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IRON GRAPHICS: BRANDING TOTALITARISM STATES

Steven Heller, keynote speaker

My real task up here is to introduce Steve Heller, which presents a problem. Before we began I sat down with Steve and asked him what he would like me to say about him and what he would like me to edit. Of course, I started off with a sheet of paper that had this much on it. You see all the X’s. Steve presents a problem of either he needs no introduction or the introduction would take too long and there would be no talk. So we are down to these. Formally, he was a senior art director at the New York Times. Currently, and he wants you to know this, he writes for the NewYorkTimes.com campaign stops blog, and the for the Visuals column of the New York Times Book Review. In my own school, Steve is what one administrator called to me a force of nature. He is the Co-Chair and Co-Founder with Lita Talarico of the MFA Designer as Author program at the school, Co-Founder with Alice Twemlow of the MFA Design Criticism program, and Co-Founder with Liz Danzico of the MFA in Interaction Design at SVA. This, along with the fact that the man has written over 100 books. I wrote a few down. I thought maybe I would announce a few but it’s difficult deciding which titles. Steve said no, don’t bother. I have been teaching at an art college for years so I brought a show and tell. These are Steve’s books plus the most recent one, which I have been reading for the last couple of weeks on which this talk is based, Iron Fists: Branding the 20th Century Totalitarian State. It is fabulous. That’s my copy, however. After Steve’s talk there will be a Q&A period. I asked Steve what else I could say about him and he told me one thing. He told me about his politics but I’ve decided I’m going to let him say that instead. Would you please welcome Steve Heller. (Applause)

SH: Thanks Maryhelen. That was lovely. I blush. I do have to tell you that today is my 25th wedding anniversary. My wife said, you’re not coming to the party? I said, well, I’ll be there late, I guess. I have to talk about Nazis again. She just looked askance and wondered whether there would be another 25 years. This talk is based, as Maryhelen said, on this book which I had been working on for many, many years. I wrote a book about the swastika, which has always been a very important sign in the world and of interest to me and I’m sure other designers, and this derived from this research that I was doing. But before we start, I just want to show you something that hopefully will get you in the mood.

(Powerpoint presentation that accompanies the talk begins.)

SH: I usually show that around fashion week. It is rousing, no matter your feelings are about it. It can’t help but titillate. Walter Benjamin said that fascism is the aestheticizing of politics.
Arguable politics are also aestheticized in democracies and under other forms of government. During the 20th century, despots not unlike corporate executives today establish convincing narratives supported by graphic identities, logos and trademarks. These graphics triggered instantaneous recognition among the public for their ideas and products. They created images based on charismatic characters, not unlike the trade characters used to sell everything from detergent to snack foods, to headache remedies, to fast food. Comparing how corporations and totalitarian states are marketed may seem harsh. After all, a popular brand of frozen food or laundry detergent is not forced down the consumer’s throat with an iron fist. Today I will talk about how four 20th century totalitarian regimes—and I know the term totalitarian is subject to debate—Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Soviet Russia and Communist China—were creative in their use of branding strategies. First, let’s look at the image of what I call the ideological trade caricature. We will start with Il Duce, Benito Mussolini. Mussolini was the art dictator of the fascist style. He was also its most ubiquitous symbol. When he came to power in 1922 he exchanged the old nationalist symbols of Italy for new fascist icons, most notably his own omnipresent lock jawed visage rendered in paintings, stone and stencils. Love that chin. Policy also demanded that the word Duce, which mean boss or duke, be used everywhere, spelled in Roman capitals as a typographic chant: Duce, Duce, Duce. He was also quite the fashion plate and dressed in different styled uniforms at every chance. Like an actor in a play these uniforms were really costumes.

Referencing ancient Rome, busts of Duce were as common as the Caesars. In this early sculpture, his raised chin is exaggerated to imply power and majesty. In this bust his forward brow makes him more like a Klingon from Star Trek than a human. Italians were unable to escape his searing gaze. Just think of George Bush on a billboard like this. Or his virility. Duce saw himself as a great lockman. So this phallic is an appropriate political statement. You probably all know who this is. Adolf Hitler was a living logo in every sense. He was a sign, symbol, figure head, pneumonic, aide-memoire, and even a mascot. He was deliberately designed not to resemble the typical German aristocrat or bureaucrat but to be one of the people. This 1932 election posture. This picture is so minimalist that it could easily be modernist which is something that the Nazis objected to, modernism. Not a gaze, the forerunning of the “1984 Big Brother” image focused on the viewer. It had a simple caption headline: “Hitler.” The only typographic tick was a seemingly superfluous square over the eye that may have echoed his mustache.

Hitler was never shy before the camera. Incidentally, his personal photographer Heinrich Hoffmann, who was also essentially his PR man, continued to earn a lot of profit over the years selling pictures of the Fuhrer over the years and other Nazi dignitaries. Arno Breker, Hitler’s favorite sculptor, made a small fortune producing busts that were placed in every official building. The Minister of Information, Joseph Goebbels, oversaw the myth of the infallible Fuhrer, who was strong as iron but kind to children. In fact, Heinrich Hoffmann devoted two pages of his retail catalog of the leader petting dogs, pinching the cheeks of young boys and accepting flowers from young maidens, in addition to the official pictures shown here. This comes out of that catalog. The goal of the photos, paintings, postures and even these postage stamps was to ensure that his followers maintained intimate identification with their leader on a continual basis. By the way, Hitler received a royalty of one pfennig every time a stamp was
purchased. It went to pay for his house. It was clear to the public relations-savvy Nazis that the standardization of Nazi doctrine throughout society to succeed was necessary to manage public opinion. Goebbels, with the national ministry of popular enlightenment and propaganda also known as the Promi, was organized into seven divisions that covered the broad range of social, political and cultural endeavor.

Now let's move to Mao. He was the chairman of the great helmsman. His face and words were everywhere. He was the principal trademark of the cultural revolution. Maosist brand was perpetrated in every corner of China and eventually etched on revolutionary movements throughout the world. I call this the chocolate Mao. The cult of Mao was a cult of personality. It was also a coordinated effort by Mao's stalwarts to revivify his mythic stature as the Great Leader, largely conceived to return absolute power into his sphere and aggrandize those who stood beside him. His myth was built upon his early years as a revolutionary—the Long March—and though he evolved into a Buddha like image, much was made of his youthful demeanor. The Cultural Revolution was ostensibly triggered by Mao's realization that he relinquished power too soon. Mao had cultivated a super ego that enabled him to deny his own failings and led him to find new means to restore his iron-fisted rule of China. He has basically given it up to the Communist Party and remained as a figurehead and realized he wanted a third term. Many images portrayed him as just one of the people, the ping pong player *par excellence*. When Mao regained his power and stature at the outset of the great proletarian Cultural Revolution, he commanded impressionable minions to bombard the headquarters or attack existing power or government structures and thus purge and humiliate high-ranking officials who had done him wrong. When hordes of young Chinese wearing red arm bands converged on Beijing's Tiananmen Square on August 18, 1966, they did not decry the decrepitude of the 73-year-old Mao Tse-tung's communist regime—he's only one year older than McCain. Song Binbin, a young female red guard, presented Mao with an arm band with the motto “Serve the People,” that was pinned to his jacket and became a symbol of the cultural revolution. Mao's orchestrated acceptance of that arm band during this demonstration was not only an affirmation of power, it was insurance that the subsequent Chinese generation exclusively belonged to him. By the way, I'm showing you a number of pictures of him. You never really see his teeth. He never brushed them. So they were black if he smiled, when he smiled. The airbrush had a great effect on improving his look.

Now let's move to Lenin. Lenin sought to give equal hero status to fellow revolutionaries and was apparently extremely reluctant to promote his own heroics. He valued power, not adulation. Nonetheless as the symbolic core of the Bolshevik Revolution, it was inevitable that Lenin would be raised on the pedestal and heroically depicted, if not as a deity, then as the loftiest equal among equals. The most famous and the most reproduced of the Lenin portraits was Lenin on the Tribune, which was done in 1929 after his death. This is it. The first posture depicting Lenin in his characteristic ill-fitting suit, tie and cap, rather than a military or political uniform, was published in 1918. I don't have that here but this is that suit as a piece of tapestry. It was the same year incidentally that he survived an assassination, which added more patina to his grand story. The Lenin cult sparked its own momentum, particularly when acolytes like Poliburo member Grigory Zinoviev conferred divine status on him and said, he is the authentic figure of a leader such as born once in 500 years. As Lenin's health declined, his
unblemished image exponentially increased, as did those who sought to inherit his mantle. He was paired with effigies of Karl Marx, who in this image looks more like God in Rembrandt’s Sistine Chapel than a German philosophy. When Lenin died Stalin took advantage of the leadership vacuum by cunningly outwitting his rivals on the Politburo to become the absolute leader. At the same time he coupled himself to the Lenin cult in order to consolidate both visual and real power. While seemingly content to promote Lenin’s image before his own, it was just a brief ruse before he could consolidate power for himself. The Stalin cult established him as the great leader and teacher of the Soviet people, as well as chief architect and builder of our socialist motherland, and other such hyperbolic honorifics. Blemishes were routinely eradicated, by the way, because Stalin suffered terribly from psoriasis over most of his body and he had a withered arm. Here the airbrush was also a good ally. Stalin portraits could be categorized according to the following characteristics. The Ideologue, where he is shown presiding over Soviet congresses, the progressive, seen at electrical plants, factories and other public works, the friend of the people, shaking hands with the masses, and the pure heroic image, which shows him with and without formal uniform. But never ever in civilian clothes. Stalin was ubiquitous in plaster, bronze, ink or paint, his image not only hung in every museum but in every room of every museum. His statute or bust was found in every bus or train station, every office building and in all parks and public spaces. The photo montage enabled a new kind of propaganda opportunity that wed truth to fantasy, grit to romanticism. In its radically manipulated form, montage was the perfect compliant media tool. He was the man of the people and his image was routinely reproduced on all manner of every day materials from booklets to brochures, stamps and seals to diplomas and certificates. With the costly great patriotic war won, Stalin added victory to his accomplishments and his graphic deification was complete until he died.

We’re going to move on to another section, and that is cult of the kids. The key to totalitarian rule was to capture the children’s hearts and souls. Nothing was more integral to fascist or Italian life in general than its youth. This was Mussolini’s very ubiquitous use of the stencil. So for anybody who thought that it started with skateboarders and hip hop, it didn’t. The cult of the cradle was an aggressive doctrine determine to inject in young boys the mythology of the omnipotent regime whose aim was to transform so-called flowers of faith into soldiers of empire. Relentless propaganda campaigns and the fascistization of schools and youth groups would breed a new cultural order. Teachers were tasked to glorify Mussolini on all occasions and he was appearing in all textbooks. Consistent with Mussolini’s concept of a male leadership governing a female mass, women were excluded from teaching in secondary schools and institutes for higher education but young girls were nonetheless invited into the piccoli Italian, which was the precursor to joining the fascist womanhood. The mystique of youth was a fascist obsession that played out in propaganda built upon the manufactured youthful image of the Duce. News media were prohibited from discussing his grandchildren but countless photographs of the bare-chested Duce were published in newspapers and magazines. Incidentally, this was a handbook for the young fascists, as is this. It’s quite beautifully printed. You can’t really see it here but the typography is lovely and the execution is quite striking. Mussolini encouraged the creation of youth groups that emphasized sports and marshal training in order that its members be fit enough to carry the baton of the fascist movement into the future. Indeed, the shock troops of fascism were originally gangs of raucous youth, a generation
of combatants storming through Italy wearing jackboots, black shirts and carrying death head (?)
flags, while wielding batons. The avant garde giovani fascisti or the vanguardisti was the group
of boys from 15-18 years old. The art work that was used to appeal to them was very
streamlined and deco like. Their journal evolved into a startlingly designed and expensively
produced giovani fascisti, which through its moderne poster-like covers of young vanguardisti
rendered in a streamlined manner defined a graphic style for the fascist youth. After taking
taking power the fascist party abolished most existing government, cultural and church run youth
organization and consolidated all such groups into government based organizations. Boys from
six to eight were called sons of the wolf. The Opera Nazionale Balilla was for boys 8-14 years
old. Balilla was the initial stepping stone toward total indoctrination into party mythology, with
the credo, “Mussolini ha sempre ragione.” Mussolini is always right, repeated daily, it was hard
to escape the propaganda efforts. The fascists tightened their hold on youth in part through
alluring ideological images rooted in the most visible of symbols. The uniform, which was
paramount in establishing conformity, yet underscored an elite within Italian society. Many of
these images were placed on quaderni, the little notebooks school children used to write essays
or take tests. Uniforms were designed with careful attention to detail and style and with each
incremental age level, the regalia including with various shinny badges and insignia increased
in direct proportion to completed indoctrination. The airbrush again became an ideological tool
in making of myths. Fascist artists used the airbrush to streamline human figures into
modernistic effigies. In contrast to the stiff heroic realism of Nazi iconography, fascist youth
involved futuristic nuance, and in fact the futurists were indeed part of the fascist movement.

In 1930 the grand council founded the Fascisti Giovani Documento for boys 18-21. It was the
ideological and military gateway for the new fascist man. Ultimately these groups had one aim:
to prepare Italian youth for military service, which was the primary goal of Campo Duces where
boys learned the techniques of fighting. Believe, obey, fight was one of the mottos of the militia
where action words were coined by Mussolini. Mussolini was the writer. He wrote one novel
and he was very good with words. The fascists worshiped might and celebrated speed, which
was duly represented in modernistic graphics and typography. While Mussolini used the Roman
heritage and some of its imperialist trappings, he did not sacrifice the sense of modernity that
appealed to the young. Colorful drawings of young squadristis illustrated in moderne style
provided a commodious counterpoint to the marshal bombast. Italians retained their national
character, what one might call Mediterranean exuberance, in graphic art design for the young
and the young at heart.

Now we will move on. Being a member of Hitler Youth and the organization of German
maidens, enabled German children to conform to part dictates and build a sanctioned social
community. They were part of a sub-brand and enjoyed the signs and symbols that adhered to
national socialists dictates, that were uniquely oriented for the youth. Hitler Jugend accepted all
Aryan boys and the young maidens all girls ages 14-18. Boys 10-13 belonged to Jungvolk and
girls to the Jungmädel. For boys the HJ was in effect the farm team for the SA, the SS and the
Reich's labor service. The members wore snappy uniforms, went on overnight hikes, played
sports, exercised and earn badges, lots and lots of badges. They were required to spend most of
their free time in Hitler Jugend camps learning the Nazi creed, which included honor, sacrifice,
camaraderie, and yeah, and anti-Semitism. The HJ and BDM grew in size from 6,000 members
in the beginning to millions, building the minds and bodies and emphasizing superiority over their enemies. There was even a junior Gestapo, which monitored other children. I have always wanted to find the artists and ask him, what is that guy thinking? Incidentally, no child was left behind.

Children, and there were plenty of them in China, were all sons and daughters of Mao. They were taught at an early age to be willing propagandists. This is a handbook that teaches children how to do anti-Western propaganda. This taught calligraphy and poster making as well, all done in woodcut, and you can see off on the bottom there the Western leaders of that era being swept away by the brush. Now we will move to the Soviets, the young pioneers were the flowers of the communist future. They were treated to their own visual vocabulary, which blended a little bit of constructivism and futurism. However, eventually it become consumed by turgid socialist realism and the mandates of being a proper party member. You can't run a regime without great signs and logos. The fasces, the ancient Roman symbol of power, was adopted by Mussolini because it conjured a glorious imperial past while projecting a progressive future. The axe blade wrapped by rods symbolized the sharp edge that the fascist yielded against its bourgeois enemies. As many of you probably know, we use the fasce too and it's in the halls of Congress alongside of Vice President Cheney, and speaker of the House or Senate or wherever they are. The term fascio, which eventually became the name of Mussolini’s anti-democratic, pro-militaristic political movement, was a generic term for any extreme factional political group regardless of leaning and was sometimes used for non-political organizations as well. The fasci was also adapted in many different ways, and you will see a few of those from the classic that you saw before to a more modern version you see here on the cover of a children's book. The Italian version of standardization was known as reform of custom. It included changing the Roman calendar so that 1922, when the fascists assume power, became Uno, one. Other transformative policies include altering the linguistic system so that the formal third-person singular lay was officially abolished, replaced by the informal, second-person singular tu or plural voi. There was a magazine that was published at that time called Lay. Of course it has to change its name to Life. All dialects were outlawed as remnants of former inglorious occupations by foreign armies. The flaw in Mussolini’s branding strategy was that despite all the bombastic rhetoric and literary pageantry, Mussolini and mythology represented the appearance and not the substance of fascism. The image-savvy Mussolini devoted more time to publicity than to policy, to the extent that publicity actually became policy. Grandiosity was its own reward for the veneer gave the illusion of authority. He confused pomp with power. This incidentally was a photograph of the 20th anniversary of the fascist revolution. It was a traveling show that started in Rome and ended up throughout Europe including England. It was designed by Propalini and Sironi. It was a futurist design and very impressive, and a very impressive catalog was done as well. You can see the fasci was truly branded everywhere, on the floor, on the ceiling and on the sides of the walls and those sculptural forms. Mussolini paid homage to the grander that was imperial Rome, yet made pastiche and kitsch out of it. Fascist style evolved through various iterations and also famously embraced aspects of radical futurism, art and poetry, as well as the imperial Roman conceit. So committed was Mussolini to managing the trappings of power he insisted on enforcing the most petty rules to maintain the style as he conceived it. His son in law, Count Galeazzo Ciano, who briefly served as fascist minister of press and propaganda, complained that Duce—who eventually killed him—takes care in person
of the minutest details and not of the broadest picture. We are going to move along. Incidentally, he was critical of how his stencils were put on buildings and actually wrote a memo that they had to be at a certain height or the people wouldn't be able to appreciate them.

We are moving to the Nazis and the swastika, which was an ancient symbol of good fortune, with occult implications. Although it had been used by nationalists in occult groups in Germany before the Nazis adopted it, Hitler realized its visual and symbolic power as beneficial to his movement and competitive—and this is very important—he was jealous of the communist mark. With Germany's defeat in 1918 numerous veterans, some members of secret orders and lodges, believing that Jews, communists and republicans betrayed them and profited off defeat, banded together into paramilitary organizations known as the Freikorps and the Stahlhelm or the steel helmet dedicated to fight a civil war for the Fatherland against the traitors. In fact, one of those Freikorps units used the swastika before Hitler every got hold of it. I always wanted to find the banding manual for the Nazi party. I had heard from many people that one existed by no one was ever able to show me. This is as close as it comes. It's the Reich Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, the DAP, the rights workers guild, which oversaw the enticingly titled strength through joy and beauty of work divisions, under the watchful eye of leader Dr. Robert Ley. He maintained the overall visual style and makeup of the party and the publication of this handbook, the organizational handbook of the NSDAP. Published in 1936, over a decade after the original ABCs of national socialist-ness, which laid down the basic party structures, the third and last edition of what you see here was the most inclusive handbook, perhaps the most important banding document and as close to resembling a corporate standards manual as the party came to codifying the Nazi party directives and organizational memorandum. There are also guidelines for party officials through the state culture chambers of the Reich's culture camera, as well as labor fronts and other subsidiary groups. There are three chapters in this book devoted to laws that protected the Reich, the party, German blood and honor, the flag and various signs and symbols. There were laws for the protection of these symbols so that commercial groups could not use them indiscriminately. There were also charts in the back of this book that indicated who was a half Jew, who was a quarter Jew and who was a whole Jew. That was part of the brand. The Nazis pursued a design policy that wed modernism with archaicism, shifting from modernity to tradition as suited the needs of policy or strategy. Assumptions were made as to Hitler's particular tastes and his minions second-guessed his wishes, but he often fooled them. To officially practice graphic design and typography, designers are compelled to join the Reich's culture chambers that represented every art and design and discipline. These replaced the outlawed independent trade and craft unions and it adhered to their regulations. They were formulated somewhere in the bowls of these chambers, the different restrictions and regulations about design for the Nazi state. This is one book that was produced by the DAF and it is their type guide. It offered the various type styles that were officially sanctioned. But interestingly enough in this particular book, there is a sheet like you see here that is credited to Dr. Paul Renner, who is the designer of Futura. Renner also wrote a book about cultural Bolshevism, which was against the Nazis. He was relieved from his teaching position but this one went under the radar and he was given credit for a typeface that people were allowed to use, be it briefly. Minor bureaucrats ultimately determined what all this stuff is about. It is said that it went as high as Hitler, but it is doubtful. A campaign to stamp out non-German lettering was promoted through stickers and slogans admonishing citizens to use
gothic letters or Deutsche Schrift, the indisputable typeface for the German nation. It was also referred to as the Die Schöne Deutsche Schrift, beautiful German script.

Now we are going to move away from that to the Chinese stars, which both symbolized the people of the new China and further implied a heavenly utopian mission. Of course, this is Mao's famous Mao cap, which became a fashion accessory for millions and millions of Chinese, and now you can see it and buy it as a fashion accessory today. This was one of the Red Guard armbands pay homage to Mao and these were the little red books, the Bibles of Maoism, that were created by one of his right-hand men who was later killed in an airplane crash suspiciously, who managed to edit all of Mao's speeches and perhaps add a few of his own into scores of books that were published and millions of copies. Let's turn to the Soviets. When the Bolsheviks seized power of Russia they rejected the symbolic trappings of the aristocratic folly that came before them and all its superstitious authoritarianism. Early Marxists held a Puritanical view of symbolism. They even avoided new symbols used by their communist antecedents. In 1917 the Soviet leader just assumed there was no reason to adapt any state symbols. They just didn't have it. The color red was good enough. Given the concept of maintaining a stateless state, the primary revolutionary flags and banners were simply red, referring back to the Paris commune, when red was used instead of the tri-color to suggest the new political wave. Red was also the color of brotherhood and offered the commune the color of what they then called socialism. The revival of traditional Russian forms called—and I'm pronouncing this wrong, I'm sure—embourgeoisment, injected images of Soviet power into the visual lexicon. The red star whose five points represented the unity of peoples of the five continents finally replaced the Romanoff eagles on the tops of buildings. The hammer and sickle, originally designed as a hammer and plowshare and conceived in 1918 to represent unity of the proletariat and peasantry, was decreed for adoption by all Soviet republics. Although the Bolsheviks denounced the imperial coats of arms as a result of predatory policies of the Czars and emperors, the basic Soviet state seal format remained consistent with the old order. In 1924 a law confirmed by the Second Congress of the Soviets in the USSR, called on the Arms, Flag and Capital of the Soviet Socialist Republic States, made these symbols law and inviolate.

Now we are going to move to the cult of uniformity. By uniformity here I mean two things, both the literal uniform and fealty through consistent branding traits. The Italian fighting leagues members known as the Fascisti were formed into armed squadrons of paramilitary squads who were identifiable by a single consistent piece of apparel, the Camicie Nere, or black shirt. As other coordinated uniform accouterments were too expensive at the time. The wearers, appropriately called the Black Shirts, exerted a significant stylistic influence on politics and fashion, as it brought the two together in a uniquely modern way. Most graphic designers wear black anyway. But Mussolini was not the innovator here. The colored shirt was introduced in Italy during the 1848 Risorgimento, the unification, when Garibaldi's Comicie Rosse, the Red Shirts, battled to end foreign occupations and unify the nation. After WWI the color coded shirts were also found for right-wing of fascist parties in Ireland, in Eastern Europe and even the gold shifts in the United States. Incidentally these sketches here were done by Paulo Garetto, who was a very well known Italian poster artist who did covers for Vanity Fair and for Fortune Magazine. He was here for quite a number of years. He was repatriated to Italy after
the war was over. When he was a young man studying architecture, he went to Mussolini’s rallies and was quite taken by them. But he was not taken by the uniforms. They just didn’t wear anything underneath their shirts. So he designed, with a couple of his friends, these uniforms and wore them to a rally. Mussolini saw them standing before the stage in these beautiful uniforms, and he told an aide I want them for my bodyguards. They were so thrilled until they learned it was a life-long job. Garett eventually got out of it. I know this because I was his pen pal for a number of years before he died. Symbolic gestures reinforced the brand. For instance, Hitler borrowed the Roman salute from Mussolini who instituted it shortly after assuming power as the ideological alternative to the bourgeois handshake. So next time you shake somebody’s hand, think of yourself as bourgeois. Hitler insisted, however, it derived not from Rome but from a mediaeval German practice, but it’s real derivation was clear. In Germany, it’s raised outstretched arm was called the German salute. Along with the greeting Heil Hitler, which substituted for the conventional guten tag, it symbolized fealty to the Fuhrer. It was used by all party members prior to 1933 and after the taking over of power, it was ordered that all civil servants use it as an official greeting. They produced handbooks to show the right way and the wrong way of doing it. Gestures of power were also celebrated in graphic art and often had to do with the hand. The hand and the arm were symbols of power. But graphics were not the only branding tools, and although I don’t have a lot to show you—in fact, I don’t have anything to show you—the Nazis’ ideals were propagated through pageantry, spectacle and song. There were staged managed marches of up to 30,000 SA that could surge for as long as five hours, given the impression of even more people than were actually there. This is a children’s game that used the SA for effect. The technical mastery of the play of light and darkness set a Wagneresque stage on which the Nazi power could be zealously expressed. Anybody who has seen Triumph of the Will will understand that. Uniforms were symbols of status in the Reich. They were given to children, they were given to adults, and everybody had a different sign, symbol, button that represented their respective hierarchy. In the USSR the marriage of industry and agriculture was heroized as you see in this sculpture, as was the glory of the military as seen in this religious-like image. Note the halo above the saintly soldier. This is not unique to the Nazis but it was part of their overall branding strategy, so it’s worth showing here. Without a rather steady diet of rabid anti-Semitic words and pictures, postures, pamphlets and newspapers like Der Stüermer here, there could be no Holocaust. This was design and design for hate. The logo even drips off the page. The slogan on the bottom which appeared on every issue is the “Jews Are Our Misery”. Graphics were key in depicting the rapacious Jew and the subhuman enemy. This was for the Eternal Jew, a propaganda film that had great effect on the populous. The campaign to discredit Jews had to be steady forethought and memorable. Much of it came directly from the Promi, the propaganda ministry. Der Stüermer, however, published a bunch of children’s books, most infamously this one, The Poison Mushroom, a repulsive depiction of the Jew, designed as much for adults as for children, laying out the preposterous lies that justify anti-Semitic policy. Official sanction was required so as to lull the population into tacit acquiescence. Never once was Hitler’s name of image tarnished by association with the anti-Jewish policies, but the implication was clear. Another of Der Stüermer’s books for children compared the Jew with the sly fox. Contrast the innocent Aryan fräulein with the evil menacing seducer. The DAF also published charts delineating who was full, half and quarter Jew, as you see here. They used agricultural imagery which cautioned against interbreeding of the races. Prior to instituting the final solution, even Auschwitz
produced currency, or what is called Lagergeld and stationery for prisoners’ use. There are some amazing books out with art that came out of Theresienstadt and some of the other concentration camps. Somewhere in the bowels of the Third Reich’s bureaucracy, a designer who belonged to the graphics culture chamber produced the basic templates for these camp materials and then turned them over to the camps themselves. Many times inmates were used to create the graphics. In fact, an acquaintance of mine, a friend of mine, survived the camps by working in three concentration camps doing graphics for them, which involved designing signs and postures, as well as pornography for the camp guards. The identification system implemented throughout the concentration camp network was based on an inverted triangle known as the winkle, many made of variously colored fabrics to distinguish homosexuals from habitual criminals from political enemies from Jehovah’s Witnesses from gypsies and of course from Jews. The color and symbol code including concentric circles distinguished one group from another and whether you tried to escape or not and if you survived that escape. It was all highly regimented and branded.

I want to move away from that depressing thought to a more uplifting one, the cult of souvenirs. Producing ephemera as badges of allegiance were common among all regimes and democracies too, as we have seen on the websites for both McCain and Obama. Mao pins and badges, which first appeared in China before the People’s Republic of China and were produced sporadically until the great cultural revolution, were among the most coveted pieces of cultural revolutionary jewelry. Fairly cheap to produce on thin metals, the government made large qualities in hundreds of configurations and different workshops produced them. Here is the chocolate Mao again. You can squeeze it and it goes pow. I’m serious. No, I’m not. Of all the propagandistic memorabilia for exclusive use inside China, the most curious were the thousands of different colorful porcelain figurines and dimensional friezes, the equivalent of three-dimensional postures. They canonized real and symbolic heroes and events of the Chinese Communist Party. I call them cultural revolutionary hummel wear. They were done sometimes quite beautifully and quite intricately and sometimes not so beautifully and intricately. They were given away to Party members as gifts and souvenirs. But there was one stipulation. You had to display it in your home and if you broke it you were up the creek. That’s a militia woman. This one showing male and female workers astride a silver missile — and you can actually see a better version of this if you go to the Asia House. There is a wonderful exhibition where you can see all the socialism realist postures, as big as a wall like that, and you can see where the artists got their rocks off because it's all about craft. I mean, they couldn’t care less I don’t think about the content but making shadows and making highlights, now that turned them on. You see this quite brilliantly. Anyway, here is this little group. It carries the Mao quotation, exceed US and UK. It symbolized Mao’s anti-capitalist economic plans and marked the end of the cultural revolution when propaganda turned outward. Yet among the most prized if eerie of all the porcelains were a variety featuring smiling Red Guard men and women, proud factory workers and patriotic peasants perpetrating cruel although officially sanctioned acts of humiliation on petty bourgeois land owners and other social criminals. Kneeling doggie style, since they were considered criminal dogs, they are given the dunce cap, which is the symbol of perfidy, and forced to wear various signs that indicate their crimes. I would like to end with the cult of stupidity. You can’t have a regime without stupidity. Today, this is a store, department store, in Tokyo that used Nazi iconography
as some of its point of purchase displays. Then finally, this was an ad taken out of a white Aryan resistance magazine, which is very slick and very well designed and sells a lot of products for the budding fascist and neo-Nazi. It also just shows that any sign or symbol can be transposed into something else. Thank you very much. (Applause).

Q&A

GM: Last summer I was in the south of France and I was anticipating and thinking about what to write for this conference and I was reading the Herald Tribune. I came across the review of your book, but I never in some kind of schizophrenic or cognitive dissonance put the two together. I quoted you today and I became amazed, and I read your book. What I spoke on today, the title was “Politics as the Art of Alienated Awe”. I was defining awe as an a-perception of the gift of consciousness and a gratitude to exist. I went through the content(sublime), how you would manufacture a representational sublime. But then there was this moment where I was considering shock and awe of the second Iraq war and how that has entered our discourse and other journalistic or even conversations. I know that it is not a visual image but could you remark on the selling of the Iraq war visually? Shock and awe sounded nice.

SH: Shock and awe is good. Who can't help but be in awe of something. That's a very positive term. Whoever termed it - it may have been David Frum, whatever his name is - was a brilliant use of the term, a brilliant piece of advertising. Then when you take that wonderful combination of words, shock which has both connotations, good and bad, and awe, which I think has great connotations, and then you have all these fireworks on TV. The only things that you can see, you can't help but feel a sense of joy and pride like you are there on the 4th of July. That really worked well. Then, of course, Bush's mission accomplished worked very well.

Q: Is it possible to have a government that doesn't rely upon these strategies that you are showing? That is, aren't all governments to some extent totalitarian?

SH: Good question. I think all governments are indeed branded. We all have our logo and we have subsidiary visuals, seals and symbols and all that. It depends on how it's done. Somebody once asked me at a talk I was giving, what is the difference between this and selling products in a capitalist society, frozen food or whatever? The fact is these things, these totalitarian images, are pushed down the throats of people. They have no real choice. This is what they are going to get and it is going to reinforce the young. It's not going to reinforce the people who are 50, 60, 70 years old perhaps, but it's going to have an effect on those people for whose livelihoods and lives are dependent on whatever regime is going on at the time. What is interesting to me is in contrast with the United States, and I always tell this story, how I was in East Berlin before the wall came down and was on - I can never get them straight - either the Unter den Linden or the Kurfurstendamm, I guess it's the Unter den Linden - and it was so grey and drab and it was overcast and it was sunny over on the other side. I thought, Jesus, I'm living through a cliché. I was walking down the street and I saw the American flag, red, white and blue, on an embassy that was on a side street, which I have later gone back to since the wall is down. It doesn't look as colorful anymore. In fact, it's full of terrorist concrete, which is quite ironic. But I thought, here is the splash of color. What the Americans do, what we have done with our red, white and blue and our various symbols, is allow anybody to use them in
any way. It becomes kitsch, it becomes pastiche, it becomes everything because we, as Americans, own those colors and those symbols. Frankly, it's not a color I would wear to a dance. It's nice that we are given that freedom. Whereas in Nazi Germany, the law of preservation of national symbols disallowed that, in the Soviet Union they were disallowed, in communist China other colors were disallowed. I think all governments need symbols but it's how they legislate them, how they govern them, how they use them. But yeah, we all have to have mental pictures. That's what we are. There is that restaurant in Paris that is run by people who are blind. You go in and there are no lights on. It was something on NPR. But other than that, we all have to have those connections. I think I depressed people.

Q: I was just thinking of Ellen Dissanayake's theory and art and evolution and art being something, we make something special. Or it's a behavior of making special. That kind of led me to think about whether branding and this visual totalitarianism, if you can tell where power resides by where the visual is controlled.

SH: It's a good point. I think in the case of Nazi Germany they understood the power of the visual. Adolf Hitler was the PR guy before he took over leadership. He was a wannabe artist. If anybody ever saw that movie Max, the fictionalized version of young Adolf wanting to be a painter. But there is truth to it. You mentioned the Spotts book when we were sitting there. Goebbels even says, Hitler wanted to be an artist, he never wanted to run the state. So once the state is off and running, he will go back to being an artist again. I think he believed indeed that power was there until, of course, he also saw that you can have the power that he wanted without force. So it's no longer about the visual. It's about what stands behind the visual, which is the violence. Violence itself has a visual component and that I think is where the power is, in violence. That is why some of the imagery for internal use was always somewhat benign. The imagery for external use was violent.

Q: You were just saying a few months ago that Hitler saw himself as an artist. I think immediately of Entartete Kunst. I may be mispronouncing that, the degenerate artist. Did anything like that in your research occur? Did the Italians try anything like that? Did the communists? Because it is such an organized, incredibly well planned out on the part of Steiglitz and some of the others that were in power in Germany at that time. It wasn't just the show itself. It was the attempt to show the German people, this is the right stuff, this is the good stuff and this is what's wrong.

SH: Right. Actually, it's a really long story and I can't go into it except to say there was a power struggle between what were called the Volkists, the people-ists, which was represented by Alfred Rosenberg, the party ideologist and a real asshole, not that they weren't all assholes, and Joseph Goebbels, who was actually a proto modernist, a pseudo modernist. There was this clash between the two, which would be the official Nazi art. Ultimately Hitler came out against modernism, which everybody says is because he couldn't get into the Kunstschule in Austria and that the modernists couldn't paint and he wanted to paint realistically. You can take that for what it's worth. The Degenerate Art show was just one more way of rallying people because people didn't understand what that art was all about. Emil Nolde, the German Expressionist painter, he was an early member of the Nazi Party who was not allowed to paint after the
degenerate art shows and the prohibition on modernism. But Hitler always went back and forth. He allowed for modernism to take place in architecture, particularly in the worker’s areas. They needed lights so he created glass buildings, or allowed for them to be built. But in answer to your question, were there other degenerate art shows, there was always art that was verboten. Definitely in communist countries. A friend of mine, Peter Sís, the children’s book illustrator, when he was in Czechoslovakia, did an album cover for some group and the drawing was an airport and the airport had a wind sock displayed. He had to go through the ideological juror to find out whether the wind sock should go from left to right or right to left, which was great for him because the drawing itself was subversive. So they were focusing on one thing and he got his. Most Eastern European artists learned how to do that quite well.

M: The Polish are great at it.

SH: Exactly. But in every one of these regimes there were these art works that couldn’t be shown. The artists couldn’t get work and there was the official sanctioned art and there was the unofficial art. In the United States, it’s interesting. When we had the WPA, which was celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, we used a kind of socialist realism but it was much more festive, most like the Italians actually. We were a democracy and so were trying to present optimism. Somebody should do a paper just on optimism and propaganda because there are different ways of presenting optimism based on the culture in which you sit. That is the short part of a very long story.

Q: How do you see individuals such as Putin, the leader of Iran or Chavez using branding today?

SH: Well, I have to say I haven’t seen a lot from what is going on now in Russia. Right after the Soviet Union collapsed there was an upsurge in nationalist art, in fact fascist art. I have a whole show that is just about that. But I haven’t seen how it’s been done now. I think what few postures I have seen coming out of what used to be the Soviet Bloc tend to echo the democratic, the postures in democratic regimes, a photograph of somebody with a smiling face and type with their name. I don’t know what is going on with Chavez. In Iran I’m in constant contact with some artists, designers Iran, and their design, not the political stuff but the apolitical stuff, is really quite beautiful. They seem to be allowed to keep working on it as long as they don’t step on any toes, but I can’t really answer that.

Q: Just briefly, Putin just put out a video, Judo.

SH: Oh, Judo.

Q: Yeah.

SH: Yeah. Learn from Vladimir. But I figure he is just hedging his bets in case he loses his job.
Q: Thank you. What you were really looking at totalitarian governments which are essentially in a way secular. I know you can argue about the word secular and so on. That really is the tradition of theocracies. They controlled the branding. The Roman Church controlled its branding. The Egyptians did. I wonder how much that is inherent. The reference was made to Dissanayake before, which is that we use symbols, when we use them in a positive way, to feel togetherness or something or belonging. But it’s when they get out of control like that. But it’s not new.

SH: No. It's not new. The theocratic use, that is the root. In fact, in the Soviet Union they had something called red corners in people's homes, and it was kind of like where the relicary was, where you have your icons and the like. So everything echoed the religious experience. The cross is still the most well known symbol next to the swastika, which was in some cases a religious symbol. They borrowed. It's like the Soviets saying we don't want to have any symbols because it represents a bourgeois past. Then they borrow the symbols from that bourgeois past. It goes to that earlier question, you can't get away from this stuff. You can’t just have vanilla. You can't just have a generic packaging in a supermarket because people are going to go to the Aunt Jemima section and get pancake mix. Do you all remember when there was the white packaging with the black lettering? Well, it wasn't all that appealing. It was cheap. Yes sir.

MH: Okay. Thank you very much, Steve.

SH: Thank you. (Applause)
THE MYTH OF TRUTH, BEAUTY AND NON-POLITICAL ART

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I begin with the unadorned assertion that art is political—all art, all the time, 24/7. By political I mean any social relation, that is, human interaction, involving authority or power. By art I mean any imaginative human expression meant for others. Thus for me and for the purposes of this argument, art is not the object created by the act of imaginative expression, but the lines of flux—think of those elliptical waves of iron filings arcing from pole to pole on a white sheet of paper held over a magnet—that stretch between the object and the viewer/listener/reader. Art is the experience—physical, mental, spiritual—that ensues when one comes into contact with an object (construed broadly) produced through an act of creative expression (also construed broadly) by someone else. Art is a species of influence; art is a certain kind of power over others; art is the exercise of a variety of authority; all art is like this—bad, good, or indifferent, whatever the basis for those ever-shifting determinations. Art is profoundly and simply human, in its source, in its ends, in its effects, from humans for humans. Art is nothing more and nothing less than a change in our temperature brought about by the heat or cold of our seeing and hearing.

Yet the history of art—that is, the record of our talk about art—would appear to be for the very great part, at least, a form of idolatry, a secular liturgy housing a worship of objects, which, through the ritual of our admiration, transcend us, become inhuman, strange, untouchable substances beyond our reckoning and experience. Somehow we have taken something from, by and for us and made it into something alien, albeit worshipfully alien, yet no less monstrous for that worshipping.

So it is that we have resisted the yoking of art with the political, for the former is exalted and the latter is base. We seem to have few illusions about the primitively human quality of politics, the always raw force of power, the intrinsic and undeniable ruthlessness of authority, all authority. We apparently attach politics to the worst aspects of our humanity, to our “lower” instincts of self-preservation and aggrandizement, whereas we have striven to place art in the crown of human achievement, an example of something that miraculously rises above the merely human. Indeed we often describe art as being a bequest of the gods, the result of the momentary gift of inspiration, of the holy breath rushing through us to move our hands to make marks of superhuman significance. All this despite the fact that art actually has its source and end in only us—that it is by, of, and for us, our pretense that it is wholly otherwise notwithstanding.

This pretense of the otherworldly, transcendental nature of art and the abiding inclination to keep art free of the taint of politics fits snugly into other fabrications rising out of the overlong adolescence of our species and its terror of our implacable mortality. For if we can convince ourselves that art is forever, art that we have somehow managed to produce despite our mere
humanity, then perhaps something of us becomes eternal as well:

    I hail the superhuman:

    Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
    More miracle than bird or handiwork,
    Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
    Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
    Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
    In glory of changeless metal
    Common bird or petal
    And all the complexities of mire or blood.

So says William Butler Yeats in his archly modernist paean to the eternal, superhuman art object in his poem “Byzantium.”

I am thus inscribing two narratives here: one the naïve and persistent narrative of everyday art history that seeks to enshrine art above and beyond us, beyond time and circumstance, incident and history, removed from politics; and the other, a counter-narrative, my version of the postmodern pushback against universality and a cultural metaphysics that makes of art something secularly sacred, inviolable and non-political.

While the benefits of metaphysics (including a metaphysics of art) are obvious—an escape from death and the achievement of certainty and clarity amid “All that man is, /All mere complexities, /Amid the fury and the mire of human veins.” to quote Yeats again, the postmodern critique of the traditional Gods of religion and the god of art is difficult to dispute or ignore. Everywhere around us is infinite difference and unending uncertainty, a vast sea clashing values and diverse beliefs, each with an argument for its own validity, which arguments, taken in the aggregate, are also proof of the inevitable contingency of each.

Nowhere can one find a scrap of evidence for a transcendental signified Moreover, there are compelling postmodern arguments now being made by philosophers like Gianni Vattimo and John D. Caputo which find in metaphysics itself its own natural and unavoidable end. Doubt and fluidity are the rightful and unavoidable heirs of certainty and fixedness, they assert, as they have even found a way to re-implant religion into philosophy, albeit a new religion rising out of the death or the “emptying out” of the non-human, omniscient and omnipotent God of old.

Despite the force of this post-metaphysical critique of a priori, universal and eternal verities and deities and their offspring, old habits of thinking continue, precisely because of their appeal to the most ancient and fiercest of our fears, to the terror evoked by the fact of our obscenely transient existence. Thus although we routinely mouth the postmodern mantra, our quotidian practice often runs counter to our words in ways both obvious and insidious. We are
forever sliding back into the blissful embrace of permanent truth, for it is difficult to live, for any time, in the hollow of nothingness.

I've said that politics concerns itself with social relations involving authority and power. I further assert that every human interaction involves authority and power in some way. No human encounter is free of the play of these forces and designs, although, of course, power and authority circulate and reconfigure endlessly—they are not static but fluid and mutable entities across the range and history of human contact. Since, then, I claim that art is social—that it involves the experience of humans with an object made (or arranged, found; you can supply the verb) by other humans, that it is suffused with the consciousness and unconsciousness of both artist and audience and with the desires of each, then this transaction we call art must be political, and as such the movement of power and authority is present in all art.

Here I am following the argument of Sartre, that when a man chooses for himself—and what is art except a particular manifestation of a set of choices—he chooses for all mankind. In other words, locked in our radical subjectivity, each of us, art makers and art consumers included, exerts the force of our will in fashioning ourselves and everyone else, in fashioning existence. That is the use of power and authority, the deployment of politics, at its most basic.

But how specifically is power or authority evident in the experience of art—the power or authority to do what, exactly? One place to look for answers to these questions is in the context of the social interaction of art. The position of the art object, of being looked at, is a position of privilege and hence of authority and power. The object insinuates its power and authority regardless of the reaction of the viewer, even if that reaction is one of “rejection” or bafflement. The art object is always already powerful and in possession of authority simply by virtue of the fact of its display. This power and authority is never wholly either that of the viewer or the maker. Rather the power and authority exerted by art emanates as a result of the object, occasioned by the object, and yet not of the object, a human dynamic infused with both the maker and the viewer but being something different from and uncontrolled by either. The power and authority is thus exerted multi-directionally and unpredictably—backwards toward the artist and forward to the viewer and in all other directions into the ether of culture, into the specific time and place when and where the object is placed.

I am concentrating here on the most elemental and most potent emanation of the political in art. I am ignoring other tangential and mundane but nonetheless important ways art is infused with the political, such as the individual power and influence of specific artists who can guarantee that their art is seen, or the galleries that have accrued (how exactly is important) the authority to choose this art and not that to show, or the authority of those privileged viewers who decide (again, how and why is crucial) what art objects become canonized and which must be denied entry to that shining realm. These are examples how art is politicized outside of or after the moment of its coming into being, remembering that this moment of creation is not that instant when the object’s fabrication has been completed by the artist, but when the object meets the gaze of another, and the dynamic reaction is set off, its reverberations rippling heedlessly outward.
As I’ve said, these are important considerations, but I am more interested in how art itself, in its very being, is intrinsically political, before it is acted upon, further politicized by other agents. If one accepts that the very display of art by itself exerts power and authority, then what is the nature of this power and toward what is this power turned? To what end is art’s authority exercised? Within every art object is the whole world, in all its teeming complexity and contradiction. A figure painting is not simply a representation of human form, but of all of history and the present, all civilization and nature, all space and time. Everything, literally, lurks behind and informs that figure: the painting or a photograph or a short story or a poem is a window to everything that is and was. And yet this image is always only itself; that is, the whole world while being present is present only by virtue of a kind of uni-vision constructed within the dynamic of the art.

That makes the figure a certain kind of figure and the world, though whole and complete, a certain kind of world. The fact of the presentation of not “the” world but of a specific world is a political act because that presentation is made and not another, not any other. The act of presentation of that figure and the resultant reaction to it has the force of creating a world of a certain type, of a specific shape and meaning made up of certain choices and decisions, with a particular distribution of authority and according to a specific idea of the truth. That is an act of power and influence. In fact, the world that we “know” and experience is nothing more than presentation, representation, declaration and reception made by such uses of power and authority; and thus the world is constantly being made and remade by these acts, and so we might say with some justification that this power and authority to make and remake the world is the highest sort of political power and authority there is.

If this is so, and I believe it is, then to ignore or deny that art is political is not a benign or insignificant act. Rather it is an act of malicious and far-reaching disingenuousness; it is an act of deceptive and malign self-interest. Such a denial would excuse us from the responsibility for what we do and have done and would hide our use of power and authority, our politics, under the snow white mantle of an impossible guilelessness. It would disguise our selfish motives and camouflage our bad acts. To deny that art is political in this fundamental sense is a refusal to accept the constitutive but contingent creative force of art that fashions a certain version of reality stroke by stroke (and we must remember that is all there is—imaginative versions of reality, products of incessant and necessary interpretation). To deny that art is political is to claim that it is not human, that it is not part of the force that makes and remakes us and the world by certain presentations and representations and their reception and interpretation.

Still, one might argue that such willful ignorance of the constitutive responsibility of art may arise from nothing more than fear or simply flow from a strategy to gain a measure of reprieve and peace in a turbulent and unstable world where the sum of our choices is our only reality. We may have no grander designs, no darker purpose, we may wish to wield power over nothing more than our own anxiety. Yet if we find ourselves (not by chance surely) in sites of art making, shackled with the dubious task of teaching something there, teaching anything, we must realize that not only is art political but surely teaching is doubly so. To deny our political activity, that is to deny that like art, teaching is always and everywhere political, is nothing
short of perfidy; it is the worst sort of the breaking of our fragile faith with our students and with ourselves. Thus our fear and ignorance can not and should not excuse us.

In my view, teaching can not and must not be the practice of a metaphysics, nor can it rest upon a denial that a profession of an a priori set of universal and eternal truths or any criteria founded upon a presumed transcendental signified is in fact the practice of a metaphysics. For incipient in metaphysics, philosophers have told us, is violence—a violence in aid of a power and authority that are wielded to make certain that the iron orthodoxy of metaphysics, any metaphysics—like the one that drove the planes into the twin towers or that which prodded the crusaders eastward, the one that celebrates the virtue of free markets or the one that awaits the withering away of the state—are practiced by everyone. One doubter, one resister, not quickly eliminated, can destroy the necessary perfection and certainty that the metaphysics promises for the rest of us.

Teaching, or we should say, learning, must not depend on the threat of violence, of any sort, in the defense of what the teacher professes. The true teacher must remain defenseless and without the sweet but false succor of metaphysical belief, which is to say nothing more than the genuine teacher must always acknowledge his or her necessarily provisional beliefs. Acknowledge them as mere shots in the endless dark, however much we tell ourselves (and have been told by our similarly unseeing mentors) that we have been rigorously trained to aim as if we had actually managed to crawl out of the cave and into the blinding light. That is why if we are to remain humane in the practice of our dubious profession, we must, at a minimum, openly and continually re-declare our shaded politics, our blinkered version of reality, and remind ourselves and our students that art, and every other human expression, is always political.

Living out such a declaration will not make things easier for us, will not finally bring us into a world of perfect and permanent light; indeed, the opposite is true. For it is in darkness and difficulty that human destiny lies and where if a true light is ever to be glimpsed at all, it will be fashioned by our own uncertain hands.

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Technology has come to be regarded by many philosophers and theorists as having emerged as the off-spring of science, concomitant with the industrial revolution and the introduction of the machine age. Hannah Arendt, for example, defines technology as “the transformation of life and world through the introduction of the machine”1 While Arendt is insightful with regard to the complexities of science and the environmental crisis they have provoked, her definition is much too restrictive and unnecessarily narrows her insights. Nevertheless, her analyses provide a helpful conduit into the problematic of labor, work and their impact on the alienation experienced in a technological orientation towards the world.

Arendt does not allow herself to be trapped by the “all-too-exclusive” concentration on debating the service or disservice that machines render to humanity. Instead she is concerned to question the ceaseless channeling of nature’s processes into the human world. In The Human Condition Arendt describes “Modernity” as forcing the destruction of the world “qua”, “a dwelling place more permanent and more stable than humans themselves,”2 into the materiality of human domination. She arrives at this description through a return to the early Greek thinking, the conception of the “polis” and the historical distinction between labor and work. While this distinction remains problematically general, it does facilitate valuable access to her analysis of the crisis of technology.

Retrieving the distinction between laboring body and working hands Arendt refers the reader to the Greek word “ponein” that associated labor with pain and frustration and “ergon” that associated work with artistic generation or fabrication.3 This distinction emerged in the Indo-European languages and remains installed in the French contrast between travailler and œuvre and the German distinction between arbeiten and werken.4 The Western contempt for labor, associated with slavery and bondage to necessity, resides in these distinctions. Labor is humanity’s punishment, as in the myth of Prometheus, or an evil that escapes Pandora’s box.5 It is the struggle for freedom from labor that makes inevitable a strictly stratified society partitioning the laborer or slave from those who seek to attain the noble life and aspire to a humanity above animality. But this freedom is impossible without the leisure provided by the bondage of both slaves and women. Work, ergon, as distinct from the labor of the body, is edifying production directed towards the useful rather than the necessary. Named after Eris, the goddess of good strife, the model for ergon is the production of the craftsman. This repetitious activity, while still utilitarian, concerns itself with objects which enhance the wealth of citizens. The worker, homo faber, is not only the wielder of tools but also possesses the conceptual plans of an end product and employs the means to bring it forth as a product. Here human activity is understood to be fabrication. “Fabrication cannot help regarding all things as means to their ends, or as the case may be, judging all things by their specific utility.”6 It is this knowledge that is the basis for the construction of the human world apart from the physical exertion of “animal laborans”.
*Homo faber* is described by Arendt as he who conducts himself as lord and master of the whole earth while “animal laborans” remains his servant. He is the prototype of modern technological man. The entire progress of civilizations is to be judged on this model of human existence. Through rational development the builder fabricates a world rather than simply employing tools to ease the laborious toil of necessity. He expands knowledge always directed towards the useful and “for the sake of”. His reality depends on understanding himself as an investigator and a problem solver. As a subject he resolves and masters the objects of his inquiry. This subject/object dominion leads to understanding non-human resistant matter as standing over and against. “Materiality” is a basic category that defines the means or potential means towards some final form, still formulated in terms of causation. As with Aristotle, it is the stuff to be molded into efficient formations and has no value until so directed. In the processes of fabrication the “thing” character of the products of labor is raw material. This objectification compels a comportment towards nature that subjects all of the earth to undergo an alienating bifurcation from human existence. But the incalculable effect is counter to the motive for this building. More and more human existence finds itself homeless, mired in the exhaustive utility that defines “Modernity”. Arendt cites the greatest expression of this in Kantian ethics.7

The second formulation of the categorical imperative presupposes and installs a radical distinction between persons and things. For Kant, ethical treatment is owed only to persons, exempt from treatment as means to an end. All else is relegated to the opposing category of the “thing” and can rightfully be used for the ends of those who rationally stand apart in the domain of privilege. For Arendt, Kant’s kingdom of ends marks the ethical boundaries of subjectivity in its most extreme form of *homo faber*. Inherent in this thinking, indicative of “Modernity” itself, is the danger of crass humanism and the tyranny of Reason.

“Modernity” is the end product of early Greek thinking and has its inevitable formation in subject/object, means/ends dichotomies. The ultimate end product is an exhaustive anthropocentric world, a fabricated world wherein the user is its own ultimate end and “progress” is the direction towards this end. All existence is dominated by this model of subjectivity, the decisive ethico-religious attitude towards self and other. The rational subject is provided with a fabricated identity and philosophical license to pursue absolute, totalizing knowledge. “Man, in so far as he is *homo faber*, technologizes, and this instrumentalism implies a degradation of all things into their loss of intrinsic and independent value...”8

Arendt sees Marx’s theories as erecting a glorification of labor in the classless society of communism in which human existence can no longer be regarded as bestial and demeaning, nevertheless, alienated all the more. If none are left out of the potential rational order of worker and all men are to be truly human only when allowed to function freely as *homo faber*, all will be equally divorced from the earth. In such a totally pervasive theory of productive labor the ancient Greek distinction between labor and work disappears, replaced by the idea that society can become a socialized humanity. Rightfully, Arendt does not regard Marxism as a radical departure from the tradition. Instead it exacerbates and extends the most pernicious of all alienating values of the Greek world. Marxist commitment to the belief that man acquires his authenticity through the espousal of an unchallenged notion of labor provides no remedy to the most fundamental alienation at the heart of Western thinking. Says Arendt:
The contempt for labor in ancient theory and its glorification in modern history both take their bearing from the subjective attitude or activity of the laborer, mistrusting his painful effort or praising his productivity.\(^9\)

As long as work ascends to the highest of human activities, domination, destruction and opulent consumption will be heralded as the hallmark of human existence. Subjectivity will guarantee itself comfort through religion and the achievements of imperial science, ensuring a demeaning relation to oneself, others and the fruits of one’s own labor.

[T]he tragedy is that in the moment homo faber seems to have found fulfillment in terms of his own activity, he begins to degrade the world of things, the end and end product of his own mind and hands...\(^{10}\)

Both Arendt and her professor, Martin Heidegger, solicit a retrieval of thinking that has fallen to oblivion since the Greeks. This thinking has no foreseeable or predictable usefulness. It has not been annihilated by instrumentalism but is to be sought in the very danger of its pervasiveness. Building and fabrication entreat some remembrance of “dwelling”. Building is not a means to dwelling. According to Heidegger: “Building in the sense of preserving and nurturing is not making anything.”\(^{11}\) Building responds to a summons to which we must attend. To build is itself already to dwell, but the way and place of dwelling has been forgotten. Man is not exclusively a fabricator. While we take for granted that all legitimate thought is determined by the context of means/ends relations, there is a thinking that leads in a direction of creativity devoid of instrumentality. Western societies have always been suspicious of deviation from the norm of instrumental thinking, and, in this vain, Arendt specifically recounts the Greek conflict between art and politics so well illustrated in Book Ten of Plato’s Republic. According to Arendt, keeping the conflict alive and not leveled out to indifference may well account for the extraordinary beauty and proliferation of classical Greek art. Yet, deemed unfit for citizenship, the artist wages an ancient war with social norms and is a threat to the existence of the polis. The mutual mistrust must result in conflict and this conflict “cannot and must not be resolved”.\(^{12}\) I shall return to this non-resolution.

Modern politics derives its origin form the Greek “polis”, a realm of speech and action. To be a free citizen in the city-state meant words and persuasion were decisive. Unlike the household, the private place of despotism, the public realm is not driven by necessity. For the Greeks it was the hedge against the futility of individual life and the space opening to the and the world of relative permanence. Arendt’s common world of the political is based on the assumption that the world is finite, and in anticipation of its diminishment, the political gains its strength. Most importantly it is the sphere of whatever freedom there may be and for Arendt is the place where art and culture meet.

A distrust palpitates within the Greek “polis” that can be seen in the famous treatment of the artists in Book Ten of Plato’s Republic. As Arendt reads this tension it is indicative of the Greek’s suspicion of fabricators. For the Greeks, the disconnect between the love of the beautiful and those who may produce beautiful things reminds us that the artist is not the same
as the lover. Thus the artist does not stand in the same relation to the public realm as the art work. Indeed political activity is often distrustful of the artist and the artist cannot neither provide nor protect the space for the preservation of the beautiful. The conflation of the artist, whether it be in terms of intention or expression, is the relegation of the art work to the vicissitudes of subjectivity, ownership, commodification and communication; all signals of a degenerate state.

Arendt’s analysis of the Greek polis and our inheritance of it comes from her questionable distinction between Greek and Roman civilization. As she reads the ancients, because of their oblivion of the essence of work (Werken), the Greeks came to consider the world as an amalgam of fabrication. Agriculture, for example, is a matter of skill and violent imposition. But with the Romans, culture (colere) emerges as the vehicle whereby the stress is on preservation. Art and culture belong together bound by care from which culture is derived.

The political is its proper sense gives shelter to the imperishability of art for without the sheltering of culture, all human life would descend into crass utility and banality. When the political is the instrumental, the world of art and culture is obliterated. But this danger exists in the utilization of art for consumption and entertainment as well as totalitarianism. And this is the crisis of “Modernity”.

The fine arts should be the paradigm of political action, that which Brecht and Benjamin designated as the aestheticization of politics. Political action is not to be understood as determined by universal principles and the drive for unity. Political action is per formative and dialogical. “[T]he reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised.”13 Art is the most faithful expression of a civilization and the spirit (Wesen) of time and place.

Great action is per formative and as such is form-giving, the possibility of the creation of new forms transforming and reconfiguring in an Apollonian sense. It is only in this sense that a human being is free. Homo faber has no grasp of the meaning of this action and even the artist, as a species of homo faber, may fail to comprehend its importance.

One may be tempted to compare this aestheticization to the Nazi nationalist aestheticism, the exaltation of art as a destiny of a people reinforced by the agency of the state. But the difference is the means/end understanding that Arendt so emphasizes and the very understanding of the world that art allows to shine forth. The aestheticization of the Nazi inclination was to base the state on universal principles and the “we” on a totalizing model of authenticity as nationality. What constitutes the common or the we is blood. In her repudiation of this drive to totalitarianism and sovereign subjectivity Arendt sees the Nazi exaltation of art as Nietzsche’s “resentiment.” Art opens and erects a world not of individuals or nations but of the futurial presencing of truth that bestows a people in an historical sense with its historical identity. What constitutes the common or the “we” is language. Because art always returns to language it is not just a cultural event amongst others.
While Arendt understands works of art to be intensely worldly, their durability is preserved as they are untouched by the “corroding effect of natural processes,” and are impervious to the destructiveness of human use. It is in the work of art and nowhere else that the “sheer durability of the world of things appear in such purity and clarity.” In the work the thing world reveals itself as “the non-mortal home for the mortal being.” Art works provide a reliable home and “transfigure” the vicissitudes of nature and human avarice.

It is as though world stability had become more transparent in the permanence of art, so that a premonition of immortality, not the immortality of the soul or of life but of something immortal achieved by mortal hands, has become tangibly present, to shine and to be seen, to sound and to be heard, to speak and to be read.

One may ask if this analysis of the political would be mired in relativism. First of all, this charge would impose a metaphysical bipolarity on Arendt’s thinking that it seeks to resist. In anticipation of this response, Arendt surprisingly solicits Kant’s Third Critique. This is surprising since Heidegger and Arendt have seen Kant to be the paradigmatic figure of Modernity in whom the oblivion of Being is most pronounced in the all-pervasive Subject.

But Arendt reads Kant’s taste theory of disinterest as having import for it seriously addresses the public with a means of judgment that brackets all appeals to existence or truth or utility. From the perspective of disinterest appearances are entreated to stand forth and it is from this perspective that one is open to the world as it shows itself as one is open to the art work as it shows itself devoid of any appeal to value or use. Kant describes “taste” as a kind of “common sense”. Accordingly, political judgments and judgments of taste involve deliberation and persuasion. “For judgments of taste, the world is the primary thing, not men, neither man’s life nor his self.” The same can be said of judgments of political action in Arendt’s analysis of the political although certainly not Kant’s.

At this juncture, perhaps one would anticipate some conclusion, some evaluation of Arendt’s conjunction of art and politics. But the reader would remain dissatisfied with such a conclusion. But what would such dissatisfaction signal? That thinking, proper philosophical thinking, must be under the reign of fabrication, with a proper end in view? To solicit the thinking of which Heidegger and Arendt elude one must drop the demands of such conclusions. One must solicit a thinking that is different to that of homo faber. There are no precise directions referencing where that thinking is to be retrieved, only indicators. To answer, explain, dispel, resolve the technological crisis would require a solution of skilled thinking, a fabricated result decisive in the very thinking that has brought us before the problem. In her wisdom, Arendt attempts no such solution. Perhaps, instead, we may read her work as continuing great action and speaking through the efficacy of her words.

The modern age, with its growing world-alienation, has led to a situation where man, wherever he goes, encounters only himself. All the processes of the earth and the universe have revealed themselves either as man-made or as potentially man-made. In the situation of radical world-alienation, neither
history nor nature is at all conceivable. This twofold loss of world—the loss of
nature and the loss of human artifice in the widest sense, which would include
all history—has left behind it a society of men who...either live in desperate
lonely separation or are pressed together in a mass.\textsuperscript{18}

In such a society there would be no art, no thinking and no dwelling. The conflict that cannot
and should not be resolved seemingly offers what hope there is to be found in Arendt’s
writings. It seems appropriate to depart from her thought so conflicted.

NOTES

p. 151.
6. Hannah Arendt, \textit{Eight Exercises in Political Thought: Between Past and Future} (New York:
MARXIAN LIBERATION, THEOLOGICAL LIBERATION, AND AESTHETIC LIBERATION

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There is a tradition of associating liberation with art. For Hegel, the goal toward which history is marching is freedom,¹ and the history of art is part of the general march of history toward complete realization of Absolute Spirit. Schopenhauer proposed that one of the values of art is that it has the power to quiet the forces of the will and thereby reduce human misery, and find peace without desires. This Hindu and Buddhist theme turns art into a grand role in human life, to liberate humans from suffering. George Dickie in his defense of the institutional theory of art claims that one of the advantages of this theory is that the absence of any strictures on art encourages “freshness and exuberance” in art making.² In the tradition of these grand traditions, I propose to explore in this paper connections between Marxian liberation, liberation theology, and the arts.

1. MARXIAN LIBERATION

Marx never developed a systematic theory of art. Yet, there is a sense in which art, or perhaps more broadly, the aesthetic, is central to Marx’s thought.³ From his 1844 Manuscripts onward, a central theme in Marx’s writings is that humans are distinctive in their productive powers, but even more so by their creative productive powers. “The whole character of a species resides in the nature of its life activity, and free conscious activity constitutes the species character of man. . . . Man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness.”⁴ But for Marx this creative making of humans has for much of human history been alienated. Our essential nature, to create freely and creatively, has been thwarted. This frustration of our true nature has many causes. For Marx, the most significant is the alienation of labor under capitalism. The lives of workers have become entirely dependent on the capitalists, and the production process instead of being free and creative, is, within the modern factory system, done under the constraints of the assembly line. Under capitalism, “labor has lost all semblance of self-activity and only sustains [the worker’s] . . . life by stunting it.”⁵ There is a sense in which under capitalism the creator (the worker) is consumed by his creations.

We have seen that within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker,- that all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become means of domination and exploitation of the producers; they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, they destroy the actual content of his labour by turning it into a torment; they alienate from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they deform the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labor process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and
drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital.\(^6\)

In *Capital*, Marx does not condemn machinery as such. Rather he argues that under capitalism, the extra productive capacity of machinery does not go to the worker or to shorten the work day, rather it goes to the capitalist:\(^7\) “It [the extra productive capacity of machinery] confiscates the whole of the workman’s disposable time, by immoderate extension of the hours of labour.”\(^8\)

Marx also notes that machinery, because of its devaluation of muscle labor, allows women and children to work in factories.

Moreover, workers must learn to adapt their movements to the machine.\(^9\) The worker becomes a “mere living appendage” of the machine. “The miserable routine of endless drudgery and toil in which the same mechanical process is gone through over and over again, is like the labour of Sisyphus.” Factory work “confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity.”\(^10\)

The separation of intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour, is, as we have already shown, finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery. The special skill of each individual insignificant factory operative vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of labour that are embodied in the factory mechanism and, together with that mechanism, constitute the power of the “master.”\(^11\)

The worker has to conform to the “regularity of the complex automaton.”\(^12\)

In a famous passage of the German Ideology, Marx describes his alternative to the destructive tendencies of capitalism and the factory system.

For as soon as the distribution [division] of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without every becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.\(^13\)

Marx in this passage imagines—despite his earlier harsh criticism of the utopian socialists (Francois Fourier, Saint-Simon, Robert Owen)—a world in which all work is performed like an artist. The overcoming of the alienation of labour will usher in a liberation from the bonds of the division of labour and the emancipation of human creativity. Work for the first time will be free, creative and spontaneous, and in accordance with human nature. And work, no long be
Marx has a very romantic view of the artist. He appears to think that artists work in response to creative impulses; and that their work is always spontaneous and creative. Only in his late work, *Capital*, does he express some reservations about his earlier ideal of the worker. He suggests that the future social regulation of production in industry will be like symphony performers following the direction of the conductor. All members perform their function willingly, yet under the discipline of the conductor.15

Work performed in a creative, spontaneous way would also, for Marx, affect the way we take and appreciate our surroundings. Marx shared with Hegel and Schiller the assumption that bourgeois society had lost its aesthetic sensibilities and hence was incapable of great art, and it had lost its aesthetic sensibilities because it sees everything through its exchange value, that is, as commodities. Under communism, by contrast, instead of viewing all, including other persons, as commodities to be bought and sold, workers will, for the first time, appreciate things and persons for their own value and not only their exchange value.

In sum, I have suggested that an aesthetic theme is central to Marx’s philosophy. Humans are makers, creators, and the fullest human life is one of free and self-conscious creative practice on the model of the way Marx believes that artists work.16 William Adams comments that Marx’s aesthetic sensibilities were formed around a traditional, highly individualized, and romantic vision of art.17 Although in his later writing, Marx become much more analytic in his diagnosis of capitalism, he never let go of this utopian vision.

As a transition to the next section, I shall end this first section with a brief note on Marx’s position on the role of religion in human alienation. For Marx, religion is also alienating, but its role in the alienation of humanity is minor and secondary compared to the alienation of labor. The alienation of religion arises because “the more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself.”18 And Marx assumes without argument that religion is a purely human projection; it is the imaginary realization of what humans (not gods) ought to be. “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”19 This idea is straight from Ludwig Feuerbach; but Feuerbach made this the principal form of human alienation. For Marx, the principal form of alienation is labor, and the alienation of religion will disappear as a consequence of the overcoming of the alienation of labor. The new order and the new human person will feel no need for religion and hence it will fade away.

2. LIBERATION THEOLOGY

There is a sense in which all theological systems of ideas are about liberation. As John Hick has often pointed out, four of the world’s major religions, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, each speak in their different ways about a movement from a “radically unsatisfactory state to a limitlessly better one.”20 Within Judaism and Christianity, this is a movement from fallenness to a relationship with a loving and merciful God; for Hinduism from...
the illusion of maya to the “Being-Consciousness-Bliss of Brahman”; for Buddhism a life pervaded by dukkha to Nirvana or Sanyata (emptiness of ego).21 Hick suggests that this movement in all of the major religions may be referred to broadly as “salvation/liberation/enlightenment.”22 If this is the common notion of liberation in all of the major world religions, what is distinctive about “liberation theology”?23

Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the leading figures in the development of liberation theology in the twentieth century, argues that the theme of liberation has ancient “biblical and theological traditions.”24 He proposes that there are three senses of liberation within these traditions. First, liberation from the “immediate causes of poverty and injustice, especially with regard to socio-economic structures.”25 Second, “liberating human beings of all those things—not just in the social sphere—that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity.”26 This is liberation in the sense of “consciously making onself.”27 By this, Gutiérrez seems to mean our internal compulsions, especially those which are self-centered, which prevent us from self-realization (e.g., personal addictions, obsessions, and consumerism). Gutiérrez refers to these three as “three levels of meanings of a single, complex process” in which each level is interdependent upon the other.28

This last notion of liberation, Gutiérrez suggests, avoids naïve optimism or utopianism which denies the role of sin (any act which breaks a relationship with God and other persons).29 This comment is directed to Marx. But, Gutiérrez continues, sin is not regarded as an individual, private, or merely interior reality. Rather it is “regarded as a social, historical fact, the absence of fellowship and love in relationships among persons, the breach of friendship with God and with other persons, and, therefore, an interior fracture—a personal one.”30 Thus there is a “collective dimension to sin.”31 “Sin is found in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of humans by humans, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races, and social classes.”32 And echoing Marx, Gutiérrez proposes that sin is “the fundamental alienation.”33

It is the first sense of liberation which has the most relevance to aesthetics. This form of liberation challenges the Marxist assumption that Christianity eschews the poverty of life here and now and perhaps even embraces it as enhancing lives toward God, toward the other-worldly. For Gutiérrez, this is a fundamental misunderstanding of Christianity. Poverty is both physically and spiritually oppressive and prevents one from any kind of development, including spiritual development. Jon Sobrino echoes this. He points out that the notion of the Kingdom of God is in present times central to the Hebraic tradition. Israel passed through many vicissitudes of tragedies and triumphs, but always with trust that God would carry it through.34 Israel, Sobrino notes, did not relegate God to the “nebulous beyond, but experienced God passing through its history, and in very concrete ways.”35 Gutiérrez echoes this. He refers to the gospel of Mark: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1: 14-15). Gutiérrez proposes that the kingdom of God is not “something purely interior which occurs in the depths of our souls.”36 It must include a transformation of unjust social and economic structures to ones that are just.
III. ART AND LIBERATION

Now what does this have to do with art? As noted above, Marx’s vision of a society in which work is performed such that one can be a hunter in the morning, a fisher in the afternoon, and a critic in the evening is probably modeled on his conception of the artist. But in light of the way that the industrial revolution has unfolded, this is a purely utopian vision. [It may have been possible in a pre-industrial society; but it is little more than a fantastical dream in an industrial society.] And Marx’s image of the way artists work—spontaneously, creatively—reflects an image of the artist which emerged only during the Romantic era. Bruce Cole observes about the Renaissance artist that

the very notion that an artist had to accede to so many of the patron’s orders opposes our romantic ideas about art as a cathartic personal expression. These beliefs were, of course, alien to the Renaissance artist. Nor did the artist think, as we do today, that any restriction would be damaging to the spirit and form of his art. And in truth they were not.

Marx’s image of the way artists work is an image which was not true of most of the history of art and may have never been an accurate description of the practice of artists. For most the history of western art, artists were craftsmen in the sense that they were given specific projects, subject matter, colors, size and all, and their task was to translate these instructions into artifacts. But even after the concept of the artist began to change, gradually during the Renaissance, and culminating in the modern concept of the artist during the Romantic era, much of the work of artists remains the application of tedious craft skills to the production of the art work.

But there is an insight in Marx’s vision which has value. Marx saw that life has become completely separated from art. Work in industrial capitalism has become repetitive, a mindless grinding out in order to subsist. Work is performed for the sake of survival, or in the contemporary west for the sake of maintaining a certain level of consumerism. Marx proposed that there is another model for work, and he took his model from the way he thought artists work. Although I have suggested that this model is utopian in a negative sense, nonetheless Marx’s model of work that is integral to and a desirable part of living, again taken from his conception of the artist, remains a model worth pursuing.

And liberation theology responds to Marx’s critique of religion. For Marx, religion is the projection of human energy into the other-worldly and as such undermines all attempts at reform in this-worldly material conditions. Part of the solution for Marx is to get rid of the God illusion and to realize that humans are the gods of the universe. Only then will humankind be liberated from the oppressiveness of religions and realize its full potential. But Marx, in contrast to his intellectual mentor, Ludwig Feuerbach, proposes that such a change in consciousness is not enough. It is necessary to change the economic system, to rid humankind of oppressive capitalism, and to usher in a new liberated age, liberated from producing objects for another which then turn on and oppress the worker. Only then will workers be able to express themselves fully and in an aesthetic way. Marx’s vision here is again very aesthetic. “The forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present.”
Instead of experiencing all objects for their exchange value, the work will for the first time fully appreciate human artifacts. Marx uses the example of a dealer in mineral. Under capitalism, he sees only their utility and their possible possession. But under communism, the worker will see the beauty and unique character of minerals.40

The great advance of liberation theology over the Marxist program is that it seeks to integrate the material with the spiritual. Liberation theologians have new interest in the Hebrew Bible in part because of its carnality, its earthy realism. But liberation theologians do not jettison the spiritual and other-worldly. They propose that it is possible to liberate ourselves from the oppressions of social and political systems without abandoning the spiritual. The Kingdom of God is both here and now and at some future time, and liberating humankind from the oppressiveness of poverty and political repression is part of the human pilgrimage toward fulfilling the Kingdom of God, partially now, in completion at some distant future time. As the theologian N. T. Wright expresses it in his recent book, Surprised by Hope, Christian hope should not be expressed in terms of “going to heaven,” of a salvation which is essentially away from this world,” but “for God’s new creation, for ‘new heavens and new earth,’” and that hope has already begun.41

Art can play an important role in this transformation. Art can liberate us from oppressive materialism, especially modern consumerism, but without being an escape into pure spirit. The visual arts especially are a unique blend of physicality and spirituality. They appeal to our senses in a very direct way and yet they are not utilitarian objects, and there are ideas behind a good work of art, indeed, sometimes a worldview (more on this shortly). Works of art, at their best, integrate body and soul, fleshiness and spirit, the tactile and the cerebral.

Douglas Morgan suggests something like this when he proposes that art has the power to enhance our feelings, imagination, and senses.42 And enhancing our sensibilities can result in more richly varied and satisfying lives. James Ackerman cites Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergere (1881) as an example of the power of art to transform an ordinary event (a woman standing behind bar) into a magical experience. The ordinary world, he proposes, is transformed and exalted. Of course, not all works of art do this, but a surprising number do have this power.

In his recent book, The Accidental Masterpiece, New York Times art critic Michael Kimmelman tells how Pierre Bonnard lived for much of his life in a modest home with his model-wife (eventually, after decades of living together) Marthe in Le Cannet. But he “made a world out of his little villa and garden.”43 Bonnard shows, Kimmelman writes, that “a circumscribed world can be made to seem enormous through a rich enough imagination.”44 He explored his small world every day, and over time, it became more and more fantastical.45 He wrote in his diary that after his morning walk, he would go to his studio to paint, but before beginning, “I reflect, I dream.”46 He painted Marthe, gaily patterned rooms, the countryside through open windows; but what a magical world.

Nelson Good argues that this is precisely what good art does. He proposes that art is a way of worldmaking, that it can make new worlds. For Goodman the “the arts must be taken no less
seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge in
the broad sense of advancement of the understanding . . . .”47 Art offers visions, not simply
depictions.48 “Pictures may make and present facts and participate in worldmaking . . . .”49 But
Don Quixote is a fictional character, one may protest, and hence not part of the world of
scientists and biographers. And of course “‘Don Quixote,’ taken literally, applies to no one, but
taken figuratively, applies to many of us.”50 Goodman calls this “metaphorical truth.”51 But
what about purely abstract paintings and other works of art which have no subject? Goodman’s
response is that “our worlds are no less powerfully informed by the patterns and feelings of
abstract works than by a literal Chardin still-life or an allegorical ‘Birth of Venus.’”52 Arthur
Danto with his usual wit and elegance expresses the same idea this way.–“What . . . is
interesting and essential in art is the spontaneous ability the artist has of enabling us to see his
way of seeing the world—not just the world as if the painting were like a window, but the world
as given by him.”53

NOTES

   that to be free for Hegel is to be “at home in the world,” that is to overcome all alienations.
   “Freedom is the progressive achievement of man’s complete adjustment to his environment, to the
   world of fellow man, to his nation and its past.” J. Glenn Gray, Hegel and Greek Thought (NY:
   Harper Torchbooks, 1941), 5. Freedom is finding oneself at home in the world through the
   reconciliation of all conflicts. And for Hegel, this is ultimately nothing other than the complete
   fulfillment of Absolute Spirit.
4. Karl Marx, Early Writings, trans. Rodney Livingstone & Gregor Benton (NY: Random
5. The German Ideology, 155, in The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker (NY: W.W. Norton,
   1972).
8. Ibid, 295.
11. Ibid.
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   507.
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35. Ibid.
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VOLITIONAL AESTHETICS

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INTRODUCTION

There was a great deal of media attention surrounding the book, *The Da Vinci Code* (2004), when the movie adaptation was released. The mystery, to a large extent, hinged on the messages or codes contained in sculptures, architecture and paintings from the Renaissance period, most notably, da Vinci’s “Last Supper” (1498) and the “Mona Lisa” (1503-1507). As a result, these two paintings took on new layers of significance and were opened to new scrutiny. Plastered all over the covers of books related to, or about the movie, they seemed to exemplify the facile flux of imagery in today’s culture. These two paintings, which epitomize the traditional, Western art world, were (and are still) being used for the same purpose as millions of popular culture images: to sell. Thus, in spite of history and tradition, “The Last Supper” and the *Mona Lisa* are part of the ever-continuing, ever-changing conversation of culture.

This paper is an attempt to contribute to that discussion and to the field of art education (for which it was originally conceived) by describing and justifying a different philosophical foundation that reaffirms the centrality of aesthetics and aesthetic experience in human creativity, education, and further, in morality and ethics in a democratic society. It does this by reconnecting aesthetic experience with understanding. The aesthetic model that I propose focuses primarily (but not exclusively) on the role of human agency and its expressions within society, as part of a dialogic relationship with others. In this view, as visual culture is experienced and consumed, people are seen as creators and contributors to their own culture and that of others.

BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL ART HISTORY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Art History

Over the last three decades, much of the scholarly focus in art history and criticism has shown the influences of postmodernist theory: examining and analyzing the ways in which images have functioned, been valued, and used, thus revealing the overt and hidden meanings or messages they conveyed to human society (Bryson, 1988; Holly, 1998; Rees & Borzello, 1986). While not intending to be a comprehensive list, many different methodologies have contributed to this movement: Saussure’s constructivist signs (1966), Derrida’s deconstructionist texts (1978), feminism and psychoanalysis, to name some of the more significant. Social art history reads images mainly in relation to their political and economic role in society to understand the full, human dimensions of art.

Wolff (1995), a social art historian, argues that art has come to be seen as autonomous from the social and historical factors that enabled its existence and that view remains. Thus, (1.) art and
the aesthetic sphere have been historically constructed in specific social conditions and in relation to particular social processes and interests, and (2.) the social history of the arts also reveals the emergence of a relatively (emphasis, mine) autonomous aesthetic sphere in modern bourgeois society (1995).

What she describes is an art world that exists within the larger context of visual culture and they both exist within the broader circle of society and culture. I agree with this view: that an art world exists as another (not a superior) aspect of culture, alongside other cultural entities.

I have constructed the following diagram (see Fig.1) to illustrate this view.

![Diagram of Society and Art World](image-url)

**Fig. 1** The largest oval contains all the multiple aspects of a society including politics, religion, family, sports, science, etc. The next smaller oval within contains the whole of visual culture, which includes all images reflecting the different aspects of society, such as advertising, films, photography, interior design, etc. The smallest oval contains what are considered art images that exist within the larger visual culture. They are not seen as separate from the milieu of society, but rather, are imbedded within it. The dashed lines of the concentric rings indicate the permeability of their boundaries and influences; content and form go back and forth between these cultural realms.

**Cultural Theory**

Raymond Williams (1963, 1965), considered the father of cultural studies as a discipline, used a socially-centered definition of culture. He was the first to conceive of culture as an interconnected social organism comprised of the different aspects of a society, without a hierarchy, which worked together to create the “structure of feeling” or “a particular
community of experience” (Williams, 1965, p. 63). “Art” is given no privileged place here, but is seen as part of many forms of cultural practices.

Paul Willis (1989, 1990) and John Fiske (1991), greatly influenced by Williams, see cultural forms or images as part of a dialogic activity, as individuals or groups try to make sense of, and express, their lived experience. Culture is created out of the consumption of these texts/images and practices, functioning as “agents in the social circulation of meaning and pleasure” (Fiske, 1991, p. 123). It is an active, living process that can only be developed from within (as opposed to above or without) as people find relevance in the texts and images they encounter and consume. It is through relevance (the points of pertinence through which the experiences of everyday life resonate with a text or image) that any cultural text is made into popular culture.¹

The “Mona Lisa” and “The Last Supper” are functioning as all images do—including works of art: they mean something and carry import—some more, some less. The message of the new art history tells us that these meanings and values have changed throughout time and will continue to change as they interface with other cultural and social ideas—sometimes uncomfortably so. Why does this matter? Because, even with the changes in art history, aesthetics is the other side of that coin. The traditional role of aesthetics was seen to inform the processes of experiencing, discerning and deciding the meaning and value of artworks. Yet if artworks, along with other images, are all part of the cultural milieu (social, economic, political, cultural), what now is the role of aesthetics and aesthetic experience? It is this background of cultural studies and social art history that forms the horizon against which this proposed new philosophy for the use of visual culture in art education is fore-grounded.

THE THREE THEORIES SUPPORTING VOLITIONAL AESTHETICS

My argument proposes an alternative approach to art education that builds on the existing curricular structure (the four disciplines of art history, criticism, aesthetics and production), but will place it on a different theoretical foundation.² Collectively, I call this alternative, volitional aesthetics, which I base on the work of the following:

1. Willis’ (1989, 1990) grounded aesthetics. This is a socio-political view that humans are active consumers and shapers of their culture.

2. Shusterman’s (1992) pragmatist aesthetics. His goal is to reclaim aesthetic experience for the purpose of enriching life and for the good of the art world.


The philosophical grounding for a theory for visual culture will rest on these three footings that share the view of culture as the result or product of human activity. People are seen to actively select, reselect, discriminate and alter their cultural products, which are chosen from popular as well as high culture. They are not the victims or passive dupes of marketing machines, and, rather than conceiving of aesthetic experiences as disinterested and separate from everyday
existence, they see the act of consumption of a cultural object or event as a pleasure embedded in the everyday. The experience functions within human society, intertwined and inseparable.

**GROUNDED AESTHETICS**

Paul Willis (1989, 1990) sees consumption as the practice in which people transform the things they buy from something that is merely a possession into something that is a part of their life and self-definition. Cultural messages are not now so much “sent” and “received” as made in reception (p. 135). It is not that people are not influenced by the text-intentions of marketing, but they are seen to have the freedom to alter or contradict these intentions by making them relevant and meaningful to themselves. It is not a response to an object that already possesses aesthetic value; it is we who put the value there.

**PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS**

Richard Shusterman (1992, 1997) argues to reclaim the human capacity for aesthetic experience as an integral part of life and as a profoundly human ability whose effects are life-enhancing, deeply felt and reinvigorating. Aesthetic understanding must start with and never forget that the roots of art and beauty lie in the basic vital functions man shares with other living things (Dewey, [1934] 1980).

There are two ideas at the heart of his argument. First, aesthetic experience is valuable in and of itself as a heightened, meaningful and valuable phenomenological experience. They are an integral part of life that gives it meaning and passion, and to ignore them is to reduce life to a form of automation. Second, is that as we construct meanings of our aesthetic experiences, we are subsequently drawn to find them in other places.

Shusterman’s method (1992) is to redefine art as experience, connecting all aspects of culture through the use of aesthetic experience—not to do away with the institution of art but to transform it by 1) enlarging the concept of art to include popular arts, whose support and satisfaction spreads far beyond the socio-cultural elite; 2) paying greater attention to the ethical and social dimensions of artworks so that we can be more aware of high art’s ethical and socio-political agenda; and 3) revaluing art in a new way. Art, in this view, is not separate from real life, but is connected to it as a reminder to us what aesthetic experiences can be (1997). Thus, art keeps alive the power of humankind to experience the common world in its fullness and complex wonder (1992). Shusterman envisions aesthetic experience as deeply connected to life, immersed in it—not as a way to achieve some pure ethereal experience by taking us out of it.

**BAKHTIN’S THEORY OF CREATIVITY**

Bakhtin was concerned with how humans give form to their experience: how they perceive an object, text, or another person, and how they shape that perception into a synthesized whole (Haynes, 1994). Although he shared Kant’s view of aesthetic experience as a uniquely human quality, he disagreed with the view of the artist/genius acting alone. He never defined aesthetics analytically, but similar to Shusterman and Dewey, treated the aesthetic as a sphere in which
the cognitive-theoretical and ethical-practical spheres may be brought together, where reality and life interpenetrates with art. He argued there was a moral philosophy to creativity and art that viewed aesthetics as ultimately, a philosophy of life (Bakhtin, 1990, 1993).

There are three concepts that are important to Bakhtin’s aesthetics: answerability, outsideness, and unfinalizability.

1. **Answerability.** Bakhtin claimed that in order for an artist to make a genuine, living connection with his or her work, he or she needed to accomplish two tasks: the *deed* or act and *obligation*. The event or “the deed” is the manifestation of answerability. Values such as truth, goodness, or beauty are only possibilities until one acts. My action, according to Bakhtin, acts like a signature, incarnating in one moment, my personality, my ethics, my uniqueness that exists and occurs in a real time and place (Bakhtin, 1993). Therefore, through the creative act, we create ourselves.

   *Obligation* is the other part of the deed. It is a kind of purpose of consciousness—consciousness that only comes to us phenomenologically. We live in the concrete world—real people and objects. To understand an object or another person means to understand my obligation in relation to that other—thus, presupposing my own willingness to act. To fully exist in life, for Bakhtin, means to be willing to act (Haynes, 1994).

2. **Outsideness.** This is the awareness that we are always looking at another person from the outside. We cannot completely merge with another person; we can only go to the edge of our own boundaries. This outside view of our self by another is essential; only another person can see me, situated against the horizon they see; only their eyes can see me in my context. We author each other—for good or for ill.

3. **Unfinalizability.** This is Bakhtin’s word for the ultimate open-endedness of art and life. Even though a person’s life is finalized in death, that person’s work lives on, to be extended and explored by others. The work (or artwork) lives on, impressing itself on many others who will, in turn, continue the conversation with each of their subsequent acts or deeds.

   There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue... nothing is absolutely dead; every meaning will have its homecoming festival (Bakhtin quoted in 1994, p. 15).

**VOLITIONAL AESTHETICS**

These three theories by Willis, Shusterman and Bakhtin form the new philosophical grounding I propose for the use of visual culture in art education. I have argued for a broader, more inclusive definition of culture and with it, a broader definition and description of aesthetics, resulting in a picture of culture as all-inclusive with art, popular culture and the energy of
ordinary life. I will, from this point onward, be collectively referring to the three theories of Willis, Bakhtin, and Shusterman as volitional aesthetics.

Two commonalities connect them. First, they all share a view of human culture that is interconnected and complex. Culture is seen as a contested site where historically formed meanings and values are opposed, reconfigured and sometimes created anew through the continuing process of human cultural activity (Surber, 1998). Second, they all share a belief in human agency. They all reject the view that cultural activity is merely a product or reflection of forces that lie beyond human control or influence. We are connected to each other by the cultural decisions that we make. It is through our actions that aesthetics is connected with real life.³

The following statements summarize the viewpoint of volitional aesthetics:

1. The role of aesthetic experience is valued as a reminder or clue of how and in what ways meaning and value resonate with us. Aesthetic experience is not seen as something that enables us to transcend life/reality, but rather, reminds us of and grounds us in, what is important and essential to our life. It is experiential, reminding us of what it means to be the most alive, most aware, and to know it.

2. Our relationship and use of visual culture is seen both as a creative act and as a dialogic activity. Images and image-making are seen as part of a way to construct authentic experiences. Part of creativity, according to Bakhtin, is the awareness of the audience. The perception and understanding of how transactions function between cultural products and the public are integral to understanding our own response to them.

3. The role of human agency/volition is valued. Deconstruction of visual images to reveal the social, historical and political influences will or may, provide the necessary insight, empowering students to make independent and informed choices. Agency is also linked to creativity, not just creativity in making art, but creativity in relation to our own life and that of others.

4. Context/meaning is seen to arise from a variety of social and political forces, which are partially embodied by the formal qualities and partially supplied by the viewer, who is acting out of his/her own context. While the formal qualities of an image are seen as the means by which context and meaning are given form, the viewer also brings a context to bear, resulting in an interpretation or meaning that is the result of this merging of horizons. Creation is the result of some kind of social, political and cultural interpretation, which is the result of previous creation, and thus, it continues unceasingly (Moxey, 1994). Further, just as the significance of the work or artifact is ever shifting and changing, so is its aesthetic value.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE ROLE OF AESTHETICS IN VISUAL CULTURE

It is not enough for a creative work to exist or hang on a wall. The rest of its life, its purpose, is to be seen, heard or experienced by an audience and understood, and through that, to have affected a change. The work shows the audience the truth of what the author or artist has lived:
This is my true experience and I need you to know about it. It is the audience, the viewer, who provides the acknowledgement of that experience. “What one experiences in a [creative] work… and what one is directed towards is rather how true it is, i.e.: to what extent one knows and recognizes something and oneself. ...The joy of aesthetic experience is the joy of knowledge” (Gadamer, 1982, p. 101, 102). Each aesthetic experience is a kind of recognition that occurs at the deepest part of our being. We stop interpreting because we have reached a fuller, more complete understanding. “I do not interpret, because I feel at home in the present picture” (Wittgenstein in Gadamer, 1982, p. 346)(emphasis, mine). This kind of profound familiarity comes from what Gadamer calls “an accomplishment of life,” (1982, p. 346)—or by living in the language.

The viewer completes the creator and the creator enriches the viewer. In this way, visual culture can both acknowledge common experiences between people and help us to understand and adapt to different forms of experience of different people. Art and images can bring a visionary role in bringing other worlds into focus, thus asking us to reflect and rethink our assumptions about ourselves and our lives, while opening new alternatives and possibilities for consideration.

Society continues to exist not only by transmission, by communication, but also, in transmission, in communication. Through our encounters, we learn about each other’s similarities and differences, breaking through barriers, to find commonalities that define a community. Visual culture can be used pragmatically to organize a community for the purpose of promoting awareness of a shared problem and of building the support and commitment to address it. Images that critique the status quo or the existing society help people to see new worlds and new realities they did not know existed; they open up possibilities of experiencing a new or different view (1999, p. 65). Dewey refers to this as “the expansion of experience” ([1934] 1980, p. 324-25). If the artist succeeds at creating a work of art that integrates seemingly different and unrelated experiences of other members of a group, that art can give people a sense or relatedness that might not have existed before (1999, p. 63). Think of the Lange’s “Migrant Mother.” Art’s function, for Dewey, was to remove prejudice; to “tear away the veils due to wont and custom; perfect the power to perceive,” and the artist’s, was to press beyond conventional boundaries ([1934] 1980, p. 325). As I argue, this applies to some kinds of images in the larger realm of visual culture as well.

It can also be used for political deliberation. In this way, images are the stimulus for the debate and discussion vital for a democracy. Because they arise from a social milieu, a community, they are influenced by ideology of some kind. The political process becomes a parade of symbols and images, which in turn becomes the basis for our different reactions to public issues and public figures (Edelman, 1995). These images stimulate their audiences to see the situation from a particular perspective; this is integral to their success. We conceive of the world in categories that “cue” us to a particular perspective. Edelman uses the example of a war that may be viewed either, as a noble crusade or an act of unjustified aggression. In the first case, the loss of innocent civilians and the profiteering from the war, are minimized. In the second, the carnage and profiteering become the major focus of attention. Therefore, far from being stable, our world can seem constantly changing, depending both on ways in which observations...
are framed and categorized. The categories are powerful shapers of political beliefs, fear, and antagonisms where they appear to be natural, self-evident or merely descriptive (Edelman, 1995).

Edelman sees artists as playing an unconscious role in the manipulation of the masses of us. “The influences of art are readily masked; they provide ideas and potentialities whose origins may not be recognized, so that political activist are likely to accept such ideas as self-generated and exploit them in diverse ways” (1995, p. 144). Therefore, “art is not a retreat or a sanctuary from the social scene but rather a consequence and generator of the scene” (1995, p. 144). Because art is a social product, it is an integral player of the kind of ongoing argument and controversy that pervades democratic government.

Political struggles can involve irreconcilable interests, circumstances of power inequality that can induce marginalized people to use confrontational form of political action because they feel there is no other solution. In this case, a work of art depends for its effectiveness on visibility; and this is more possible with economic or political power. I argue it is still within the power of the individual to discern, accept or reject such presentations. Through dialog, other voices may be heard and considered. The gaps in reasoning or morality should be revealed and explored. The more with which we experience, the greater will be our ability to use our aesthetics for our ethics.

I offer the following example. The Thomas Hart Benton murals at Indiana University were originally created for the state of Indiana exhibit at the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair. Among the panels depicting the social and industrial history of the state, one includes a scene of the robed members of the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross. In 2002, members of the Black Student Union raised the issue of the mural, claiming that it was a racist symbol, which contributed to an unwelcome and hostile environment for Africa American students. They stated that some students had members of their family who had suffered directly at the hands of the KKK; for this and other reasons, it was a painful image. The students wanted it removed.

As I explained earlier, the encounter between the viewer and an image or creation is part of a dialog. The ideas embodied in visual culture work live on, far beyond the creator’s original intentions, to become part of the next age’s dialog. However, as we encounter these works, these images, it is not enough, according to Bakhtin, to have that moment of encounter, we must also then, pull back and return to the re-experience of our own life. Without this separation and re-experience, we—the viewer—are not able to act in the world (1994). In other words, the people who viewed Benton’s murals took that encounter back to their life and as a result, were perhaps able to do the next thing.

In response to students’ complaints, I.U. Chancellor Brehms met with the students and other groups. After several weeks of discussions, Brehms announced the decision to keep the mural there. She stated that removing or covering the mural “would be morally wrong, because it would, in effect, do what Benton refused to do: that is, it would hide the shameful aspects of Indiana’s past. …[T]he combination of a powerful mural and motivated students has brought us here today to a much stronger commitment to diversity on the Bloomington campus.”
Because we (now) inhabit multiple and often conflicting worlds, it is visual culture that reveals to us who and how we are, what these worlds are, and to some extent, what our potentialities for being are. We learn more about what it means to be human. This is ethics in the wider sense—The values of our life. It may be an affirmation of prior values. It may be discerning a correction to those. But it does away with the illusion that these are unchanging eternal truths. They are constantly being weighed and re-assessed, along with our life’s experience, through the images of our culture. It is in the actions of the person who created it and in the actions of the viewer who saw it, that the truth of our creative expression becomes a concrete (and ever changing) reality.

NOTES

1. The recent ad campaign for the Indianapolis Museum of Art focused on using the idea of relevance. Using the tag line: “It’s My Art,” (using the acronym of the museum) they have engaged local celebrities—including an Indianapolis race car driver, Danica Patrick—to share with the television audience “their” artwork from the museum’s collection. Further, they have put all thirty-four videos of the segments on YouTube for Internet viewing.

2. For pedagogical and pragmatic reasons, I see value in using the four components of DBAE: art criticism, aesthetics, art history and art production. I find no fault with the structure of that model. Part of my argument for changing DBAE’s substance is that the professional fields, upon which the four components are based, especially art history and criticism, significantly changed their philosophy in the 70s and 80s to embrace sociological and post-modern influences. The changes in the disciplinary fields do not necessarily negate their continuing influence and contributions. Therefore, I argue that the connection with the professional components remains important to the integrity of art education.

3. I want to be clear that I am not making a claim here for the development of a new aesthetics theory, in and of itself; I am merely using this term as a way of referring to all three theorists as part of a different philosophical foundation for art education. However, I also intentionally use the term volitional to emphasize and underscore the belief in the role of human agency or volition as a catalyst for the creation of culture.

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ART & THE POLITICAL: THE ILLUSION OF FAILURE

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There is a claim that in the contemporary atmosphere of war, violence and crisis, the absence of memorable images from the arts indicates some sort of failure, perhaps a lack of nerve. This paper will argue that such a view is incorrect.

Usually when we think of art and politics, we have in mind works of protest and outcry, or an art that rallies the people or teaches some political lesson. Goya’s “The Third of May,” (1814) for example, is a portrayal from memory of a massacre by Napoleon’s army in 1808.

Gustave Courbet, too, comes to mind. In “Burial at Ornans,” 1848, the scale of the work and its medium of oil on canvas, establish the importance of the subject—ordinary people, equality, class struggle, in short—revolution—political art at its finest.

By stretching his memory back half a century to 1807, Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier created political art of a different sort—a patriotic celebration of the French victory at Friedland. It is one of the last attempts of academic painting to represent the battlefield. Completed in 1875, astounding in detail, and years in the making, it seems sadly oblivious to the arrival of photography.

Political art assumes a variety of forms the 20th Century. Filippo Marinetti’s Futurism lobbied hard for its vision of the future. Umberto Boccioni’s “The City Rises” (1910) tries to capture the changes brought about by progress, speed, and machinery. For the Futurists, these changes were not only inevitable, but constituted the only suitable subjects for the artist who was moral and just. Look to the future, turn your back the past, “destroy the museums, the libraries, every type of academy,” said Marinetti, and sing of ”the great crowds, shaken by work, by pleasure or by rioting.” “We will glorify war—the world’s only hygiene.”(Marinetti) For Marinetti, violence was sacred, aesthetic, and a necessary part of life. By the 1930’s, however, Italian Fascism had absorbed the Futurist style as its own and many artists joined the cult of Mussolini, with predictable results. Tulio Crali’s 1936 Diving on the City is an excellent example: political art in service to the state.

Art serving political power and its heroes is not new, and it is a blurred line between patriotic art and propaganda. Note the bronze bust celebrating the service in the Texas National Guard of the 43rd President of the United States.

But it is the art of protest that is most instructive. Heinrich Kley’s “Die Belastungsprob” (1912-13) shows the ordinary person breaking under the weight of the state.
It is the setting of World War I, however, where political art comes into its own. And two things immediately became apparent: first, the photograph had become the master recorder of carnage. This would never again be the task of art.

The second thing that became clear was that many artists found that the carnage and its terrible aftermath demanded of them a sober and reflective response. This was a period of extraordinary political art producing some unforgettable images.

Otto Dix and his Card-Playing Cripples (1920) shows the human costs of war; below, his 1928 Metropolis, shows the gulf between those that experienced the mud, the trenches and the horror—and those who did not. George Grosz, with “Eclipse of the Sun” (1926) and “The Pillars of Society” (1926) points up the industrialists, the church and the generals as not only the war’s cause, but its profiteers as well.

What makes all of this so interesting is that in addition to the powerful political art of this time, there was a self-righteous condemnation of those who didn’t join in. The Berlin Dadaists and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement thought all artists should be like them. Their scolding went something like this: these are momentous times—horrible wars, bloody revolutions, social turmoil—and the artist has a duty to respond, to speak out against the death, the waste, and the injustice.

The Expressionists were their main target. To be preoccupied with the self and its “existential predicament,” as they were, or to indulge in the silliness of Zurich Dada, simply wouldn’t do. People are suffering in the world. How can one—at a time like this—tear up bits of paper or emulate the mind of a child? Such artists were simply not living up to the possibilities and responsibilities of the time.

We heard exactly the same accusations in the 60’s. The country was in upheaval with the counter culture, rock and roll, hallucinogenics, the drug culture, the pill, the civil rights movement, and of course, the war. The question was asked, “Where are the artists?” and by that, of course, people meant mainstream New York artists.

Where were the political artists of our time, they asked—the Goyas, the Otto Dixs or the Picassos with their Guernicas? Did the war even exist? You couldn’t tell from the old-guard Abstract Expressionists. The Pop artists? The hard-edge people, the color-fielders, the minimalists? It is as if mainstream art turned its back on what was arguably the most tumultuous decade in the country’s history. The absent artist, a profound disconnect, so the charge goes.

We hear much the same kind of thing today. Just as the artists of the 60’s seemed not to make eye-contact with Vietnam, some are wondering about the artists’ response to 9/11? Or the war in Iraq?

I’ve come to think there is something quite wrong in this way of thinking. The question has been incorrectly stated—we have it precisely backwards. Instead of looking at the political situation first, and then and asking “Where are the artists?”—and this is the main point of the
Max Beckmann is a case in point. Consider “The Night” from 1919, after which he wrote, “We have to lay our hearts and nerves bare to the deceived cries of people who have been lied to… the sole justification for our existence as artists, superfluous and egotistic though we are, is to confront people with the image of their destiny.” (Hughes 290) “The image of their destiny.” What a phrase! What is the image of our destiny? What does tomorrow hold? What can we take with us to the future? Beckmann shows us.

Beckmann’s self-portrait from 1907—a young man in Florence; and then between the wars in 1927—dapper and urbane; and lastly 1944, in occupied Holland—poor, cold, ill, hounded by the Wehrmacht, but without giving an inch.

Should we criticize him for not making a political statement about the war or the occupation? He put on a tuxedo, set up the mirror, and fixed his gaze on himself—and on us—and reaffirmed his dignity as a human being. And this painting, I would suggest, given the context, is a very political statement. Not about the war, but about being human in a war.

Rembrandt is looking at himself in 1669, a serious appraisal. He has been bankrupted. His house and possessions, even his wife’s jewelry, have been auctioned off and he is near the end of his life. He has set the lighting and chosen his attire carefully. He unflinchingly presents the aging artist, vulnerably human, but with dignity intact. Mark Rothko said that in painting “The subject is crucial and only that subject matter is valid which is tragic and timeless.” (Rothko) Tragic and timeless? This Rembrandt fits the bill.

Not all art has to be tragic, of course. Matisse shows us that. Above—the events that bracket his life: the launching of the Cutty Sark in 1869, the year of his birth, and a thermonuclear explosion in 1954, the year of his death. It is a career spanning more than sixty years—encompassing two world wars and arguably more historically profound changes than in the previous 2000 years—and in his work, not a whisper of the political or anything but life as we would have it.

He confined his vision to the studio, the view from the window or plein aire—color, texture, and form. Here is his Open Window, Collioure from 1905. The Mediterranean—emblematic of a benign, almost unattainable beauty, and a life of sufficiently modest pace to fully experience it—a painting in which one of my students simply saw “vacuum cleaners on the patio.”

“View of Collioure,” 1906, and Richard Diebenkorn’s “Ocean Park #54”, from 1973. Where is the political? Would Matisse’s commenting on the recent Russo-Japanese war have added anything to this painting? Would an acknowledgement of the wind-down of the war in Vietnam add to the Diebenkorn? Matisse said he wanted his art to have the effect of a good armchair on a tired businessman. Would we really wish these paintings to be more political? Would we trade
these for something more political? And should we hold these artists in less esteem for not having been more political?

Powerful and unforgettable images, to be sure. But what exactly, should the artists’ role be here? Should we say to the artist, “Drop whatever you’re doing and paint these things”? What we see here is photo-journalism, and it tells us what happened at a particular place at a specific time. The South Tower of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan was struck by United flight 175 at approximately 590 mph at precisely 9:03:11 on the morning of September 11, 2001. This is the record. In journalism, the photograph long ago replaced sketchbook and canvas. But art is not journalism. It works on a different level. The horrific photograph captures our attention, to be sure, but it often numbs our thinking. A good painting or poem must engage the imagination.

These self-portraits, for example, were also done at a specific time and place. But they are not anchored there. Their power flows from something deeper, more universal. The year they were done is not nearly as important as the stage of life when they were done. The painter approaches us from a different perspective. Robert Motherwell, in a letter to Frank O’Hara, said that “Painting that does not radiate feeling is not worth looking at. The deepest—and rarest—of grown-up pleasures is true feeling...The greater the precision of feeling, the more personal the work will be.” And then the clincher: “The more anonymous a work, the less universal, because in some paradoxical way, we understand the universal through the personal.” (O’Hara 58)

This points up art’s power and challenge: the work must be personal enough to be universal, as Motherwell noted, and at the same time avoid being dependent on a particular time and place, thus negating the universal.

A painting and a poem:

   sick on a journey  
   my dreams wander  
   The withered fields   (Hirsch 145)

Van Gogh can speak to us from the 19th century, and Basho from the 17th, because by being intensely personal, they are, in some paradoxical way, universal.

Aristotle reminds us that the state’s only justification is to fashion a social structure in which the good life is possible, where the fully human life can be realized. Almost without exception the focus of traditional political art has been the obstacles and injustices in the political structure that have made the good life impossible. Art, less narrowly considered, reflects a broader spectrum of human experience, as these works show.

Where artists put their energies, how they spend their precious days—only they may say. May Stevens noted that while all art could be placed somewhere on the political spectrum, it cannot be reduced to the political. Artists have made varied decisions.
Beckmann, for example, was drawn to political art, but was not confined to it. So, too, Picasso. There was serious art before Guernica and after. Max Ernst made political statements and he, too, moved on.

Philip Guston, in his abstract period, could not sustain the detachment of formalism. “When the middle 60s came along I was feeling split, schizophrenic. There was the war, what was happening in America, the brutality of the world. What kind of man am I... going into frustrated fury about everything—and then going into my studio, to adjust a red to a blue?” (Storr 53)

Leon Golub and Nancy Spero were activists from the beginning. Golub’s Interrogation series, more than any other work I know, highlights the violence and suffering that mercenaries have inflicted in the name of politics and ideology—a poignant indictment of us all.

An image by Clea Davis, and lines from Wislawa Szymborska’s—“Children of Our Age.” (Hirsch 182)

Meanwhile, people perished,
animals died,
houses burned,
and the fields ran wild,
just as in time immemorial,
and less political

The artist will always worry over life and the world, and they will paint what they paint. Szymborska again: “Forgive me, distant wars, for bringing flowers home.”

We applaud the artist who stands up to the colossus of the state, and we are grateful to the artist who brings flowers home. Art is still here, as insightful as ever. And the alleged failure? an illusion—our frustration with the world.

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<ralphdavispaintings.com>
SOCIAL DESIGN AS A FIFTH ESTATE: POWER, ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AND LEADERSHIP

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How is meaning conveyed through the rendering of a letterform? How can an archetypal symbol of well-being be successfully appropriated in a manner so fundamentally at odds with its original meaning? How does an artist with superior talents stumble down a path of nationalistic fervor, and apply those talents in service to glorifying racial supremacy? How does an artist so determined to define new meanings for art that celebrate a revolutionary social experiment end up applying his creative skills to perpetuate lies justifying the invasion of sovereign nations?

In considering the perils of unleashing the powers of a charismatic, transformative leader, our founding fathers devised a system of governmental checks and balances. This country’s founding documents are nothing short of masterful, and should be read with some frequency by all citizens. I don’t simply mean pamphlets such as Paine’s Common Sense, or official documents such as the Declaration of Independence or the US Constitution, but bodies of work, like the Federalist Papers, that explain and defend the concepts behind these documents. Yet, even a government so carefully crafted to neutralize abuses of power can unduly dominate over the will of its citizens, and it’s the job of the free press—what’s called the Fourth Estate—to cast light into the dark corners of our government’s inner workings. But with a free press ossifying into a press that’s compromised by its own institutional interests, we are in constant need of alert and vocal critics.

While the blogosphere and the alternative press fill this void to a degree, a journalistic profession dedicated to the written word is not always enough in the face of the coordinated dissemination of so-called ‘legitimate’ truths that are pumped out by the established power structures. In the 19th century, even as rulers reluctantly allowed the press to publish essays and articles that critiqued the ruling class, they banned visual depictions of such critiques. Certainly, low literacy rates had something to do with this decision. But, perhaps as importantly, the visuals cut much closer to the bone—they spoke more immediately—and more viscerally—to the masses, than did long essays that railed against abuses of power. This is still true today.

The unique and undeniable power of visual propaganda suggests that its practitioners could claim to reside within a Fifth Estate; one that not only challenges the vagaries and corruption of government, but one that also tangles with the Fourth Estate, supporting it even as it keeps it in check. Unlike governmental structures, and unlike the organizational hierarchies of the journalistic establishment, designers engaged in social critique often function as free agents, and thus have more hope of remaining untainted by organizational influence. So far, I’ve spoke explicitly about politics, but I’d like to broaden the scope at this point in order to address, not just the political realm, but society writ large. For example, we’re struggling intensely in this country with fabricated truths that celebrate material culture and American exceptionalism...
where the obsession with the former has strengthened the illusion of the latter, and an isolation from the larger world prevents glimpses of truths more universally evident from piercing these tenuous fallacies. Because we devour materialism and grow corpulent with shortsighted righteousness, counter notions sit on the side of our plate as the most vile of undesirables. With such truths leaking beyond mere politics, the social designer must not limit his or her horizons.

I’m here today as a professor of graphic design, and as a writer. But, more specifically, I’m here as someone engaged in social design—the term I’ll use from this point forward to signify any art intended to persuade the broader public on matters having to do with society or politics within the public sphere—and as such, my interests lie in social design as a tool for either the propagation or the deflation of memes. A carefully packaged idea can rarely be resisted by those too lazy to think for themselves, and in the right hands such an idea can be elevated to the status of cultural truth. Leaders and would-be leaders, in political, civic and commercial realms, strive to control the levers of power by crafting irresistible truths. Graphic designers use the power of visual persuasion to define these truths as either socially redemptive or corrosive, depending on their own intuitions. If, as Foucault has claimed, modern power owes its strength to the effects it produces at the levels of desire and knowledge, than those with access to and control of the mechanisms that influence modern desire must act in ways that are morally astute and ethically sound.

As the most pervasive and persuasive form of visual communication, graphic design performs in society as transmitter and transmuter of power: It can presume power or consume power, it can conceal power or reveal power, and it can speak truth to power or speak truths that power wants spoken. I believe that graphic design’s ability to interact with the complexities of modern life in such ways is a manifestation of the designer’s deeper ability to discern patterns within the dynamics of these complexities. This may sound like a truism—of course, graphic design that penetrates cultural misperceptions must owe its existence to a designer with the intellectual capacity to recognize them—but rather than leaving it at that, I’d suggest that the designer’s way of thinking can transcend the act of making meaning with visuals. And, because of this, it’s not the designer’s form making that is so relevant as much as the designer’s manner of interrogating the customs and mores of a society.

The artifacts of graphic design work their way through us in ways we can scarcely understand. Graphic design in service to dominant power structures prevail en masse over those of any alternative voices. By crowding out, covering over, and co-opting alternative narratives, the dominant culture prevails by producing and legitimizing only knowledge and truth that perpetuate the hegemony of that dominant culture. Writers like Thomas Frank have explored the predicament of dissent’s voice when faced with the constant pressure of being absorbed, embraced and reflected by those forces of consumerism it aims to dismantle, and these writers have come to the conclusion that consumer culture will inevitably prevail due to its ability to pacify would-be dissenters with the feeling that their voice is being heard by presenting them with appropriated versions of their authentic expression. Guy Debord, with another insight into the power of the visual realm, observed that, ‘A society organized as appearance can be disrupted on the field of appearance,’ but if that disruption is folded quickly into the accepted structures of the culture, any sustained battle against the status quo is difficult, if not impossible.
As he describes a central paradox of mass culture, social theorist TV Reed understands it as a point of opportunity; ‘On the one hand,’ Reed says, ‘mass culture thrives on standardization and reduction of all cultural meaning to marketability. On the other hand, it must have innovation; it must constantly produce newness in order to overcome boredom inherent in standardization. Thus, it is largely dependent for its success on its ability to appropriate energy and style from subcultures.” While subculture ideologies are initially perceived as a threat to the stability, cohesion and homogeneity of the dominant culture, the mechanisms of power kick in by offering a sense of newness with consumer-culture surfaces that reflect an inclusiveness which will, in turn, re-engage the disaffected masses. But Reed suggests that this cycle can be interrupted by “transforming aesthetic or stylistically based subcultures into MOVEMENT cultures.” While this seems obvious, consider how many subcultures in the past 40 years alone have devolved from finding resonant symbols of anti-establishment culture that could announce their concepts, to considering the symbols themselves as the essence of that subculture.

At this point, with an understanding of the role of social design as something that is necessary to the healthy functioning of an open society, combined with a sense that, in order to be effective, social design must not simply be about the surface as much as about the depth that resides below it, I’d like to focus on four areas I believe social designers should be mindful of. If leadership scholars concern themselves with the definition of ‘good’ leadership, and attempt to define it as both good in a moral sense and good in a goal-oriented sense, scholars exploring the relationship between designers and leaders—and individuals engaged in social design—would do well to consider the same criteria. I don’t presume to suggest these four are all inclusive or unassailable; I’m merely attempting to define some elements that might reflect on issues of effectual and ethical conduct.

I. ELEVATING VOCALITY OVER VOICE

Designers who work in the field of graphic design are often honored with awards and recognition for developing a personal style because changes in style are seen to offer the world a ‘new voice.’ Designers who hope to operate as a voice for alternative narratives must be wary of this tendency to rely on surface innovation.

First, designers who fall prey to the idea that they need to develop their own style are compromising the truths they care most deeply about to the vicissitudes of fashionability. When considering matters of voice, what is needed is a resonant vocality, not merely a different pitch. Designers intent on communicating the ideas of a subculture must instead weigh the efficacy of the memes that control the culture’s way of thinking, and discover new memes that provide a clearly articulated alternative. They must keep the focus on disrupting the dominant norms that they set out to interrogate—this is done through making meaning, not merely making form. To say that subcultures require visible identifying characteristics for a shared sense of identity is to miss a point; once a style that’s embraced by a movement as authentic is co-opted, that subculture is loses a sense of its own identity.
Second, as a method of creating movement unity, insistence on style—even as it helps define a common identity—perpetuates the co-opting dynamic already mentioned, in that the more these designers define a style that comes to represent the ideas of a subculture, the more likely that style will be appropriated by commerce. Style, then, is a Faustian bargain, and the moment of its betrayal grows nearer as the subculture’s faith in its transformative power deepens.

II. SIMPLICITY AS A GATEWAY TO NUANCE

The most dangerous potential weakness of social design resides in its very source of strength. The art of framing an idea is a form of simplification, and simplification can be perilous in its refusal of nuanced consideration. Social design can simplify complex ideas into concise expressions, and the best designs can cut quickly to the core, effectively smashing previously unassailable truths. In this sense, designers engage in the hard work of critical thought so that their audiences do not necessarily have to.

Yet, simplification as an end to itself—rather than a means of expressing the logic of a desired end—is one of the most common causes of human suffering. After all, it was Josef Göebbels, the Nazi Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, who proclaimed, “In the long run only he will achieve basic results in influencing public opinion who is able to reduce problems to the simplest terms and who has the courage to keep repeating them in this simplified form despite the objection of intellectuals.” If the simplification of an idea is used as a rationalization to reject a more nuanced understanding of that idea’s complexity, far greater damage may be perpetuated than if the idea had remained inchoate.

You could go further to say that this kind of reductionism has been the clarion call of consumer messaging, even as it’s been the bane of any social movement culture; consumer messages care only if the encapsulated message is remembered, but social movements require that the element of simplification acts as a doorway. Designing a path to the door is one thing, but designing a path through the door is something altogether different. Even an aggressively declarative visual statement can provide such a passage—but only if the designer is willing to, quite literally, open that door, so that the individual can walk through it of his or her own accord.

III. AUTONOMY IN THE FACE OF SUBCULTURE INFLUENCE

When asked about his habit of working at a remove from political parties, even as he wholeheartedly supported many of their philosophies, the great French poster designer, Alain le Quernec, replied, “If I was American, I’m sure I would be Democrat, and if somebody asked me why, the answer would be because it would be impossible to be Republican. And so it’s by the negative: why are you from the left in France? Because I think it’s impossible to be from the right. But I never wanted to belong to a party. I wanted to be free. I’m not property and that’s that.”

This tendency to remain wary of the influence and hierarchy of any organization—even ones
that support social movements that the designer supports—reflects a healthy concern that the integrity of the designer’s work might be compromised in some way. It’s not uncommon for these individuals to treat movement organizations with a degree of detachment for any number of reasons; from a discomfort with organizational tendencies to compromise and shift allegiances, to the relative inflexibility of their scope of action, or to their vulnerability to corruption and factional infighting.

Immanuel Kant in his 1784 essay, *What is Enlightenment?*, exclaimed that individuals in a society who had become accustomed to having an overbearing, paternalistic force tell them what is right and what is wrong had developed an ‘*inability to make use of their understanding without direction from someone else.*’ According to Kant, this inability did not lie in a ‘*lack of understanding but of courage.*’ He believed that by applying our tacit understanding of the way in which the world works in a more intellectually rigorous fashion, we could provide ourselves with the necessary ethical foundation to behave in ways that do not harm others.

I’d argue that the same qualities of probity that we demand from mass culture should be demanded also of the sub-cultural organizations that we consider supporting. And that pressure to conform to the entirety of any set of conditions can be avoided by maintaining autonomy at all costs. Of the 10 primary functions of art and culture in social movements that TV Reed has defined in his book ‘*The Art of Protest,*** perhaps the one function that would be most damaging to the long-term success of any movement in its absence is that of critiquing movement ideology. Overbearing dogma is another mechanism that respects no boundaries, after all; it is not the sole province of dominant power structures, but a human tendency that we must guard against in all its manifestations.

**IV. RELENTLESS CHALLENGING OF PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

While intellectual vigor is a shared trait of many designers, this vigor does not always translate into rigorous or even accurate assessments of social dynamics and value systems. Deeply ingrained biases and moral inconsistencies are as much a part of a designer’s genetic makeup as that of any other individual. Just as we must challenge the assumptions of the cultural status quo, and just as we must challenge the assumptions of the sub-cultural status quo, we must also challenge the assumptions of our internally derived status quo. The external activist must remain in check with an internal activist: are we willing to question the integrity of our own assumptions? If an individual ethical framework, after all, does not involve critical reflection, it neglects to consider its very subject matter.

Designers must resist the assumptions they’ve grown comfortable with, and besiege those assumptions with ideas that may seem distasteful to their intuitions. But rather than suggesting a manner of thinking that could lead to equivocation or paralysis—*if we must constantly question our own motives, when will we find the opportunity to challenge those beyond ourselves?*—I’m suggesting that this constant, internal questioning feed a wellspring of expression. Once an inward dialectic has arrived at an understanding—as temporal as it might
be—we cannot hesitate to make the beliefs we’ve arrived at crystal clear in our depictions of the issues as we understand them. This, of course, must be a cyclical relationship between discerning meaning and making meaning. And a holistic and critical discernment is sure to set the stage for not just effectual form making, but form making that is not ethically compromised.

Finally, I’ve mentioned that I come here as a designer of social art. My own desire to speak against those who abuse power and speak for those who’ve been diminished, forgotten or oppressed has ebbed and flowed with an internal dialog that’s been constantly informed by external inputs. The input/output cycle informs and renews itself in many ways. But critical thought that, by its nature, is conflicted with the contradictions of life should not lose itself in uncertainty and capitulation. Instead—as an expression of clarity within complexity—it should single out the essences of injustice, and expose them as best as it knows how.

I began by asking a few questions. As a designer I could venture a good guess as to some of the answers. I could determine how the tools of our trade have been applied to support certain truths. You could even say that I am not unaware of the meanings that I myself might be making with this particular juxtaposition. These are the mechanisms we apply, after all; we have learned to manipulate them with aplomb. But other questions are more difficult to answer—perhaps even impossible. These images are a record, not merely of the manipulation of form in the expression of meaning, but of the mutability of the form makers themselves in their capacity to comprehend the impact of meaning upon their own understanding. Is it the destiny of these men made concrete, or is it a record of their own journey through the pathways of believing in truths that were made meaningful to them? Only one thing is certain: our vigilance as designers must be as critically aware of our own shortcomings as they are of the shortcomings of those leaders we hope to challenge.
INTRODUCTION

This article provides a case study of curriculum redesign that integrates service learning as a pedagogical tool from freshman to senior years. Based on the Visual Communication design discipline, this article explores service learning's relationship to teaching and learning in an emerging consensus within the context of higher education. The article consists of three major parts: the context of curriculum redesign, the conceptual components of the redesigned curriculum, and the influence of curriculum redesign on faculty and students.

The Context of Higher Education

In *The Report of College Learning for New Global Century*, it is said, “The world has been rapidly changed by scientific and technological innovations, global interdependence, cross-cultural encounters, and changes in the balance of economic and political power.” (Association of American College and Universities, 2007, p. 8). With this perspective of the world, the community of higher education has been faced with the question, “What kind of new knowledge and skills should be sought out to prepare students for the new global century?”

The author of *The New Production of Knowledge: the Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (Gibbons, 1994) wrote that a profound transformation of knowledge production in higher education is underway. While the traditional knowledge production is set within discipline based academic discourse, the new mode of knowledge production operates within “a context of application in that problems are set” within a transdisciplinary framework (Gibbons, p. 4).

THE CONTEXT OF DESIGN EDUCATION

Visual Communication Design, as a problem solving practice in communication, is context based in applying disciplinary knowledge and skills. However, within the disciplinary paradigm, designers’ involvement in context has been limited to a focus on the production of artifacts (e.g., poster design, web design, magazine design) within the problem solving process. This approach shapes certain characteristics of the practices and processes of design, an approach that is isolated from broader contexts, primarily solution driven, and is overly focused on application.

In response to the content of the discipline and the work of the practice, traditional design education has focused on form and technology as means for production. In instruction
methodology, practicing designers as instructors deliver their design knowledge and skills through a process of apprenticeship in the studio setting isolated from the actual design context (Cross, 2007). Context issues, such as interrelationships between design solution and audience experience, are either provided by the instructor’s hypothetical scenario or imagined by the student’s personal experience. This solely artifact driven approach has established a concept of design education as preparation of students for a professional, technical role.

Changes in the world have influenced contemporary design practice. Situated in heterogeneous and interrelated design contexts, design practice now requires designers to have a deeper and broader understanding of the conditions of designing in order to seek relevancy in design solutions. This context driven practice demands a highly cognitive competency, beyond form making, for the designer to navigate the complexity embedded in the design process.

Design education has been slow to embrace this change in the pedagogical framework. The National Association of Schools of Art & Design, a higher-education accrediting agency, has urged design education to reshape the curriculum in relationship with contemporary design context to prepare students for professional practice. This case study describes such a process.

KEY ELEMENTS OF CHANGE OF CURRICULUM REDESIGN

Perceiving the problem in design education, the Herron Visual Communication department at IUPUI redesigned the entire curriculum in a series of revisions by integrating service learning as a strategic pedagogical tool (2003-2006). Formulating service learning in the curriculum structure beyond course driven features by individual faculty required multiple ingredients to make this possible. Three key factors led this collective and intentional process:

First, under the leadership of the department chair, there was a shared perspective among the department faculty and a new vision for the discipline. The collective perspective on present and future teaching and learning brought a need for curriculum redesign. Second, at the school level, there was a strong culture that valued community engagement. Herron School of Art and Design has had a long history of community engagement through diverse activities. The tradition naturally introduced young faculty to the concept of community as a learning asset and encouraged their appreciation for the heritage of service learning from senior faculty. Thirdly, Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI), as a nationally recognized institution in service learning, provides various supports for faculty to integrate service learning in research, teaching, and service activities. In the actual curriculum redesign process, the faculty members participated in individual and group level workshops and Faculty Learning Communities offered by the university through the Center for Service and Learning. As well as support for intellectual resources, internal grants provided opportunities for faculty members to explore service learning in the educational process, including curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

THE CONCEPTUAL COMPONENT OF THE REDESIGNED CURRICULUM

Pedagogical Philosophy
The first step taken to redesign the curriculum was to develop the department mission statement, which articulates the teaching goal from the philosophical perspective on discipline:

Herron’s visual communication design programs are focused on preparing leaders who can proactively manage processes for change and innovation to improve the experiences of businesses, institutions, organizations, communities and individuals. We advocate designing as a collaborative process for identifying root problems and facilitating meaningful solutions to complex issues. We seek to harness the power of design to clarify, humanize and energize the issues that are central to life in a pluralistic society.

As stated above, the department approaches the discipline as methodical application for problem solving, focuses on adaptability of knowledge in a diverse array of problem settings, and pursues value driven education in a social context. This articulated teaching goal enabled the faculty to define conceptual elements in curricula implementation: the pedagogical frame (problem based learning), the scope of knowledge and skills (general education and discipline based learning) and the pedagogical tool (service learning). <Figure. 1>
Pedagogical Frame: Problem Based Learning

The faculty members adopted the problem based learning model as a pedagogical frame. In the problem-based approach, the faculty perceived the need of general education learning beyond the discipline-based learning, which fosters competencies required in the problem solving process: critical thinking, understanding of the wider world, analytical and communication skills, and responsibilities beyond self (Association of American College and Universities, 2007).

Scope of Knowledge and Skills: General Education Learning and Discipline Based Learning

For general education learning, the faculty adopted the Principles of Undergraduate Learning (PULs), which have been approved as a conceptual framework for all students' general education at IUPUI. The six PULs describe fundamental intellectual competencies across disciplines in the context of complex society:

- Core Communication and Quantitative Skills
- Critical Thinking
- Integration and Application of Knowledge
- Intellectual Depth, Breadth, and Adaptiveness
- Understanding Society and Culture
- Values and Ethics

For discipline-based learning, the essential competencies were chosen from the Standards for Professional Undergraduate Degree Program by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), the national accrediting agency for art and design and art and design-related disciplines:

1. The ability to solve communication problems, including the skills of problem identification, research and information gathering, analysis, generation of alternative solutions, prototyping and user testing, and evaluation of outcomes.

2. The ability to describe and respond to the audiences and contexts which communication solutions must address, including recognition of the physical, cognitive, cultural, and social human factors that shape design decisions.

3. The ability to create and develop visual form in response to communication problems, including an understanding of principles of visual organization/composition, information hierarchy, symbolic representation, typography, aesthetics, and the construction of meaningful messages.

4. An understanding of tools and technology, including their roles in the creation, reproduction, and distribution of visual messages. Relevant tools and technologies
include, but are not limited to, drawing, offset printing, photography, and time-based and interactive media (film, video, computer multimedia).

6. An understanding of basic business practices, including the ability to organize design projects and to work productively as a member of teams.

The professional competencies were analyzed and mapped out under the Principles of Undergraduate Learning in hierarchical arrangement. The matrix combining the PULs and NASAD Standards functioned as a conceptual guideline for each faculty to develop student-learning outcomes within each course setting in a cohesive structure.

PEDAGOGICAL TOOL: SERVICE LEARNING AS AN ACTIVE COGNITIVE TOOL

While the mission statement defines the ultimate teaching goal and the matrix (of the PULs and the NASAD standards) specifies learning outcomes, service learning (identified as a pedagogical tool) implements those declarative statements in real learning experience.

Specifically, in regard to the current agenda in design education (how to enhance cognitive competency in context driven practice), the faculty members viewed service learning components—natural context for context inquiry, multiple stakeholders for collaborative process, social context for the common good—as intentional learning opportunities and approached service learning as a cognitive tool in curriculum redesign.

In Cognitive Tools: A Suitable Case for Learning (Mayes, 1992), a cognitive tool is described as a comprehension task, which helps learners perform an analytical search for meaning in the learning process. The cognitive tool concept carries the implication that learning is a byproduct of comprehension and that “to learn” is to perform cognitive processes using a cognitive tools task. Cognitive tools as supportive instruments play an important role particularly in the discovery learning mode (Joolingen, 1999). The purpose of this approach focuses on deep learning throughout learners’ active and constructive learning processes.

From this perspective, service learning as a cognitive tool was applied to the curriculum design (macro) level and course design (micro) level. At the course level, service learning as a cognitive tool was employed for student understanding of course related theory and concept. For instance, the course topic in the sophomore year is about a communication design system with semiotics as a theoretical base. To provide a relevant visual messages for community partners, students were required to analyze visual perceptions on existing visual identity systems, to research other cases, and to communicate with multiple stakeholders involved in it. A series of analytic and synthetic cognitive processes involved in service learning experience elucidates the connection between theoretical and practical disciplinary concepts (Kecskes & Spring, 2003). At the curriculum level, service learning as a cognitive tool was used for developing problem solving process skills, which are applied to every individual course activity as meta-level cognitive skills. Service-learning tasks based on constructivist models (Kecskes & Spring, 2003, p.30), were built in the incremental process through multiple years of experience. In the freshman year, students focus on fundamental disciplinary knowledge without involving
real world context. Starting service learning with less complex community problems in the sophomore year, students advance toward more complex problems in the junior and senior years.

The nature of complexity is defined by three elements: (a) learning context: theoretical to real, (b) determinacy of interacting elements: undefined to defined, and (c) scale of context: organization system to socio-cultural system. <Figure. 2>

![Figure 2: Taxonomy of Complexity](image)

The Influence of Service Learning on Faculty Members’ Scholarship Ernest L. Boyer, who envisioned a new model of scholarship, wrote:

> The time has come to move beyond the tired old “teaching versus research” debate and give the familiar and honorable term, “scholarship” a broader, more capacious meaning. . . . The work of professoriate might be thought of as having four separate, yet overlapping, functions. These are: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration; the scholarship of application; and the scholarship of teaching. (p.16)
Aligned with the notion of scholarship by Boyer, service learning teaching provides opportunities for the faculty to re-conceptualize professional service in the context of scholarship.

Historically, real world problems have been in the center of design practice. Designers involved in the real problems of stakeholders or organizations provide design service to solve issues. In this conventional practice mode, ultimate solutions are given more weight than the problem solving process. This stakeholder-centered perspective often overrides cognitive elements embedded in
process of designing and generates limited understanding of the discipline based on what the designer produces.

Putting real world problems in the learning context shifts the mode of designing from solution driven to process driven. To design educative experience (Dewey, p.17), the faculty members have to be keenly aware of contextual elements in natural problems, translate them into cognitive tools, and integrate them in student learning process.

Teaching process in a service learning context raised these questions for the faculty, which have been neglected or ill-articulated from a solution driven perspective:

1. What is a “designerly way of knowing” (Epistemology)?
2. What is the design process and method based on the nature of practical problems (Methodology)?

The author of *Designerly Ways of Knowing* (Cross, 2007) proposes to develop a design subject in its own terms by quoting the claim from the Royal College of Art study of “Design in General Education.” It says, “There are specific things to know, ways of knowing them, and ways of finding out about them” that are specific to the design area (p. 22). Supporting this argument, the author provides the rationale by specifying the nature of design inquiry that is based on real problems, which are ill-defined, ill-structured, or “wicked” (Rittel and Webber, 1973).

This argument can be better understood from general professional practice level. In *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Donald Shön (1988) writes, “On the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the hard ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory ad techniques. In the ‘swamp lowlands,’ messy, confusing problems defy technical solutions.”

In the process of curriculum design and teaching, the Herron School of Art and Design faculty had opportunities to examine the fundamentals of the discipline and to expand inquiries beyond the discipline specifics. The evidence of change in the research domain can be found in faculty research activity. Before the curriculum redesign, the faculty focused on the study of form and configuration of artifacts. Under the new curriculum frame, the scope of inquiry became broader and interconnected across disciplines. <Figure 4 and 5>

As well as expansion in the research domain, service-learning teaching brought a new mode of research by opening new collaborative opportunities. The faculty has directed research projects that engage students as researchers and the community as a new intellectual resource. This participatory action research also invited community partners and faculty from other discipline as collaborative researchers.

THE INFLUENCE OF SERVICE LEARNING ON STUDENT LEARNING

The impact of service learning on students is well documented from a wealth of literature on service learning. Therefore this article specifically focuses on findings within the context of the departmental and cognitive approach to service learning.
Cognitive competencies
Before the curriculum redesign, for twenty years, the Herron Visual Communications department has offered a single elective professional practice course where students deliver client-focused work for community-based partners. However, the complexity of real problems was not considered as an instructional element. Community partners identified their needs and problems and students provided visual solutions. The course-learning objective was more "applying" of knowledge and skills with focus on the craft of detailed design.
In the new curriculum, community problems are employed as cognitive tools from freshman to senior year. Intensity and frequency, of the cognitive process, increasingly enhance students’ cognitive competency. Feedback from community partners provides evidence of student learning outcomes with sophisticated design solutions and analytical process management. Students demonstrate evidence of their learning competency in portfolio format in senior year capstone course <figure 6>. Students analyze their learning outcomes with the matrix (of the PULs and NASAD competencies), which were originally used as a learning outcome design tool for the faculty. Each student portfolio clearly reflects the enhanced cognitive competencies and deepened understanding of the learning experiences of that student.
<Figure 6> student portfolio by Marshall Jones, Instructed by Lee Vander Kooi
ENGAGED LEARNING

Students came to the Visual Communication program with preconceptions about the major through various experiences. In many case, the preconceptions were based on phenomena in which Visual Communication is identified with design application such as poster, logo, or web design. Students expected to learn stylish form and technology skills for production. Contrary to their expected learning outcomes, the concept of design as problem solving and the related learning subjects were unfamiliar or unattractive to students. That disconnection led to the challenges of their first year of learning. Service learning which started in the second year prompted a shift in students’ attitudes toward learning. The actual involvement in the service-learning context, which was designed intentionally to be repetitive and incremental, enabled students to grasp the conceptual understanding of their learning as they advanced and transformed them into more engaged and confident learners.

VALUE IN ACTION

Service learning experiences made departmental values transparent and provided opportunities for students to see those values in action (Kecskes & Spring, 2003). As a result, there was a change in the way students viewed their professional and civic identity beyond academic learning. Student involvement in real life situation as design context has provided opportunity for students to develop ethical sensitivity with consideration of cause-and-effect relationship and to establish their value system through design decision process.

Community problem settings have provided opportunities for students to see how their design process skills and design thinking can be transferable to a wide range of problems and be instrumental for creative solution development beyond the role of mediating communication needs. Students consistently mention that they feel empowered and take active ownership of the practice.

CONCLUSION

Key findings from this case study can be expressed by two main concepts. One is a cognitive approach to service learning, which takes service learning as an intentional teaching tool and demonstrates how service learning facilitates students’ deep learning in the process of community problem solving.

The other key concept can be described as the systematic construction of service learning in curriculum design. Curriculum generally means a mechanism for generating knowledge and skills. This curriculum redesign case study not only demonstrates the value of service learning in student academic learning in light of the current agenda in higher education but also presents the impact of service learning as a strategy to internalize value driven education in the curriculum structure.
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REFORMING MULTIMEDIA DESIGN CURRICULUMS TODAY: ART AND TECHNOLOGIES IN INTERACTIVE WEB, CELL PHONE AND DESKTOP APPLICATION

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Today, computer multimedia technologies are powerful media for mass communication and art creativities. Interactive Web, Cell Phone and Desktop Application belong in digital media; they strongly rely on computer multimedia technologies. Therefore, no doubtfully, digital media courses are the technology-intensive courses to either design student or art student. Accomplishing a digital based design or artwork demand creative learning, students have to face complete different environments involving computer techniques such as programming languages, hardware and software.

In fact, we have to realize that high techniques really bring the troublesome situation for art and design school construct a proper framework for teaching high techs. In university, computer language learning completely separates from design and art courses or collaborative learning. So far, all experiences tell us that it is a very inefficient way. Therefore, changing existing courses is critically important for art and design school unless the school only has traditional media programs. In order for new technology to be effective in today's art and design programs, new curriculum needs to be intelligently integrated into a rich, effective and meaning-centered curriculum for art and design school.

I've taught digital media for 4 years at a university. In most of cases, department always points students to computer science department to take the relevant courses since most of faculties in art and design area lack of relevant knowledge in computer science. And they also don’t clearly know what exactly their students should learn first, and how much relevant contents fit into an academic year.

What we are seeing here, art and design student struggled with learning computer language in computer science department, because of those courses are originally designed for computer science student, not for art and design student. And the faculties in computer science don’t understand students who come from art and design area, and art and design student don’t like the way to learn the knowledge like computer science student either. We have to realize that two area’s students with quite different thinking in many ways. But, obviously, by the time, art and design student will be required to master more and more computer techniques to server their work. For instance, currently web designer is required have knowledge in HTML, XML, CSS and JavaScript. If it was five years ago, the area required only HTML. Thus, the way we taught the classes is not suit for current digital circumstances. We must to reform the curriculums for fit into the new environment—digital era. But, what is the best way to solve it? Well, let’s classify most popular computer languages that we are using for our projects today. I
can’t cover all details, but simply divide them into following categories:

Server side language for Web—ASP, ASPX, JSP, PHP, Flex, JavaScript, Vbscript, ASP, JSP, PHP.

Desktop—C++, Java, VC, VB, VB.net and Shell.

Video/motion graphics/3D animation—VBscript, openGL, C++, Java, JavaScript VC and .net.

Interactive art—C++, Java, VC, VB, VB.net and Shell.

Database—PL/SQL, Mainframe, Data Warehouse.

Hardware—Various sensors and interfaces.

New media software: Flash, computer 3D animation software SoftImage, Maya, 3Ds Max…

Look at above listed knowledge, we are facing a vast sea of knowledge, and then we will question ourselves:

1. What is the priority for art and design student to learn?
2. What is “Net generation” learning convenient?
3. How many credits could apply for learning high techniques for the art and design student?
4. What are the barriers for art and design student learning high techniques in an art and design school?
5. Finally, how we create a proper curriculum for art and design student?

It is very hard to say which language must to learn first exactly. Personally, better learn all of them, but it is impossible and completely unnecessary. We are not going to make our students like programmer or developer; they are future artists or designers. Hence, the contents really depend on what the student’s intension or concentration area is.

In general speaking, if the student is a fine art student who wants to do some artwork with interactive multimedia, he should start with C++, Java or VB, because of these languages are good for creating powerful computer interfaces. If a student is interested in web application, he should start with JavaScript. HTML and XHTML are the backbone for the web application, the student have to learn too. HTML and XHTML are not really programming language; they are easy to learn with software Dreamweaver.

It looks like problem being solved! Wait a minute; the problem can’t be solved that easy. No matter what kind of languages you choose, it can’t be easy done by a 3 credits course. Absolutely, principles are not enough to support our design or art creation. We need more knowledge about it. But, an intermediate level class in computer language, it requires some relevant subjects such as mathematics, physical and algorithm. Do our students have to learn
all of them? Of course, No. Therefore, we have to reform the curriculum. First of all, we should select the contents that must be installed in an intermediate level class. Faculty could do it wisely. In any computer program language, there are many build-in/existing classes or objects in it; those classes or objects are similar to all different computer languages. We don’t care about how to make them work, but how to use them. The idea will narrow down the scope for learning. For undergraduate student in art and design, following objects or classes are used frequently in their work:

1. Resize an object.
2. Move an object from position A to position B.
3. Rotate an object.
4. Change the color for it object.
5. Fade in or fade out an object.
7. Date and time.
8. Trigger events.
9. Layer handler.
10. Text input objects
11. Text font, size control.
12. We may list more of useful classes or objects here.

We can intelligently integrate above classes or objects in to the course projects of art or design. Student will directly use the knowledge what the learned in class intermediately. Through these projects learning, it will expand learning skills of students in computer language. This is the most effective way for learning computer language.

Design projects always encourage making connections across curriculum areas. For example, in my web design class through an application project, students use JavaScript as tool to design a scheduler to display various small image icons based on different user access. I taught them how to use JavaScript time object “getTime ()”, and then used basic function code to loop it. I found student understood the functions of the specific object quickly and applied to their project properly. Students showed apparently great interest and courage to continue learning more.

ADVANTAGES FOR THIS METHOD:

1. Student can learn and apply it in a real case in a class.
2. Student don’t waste their credits and time to learn extra things that not be applied in their applications/projects.
3. Save credits for learning more relevant course.

CONCLUSION:

We’re seeing the problems, and we have found the better way for making different curriculum for art and design student. Usually, we should create 3 ~ 4 different levels of relevant courses.
EXAMPLE:

1. 100 level course for learning principles of computer language.
2. 200 level practical studio courses for learning practical classes or objects. This course will integrate computer technology with practical projects/applications.
3. 300 level practical studio courses for using practical classes or objects to create interfaces. This course will integrate computer technology with practical projects/applications.
4. 400 level interactive multimedia tech application. Focus on creating or designing interactive multimedia work with computer interfaces.

Of course, the new curriculum demands faculties with strong technique background in computer technology. If the faculties lack of strong technique background, they have collaborate with other faculties across area. It is extremely important; your collaborators completely understand what you really need for your classes. It is difficult part anyway. However, the first thing that you should do is to choose all necessary classes or objects from the specific computer language you choose for your area. And then design a series of proper projects or applications that associate with classes or objects you selected. You will be success in your classes.
POLITICAL ART IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF BELFAST AND BETHLEHEM

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In a café on the top floor of the Ibdaa Cultural Center in the Deheisha refugee camp outside Bethlehem a young man tells me his name is Jihad Ramadan. My skepticism reads and he continues, “I did not choose this conflict, it chose me.” I never see him again. On Falls Road in West Belfast I meet a Republican muralist, Danny Devanny, who at one time was the Director of Communications for the I.R.A. He now collaborates with a Protestant muralist.

The conflicts Jihad Ramadan and Danny Devanny represent beg for comparison precisely because they are going in opposite directions. Both these regional conflicts have far-reaching international implications. How are these conflicts depicted in the local public political art; in graffiti or murals and posters? More important though, why is one peace process working and another one not? I’ve broken this “big question” down into three more specific questions.

Question #1 How and why are images of conflict created as public art? What are the intentions of the artists and the community?

These images are created in an atmosphere that ranges from pure community consent to provocation. Pure consent often supports images that have to do with something other than the immediate conflict, cultural symbols for example. The creation of these images takes place in public where the act of creating the mural as well as the mural itself is designed to consolidate community opinion. These images usually exist within the geographical boundaries of a community and away from the perimeter, interface or possibility of interference. These images are often composed with icons that project layers of meaning. Celtic designs in the border of Devanny’s mural, connoting republican unity. Handela, the barefoot Palestinian boy, as a detail in the memorial mural of Kfah Obied, connotes refugee the status of most Palestinians.

Provocation is clear when the boundaries of one community or faction are breached or defaced by the other. This is the case with the Ulster Freedom Fighter (U.F.F.) graffiti that defaces the republican civil rights mural in the north Belfast neighborhood of Ardoyne.

Images or texts like these, though public, are often executed in haste, secretly and under cover of darkness. The may be closer to graffiti than a painted mural. They may also be created using some mechanism that will ensure quick execution. Good examples of this are the stenciled images of “Martyrs” in West Bank refugee camps. Secrecy there has much to do with concerns about Israeli Defense Forces and to a lesser degree with factional differences within the Palestinian community.

In the occupied territories, especially the refugee camps, community consent is given to a wide range of images. A large colorful mural that reads “Free Palestine,” is embellished with
fanciful, child-like stencils and was painted with the help of school children during daylight. A poster, heroically depicting two dead Palestinian militants holding assault rifles coexists. This example was produced in secret and posted on a wall at night. The fact is most residents of Deheisha consent to both images and agree that these men are heroes. The caption reads, “If the oppressor broke my sword he will never break my spirit.”

It is a fact that in Northern Ireland cultural symbols and sports heroes are now overshadowing and replacing paramilitary murals. Community consent combines with a form of reconciliation in Belfast in stark contrast to the consent linked to provocation in the West Bank. There is a correlation here with the success and the lack of success of these two separate, yet in my view related, peace processes.

**Question #2** How do these images construct space that is both physical and psychological?

If we accept reception theory and Arnheim’s idea that visual expression is a form of reason, then these images certainly qualify as rhetoric. Rhetoric can be both persuasive and intimidating, adding an additional dimension to consolidation and provocation. Loyalist paramilitary murals in Northern Ireland have in the past been noted for intimidating effect, marking territory with images of hooded gunmen. Posing on the sides of buildings, their threat all the more ominous because of their anonymity.

You have to ask yourself what it must be like to live with these images day-after-day for significant chunks of a lifetime. Do you become inured to the images and largely ignore them? Or do these images have a cumulative effect on an individual or group outlook? The answer is probably a little of both. Existing beliefs are reinforced and very few minds are changed. Despite this the trend in Northern Ireland is away from provocation and intimidation.

On the other hand the trend between Israel and Palestinians from the Israelis side is intimidation through control. The nature of this control, checkpoints, travel restrictions and a Palestinian Diaspora are well known. In the West Bank the architecture of this control becomes the canvas for local Palestinian reactive dissent and international disapproval.

**Question #3** Finally, will close study reveal compositional structures and thematic similarities? More important, what do these transparent cross-cultural markers mean?

There is significant overlap between international-influenced Palestinian images and homegrown internationalist Irish Republican images. Easy to find in both locations are images critical of American foreign policy.

The Solidarity Wall on Falls Road in Belfast also includes a large mural of a Palestinian woman confronting an Israeli soldier with text in Arabic and Gaelic that reads, “our day will come”. In numerous West Bank locations on the separation barrier are signs of international support for Palestinian independence and removal of the barrier. As I have illustrated there is also a healthy indigenous tradition of image making but these tend to be placed within Palestinian enclaves and away from boundaries or interfaces.
The images from Northern Ireland are well known. Both republicans and loyalists have learned the value of exporting them, either as photographs taken by tourists, in book or postcard form or electronically via TV or the Web. In fact many of the murals in Belfast and Londonderry have become tourist attractions. Google Earth features many murals from both sides. Their value as factional representations of conflict is enormous as is their public relations value. This is an idea that has been readily embraced by Republicans who as one observer noted have been “more strategic in their image-making” by embracing international causes.

It is a fact that protestant murals for the most part rely on a predictable iconography and compositional style. Symmetry, suggesting stability or stasis is a common characteristic of Loyalist murals. The tradition is old and has always been about reinforcing a status quo. This status quo no longer exists. The British Parliament recognizes this and in 2006 earmarked 100,000 pounds to change loyalist paramilitary murals into murals oriented toward culture, furthering the trend away from provocation and intimidation in the visual culture.

The comparison between Israeli and Palestinian public political art is itself more difficult for two reasons. One: Israeli art of this kind addresses history, the holocaust and the birth of the nation. Very little, none that I could find directly addresses conflict with the Palestinians. (This is clearly an area that needs more work.) Two: it is one thing to get a sectarian image out of Northern Ireland and quite another to get one out of the occupied territories. Access to the West Bank is difficult at best. Despite checkpoints in Bethlehem that tourists may easily pass through, years of occupation have eroded basic infrastructure so that few who make the trip to Manger Square stay the night. The rest of the West Bank is even more inhospitable to travelers.

**IN CONCLUSION:**

- Internationalist images and international influences are strong on the side of Irish republicans and Palestinians though Palestinian images of any kind are rarely exported.
- Loyalist image-making is moving away from depictions of paramilitary units to memorials and now to historical and contemporary cultural icons.
- Israeli public image making tends to avoid the current conflict and focus on the past: the Holocaust and the founding of Israel, and so does not compare easily with Palestinian image making.

Republicans and Unionists in Northern Ireland will never agree what happened but there are no more walls being built. The images there are part of a larger on-going dialogue. The search for that larger dialogue that embraces visual culture between people in Israel and the West Bank is proving more difficult.
DISROBING A DEMAGOGUE

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I grew up in a country under the communist rule where every nuance of a cultural life, a poem, a body in dance, a gesture of an actor on a stage, an out of focus frame of a photograph or a film were all interpreted from the underground perspective. There has been a necessity to construe, to find the underlined meaning, to feel that there was a rescue in this desperate search for hidden metaphors and symbols.

It is difficult to comprehend a mind of a demagogue. It seems to reside beyond general ways of perceiving the environment because not everyone has an ill desire to destroy things one does not understand. In totalitarian systems where human spirit is caged they burned what:

They could not
Understand.
They burned
All that frightened them....

As much as dictatorships anywhere set up similar systems of censorship and propaganda, artists, designers, composers know how to surpass them. They have the strategies of expression in disrobing a demagogue. There are also some unforeseen readings of their works.

Art, dance and poetry possess a magnifying ability to penetrate beyond and above a brain’s capabilities of an average censor. These arts are considered by censorship of demagogical states as a degenerate culture. When one contemplates this judgment, it is not difficult to realize that the abstract and conceptual ideas can open unexpected ways of thinking of political environments, but one also needs to find a route leading “from symbols to substance”.

Some of the designers, artists, poets, quite blindly or, perhaps, not so blindly, follow political systems of horror that silences, imprisons and tortures. Oblivion to an oppressive environment can be very convenient since it is much easier to follow the wave than to rise against it. One can then with more respect and unstoppable admiration look at those who bravely ascend against schemes of indoctrination and ruthless propaganda.

Slawomir Mrozek is a Polish playwright and writer whose sharp and sarcastic humour enlarges the reality of the confinement. In one of Mrozek’s play titled Emigrants the viewer is transported into the Orwellian reality of 1984: a mechanical, depressing and tragically desperate place. One wants to escape this controlled cage, but the obstacles are
many and horrific. One day, however, almost miraculously, one breaks out of the
dystopian state. In the play there are two archetypal emigrants: the intellectual and the
worker. These two share their living quarters in the under-belly of a building, somewhere
other than 1984 because they fled what they the inescapable. Ironically though the place
they inhabit in the present becomes all too close to the realities of the past. The dialogues
between the intellectual and the worker are filled with wit, cynicism and irony as if there
were an invisible wall dividing and yet uniting these two men. They desperately try to
escape the old reality and suddenly they realize that the new one brings them back to
what they had left behind… the space where these two emigrants live is the space where
the horrors of the past meet the horrors of the present and the future. The psychology of
the mind and space slowly reveals itself. The play’s metaphors and realities create a nod
that is possible to be entangled by the play’s viewers and it can flee the logic of a censor.
Logic of a censor is based on rules and regulations and it is caged in itself, that’s why
nuances and metaphors of a message can conquer the viewers and stay invisible to
censorship’s eye.

There are several inquisitive works of culture, which parallel to Mrozek’s Emigrants.
Krzysztof Wodiczko’s penetrating exploration of a state of mind If you see something is
chilling, provocative and critical to the bare bone. The installation’s tangible body
becomes instinctual and cerebral. Its intellectual clarity incites a variety of experiential
responses of the viewers. Plasticity and enclosure of the gallery’s space expands the
unraveling message. Wodiczko’s voice is strong in revealing ambiguities of
contemporary and past fears allowing them to be conquered. Describing his installation
would be stripping it from its vital forces, but Wodiczko’s aptitude is unmistakably locating a
viewer in an uncomfortable position—a position of a censor or a silent controller or a passive
listener. One has to rely on things that are untold and to be discovered in meandering
complexities of manipulation and threats of politics. “The unexpected, the unrehearsed, the
event that will prove unforgettable, may, they hope, (readers) happen in front of their eyes,
making them witness to…” (Manguel 258) something extraordinarily essential—a display of
courage and a rejection of apathy.

There is possibly not a greater thrill than to resist a demagogical with knowledge that
one’s resistance and its methods are shared by many others. Tadeusz Konwicki’s book A
Minor Apocalypse. One must say it was not so MINOR since it triggered a monumental response
from his readers in a communist Poland in 1970s. The book was published by an underground
press in Poland and was immediately widely circulated. Its publishing numbers were not high
and yet, it had been difficult to find in Poland anyone who had not read it. To read meant to
object, to rebel, to disrobe a demagogue. You would have seen people on park benches, on the
buses reading breathlessly The Minor Apocalypse. What had impressed me then still impresses
me now: the openness, firmness and fearlessness of how people displayed the book’s title while
reading it. One would have thought that there were so much to risk to do it in such an overt
manner and yes, there was, but this decisive courageous act against oppressiveness can be
difficult to compare. We do not think of ourselves as heroes… and yet our actions, sometimes,
add to the resistance. Today, in the age of compassion fatigue, unashamed materiality and
fabricated feelings, more than ever it is important to participate in the acts of opposition.
What frightens a demagogue the most is a disease that can be called agoraphobia of the infinity of ideas. As Ricardo Scofidio writes: “...a type of agoraphobia, fearing the virtual infinity of ideas that open outwards” (Scofidio 41).

A Minor Apocalypse is a brilliant work that engages in its surreal environment: The environment that is at the same time specific and universal. Perhaps because of that, I found it extremely difficult to quote its fragments. And yet, a quote from The Minor Apocalypse “a slavery adds wings to one’s existence” cannot be omitted. It needs to be actually celebrated in its comprehension of human psyche, its sarcasm, its wit and sharpness! To follow its dark humour step by step is a prerequisite for it to be a part of one’s system of resisting!

The German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 started a chapter of tragedy and horror, it also started a chapter of courage. In her book, The Rape of Europa, Lynn H. Nicholas points directly to how culture can become an endangered species and can be “captured” and destroyed together with the people responsible for creating it. The author, in her thorough investigation of the German invasion of Europe, concentrates on the deliberate actions of the Germans in destroying the cultures of the countries they violently conquered. Poland was the first to be invaded and the first to painfully witness the horrors of its cultural heritage being demolished.

The Germans moved many Polish Jews to the Warsaw Ghetto and sealed off on November 22nd, 1940. Every day in life of people in the Ghetto was tragic and difficult. Yet, the cultural life in the Ghetto was truly vibrant. Theatre productions unified many professionals: actors, musicians, composers, designers and artists. Already in December 1940 the first professional theatre opened its doors with a production of Moliere’s L’Avare. Because there were strict rules imposed by the Germans forbidding Jews to perform works by Aryan authors, the posters advertising the play gave the name of the translator rather than that of Moliere. This would become common practice in the future. The Germans did not notice but, of course, everyone in the Ghetto knew who the author of L’Avare really was.

Music and its undeniable power have threatened demagogues for millennia. Plato, in his utopian or rather distopian Republic proposed a censorship of Lydian music for it being too soft and gentle and not encouraging brave actions. The sound of music can menace, it can suggest as much as the word and the image. Music and its sound and resonance can be interpreted in so many ways that can escape a rigid mind of a censor.

Many composers were, quite consciously, moving against the demagogical establishment. Schoenberg, Mahler, Berg shared a place in the Pantheon of Entartete Music. Their compositions threatened not only because of their dissonance and atonality, but also because their creators were not of pure German race. To listen to their music was thrilling, exhilarating almost uplifting because the listeners, through a simple gesture of listening, were becoming the participants in the act of disobedience against demagogy.
There are many ways one can defeat the demagogical devices: some of these ways can be disguised others can very directly attack the system. Frederic Chopin, an incurable Romantic, composed music that inspired courageous actions as much as nostalgic feeling of longing. His music was blacklisted and banned several times. During the Russian occupation of Poland in the 19th century, Chopin’s music was viewed by the occupiers so dangerous that the Russians destroyed his grand piano by throwing it through the windows of Chopin’s parents’ apartment. Many cultures hold a belief that musical instruments have souls and their magnificent sound is a proof of divine powers residing in them.

During the German invasion and occupation of Poland no one was allowed to listen and play Chopin’s music for its enormous impact. Listening to his tunes leaves one quite overwhelmed… Chopin died in November of 1848. His body was buried at Pere Lachaise in Paris and his tomb has always been covered with fresh flowers. Chopin wanted though, in a very romantic way, for his heart to be transported to Poland and to stay there for ever.

Despite the fact that we amass mountains of things and we are logo paralyzed creatures we are still captive to irresistible hope. This hope allows us to resist so many forms of censorship and propaganda—we learn slowly, but indisputably how to disrobe demagogues and it is not yet another commodity.

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DECORATION AS BRAND, BRAND AS POLITICS

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A few years ago, the department I teach in was conducting a position search for a tenure track position, teaching graphic design. One of the candidates was giving a lecture on his work. The work was mostly poster work that utilized Victorian Gothic letter forms within a modernist grid structure. One of the faculty members asked him about decorating the page. As if coining a line from Shakespeare himself, he said: “to decorate or not to decorate, that’s a good question.” He went on to explain that decoration was something that made him anxious. I, myself am an avid collector of the Gothic letter form. I spend most of my disposable income on lead, wood type and borders from online auctions. The notion that Victorian typefaces are not decorative made me stop and think of a shopping bag that my wife and I collected at Urban Outfitters in New Orleans. The bag had a large, cap U and O in a Victorian display face I recognized from a book I have at home, *Handbook of Early Victorian Art, Typographical Edition*. The two caps are from a font set called Lapidaire Monstre. The typeface is heavy and squat and divided into three horizontal registers. Heavily decorated with rural scenes cut into the strokes of the letter forms, the typeface is made dimensional by the presence of a bold, heavy outline with a small black rule behind that down and to the right. To me, the bag represented a designer using a visual trope common to Victorian decoration. I was at first surprised to see a direct copy of those typefaces on the bag. The type lifted directly from the book was something that could have easily been developed for a larger branded visual system with the rural scenes replaced by T-shirt clad youngsters in idyllic settings. The use of decoration in design seems to be a more oft used pastiche in today’s practice in visual communications. Nature scenes, fleurons and other decorative uses abound in today’s design. Logos, too are used in surface design. Mathematics and geometry are all used in applied acts of metonymic signifiers of meaning. The repetitive use of bright red target on white backgrounds in advertising and logos stationed behind the heads of sports and political figures seem to cry out to us for our attention. Were the typefaces used on the bag from Urban Outfitters an attempt to appeal to a simpler time? Or is the application of decorative elements to a page an attempt at a return to an emphasis on craftwork?

The senior undergraduate class at the University of Louisiana I teach is a studio class that focuses on history and theory in the practice of design. The first few weeks are dedicated to looking at the history of design. John Ruskin and William Morris are two of my favorite historical people upon which to elucidate. Their recalcitrance toward Industrialization and modernization produced some of the most beautiful work by the artists of their time. Morris’ own designs for wallpaper, textiles and books all reflect nature at its most ideal. The merging of applied design to everyday artifacts was an attempt to bring beauty, truth and taste to the masses. In 1851, the Great Exhibition showed the handiwork of all industrialized nations. Victorian art was on display for over six million viewers to see the spirit and characteristics that mechanization had to offer. The exhibition gave an opportunity to, “design reformists,” to debate ornamentation in design and taste. “The Grammar of Ornament,” written by Owen
Jones in 1856 suggested a geometric approach in crafting ornamentation. Nine years later, Ruskin states in his lecture “Traffic,” “taste ... is the ONLY morality.” Overly decorated objects were seen as duplicitous and inferior. Morris’s own founding of the Kelmscott press made him close friends with Walter Crane, and they worked together on books. *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, its influence from incunabula books in Mediaeval Europe use heavy borders around Crane’s illustrations. Crane, too was a proponent of socialism and was the first president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888. Crane’s book, *Line and Form*, published two years later also seeks to formalize ornament into fundamental geometric units that repeat and bind the page into a cohesive whole. That Morris reached back over 400 years to make book design an art form and to bring the beautiful into the life’s of the common man must have seemed anachronistic to those just stepping out of the Enlightenment. However, Morris, and the practitioners of the art movement made their social goals visual.

The revolutions in typographical design and printing from the Industrial Revolution had a great impact on Victorian Society in general. Chromolithography made pages, advertising and packages livelier and more realistic than before. The lateral router, invented by the American printer Darius Wells in 1827, as well as advances in steam printing on both sides of the Atlantic had their part to play in the larger, theoretical aspect of design in the early 19th Century. The number of typefaces greatly increased as production methods became more efficient. The advancements that Morris made in type design and surface pattern would not be felt on the American side of the Atlantic for decades. Letterpress, with its design emphasis on designing from the center axis of the page made it quite easy to embellish designs with all sorts of typefaces and other ornamentation. Border ornaments were all added as relief printers competed with lithography and copper engravers with a much more fluid and curvilinear style. Whatever the governing general principles in designing the broadsides and handbills, the layout is subservient to the technology and the typographical embellishments common to the era. Ruskin’s goal of forming a society in which the arts played a significant role as artisans and laborers work in service to society seems undermined in these endeavors of selling goods or advertising. The type forms grow bulbous appendages, attenuated strokes and dimensional aspects that run counter to any typefaces from the Renaissance favored by Morris or Ruskin.

However, in Vienna at the turn of the century, *Ver Sacrum*, the Secessionist periodical pushed the idea of high art and design. The magazine waged a war against complacency. Steven Heller, in his book *Merz to Émigré and Beyond*, relates that the editors of the journal were a collection of artists, designers and architects who published poets like Rainer Maria Rilke as well as art critics of the time. Advertising was also required to be commissioned from the artists and designers of each issue. Artists such as Koloman Moser and Alfred Roller were inveterate draftsmen and had much to contribute in shaping the Secessionist movement. Historian Philip Meggs writes that,

This evolution toward elemental geometric form in design was diagrammed by Walter Crane in his book *Line and Form*. When Vienna Secessionist artists rejected the French floral style, they turned toward flat shapes and greater simplicity. Design and craft became increasingly important as this metamorphosis culminated in an emphasis on
geometric patterning and modular design construction.\(^8\)

Type, pattern and human figuration work together in a prevailing sense of unity in design. Composition is based on fundamental geometric principles. Although many designers and illustrators still used elements from nature, more attention was given to negative space on the page. Geometry in design was now the prevailing system of order, and order is seen as a natural product of the modern culture. In 1908, Adolph Loos argued in an essay published in Ver Sacrum, that, “…cultural revolution and human progress were being hampered by ornament.”\(^9\) Decoration was seen as tendentious and regressive. Flat shapes also became a predominant theme in the designs of posters and advertisements.

In Germany, art critics were also interested in the relationship of art and design to social conditions, culture and technology. Peter Behrens, an architect and designer for Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gelleschaft, or AEG believed that after architecture, typography was the most influential and characteristic emblem of the times.\(^10\) In his poster, for electric lamps, geometric elements structure the space and signify the radiant energy of illumination, reducing the formal parts of decoration further yet into functional elements. At roughly the same time, Lucian Bernhard working in Berlin is reducing his compositions further, and striking any decoration from the design itself. The object poster, or Plakatstil, was reduced to a line of hand-lettered type and a concise illustration. Bernhard’s Munich rival, Ludwig Holwien, also was a pioneer in the development of advertising leading into the modern age. His inventive application of patterning to advertise clothing in the posters is distinctive and metonymic; much the same way that Behrens produced work for AEG. Bernhard’s rejection of ornament in design and Holwein’s discreet use of pattern to lead the viewer’s eye directly to the conceptual message clearly paves the way for the modern era to flourish with simpler elements in the layout of the final work.

The political affiliations of the three Germans seem relevant here. Behrens, ever the rationalist, tried to strip the connotations of social class and wealth in all of his designs from teapots, posters and architecture.\(^11\) Behrens was interested in a language of form that was a priori to decoration and ornament. Bernhard found success at a very young age and owned his own studio, employing up to 30 artists and assistants at the height of his business. Bernhard’s printer had permission from the designer himself to encourage others to work in the same style.\(^12\) He traveled to America and tried to persuade designers to work in a similar manner. By 1925, he moved to America and didn’t have the same success that he enjoyed in Europe. Holwein was very much a German nationalist and a member of the Nazi party and worked in the department of propaganda.\(^13\) After WWII, most designers had fled much of war torn Europe for the safety of Switzerland or America. Designers like Max Huber, trained at the Bauhaus, moved to Zurich in 1931. According to Meggs, Bill created a manifesto, “calling for a universal art of absolute clarity based on controlled arithmetical construction.”\(^14\) One can see from his Autodrome poster that formal decoration is abandoned. Composition is reductive and the typeface of choice is the sans serif. Conceptual meaning is much more prevalent and relevant to the times. Modernism was fully entrenched as branding principles made a strong case for integrated design systems for corporate needs. Clean areas of open space with sans serif type and designed spaces all based on a grid and mathematical principles were pervasive in design.
It isn’t until the pluralism of the 60s that we see major changes in illustration. But the *Push Pin Almanac* is published in the middle of the decade, which turned into the Push Pin Group. Milton Glaser and Seymour Chwast united fragmented component parts into, “total communication conveying the individual vision of the creator, who was also involved in the total conception and design of the printed page.”15 Glaser’s Bob Dylan poster is a strong example of these attitudes. The flat planes of color with the hand-lettered type are emblematic of the work of their studio. *Push Pin* also looks back to Victorian wood type and starts to revive typestyles prototypical of the 19th century styles. Other designers like Victor Moscoso, Wes Wilson and Peter Max also explore senescent styles of the previous century. However, it is at Cranbrook in the late 80s that Katherine McCoy begins to use typography as a discursive device.16 Roland Barthes ideas of the death of the author and the birth of the reader are a prominent aspect her work and writing. Design, writing and literature wasn’t so much created by an author, but created in the mind of the reader or viewer. Modern society changed greatly after the Industrial Revolution. Mechanization of products created a boom of products on the shelf for sale. Consumers now had many more products to choose from and advertising became a big business. Adolph Loos in 1930, writes that he had, “freed mankind from superfluous ornament.”17 Branding was born of this age and is still the dominant voice of the discipline of design. Alice Twemlow writes in her essay, “The Decriminilization of Ornament.” Modernist design is an enduring hegemony.18

However decoration, ornament and work based on handicraft abounds in the current vernacular. Twemlow states that decoration is a return to meticulous and obsessive craft. With the evolutions in the technology used in the creation of work based on solutions, it only seems natural that a designer would want to take back their art from amateurs, especially when there is no system for accreditation in place for professionals that have studied at length in the field. But decoration, as we have seen in the art work of Morris and others is a powerful signifying application, especially in the service of branding. According to Marty Neumieir in his book, *The Brand Gap*, mass production has turned to mass customization and symbolic attributes make packaged goods desirable to a buying public.19 Groups of people are lumped into categories called “tribes” that are heavily studied by their buying trends. The better to understand a group of people is to increase one’s knowledge of their behavior.

In his book, *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes tries to find what he would consider a “true” photograph of his mother. His mother had died, and in the book, he describes going through old photographs of her; he wants to see her for who she is, an image that he would recognize with veracity. In the book, he finds a picture of his mother as a young girl of five years old. Barthes relates, “…the distinctiveness of her face, the naïve attitude of her hands, the place she had docily taken without either showing or hiding herself, and finally her expression…”20 Barthes idea that the viewer is the creator of meaning is an interesting point of departure here. However, as we have seem with Morris and others, the designers intent will always be informed by many sources. As Rick Poyner states, “A design(er) cannot fail to be informed, in some measure, by personal taste, cultural understanding, social and political beliefs, and deeply held aesthetic preferences.”21 Coming back to the bag from Urban Outfitters. One must assume that the use of the typographic forms, without any attempt by the designer to alter in any way the type is a cop-out. Whatever the reason the designer had for using these typographical forms,
one has to wonder about the intention in the design of the bag itself. I think that Twemlow says it best, “Evident in these expressions of the neo-baroque is a bizarre nostalgia for a rural past. [...] contemporary and largely urban designers appear to be trying to recreate a past and rural idyll as an escape from the real urban present.” This sense of escapism is alarming, however, not all designers have such a cavalier attitude about their audience or their own talents. Marian Bantjes walked away from her design business so that she could focus on ornate and decorative designs. She was a typesetter for years, with no formal education in design. Bantjes now designs ornate patterns that flow across the page for catalogs, posters, bags as well as textiles for notable clients which include Saks Fifth Avenue, Wired and others. While some seem to dabble in the craft of design, Bantjes excels at it. Form, proportion and exact drawing are at the forefront of the design work she produces. And maybe decoration can be seen as having a more feminine side in an exacting precision of fluid linear form.

In 1904, when Gandhi travelled from South Africa to Durban, he read Ruskin’s Unto This Last, a polemic on economics. Gandhi, says author Patrick Brantlidge learns three lessons:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.

2. That a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.

3. That a life of labor, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.

The practice of Ruskin’s writings was already underway by Morris and other artists in England, but it is Ananda Coomaraswamy, Morris’s Indian disciple that questions England’s Imperialism and colonialism in general.

Thus the ideal society is... a kind of co-operative work-shop in which production is... for use and not for profit... The arts are not directed to the advantage of anything but their object... and that is...to satisfy a human need... [thus serving humanity] in a way that is impossible where goods are made for sale rather than for use, and in quantity rather than quality.

And maybe, ultimately, that is what decoration is leading towards, a road back to quality and products that don’t ravage the natural resources of the world in which we live or place us in groups to study our buying behavior at the local mall. Rick Poyner, in an article titled, “Everything is Illuminated,” writes of the Hotel Fox in Copenhagen. The hotel worked with the company Volkswagen in a publicity stunt to promote a car, the VW Fox. The hotel commissioned designers from around the world to create wallpaper and textile patterns for the rooms themselves. “In the best of the new decoration,” says Poyner, “we see a love of complexity and a return to ideas about the role of the personal that underpins much of the most significant work of the last two decades.” The personal computer has changed the way in which the designer designs. With the ability to control much of production of creative work, designers have realized that the computer is just another tool that will forever change. Designers, if anything, are adaptable to the tools with which they operate, create and conceive.
Much of the work produced by artists has a strong design sense, and designers such as Stefan Sagmeister and artists like Jeff Koons create work that is similar in form and concept. But as artists and designers create work that is meaningful, stumbles will be encountered on the way in the form of cheap knock-offs and copycat work. Poyner, states in his article, “With luck, the kindergarten iconography getting so much attention is just a step in the right direction.”

Modernist work, and its concern with concept and cool, understated formal applications removed the designer’s hand from the viewer’s gaze. Decorative work, on the other hand, requires that the artist have the ability to draw and arrange items on a page that are dynamic and emotional. It is an exciting time to see so explicitly the re-emergence of handcraft. What this return might mean to our current moral and political standing is another debate. Morris and Ruskin turned their back to Industrialization, and it consumed them in the end. Technology, so much a part of our modern life, now is part of our day-to-day experience. If we are lucky enough to recognize these powerful tools at our hands, maybe we can then place morality and political discourse that is proper for our society. In the end, Ruskin ultimately may be right. It really is a matter of taste.

NOTES

10. Meggs, 223.
11. Meggs, 229.
15. Meggs, 394.


24. Brantlinge, 467.

25. Brantlinge, 485.


27. ibid.

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THE USE OF WORDS AND IMAGES IN OUR CULTURE TO CREATE Misperception, Objectification and Denial

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As a culture, we use words and images in the media and in the arts in order to influence behavior. The media reflects and influences our cultural beliefs about ourselves and about other beings. Not only do advertisements, books, television, film and art encourage expected behavior, they often contain underlying themes that reflect and enforce how we are structured as a society.

Our society often uses misperception, objectification and denial in order to propagate myths. The repetition of certain texts encourage acceptance and often denies accountability. One’s consciousness must be raised in order to challenge one’s own mythologies. What does the subject of consumption mean and how is it masked? Is it only in relation to buyers and merchandise, to the visual consumption of images, to the consumption of another by eating or the consumption of a woman’s sexuality, for example? What is the difference between pornography and sensuality? Is the objectification of others a necessary part of life? Can we as artists and educators deconstruct dominant discourses that discourage and destroy ethical behavior in present and future generations? We must challenge those attitudes that have been so securely entrenched in our culture today.

Many 20th and 21st century artists have incorporated words and the manipulation of words in their work in order to influence behavior. In 1916, the Dadaists named themselves by arbitrarily choosing a word from a French-German dictionary. That word happened to be “Dada” meaning “child’s rocking horse.”\(^1\) World War I was the catalyst for the moral and intellectual crisis in which these artists found themselves. Motivated by their anti-war philosophy, this “random” act was symbolic of the group’s intentional efforts to disarm the Establishment and twentieth-century art.

One of the leaders of the movement, Marcel Duchamp used words as a part of his preconceived and intellectually driven “readymades”. Poet Andre Breton described Duchamp’s “readymades” as “manufactured objects promoted to the dignity of art through the choice of the artist.”\(^2\) Duchamp’s 1917 “readymade” porcelain urinal, “Fountain,” contained words. He submitted the piece to the 1917 exhibition of the New York Society of Independent Artists. He signed the work, “R. Mutt” a tongue in cheek play on words referring to the plumbing fixture manufacturer, J.L. Mott Iron Works.

The Surrealist, Rene Magritte used linguistics as a tool beginning in 1926 in order to disconnect what the viewer saw from what the viewer read. The cryptic titles of his paintings were usually composed after the completion of the works and after discussions with friends.\(^3\) Between 1928 and 1929 he painted variations of “Ceci n’est pas une pipe,” (This is not a pipe) which, of course, were paintings of pipes. What the object was and the name we had given it, were then no longer connected. The object therefore, was allowed to go back to what it was.
before various languages possessed it. Hammacher quotes Magritte’s writings, “Sometimes the name of an object replaces an image. A word can replace an object in real life. An image can replace a word in a proposition.”

Artist Duane Michals started supplementing his photographs with text in the 1960’s in order to create narrative sequences of images on subjects such as relationships, vulnerability, desire, dreams, time, memory and mortality. Titles such as “The Fallen Angel,” “A Man Dreaming in the City,” and “The Return of the Prodigal Son” are clues to the narrative to follow. Our reaction to this marriage of text and imagery would in turn, reveal much about ourselves. Michals inked his words into the photograph allowing mistakes to simply be crossed out which added to the spirituality of the work, and created a visual path from Michals, the storyteller. In his words, “The things that interested me were all invisible, metaphysical questions: life after death, the aura of sex—its atmosphere rather than the mechanics—these are things you never see on the street.”

Since the 50’s Ed Ruscha has painted words, drawn words and incorporated them in his many artist’s books. He used words and phrases such as “AN EXTREMELY HOSTILE INDIVIDUAL,” “PROPERTIES IN HOLLYWOOD,” and “DRUGSTORE HEAVEN” against atmospheric backgrounds. Ruscha explains his motivation: “[...] I found painting to be the least interesting of all those forms of communication. I felt newspapers, magazines, books—words—to be more meaningful than what some damn oil painter was doing. So, I suppose it developed itself from that—into the idea of questioning the printed word. Then, in questioning, I began to see the printed word, and it took off from there.”

In the 60’s, Barbara Kruger worked as head picture editor in the world of advertising for “Mademoiselle,” “House and Garden,” and “Aperture” magazines. Using this background in advertising in the late 70’s, she started making print media collages with words and images. Kruger addresses cultural representations of power, greed, identity, sexuality, consumerism, stereotypes and clichés in her work which include large-scale installations. Kruger confronts us in black, red and white: “I Shop, Therefore I Am.” “Power, Pleasure, Desire, Disgust.” “Your Body is a Battleground.” She says, “I work with pictures and words because they have the ability to determine who we are and who we aren’t.” Describing today’s culture she further states:

[...] We are literally absent from our own present. We are elsewhere, not in the real, but in the represented. Our bodies, the flesh, and blood of it all, have given way to representations: figures that cavort in TV, movie, and computer screens. Propped up and ultra-relaxed, we teeter on the cusp of narcolepsy and believe everything and nothing.

Writer Carol Adams said, “Advertisements are never only about the product they are promoting. They are about how our culture is structured, what we believe about ourselves and others.” The media plays a large part in my studio work. I have been preoccupied with our blatant disconnect with Nature. My focus has been how that disconnect manifests itself in our relationship to animals and women, and how both are marketed as meat through the use of
words and imagery. My emphasis is on the strong dichotomy which exists between perception and reality.

A great disconnect with Nature, and therefore with our selves, is demonstrated in our relationship with animals. Most of this relationship takes place behind closed doors as we experiment upon them, hunt them, kill them, separate them from their young, mutilate and consume them.

The pastoral setting of the cow peacefully grazing in the meadow of a family farm and the county fairs promoting kind animal husbandry are comforting images, but both are rife with misperceptions regarding the lives of animals used for food production. These are images the media perpetuates which serve to keep us, as consumers, in denial.

In reality, the most omnipresent example of our disconnect with Nature involves factory food production. Animals are processed, disassembled, packed, and dressed. The majority of animals we eat are female and mothers. The females are impregnated forcefully while under physical restraint called a “rape rack” and held in “iron maidens” for the birthing process. Farrowing crates are metal prisons in which the mother sow is not allowed to move. Theoretically, the crate is to prevent her from rolling over on her young. The truth is, it is based on space and less space means more animals and that means higher production. In this ghastly prison, she is not allowed to turn over or walk, much less nurture. A broiler chicken has about a half of a square foot to live. In the microwave she has more room than she ever did when alive. Over one hundred thousand pigs die in transport each year and most are crippled by the time they get to the slaughterhouse having never touched the grass of a pasture, much less been on a family farm.

The goal of factory farming is to produce the most animal products as cheaply and as quickly as possible, in the smallest amount of space. Cages are such that turning around is impossible. Animals are deprived of the opportunity to exercise so their energy is spent on growing and producing at an unnatural rate. Genetic manipulation and drugs are used to fatten them at a faster rate. Since the crowded conditions encourage disease, pesticides and antibiotics are used which remain in their bodies and are passed on to those who eat animals.

Factory farming denies the beingness and the connectedness to Nature of over 9 1/2 billion animals annually in cloistered slaughterhouses and 21 billion sea animals in the United States each year. If you are an animal raised for food, everything natural is denied you. Your life is about confinement.

Our love affair with meat is consummated by meat eating. The mythology of meat eating is inherent to our culture. It is supported by our government, and generally believed that it is the best way to stay strong.

The “Beef: It’s What’s for Dinner” campaign demonstrates a myth foisted on the consumer regarding health. Every hour, over one hundred people die in the United States due to heart disease. Vegetarians are about 50% less likely to die from heart disease. On the Cattlemen’s
Beef Board website, the “Beef: It’s What’s for Dinner” campaign is explained. “When introduced to the new creative, consumers agreed beef was the only protein that could make such a majestic and powerful statement and so ‘Powerful Beefscape’ was born.”15

McDonald’s pushes the beef myth to children and parents with their “Happy Meals,” yet there is nothing happy or majestic about how that beef gets on your plate. Chilling would be a better description. Adding a toy to the meal is simply adding insult to injury, but it keeps parents and children in denial about what it is that they are eating. Writer Larry Gallagher worked in a slaughterhouse to educate himself on the process of killing animals for food. He wrote about the experience for “Details” magazine. In his article, “Meat is Murder,” he referred to the animals by stating:

The enemy is upon us. We respond with speed and fury. With all the might of technology and greed on our side, but no matter what we do, they won’t stop coming. We cut off their feet, their ears, and their heads we split their carcasses in 2 and grind up their insides for our children to eat at baseball games. Pieces of the enemy are everywhere—on chains, on belts, hanging from the ceilings on hooks, but the message is apparently not getting out in this nightmare, for everyone we kill, there is one more to take its place.16

The word “Happy” in regards to factory-farmed animals is used again in the absurd “Happy California Cows” campaign by the milk industry. Cows produce milk for one reason—the same as we do, to feed our young. Today’s cows are forcibly impregnated through artificial insemination in order to keep producing milk. Female calves have the same fate as their mothers. A dairy cow’s male calves are taken from their mothers when they are less than one day old. They are kept in veal crates to keep them immobilized in order to produce tender flesh. The low in iron liquid diet is what makes the flesh white. The veal calf commonly suffers from anemia, diarrhea and pneumonia. After a few months of being sick and alone, this by-product of the milk industry is killed.

One fourth of California’s dairy cows are slaughtered annually. In the dairy industry a cow is killed at the age of four or five years although the natural life span is twenty-five years. Cows and cattle are trucked to slaughterhouses in all weather extremes, and without food or water. Forty to forty five animals may travel 1,200 to 1,500 miles in 95-degree weather in the summer. Succumbing to heat exhaustion means falling. Falling can mean lying there for a 10 to 12 hour trip. Traveling in winter in 50 degree minus weather, combined with wind chill at 60 miles an hour, guarantees the cows will have frozen hooves from standing in urine and feces. A downed animal or “downer,” is one that has fallen—for good. “Downers” are hauled off the trucks by a chain around their legs or head. Cattle are hoisted upside-down by their hind legs and dismembered while they are still conscious during the slaughtering process. A typical slaughterhouse’s kill rate is 400 animals per hour, alive or dead. There are no federal regulations protecting factory-farmed animals. “Happy” cow is an oxymoron.17
Meat eating weaves together the oppression of women and of animals. Since this objectification has become so ingrained in our culture and denies accountability, it propagates the myth of how women and animals are marketed as being acceptable.

The blurring of the distinction between women and animals can be clearly demonstrated in advertising spreads in which animals are dressed as women. Animals such as birds, pigs and cows are often marketed using imagery usually associated with the objectification of a woman. A pig in a bikini, various animals with cleavage; hand, (or hoof, or wing) on hips or in high heels have all been used.

The depiction of non-human animals as whores is anthropornography.18 In advertising animals are often reduced to body parts, and sometimes marketed with sexual innuendos referring to women’s body parts. The Chicago Restaurant, “Uncommon Ground” has on its menu the “Double D Cup” breast of turkey,19 and the campaign “Pork, the Other White Meat,”20 are examples. Colonel Sanders asks of his chicken consumers, “Are you a breast man or a leg man?”

Body chopping in ads shows parts of a female’s body or an animal’s in order to deny individuality by fragmenting body parts. Fragmented body parts become sexualized. In The Pornography of Meat, Carol Adams says, “Pleasurable consumption of consumable beings is the dominant perspective of our culture. It is what subjects do to objects, what someone does with something.”21 “And so the question that comes to mind is just how does someone become something? How does someone come to be viewed as an object, a product, as consumable?”22

Adams’ “Absent Referent” is: “[. . .] to keep our “meat“ separated from any idea that he or she was once an animal who was butchered, to keep something (like hamburger) from being seen as having been someone (a cow, a lamb, a once-alive being, a subject.).”23 This refers to the thought process that separates the meat eater from the end product.

Dominance, subordination, power and submission are the qualities most often depicted in advertising—or promoting someone over something.24 One has to be seen as consumable, as useable, as something rather than someone.

We are living in a time in which sexuality, sensuality and pornography are confused and confusing. The objectification of women and animals in everyday language contributes to their oppression. We have a clever way of changing a living thing’s beingness by altering language. We say steak or hamburger instead of cow, pork or bacon rather than pig, leg of lamb rather than lamb’s leg, and chicken wings not chicken’s wings. Women are called “chicks,” “birds,” “kittens,” and “bunnies”. They are called names of other beings, beings who are not free to determine their own identities. We mock: “She’s a fat pig (or cow)”. A woman is a “dog” or “sow” if she has not met the social obligation of being “pretty.” We oppress in a patriarchal way by comparing animals and women to “prey” in hunting and seduction and by doing so, continue to give both a lesser status.
Hooters Restaurants manage to objectify both women and animals with their 440 locations all over the world. A Hooters’ billboard reads, “Only a rooster gets a better piece of chicken.” The restaurant serves chicken wings thanks to the Hooter’s Girls, who were once required to wear t-shirts that said, “More than a mouthful.” Their business motto is, “You can sell the sizzle, but you have to deliver the steak.” Hooter’s language must speak to men although it appears to be speaking to anyone. References to other animals (owls with huge round eyes) and meat become the vernacular for sexual talk about women.

However, as Adams says, the “sexual politics of meat” traps everyone, women, animals and men. More myths are propagated through the negative imagery of any species which in turn continue to oppress that species. Writer Melinda Vadas said, “Meat is like pornography. Before it was someone’s fun, it was someone’s life.”

In an effort to demonstrate the disconnect we have to Nature (specifically women and animals) and therefore with an intent to reconnect, I have been creating a body of work. One of the works is an installation titled “Peep Show.” “Peep Show” exhibits three pink egg shaped frames on the first wall and three red egg shaped frames on the last wall. These two walls are on either side of a pedestal holding a Plexiglas box the exact size of a battery cage. A battery cage is the wire cage measuring 18” x 18” x 14” meant to hold 4-8 debeaked egg laying hens for up to their 2 year life span in a building containing 125,000 hens. The viewer is meant to start at the pink eggs by touching a black sequined tassel in order to slide the outer frame to the side. A photograph of an egg is revealed in each frame; one on sheer mesh, one on satin and one placed on a velvet cloth. These are the young, the innocent, the soon to be exposed.

The viewer then proceeds to the red eggs (the experienced, the worldly) and by touching the tassel, lifts away the outer frame to reveal a whole raw chicken, placed on red satin in three different “cheesecake” poses: legs up, rear view and complete view. The texts that accompany all six eggs are actual titles from what was known as Mutoscope cards in the 40’s. These Mutoscope cards were illustrations of girls in various poses such as a girl bent over dressed in a sailor suit. These could be purchased from penny arcades. The titles of the pink eggs are “Sheer Nonsense,” “Never too Young to Yearn,” and “Direction: Paradis.” The titles of the red eggs with meat are “Sitting Pretty” (chicken on side), “Peek A View” (chicken on back), and “Aiming to Please” (rear view).

Once the viewer has seen the six eggs, the viewer turns to examine and circle the Plexiglas box on the all white pedestal. The box represents the battery cage, the actual amount of space in which 4-8 female chickens spend their lives; 18” x 18” x 14”. The Plexiglas allows the viewer to see inside; fast food chicken parts, mashed potatoes, corn, bones, skin, rolls and trash. No actual or complete chicken has been revealed. She is fragmented, disconnected, but desired and finally, consumed.

In researching for my studio work, the female chicken’s plight exemplified our disconnectedness to Nature in regards to how her real life is in contrast to how the media represents her, and, as a consequence, how she is perceived. She is the perfect example of perception vs. reality in how her life is lived in contrast to how her life is presented. I realized
that animals are **consumable** because they are **controllable**. This realization inspired my artist’s statement.

The *female chicken’s* two-year existence is a life lived against her will and against every natural grain in her being. Her body is not her own. Her natural desires to dust bathe, roost above predators and nurture her young are denied her. Instead, her two years in a factory farm are a living hell, an insane asylum. She lives with 4-8 other debeaked hens in a single wire battery cage measuring 18” x 18” x 14”. These cages are stacked in dimly lit buildings holding up to 125,000 hens. She cannot stretch, spread her wings, or nest. She stands on wire, stretches her neck through wire to eat swill from a tray, lays her eggs on wire with no place to prepare or nest, defecates through wire and often dies on wire, before her slaughter after two years as an egg layer. Those who *do* survive two years as a battery hen, do so only to face a horrific slaughter. She will ultimately have more room in the household microwave.

She is lastly reduced to garbage on a plate, automatically thrown away with the paper cups, cigarettes and gum; without a thought for what she once was, or rather never had a chance to be. Yet, she remains a pastoral symbol in the kitchen; decorating hand towels, painted on the morning coffee cups, dyed at Easter, and referenced as a nurturing mother figure in children’s books. The genocide of over 25 million chickens a day ends the lives of these gentle, earthy souls. This self-serving affair with meat that was once a being operates between desire and denial.

**NOTES**

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GENDER AND THE WRITTEN WORD IN RECENT ART: LANGUAGE VERSUS POLITICS

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The conceptual artists of the 1960s followed the doctrine of “art as idea” using words, text, imagery and objects, to examine or push the cultural expectations of what art is.¹ To understand their reasoning I look to Joseph Kosuth, who stated in 1970 that when language was considered a cultural element analogous to art, it became a useful medium.² However, while his contemporaries were concerning themselves with linguistics and word play, emerging artists were finding other reasons to justify a use of text within or as their art.

Events of the late 60s and early 70s as well as the need to openly discuss personal and public interests and issues spurred the substantive growth in feminism, accompanied by an increased visibility of women artists. This was not merely the inclusion of more women in the movements. Rather, it heralded a new direction in art making and purpose as well as a renewed use of art as communication, co-opting the conceptualist use of the written word with more significance. In this work, there is an understanding of language’s prevailing use as a tool of male superiority and oppression. Women sought new vehicles of communication, declaring, “…that it must be the antithesis to language as it is customarily employed.”³

When examining the use of text as or in art from the 1970s through to the 21st century, the gender of the artist appears to play a role in the intention and application of the text. While male artists continue to focus on language itself, women artists often seem more concerned with the message conveyed by those words. Today, I will examine the work of artists utilizing text as or within art. While the intention is not to infer that all use of text in art is gender-informed, gender may, in many cases play a significant role in what the artist communicates.

Bruce Nauman's text-based sculptural work with neon and that use of text has been considered similar to Jenny Holzer's publicly posted lists in that they both combine a recognition of Minimalism and Conceptualism, but infuse an originality that defines the work as other than belonging to either of the two.⁴ However, where Holzer's work can contain political undertones, one is hard-pressed to find the same in Nauman's. While his neons are clearly reliant on the words, is the art about the content of the narrative, the words themselves, or just the medium? Nauman presents loaded statements with no concern for the questions that arise. Or perhaps they are not loaded with any meaning at all, functioning merely as a demonstration of creative word play. The artist does not appear to see the need to address these questions.

Nauman seems to be interested in the linguistics of his work, regardless of the inferred issues when viewed by the public.⁵ Nauman's word play and repetition does not seem to aim to initiate a dialog with the viewer or comment on any issues. There seems to be no concern that the words utilized can draw strong and varied inferences among viewers. An initial reaction to One Hundred Live and Die could be derived from the strength of the words “live” and “die.” The
intent at first appears to be a powerful commentary on conditions of life and death, until you continue to read the piece. Nauman’s use of repetition renders the words inert, void of any meaning. Rather than convey any pertinent thoughts or messages, the work leaves us looking for more answers than can be reasonably found.

A second male artist utilizing words in his art, Joseph Kosuth, has declared himself to be the initial Conceptual Artist working with text dating back to 1965. He makes no claim to political or social commentary as his goal. His focus is language and art and their inherent associations.

Early works such as *One and Three Saws* were investigations into the visual, the verbal and the actual and the relationships among them calling into question the meanings of words and items in every day life. Kosuth asks what defines the object more accurately: the object itself, a representation of it, or the accepted dictionary definition of it, but gives no hint of an answer. Kosuth’s Photostat of the saw is fairly unassuming and matter-of-fact. The Photostat of the definition recalls the Dadaist use of preexisting text, albeit without the political undertones. Does it matter to Kosuth what the relationship is among the three elements? Does he care if the viewer draws any particular conclusion?

When considering the three elements of *One and Three Saws*, the item he chooses to examine is arbitrary. When asked in 1970 what the viewer is supposed to do with his work of words on a wall, Kosuth replies “they are supposed to read it, that’s all” and later declares “I call it art and it came out of art.”

While Kosuth and Nauman are concerned with art as concept, Ed Ruscha claims to not make art about art. Recent exhibitions included work such as his drawings from 1966-1977 of ribbon words. Ruscha's ribbon words exhibit a mastery of the medium. But there are a vast number of drawings in this series, and no perceivable reasoning behind the selection of words. When faced with galleries of these ribbon words, one may begin to agree with writer Mark Godfrey who states, “as a whole, the series is a very different proposition to a single work, it begins to nag like a child.” Which begs the question: what is Ruscha's reasoning for his choice of words? His response in 2005 was “My choice might be just a particular choice of the day… I'm not taking things with loaded evidence and loaded response to make a message.”

While Ruscha is concerned with communicating with the viewer, he has no pretensions of trying to pass his words off as anything carrying a message, political or personal, and unlike the previously discussed artists, the selection of words is completely arbitrary. This makes one wonder if this communication Ruscha aims to have is merely one-way.

Now moving on to the work of women, the work of Nancy Spero clearly illustrates the earlier statement that women sought a new use of language as their own tool. Despite eliminating all visual images of men in the 1970s Spero does not ignore the gender completely. Her work reveals an anger and frustration with the destructive and abusive tendencies of men.

The artist’s use of text from outside sources, as well as the application of raw, gestural images as a means of communicating the inner struggle with the struggles of women come to define an
arresting body of work. Spero does not just rely on a personal anger to relay her own opinions. She extensively researches her work. This is illustrated in 1974’s Torture of Women.

The artist spent two years researching quotes regarding the torture and suppression of women for this piece. Fragments of found text are juxtaposed with fragmented images of women “to analyze[sic] the conditions of the torture of women (which always implies sexual control over the bodies of women) and to explicate the timelessness of this practice.” Viewed without the text, the imagery loses meaning and power. It is not just the text, but the manner in which the text is treated and its relationship to the visual that gives Torture of Women its ability to articulate what is so disturbing, not just about prevailing attitudes and behaviors of men toward women, but the extended history of it. Spero utilizes images borrowed and informed by mythology and juxtaposes them with contemporary accounts of violent acts toward women.

When viewing her scrolls face to face, one is struck by the amount of negative space. Drawn into close proximity with the scrolls in order to read the reprinted media reports of atrocities committed against women, the negative spaces function as pauses. The Western viewer may be unimpressed that these events occurred in locations such as Central and South America. Yet these atrocities were committed by regimes that were in many cases supported or put into power by the United States. The fragments of text—such as no. 10’s “were informed that she had ‘committed suicide’”—does not just convey the problems of keeping the truth hidden, but, when viewed with Spero’s imagery, lets us know that the truth is there if only we are willing to take a closer look at what is happening. Spero stated in an interview in 2000 that she aims to have “a dialog with the world.” This contrasts markedly with the textual work of male contemporaries. We find women using their positions to communicate with others, not just to carry on a dialog within themselves.

Annette Messager’s Collections include images, words, handwriting, photographs, and textual embroideries. She rejects the label of “feminist,” claiming her work comes from within her own “desires, fears, and fantasies to create works whose themes reflect broader social issues for women.”

Catherine Grenier states that the individual stages of Messager’s career are “vehicled by words in a way, diary, narrative, play, litany, and layout being only a few examples.” She also states that in the case of the “Albums,” the language is the unifying element, uniting all the parts as one. The “Albums” are not merely a woman's scrapbook. The items culled from a variety of sources and the manner of assembly speaks to the stereotypical view of the woman recalling the Victorian woman’s activities of collecting ephemera. However, in examining Mes Approaches from Album no. 8, this is clearly not the stereotypical scrapbook. Messager photographed a male passer-by, anonymous, his head cropped out of view. As the series of six images progresses, the view focuses closer on the man’s genital area. While the images alone take on a leering, voyeuristic view—typical of man’s treatment of passing women—it is the accompanying text that gives the work its strength:

SHE’S HAD ENOUGH OF KEEPING QUIET...HERE’S PRECISELY WHAT SHE WOULD HAVE SAID TO HIM IF SHE COULD HAVE
The pairing of this text and the imagery calls to mind issues of domination, abuse and invasion of privacy, acts commonly committed against women by men. Messager's work here begs the question of who is the victim and who is the victimizer here. Are the voyeuristic shots of the man's genitals the viewer's retaliation of such treatment or a reclaiming of power? Because Messager reveals so little of her personal history, works such as the Collections can be interpreted in a number of ways.

The methodology and imagery of Jenny Holzer is in stark contrast to Annette Messager's closely-guarded narrative in that Holzer's work embraces a directness of communication suitable for her chosen venues and media. Her work is described as “pack-[ing] an emotional punch, provoking the reader to stop and think.” Women artists of the late 70s and early 80s continue to be driven by a need to communicate. However, with the greater presence of women artists and an—albeit not acceptable or equal—but greater critical validity given to their work, women of the time could approach broader-ranging issues. Jenny Holzer's work does exactly this.

Holzer is the first female artist to be discussed who betrays the evidence of the artist's hand, thus the previous comparison to Bruce Nauman and his use of neon. Her Truisms consisted of a series of pithy comments of her own creation based on reformulated, simplified, important, familiar unattributed statements, an appropriation of sorts. It is worth noting that according to one writer the concise wording was “in part a response to the overlong theoretical texts she was made to read as a student, such as those in The Fox,” a publication with Joseph Kosuth serving as a member of board of editors.

By wheat-pasting her Truisms throughout Manhattan, Holzer took her art out of the gallery and involved segments of the population not normally exposed to the art world. The narrator in Truisms is not specified with regards to gender, social or historical position, and as a result, they can be read and appropriated by various populations—underground, marginalized segments viewing them on the street, young and modern wearing select “truisms” on t-shirts as part of a knowing group of intellectuals, as well as bourgeois art gallery viewers. The statements are worded in such a way that they seem familiar, much like historical proverbs, yet any viewer can relate or feel free to react.

Holzer, as an American, has recently turned her attention to issues close to home. Nothing by Holzer’s hand restricts the reading of the content of these documents—it is the judicious blacking out of these supposed free information letters and memoranda that strikes the viewer. As Cathy Lebovitz notes, Holzer “purposefully selects her subject matter as a calculated political act and… as a means of facilitating historical memory.” By selecting such heavily-censored government documents purported to be examples of a completely unrestricted public access to our government, she alerts us to the contradictions and unreality of this. Holzer's propensity for staying contemporary and relevant has as much to do with her choice of medium as her choice of what she wants to communicate and whose words to use.
The work of the next female subject may at first appear to not substantiate the goals of this talk. Although Kay Rosen’s work with language can be viewed as similar to Holzer’s, Rosen rejects that association. In a 1998 interview, the artist states she identifies more with Ed Ruscha because of his non-political approach to text as art and the focus on pigment, type and font, drawing a “blank” when asked what the purpose of her art is.26 But look closely. It is more than her prior training in linguistics that informs her work. That background enables Rosen to employ a play of words and sounds that can deliver a poignant commentary on social or political topics when read or spoken aloud.

Admittedly, this is not always the case. But we cannot ignore the obviously political 2000-04 BS bumper sticker. Noting the dates of this work, you can draw the conclusion that the boxes signify censored letters. Replace the censored letters on the first line with two L’s and an I and T below, changing BS’s censored version to BULLSHIT. Can it be mere coincidence that the censored version spells out our current president? It is hard to not draw the conclusion that Rosen is making a statement on the current regime’s practices with this work, its title and the choice of letters and placement of boxes, or blacked out letters.

Rosen may not view her mission as addressing problematic politics, but that is what the viewers and critics continue to glean from her paintings. Even a review of recent work classifies her work on exhibit as her usual combination of politics, word play, and philosophical musings.27

Thus far, the art examined has been the product of Western artists who utilize the Roman alphabet. Shirin Neshat, an Iranian artist, used her native written language of Farsi to startling effect, whether the viewer can read it or not. The artist did not look to refute the assumptions and stereotypes within Western media but looked “to recompose and reorganize them” in order to present the public with more varied options and interpretations.28 The Women of Allah series of the 1990s utilized overwriting on black and white photographs of Iranian women in black (actually self-portraits of the artist).

By using women rather than men, traditional Western thought has been that Neshat brings attention to the oppression of women by men in her Islamic culture. Morley states Neshat “challenged the association of script with patriarchal law, turning language against the oppressor.”29 It is the combination of language and imagery that lends the artist’s work and its subject’s power. Neshat defies patriarchal law requiring the modest covering of the woman by showing her subject uncovered and in possession of weapons and publicizes the written word of condemned or censored women writers by inscribing their words upon the images. This combination enables Neshat to communicate a vision of a strong, independent Iranian womanhood and smash Western stereotypes of the subservient Muslim female. Neshat created The Women of Allah series after returning to post-revolutionary Iran after a prolonged absence.30 The artist gives voice to women who have been unwillingly silenced, while commenting on the ironic role of women in a world the Western viewer does not and cannot comprehend.

From the 1990s on, we continue to see the work of male artists who use language within their art. Yet, in many cases, the difference in the use of the written word is dependent on the
individual. This is not to claim that the purpose and intention of the use of text is determined by the gender of the artists. The differences discussed thus far are not found solely among women. Male members of marginalized populations have also gained strength from a more welcoming art climate and have challenged “the Western, white middle- or upper-class heterosexual male” who had been guiding what passed as art for so many years.31

As a black, gay American, Glenn Ligon uses imagery and words to draw attention to the continuing history of American oppression, discrimination and silencing of those society deems worthy of suppression. Ligon’s series *Runaways* references 1800s runaway slave posters, using descriptions of the artist submitted by friends. Possibly appearing light-hearted in the personal qualities noted, as the reality of the original source is realized, the humor is gone. Look at American society’s tendency to assume the African-American as criminal/perpetrator of a crime and Caucasian as victim. Those words take on the sound of a police description.

Ligon’s work utilizes text and language to address issues of homosexuality and race to communicate personal feelings as well as to alert one to a situation many assume no longer needs addressing.

In an attempt to assess the differences of gender using text in their art, I return to the art of Joseph Kosuth. He continues to use text, eliminating objects and visuals from his art, relying solely on verbal elements and working on a large scale. His 2006 *Labyrinth* installation is one example. In 1998 one critic stated “many of Kosuth’s recent installations have been almost megalomaniacal in scale” and considering, “Labyrinth” it is hard to disagree.32 When the use of text in art is increasingly intensely personal and political, Kosuth bombards the viewer with a myriad of quotes. He has not moved on to greater meaning within his work, just greater scale. It is art because he says it is and created it to be art, but how relevant is it in the company of today’s text-based art?

For that matter, how does the work of Ruscha, Nauman and Kosuth—members of the privileged gender—compare to the work of artists marginalized by the “white middle- and upper-class heterosexual male”?33 Looking at the work of women who came of age artistically with the growing strength of the feminist movement, the influence of feminism is evident, be that the intention of the artist or not. Women such as Nancy Spero, Annette Messager and Jenny Holzer use their voices and media to communicate personal concerns regarding women’s issues and oppressions, world politics and violence as well as individual concerns. Even Kay Rosen nevertheless has more in common with Holzer. A political awareness informs some of Rosen’s work and keeps it from being merely a study in linguistic signage. Shirin Neshat continues in the tradition of Spero and finds new ways to communicate in ever more personal terms, issues that beg to be shared.

While it may seem a broad generalization to state the gender of the artist frequently plays a role in the intention and application of text in art, in the examination of the work of men alongside their female contemporaries and successors, that generalization appears to apply to a great deal of text-based work. It may be tempting to claim one is stereotyping women when stating the intentions in using language are informed by a need to communicate a message. However, as
Whitney Chadwick states, language is one of a number of means by which women artists are “engaging with, and shaping debates around contemporary art world issues.” The fact that Glenn Ligon is a member of the male gender does not refute this theory. When one notes his position as a member of society witness to persecution, violence, prejudice and suppression and his desire to communicate a personal message, it appears that one's position within society coupled with one's gender may play a role in determining the nature of one's communication in art.

NOTES

5. Simon, Joan, Bruce Nauman, (Walker Artist Center, Minneapolis, 1994) 62.
10. Ibid.
12. Her “War Series” for example, is an honest response to the horrors of the Vietnam War, a war that took the lives of a great many young American men.
15. Posner, 60.
16. Ibid., 63.Ibid., 63.
19. Ibid., 40.
20. Grenier, Catherine, Annette Messager, (Flammarion, France, 2000), 68.
21. Ibid., 68.
22. Frederickson, 47.
25. Lebowitz, Cathy, “Protect Us From What We Don't Know,” Art In America, October 2006, 163.
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SAVING THE ENVIRONMENT BY KNITTING IT

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Ruth Marshall is an artist working in the Bronx Zoo’s exhibition department. She is also a knitter and sees knitting as a zoological act. She began by knitting reproductions of the skins of all 68 species of coral snakes. These are realistic not only in terms of pattern but size. Marshall has gone on to knit skins of jaguars and leopards; she considers this artwork as part of the conservation effort to save these species (http://www.saatchigallery.co.uk/yourgallery/artist_profile/Ruth+Marshall/4563.html?itemid=199). Her “skins” are valued more highly than the skins themselves, suggesting that perhaps knitted skins can replace real skins as trophies, reducing their illegal sale.

In this presentation, I will explore the work of a number of women fiber artists, like Marshall, who see their work as contributing to the scientific, political, cultural, and economic discourse on environmental issues. They consciously use traditional women’s crafts in nontraditional ways, questioning assumptions about women’s work, environmental issues, and the role of art in our lives. As a biologist, I am interested in this work because it illustrates for students how closely science and art can be tied together. It also helps to stress how remaking living things in fiber requires acute observation, which is important for students to learn if they are to appreciate what it is to do biology.

This presentation grew out of a series of interviews and email exchanges I’ve had with fiber artists who use biological themes in their work. I was interested in finding out how they view the relationship between science and art in their art through questions such as: Do you feel the need to learn about the organisms you portray in your work? Do you think that you learn more about them in the act of creating your work? Do you see a natural affinity between your medium and your subjects? In answering these questions, many of the respondents spoke of their interest and commitment to environmental issues. For example, Kyoung Ae Cho considers the incorporation of natural materials into her work as a form of recycling, a way of connecting with nature’s rhythms. She sees her work as a conversation with nature, collaboration with living things (Hemmings, 2002). For example, she traps a corn leaf or seeds between layers of organza and then carefully hand stitches around and around the plant material, which remains visually at the center of the piece. Her work is a quiet homage to nature.

Ruth Marshall, whom I mentioned earlier, is more explicit and political in her work and in her environmental outlook. She has a dualistic view of her knit large cat “skins;” she admires the beauty of the real skins and that comes through in the knit skins. But she is also communicating that these skins have been worked, poached, damaged, and thus have something abhorrent about them as well. This is particularly true of her Golden Jaguar where the “skin” is stretched out on poles as if to dry. She describes this piece as more “edgy” because she has incorporated marks on the skin indicating that the animal has been slaughtered. Marshall collaborates with conservation biologists on the tiger projects and sees
this partnership as fitting with issues of third world politics, economics, environment and feminism.

Karen Nicols may be considered as on the other side of the environmental spectrum since her work “Out of the Blue into the Black,” an exquisite display of sea creatures in embroidery, was supported by Shell Oil (Abbott, 2007). A rich variety of invertebrates beautifully created out of a many materials with both hand and machine embroidery, are suspended in a Plexiglas box, as if they were floating in seawater. The message this piece sends is one of reverence for nature and it could spark a desire to insure that such creatures continue to fill the ocean. Nicols says that she had always been attracted to these organisms since seeing Ernst Haeckel’s (1904) Art Forms in Nature, but it was when she went out with research scientists to collect and then examine specimens that her awe of these invertebrates was magnified. Leslie Pontz had a similar experience in a very different environment: the desert. Her medium is crocheting, but she often uses wire rather than thread to express the toughness of desert flora (Patterson, 2006).

Like Karen Nicols, Barbara West has also been inspired by Ernst Haeckel’s work and then by the organisms themselves. She knew a oceanographer, the late Catherine Nigrini, who turned her on to Haeckel and to radiolarians. This led to her Mandalas of Science quilt. It is a huge work with a large “mandala” of the microscopic radiolarian as its focal point. There are also several smaller organisms along one side. The entire quilt is done in shades of blue to suggest these creatures aquatic home. The environmental statement here is subtle and related to the beauty of nature (http://www.radiolaria.org/west/). Since then West has made a quilt that is more overtly political, in two different contexts. Called “Myths of Our Times: Intelligent Design,” it is a three-dimensional quilt of a series of tortoises standing on top of each other, with the uppermost animal balancing the earth on its back. The title obviously references the evolution-creationist debate—one of the major science/religion questions in American politics today. But its visual theme comes from a Native American, or as West, a Canadian, would put it, a First Nation myth about the origin of the earth.

In an effort to bring attention to both fiber arts and environmental issues, the noted art quilter Susan Shie began the Green Quilts Project in 1989 (http://www.turtlemoon.com/greenquilts/gqstatement.htm). Among its activities was to honor one quilter a year who through their work had made an important contribution to creating awareness of the environment. One year, the winner was Jane Sassaman whose richly botanic view show an ambivalent view of nature—both beautiful and dangerous—which is relevant to a balanced view of environmental issues.

I’m a quilter who likes to read all I can find on this craft, hence I’ve spent quite a bit of time looking at quilting magazines published in Australia and New Zealand, both countries with a significant number of avid quilters. What impressed me about the quilts pictured in these publications is how proud the quilters are of native species and how carefully they render them. In one issue of Australian Patchwork and Quilting were instructions for making a wall hanging with the native plant Banksia carefully created in appliqué (Day, 2000), and in another issue was a beautiful appliquéd kookaburra bird (Leach, 1999). New Zealand Quilter ran a whole
series of articles on making blocks, each with a different native plant. While American quilters are also sometimes as biologically accurate, I think such attention to biological correctness is more common in Australia and New Zealand, where there are also some quilters making very ecologically sophisticated quilts as well. Clare Smith, a New Zealand quilter has even created a four-foot-high bedbug in a quilt called Sleeping with the Enemy (Mitchell, 1999). And needle workers in one town in Tasmania created an elaborate, four-quilt visual history of the area, including one picturing Tasmanian tigers roaming the land in prehistoric times (Bevan, 2000). Seascapes of the creatures of the Great Barrier Reef are also a favorite subject for ecologically minded quilters in Australia.

One of my favorite books on the craft of quilting is *Quilting Masterclass* (Guerrier, 2000), which presents dozens of beautiful quilts and gives some of the techniques used to create them. The chapter entitled “Focus on Fungi” presents the work of Cynthia Morgan, not surprisingly an Australian quilter, who documents a trip she took to a forest in the Bunya Mountains of Queensland. The quilt presents a forest scene, and in its lower half there are five small panels, each showing an enlargement of a different fungus. This quilt truly is a work of natural history as well as a work of art and needlework.

In the same book, there is a quilt by Joan Colvin of a blackbird perched on the edge of its nest which is wedged into a rock crevice, and another by Ginny Eckley of an Arizona desert scene complete with a Gila woodpecker perched on a saguaro cactus that’s in bloom. In both these quilts, the artists have painted details on the fabric and thus have gone a long way beyond traditional patchwork to create a very different effect. But still, these are works of cloth, with their three-dimensional effect created by the use of stitching the layers together. And finally from the Guerrier book, there is “Tea for Trout = Trout for Tea” by Marta Amundson which is one of a series of over 70 (!) of her quilts called “Menagerie” and focusing on endangered animal species. The theme in this particular quilt is that waters are becoming so tainted that “there will be no fish left” and Amundson conveys this idea by filling the quilt with ghost-like fish forms.

The environmental theme is strong in many of today’s quilts, though some quilters of the past also took up this subject. Goldie Richmond worked on an Indian reservation in Arizona is famous for her quilts depicting life in the Southwest (Austin, 1999). There are some cases where quilts are used to raise money as well as awareness for environmental causes. One of the most famous and spectacular examples of this is the Hudson River Quilt which Irene Miller and the Hudson River Quilters completed in 1972. Its thirty blocks show important landmarks and natural treasures of the Hudson River. Begun at a time when the Hudson was under siege, the quilt was created to draw attention to the beauties of the river and the need to reverse the damage done to it. It was exhibited many times and finally was auctioned in 1990 to provide funds for environmental education projects (Warren & Eisenstat, 1996).

It is interesting that these women turned to sewing when they wanted to express their concern about an environmental crisis. Their passion expressed itself in a cloth vocabulary with which they were familiar and also with which they felt confidence, confidence that their work would be valued by others. There was a confluence of emotion and common sense coming to the fore
here, along with craft. Hilary Rose (1983) observes that the union of the physical, intellectual, and emotional (what she calls “hand, brain, and heart”) is characteristic of women’s approach to science. It is a “craft” approach which was common for all engaged in science in earlier ages, but which in the 20th century has been replaced by an “industrial” or assembly-line approach, with the head of a laboratory designing the experiments but rarely executing them.

The linking of hand, brain, and heart is very different from the distanced objectivity that is a major characteristic of more positivist views of science. This linkage means that the emotions are valued rather than suppressed in doing science. The passion I feel for quilting has made me more aware of my passion for science, and what it means to be passionate in any pursuit: to think about it constantly, to want to be doing it all the time, to feel joy simply at the thought of getting back to it. In fact, as humans in their daily lives become more distant from the living world, creating representations of organisms is a way to associate at some level with other species. Fiber art seems a particularly appropriate medium since living things themselves contain fibrous tissues and many of the fibers used in textiles are the products of plant and animal life. This comes through in the work of many fiber artists who explicitly see a link between their work and environmental issues. Recycling is another theme central to the work of artists like Helle Jørgensen who crochets beautiful sea creatures using plastic grocery bags (http://hellejorgensen.typepad.com/). Here hand, brain, and heart are coming together in a very intimate way: intricate hand work done with passion and based on a very clever idea.

An additional wonderful illustration of this and of environmental awareness, too, is the Crochet Coral Reef project organized by Margaret and Christine Wertheim of the Institute for Figuring in Los Angeles (http://www.theiff.org/reef/index.html#). It is designed to heighten awareness of the destruction of coral reefs worldwide and to illustrate the mathematics of hyperbolic curves, the wavy edges seen in reef life, lettuces, and a variety of other organisms. It was Diana Tiamina, a mathematician and crocheter, who created the first good physical model (crocheted) of a hyperbolic curve, more than a 100 years after it had first been described mathematically—a wonderful example of fiber art in the service of science.

Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), an expert in the history and philosophy of science, argues that what is needed in science is a “dynamic objectivity” to counterbalance the severe dichotomy between the scientist and the object of study, in which good science is science where subjectivity is eliminated by creating a distance between the emotional life of the scientist and the object of study. Keller sees such a separation as undesirable, and in fact, impossible. Keller’s dynamic objectivity is very reminiscent of the relationship between organism and artisan which Pamela Smith (2003) describes. In both cases, there is a desire to objectively represent some aspect of nature. Smith argues that in the Renaissance, craftsmen such as goldsmiths and ceramicists contributed to the development of modern science by creating realistic representations of plants and animals. In pushing for greater naturalism, artisans had to combine expertise in their craft with close observation of nature, including handling specimens and making careful notes on them. She sees a close link between “knowing” and “doing,” between naturalistic representation and the emergence of a new visual culture that stressed eyewitness and firsthand experience. The same is true of the artists I’ve mentioned. Nicols wants to communicate the
fluidity and glow of sea creatures; Pontz, the surprises to be found in desert life; Marshall, variations on a basic pattern theme found in one snake group.

The biologist Edward O. Wilson (1984) has even posited a hereditary basis for such conversations between knowing and doing, between observation and action. He argues that humans have a sense of biophilia, which he defines as an innate urge to associate with other species. This could explain why we are so drawn to conversations with nature, to studying the living world and depicting it in art. In fact, as humans in their daily lives become more distant from the living world, creating representations of organisms is a way to associate at some level with other species. Fiber art seems a particularly appropriate medium since living things themselves contain fibrous tissues and many of the fibers used in textiles are the products of plant and animal life.

The environment is not the only sociopolitical issue which women fiber artists address. A number of them draw on the power of the disconnect between the femininity of needlework and medical dangers. Laura Splan has created a series called “Viral Doilies”+ in which she has used an embroidery machine to create, quite literally, doilies in the form of viruses (http://laurasplan.com/). These are beautiful to behold but also convey an element of danger when the view considers what they very accurately represent. Caitlin Berrigan is another artist using viruses as a theme. She has done a series called Sentimental Objects in Attempts to Befriend a Virus (http://membrana.us). Berrigan herself has hepatitis C, and this series is her approach to dealing with this chronic infection. She is trying to “befriend” the virus, to make it feel at home, because it has become part of her. She does this by creating art with domestic and friendly connotations, such as Viral Confections, chocolate truffles molded in the shape of the virus, and knitting a lipoprotein envelope in the form of a sweater to wear—it even has a hood. There are also tents made to represent half of the viral sphere. In other words, Berrigan has created food, clothing, and shelter, of and for her virus.

Geraldine Ondrizek, too, uses medical references in her mixed media pieces (http://academic.reed.edu/art/faculty/ondrizek/). In “Repairing RNA”, she has taken a photograph of a RNA gel, a tool used in studying the genetic makeup of an individual. She enlarged the photo and printed it on shear fabric that suggest the translucence of the gels. She stretched the printed fabrics on a 16-foot-long embroidery loom similar to those used in Southeast Asia for traditional embroidery. She then sewed into the image in an effort to repair the genetic damage pictured there. Ondrizek is thus representing her own experience of loss, of an infant with a genetic defect. She is calling on traditional women’s work to deal with her loss and with the sterile representations of life found in medicine today. She is indeed searching for a dynamic objectivity in order to make sense of her experience.

Ondrizek’s art is a far cry from the images of nature created by Pontz and Marshall, but all these artists are drawing on traditional fiber arts and using them in new ways to learn about the living world and come to grips with our present-day relationships with it. By representing nature, from the microscopic to the macroscopic levels, they are trying to make sense of the world much as Renaissance artisans did. In focusing our attention on various parts of the living world, they are helping us consider vital questions, such as the role of medicine in creating our
identity, and the link between the need to preserve other species and preserving our identity as humans who require other forms of life to complete ourselves.

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ENVIRONMENTS ARE INVISIBLE. (MM 82)

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PART I

In this collaborative paper John Charles “Charley “Camp and I are addressing talking points to propose where McLuhan’s thinking sets up models for ethic and aesthetic conversations. [When this paper was presented 84 spreads that comprise The Medium is the Massage were projected and continuously rotated.]

Sometime during 2000-2001 and after reading Ellen Lupton and Abbott Miller’s McLuhan/Fiore essay in Design/Writing/Research, I began using The Medium is the Massage as a resource in my History of Design studio and Honors Communication Theatre courses. I assign students to read Massage. In the classroom, we dissect its communication ideas and models, as well as explore Fiore’s art direction by interpreting opinion editorials with visual illustrations. As an aesthetic form, Massage presents a discourse in DaDA and avant-garde communication forms. I think its cacophonous tone presents a version of the Internet: interconnecting threads and conversations way before the web’s technology was hatching in a Department of Defense database.

Massage’s “Environments are invisible” topic is presented by Fiore in the text’s center spread. Fiore demonstrates this probe with a photograph of Philadelphia PA’s water works architecture. I ask students what is invisible here? Fiore’s photographic cropping presents the water works neo-classical forms as “authentically” Athenian. But in two more page turns, the viewer is challenged to consider “Where are we?” and Why is the city of Philadelphia using neoclassical architecture to disguise its infrastructure?

Various talking points arise: The water works forms do relate to the neoclassical architectural surroundings specifically the Philadelphia Museum of Art neoclassical façade, would this be why this style of architecture was employed here? We also recognize Philadelphia’s identity as a founding city of United States democracy. Does the water works aesthetical-turn point us to the city’s values and identification with founding democracies? or, is it Pop Culture appropriation? or, Just plain deception taking place to hide water-processing activities?

On page 125, there is another “Environments” example:

In television, images are projected at you. You are the screen, the images wrap around you and you are the vanishing point.

McLuhan is pointing out that a reverse perspective is in play. He continues explaining to the reader that this point of view has much in common with Oriental art. I continue this train of thought with my students: could mosaic tile decoration be correlative to pixel spaces- and what
does it reveal about each culture’s aesthetical values? Following McLuhan’s evaluation, I leap: Where do we locate the individual, individuality in our digital, webbed, global broadcasts? Descartes asked a similar question (in a different political time) and his response positioned western ethics toward a modern concept of self-definition.

McLuhan’s axiom: “Environments are invisible” can also point us to weigh and compare invisible environments with democratic identity politics that employ the concept of property (Hobbes and Locke here) as an organizing principle. And, if we were to consider that the World Wide Web de-signifies property principles, then are democratic constructs threatened within the World Wide Web massage? I propose that web broadcasting is an example of a McLuhan Anti-Environment (a change agency); a lever in reframing democratic constructs.

The importance of media as change agency is further explained on page 148:

Media, by altering the environment evoke in us their critique of the ratios of sense perception. The extension of sense perception alters the ways we think and act—the ways we perceive the world.

The above probe opens up an ethical concern: how does message-making sponsored by governments and/or citizens effect the framing of decisions that need-to-be-made?

PART II

For Herbert Marshall McLuhan, the 1967 publication of The Medium is the Massage was a dramatic step from academia into public life. Like popular music recording of that era that were simultaneously released in and multiple tape formats, The Medium is the Massage came at potential readers in hardback, trade paperback, and mass market editions. Having made his core arguments in earlier, more academy-friendly publications, The Medium is the Massage took the author’s promised “inventory of effects” into public, private, and corporate space, ignoring existing boundaries for discourse and decorum. With the publication, Marshall McLuhan created, then governed multiple ongoing conversations with popular and academic media, trading statements for probes, explanations for observations. His growing audience in the late 1960s kept tuning in, hoping that the next thing he said would clear up the confusion surrounding the last thing he said.

Similarly, those readers who struggled with Understanding Media had hopes for The Medium is the Massage, a resolutely multi-media, form-follows-function, sort of book whose arrival held the promise, at least, of making everything plain. Failing that, there was a Columbia record album, which vocalized McLuhan and his collaborators, Quentin Fiore and Jerome Agel, in a noisy opera of non-sequiturs and sound effects. If both reading and listening failed, there was 1968’s Sunday-afternoon CBS television special, which surrounded McLuhan as a tweed-jacketed academic with groovy chicks and word balloons—a cross between “Laugh In” and “60 Minutes” that continued to add to the pile of “effects,” inventoried and uninventoried that seemed to accumulate with every McLuhan interview or appearance.
Each of these initiatives was a hand-wave from McLuhan, on a long tether at the University of Toronto, en route to an undeclared and apparently unidentified destination within the public mind. In 1973 and 1974, I worked for and with Marshall McLuhan, first as a student in his graduate seminar on media and culture at the University of Toronto, then for a year as his research assistant at the Centre for Culture and Technology. I’d like to think that in the course of these two years I acquired a special understanding of Marshall McLuhan’s work, but I can’t honestly say that I did—that I “got it” more than others who spent time with the scholar and/or with his work. What I developed was an appreciation for the way he went about his business, and respect for his willingness to follow ideas across established lines: those separating academic disciplines, those dividing campus and the real world, those that split fiction from non-fiction.

Marshall McLuhan wrote a letter of recommendation for me when I completed my M.A. at the University of Toronto and moved on to the University of Pennsylvania for my doctorate in Folklore & Folklife. He told me that he was willing to write the letter because he saw the study of folklore not as academic antiquarianism, but as the cutting edge of ethnography in a world increasingly present-minded, tribal, and oral. In my last communication with him, I related a colleague’s account of an evening spent fireside in Greece with herdsmen who took turns in a rhymed performance of the stories we know as *The Odyssey*—in other words, evidence of the persistence of oral tradition within a post-literary world.

I knew the story would please him. McLuhan used Homer as a roadmap for the Old Testament and for much of contemporary Western culture; its orality fortifying its immediacy and relevance. For Marshall McLuhan, oral tradition represented man living in an eternal moment situated in the Eden from which he was soon to be expelled. Seduced by the printed word, imagining himself eternally famous, Adam turns the tree of life into pulp for paper, relinquishing paradise for a shameful past and clouded future populated by the record of his misdeeds.

To some who have read his publications—especially the early ones, the crimes of literacy represent a growing indictment of reading and writing. Marshall McLuhan seems at times not to value books, or more pointedly to direct our attention to other cultural phenomena, but at the University of Toronto he expected his students to be very well-read. Our textbooks in his seminar included Ernst Gombrich’s *Art and Illusion*, Havelock Ellis’s *Preface to Plato*, Albert Lord’s *The Singer of Tales*, and Sigfried Gideon’s *Mechanization Takes Command*. *Art and Illusion* greatly informs discussion of *The Medium Is the Massage* in the same way that Gombrich’s anticipatory arguments inspire McLuhan’s treatment of visual thinking. McLuhan bemoans the domestication of the eye, the exchange of the peripheral thinking for the discipline of reading. Confined to the page, the eye no longer sees; instead, it registers a series of illusions that ultimately supplant vision itself. Art becomes surprise as artists confront the perceptual environment exerted by print. One could argue that *The Medium is the Massage* represents McLuhan’s attempt to restate some of Gombrich’s arguments as probes.

For example, Gombrich specifically challenges created notions of the “real” by treating constructions of reality in art as illusions that compete with our experience, and with each
other. To make any claims of power or influence, what artists stipulate within the frame must continue beyond it. The visible environments created by artists strive toward invisibility; illusion that seeks to be revealed and understood as illusion is a prisoner content in his chains. That’s Gombrich speaking to McLuhan and McLuhan distinguishing between vision and perception.

This sort of conversation occurs all the time in McLuhan’s books, most vividly perhaps in *The Medium is the Massage*: a quote or statement from an absent expert collides with McLuhan’s fractured commentary, ultimately rebounding into the reader’s realm as an admonition to pay closer attention to the changing world around him, to spend some time outside the library. Or a contemporary occurrence puts the author in mind of Plato or Homer, sending the reader back to the library. *The Medium Is the Massage* is one of Marshall McLuhan’s best-loved books because its interior dialogue is tightly wound and tactically impactful. Quentin Fiore, visual designer, is a full partner in the book, given license to mess around with not only the look of the work, but with McLuhan’s very words. The same thing happens in several of McLuhan’s other books: 1970’s *From Cliché to Archetype* is a collaboration with Wilfred Watson; *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* with Barrington Nevitt (1972); and Bruce R. Powers (*The Global Village*; 1989).

There are two sides to this pattern of collaboration. At the time—the late 1960s, when collaboration itself was not so widely praised, McLuhan’s back and forth was used by his critics to suggest that he didn’t have anything original to say; that his was a commentary on the parade of contemporary life as it passed by—something less substantial and rewarding than the parade itself—which was not so highly regarded either. On the other hand, his books demonstrate the utility of his point-of-view—that Marshall McLuhan can do that thing he does to practically any subject or occurrence. Shortly after my student days at the University of Toronto had concluded, I proudly sent Professor McLuhan an essay I’d written on what I called a “synaptic model” of folkloric communication. He wrote me back a nice letter, suggesting that I bone up on Cicero and T.S. Eliot before proceeding further. McLuhan cared passionately about originality and time-of-arrival. If a poet, philosopher, or James Joyce had visited the vicinity of a student’s argument, discussion proceeded no further.

What occurred in our classes is created in each of Marshall McLuhan’s early books: a triad of communication that fully engages the reader in an ongoing conversation between the scholar and his collaborators—live and present or dead and quoted. It’s an exemplary model for considering questions of ethics and aesthetics—one that is at once old-fashioned and enlightened, Socratic and Oprah-esque. In McLuhan’s classroom, the same procedures were followed. Students were expected to be as up-to-date as today’s newspaper and up-to-speed on the canon of Western philosophy and literature. This could be intimidating, but when it worked the room filled with the presences of great authors and thinkers, fortifying a soaring conversation between students, teacher, and text.

Education must shift from instruction, from imposing of stencils, to discovery—to probing and exploration and to the recognition of the language of forms.

(MM, 100)
As an author and a teacher, Marshall McLuhan practiced what he preached. Which is why his published work continues to prove useful in classrooms that share his enthusiasm for open inquiry. The excitement of discovery, the hope of breakthrough palpable in almost every page of *The Medium Is the Massage*, offers the same classroom rewards today. That's because McLuhan never believed the hype that swirled around him, never changed his mode of address or his mode of dress. For a public author often lumped with late-Sixties luminaries, McLuhan never looked the part. He kept his hair short and his tie tight; his ideas and their original presentation in books like *The Medium Is the Massage* were on time in a way his appearance never was. The root causes of what is captured in the pages of *The Medium Is the Massage*, elements of the invisible environments in which revolution occurs, are as evident today as in 1967—another time, not unlike our own, when change was in the air and wisdom in short supply. Forty years have not dimmed the promise and the challenge in Marshall McLuhan’s work. Provocative in intent and delivery, *The Medium is the Massage* exhibits a scholar’s embrace of a vast precinct that includes all of the intersecting worlds we inhabit, and a wealth of strategies for its exploration.

**PART III (and back to the present)**

McLuhan’s ideas address our assumptions; he leads us to places that provoke us, as a group, to explore ideas such as:

**What media does to us:** it presents and sets us up to accept/address the next *massage* form.

The problem is the tendency to think that the *evolution* of thinking is a revolution. Society resists the “new” but from McLuhan’s perspective the *new* is just the *unfamiliar*.

McLuhan writes about how we naturally address the future in the present tense. McLuhan expands the present tense to contain the past as well.

On page 108-120, McLuhan/Fiore set out the idea that the ear favors no particular “point of view.” These examples of oral traditions end with an example from Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*:

> What can’t be coded can be decorded if an ear aye seize what no eye ere grieved for. 
> Now, the doctrine obtains, we have occasioning cause causing *Effects* and *Affects* occasionally *RE*causing altereffects.

McLuhan continues, on page 120:

> Joyce is, in the *Wake*, making his own Altamira cave drawings of the entire history of the human mind, in terms of its basic gestures and postures during all the phases of human culture and technology.

Point-of-view and technological change scenarios are two probes from the several dozen probes entertained in the *Massage* text. I have had dynamic class discussions around students’
preconceptions of Technology as a modern construct vs. a necessary and continual example of adaption in the histories of civilizations.

PART IV

Lastly McLuhan “occasionings”, potential causing effects and affects can be powerfully realized when students collaborate and practice interpreting an essay. An application of “occassionings” follows: working in groups of two and three, students interpret opinion editorials in visual montages. Then at the end of this collaboration, the class sequences the pages to produce a storybook. This activity usually takes place over two-and-a-half hours. This interpretive design problem gets students to read opinions, work collaboratively in a way that The Medium is the Massage was produced, and most importantly to practice the processing of conclusions (ethics and aesthetics) drawn from public voicings via the traditions of newspaper massaging.

In part II of this paper, Charley recounted his experience as a student of Marshall McLuhan. In parts I, III, and IV, I explained contemporary investigations of the text. So between this and that, Charley and I are promoting that we re-consider The Medium is the Massage as a classic text to explore invisible environments: themes of ethics and aesthetics.
TEACHING ART IN THE BIBLE BELT

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There are many challenges to teaching fine art in America’s Bible Belt. Everything from taking students to a museum where there is nudity in the artwork to displaying masterworks of art in the classroom can be problematic. How do you teach art and keep your job in America’s heartland?

My goal here is to explain some of the challenges art educators in the Bible Belt face and to discuss some of the ways educators can work to overcome obstacles and still provide a quality fine arts education.

Whether you are teaching high school or working as a professor at a university, teaching art in the Bible Belt can seem impossible to do without offending someone. Quite often a seemingly benign incident can cause major problems.

Probably the most notable incident of recent years was a case in Texas. The New York Times reported in Sept. 2006 that Sydney McGee an art teacher at Fisher Elementary School in Frisco, Texas, who was reprimanded and eventually lost her job, because one of her 5th grade students saw a nude sculpture during a field trip to the Dallas Museum of Art. After the field trip a parent became upset and complained to the school, the teacher was suspended and eventually fired. Because it was a personnel issue the school system refused to release many details about the teacher’s termination claiming she was terminated because of several performance-related issues, the Times reported.

This was a field trip that was not only approved, but also encouraged by the principal, the students’ parents all signed consent forms and yet when it came right down to it none this was enough to save her job.

I work as an art professor at a regional, four-year university in Oklahoma and each year I encounter incoming freshmen whose art knowledge is spotty due to inadequate art education in high school due to lack of funding for art education as well as moralized restrictions placed on art teachers. I find a large number of our new students come in without knowing basic art or art history. It often seems that what they get in our public schools is a sterilized and safe version of fine art.

I grew up in a conservative rural western Oklahoma town. Until I went to college my idea of art was basically wildlife paintings, John Wayne drawings and photos of ducks. While in college my view of what constitutes art changed because I was exposed to new ideas. I would not have appreciated many of my now favorite artists in my teenage years. It is my goal to expose students to new ideas so they can learn and grow much like I did.
Oklahoma is sometimes referred to as the buckle of the Bible Belt, a state that holds the whole belt together and was the “reddest state” in the 2008 election. Oklahoma is a very conservative state with a primarily fundamentalist Christian populace. Oklahoma is comprised of rural small towns where the only things to do are go to the bars, high school football games and church three times each week—twice on Sunday and once on Wednesday. There is not much else to occupy your time. Most of the towns are spread out and often you can drive for 30 minutes or more before seeing the next house. So the church (predominately Southern Baptist) becomes the source of social interaction and the glue that holds many of the communities together and as such serve a very important role to the Midwest. There are not a lot of cultural events and those that do happen are usually church related. Many institutions including the local town hall and the school system are operated within a fundamentalist Christian framework where a black and white approach to morality prevails. This is the environment that my students are coming from, this is where I came from and this is now where I teach at the college level.

I interviewed several public school teachers from northeastern Oklahoma for this paper. Each teacher had stories of censorship. Some were censored by their administration and others censored themselves because they felt it was the only way to keep their jobs. I would like to share a few of their stories, while keeping the instructors anonymous because several of them expressed fears of reprisal.

One teacher from a suburban high school near Tulsa said that she felt she was walking a tight rope between the conservative Christians and those that wanted separation of church and state. That no matter what she taught someone was going to be offended. This same teacher had a poster of a classic Greek sculpture and the principal made her censor it by putting tape over the genitals. She also had an incident when she displayed in her classroom an article from the Art Scholastics magazine about the history of masks. The article was about how masks have been used in various spiritual rituals around the world. The parents of two girls accused her of teaching Voodoo.

This same teacher stated that she cannot even speak about the great art in any of the Catholic churches because the Southern Baptist students in her class are not willing to learn about other denominations. She said she was fearful of parents thinking she was trying to convert their children to Catholicism.

Another art teacher from rural northeast Oklahoma would use her own art books for demonstration purposes and actually glued pages together so some possibly offensive images by Klimt and Dali could not be seen if students were flipping through the book on their own. The same teacher went so far as to draw swim trunks on Michelangelo’s David before showing an image of the sculpture to her class.

Another rural art teacher from northeast Oklahoma tore pages out of a book on Magritte to remove possibly offensive images. The principal even censored a piece of scratchboard art by one of her students. The piece in question was a small rendition of Angelina Jolie sitting provocatively on a toilet in her under garments. The image did not show any nudity, curse words, alcohol, drugs or anything that would normally be restricted in a public school. The
original photo will come up in Google with the safe search turned on. It was however a very powerful and well-done illustration. This incident led to further constraints in future art shows in the high school. This piece would later win first place with a $500 prize in a regional art contest beat artwork from many professional artists.

Although censorship is not as bad at the collegiate level, we still have issues to deal with. Students routinely refuse to draw a nude model in life drawing class because they object to nudity on moral grounds. Right after the Mel Gibson movie “Passion of the Christ” came out; I was showing images by Louise Berliawsky Nevelson to my college art students. I gave the Art Appreciation class the assignment to research Louise Nevelson’s work and one of my students came back very offended that I would make them look up a “Jew Artist.” Some of the students started making statements about how the “Jews killed Jesus.” This took me by surprise. Although I consider Nevelson’s work innovative, I don’t usually see her as a highly controversial figure. I would have expected some backlash had I made them look up Mapplethorpe, but I did not anticipate a backlash against Jewish artists. The students did complete the assignment, wrote a short paper on Nevelson and hopefully learned a little about what it means to be human in the process.

I recently had an incoming freshman and her father in my office. She was planning to attend our university in the fall. The informational meeting was going well until her father asked about the life drawing class. They gave each other a look as he was asking the question. He wanted to know if we used nude models in our life drawing class. I replied, yes we do. I tried to explain that artists have learned to draw the figure this way for centuries and that all the great artist throughout history have learned in this fashion. The father /daughter team shook my hand and thanked me for my time. This was to be the last I would see them, as she did not enroll for the fall semester.

I participated in an online brown bag discussion organized by the Chronicle of Higher Education, titled “Dealing with Religion in the Classroom.” The guest speaker was Barbara A. Lee, a professor of human-resource management at Rutgers University at New Brunswick. She recently wrote about legal issues relating to religion and higher education for the book Encountering Faith in the Classroom: Turning Difficult Discussions into Constructive Engagement. Lee is also the co-author of the book The Law of Higher Education.

Barbara Lee (2008) wrote a chapter “Religion in the Classroom” about legal issues surrounding religion in the book Encountering Faith in the Classroom edited by Miriam Rosalyn Diamond. If a student objects to course content (nude figure drawing) on religious or moral grounds they will sometimes claim sexual harassment. In the case of “Cohen vs. San Bernardino Valley College” (1996), the professor assigned his students to write a paper defining pornography. A female student refused and requested an alternate assignment; Cohen refused her request. The student filed a claim of sexual harassment and the college disciplined Cohen. He then filed a lawsuit for the violation of his First Amendment rights. The trial court sided with the college, but that decision was reversed in the appellate court. The appellate court ruled that the sexual harassment policy was unconstitutionally vague and that Cohen had used these assignments for
years without incident. He had no warning that they were suddenly violating the college policy. (Lee 2008)

“In a similar case, “Silva v. University of New Hampshire” (1994), a federal court ruled in the professor’s favor, finding that his use of sexual imagery in a writing class was pedagogically appropriate and not a violation of the university’s sexual harassment policy. (Lee 2008)

While neither of these cases had direct claims of religious discrimination or nude figure drawings. The concepts could be applied to such claims. You need to make sure that the course content is firmly grounded in the pedagogy of your discipline. (Lee 2008)

As a college level educator, how do you overcome the obstacles of the “Bible Belt” and provide quality fine arts education? Lee confirmed what I do at the start of each semester as a good practice. Some of the suggestions I have for educators include:

1. Clearly explain the requirements of the class in the syllabus.
2. Make sure that students understand what to expect from day one (for example that there will be nudity or possibly offensive materials displayed and discussed.)
3. All assignments are grounded in the pedagogy of your discipline.
4. Everything taught is necessary and germane for the class.

I also have my students sign a contract at the beginning of each semester. The contract says that they have read and understand the syllabus.

As a professor at a state university I also have to keep in mind that I cannot inhibit any students’ religious freedoms. One must observe the first amendment rights of the students. The “Establishment Clause” of the First Amendment is often interpreted to prohibit the government or a college funded by the government from showing preference of one religion over another. The First Amendment also however has a “Free Exercise Clause,” which essentially does not permit the government to interfere with an individual who is exercising their religious freedoms. “These portions of the U.S. Constitution require public institutions to be neutral toward religion—they cannot support one or more religions. Nor can they forbid religious exercise (such as prayer groups or religious services) on campus.” (Lee 2008)

State-funded collegiate art departments must also allow the expression of religion in a student’s art, regardless of what that religion or denomination is. This can create problems if you allow someone to show art that is not in line with the conservative Christian views of the Midwest—Whether it is a depiction of Jesus on a cross or an image of Buddha.

People are defensive and fearful of things they do not understand. I am sure that these issues are not germane only to the Midwest. These questions and concerns manifest themselves in different ways across the nation. I hope this paper will assist other art educators facing these types of challenges in the classroom.
A PENNY LECTURE

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And to reference Wittgenstein: “Meaning occurs in its use.”

My colleague Mark Graham at the 2004 Aspen Institute Wye seminar cited the penny as a daily transaction of democracy—because of its familiarity as a commonly available populist object. As our seminar group discussed this idea, I realized that I could employ the penny to demonstrate a branding process and discuss semiotic theories in undergraduate design studios. The penny ubiquitous familiarity disarms an undergrad’s preconception that stimulating and meaningful visual communication design (VCD) is only found in high style and in niche market products.

Branding exercises are transacted to define a given company’s service or product(s) ineffable promise(s) to its audience. The exercise I employ includes six questions to answer, each question builds on the next. And at the exercise conclusion, talking points, visual strategies, and communication goals for the promise(s) are explicated and ready to be employed in a variety of tactics. In branding a penny, we are analyzing in reverse—basically critiquing an established brand—analyzing if and how the visual identity effectively represents the penny brand.

This Penny Lecture introduces semiotic processing within the context of a common object. I get started by passing pennies out to each student and asking: “What do you see first? Second? Third?” And as the questions are answered political, social, and semiotic discussions get woven into our formal analysis. In this exercise, visual communication design becomes more than simply about contemporary styling, ephemera, and consumption. Visual communication design is realized as how societal values can be communicated, can be maintained, and can be transacted.

So, to get started, and how I start in the classroom: let me retell the anecdote of Marco Polo’s account of encounter with a unicorn in Java: (From Eco; Kant and the Platypus chapter 2.1; 1997)

Often, when faced with an unknown phenomenon, we react by approximation: we seek that scrap of content, already present in our encyclopedia, which for better or worse seems to account for the new fact. A classic example of this process is to be found in Marco Polo, who saw what we now realize were rhinoceroses on Java. Although he had never seen such animals before, by analogy with other known animals he was able to distinguish the body, the four feet, and the horn. Since his culture provided him with a notion of a unicorn—a quadruped with a horn on its forehead, to be precise—he designated those animals as unicorns. Then, as he was an honest and meticulous chronicler, he hastened to tell us that these unicorns were rather strange—not very good
examples of the species, we might say—given that they were not white and slender but had “the hair of the buffalo” and feet “like feet of an elephant.”

He went on to give even more detail:

It had one horn in the middle of the forehead very thick and large and black. And I tell you that it does no harm to men and beasts with its horn, but only with the tongue and knee, for on its tongue it has very long spines and sharp…

It has the top of the head made like a wild boar… It is a very ugly beast to see and unclean. And they are not so as we here say and describe, who say that it lets itself be caught in the lap by a virgin girl: but I tell you that it is quite the contrary of that which we believe that it was.


An additional example of approximation I tell the class to introduce meaning as an integrated concept of picture & image is by describing a group of blind people encountering an elephant for the first time. I ask them to imagine that one person is at the elephant’s tail, another at its trunk, one by its ear, and another by its belly. And then when each is asked to describe the elephant, each in turn would provide a completely different account of the elephant, and none incorrect.

Now onto a visual analysis of a penny: when students begin to provide answers to the questions of what do you see First? Second? Third? Tripartite columns break the penny attributes out into: describing the overall materiality of the penny; the hierarchy of information on the penny’s face; and on its reverse side.

In the materiality column, the group acknowledges that the penny is small enough to hold in one’s hand; it is not heavy; it is copper-colored and made of metal. The penny’s circular form is double-sided, has raised surfaces of pictures and words, and the penny-form is easily reproduced. The hierarchy of the face of the penny (the side of Lincoln is usually cited here) is described by the following observations: a bearded-male silhouette portrait is observed first and that he is dressed in a suit; *In God We Trust* in relief is seen next; *Liberty* third; and the penny date is seen last. As for the reverse, the hierarchy goes as follows: a building is centered on this face; the next observation is *One Cent*; then *The United States of America*; and lastly, *E Pluribus Unum*.

Next, this list gets further analyzed. What, if any, is the importance of the bearded-man on the penny face? Why is all of the text capitalized? Why are the phrases “In God We Trust,” Liberty, a date, One Cent, *The United States of America*, and *E Pluribus Unum* used here? What is an illustration of a Greek temple doing on a United States of America coin? The conversation that ensues reintroduces the ubiquitous penny as an object that literally transacts the United States
of America democracy on a daily basis. I take the students to this realization by unpacking the penny imagery.

It is fairly easy for the students to sight the Lincoln portrait as a representation of someone who is revered as a leader. (They know of Lincoln’s importance as the 16th president of the United States, his role in the Civil War, and of his assignation.) *In God We Trust* reiterates the USA founding principle that the USA is a place where religious freedom is valued and that the country identifies with religious traditions of monotheism. *Liberty* points us to *liberté*, the French society’s revolutionary fight for liberty from tyranny. The date on the penny identifies the coins minted date.

On the reverse face, the Greek temple usually takes a while for the student to unpack. Eventually, based on the logic of unpacking of the penny face, the students connect this architectural style with the first democratic society. As for the spelling out of *One Cent*, this is where they recognize a system of equivalency, a communication of the monetary value of this coin. *The United States of America* text establishes the social and political governance responsible for and owner of the currency system. Lastly, the incorporation of a Latin phrase, *E Pluribus Unum—Out of Many One*—reminds us of Roman transactions of democracy, its currency system that was used throughout its Empire and that language decoration on Rome’s architecture employed words and phrases carved out in all capitals—hat modern type designers’ call Roman Caps. (I have always found during this portion of the branding exercise that the *E Pluribus Unum—Out of Many One*—phrase conveys the most proof in establishing the value of learning about semiotic constructs.)

With the penny attributes columned and listed on a white board, our inverted branding exercise commences. First question: Who is the target audience? Answer: Anyone who needs to buy something in the United States of America. Second question: What is the core desire? This answer tends to drag out but the students’ eventually get to that the value and use of a penny to purchase goods and services remains constant. Third question: How does the product or service fulfill the core desire? Answer: In its use and attributes. The penny shape and size fulfills my desire to carry enough of it, that I can store it, and then when needed, I can pull it out to use it, to purchase something. The penny’s materiality designates that it possess durability. And, most importantly because of its markings, the penny identifies itself as part of a currency system. Fourth question: Why should I believe and what is the proof that my core desire will be fulfilled? The answer builds upon the previous answer, simply stated: when ever I use a penny to purchase something its value remains constant and because it is made of metal the penny will not easily disintegrate.

The fifth question: What is the brand essence? This answer gets us to the heart-of-the-matter, connecting form and content, connecting the students to why the penny visual elements are what they are. The underlying penny message, framed by its words and pictures, is that this currency’s consistent monetary value is verified by democratic principles of property and ownership; that the founding democratic societies and events in Athens, the Rome Empire, and the French Revolution are valued and provide ‘proof’ to this United States of America democratic legacy. Lastly, the sixth question (that is evidenced in the penny design) is: How is
the brand essence communicated? The answer: by the use of cultural iconography that signifies the currency’s democratic principles and historical grounding; the use of cultural imagery that celebrates citizen collaborations and events over any one individual’s authority and/or identity.

When I present this problem to VCD majors, it often starts out with dis-interest; and as the penny’s elements get organized and identified by students, their dis-interest turns into a realization that meaning can be determined in its use. The Penny Lecture demystifies and validates that all designing incorporates messages of meaning thus helping students move past: indoctrinated ideas about visual communication design; their thoughtlessness in regard to a common object; and lastly, introducing opportunities to present and discuss theories and practices of constructing messages.
FRESHMAN ENGLISH FOR ART STUDENTS: TOWARD A BETTER PROGRAM

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I am speaking to you today as a member of an as-yet-unidentified subspecies of academicians. Our field is not recognized as a separate discipline, nor is there any professional organization (that I know of) that draws together the members of our ranks. There are no journals dedicated solely to what we do, no conferences (except maybe a portion of this one) dedicated exclusively to our concerns. Yet I am among a group of professionals that must number in at least the hundreds across the country: I teach freshman English at an art college.

What’s so special about that, you ask? Why, the literacy of the next generation of visual artists is in my hands—not to mention the success of their college careers! If you don’t believe me, just talk to the professors of any liberal arts discipline in any course above the 100 level after the latest set of graded papers has exposed, yet again, the hordes of students who have made it to sophomore or junior status and still do not understand what a thesis is, much less how to support one. These clueless individuals can’t even construct clear sentences and may still be in the dark about such issues as apostrophes, semicolons, and the difference between who and whom. “Aren’t they teaching anything in freshman English these days?” professors ask.

Yes, I (and a few others like me) teach something in freshman English these days—although what is not always easily defined and not always easily transferred to other fields of endeavor. What we teach can be generally captured under the heading of “college-level writing skills.” In addition to imparting these college-level writing skills, it also falls to us (as well as to other faculty who teach the freshmen) to take these raw recruits in hand and disabuse them of their naïve notions that art school is not “real” school and that in art school they won’t be bothered with those annoying academic subjects anymore. With the rigidity of drill sergeants, we instill in freshman students the discipline of the college environment, the immutability of the deadline, and the danger of the comma splice. We compel them to come to terms immediately with cultural and ethnic difference and to face the eventual and inevitable destruction of their most cherished beliefs. While we freshman English professors lead this forced march through academic life and culture, the unfamiliar environment of dorm life has stripped away any and all stabilizing structure of home life, leaving the freshmen vulnerable to every temptation that modern life has to offer. We necessarily become more than the aforementioned drill sergeants; we morph into coaches, mentors, advisors, and occasional shoulders to cry on when things fall apart. Are we expected to be all things to all freshmen? In a word, yes; indeed, the only role that I resolutely refuse to play in relation to my students is that of—parent.

And the point, you ask? I’m getting there. A little more than a year ago, already bent under the weight of all this freshman English responsibility, I was called to a meeting with the Dean of Academic Affairs. As coordinator of the freshman writing program as well as chair of the entire Liberal Studies Division, I was presented with a new mandate: “Our students need to be better
critical thinkers,” the Dean said, “and better writers, and the process needs to begin in the freshman English classes. We need to make that happen.”

What more can we do, I queried myself. We already work small miracles in the classroom every day! Stunned by the enormity of this directive, I floundered for a time, even questioning my own worldview, until finally I came to my senses. It is not how much more we can do, but how much better we can do that will make a difference in our freshman writing program; a revitalized writing program will have positive ripple effects throughout our curriculum, and even beyond, as our students graduate and begin to shape the society in which we live.

Therefore, like the true critical thinker that I am, I began to ask better questions; slowly these questions took shape. First I clarified for myself what critical thinking is. It’s a term that is easily tossed around. Critical thinkers question everything. They read actively, looking for organizational principles. They can spot assumptions, and they can separate fact from opinion. They recognize an effective argument when they see one. They can also spot faulty logic, no matter how well dressed, and they always know when their emotions are being played upon. Critical thinkers contextualize, using their own background knowledge as an aid to their understanding. They apply these principles to both reading and writing. And finally, they are aware of their own effective thinking processes; in other words, they are metacognitive in their approach to learning (Thistlethwaite 587). Once I established for myself these basic principles, the next broad question formulated itself: how does one best teach critical thinking and writing in the 21st century? No easy answers here. Then, narrowing my focus, I posed another question: do art students possess any propensities that make them a specialized group, that call for different measures, or an alteration of whatever plan evolves from the answer to that other broad question? A simpler way to ask the same question is this: what do we know about freshman art students that would change the template for teaching critical thinking and writing? Then, the next logical question: can this knowledge help us conceive specific methods that will effectively impart critical thinking and writing skills to art students in the context of freshman English? These questions form the backbone of this presentation, and with them, I hope to jumpstart a conversation, charting new territory in our knowledge of writing and its relationship to art and artists.

For a concise answer to the first question, how best to teach critical thinking and writing in the 21st century, I turned to the recent “Writing Now: An NCTE Policy Research Brief” published by the National Council of Teachers of English in its September 2008 Council Chronicle. (This Policy Brief can be downloaded at www.ncte.org/policy-research by clicking on Writing Now). In this publication, the NCTE has saved us all a lot of time by pulling together relevant recent research and making recommendations based upon the findings of multiple researchers. It provides some current answers to long-standing questions.

It is pointed out in the brief that we write more and differently today than in the past; yet “time devoted to writing instruction and research focused on writing evaluation have both decreased in the last ten years” (15). As the demand for good writing grows, so does the need for more time and attention devoted to writing instruction. It is noted, and we all know, that “writing acts as a gatekeeper” to “school, job, and advancement opportunities” (15) in the 21st century. Just
as importantly, we know that good writing “enhances critical thinking” (15); thus an important connection is made at the outset of our discussion.

Recognizing the importance of writing instruction does not make implementing it any easier, however, since, according to “Writing Now,” “Research cannot identify one single approach to writing instruction that will be effective with every learner” (15). What current research can identify are three hallmarks of effective writing instruction: it should be “holistic, authentic, and varied” (16).

EFFECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION IS HOLISTIC

Writing is a complex and intertwined mental and physical activity, and whatever strands of it we can untangle must be taught as parts of a whole, not in isolation, including grammar. No more split grades, for instance. One grade for content, another for grammar makes no sense. Grammatically perfect nothing is still nothing. How grammar and punctuation affect meaning and how poor grammar and punctuation present roadblocks to meaning are, on the other hand, matters for serious inquiry. “Writing Now” defines this approach as the “explicit teaching of grammar using a context-based functional approach, which focuses on how words, phrases, and sentences work together to make meaning” (18). The writing process that we believe in, as delineated by Linda Flower and others in the 70s and 80s, also loses power when not treated holistically; it too easily becomes a prescription. That is, acknowledging that writing is a process but not necessarily a linear one is a holistic approach. “Revision,” for example, says “Writing Now,” “occurs at every stage of the writing process. Students benefit from a metacognitive understanding” (18) of and reflection upon their own writing processes. To neglect this level of understanding is to follow someone else’s formula for success, which, as we know, never works.

EFFECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION IS AUTHENTIC AND PRODUCES AUTHENTIC WRITING

Real writing takes place in a real environment and addresses real needs. This concept does not mean that students in freshman English spend all their time writing business letters and proposals because those are “real”; rather, it means that writing assignments should be built upon a real purpose and that students write, not just because they are forced to, but because they have discovered that they have something to say.

Authenticity also means that writing should take place in digital environments insofar as possible, because our current technology shapes our writing, indeed even our literacy. Composing at the keyboard has become today’s norm, enabled by the flexibility of word processing and necessitated by email and instant messaging. In-class web-surfing and instant messaging, unfortunately, have also become the norm, causing some institutions to consider removing classes from computer labs or disallowing laptops in lecture classes. Technology restrictions are not the answer, however; classroom management is. We must help students understand the responsibility that comes with this new technological power. “Writing Now” says, “Writing has always depended upon some technology—scrolls, quills, printing presses, or
ballpoint pens” (19). The NCTE Executive Committee, in its description of 21st century literacy, goes even further:

Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities and social trajectories of individuals and groups. Twenty-first century readers and writers need to:

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
- Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments

Therefore, dissociating writing instruction from its current technology—when we have the means to do otherwise—would be analogous to, fifty years ago, not allowing students to bring pens and notebook paper to writing class because they were using them to write notes to one another. Nothing more surely disengages students than obvious illogic on the part of an instructor or an institution, and being illogically separated from the appropriate tools certainly falls into that category. On the other hand, nothing more surely engages students than being taught how to use their tools effectively in “real-world experiences and tasks” (“Writing Now” 18).

Next, authentic writing has a social dimension. Effective writing teachers set up peer evaluation activities that reflect a professional environment in which colleagues act as peer editors for one another. These activities help students to develop both higher writing standards (both by receiving helpful reader feedback and by being able to measure their writing against others’) and “a strong sense of audience as well as a more fully developed understanding of voice in writing” (“Writing Now” 19).

Last, authentic writing instruction provides “quality feedback” consisting of “comments on a draft, peer response, or suggestions for revision” (“Writing Now” 19). Correction focused solely on grammar and spelling, without other consultative feedback, does little to help students develop writing or critical thinking skills.

EFFECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION IS VARIED
The third and last hallmark of effective writing instruction, according to “Writing Now,” is that it is varied (19). As the report establishes at the outset, there is no one single approach that will work with every emerging writer; furthermore, students “are often at different points” in this emergence “in a single classroom” (“Writing Now” 19). In other words, just as writing is a process, so learning to write is a process. Writers’ abilities to “imitate and repeat” emerge before their abilities to “analyze and question” (19). Varied writing instruction provides assignments that scaffold these abilities. For example, students who find that they can narrate an experience similar to a writer they have been assigned to read in class soon find that they have something to say to and about that writer and the writer’s text, thus leading to interpretation and analysis. Varied writing instruction also provides exposure to a range of genres and the specific skills that they require. Having explicit knowledge of these skills and being able to “articulate particular genre decisions can help students to transfer knowledge into various disciplines” (“Writing Now” 20), a necessary skill if we expect students to apply recently acquired knowledge and skills to new situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The NCTE Policy Brief summarizes its findings with several recommendations (20). Students should write extensively. Writing assignments should move from imitation to interpretation and analysis. Functional grammar should be taught in context. Collaboration among peers should be fostered in the classroom. Writing in digital environments should be a “part of students’ regular composing” (20). Substantive feedback should be given on developing drafts. And finally, multiple measures should be used to provide final assessments of students’ writing development.

Coming at just the right time for MCA’s freshman writing revamp, this NCTE Policy Brief certainly creates a template for an effective writing program using what we currently know about writing. The next step in creating this program in an art college is asking that second question mentioned earlier: what knowledge do we have about freshman art students that would change the template? There appears to be very little in the literature of composition theory concerning how visual artists function in the writing mode, nor is there an “art student” version of “freshman experience” and student development theories. If it exists, I have not found it. Therefore, my source here is my own experience. So what do I know about art students as college freshmen?

First, freshman art students may have an especially difficult time developing a college-level work ethic. To a greater extent than the norm, freshman art students possess passion without knowledge or experience: they know what they are here for, but not necessarily what they are in for. They may victimize themselves by following their muse at the expense of their academics. Once they develop the time management skills needed to get their work done, they still think it impossible to do their best in every class and often feel they must place studio classes above English and even art history, again leaving their academics to suffer, at least until they fully acclimate to art college demands, which may be well beyond the freshman year.
Second, even though both visual art and writing are creative and inventive processes, students who are good at the first may not be good at the second and may have already privately concluded that it has to be this way, and may have “settled” for what seems to be the inevitable, that art and academics don’t mix. These students may take Andy Warhol’s statement, “I never read. I just look at pictures,” as a kind of anthem to their “magical” abilities.

Third and last, art students may feel “different.” Statements such as “I’m the outcast of my family,” or “No one knows where my artistic ability comes from” are common. This “difference” may have alienated them from their academic pursuits in the past, or it may have elevated them to star status in a school where there were few other artists. In either case, these students feel a sense of isolation and are not at first comfortable in an academic community of artists where collaboration is encouraged and, at times, even necessary.

If we accept these assumptions, how can we use them to design a freshman English program that is especially effective for art students? First of all, instructor feedback is crucial. However, art students who have a difficult time developing their work ethic will benefit from more than simply the NCTE’s recommendation for frequent feedback. They need grades! Some writing professors withhold grades in favor of advice in order to relinquish a certain degree of power and form a more “democratic” classroom. Alfie Kohn, author of The Homework Myth, argues against grading individual assignments in favor of constructive criticism, which he says will enhance critical thinking skills (Ruggieri 13-14). This strategy does art students a disservice, however. The idea that feedback substitutes for grades is erroneous. Freshman art students don’t yet know the importance of effective writing, and grades hold the incentive that they may lack; the wielder of those grades, in turn, holds a great responsibility. We as professors of new college art students must embrace the power of grades and wield this power wisely. Grades are the language of the academy; they are the only real answer to the abiding student question, how am I doing in this class?

The NCTE’s recommendation that writing assignments should move from imitation to interpretation to analysis is valid, especially for emerging artists who may have read little and perhaps have mentally settled for a nonacademic life. This writing development from imitation through analysis takes two semesters. Freshman art students need to begin by writing narration and reflection; they must first engage their own experience in order to gain the insights necessary for later interpretation and analysis of texts, for if we construct our own meaning when we read, as the critical theorists tell us, then from what do we construct it, if not our own prior experience? The freshman writing professor must in turn be willing to shoulder the sometimes uncomfortable burden of the intimate personal details that students share, again embracing those multiple roles that we play. Visual artists will come back to the details of their own experience again and again to make meaning in what they do. The progression of assignments should proceed from personal, inner experience to outer experience (observation), followed by application of that experience using exposition in a variety of its forms: comparison/contrast, process analysis, followed by causal analysis. A second semester should begin with analysis and move toward argument, all the while preparing the student for the rigors of research and documentation. Students begin by using texts as models and progress to
analysis of the texts themselves. This work culminates in a research project which enlists others’ texts to support the students’ own arguments.

Grammar should, indeed must be taught, but certainly in the context of the student’s own writing. Art students generally are perceivers first; they know what they see. They develop conceptual understanding inductively, by being made aware of their own errors and deriving the pertinent grammatical principles from them. When they see that their own writing is not communicating because of flaws in grammar or punctuation, and they have these concepts reinforced by one-on-one instruction, they can learn to self-monitor in order to avoid the same errors in the future. Peer evaluation of writing can reinforce these same concepts.

Peer evaluation creates more than community among students who are new to academia. Writing about one another’s essays is an important precursor to interpretation and analysis of texts, which is an important link to critical thinking. Even though the framework of the course must be strong, little by little students benefit from having the framework lifted from individual assignments. For instance, the typical question and answer of class discussions may be engaging and interesting, but until students begin asking the questions instead of simply answering them, they are not engaging in actual critical thinking. In peer evaluation, a letter from the peer editor to the writer, guided by some key points given to the entire class, produces much better results than the typical editing questions which can be answered in a brief sentence or two. In my classes, students have begun to ask more (and get more) from one another using this forum than they would have ever been willing to give to me as their only reader and evaluator. I have quite honestly been amazed this semester by what they can do when given the opportunity.

To engage the “difference” that art students may feel and to develop the connection between the visual and the verbal, we need to at least scratch the surface of where these two abilities connect. In ARTiculating: Teaching Writing in a Visual World, Pamela B. Childers, Eric H. Hobson, and Joan A. Mullin remind us that our world is “increasingly visual” and that “in the development of literacy, as in life experience, image precedes language” (x). The beginning stages of writing we refer to as “invention.” Drawing also is invention. What if students draw what they mentally see instead of verbally invent it? What if we ask students to draw what their writing process looks like? What if we ask them to visually represent a grammatical concept? What would we get? Would it be a worthwhile learning tool? Would it be writing? Would it be art? Can we bridge the two forms? What is the difference between visual art and writing? When I write a C on a paper, am I writing a letter or drawing a curved line? And you see I have reverted to once again asking questions even though I am supposed to be answering them.

WHAT NOW?

Here I come to a close without a definitive conclusion. Freshman English at Memphis College of Art is a work in progress. What do we know for sure about artists as writers? Not much, I’m afraid. In making assumptions about art students as freshmen, I’m not making excuses, or giving artists a “bye” in the academic world, nor am I putting artists in the automatic “win” column in the contest of lowered expectations when I refer to an increasingly visual world. What I am attempting is to discover how artists think and how the connection between visual
skills and verbal skills can create a balance between perceiving and conceiving, resulting in—
better-educated visual artists? I certainly hope so. I also hope that I have started a conversation,
rather than ended one, with other members of my subspecies. After we locate and identify one
another, the possibilities are endless.

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586-593.
"Oh Dear, What Can The Matter Be?" is the start of an old Mother Goose Rhyme that goes on to state that “Johnny is too long at the Fair.” We can probably all remember the corner carnival, city circus, or state fair that we wanted to play at longer than we were allowed to as children. Today that “Fair” is in our living rooms, cars, schools, and, with MP3 players, and iPods, in our pockets.

I use the word Fair as a metaphor for the word spectacle: an event put on by those in power to entertain those who are not in power. Or, better said, a free, entertaining event to keep us peasants in our place. These events have been staged by the great empires of to past to our annual 4th of July events, and worldwide Olympiads today.

If “The Fair” is the spectacle that John, and his sister Jane, have been at too long, then as educators, we need to help John, and Jane, understand where they have been, and what they have been doing for so long, and whether it matters at all. For that is THE MATTER with which this paper is concerned.

When the spectacle becomes the constant series of events seen on MTV and Survivor—when Dancing with the Stars, and American Idol become the spectacle in our living rooms and SUVs—when John and Jane learn to blog and connect globally with more spectacles, what will they expect when they go to art school? What will they produce, and how will they learn?

As educators, we forage for meaning in events, statements, activities, and spectacles. And as educators in various forms of art making, meaning and critique, we are aware that John and Jane haven’t just been at the fair, they are also coming to our schools.

Lucky for us values, ethics, even morals not only provide meaning; they have a substantial visual history in art. Art educators, as art historians, studio artists, and philosophers of art, have a pedagogy, about the meaning and purpose of artwork, that can be mustered for use in classes.

The watershed that takes what art educators provide, and mixes it up with the many events and miles of information the student arrives with, has as its catalyst the student’s search for meaning.

I am a graduate of a liberal, liberal arts college in the early 1960s where advocacy was inherent in the pedagogy of the institution as well as in the orientation of the students. Where Helen Holmes Norton, Coretta Scott King, Stephen Gould, and John McGregor were able to hone the ethic, they espoused in college, for use in the world at large.
As a consequence of that early education, I find it strange that art students today need to locate the tools and acquire the knowledge necessary to make art that advocates an ethic. I find it even stranger that faculties consider the teaching of advocacy somewhat of a political hot potato to be tossed around as long as no one holds it too long.

In our shrinking world visual artists bring images, with a point of view, to a global audience. This art often speaks for those who are voiceless. It is art that comes from beliefs, meanings, and political stances, and it is the art that intrigues and influences our students.

As educators we know that it is possible to separate the learning of aesthetic skills from meaning. Just as we know it is impossible to separate morality and ethics from the teaching of art and the education of artists. Art students need to know for whom they are creating: for Mom—for fun—to become famous—to get rich? The visual work our students create is aimed at whom in our society, our nation, and our world? Who today do artists hope will view, buy, covet, or even understand their work?

These are the questions that concern art students who hope to be able to change society, make a living, or even just survive. What is created, and for whom, are questions that art educators need to consider as the foundation, the reason, why anyone would choose to make art. In this context, it is impossible to escape from considering society, the community, and the general public.

To separate morality and ethics from the teaching of art would be possible if you were only teaching specific skills, but to separate artists from the mores of their society and specific institutions such as our Constitution, or our mosques, churches, and synagogues is close to impossible.

Ethics—morality—and social responsibility are part of the glue that joins an organized society together, even that of early Homo Sapiens. Hammurabi’s Stele (ca 1795-1750 BC) is a testament to this fact. This great artwork, the first written code of law, was carved in basalt with the image of the great King Hammurabi receiving these laws from the gods of Akkad and Sumer, whose statues graced the temples in the lands of Mesopotamia.

Artists give voice to words and ideas. Honore Daumier’s, *The 3rd Class Carriage*, 1863-65, is evidence of something more than train travel in the 19th Century. And Gericault’s painting, *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) was, in part, responsible for changing the immigrations laws of France.

It is true that all humankind gives voice in one form or another, however visual artists, by the nature of their medium, provide strong witness to an ability to change society. From the invention of multiples in printmaking to the use of film and digital images, artists have been able to change people emotionally, and intellectually, through their artwork.

It is a human trait to give voice in one form or another. Giving voice involves making choices and judgments, and that involves moral values, something that can be studied, critiqued and expressed in artwork.
Using art in the service of an idea or belief or point of view, whether political or not, is not new. Witness Eero Saarinen’s magnificent Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Missouri. However, when that use witnesses crimes of society it is powerful. A contemporary example would be the performance work of the Gorilla Girls that has helped us all to be aware of the great silence that has been allowed to exist in regard to the work of the female half of the human species.

For the visual artist artwork, that expresses opinion that rests on knowledge and a rigorous study of incoming information, can provide a viewer with a compelling image that reaches beyond the visual to the emotion—beyond effect to affect, e.g. Goya’s etching, The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, a telling witness to the horrors of war.

As teachers we are able to help our students to think critically, to research and exchange information, as well as to be able to submit that information to careful analysis. We do this so that our students will be able to write books, make music, and paint pictures with the authority of an educated opinion as well as the passion of a belief.

Maya Lin presented such a point of view in the design and defense of The Vietnam Memorial (1982). The point of view expressed was an original idea proposed by Lin, a graduate student at Yale University.

The teaching of liberal arts and the education of artists demand a global perspective today. All of us are bombarded by images and information, local, national, and global; how to sift through that cacophony of sound, fury, and image in order to make choices about what we do with our lives and living situations is very difficult. And it is very very hard for our students to make any sense of that information. If we expect our students to go to war and to vote in elections then it is very important that they have educated opinions. And it behooves us all to know an educated opinion when we hear it, and when we see it.

Guernica (1937) Picasso’s painting of Franco’s bombing of that Basque village is a visual point of view: a well-educated opinion expressing, with great skill, the horrors of warfare, the death of innocents, and the betrayal of leaders.

Knowing how to make choices and judgments in a world where information is so widespread and instantaneous is scary. No one knows this better than today’s student. Students in elementary schools, High Schools and Universities are expressing their stress and rage. Witness the killings at Columbine (1999) and the University of Virginia Tech (2007). Shockingly, Google presents a list of 41 pages of school killings in the United States compiled by Wikipedia.

Making choices and judgments, expressing a point of view, involves moral values. Here is where some educators get nervous, they confuse teaching students how to analysis an argument, and critique a presentation, with infusing students with the values of the teacher.
Our job, as academicians is to show students how to look at the many sides of any argument. It is to help our students understand their own values so that they are aware of the value judgments they make, especially those expressed in their artwork.

The question is not whether but how academics are going to include such teaching when teaching artists. Fortunately we don’t have to instill advocacy in students, but we can show them the tools and help them to discover the knowledge that makes advocacy successful.

For Immanuel Kant morality in art and education was a categorical imperative. For us it is a global necessity. We must not forget that whether or not we are working artists, we are also academics. It is our job to open our students to new ideas and contemporary knowledge. It is our job to increase the perspective of our student’s horizons.

Fortunately art has always been international in scope [although that generally meant western in concept prior to this century.] Now as academicians we are beginning to realize, if not appreciate, the worldwide connections of knowledge proved and/or just blogged.

www. the World Wide Web leads to web crawling and spiders, ants, bots, and worms. Web crawling, known as spidering, is a means to keep track of places visited and places to visit, called seeds. Although there are web crawling policies there are few rules to help students, much less teachers, through this sticky maze.

These apparently infinite connections to everywhere provide for our students, opportunities to see the world from their dorms, homes, cars, hovels and compartments; opportunities to view visual art and words and to plagiarize ideas. Students are exposed to too much information without sensible tools with which to filter, or document it. This is a problem for all academics in every discipline.

The words teacher, rabbi, Sensei, Imam, or Priest are appellations given to those who teach value systems and value awareness. As art educators, and as artists, we have a platform before us. How we use that platform depends on our values, our beliefs, and our integrity. And values, beliefs and integrity are words our students are hungry to hear. Our students are crying out for meaning, they are not looking for facts but for purpose. We can help them find purpose by showing them how to ferret out facts from the mass of information available today.

We studio art educators know our students need to apply critical thinking not just to the formal properties of their artwork, but also to the concept that occasioned it. How those concepts are introduced and analyzed depends on all art educators. The pedagogical answer would require research of the past and accurate knowledge of the present, all things we are able to teach.

It is our students who will envision and produce the future. And we can help them by giving them the tools they need to provide a disciplined approach to the task of searching for their personal construct of meaning—FROM FINDING OUT WHAT IT IS THAT MATTERS—in the spectacles they see.
TEACHING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ART AND
DESIGN CLASSROOM

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As our global society faces some of its toughest challenges to date with environmental issues, food crises, economic and political upheaval occurring in tandem, it is imperative to educate students in a manner that will prepare them to think critically and innovatively as well as collaboratively to meet the challenges that lie ahead. While classroom teaching and learning can be an elusive endeavor, difficult to define and measure, especially in the studio arts where class time is devoted to experiential learning: painting, drawing, sculpting and working hands-on with media; where students are urged to “discover the materials” and themselves, it is important here too, that educators consider the notion of building deeper connections to social context and responsibility inside the classroom. Ironically, if our goal is to prepare students to live responsible, creative lives within an ever-changing social context, we need to rethink the parameters of what we mean by “inside the classroom.” We need to build interdisciplinary bridges, and provide opportunities where immersive learning can take place. This too, may prove difficult to measure, but it is absolutely necessary for our survival as a society.

As art and design educators, we are particularly aware of our student’s struggle with the dichotomy of entering the workforce to find themselves working to perpetuate an overly consumerist society while at the same time feeling the pressure of a burgeoning desire to be socially responsible, not just as individuals but also, and perhaps more importantly, in their work as well. This dilemma often reaches a crisis point early in designer’s careers when they find themselves feeling lucky to have landed an entry level position but designing products or brand identities that at best they do not believe in and at worst function to prolong the life of an unsustainable design market. Esteemed designer, Paul Rand, had no doubts about the intertwined roles of designer and market, “It is no secret that the real world in which the designer functions is not the world of art, but the world of buying and selling.” Rand also believed that it was a less than ideal practice to produce design solutions in great quantities rather than focus on quality, “It discourages spontaneity, encourages indifference and more often than not produces results which are neither distinguished, interesting, nor effective. In short, good ideas rarely come in bunches,” seeing the role of successful management as providers of an atmosphere that was conducive to the ‘less is more’ concept while fostering good communication and mutual understanding between designers, marketers and clients.

Rand’s conditional acceptance of the relationship between art, design and consumer markets does not seem unusual for someone so familiar with the inner workings of the process of design, however, when compared with political scientist and distinguished professor, Timothy W. Luke’s view of a continuous cycle of the desire for more, this same acceptance can set off alarms.

Without the arts, ephermaculture could not endlessly refuel its unrelenting production of newer goods, trendier products, and fresher images, inasmuch as the commercial arts
guide each individual’s recoding of his or her personal aspirations in terms of scientifically designed and organizationally produced material satisfactions . . . once this greed for power and possession develops, the commercialization of art in the design salons and artistic studios of every individual imagination mobilized by the market constantly stimulates individuals always to desire more.¹

Clearly, today, the desire for more is no longer acceptable in terms of the sustainability of our global environment, society and culture.

While our institutions of higher learning are in the position of rethinking what it means to successfully educate students for the challenges ahead, they are also perhaps better prepared to initiate institutional change than the corporations they feed. Revisioning and re-imagining a paradigm shift is being undertaken at universities and community college campuses across our nation. The task seems daunting with many powerful built-in deterrents to change such as strong links between large corporations and grants funding research at the university level. Ultimately, change is taking place at a grass roots level with staff members and instructors along with their administrators attempting to look at and implement changes in meeting student needs while providing dynamic learning experiences. Witnessing the change process slowly take off at the community college where I work, it occurred to me that conventional policy makers may benefit from artists and designers familiarity with the design process, a time-proven method for implementing change and providing opportunities for creative solutions to emerge. In fact, I think designers and artists are uniquely situated to take part in the change process and provide solutions that will be not only necessary, but imperative, in the next few decades.

It is no longer possible for any of us, but particularly for artists and designers to remain aloof from a larger global process of paradigm shift as we look at our current crisis. Artist, art critic and cultural philosopher, Suzi Gablick states in Paradigm Spinning: Artists as Agents of Social Change, “it is time for artists to break the paradigm of the isolated, ‘crazy’ artist/genius and begin to operate in the world as they have always really done: agents of social change.”⁴ It could begin with actively learning and using the design process. This is a multi-step process used by artists and designers to arrive at the best possible solutions to visual and other communication problems. Sometimes the steps are labeled by different names, but essentially they encompass the same ideas:

1. Research
2. Thumbnails and/or Brainstorming Ideas
3. Roughs and
4. Comprehensives or Prototypes.

This process lends itself to instilling critical thinking skills in students with the ability to recognize and define problems clearly, identify and gather pertinent information on all sides of an issue, perceive as many solutions as possible, breaking with the model of providing only one definite answer, while analyzing, reasoning and testing solutions in both critique and practical application. It also provides the ability to think carefully about the moral and ethical implications inherent in most dilemmas. The steps themselves are designed to build bridges.
between distinct areas involved in any design solution: the client or issue, audience or end user and the message or intent behind the design. The process begins broadly, looking at the issues, the people involved from users to those affected by the problem and all possible solutions. Final solutions are fine-tuned and tested before implementing change. While this process may not be unique to design or art, indeed, similar processes are used in engineering as well, Derek Bok, an American lawyer, educator and the former president of Harvard University states in his essay on “Our Underachieving Colleges” that these are the very qualities education needs to give rise to.

Recent research suggests that certain familiar qualities of mind and habits of thought may help resolve such a wide range of problems that every student would benefit from acquiring them. Among these qualities are an ability to recognize and define problems clearly, to identify the arguments and interests on all sides of an issue, to gather relevant facts and appreciate their relevance, to perceive as many plausible solutions as possible, and to exercise good judgment in choosing the best of these alternatives after considering the evidence and using inference, analogy and other forms of ordinary reasoning to test the cogency of the arguments. These methods will not solve all problems; far from it. But they will solve many and clarify many more, enough to make proficiency in their use well worth the effort.

It is not difficult to imagine that concurrent issues of healthcare, global warming, social security and international relations could all perceivably benefit from an awareness of the design process approach utilized by great and soulful thinkers.

In reference to design and aging, interactive designer, Whitney Quesenbery discusses “user centered” design in the article, “The Politics of Design,” stating,

designers should not merely be interpreters of the product requirements . . . but should be able to empathize with the audience or end user and imagine their work in context.

Site visits and direct observations of their designs in use are important for designers and for learning. When I was beginning my career as an art director for Weekly Reader Publications, the sheer quantity of newspaper design being worked on at any given time was often mind numbing. It was not until I took a classroom observation trip to witness teachers using the product and my designs to instruct young readers that I began to see the full potential of designing for this young educational audience. I returned to my work with renewed enthusiasm and a greater appreciation of the efforts of the elementary educators who had appeared to be teacher, parent/guardian, role model, entertainer and creative thinker rolled into one. The more interesting my designs, the use of an unusual crop or exciting use of color—the more accessible the educator’s job became as the children were more inspired and motivated to look at, read and participate in discussion of the story in front of them. This important discovery later became part of my approach to teaching graphic designers at the community college level. Site visits before designing for a particular client, as well as afterwards, gleaned invaluable information for design students to see how well their designs not only met client’s needs but also inspired the users of their designs.
In regards to building interactivity and partnerships between fine art practices and the viewer or “user,” Gablick suggests that Modernism and the notion of “art for art’s sake” isolates both art and the artist, feeding into the capitalist system of art functioning solely as commerce. I believe that art espousing aesthetic form however, can also have a spiritual purpose for society, as psychotherapist Thomas Moore, best known for his work in the field of archetypal and Jungian psychology, states in Gablick’s, *Conversations Before the End of Time*:

Any art that arrests us, and does not lead us back into life with an opinion about it, is inviting us out and is performing a very important service. What it is giving us is an occasion for contemplation. We’ve lost the capacity, as a culture, for real contemplation. We do not contemplate easily— it feels like we’re not accomplishing anything when we contemplate. Now if we don’t have contemplation in our lives, we’re probably going to be going after it symptomatically—a lot of our spectating is like this.7

An exciting notion that emerges from Gablick’s writings is the idea that new art can perhaps be both aesthetically spiritual and also *functional* on a social, cultural level, connecting with audiences instead of pushing them away. Moving away from object creation towards relationship building, one of the examples Gablick provides is artist Ciel Bergman, traditionally a painter who revisioned her work after questioning her role as an artist in today’s society. Gablick describes an installation piece by Bergman:

She and her collaborator, sculptor Nancy Merrill, spent three hours a day for five weeks picking up all the nonbiodegradable plastic they could find (on the Santa Barbara beaches,) and then brought it into the gallery. Most of the plastic was hung from the ceiling, creating a contemporary Merzbau of sorts.

The feeling inside the room was that of a temple, with sounds of the ocean, whales and seagulls drifting through from an audiotape. On the south wall, Bergman painted a black mural, a rich compost of grief, in which there were seven openings onto the sea and sky. The trash objects on the floor were covered in flour, which created a haunting, post-nuclear-explosion atmosphere, and in the center of the room was a firepit of ashes, which functioned as a circular prayer altar, in the manner of a Native American medicine wheel . . . Since the room was dimly lit, it took a while before people realized that what they were looking at was not art, but garbage.

Visitors to the gallery were invited to write down their fears for the world on one of the remaining walls and their hopes on the other. A collection of sticks that had been picked up from the beach were left in a pile, along with other natural materials and some rice paper, with a further invitation to the audience to make prayer sticks. By the end of the exhibition, both walls had been covered with writing, and nearly four hundred people had written a prayer, hope or thought and attached it to a stick, which they decorated and placed in a ring around the ashpit. 8
This is a beautiful example of the artist/designer going beyond the idea, expression and object, to connect and inspire an audience, or as phenomenological philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, “awaken the experiences that will make their idea take root in the consciousness of others.”

If the goals of design and art include producing “usable” or effective products whether they are defined as objects or as relationships and are a means of embodying positive values that propel us forward as a society, then these goals can be compared to political goals. Politics in general has goals about values. A working definition of politics from Wikipedia is “the process by which groups of people make decisions” and “social relations involving authority or power,” duly noted by Quesenbery, as well as Lenin’s, “politics decides who can do what to whom,” and political scientist Harold Lasswell’s statement, “politics is who gets what, when and how.”

Design, art and politics therefore, are all concerned with setting or shaping preferences. While political theory looks at problems from the standpoint of systems, institutions and organizations, the design process asks questions at the beginning of the process (during the research and brainstorming stages) that can influence the overall outcome of the design and how it is used. Indeed, if the designer is not asking the appropriate questions at the start, the ultimate solution(s) will most likely not fit the needs of the client or the audience and the result is often at best, ineffective design and at worst, design that can confuse and even perpetuate negative stereotypes. The audience or user ideally is the designer and artist’s collaborator, enabling design to function as an extremely powerful tool that can inform and shape behavior. Some critics such as Kevin McCullagh, further suggest that design is “social engineering,” when operating at the behest of policy makers. He states, “a growing number of young designers have rejected aesthetic concerns in favour of adopting strident moral stances on issues such as sustainability, public health and transport . . . however, a line has been crossed: rather than considering how an object might affect behaviours, designers are now looking at behaviour as being the object of the design process.” If the process triggers positive, revolutionary change however, it might well be worth it to consider client, consumer and user behaviors at the outset, and may not necessarily have negative connotations or “Big Brotherism” automatically implied.

One has only to look towards the multitude of protest posters, historic and contemporary, to witness the power of design to promote positive social change and impact human behaviors. An outstanding example continues to be the My Lai protest poster shown below:

The poster was used by the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC,) a coalition of artists, filmmakers, writers, critics, and museum staff that formed in New York City in 1969. AWC’s aim was to pressure the city’s museums into implementing reforms, including a more open and less exclusive exhibition policy concerning women artists and artists of color. The coalition successfully pressured MoMA and other museums into implementing a free admission day that still exists today. It also pressured and picketed museums into taking a moral stance on the Vietnam War, which resulted in the famous My Lai poster, one of the most important works of political art of the early 1970s. The poster was displayed during demonstrations in front of Pablo Picasso’s Guernica at the MoMA in 1970.
Of course, the same inherent power of design to control and shape behavior has been put to extreme negative use when wielded in the hands of dictators such as Hitler and the Nazi propaganda machine.

Jennie Winhall, senior design strategist for RED, a ‘do tank’ within the UK Design Council that develops innovative thinking and practice on social and economic problems through design, notes in her article “Is Design Political” that the most overt use of design as political object occurs in “symbols, logos, political organizations and national identities.” The Nazi swastika symbol utilizes an ancient Christian mark of a backward cross and has become one of the most feared and rebuked icons of our time because of its associated meanings with ethnic cleansing and the Holocaust. Many other politically motivated symbols of the 20th century have acquired positive connotations for social change however, including the red AIDS ribbon and the Rainbow Coalition symbol for Gay Rights/Pride, as well as the more recent development of color wrist bands, and the “One” white wrist band for fighting extreme poverty and world hunger. In fact, the use of color in wearable form has become an act of protest or solidarity in and of itself.

Color associated with political activism was certainly given a huge boost by all that orange we saw in the dramatic uprising in Ukraine (November, 2004.) “Those thousands of people in Ukraine wearing orange didn’t even have to open their mouths,” said Leatrice Eiseman, director of the Pantone Color Institute. “You knew what they stood for.”

We do not need to leave the United States though in order to associate color with politics. Just look at the ‘red’ and ‘blue’ states dividing America. Designer, writer, and educator, Katherine McCoy states “Design is not a neutral, value free process.” Design can exclude. It can dictate, saturate and promote harmful code as NYU Professor of Sociology, Steven Lukes notes in the same article, “it can reinforce the maleness of power tools.”

“Real world” politics and design can also intersect with sometimes disastrous results as in the Florida 2000 presidential election and the now infamous butterfly ballot. The butterfly ballot design was not a computer error. It was poor information design. It is also an example that good intentions are not enough in the design process. Using large type for senior readers was an admirable design decision but seniors should have been brought into the design process in order to work through the readability problems on the ballot. In this sense, the design process was not understood to be a democratic process, inviting participation from ordinary people, lending a voice to the user who should have been able to influence the outcome of the design. Similarly, we need to begin to recognize that issues of chronic healthcare, climate change and aging are all opportunities that can be approached through a collaborative and user-friendly design process.

Examples such as butterfly ballots and propaganda designs beg the question of whether designers and artists are ultimately responsible for the consequences of their designs. From a historical perspective it seems reasonable and just to hold artists such as Leni Riefenstahl, accountable for the 1934 German propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will*, and many historians, critics and citizens have judged it so. It is perhaps more difficult to discern social responsibility
in the present moment. Many theorists acknowledge that the world would surely be a different kind of place if the power of design and artistic expression were put to positive use in addressing some of the prominent issues of today. Author and speaker, John Naisbitt notes Luciano Benetton’s Italian fashion company and their use of advertising not just to promote product, but also to promote a positive social message regarding race in their “United Colors of Benetton’s” ad campaign.

In 1984 . . . Olivero Toscani presented youthful images from culturally diverse nations. The varying colors of the Benetton collection linked with the diverse “colors” of its worldwide customers. With young people engaged in a variety of playful acts, Toscani presented a theme of racial harmony and world peace. It became the inspirational trademark still used today: “United Colors of Benetton.”

Toscani headed Benetton’s campaigns until the year 2000, using images to speak across cultural boundaries, raise social awareness and communicate globally a message that promoted company values while selling fashion products.

Corporate bottom lines and world markets do play a role in the relationships between art, design and social politics. More often than not, the results can be poor customer service and unsustainable design solutions running amok. Adbusters magazine deconstructs these relationships in their July/August 2008 issue and the article, I, Designer, reprinting Stuart Ewen’s ‘Note for the New Millennium,’ from ID: International Design, March/April 1990 issue. Ewen remarks,

Design is useful as an instrument for glorifying corporate power. In a global economy, where ownership and wealth operate on a transnational level, designers and other image-doctors celebrate and aestheticize colossal institutions that are for the most part entirely unresponsive to the needs of the broader human community . . . Designers must come to reflect upon the functions they serve, and on the potentially hazardous implications of those functions. In the 1930’s Walter Benjamin wrote that humankind’s ‘self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.’ When we consider the ways in which design serves to aestheticize and validate waste, anti-democratic forms of power and the primacy of surface over substance, Benjamin’s words can only give us pause.

Almost twenty years from the original 1990 publication date, we may still be in ‘pause’ mode, but we can hardly afford to stay there.

Art and design students need to experience the design process as a democratic, participatory practice. Some design outcomes will reflect that practice while others will impose rigid outcomes upon their users by the very nature of their design. We can see this in the 1980 article, “Do Artifacts Have Politics” by Langdon Winner. Winner writes eloquently on the debate of whether technologies or ‘artifacts’ as he calls them, can have political properties, whether they can change the use of power and the human experience. He notes, “At first glance . . . we all know that people have politics, things do not.” Winner continues,
acknowledging the complex and interdependent relationship of designed technologies and social context, in which there are two kinds of political properties designs can manifest. The first are designed solutions that fulfill the needs of a particular community, often remaining fairly flexible in their implementation and sometimes even afterwards. The second are designs that are inherently political, or “having power in the arrangements and associations of people.”23 The latter kinds of designs can be used in ways that enhance the authority of some over others, for example, the designed presentation of a political candidate on television and the Internet to promote that candidate. Studying the perception and meaning of the arrangements of these designs is crucial to the development and understanding of the power of design to influence many.

Indeed, designs, whether informational, industrial, editorial or promotional are ways of ordering or structuring information. There are many possibilities for different ways of ordering that information in connection to human activity. We can choose structures that will influence how people work, communicate, travel and consume. In the design process by which we decide the structuring of information, there can be unequal degrees of power for different users as well as unequal levels of awareness brought to bear by designers, themselves. Sometimes the smallest changes to a design can have the utmost impact on the end users. Winner outlines the advent of the mechanical tomato harvester in the 1940’s California agriculture business and the small but powerful addition of the ability to sort tomatoes as they are harvested, affectively eliminating hand harvesting altogether, resulting in the loss of jobs and farms as well as the breeding of new, hardier and less tasty varieties of tomatoes to accommodate mechanization. Although the University of California’s research and development of the agricultural machines was the subject of a lawsuit brought by a group of farm workers charging that university officials were spending tax monies on projects that benefited a handful of private interests, while injuring small farmers, workers and consumers, the university successfully denied the charges. A pattern of scientific research, design and corporate profit bound with political and economic power remained in place.24 Perhaps more alarmingly, if American big business recognizes a centralized model (non-democratic) as the desirable method for doing business it may prove increasingly difficult to use democratic processes in problem solving or introduce decentralized systems such as wind and solar power over nuclear power, a necessarily highly centralized and hierarchically controlled system.25 “If you accept nuclear power . . . you also accept a techno-scientific-industrial elite to control it.” 26

The entangled relationships of corporate, economic, political and educational institutions wrapped in a paradigm which may no longer benefit the larger society can be seen perhaps as partly responsible for the slow response to the crucial issues of our time. To add to the dilemma of educating young designers and artists, until recently, most schools were designed and built on a 1950’s model, with rows of students behind desks and teachers in front of the class lecturing. Standing in front of a classroom one quickly realizes that this traditional model of seating does not foster open-ended discussions and creative exercises that are part of a strong design classroom today and ironically, in the workplace, students have to quickly adjust to a teamwork ethic. With the advent and broader use of computer technology in instruction, smart services like wikis and blogs, a less hierarchal approach is opening up with “student centered” learning replacing the conventional model. Schools and curriculum design are still catching up
with creative group spaces designed to better suit the learning needs of a diverse group of learning styles. Older spaces are being redesigned for a mix of group and individual work, desk work, role play and the addition of new types of furniture allowing for greater accessibility and flexibility. As Foucault states, “The spaces we inhabit, the tools we use, the systems we interact with are all mediated by design . . . design operates as part of that power.”

Moreover, the teaching of social responsibility without imposing or indoctrinating students to one particular ideology or political view becomes increasingly crucial. “We need to make sure we’re using design for social justice,” says Hilary Cottam, Director of RED@UK Design Council. Yet, questions arise as to how and what positive values can be approached in the classroom. According to Bok, “The educator needs to provide opportunities, experiences and goals with which no reasonable person is likely to disagree.” Important questions for students and instructors alike are “How do we value what we value?” And “Who decides?” Sounds familiarly like the definition of politics. Plenty of examples can and should be provided for students such as: Apple values software and creativity. And less obviously, they value the invisible. MIT’s open studio system teaches economics and mathematics in the context of art. There is a recognition and a value of art as business in this context. And corporations like Ikea, Swatch, Mont Blanc, Apple and Nokia that sell world wide using designs that do not need to be adapted to different cultures, because they are imbued with functionality and feeling can provide rich examples for analyzation.

American cultural critic and founding theorist of critical pedagogy, Dr. Henry Giroux writes,

> Pedagogical practices informed by ethical stance that contests racism, sexism, class exploitation and other dehumanizing exploitive social relations . . . (are) part of an ongoing struggle to link citizenship to the notion of a democratic public community, civic courage to a shared conception of social justice.

One would think that this fits Bok’s view of providing opportunities with which “no reasonable person could disagree,” and it does, until the view becomes too specific regarding the process of social change. While no one can predict the future with any great specificity, the same is true in teaching and learning. The challenge is to lay the foundation of understanding, to help students to respond and adapt effectively to new situations and problems while recognizing and taking advantage of opportunities which present themselves for further exploration. Inspiring students, nurturing imagination and creativity while developing judgment, critical and analyzation skills require both work in the classroom and outside fieldwork.

It is imperative that sophisticated responses from motivated and engaged students rise to meet the onslaught of complex issues of our time. Bok cites a 1990 national study finding that 28 percent of college students were “wholly disengaged from the life of the institutions (they attended) or were deeply involved in social and extracurricular activities at the expense of coursework.” The implications for the educator are clearly those of competition. Competing for the attention and desire of students to be fully present and aware, prepared to work, can wear down even the most talented instructors. Factor in other distractions such as iPods, cell phones, and video games and the task can seem daunting. Embracing the student(s) where
they are, technological distractions and all, moving them forward with the incorporation of what matters to students into the coursework, is an alternative. A successful educator must be willing to try a variety of techniques such as onsite, hands-on collaborative exercises, interdisciplinary projects, group work and active problem-solving discussions, continuously reinforcing, complimenting and building upon existing student knowledge and frameworks. For the most part this requires getting to know one’s students on a deeper level. It requires conversations with students and attentive listening on the part of the instructor. The rewards can be great. As artist and educator, Beverly Naidus comments in *The Reenchantment of Art*, my students are all looking for something beyond the courses on how to produce slide portfolios and how to market your work. They’re looking for role models for an art which talks about what’s happening in the world rather than being obsessed with making innovative creative statements.34

Every student is unique, and each will be interested in connecting to a larger social context in varying degrees, some minimally if at all. Modeling behavior, expressing enthusiasm and providing plenty of examples of contemporary artists and designers working for different kinds of positive social change is important. Luckily, today, we are beginning to see a “tipping point” in progressive thinking especially regarding green technologies and sustainability. Artists, designers, politicians, social scientists, activists and every day citizens are beginning to attempt change in relation to “going green.” This is particularly exciting for teaching because examples like the thomas.matthews studio: “ten ways design can fight climate change” brochure/manifesto are readily available providing excellent examples for active learning discussions. Sophie Thomas, cofounder of the London based thomas.matthews studio, which has made design’s sustainability the fundamental philosophy behind it’s projects was interviewed as an Icograda Design Week conference presenter, remarking, there are a number of ways that graphic design can physically reduce its impact on the environment. A designer must get to understand their “sphere of influence.” A graphic designer sits in the middle between the client, the audience or consumer and their suppliers. We need to look at each group and work out what influence and what impact we have in order to know where we can change. 35

Active learning discussions in the classroom can pose the question of designer influence and impact on environment. Students can work in small groups to discuss the problem and offer their own solutions, analyzing and challenging each other while comparing their responses to Thomas’s “10 things.” Reflection on their reasoning can take place on student blogs and wikis providing interactivity as well. Students who engage in the use of “real” concepts and examples to solve actual problems tend to remember information because it is connected conceptually and socially across new situations, building new narratives. Robert Kegen, The William and Miriam Meehan Professor in Adult Learning and Professional Development at Harvard University, Educational Chair for the Institute for Management and Leadership in Education, Co-director for the Change Leadership Group and author of *The Evolving Self*, refers to these kinds of activities as “creating a bridging environment to the real-life world.”36 Kegen also recommends allowing for student self direction, permitting students to take the
initiative, set goals, refer to experts and other resources while taking responsibility for the
direction of their learning. In this manner students can be seen as “co-creators of culture
rather than just being shaped by it.”

Other models for classroom learning in this area abound with designers like Bruce Mau, a well-
known Toronto based product designer and the launch of “The Massive Change Project,”
which brings together members of the international design community through a traveling art
exhibit, book, website, and online community and a future documentary film. “Engineered as
an international discursive project, Massive Change: The Future of Global Design, will map the
new capacity, power and promise of design.” Locally, “Beyond Green, Toward a Sustainable
Art” could be viewed at the University of Hartford, Joseloff Gallery this past spring where
thirteen artists and design groups showed their work incorporating sustainable thinking and
social change. The work can be viewed online at www.joseloffgallery.org and blog.

Eco-architect William McDonough, also a member of Massive Change, known for his work
building sustainable factories for corporations like Herman Miller and Ford Motor Company
popularized the theory of “cradle to cradle’ in which waste is converted into energy and new
materials, and pollution becomes nonexistent.” He is currently working with rural areas of
China with this concept for energy creation. Awareness of professional designers and artists
working for positive change is terribly important in providing a catalyst to student thinking, so
that they can also move beyond paralysis and despair, generating innovative ideas of their own
when tackling such large issues as the impact of art and design on global climate.

My contributions as an artist, designer, educator and agent for social change both inside and
outside the classroom include collaborating with Professor Lucy Anne Hurston’s “Sociology
100: Community Involvement Class with Relief Work in New Orleans in 2007”. As a graphic
design educator, one of my primary goals is to provide learning experiences that encourage
students to connect with their context and build a sense of social responsibility into their work.
For many of my students it was their first exposure to the idea that graphic design can have
such powerful social, political and cultural impact.

My Graphic Design I class essentially treated the Sociology class and Professor Hurston as
“clients” in an effort to design a t-shirt for members of the class to wear while working in New
Orleans. Graphic design students were given project parameters such as format and possible
color choices for screen-printing on sweatshop-free cotton shirts. The inclusion of the Habitat
for Humanity logo and Manchester Community College logo as well as a slogan, “No Matter
How Long it Takes . . .” was to be part of the design. Fifteen students engaged in the design
process of producing thumbnails, roughs and final comprehensives. Their designs were
presented to Professor Hurston and a final design was chosen. Through the course of the
design process, some of my graphic design students were inspired to enroll in the Sociology 100
class and participate in the rebuilding effort in New Orleans.

I also participated, creating a video documentary of the class work before, during and after the
trip. (I teach Digital Video Editing at Manchester Community College as well, and have a
background in producing and editing for public television.) It was my intention to document
the trip and edit the footage into a movie that detailed the student’s experiences as they worked to rebuild devastated areas of New Orleans. I was aware that the trip would be an emotional process and in some cases a life-changing event. I wanted to bear witness to that experience and provide a document for the students and the larger college community upon returning for both instructive and inspirational purposes.

Ultimately, my involvement and collaboration with Professor Lucy Anne Hurston’s class included taping the first class introductions, two retreats, a week in New Orleans and final class presentations. Twenty-two hours of footage from three camcorders was captured and edited down into a two-hour movie detailing worksites, tours and class experiences. Students on the trip became camera operators on the tours, gathering information, as they were encouraged to document their experiences as part of the course work. Upon return to Connecticut, many of the class members contributed their still photographs to the movie and three students recorded their own music for part of the soundtrack.

In October 2007, we held an MCC-NOLA movie premiere for the students where they received copies of the DVD. The editing process had taken approximately three months. I also designed a poster and program for the premiere event. The bond that was created between students, faculty, staff and members of the New Orleans community will last a lifetime and the impact on the design students who engaged in the process of seeing their work effect positive change within a community in need was tremendous for all involved.

Other hands-on learning projects include an award winning video on Community Health Care Centers in Connecticut and more recently the premiere issue of the paperless _MCC Sustainability Newsletter_ distributed in an electronic format, highlighting ongoing sustainability initiatives at MCC, particularly the college president’s signing of the American College & University Presidents’ Commitment to Climate Change, Earth Day events and the MCC Farmer’s Market. Currently, students are involved with contributing to and working on a video loop that documents some of the initiatives on campus pertaining to sustainability.

Difficulties in utilizing active learning techniques in course curriculum can arise from cost, depending on the scope of the project. Active learning can also be a messy endeavor because learning opportunities are loosely structured around current events, projects and examples of experts in the field and the unexpected can happen. This kind of learning takes time for students to process what they are being exposed to. But mostly, students are highly engaged when taking part in this kind of learning process. Working across disciplines forces people to think outside of the box, losing their sense of isolation and gaining a sense of interdependence as well.

As we make room to take our students outside of the classroom into the world whether through the use of the internet as a tool or through hands-on immersion in real world environments, we are providing thinkers with learning opportunities which will come back to us all, in time. Our global community benefits as students become active members of their communities, able to fully grapple with the issues at hand from a rich and diverse perspective of experiences.

William G. Tierney, Director of the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis and Wilbur-
Kieffer Professor of Higher Education at the Rossier School of Education writes about ‘symbolic analysts’ in the essay, “Building the Responsive Campus, Creating High Performance Colleges and Universities.”

Those individuals who are ‘symbolic analysts’ or knowledge workers will have increased importance in a global economy. Symbolic analysts identify and solve problems by manipulation of images, critical thinking, abstraction, innovation and collaboration . . . rather than isolating him/herself in a community of like-minded individuals, the symbolic analyst seeks to understand how difference operates in any number of forums— culturally, logically, economically.40

Successfully educated art and design students should be able to operate at the level of ‘symbolic analyst’ described by Tierney.

Graphic design in particular, has been defined as a form of visual communication, (often using symbols,) which carries an implicit message to an intended audience. Perhaps, the time has come to add to this definition the need for that message to effect positive social change, even if the form it takes is unconventional as in the “ad campaigns” of the Guerrilla Girls, a group of radical feminist artists established in New York City in 1985, known for using guerrilla art to promote women and people of color in the arts.41

Historically, artists and designers have worked to effect social change, from within the art and commercial design fields as well as without. The 1970’s and 80’s saw artists of the caliber of Judith Barry, Hans Haacke, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Joseph Bueys to name a few, working to subvert and alter the nature of corporate power and consumerist practices through powerful messages latent in their artwork. Luke urges designers and artists to recognize the tremendous opportunities to challenge the symbolic essences of late capitalism, questioning both the media and the messages that the hyperecology of late capitalism uses to integrate individuals and society to its reproduction . . . First, those artists working immediately within the industrial design and consciousness-management segments of industry might attack from within the codes of consumption, doubting and disparaging the desires they encode in consumer goods for others to need . . . to do this as well keep their jobs and continue at their crafts, artists must embrace new values consonant with a permacultural, ecological way of life. Rather than stimulating individual desires for the flimsy, the superfluous, and the trendy, artists must identify new, environmentally sensible values—durability, utility, and permanence—in their works and designs. By linking artistic practices with a general cultural awakening to the critical importance of ecological values and by embracing values of ecological sustainability, artists can help to begin revolutionizing the present system from within their vocations and crafts.42

Whether we are working within the system, embracing corporate sponsorship as the new patron of the arts, as architect and designer Peter Marino asks, “When the great Renaissance painters did the Medici chapels, were they selling out?” and answered, “No, that’s what lasts. We don’t
have popes commissioning art anymore; we have big corporations, or fighting from without, as the world rapidly changes around us, we can choose as artists and designers to embody a role of effecting positive change. It may not be enough anymore to simply educate and help our students find their way into internships or other work. We may also need to nurture them through a process of finding their own voice, even while working within the established corporate structures. For some, an example like designer Shepard Fairey may prove to be inspirational as he used new and existing marketing structures to essentially build his own brand, and is now using that brand for social awareness and impact with the design of posters for political change in the U.S. and Darfur. Modeling, providing examples, building partnerships, networking, performing pro bono work for causes that have social and/or environmental impact, while refocusing student’s independence towards a method for interdependence and sustainability are increasingly important. Those of us who are in the business of educating must remember we are “training creative spirits.” Our goal is to release our students in the end back into their communities fully prepared to unleash the powerful, positive potential of the art and design process within their lives and those they touch.

Art may not change anything, but the ideas we have about ourselves we project into the world... Negative images have a way of coming alive just as positive images have. If we project images of beauty, hope, healing, courage, survival, cooperation, interrelatedness, serenity, imagination and harmony, this will have a positive effect. Imagine what artists could do if they became committed to the long-term good of the planet. The possibilities are beyond imagination. If all artists would ever pull together for the survival of human kind, it would be a power such as the world has never known.”—Artist, Ciel Bergman, “The Reenchantment of Art”

It’s when you believe in something, when you stand for something, when you put forth not a symbol, but a piece of yourself—that’s when the sparks begin to fly. Rodchenko, Heartfield, Kalman—they were more than designers. They were the life, the blood and the voice of their struggles—completely immersed in the burning issues of their day. They didn’t depict culture, they were culture. To push the boundaries of global culture in a fresh way, you have to do more than just design, you have to LIVE.”—Adbusters July/Aug. 2008

She is more in tune with the changing technical world than most artists who have yet to realize the power of this tool, (note the Barack Obama surge in the political sphere due to tapping into the younger generation’s savvy with the Internet) and continue to stick to antiquated materials and methods of making art. We don’t use chisels anymore, to chip at large pieces of marble. We don’t draw still lifes. Nothing is still in this life anymore; the computer is denying that for us. The communicating of ideas and images is done instantaneously...”—artist and teacher, Laurann Szpak, thoughts on her 70+ year old mother using the computer to draw, design and sell artwork.

“And if I re-phrase this question: Can graphic design actually save the world?
No, but saving the world needs everyone to understand the situation, be empowered by the knowledge and demand the solutions. Graphic design can be the agent for change and the disseminator of that knowledge, a powerful and important place to be.”—Interview, Designer and co-founder of communication design agency, thomas.matthews, Sophie Thomas.48

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ART, CONFUSION, DEMOCRACY: TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF ART AND MEANING-MAKING

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One of the many strange fruits postmodernism—understood in Fredric Jameson’s sense as a cultural dominant, a condition rather than one style among many—has engendered is a particular attitude in the world of art: as Andreas Huyssen famously diagnosed in After the Great Divide, this attitude consists of a pervasive spirit of laissez-faire, a kind of disenchanted “anything-goes” approach to art (220). Larry Shiner, in a similar vein, observes laconically in The Invention of Art, that these days, we can get away with calling pretty much anything art (3).

This state of affairs has caused considerable confusion among audiences—and critics and artists alike: how do we know if something we are looking at is indeed art? B.R. Tilghman, in 1984, published the first inquiry into the nature of art, aptly titled But is it art? Rita Felshin, in 1995, followed suit and expanded the question to include considerations about the relationship of art and activism in But is it Art? Finally, noted philosopher Cynthia Freeland asks the very same question in her 2001 book But is it Art? To round off these three decades of confusion, consider Terry Barrett’s 2008 Why is that art?, an attempt at a non-partisan inquiry into the many components factoring into the aesthetic and political decisions that determine and define what is and can be art today.

Even if there is much disagreement with the causes and possible solutions to this confusing quagmire that is art today, there is, I think, agreement on the simple truth that, yes, art has become a very confusing sort of business, particularly for the lay-person.

Starting with this confusion, in this essay I plan to map what I consider some of the more pertinent responses to the current situation before offering my own two cents on how we should navigate this confusion: namely, by reasserting the importance of ethics to all aesthetics, to all art. I am well aware that this is not exactly a new idea. In fact, Larry Shiner has traced it back all the way to Greek antiquity. Nonetheless, I want to update it by exploring it in a contemporary context and ultimately argue for its continued (or renewed) importance. In order to make this case, I will look at some recent work by Norwegian artist Matias Faldbakken and, closer to home, at Marcus Young and the Primary School of Conceptual Art in St. Paul, MN. Finally, I want to emphasize that this essay is an exploratory one, devoted to developing and playfully experimenting with ideas to see where they can take the current confusion.

BUT/WHY/WHAT IS ART? NAVIGATING THE CONFUSION

In Art Power, Boris Groys rejects the idea of postmodern pluralism—laissez-faire or not—altogether. In his opinion, there are only two opposing trajectories in contemporary art (and they have been contradicting each other for decades): first, there is art that functions as a commodity, traded and sold, for the financial benefit of artists and dealers. Secondly, there is—
still—art that is made for ideological purposes outside of the capitalist profit motive and whose purpose lies in political propaganda, polemically put. According to Groys, the commodified version of art has long dominated the conversation, marginalizing anything that attempts to resist or question capitalist commodification.

For those ready to embrace art as commodity—and the list is long—Japanese wunderkind Takashi Murakami serves as the new paragon: his work has certainly taken the commodification of art to new heights—or lows, depending on your perspective—prompting critics such as Scott Rothkopf to prophesy the end of art as we know it—which, just for the record, is not a good thing in Rothkopf’s mind. Similarly, Peter Schjeldahl, in his review of Murakami’s 2007 retrospective, concludes that he, for one, is not buying or getting it. Clearly, the seductive appeal of art as commodity has its limits with some critics.

Yet on the other hand, Johanna Drucker, in Sweet Dreams, chides us for wanting a critical attitude from art. Critique is too negative, argues Drucker, and instead of insisting on some elusive critical attitude (Thierry de Duve’s “When Form Becomes Attitude—and Beyond” comes to mind here), we should embrace art as commodity, let ourselves be seduced, enjoy the ride, and simply, pleasurably, give in to what amounts to an inevitable complicity with the market. Would that really be so bad, Drucker insinuates.

While Drucker advocates an unequivocal embrace of art as commodity, a turn to slightly older but no less compelling arguments suggests a different route to navigate the confusion: Donald Kuspit has famously asserted that the only way to tell true art from all the fakes and wanna-be’s out there is to return to the medieval model of craft as mastery of skill, technique. Craft, so Kuspit, is the only irreducible ingredient of art, the only criterion that can serve to redeem art. Interestingly, the collection of his essays that includes “Craft as Art, Art as Craft” is entitled Redeeming Art: Critical Reveries (2000). Note the shift from critical reveries to sweet dreams: these titles serve as potent signs of the times.

But, as Larry Shiner would correctly counter, there is no way back in time; only nostalgia will await us there. So instead of opting for either concept or craft, Shiner proposes we look for a third term—something that will allow us to move beyond the current confusing impasse. According to Shiner, we need art that “turn[s] away from the ideals of the autonomous artist and the self-referential work to embrace a democratic vision of collaboration, service, and social function” (301). Let me emphasize what I consider the key terms here: democracy, collaboration, service, and function.

**ART, ETHICS, DEMOCRACY**

Using Shiner as a springboard for my own model of art and meaning making, I would like to entertain the notion of re-introducing ethics into the art-making process—and, for the critic, the meaning-making process.

What I mean by invoking ethics in this context is, simply and briefly put, a commitment to ‘doing good,’ which is closely connected to the idea of service whose importance Shiner so
powerfully asserts. Service, despite the many different things it could mean to each of us, always entails involvement with the world, which I consider the diametrical opposite of a cynical, lazy withdrawal from the world into private, escapist universes of self-absorption as well as the ice-cold quasi-rationality of nihilism. The ethics of art require a concerned and engaged stance that sees art as very much as part of this world and, more specifically, this democracy we find ourselves in, not as somehow mysteriously apart. Engaging with art, then, translates into an interested engagement in the world.

The model I’d like to propose for this engagement is a kind of mutual responsibility model, if you want, that I think is closely related to how a democracy should ideally function. (That’s where the democracy of my title comes in).

With a historical election season barely behind us, consider how a democracy should work, ideally: an informed electorate gets to choose who gets to represent it in parliament, or in congress and the senate, in the government, and vis-à-vis other nations. Access and interest to relevant information is crucial. In addition, with all the proverbial freedoms we enjoy as residents or citizens of a democratic state, we also bear responsibility: namely, participation. We, as the electorate, bear the responsibility to know ‘stuff,’ that is, access the information we need to make informed choices rather than ignorant ones, and to participate, to vote—rather than not to vote—in order to guarantee the functioning of democracy. Information, participation, and responsibility emerge as key ingredients of an effective democratic process.

Here is how I think contemporary art resembles this process: in order to participate in meaningful ways, we have to know our stuff, i.e. we have to do the work necessary to become an informed audience. We have to put in an effort to make meaning—participate, in other words—rather than expect to be fed meaning with the proverbial silver spoon and the outdated hand of putatively invisible authority holding that spoon ever so benevolently. If we do this work responsibly—find information and participate in the meaning-making process—we should, in turn, be able to expect to get to see art that is consciously and conscientiously presenting us with meanings that are relevant, engaged, and purposeful. Our labors as meaning-makers should be rewarded and lead someplace other than a mere dead end.

In art as in democracy, we should accept our responsibility as critical audiences to make meaning, to accept our share of responsibility in the ongoing conversation that is art rather than hand over that responsibility to paternalistic authority figures. We have to make the commitment to engage, to make effort in this meaning-making process, and can thus ask of artists to hold up their side of the bargain: an attitude that is not cynically dismissive of our efforts but gives us the tools to engage with creative work that holds (rather than withholds) the promise of meaning. That, in a nutshell, is the mutual responsibility that I am proposing.

What this means for me, as a critic and engaged member of the audience, is that I take seriously my responsibility to make meaning rather than to blindly and carelessly trash or praise the work I encounter. If I take on this responsibility, I can then expect artists to extend the same care and responsibility to the making of art. This mutual recognition of responsibilities also helps blur the line between two putatively distinct activities: the making of
art and the making of meaning. Criticism at its best, to quote Vince Leo, is an imaginative transformation—much like art.

The approach to art I am proposing here, driven by a commitment to information, participation, and responsibility that is shared by art-maker and meaning-maker, an approach to art as inherently and inevitably ethical, ties into the very theme of this conference: ethics is always political. The decision if, how, when, and why we care about something or someone, whenever we think we should care, is deeply political.

UNETHICAL ART

The first artist whose work I want to explore in this context is Matias Faldbakken, a Norwegian artist with an impressive international reputation. I encountered him and his work in 2007 in Minneapolis, where he was showing at Midway Contemporary Art.

Faldbakken’s ideas about art and art-making are intentionally provocative. For instance, he is interested in re-defining acts of vandalism—the casual destruction of others’ property—along with the attempts to repair the damage done as unwitting acts of collaboration between vandalizer and vandalized. A sliced convertible top, haphazardly repaired with duct tape, becomes a collaborative piece of art. A spray-painted wall, covered by a layer of thick paint, likewise is re-figured as a work of art. These anarchist leanings, such as the disrespect for private property and the equation of vandalism plus clean-up equals art, seek to extend the definition of art, a move that echoes through 20th-century art history: according to Boris Groys in Art Power, whenever someone says something is not art, we can duly expect the counterstatement. Thus Norway, with its zero tolerance policy on graffiti, seems to invite the opposing statement: graffiti and its removal/coverage is art, not mere vandalism.

These counter-statements are as predictable as they are safe in Faldbakken’s cultural context. However, I am interested in pursuing the implications of translating these re-definitions and extensions of what constitutes art for Faldbakken from Norway to cultural conflict zones.

In “Untitled (Video Sculpture),” (2005) Faldbakken appropriates an act of vandalism and aggression from the streets outside Kabul. As he explained in his talk in Minneapolis on September 7, 2007, the Taliban lined the streets leading to Kabul with 6-foot long stakes wrapped in shredded video tape. Faldbakken appropriated this visually striking “sculpture” in 2005 and exhibited it as his work. The original act of cultural warfare by the Taliban is thus re-figured as art. Likewise, the destructive gesture comes to signify as a creative act.

Applying the logic of Faldbakken’s concept of involuntary collaborations here quickly leads to an impasse: is the appropriator/artist interested in seeking to undo—tape, patch, remedy—the effects of the original vandalism? No. Faldbakken’s appropriation could be interpreted as an ironic act—video, after all, is a dying medium in the technologically advanced world—or even as an act of repetition designed to empty the original act of aggression of its destructive meaning. But both irony and emptiness have the problematic side effect of erasing the very presence of
the vandalized—those whose ability to express and assert themselves by consuming whatever may have been on those tapes has already been violated once.

In a similar act of appropriation, Faldbakken re-defines the defacing of walls in the Palestinian ministry of culture by Israeli soldiers as an “action painting,” which he re-creates, far away from the conflict zone, on the safe white walls of a gallery. What Faldbakken neglects to mention in his Minneapolis talk, when he discusses this piece, is that he, as an appropriator, benefits from the Israeli soldiers’ act of destruction, aimed at a dispossessed people’s institution to preserve cultural intactness. Again, does Faldbakken’s appropriation qualify as an unwitting collaboration between vandalizers and vandalized? No. The only collaboration here happens between the vandalizers/soldiers and the artist. The actual victims, the vandalized, have been erased from Faldbakken’s appropriation; there no longer is any pretense of their voices and experiences having any relevance.

Faldbakken’s political appropriation-art effectively silences the vandalized victims, while re-casting the perpetrators of cultural destruction as unintentional artists. Besides, he turns the artist into an archivist of cultural atrocities who handsomely benefits from his repetitions and shows us, his audience, how he has mastered the contemporary art world. Acts of warfare are thus turned into commodities, emptied of their immediate political meaning and, instead of political purpose, imbued with a self-serving does of nihilism and privileged ennui. That, I find ethically objectionable.

ART, PURPOSE, POLITICS

In contrast to these two highly problematic pieces, Faldbakken is perfectly able to create compelling work that does not further marginalize the vandalized in unethical ways, for instance in “Milk Bar,” created with collaborator Gardar Eide Einarsson in Oslo, prior to the opening of the new opera house in 2008.

Before construction on the new opera house by Oslo’s harbor began, several “young-ish” artists, as Faldbakken referred to them, were invited to create art in this public space, a site also known as “junkietown,” which refers to its population of itinerant heroin addicts. As Faldbakken explained, Norway has the highest per capita number of heroin abusers in Europe, a fact that this socially progressive and rich country fails to address effectively. Faldbakken and Einarsson’s “Milk Bar,” up for two weeks, wanted to recognize and somehow draw in this invisible population.

By building a white, circular bench in the future construction site, the two invited people to sit down, living-room-like, and linger. Each day, flavored milk in small cartons was delivered, a type of dairy product that, again according to Faldbakken, Norwegians joke only junkies drink. “Milk Bar” thus engaged two typically separate spheres of Norwegian social life: the junkies, on the one hand, and, on the other, the opera-going, art-loving public who went down to the harbor/parking lot after attending a performance, where they mixed and mingled with the junkies. Thus, “Milk Bar” accomplished a temporary suspension of class boundaries, provided a poignant counter-statement to the planned gentrification of the area, and offered a timely
recognition of the heroin abuse problem. Furthermore, Faldbakken reported that a certain micro-economic system evolved around “Milk Bar,” with entrepreneurially minded junkies taking the milk each morning and selling it to others.

Unlike Faldbakken’s deeply problematic attempts at appropriating acts of state-sanctioned vandalism and re-define them as art, “Milk Bar” engages audiences by directly involving them in the installation/performance. Whether intentioned or not, “Milk Bar,” at least temporarily, turns spectators into participants, foregrounds those who have fallen through the cracks of a rich European country’s social safety net, and thus serves a purpose that is socially and politically relevant in its critique of gentrification, drawing attention to addiction, and suspension of rigid class boundaries. In this collaborative piece, Faldbakken and Einarsson alter both the dynamics of how we typically inhabit public space and the dynamics of social interactions. “Milk Bar” allows for an—albeit ephemeral—transformation of the expectations of how to use and inhabit this public space and of assumptions about those who use it.

In this project, best described as public art—but decidedly not of the monumental sort—Faldbakken and Einarsson succeeded in democratically involving people, abandoning the idea of the autonomous art work, and accomplishing a socially meaningful function. The artists are aware of the concerns of their audiences, particularly the marginalized junkies, and render their stigmatized existence visible. The audience, in turn, has the opportunity to engage, via art, in a world many of the opera goers may not be familiar with—and to make meaning through these opportunities for active, interested engagement.

Moving from Norway a little closer to home, I consider one more example of collaborative, participatory, engaged and engaging, ephemeral and politically meaningful work: Marcus Young and Primary School of Conceptual Art’s “Don’t You Feel it Too?”

The original call for the project, which premiered in the Twin Cities during 2008 National Republic Convention took place in St. Paul, was emphatically inclusive: “the project ‘Don’t You Feel it too?’ seeks volunteers (artists and non-artists) to create a joyful work of public behavior. The only qualification is a willingness to say hello to your personal awkwardness and accompanying happiness.” The artists responsible for conceiving the project intentionally sought out participants democratically, eliminating any boundaries between those who identify as artists and those who simply want to be involved.

Here is a description of “Don’t You Feel It Too?” from the project’s collateral:

“Don’t you feel it too?” is dancing where dancing doesn’t belong. Practiced in public and semi-public places, it is a simple and courageous act of self-embarrassment and joy to protest standardized behavior. A large cast—initially dispersed to such places as museums, bus stops, downtown elevators, and Target—eventually congregates to transform the emotional air of a large civic space. Acting as individuals and as a collective, performers serve the unintentional audience. Like an invigorating wayward wind, this work of choreography unburdens everyday life. “Don’t you feel it too?” can happen anytime, anywhere and will premiere during the Republican National Convention.
What is noteworthy about “Don’t you feel it too?” is that while the project returns participants and audiences to that putatively old-fashioned sense of creating art with our bodies, our hands and feet, it is conceptually solid and purposefully not “marked” as art: people who encounter the dancers are left to their own senses and devices to figure out what this strange behavior, obviously indebted to Situationism’s happenings, amounts to. Thus “Don’t you feel it too” seeks to activate audiences’ curiosity and intrigue spectators into actively making meaning.

Importantly, “Don’t you feel it too” embraces awkwardness, a certain sense of off-kilter disorientation, and a refusal to abide by standards for polite and disciplined public behavior. Yet it does all of this ever so gently, without hostile provocation, caring as much for the audiences as for its many participants. The social purpose of the project could be articulated in many ways, but seems to aim, primarily, at subtly and temporarily messing with the sense of what ordinary reality and proper public behavior should look like—without excess, alienation, and/or hostility. “Don’t you feel it too” also qualifies as art that resists commodification: it’s ephemeral, it’s political, it’s collaborative without erasing the agency or individuality of the participants. This is art that takes its responsibility seriously in making meaning—and making audiences work for that meaning.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by returning to my earlier analogy between art and democracy: in these confusing times, I think it is of paramount importance that we are clear about what we want from art. Do we want escapism and nostalgia—as Komar and Melamid’s “America’s most wanted” seems to demonstrate? Do we want art that serves a purpose beyond self-referential navel-gazing and self-conscious commodification—art that has the potential to alter, even if only temporarily, the world—or discourse about the world—we share? Or are we content with a model of artistic practice and production whose prime purpose lies in the creation of more commodities, more stuff?

As art educators, I think we have a responsibility to teach civic engagement through art that is conceptually ambitious, engaged with the world rather than absorbed with and by the contentious art world. As practicing artists, we have a responsibility to make art that intends to be more than just another commodity. And as critics, we have a responsibility to work for meaning and to take seriously the responsibility of participating actively in the art of criticism as transformative and creative meaning making. It is our responsibility to model the process of ethical, practical engagement with the work and the world, and to re-assert the importance, value, and ethics of art.

To end on a speculative note, perhaps the era of “postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism”—to quote Jameson’s famous phrase—is coming to its final days: since the days of unfettered late capitalism seem to have finally waned, as we witnessed the turmoil of the markets in fall 2008, what will that mean for the art market? Will we, too, abandon the dogma of “anything goes” and return to ethics? To my mind, a much-needed departure from the
laissez-faire excesses of the art world could indeed promise a return to the idea of ethical responsibility, which does not lie on the periphery of artistic practice but at its very heart.

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