect. The result is that male research tends to be objective and hierarchical, with the researcher honouring his subject’s autonomy; female research is premised on the establishment of ongoing relationships that influence the outcome of the project. In addition, female methodologies tend to be narrative and based in a particular social context. Davis even alleges that women perceive in a “holistic manner” (meaning that persons, relationships, time and place interconnect) and therefore “rarely find clear solutions to problems or parsimonious explanations for phenomena” (34).

So the innate female inclination to create relationships means that my predilection is to care about the subjects of my research, male furniture makers. I unconsciously project an ethos that says I will support and protect this relationship. Permission for emotional revelations is not explicit but my gender fosters it. A male researcher, even one of the woodworker class, would not inspire a safe haven for intimate narratives and passion. As noted previously, displays of male sentimentality within the New Zealand context have been taboo, and my research is devoted to a masculine-gendered space—the woodworking workshop. Within this context it is not normal to witness outpourings of sensitivity.

The fact that I can comfortably enter the workshop domain is because I do so as a ‘class’ member: I enter what has traditionally been a man’s world with the requisite male knowledge and experience. I dress and behave as a man because my class knowledge overrides feminine manners: flowing hair, loose garments, jewellery, stiletto heels are prohibited for safety reasons. I demonstrate being a member of this

31 Gilligan’s In a Different Voice, which provides a basis for Davis’s paper, has been subject to ongoing debate for feminist scholars (Larrabee “Gender”). Gilligan argued that women made choices based on “ethics of care” whereas men’s choices were based on “ethics of justice.” I will return to the ethics of care and justice towards the end of this chapter.

32 “Women feel a strong obligation to protect and care for those with whom they are connected” (Davis 34).
class, which in New Zealand is normally male, yet my female gender is there. Amongst their male peers, my interviewees may never before have spoken about the bliss of creativity or influence of family or love of a mentor. As Davis asserts, my gender encourages subjective and emotional discussion that would not be fostered by a researcher whose inclination is to ensure independence for all participants and maintain an exchange hierarchy.

Has my womanhood been a hindrance amongst manhood? I can think of no instances where it has. My gender fosters a positive relationship with my interviewees, thereby reinforcing the propriety of autoethnography as a research method.

3. Nationality

I was born in Canada and made my first journey to New Zealand in 1968 when I was 20 years old. I married a New Zealander in 1969 and became a citizen in 1981. I have lived on-and-off in the country for approximately 12 years, residing in both the North and South Islands. All of my interviewees are New Zealand citizens but, like me, the majority were not born here (Figure 17). On the one hand I have enough experience of the country to be able to offer well-grounded commentary; on the other I am an outsider. Phil Osborne saw this as advantageous in light of the small community of furniture makers. He said that, apart from commitments that prevented him from undertaking a book on furniture, he was reluctant to offend anyone lest he include some makers and exclude others (Osborne Personal 1). I am able to wear two hats—a domestic one and a foreign one.

The foreign one has two aspects. Firstly, my access to the furniture community in North America provides personal insights and anecdotes that a New Zealander would not have. Experience of tertiary education, summer workshops, conferences and exhibitions, plus an ongoing relationship with a network of North American practitioners, broadens the range of accessible material. I am able to recognise similarities and differences between New Zealand and North America that may not be evident to someone trying to make comparisons by means of secondary sources. My research, therefore, can be placed in an international context, making it relevant to a wider range of readers.

Secondly, a foreign perspective affords insight into nationalist preoccupations. For instance, later in this thesis I will discuss New Zealand’s historical predilection to look beyond its shores for economic survival. Emphasis is placed on export earnings with the result that local industry, such as craft production, is not seen as significant to national identity or well-being, socially or financially. These policies have certainly been challenged by critical citizens onshore, but a researcher who is not entrenched in the status quo readily becomes the ethnographic outsider.

My foreign associations also include Finnish ancestry and citizenship—my mother was born in Finland and my grandparents emigrated from Finland to Canada when my mother was seven years old. My grandfather, known as Pappa, was a carpenter who built Kotiranta (meaning cottage by the lake) in northern Ontario the year before I was born. I spent my childhood summers at that cottage, surrounded by crafts (my grandmother was a prolific knitter), tools, and practical know-how. Pappa was of a generation that saw women’s work as cooking, baking, needlework and vegetable gardening so he did not teach me his skills. Yet I like to think that genes and/or osmosis and/or Finnish culture are in some way responsible for my furniture-making interests. B.A. Harrington, an American furniture maker and scholar, captured this genealogy during her presentation at the Furniture Society Conference 2010: she described her own carpentry heritage as “an inherited resonance of wood,” adding that she grew up with the “rhythm of the hammer” (Harrington).

4. Race

The definition of race can be strictly interpreted as Caucasoid, Negroid and Mongoloid. I am Caucasian, as are most of my interviewees; unconsciously we assume that in entering each other’s ‘space’ the cultural proprieties will be familiar. By contrast I admit to certain discomfort in my initial

33 He didn’t teach my male cousins either. It was more important to these new Canadians that we be university educated, which all six of his grandchildren are.
<table>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<th>Education/Training</th>
<th>Overseas experience</th>
<th>Years of Practice</th>
<th>Full-time, part-time, ceased</th>
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Figure 17. **Analysis of Demographics, Training and Practice for a Selection of Studio Furniture Makers**, created 2009

This chart includes the majority of the senior furniture makers. Their names, and those of others, will appear in subsequent chapters.

The chart shows the youngest are in their early 50s; three were born in New Zealand. The majority are self-taught.
encounter with Carin Wilson, a furniture maker of Māori descent. Acquaintance with Māori traditions equips me, to a small degree, to interact appropriately with Wilson but there are limitations to my knowledge of Māori culture and tikanga (customs, lore). Having familiarised myself with Wilson’s biography prior to our meeting I was aware of his acculturation in the Pākehā (non-Māori New Zealander) world and trusted that respect would be the best protocol. During the interview I was assisted by Wilson’s diplomacy and grace in speaking and behaving inclusively.

5. Age

The majority of the practitioners in my research project are now in their 50s and 60s. I am of the same generation. I have silver hair and my body is showing its maturity. To my interviewees, this probably represents authority, wisdom and comparable life experience. I have been treated with respect and encountered unfailing willingness to participate.

The reasons for the seniority of my furniture makers will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. The fact that they are of this cohort means that my motivation in undertaking the research—appreciation of craft heritage; recognition of the merit of traditional techniques and the value of creative work with pleasurable materials; regard for the hand-made and the direct client/producer association—is echoed. I did not seek out practitioners who would confirm my world view but rather discovered that my world view was shared by strangers (to me) whose lives were dedicated to a particular community of practice. Much as we spoke the ‘class’ language, we spoke the ‘class’ philosophy, a product of similar age and experience in the field.

Because of my age I do not objectify my participants as ‘old people’ or see them as nostalgic upholders of by-gone traditions. I approach the research in the present tense, with optimism that the knowledge and skills that we possess are current and critical for the future. A future world may not need one-of-a-kind pieces of furniture but, in the following interchange, Hans Herleth (Figure 18) designates what will be needed:

DW: What about the young people of New Zealand? Are you anxious that your skills and woodworking skills are carried on to the next generation?
HH: No, not really. I’m anxious about much more fundamental things... woodworking skills, yes, only in the sense where they are part of our survival because I can see a time when our western way of life is not gonna carry on the way it is. It’s not gonna carry on forever; it’s not sustainable and there’ll be a crisis no doubt and I’m only worried in that sense that maybe gardening skills and basic skills of how to put things together [are needed]. You know if you grow up in an urban situation, you have no idea of, about practical skills and, yah, from that point of view. But in terms of art or in terms of all this, what goes on on the periphery, I’m not worried about that at all (Herleth).

Figure 18: Hans Herleth
I met Herleth at CollaborateNZ 2009, a one-week biennial event that takes place near Whangarei. International artists from all media spend their days and nights making objects from recycled material that organisers bring to the site. The climax of the intensive period of creativity is an auction whose proceeds are used to finance the travel expenses of guest artists at the next CollaborateNZ. My attendance in 2009 permitted me to interview four furniture makers and two turners, as well as be involved in several collaborative projects.

34 Māori is an official language of New Zealand and therefore not italicised as ‘foreign’ in this thesis.
35 The connotation of need intended here is anti commodity for commodity’s sake. If needs are being met with what you have, purchase of a piece of studio furniture, simply because you can, is unnecessary.
Herleth's concern about sustainability comes from the wisdom of age and experience. He emigrated to New Zealand from Germany in 1973 seeking a rural lifestyle in contrast to the densely-populated urban Europe he was used to. His training as a toolmaker enabled him to construct a lathe and he experienced a monetarily satisfying period in the late 1970s as a woodturner, supplying galleries throughout the country. But he stepped back from that occupation because he felt that the pressure to produce was no different than working in a factory. His move to furniture in the 1980s provided a modest income for Herleth and his family, while their vegetable garden and domestic farm animals met their food requirements. Maintenance of this alternative lifestyle, and its philosophical underpinnings since he was a young man, benefits Herleth's perspective on potential future problems for New Zealand and the world.

6. Personal history

Personal history—upbringing, education, travel—has been included in the above sections. In addition I want to add two personal stories that demonstrate my willingness to be as self-revelatory as my interviewees. Authenticity and vulnerability on my part reciprocate the trust invested in me by my interviewees and the stories they shared with me. Denscombe describes this as “becom[ing] fully involved as a person with feelings, with experiences and with knowledge which can be shared . . .” (171). I hasten to add that this self-revelation is taking place after the interviews, because the interviews were about the New Zealand furniture makers, not about me. Instead I provide these stories as background to my research analysis.

The first story: I am the eldest in a family of three girls and fit the stereotype of the father’s daughter. During my adolescent years I struggled between being one of the boys and not fitting in with the girls; being married at age twenty-one was more to have a brother or full-time male friend than be a wife. The father’s daughter is a deep-seated archetype and it wasn’t until I was in my forties, after many years of living and therapy, that I became conscious of my bias towards the superiority of the male world. By the time I entered craft school I was aware, intellectually, that my choice of woodworking probably stemmed from years of patriarchal partiality, yet I couldn’t help myself. As I made furniture, my aesthetic included pattern, texture, and organic forms, which are seen pejoratively as feminine, yet I was executing them in wood in a male-dominated environment. I had found my niche and did not think twice about my feminism in this comfort zone.

Figure 19. Centre for Fine Woodworking Exhibition
The CFW Exhibition was a showcase for CFW graduates, students and faculty. The venue’s neutral environment gave precedence to the furniture, and visitors could touch the pieces. The opening night was an occasion for the furniture community to gather and reminisce; visitors were impressed by the quality and range of the pieces on exhibit. More details about the CFW will emerge later in the thesis.
My long-standing predilection towards a circumscribed male world\textsuperscript{36} induces my willingness to enter upon research devoted to that world. It is familiar territory and I believe it fosters the “fruitful relationships” described by Carrithers. One instance of this followed my attendance at the opening of the Centre for Fine Woodworking exhibition at the Centre of Contemporary Art (COCA) in Christchurch in February 2010 (Figure 19). The 1980s furniture-making veterans, using the occasion for a reunion, invited me to accompany them to reminisce at a nearby pub, where I was entrusted with two albums of original photos (Figure 20) from their early exhibitions.

The second story began on 5 September 1995. On that morning, the first day of my second year as a furniture student, I was hit by a car as I walked to class. The accident almost destroyed my left knee and the orthopaedic surgeons said I could no longer aspire to be a full-time furniture maker. Since I had quit my marriage to return to school and spent a year confirming furniture-making as a fulfilling and viable option, it was especially cruel to be literally knocked off my feet. Undaunted, however, I continued with my studies from a wheelchair (Figure 21), eventually regaining sufficient mobility to graduate with my Sheridan classmates.

My body was compromised but my spirit was not—my passion for furniture was sustained by graduate school and being fully immersed, as much as was physically possible, in the community of furniture-making. Subsequent to obtaining my MFA I sought ways to remain in touch with my passion, by writing, attending conferences and workshops, and teaching furniture history. The opportunity to research studio furniture in New Zealand is one more important component of my avocation.

\textsuperscript{36}The circumscription was created by the personalities of my father and former husband, both of whom were gentle, genteel men. It is not violent, nor does it contain manifestations of typical male pastimes (rugby, motor sports, horseracing), heavy drinking or coarse behaviour. It could be said that this notion of masculinity is idealised by many women.
A careless driver forced me onto a path that was not anticipated when I enrolled for craft studies in 1994. My goal was to make my own designs and support myself doing so. This was idealistic, given the economic realities of furniture-making and the reality of the world-wide economy at the turn of the millennium. Yet the creative drive was as powerful as hunger, and brought me to a situation I could not have anticipated. In retrospect, I have been well guided: as I watch senior makers dealing with ageing physiques, I doubt I could have sustained the necessary physical rigours, even without the accident. My PhD candidature and the experiences leading to it unfolded exactly as they should. So the fact that my dedication to this field is as deep as that of my interviewees substantially affects “the process, interaction and emergent material” (Okely and Callaway “Preface” xi).

I want to conclude the ‘Personal history’ component by describing a relatively recent addition to the cumulative process. In November 2009 I received an email announcing a Design Anthropology PhD course to be held at the University of Aberdeen (March 2010) and the University of Southern Denmark (May 2010). The course description coincided with my philosophy of craft and the work thus far on my thesis:

This is a radically new area of research that cuts across a wide range of fields from industrial design, through human movement studies and ecological psychology, to sociocultural anthropology. From an anthropological perspective, it resonates with four areas of interest that are generating some of the most exciting new work in the discipline: exchange and personhood in the production and use of technology, the understanding of skilled practice, the anthropology of the senses and the aesthetics of everyday life (Donovan).

I applied and was one of thirty-seven doctoral students chosen to attend. The course’s extensive reading list, exposure to two significant anthropology scholars—Tim Ingold and James Leach—and discussions with PhD candidates in anthropology put me in touch with a discipline from which design has much to learn. While some industries have hired anthropology graduates to strategise ways to enhance market share, I now believe that anthropology’s long-term attention to humanity is a more appropriate model for the future of design. Steps towards re-orienting design from products to people are evident in user-centred and participatory design, but deeper engagement with anthropological methods and approaches could be explored. Fry states, “the quality of the characteristics of the product, culture, life, and the environment cannot be disaggregated from the quality of care of design and making” (“Sacred I” 214). In other words, sufficient study of the parameters of human life—anthropology—is essential to appropriate and sustaining design and manufacture.

The promise of discussions of technology, skilled practice, and the senses in, and aesthetics of, everyday life resonated with what I was hearing in my interviews and reading at my desk. I travelled to Europe because design research through intermediaries (literature review) is the antithesis of human-centredness. My beliefs concurred with Fry’s definition: “Human centredness as an ethical basis of value . . . is not dependent upon the anthropocentric, logocentric and ethnocentric configuration of the European humanist tradition. It is in fact anti-humanist, for it is not based on a centredness of ‘man’ over nature and Western knowledge and values over all ‘others’. Rather, it is the centrality of present and future life over inert cybernetic systems” (“Green” 267). I felt that my championship of people-centred objects—studio furniture and its depiction in Figures 3 and 4—required direct interaction with design anthropologists, the people espousing this new theory; my physical presence in proximity to the theory was critical to the holism of my thesis. And while my expectations were only partially met by the course, my connection with anthropology at a timely moment in the process added legitimacy to my research strategy and adoption of autoethnography.

Tim Ingold’s writing, especially, resonated with me. Ingold has moved away from anthropology’s traditional emphasis on cultural objects to their materiality (“Materials”; Ingold and Hallam) and making. He has analysed weaving (“Making”; “On Weaving”) and woodworking (“Walking”) and their respective processes (“Textility”). Instead of taking for granted the coming-into-being of crafted objects, Ingold’s anthropological magnifying glass looks closely at the raw materials and human physical movements, not only those of the hands, that enable their existence. In analysing woodworking (“Walking”) he does so
by means of autoethnography: he observes and documents his own body, undertaking the cutting of timber with a handsaw. During the PhD course Ingold (Figure 22) climbed onto a table and re-enacted his sawing activity. To me, this act represents what design anthropology is about—the designer/researcher places himself into the shoes of an ‘other.’ He is not at arm’s length from the other: he is figuratively, and literally, the other.

How does the academy define design anthropology? One of the perceived failings of the PhD course was that design anthropology was never defined. The course organisers said they were unwilling to do so because restrictions (what it is, what it is not), at this early stage, would limit the parameters. Those venturing into the discipline, therefore, have the opportunity to apply their own definition, and a 2011 publication, Design Anthropology: Object Culture in the 21st Century (A. Clarke), demonstrates that the term is being applied to designer as observer, user- and actor-centred design, material culture, commodity psychology, adaptive craft practice and anti-design. With respect to this thesis I have adopted a definition that encompasses the subjective researcher as well as the reflective researcher. The fieldworker is of the field, as indicated in Figure 3, by means of the vascular rays: her presence permeates, and is permeated by, the surrounding local, national and international elements. Secondly, she pays attention to the process in the field, being continually cognisant of the situation and making adjustments as necessary.

Wayfaring, as noted previously, finds each individual—like the researcher—on a path and “[w]here things meet, occurrences intertwine” (Ingold Being 160). Consciousness of those intertwinnings contributes to the narrative of personal history. I indicated earlier that Finnish scholarship provided me with a significant moment in my thesis process; I also mentioned my Finnish citizenship. While I was in Aberdeen I learned that Tim Ingold’s early anthropological research was on the Lapps in northern Finland, that his wife is Finnish and that his children, like me, are half Finnish. This synchronicity has no bearing on my thesis but it has personal meaning. Such a ‘connection,’ as nebulous as it is, provides meaning. And that, too, is a vital part of a PhD process that, at times, can seem utterly meaningless.

7. Persona

Some researchers (P. Thompson) mention character or personality as significant to the research results. Being a listener and observer, having patience and curiosity, showing empathy, and trusting intuition are qualities that improve the fieldworker’s results. These aspects of my make-up, “displayed to or perceived by others” (“Persona”) form part of my persona. Yet, as the thesis has progressed, another aspect of persona, enunciated by Jungian psychology, has come to the fore: “We are born individuals.

37 While I believe that some people are listeners and others are not, Belenky et al. cite a number of studies that suggest that women listen and men talk (45).

38 Jenny Harding: “Empathy may be a crucial ingredient in producing ‘thick dialogue’ in oral history . . .” (33). Her qualification, “may,” is based on oral history research where subjects hold opposing views to those of the interviewer (e.g. interviews with the Ku Klux Klan) (Endnote 1).
But to satisfy our needs we have to become social persons, and every social person is a bundle of rôles or personas.”

One significant aspect of my persona, part of the social person I have become to satisfy my needs, is feminist. My feminism, which I regard as a worldview as innate as patience or intuition, has never been politically overt but is long-standing. I was exposed to feminism’s awakening in the 1960s in North America, and though not active, inculcated the movement’s tenets; in 1975, by which time I was living in New Zealand, I attended the United Women’s Convention in Wellington and achieved notoriety in my husband’s office for that benign deed. As mentioned above, my personal history has contained many feminist-motivated acts—the very fact that I am doing what I am doing at this moment is due to a desire to redress the absence of craft from the patriarchal historical record.

When I embarked on this thesis I took my topic, studio furniture, to two human geographers at the University of Waikato. Their academic predilections would have suited a feminist take on my topic but, at that stage, I did not see how feminism applied to the research. As stated previously, however, process unearthed unexpected paths and feminism has become a major factor in the thesis development. In this final section, I want to place this research in the context of feminism. In doing so I begin by reiterating, in a feminist voice, Okely and Callaway’s assertion stated previously: “... the ‘race’, nationality, gender, age, and personal history of the fieldworker affect the process, interaction and emergent material.”

Sandra Harding puts autoethnography in a feminist methodology:

The best feminist analysis ... insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint. ... we are often explicitly told by the researcher what her/his gender, race, class, culture is, and sometimes how she/he suspects this has shaped the research project ... (9).

In the next paragraph Harding adds that an attempt to undertake research in this manner “is a response to the recognition that the cultural beliefs and behaviors of feminist researchers shape the results of their analyses no less than do those of sexist and androcentric researchers” (9). In Harding’s terms, my feminism, as much as my class, race, gender, etcetera, is a relevant lens through which to view any research I undertake, but is it relevant to studio furniture? To answer that question I return to the beginning of this chapter where I introduced Tony Fry.

Fry’s assertion of the necessity for design to be re-created as sacred or meaningful encompasses craft as care (“Sacred I” 211). Fry’s emphasis on the importance and contemporary relevance of craft resonated with my long-held beliefs and I flagged it, early on, as a philosophical vein to pursue. Parallel with trolling the archives for craft and furniture history in New Zealand, I tried to find literature about care as an emotion, without pertinent results; then the design anthropology course came along and the required readings were relevant and resonant. But it was not until investigations into women’s socialisation and their absence from furniture that I spied a book on the library shelf: An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives. Larrabee’s book, containing essays proposing various stances with respect to the ‘ethics of care,’ prompted me to read Carol Gilligan and subsequent authors who have advocated and expanded upon the ethics of care as a notable feminist tenet since the early 1990s. McLaughlin identifies the ethics of care as a feminist social and political theory that seeks to identify a “shared framework about what is important for the human condition” (16).

Gilligan made a gendered distinction between an ‘ethics of care’ and an ‘ethics of justice’ (see Footnote 30). Her research on moral development was spawned by that of her mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg. In In a Different Voice, Gillian describes his perspective: Kohlberg asserted that boys made

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39 The quotation comes from “Persona,” Def. 2b in the Oxford English Dictionary; its source is 1935, Transactions of the Philology Society 66 [no author].
40 Associate Professor Lynda Johnston and Professor Robyn Longhurst.
moral decisions based on reason and rationality, whereas girls’ decisions were predicated on the maintenance of relationships; he stated that females’ ‘irrational’ behaviour could be rectified through greater public involvement. Gilligan sought to contradict Kohlberg’s thesis through her empirical work with adolescent girls—rather than see relationships or caring for others as inferior, she argued that the ability to care is morally rational and as worthy as abstract, objective reasoning. Comparing the disjunction, the ethic of care “gives moral priority to contextual and particular decision-making, to relationships, and to the responsibilities entailed by those relationships” whereas the ethic of justice “emphasizes universalizable moral choices made by impartial, autonomous individuals, and the rights of such individuals” (Gardner 42).

Gilligan’s theory has been subject to a number of criticisms which are identified in Larrabee: her research is not verifiable; it verges on ‘anatomy is destiny’; the dichotomy of men/women, public/private, normal/inferior is maintained; race and class are not considered. Considerable debate surrounds the ethics of care, including a denial of the mutual exclusivity of care and justice. The discussion is ongoing, by female and male (Blum; Puka) theorists, a fact that deserves specific note in relation to this thesis. The ethics of care—concerning 1) the moral concepts of attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, and integrity (Tronto Moral 126-137); 2) concrete situations rather than hypothetical ones; and 3) caring being an activity that will generate moral responses instead of reliance on abstract principles—is not gender specific. Both sexes are mothered, to a greater or lesser degree, and can understand the concept of “care.”

Expanding care beyond the domestic, nurturing and health environments, Sevenhuijsen sees it as a social and political activity and applies it to citizenship: “Care is, and this cannot be stressed enough, not only directed at ‘others’ (those in need of care) but also at the self and the physical environment, as well as interrelations between these” (23). From this point of view, the ethics of care has application to ecological concerns such as destruction of forest resources, disposal of toxic waste, proliferation of carbon and methane emissions, and, ultimately, global warming. I believe such caring citizenship aligns with Fry’s ontological view of care. Earlier in this chapter I noted that Fry’s theory was drawn from Heidegger who equated care with the very existence of self, humanity and the planet, interconnections that necessarily engage the political sphere of citizenship and government. Fry extends this sphere to the built environment: “Care for self and future, as a working practice toward a quality of the being of objects, and being with objects, clearly is inseparable from the quality of survival of all being” (“Sacred I” 207).

From a feminist perspective I noticed two authors who come close to iterating Fry’s connection of care with craft. Selma Sevenhuijsen argues: “The ethics of care implies being open to the ‘other’; it thus attributes an important place to communication, interpretation and dialogue . . . it appeals for the restitution of sensory knowledge, symbolized by the unity of hand, head and heart.” (61) The connection of the senses and hand, head and heart reverberates with holism and with craft. Virginia Held even mentions wood: “Chopping at a tree, however clumsily, to fell it, could be work. But when it does incorporate such values as doing so effectively, it becomes the practice of woodcutting. So we do better...
to focus on practices of care rather than merely on the work involved” (37). Thus, a Warehouse (New Zealand) or Walmart (USA) table does the job but a one-of-a-kind table incorporates care.

Fry theorised about craft and care in Australia at the same time as the ethics of care emerged in the United States in the early 1990s. But the two remained separate, one of the reasons being that Fry wrote within the context of design and feminists addressed their writings to sociology and psychology. As Fry continued to write about care, particularly in Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics, and New Practice (2009), he inadvertently addressed one feminist’s concerns: “Unless the full social and philosophical context for an ethic of care is specified, the ethic of care can be dismissed as a parochial concern of some misguided women” (Tronto “Beyond” 247). Fry places care of the self, and the self’s condition of being, at the heart of “futuring” (Design 113), thereby acknowledging care as seminal to a self-sustaining social context. The cross-fertilisation of feminist and design scholarship represents an inter-disciplinary opportunity that can contribute to the sustainability and enhancement of the planet.

I agree with Sandra Harding that, “the designation ‘feminist’ can apply to men who satisfy whatever standards women must satisfy to earn the label” (12). As a furniture maker and feminist, I recognise ‘care as craft’ as a feminist proposition but refuse to relegate it to the distaff gender. Craft was traditionally and pejoratively seen as women’s activity—the very word distaff symbolises this attitude. A distaff or spindle, used for spinning flax or wool, was held in the left/sinister hand, with the result that distaff designated a female craft, then female activity generally and, ultimately, the female side of the family (spindle-side versus spear-side) (“Distaff”). However, within the re-creation of design, Fry delineates a place for craft that is not marginal:

Craft knowledge should not be viewed in a developmental lineage in which it is placed behind new or high technologies, for it is essential in keeping and making the world human and in artificially sustaining the ecosystem. Craft knowledge is, therefore, behind, in front of, and in competition with noncraft technologies. It is not, in terms of importance, marginal. Craft knowledge is in fact of central importance to the future (“Sacred I” 212).

By placing craft in the mainstream, Fry eschewed the male/technology female/craft dichotomy. He also dismissed craft as an effete practice: “. . . since the craft revival of the 1960s, the prevailing belief has been that Western craft is an essentially bourgeois activity intensely concerned with self-expression and identity, and which produces objects of conspicuous consumption” (Ioannou 12). He envisioned that craft has the potential to embody care of the planet, materials, tools, objects (from cradle to grave), the maker and the user. Such a vision is holistically human-centred.

My research topic is gendered, in many ways; my research topic is not gendered, in many ways. To paraphrase Michael Carrithers: this constitutes its pith and its pain. Gender is an essential part of and permeates the thesis—female practitioner and observer in a male practice; at the same time it creates a frisson or discomfort that enables a unique perspective on studio furniture. It is not a feminist treatise about studio furniture but a studio furniture treatise that takes account of its feminist components.

Having established myself as a visible, authentic voice of authority, as a “real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests” (S. Harding 9), I return to my original query: did my role as facilitator influence the outcome? The answer is a resounding, YES. I am at the centre of this research; I am a facet of its whole-ism. Embracing that fact and its consequences, I now move on to the structure of the thesis.

Choice of Techniques: Thesis Evolution

Because of the uniqueness of my topic, the literature review constituted primary knowledge gathering and is recorded in Chapters 2 and 3. In order to find out about craft in New Zealand I read the publications of the Crafts Council of New Zealand (CCNZ) and its predecessor the World Crafts Council (New Zealand Chapter). In retrospect, this component was a natural fit with my model (Figure 3) and it was my first research task in March 2009. Beginning with the first newsletter in 1967 and ending in 1993 with its last magazine, I examined the public record for evidence of studio furniture and issues affecting
the Crafts Council that had bearing on furniture—for example, sales tax, education, exhibitions, resources. I took special interest in the demise of the Crafts Council because when it ceased, documentation of studio furniture ceased too. I visited the Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt, which is the repository of some of the CCNZ archives, and gleaned details about furniture makers and their association with the national body. This research is contained in Chapter 2.

Carin Wilson and Colin Slade, as furniture makers, come to light in Chapter 2 because they were Presidents of the CCNZ; their respective impacts on craft and furniture will be expanded upon in Chapter 3. Both men wrote extensively in CCNZ publications as well as Touch Wood, a national magazine devoted to woodworking (1983–1988) and its successor, The New Zealand Woodworker (1988–1991). Chapter 3 is an account of the woodworking community (guilds and clubs), foreign visitors, exhibitions, education opportunities and attempts at unification: evidence of the structure in which furniture makers were nurtured and supported for approximately twenty years, during the 1980s and 1990s. Studio furniture’s subsequent invisibility and the state of the medium in 2008 conclude this section.

My initial intention was to travel the length and breadth of New Zealand, documenting as many furniture makers as possible. The timeframe and economic parameters of the PhD made this prospect impossible and I decided to confine my thesis to case studies of makers who represent the variation in how studio furniture is manifest in the country. These case studies constitute Chapter 4. The final research activities were selecting those makers and undertaking follow-up interviews with them. My choices were:

- Greg Bloomfield: a New Zealander, who trained in the United States, and whose absence from the country during the community-building years of the craft and furniture community, affected his return. His American influences contributed to an aesthetic that is very different from makers who spent most of their time in New Zealand.
- Humphrey Ikin: a self-taught Pākehā New Zealander whose vernacular could be described as authentically South Pacific. Ikin has had a distinguished, consistent career as a full-time maker.
- Wendy Neale: the ‘token’ woman who trained in Tasmania and was one of the founding instructors of the programme at the Universal College of Learning (UCOL) in Palmerston North. Neale’s aesthetic reflects current design concerns about social and environmental sustainability.
- John Shaw: grew up in New Zealand and trained in Britain and the United States. Shaw was the most esteemed furniture-making instructor in the polytechnical tertiary education system (described in Chapters 2 and 3) and one of the principals who established a fine woodworking school in Nelson. Shaw’s role has been primarily that of an educator.
- Colin Slade: born in Britain, Slade trained as a chairmaker and emigrated to New Zealand in 1972. He was a CCNZ President, exhibition organiser and prolific writer. Health factors prompted him to terminate his making, and this case study permits a discussion of inhibiting circumstances for studio furniture makers.
- Carin Wilson: a self-taught maker and CCNZ President. Wilson’s Māori ancestry offers a unique instance of hybrid craft practice since furniture is not a traditional Māori skill. He was instrumental in bringing overseas furniture makers to New Zealand and taking an early initiative in the institution of craft education in polytechnics.

Finally, the Conclusion, Chapter 5, summarises the state of studio furniture in New Zealand according to the tree trunk metaphor. The diagram, Figure 3, is re-drawn to reflect the findings of the research and the question—what is the necessary protective layer that will ensure that studio furniture will thrive and survive in New Zealand?—is addressed. Recommendations are made for ensuring ongoing protection of the practice, which could be considered as the post-research adjustment or

47 The archives were donated to the Alexander Turnbull Library by the CCNZ in November 1992. The Dowse Art Museum received the resource portion of these archives: artist files, artist slides, overseas resources.
refinement phase of this holistic project. Finally an evaluation of the research and its process, from methodological and personal viewpoints, concludes the thesis.