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Cultural Identity, Voice, and Agency in Post-Secondary Graphic Design Education: A Collective Case Study

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, CULTURAL IDENTITY, VOICE, AND AGENCY IN POST-SECONDARY GRAPHIC DESIGN EDUCATION: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY by LARRY M. STULTZ, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

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ABSTRACT

CULTURAL IDENTITY, VOICE, AND AGENCY IN
POST-SECONDARY GRAPHIC DESIGN EDUCATION:
A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY
by
Larry M. Stultz

This study investigates areas of conflict between students' cultural identities and the educational environment established and maintained by their faculty and school. It analyzes the usefulness and value of personal creative expression in the classroom and how treatment of cultural identity and performance influences student persistence and success.

Four theoretical frameworks ground this study and comprise the majority of the relevant literature. The inquiry is framed by theories in curriculum, performance, cultural difference, and symbolic interaction. Three purposely selected students participated in individual case studies, and the data from interviews, classroom observation, and examples of student work were subjected to both unique and collective case analysis.

Three identifiable areas inform the collective interpretation: socialization, self-view, and agency, with

the latter seeming most dynamic. Very significant are the students' disparate socialization goals: assimilation, acculturation, and syncretism or compromised coexistence. The problem of self-view, or naming, is also useful. The identity and voice exhibited by these three students create ways in which they are viewed and treated by their peers and their faculty. Most importantly, the students' experiences and cultural capital are shown to have agency, and agency is a signifier in looking into student success. This study reveals that while it is up to the students to utilize experiential agency, it is up to educators and institutions to consider the role of identity, voice, and agency in developing and maintaining an educative environment.

CULTURAL IDENTITY, VOICE, AND AGENCY IN POST-SECONDARY GRAPHIC DESIGN EDUCATION: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

by
Larry M. Stultz

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy
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in
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in
the College of Education
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Atlanta, Georgia
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue iv

1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM..... 1
Definition of Terms..... 6
Purpose of the Study..... 18
Conceptual Framework and Background..... 19
Educational Significance..... 39

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS..... 41
Curriculum Theory..... 44
Cultural Difference Theory..... 48
Performance Theory..... 51
Symbolic Interactionism Theory..... 59

3 RESEARCH METHODS..... 64
Case Study Research..... 65

4 TRUMAN REED..... 83
Assertions.....104

5 SELMA BALIĆ.....108
Assertions.....123

6 RICARDO BENITEZ.....127
Assertions.....137

7 COLLECTIVE INTERPRETATION.....142

Epilogue.....164

References.....166

Appendix.....174

PROLOGUE

I spent twenty-five years working in the graphic design business. The first six years out of design school I worked for advertising agencies, publications offices, and printing firms. The next nineteen were spent as an entrepreneur, operating a design studio or an advertising agency as my clients required. I worked with a partner, and we had up to nine employees, most of whom were graphic designers. I was a creative director, art director, and copywriter. I was an account executive, which meant I represented my firm, presented our solutions, and sold the work. I learned through experience the issues and decisions that most design school graduates will face.

Over time I realized that I wanted to teach, to help young creative people build their careers. Because of my professional experience and a master's degree in graphic design, I quickly found a full time teaching position in a proprietary design school that offered baccalaureate degrees. Two semesters later the school needed a department

chair, and based upon my management experience I was promoted. Here I remain. The eight years since I made that decision have been an education for me, as well as for my students, I trust.

Every morning I wake with a sense of excitement, intrigue, and anticipation, because I will be spending yet another day with students who are committed, for the most part, to their future creative lives. As I near the school each day, I am struck by a combination of pride, amusement, and envy. I am proud to be the perceived leader of this band of creative people. I am amused by their constant positioning and signifying and acting out, so common among "creatives." And I am envious of their youth, their chance to start their careers from scratch, their innocent commitment to be the creative savior, hero, demagogue, or iconoclast that future young designers will one day want to emulate.

I usually walk into the school through the student lounge. It keeps me in touch with the students. I know their words, their hand gestures, their nods, their grunts and groans, and without being too patronizing or phony, I try to show an understanding of their language. That's the hard part...staying current with their cultures. They

are a diverse group. I see their faces, their current dress, and I hear their current favorite music bursting out of their headphones. The students' combined presence offers a sort of cultural cyclorama. So early in the day, seven thirty or eight o'clock, in the spacious deli with tables and chairs haphazardly rearranged, there are pockets of students studying their notes for some upcoming quiz or test. There are the card players. Some students are eating breakfast; some are drawing amazing animal-like humanoid creatures on scraps of paper. College TV Network blasts its music and flashes its Eros-laden imagery from monitors high above their heads, uncontrolled and uncontrollable. It's all satellite beamed, and there is nothing some can do but listen, watch, and become mesmerized. Outside on the patio, there are many sleepy or moody students sitting on the walls and tables, smoking deeply and talking little. The smoke is so thick that to be out there at all, one should be a smoker in the first place.

At this time of morning especially, there are those who just sit and stare. Some are the Goths with their angst-ridden faces, lips and tongues flashing silver posts and rings, the occasional dog collar with spikes and chains, and the black eye shadow and lipstick. Some

sit-and-stare people might be serious students waiting to join a class and expand their minds. Some might just be tired from a student kind of night life.

Art and design students generally make their self-view eminently visible, their outward reality. They signify. They are out. They are demonstrating their creativity. They find each other in similarity, and they gather in groups, flocks, teams, and covens. I wonder, though, about each one of these students' inward realities. Who are they, really? Each of them possesses a unique culture, a culture of one. What makes them decide to enter a school like The Crescent School of Design? What do they wish to become?

Three of the many who intrigue me became subjects for this collective case study. Each of them represents a unique cultural background, clearly not univocal or one-dimensional, and offers me a view into the boundaries between their voices and that of the school as a whole.

Truman Reed's presence in the school is largely social and tribal. He wears Rasta dreads covered by a huge knit cap. He is a leader in the hallways. He has stature in the classroom among his peers. He has a gift of intelligence and inspiring conversation. He promises a grand creative product, but there is little creative work that has

actually been given form beyond Truman's wonderful imagination and illustrative, visualizing words.

Selma Balić survived the war in Bosnia. She becomes rueful when talking about the effects of the war on her family members, most of whom still live in Bosnia or Croatia. She avoids telling most people about her past, choosing to assimilate into the American design culture as quickly as possible. Selma has a habit of dismissing conflicts and disappointments with a wave of her hand and a quiet, "It doesn't matter anyway, does it?"

Ricardo Benitez is waiting for Fidel Castro to fall from power in his family's homeland of Cuba, so that he may become "the world's next Ted Turner in Havana!" He carries a laptop computer with him, always seeking opportunities to open it and show a desktop packed full of icons...each representing an idea in progress. Ricardo has so many ideas, so many new projects started every day, but he cannot slow down long enough to finish any of them. Oh, but when he does...!

Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As an educator in post-secondary design education, I am concerned about judgments of students' cultural practice and performance in the classroom. Are students free to express their cultural backgrounds, their social identities, in classroom interactions and their creative work? Do students feel they have a personal voice in classroom critique? Are their own cultural experiences and meanings given validity, usefulness, or even agency, the capacity for socio-cultural impact, in their creative work, or is it the language of the instructor, the school, and the industry that must be used?

These questions assume a desire or tendency in students to exhibit their cultural identities, to give voice and agency to their experiences through performance in the classroom. Perhaps equally important is to ask, do all students' cultural backgrounds support and encourage open expression of identity and voice? Are there students

to whom the idea of cultural performance, or even simply cultural exposure, might be discomforting or threatening? Said another way, in addition to my concerns about judgment in the classroom, perhaps we should be concerned about a school's insistence on or encouragement of cultural practice and performance from its students.

Simply said, I am concerned that there may be conflict between the cultural identities brought into the educational environment by the students and the culture they encounter in the school and from instructor practice. As I will demonstrate, the typical goal of post-secondary design education is to prepare students for entry into the marketplace, and the schools tend to perpetuate and serve a collectively defined view of the type of graduate the industry requires. Some students may experience a limitation, regulation, or other form of control over their individual creative expression by the school and its instructors in order to serve a stereotypical view of the professional design industry.

The fact that these questions occur to me and others in design education, as I will report later in this chapter, represents a relatively recent and still evolving change in both the schools and the industry. Edward

Castella, a professional advisor to the graphic design program that I chair, remarked that the school central to this study, the Crescent School of Design, enrolls the most culturally and ethnically diverse student body he has ever seen. Castella, born in the Philippines and having indigenous, Spanish, and Chinese lineage, said that until recently he has been as far outside the norm as anyone he knew in the industry. He notes that while Asians are the largest ethnic minority within the graphic design industry, and Hispanics are gaining in numbers, the percentage of minority designers is small. The largest under-represented ethnic group has always been African-Americans. In terms of designers working within the advertising industry, the creative departments have consisted predominantly of white males, and they have been slow to diversify. More women and minorities continue to enter the field in account service and administrative support, but the creative product is still primarily white male driven.

Sylvia Harris observes that in her twenty-seven years as a graphic designer and educator, ethnic minority involvement in the American graphic design industry is rarely discussed, and she attributes that to a historic

lack of racial diversity in the field. She writes of the performance insecurities in black students she has known,

> In fact, they experience a problem common to may black design professionals: the feeling that they are not completely welcome in the profession... this outsider posture leads many black designers to compulsively imitate and assimilate mainstream aesthetic traditions in order to feel accepted and be successful. More often than not, black designers and students are trapped in a strategy of imitation rather than innovation.[1]

Concurrent with Harris' observations, Andrew Blauvelt and Meredith Davis note a trend in the constitution of both the graphic design industry and its audiences. "We have witnessed an influx of women into the field; this along with an increasing ethnic diversity has produced challenges to many of the premises of a white, male, European approach to design education and practice."[2]

In my own experience in the graphic design industry during the twenty-five years preceding my becoming an educator, few design studios had a minority-based subdivision or department, and very few had minority ownership or a niche market focus. A commitment to the

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[1] Sylvia Harris, "Searching for a Black Aesthetic in American Graphic Design," The Education of a Graphic Designer, Steven Heller, ed. (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 125.

[2] Andrew Blauvelt and Meredith Davis, "Building Bridges: A Research Agenda for Education and Practice," Looking Closer 2, Michael Bierut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller, and D.K. Holland, eds. (New York: Allworth Press, 1997), 78.

growth of ethnic and cultural niche marketing attention in the industry is surprisingly recent. In 2002 the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) initiated its Center for Cross-Cultural Design to raise awareness of the design industry's cross-cultural capabilities and help designers develop their knowledge and skills in cross-cultural design.[3] Castella notes that the AIGA has indeed elected two Asian presidents in the past ten years.

According to the Registrar's records of a national consortium of over thirty schools to which the Crescent School of Design belongs, the past sixteen years have shown significant change in enrollment statistics. In 1990 72.1% of students were white, blacks accounted for 24.8%, Hispanics just 2.3%, and less than 1% were Asian. By 1996, white enrollment had decreased to 66.9%, black enrollment had increased to 29.8%, and Hispanic and Asian enrollment were each at 1.7%. By 2006 white and black enrollment totals are converging at 47.7% and 44.7% respectively. Hispanic enrollment has increased to 4.5%, Asian remains fairly stable at 2.1%, and a new multi-racial category accounts for 1%. Enrollment by the stereotypical white male student has dropped from 41.7% in 1990 to 29.1% in 2006.

[3] American Institute of Graphic Arts: The Professional Association for Design (New York: 2005), [http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/centerforcrossculturaldesign], (Accessed December 27, 2005).

While design schools seem to be enrolling increasing numbers of non-traditional students in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and country of origin, the majority of the faculty continue to be Caucasian and middle class. They come to the classroom from the ranks of industry, having spent a number of years working within the stereotype. Such is the case with the Crescent School of Design. Of twenty-one instructors in the graphic design department, sixteen are white, two are black, one is Hispanic, and two list themselves as multi-racial. If the design industry is developing niche market capabilities and is working to support minority design specialists, do students feel they are being prepared for these opportunities? I suspect that there may still be a stereotypical industry standard perceived by schools and by which students are measured that has not yet adjusted to an emerging marketplace.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined in agreement with their usage in the related general literature.

Agency

Laura Ahearn defines agency as the socioculturally mediated capacity to act. All action is socioculturally mediated, both in its production and in its interpretation.[4] In discussing the interaction of language and culture, she writes, "neither should be studied in isolation from one another, especially when a researcher seeks to understand a concept as complex as agency."[5] Agency, then, can be seen in part as the interaction and effect of one's language and culture with one's production.

Experience

Oliver Wendell Holmes writes that culture is experience.[6] Applying the above discussion of agency, we add experience to language and culture in our expression, our agency. John Dewey claims that experience is not only personal, it is social. He writes, "The world we have experienced becomes an integral part of the self that acts and is acted upon by further experience." He asks, "How then can objects of experience avoid being expressive?"[7]

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[4] Laura Ahearn, "Language and Agency," Annual Review of Anthropology, 2001, 30: 1, 112.

[5] Ibid., 131.

[6] Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Common Law, 1880, 1.

[7] John Dewey, Art as Experience, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1934; Berkley Publishing Group, Perigee Books, 1980), 104.

Culture

Holmes in The Common Law states that culture is experience; it is social, collective, and consensual.[8] Paulo Freire tells us that one's view of the world equates to his or her situation in the world.[9] Clifford Geertz writes that our culture consists of the stories we tell about ourselves, and that culture is public, because meaning is public and all human behavior is symbolic action. Culture, Geertz says, contains webs of significance for each of us.[10]

Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu defines cultural capital as the tastes, habits, and cultural performance that reflect our cultural identities.[11] He says these are all included in and necessary to production. Cultural capital provides substance and content to daily cultural practice.

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[8] The pragmatists Holmes, Peirce, James, and Dewey are discussed thoroughly by Louis Menand in The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002). I will refer to them more extensively in the last section of this chapter.

[9] Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1970), 96.

[10] Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 20.

[11] Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste (1986), trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 261.

Identity

Thomas McEvilley writes of identity as a culture's or an individual's image it has of itself, a state of being as opposed to doing (as in performance).[12] Also speaking to the problem statement for this study, Michael Omi and Howard Winant write that multicultural assimilation tends toward the dissolution of group identity and cultural pluralism toward its preservation.[13]

Performance

Erving Goffman tells us that performance is the expression that an individual gives in presentation of self; the expression that an individual gives off; and, the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.[14]

These definitions and others will be utilized and expanded in further chapters of this text as theoretical frameworks are developed, questions are framed and asked, and interpretations of resulting data are reported.

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[12] Thomas McEvilley, Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity (Kingston NY: McPherson and Company, 1992), 129.

[13] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s (New York: Routledge, 1994), 48.

[14] Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 22.

Topical Background

Beyond the definitions of terms found above, within these chapters the reader will find terminology that is unique to the topic and the method. The general topic I investigate is student creative development in a post-secondary professional design school environment. Specifically, my investigation and interpretation takes place within the graphic design baccalaureate program of a proprietary college that focuses its degree offerings on communication arts. Graphic design schools and programs are the learning places for visual communication, also called the applied arts.

Within graphic design classes, typical pedagogy involves studying the theory and application of select forms of graphic communication, such as newspaper and magazine ads, travel brochures, logos and stationery, direct mail, posters, television commercials, product catalogs, book jackets, annual reports and more. The evolution of new media, including web pages and interactive internet-based communications, has added to the educational requirements for faculty and students alike. Students typically are asked to select a "client," acquire appropriate headlines, text, and imagery, and create an

example of the assigned format for class and instructor critique.

Students' projects are meant to demonstrate their ability to communicate ideas, concepts, imagery, and cohesive visual solutions about a product or service to a designated target market. In a single class a student may be required to design a soft drink label targeted toward retirees, a direct mail piece to sell software to accountants, and a magazine cover for Generation Y music enthusiasts. The goal of graphic design education, in simple terms, is to develop the ability and skill to create unique and refined graphic solutions that are beyond the capabilities of an untrained person who simply owns a computer with desktop publishing software.

Students' ideas for their projects generally come from experiences they have had and visual understandings they possess. These experiences and understandings may often reflect each individual student's inherited and acquired culture. The schools and instructors generally have a set of criteria by which student design work is judged as creative and industry-worthy or not. If a student's experiences and visual understandings come from a culture different from the dominant one, these sources of creative

ideas might not be sanctioned and supported by the schools. Ideas might have to come from a stereotypical "bank" of practices and trends, negotiated and accepted by the schools in concert with the hiring market. Schools and instructors might require adherence to a defined set of industry standards for visual communication.

Of course, there may be disparate views among students themselves on the desirability or advisability of drawing upon cultural experience for creative concepts. Some students come to school wanting to emulate the current work being done by the most outstanding professionals in the graphic design industry. Said another way, these students might have their minds set on adopting the status quo in professional design services and becoming very good at working within the established industry culture and its emerging trends.

Deron Boyles writes of schools and programs that embrace market logic and deliver what these students are ostensibly seeking: teaching and measurement standards that favor market needs and meet business interests. He writes,

> ...they no longer qualify as teaching and learning. They become production-line oriented – processes of transmission of data, retainable by some students, but only those whose cultural capital is valued in the commodified classroom

> and represented in similarly representative textbooks.[15]

So, I must ask, what about the others, those students who might wish to think for themselves and direct their own career preparation? While some students purposely apply or adjust their cultural capital to emulate the market logic, other students may want to enter the marketplace with a goal of social and cultural contribution or even reform for an industry they view as insensitive to their own culture. Some students may see rich rewards for the development of bilingual or multicultural visual communication abilities. These students may have no interest in denying their own identities or repressing their voice and agency. Students might, then, be at cross purposes in their degree pursuits and have each other to dispute or convince with their work in the classroom.

The ultimate goal of professional design education is to prepare students for careers. Many programs in the applied arts, specifically the communication arts to which graphic design belongs, are methodically producing graduates who will be able to join the workforce and fit into the industry culture with ease. Graphic design

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[15] Deron Boyles, American Education and Corporations: The Free Market Goes to School (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998), 120.

graduates typically enter the workforce as production artists, advertising designers, junior art directors, illustrators, package designers, information graphics specialists, and web and interactive media designers.

Most design schools are accredited by one of the variety of accrediting agencies. These must maintain records of their success for the requisite self-studies. Graduate success in terms of longevity in first placements and employer satisfaction are tracked, and curricula and instruction are monitored and adjusted to help assure that success and satisfaction. Not only does this practice provide information for future accreditation visits, but also it helps assure a direct working relationship with the employers, many of whom might serve on program advisory committees and in the classroom as visiting professionals.

Curriculum planners and instructors know their objectives, which are very likely developed and shared by the institutions and their industry constituents. The curriculum developers work with industry representatives to assure delivery of contemporary design theory, technical production skills, and professional development training, which can involve presentation skills, resume writing, mock interviews, employer site visits, and internship placement.

Instructors in applied arts programs typically are current or retired industry professionals themselves, and most have informed, if not rigid, opinions based on their professional experience regarding what the students should know and how they should develop themselves in order to begin careers in the "real world."

Faculty members in the applied arts have a hand, not only in delivering course material, but also in determining course and program learning and exit competencies. Course objectives and exit competencies tend to be synonymous and include the ability to understand and solve problems, the creation of effective original images, development of symbols and other graphic elements, typographic legibility, color theory application, and software proficiency.[16]

To a great extent the design of curriculum to meet industry needs is representative of a hidden curriculum in a capitalist society. Peter Hlebowitsh expresses concern about the hidden curriculum and "its inculcation of values, its training in behaviors of subservience, and its slotting of students into disempowering categories."[17] He suggests,

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[16] Marty Neumeier, "Secrets of Design: Mentoring," CRITIQUE Magazine, Winter 1999, 27-37.

[17] Peter Hlebowitsh, Radical Curriculum Theory Reconsidered: A Historical Approach (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 38.

and I consider this integral to my study, that service to a potentially hegemonic[18] industry standard might be "marked by some level of malevolence toward marginalized groups."[19] Whether a student comes to the school from a rural town, a mountain resort community, an inner-city public school, or an unfulfilling career in another industry, the service to the design industry by post-secondary design educators may be shrouding or mistreating these students' cultural identities in an effort to mold them into employable professionals. In other words, industry-serving instructors might be playing the role of the elitists, viewing the students as "pledges," commoners seeking the secret password and handshake so they can join the professional design fraternity.

Michel deCerteau explores assimilation of "common people" into a culture that is imposed by "elites" producing the language. He notes that representation of the language and processes of the elites constitutes acceptable performance in the eyes of the elites, but does not adequately communicate the identity of the people as a

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[18] Antonio Gramsci writes of hegemony as a permeation of values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Barry Burke, "Antonio Gramsci and informal education," The Encyclopedia of Informal Education, n.d., [http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-gram.htm](Accessed October 8, 2004).

[19] Hlebowitsh, Radical Curriculum Theory Reconsidered, 40.

whole.[20] Thomas McEvilley refers to "communities of taste"[21] as groups that are defined and bonded by value judgments that are both useful and dangerous, because in bonding some people they exclude others. Those who produce the language attempt to enforce ideas of quality on an "other." He writes, "the forces of censorship are ill-disposed toward change... they want art to make private emblems for a cult that does not vary." In an educational environment, I wonder if it is common to find elitism or at least inflexibility in the critique of a student's attempts at cultural production, representation, and performance. McEvilley continues, "The pleasure of exercising judgment is a pleasure of self-realization, self-recognition, and self-definition. One reflects oneself, putting certain things in a class with oneself, excluding others from it."[22]

The practice of preparing graduates for industry success is neither uncommon nor indefensible. However, it may seem to professional educators and others that what Giroux calls "the creeping vocationalization and

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[20] Michel deCerteau, The Practice of Everyday Life, Stephen Rendall, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), ***xiii***.

[21] McEvilley, Art & Otherness, 23-24.

[22] Ibid.

subordination of learning to the dictates of the market"[23] frames a misguiding principle in professional arts education. I am concerned that a hegemonic suppression or removal of a student's cultural identity and background by the schools in the interest of employability might be commonplace. I am concerned that inhibition of cultural content and performance in projects and the classroom might be contributing to student disillusionment and might have a negative impact on the persistence and success of those preparing to enter the marketplace. While some students might be working diligently to mold themselves in the current likeness of the industry, others might be more idealistic, preferring innovation and the creation of new directions in design and visual communication.

Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and critique industry-based practice and curricula in post-secondary design education. Specifically, this study investigates program goals and classroom discourse and how they affect students' cultural performance opportunities. This study

[23] Henry A. Giroux, "Vocationalizing Higher Education: Schooling and the Politics of Corporate Culture" in Beyond the Corporate University: Culture and Pedagogy in the New Millennium, ed. Henry Giroux and Kostas Myrsiades (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 30-31.

also analyzes the value of personal creative expression in the college environment as preparation for entry into the workplace.

The information related to industry hiring practices and their influence on the training of design school students is vast. College catalogs and curriculum planners have published a great deal of information, which I will explore later in this chapter, related to the preparation of hirable graduates. But there is a lack of significant literature on the practices and effects of encouraging or discouraging, validating or denying cultural capital in students and their work. This study will seek to interpret and define ways in which faculty and peer support of cultural performance and production might be a contributor to student success.

Conceptual Framework and Background

In his chapter, "The Tyler Rationale,"[24] Herbert Kliebard notes Ralph Tyler's three sources of educational objectives: studies of contemporary life, suggestions from subject matter experts, and studies of learners. Jerome Bruner uses the terms social consciousness, broad

[24] Herbert Kliebard, Forging the American Curriculum: Essays on Curriculum History and Theory (New York: Rutledge, 1992), 154.

knowledge, and a finely-honed repertory of intellectual skills.[25] These equate to the more generalizable and extensively used categories: society expectations, subject matter, and student needs.

These three overriding elements of curriculum theory and development are symbolized by graphic elements in my conceptual framework (see figures 1 and 2 on following pages). Society's expectations, in this case the demands of industry and the resulting goals of the applied arts schools, are represented by a square, the edifice in which the education is delivered. Subject matter delivered by the faculty is represented by a large, solid circle. Student needs are represented by an open oval.

The conceptual framework for this study is represented graphically, consisting of the three key elements noted above and the relationships I presume to exist among them.

[25] J. Dan Marshall, James T. Sears, and William H. Schubert, Turning Points in Curriculum: A Contemporary American Memoir (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2000), 53.

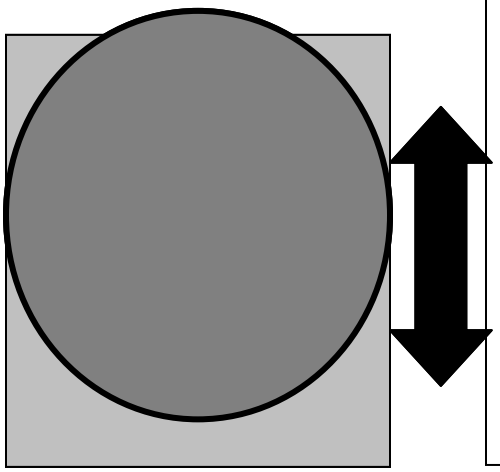

Figure 1: The square represents industry expectations, the foundation or edifice upon which curriculum may be based. The circle represents the subject matter, which is in the hands of the faculty and may vary somewhat, but generally, stays within industry expectations. In this figure, the circle can move vertically to be totally within the square or somewhat without, but generally will not move completely outside the "industry realm." Faculty members tend to want to remain employed.

In Figure 1, I depict two elements, society expectation and subject matter, as closely interrelated. As I have alluded previously in this text, society expectation is represented as industry expectations, and subject matter seems to be created and presented to serve those expectations by the schools of applied arts. In other words, the faculty, curriculum, and industry are culturally similar and operate on the same vertical plane in most cases. The post-secondary schools of graphic design seem to be delivering a mono-cultural pedagogy, one aimed at unifying the skills and actions of graduates and placing them in stereotypical workplace positions.

Of course, it is possible for a faculty member not to stay within the philosophical and pedagogical boundaries of the institution, the edificial square, but it could mark the end of the instructor's employment at the school. As I have mentioned, the utilization of industry professionals as members of a program advisory committee is commonplace. The guidelines for these committees at the Crescent School of Design suggest a membership of ten to twelve members including 80% business and industry professionals representing the major occupation for which training is being provided by the program. The remaining committee positions are to include post-secondary educators and graduates who are working in the field. Thus, industry has a direct hand in advising on curriculum and pedagogy. The more completely the faculty's subject matter delivery stays within the square of industry expectation, the more faith the industry puts in the school's graduates.

The structuralist approach in the above graphic certainly has limitations, which might inspire debate among planners and instructors at a number of schools. There are schools following differing models of graduate preparation and having creative points of differentiation in meeting the needs of the marketplace. However, most will still have

a defined set of industry expectations and a clear mission statement that determines subject matter and its delivery. The reader is invited to make his or her own assertions and hypotheses regarding the relationship of industry expectations and subject matter delivery.

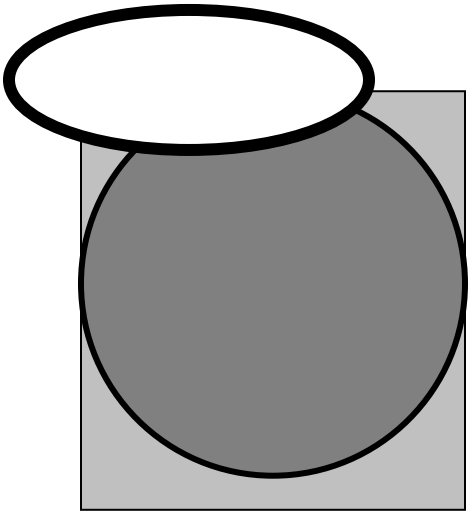

Figure 2: The added oval represents student needs, desires, and expectations. The symbolic oval is capable of moving in any direction and may expand or contract, depending upon student interest and commitment. Students may identify with faculty and completely overlay the circle. They might, however, move completely outside the industry and the subject matter/faculty realm. In most cases, I believe there is some overlap, yet some distance, as depicted here.

In Figure 2, the added element (the open oval) represents the student and his/her needs, desires, and expectations in career preparation. It represents the student, inclusive of his/her social and cultural background brought into the school environment. This oval can move in any direction and can grow or shrink in size. The student can exhibit various levels of assimilation, acculturation, or resistance in relation to the culture imposed by the school and faculty.

The students represented by this oval and its mobility in relation to the other two elements are the subject of this study. In other words, my purpose is to identify and critique the relationships between the students and the school environment, the elements of classroom discourse, and how a school's treatment of cultural identity might limit or enhance student success.

For the purpose of this study, student success is defined as persistence in the active pursuit of a degree in a field of study and the retention of exit competencies sufficient to gain employment after graduation. The concerns that encouraged this study certainly include the support of student success as just defined. It is the treatment of variance in students' needs, desires, and expectations as contributors to individual student success that is of interest in this study.

Curriculum Planners and Faculty

One might question my placement of curriculum planning to meet industry expectation and faculty on the same plane in the two preceding figures, while granting freedom of student interaction with this structure. Ralph Caplan complains that "administrators talk as though students were

the educational product."[26] He says students are not the product. "The only educational product schools can reasonably be charged with designing is the educational environment...the situations in which the students interact with each other and with faculty members."[27] In this view, the alignment of curriculum and faculty places the responsibility for performance on the student. It also, however, places the responsibility for correctness of curriculum and pedagogy on the planners and, therefore, on their interactions with the industry.

There is often pressure from the faculty on students to subscribe to a professional industry culture and to enculturate themselves to industry-accepted ways of looking, talking, and acting. Visiting professionals often present and later critique "real world" assignments. Schools organize panel discussions for industry members to speak collectively on current industry-relevant topics and field questions from the student audience. Department chairs and career service staff at many schools set up and administrate internships, and students typically receive program credit for participation. Many curricula require

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[26] Ralph Caplan, By Design (New York: Fairchild Publications, Inc., 1982), 167.

[27] Ibid., 168.

courses or workshops in career development, design business practices, and professionalism.

Colgate University and New York University's (NYU) College of Arts and Sciences offer career-oriented workshops to undergraduates, bringing alumni business executives into the classroom to offer advice on succeeding in the marketplace. An even earlier introduction to professional training begins with this NYU college offering a Professional Edge program to high school students for advance academic credit when they enroll.[28] Interestingly, these are liberal arts colleges offering primarily liberal education degree programs. When we find applied arts and liberal arts programs both involving themselves with professional expectations of the marketplace, there might be some shared goals and values that affect students and their degree pursuits. I have long suspected that a liberal arts educational environment is better at supporting individual identity, voice, and agency in its students than one devoted solely to applied arts training. However, there are recurrent themes in the literature about design education that indicate a link between support of student

[28] Rachel Donadio, "The Employable Liberal Arts Major," The New York Times Magazine, Dec. 12, 2004, 66.

cultural performance and a liberal arts component in the applied arts schools.

Graphic design educator, Gunnar Swanson, advises that graphic design be taught as a liberal art, that graphic design be seen as an integrative field dealing with communication, expression, interaction, and cognition.

> Design should be about meaning and how meaning can be created...about the relationship between form and communication. It is one of the fields where science and literature meet. It can shine a light on hidden corners of sociology and history. Design's position as conduit for and shaper of popular values can be a path between anthropology and political science.[29]

Leon Kass provides credibility for the use of the term "liberal arts," which often refers to development of skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, arguing, looking, and experimenting. Kass writes that liberal education and the liberal arts specifically go far beyond the acquisition of these skills. Liberal education is education in and for thoughtfulness.[30] Maxine Greene helps elaborate:

> It is through a liberal education, even within the professional arts, that the educated become

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[29] Gunnar Swanson, "Graphic Design Education as a Liberal Art: Design and Knowledge in the University and the Real World," The Education of a Graphic Designer, Steven Heller, ed. (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 18.

[30] Leon Kass, "The Aims of Liberal Education," The Aims of Education (University of Chicago Publications Office, 1997), 86.

> empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, and to make sense of their lived worlds.[31]

Marshall Gregory writes,

> Liberal education is the pursuit of human excellence, not the pursuit of excellent salaries and excellent forms of polish and sophistication... its goal is more ethical than intellectual: it focuses on the development of individuals as moral agents.[32]

Design Industry Expectations

There is much discussion regarding the alignment of design education programs with the expectations of the "real world" practitioners. Rita Sue Siegel, president, Rita Sue Siegel Resources in New York City takes a hard line, elitist approach that leaves little room for straying from the production of a stereotypical graduate:

> Do you know how to present yourself and your work? Will you be able to present yourself in meetings?...Students will fail if they are not prepared for this increasingly complex business environment...some will just give up and do something else, which is fine...they don't understand that their behavior and attitude is as important as their talent and creativity...in

[31] Maxine Greene, The Dialectic of Freedom (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 12.

[32] Marshall Gregory, "A Liberal Education is Not a Luxury," Chronicle of Higher Education, (September 12, 2003), B16.

> short, they don't understand what designers have been put on earth to do.[33]

Many applied arts programs rely on working professionals to teach applied arts-specific courses in their classrooms. The Miami Ad School, Atlanta's Creative Circus and Portfolio Center, and the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Ad Center all utilize this practice as a marketing tool in their admissions materials.[34] But Gordon Salchow warns us,

> Part time teachers often deal dogmatically with the classroom with play-acting the 'real world.' Practitioners may mistake training for education by emphasizing 'practicality.'[35]

On the schools' alignment with the working designers as curriculum advisors and visiting professionals in the classroom, Salchow also writes, "Once we so align with practitioners, we are obliged to take most seriously what is said about education by the busiest practitioners rather than by the most industrious teachers."[36] Earlier he wrote,

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[33] Rita Sue Siegel, "An Address on Design," presented to graduates of The Portfolio Center, Atlanta, Georgia, May 1999.

[34] See The Miami Ad School at [www.adschool.edu]; The Creative Circus at [www.creativecircus.com]; The Portfolio Center at [www.portfoliocenter.edu], and VCU Ad Center at [www.adcenter.vcu.edu].

[35] Gordon Salchow, "Two Myths About Design Education" Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design, Michael Bierut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller, and D.K. Holland, eds. (New York: Allworth Press, 1994), 222.

[36] Ibid., 224.

"There is little room for the 'this is the real world, kid' characters who feel that a classroom is a second-class imitation of the work place."[37]

If liberal arts programs are opening their doors to professional courses and workshops, the applied arts schools have their proponents of liberal studies inclusion.

> In many programs, if not most, it is possible to study graphic design for four years without any meaningful exposure to the fine arts, world literature, science, history, politics, or any of the other disciplines that unite us in a common culture,[38]

writes Michael Bierut, a successful designer in New York City who has published a series of edited texts titled Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design. He asks what is wrong with graphic design education, answering that students are taught sameness in cultural vacuums, learning skills and processes outside of any regard for cultural context. He writes that "until educators find a way to expose their students to a meaningful range of

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[37] Gordon Salchow, "Designer," Journal of the University and College Designers Association, Summer 1992, 62.

[38] Michael Bierut, "Why Designers Can't Think," Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design, Bierut, M., William Drenttel, Steven Heller, and D.K. Holland, eds. (New York: Allworth Press, 1994), 215.

culture, graduates will continue to speak in languages that only their classmates will understand."[39]

Similarly, Gordon Bruce of Bruce Design in Milford, CT, and a graduate of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, CA states,

> We need to think more about design performance and what technology can do. At the same time, the world continues to globalize more rapidly in ways we can't predict, which will eventually have a deeper cultural impact on the quality of judgment we make about our designs. If we're not careful, we'll become too insular to what's most meaningful.[40]

Bruce continues that U.S. schools do well in innovation, but that other societies seem more connected to meaningful solutions based on understanding cultural sensitivities. He tells us that "somehow, we need to find a balance between the two...we must concentrate more on people, psychology, cultural relevance, and history...and shape technology to issues that are culturally meaningful."[41]

Hank Richardson of Atlanta's Portfolio Center writes,

> Design education should focus on helping the students find their own voices, which means affording an opportunity for exposure and experimentation with a range of styles and

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[39] Ibid., 217.

[40] Gordon Bruce in an interview titled "Making the Grade" by Jenny Wohlfarth, executive editor, I.D. Magazine (October 2002): 57.

[41] Ibid., 58.

> perspectives. If the student is to make a deliberate contribution to society once in practice, they must be able to integrate all they can learn about human behavior and resources, ecology, and human needs...Design is something we do, not something we have. It is a catalyst for ideas; and, therefore it is culture.[42]

Yet, in the face of such social responsibility urgings by professional designers, many schools continue to shy away from adding emphasis to the liberal arts courses that might support a student's cultural awareness and practice. It is not that students do not want to think in terms of their cultures. Meredith Davis of North Carolina State University is a respected scholar in the graphic design field. She writes,

> Folklore and intuition dominate most designers' rationales and are poor ammunition in the face of marketing's numbers. Fields such as linguistics, cognitive psychology, anthropology, sociology, and other social science disciplines hold enormous insight for the work of graphic designers. Yet most college graphic design curricula indirectly discourage enrollment in such classes by the few credits they make available for non-design study. Further, design schools do little to integrate social science issues into project briefs when students do engage in appropriate coursework.[43]

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[42] Hank Richardson, "Design Education," an address to the student body of The Portfolio Center, September 1996.

[43] Meredith Davis, "How High Do We Set the Bar for Design Education?" The Education of a Graphic Designer, Steven Heller, ed. (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 29.

Supporting a need for cultural representation and practice by students in design higher education, Ellen McMahon of the University of Arizona and Karen White of the University of Hawaii write,

> As design educators, our role is not to censor or ban our students from using any particular kind of imagery, but rather to foster an understanding of the ways that images carry meaning. The bonds that form between students in the process of Exchanges [critiques] create a personal interest in some of the important issues presently facing professional design practice, like stereotyping, appropriation, and the commodification of ethnic images. Through direct interaction, students get a sense of what they don't know about the experience of others. Our hope is that the humility gained will make our students more responsible visual communicators, and more responsive to the complexities of representation and interpretation.[44]

One cannot, therefore, indict design schools in general, claiming that they are all being elitist and industry-serving. It is not the practice of every applied arts college to focus on industry preparation of graduates to the exclusion of their cultural representation. Many are supportive of students' cultural differences, and they try to maintain an academic sense, an idealistic barrier, between the classroom and the industry's expectations.

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[44] Ellen McMahon and Karen White, "Have Sign, Will Travel: Cultural Issues in Design Education," The Education of a Graphic Designer, Steven Heller, ed. (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 123.

Still, for the purpose of this study, I question why more design schools might not share the culturally supportive ideologies of the Portfolio Center and the Universities of Arizona and Hawaii. As stated earlier, the purpose of this study is to identify and critique industry-based practice and curricula in post-secondary design education, investigating program goals and classroom discourse and how they affect students' cultural performance opportunities. It is my stated concern that there may be conflict between the cultural identities brought into the educational environment by the students and the culture they encounter in the school and from instructor practice.

I have reported earlier some of the comments from both educators and practicing designers that seem to equate liberal arts education with cultural support and representation for students. I have also reported that, while not all schools limit their curricula to industry-service and marketability of their graduates, neither is it common practice to support liberal studies or cultural practice.

I have utilized admissions catalogs and web sites from a number of higher education organizations that include

graphic design in their degree offerings in order to determine the level of industry-focused content in their curricula. Many graphic design schools appear to be single-minded in their drive to feed skilled workers to the industry. The technology and skills-based content leaves little room in the curriculum for liberal arts coursework.[45]

Many share similar promotional messages and sentiments about the value of their curricula. A representative sampling of the rhetoric includes: "teaches emerging professionals that their ideas, designs and creations do make a difference to society... careers will likely be more global, technological, interdisciplinary, and collaborative... students are encouraged to define their creative vision and professional practice,"[46] "stresses strong technical and presentation skills" in preparing students to be "the communications link between suppliers and consumers,"[47] "a leader in the education of artists and designers who have

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[45] Larry Stultz, "Egocentrism in Professional Arts Education," Schools or Markets? Commercialism, Privatization, and School-Business Partnerships, Deron Boyles, ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2005), 184-185. It is not my purpose to compare or indict specific professional design education organizations. However, I will cite some examples of schools that seem to support cultural studies and some that do not, as evidenced by their catalogs and web sites.

[46] Art Center College of Design, 2003-4 Catalog, Pasadena, California. See [www.artcenter.edu].

[47] Savannah College of Art & Design, 2004-5 Catalog, Savannah, Georgia. See [www.scad.edu].

produced the ideas, images, and artifacts that have helped give the world both its form and function,"[48] and "educating students for professional careers."[49]

All of these promotional messages sound quite promising and even enlightened. They use words like "society," "global," and "form and function," which arguably sound liberal arts based. But they predominantly use words like "technological," "professional practice," "presentation skills," and "link between suppliers and consumers" which indicate that they are skills-based.

Furthermore, when looking into the curriculum content of many of the schools, I found divergent attempts to provide liberal arts content to the otherwise technological and skills-based coursework. Twenty percent, or eight courses, in one curriculum includes liberal arts courses consisting of three art history courses and one course each in math, literature, cultural beliefs, environmental studies, and geography. One third of another curriculum, or thirteen courses, includes liberal arts courses in the general education requirements, but while six are art and design history, one is desktop publishing, one is client-

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[48] Rhode Island School of Design, 2003-4 Catalog, Providence, Rhode Island. See [www.risd.edu].

[49] San Francisco Art Institute, 2004-5 Catalog, San Francisco, CA. See [www.sfai.edu].

based speaking skills development, and the students must choose between one science or one math course. Another curriculum requires twenty-five percent of a graduate's coursework be in the liberal arts, including ten courses in art history, humanities, social sciences, and natural science, but none in math.

If it is true, as I suspect it is, that schools placing value on liberal studies also validate cultural experience and are supportive of students' cultural practice, then readers might find these examples of interest in examining their own curricular environments and student attitudes. However, with the predominance of claims to building "skills," as noted above, I suspect Deron Boyles is right that the schools talk about professional skills, reading skills, and technical skills, and everyone acquiesces to the correctness of the language, even though there is little questioning of the real value of those skills. He writes, "The purpose exists for the generation of revenue and teachers hegemonically reproduce corporate cultural capital."[50]

All schools, faculty members, and students must remain aware of potential pressures to limit students' unique

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[50] Boyles, American Education and Corporations, 157.

individual performance and to serve industry. Said another way, in light of the above discussion of college curricula, schools make choices about what courses to offer and how much elective credit to make available for students to expand their educational experience. Some are expanding and encouraging studies in liberal arts, which seems to be an encouragement of cultural exploration and practice. Some are encouraging industry assimilation, which seems to be discouraging cultural difference.

Marshall Gregory warns, "There is constant new pressure to move education toward a skills-based curriculum...to treat students as if they were mere mechanisms for getting the skills needed to run a post-industrial society in the marketplace."[51] Charles Smith wants us to keep asking questions about the purposes of higher education. Is it to prepare citizens for employment? Is it to produce better informed citizens?[52]

While those may not be the sole options regarding the purpose of higher education, Gregory and Smith inform my

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[51] Marshall Gregory, "Liberal Learning vs. Professional Training, or Liberal Education Knows a Hawk from a Handsaw," Conference paper, Butler University, 1997.

[52] Charles W. Smith, Market Values in American Higher Education: The Pitfalls and Promises (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000), 46-47.

own questions and the purpose of this study. Might students' cultural exploration and practice not only produce better informed citizens, but also encourage multiple literacies that would benefit the communications industry's understanding of itself and society?

Educational Significance

The significance of this study lies in the exploration and interpretation of students' perceptions regarding their cultural practice opportunities in school. Evidence of post-secondary design education's service to the professional design industry is vast. Evidence as to the validation of students' cultural capital, or the disempowerment of it, by faculty and market-logic curricula is not so easy to find. There are design educators whose writings seem to support students' cultural practice, but one must wonder how much actual cultural performance is allowed in daily practice in the classroom.

This study adds to the literature available to post-secondary design education institutions that informs us of the interpretable and definable effects of supporting students' cultural identities and performance in the classroom. In other words, the schools have a choice as to

whether to encourage student cultural practice or to inhibit it. This study provides some insight into how each choice might affect the student, the classroom, and the industry.

Administrators, faculty, curriculum developers, and industry representatives may be able to use the narrative inquiry and interpretation from this study to examine their own school's student persistence and success. The schools and students would arguably benefit from any initiative that increases student success. The market for these potential graduates, the industry that puts them into the communications work force, also benefits in two ways. Firstly, increased student success means there will be greater numbers of successful graduates from which to choose. Secondly, and most significant to the study, open support of students' cultural practice and performance in schools may help expand the industry's self-awareness and broaden its creative and contextual scope.

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Several theoretical frameworks ground this study and comprise the majority of the informing literature. My inquiry into what the post-secondary applied arts educational institutions deliver with regard to curriculum, pedagogy, and skills-based training is framed in part by curriculum theory. This framework deals with the ideas and interfaces of the nature of the learner, the values and goals of society, and the objective and subjective subject matter which are to be considered in preparing the curriculum.

Looking into the cultural backgrounds and experiences brought into the school by a diverse group of students and how cultures interrelate in the classroom and in students' work is framed by theory in cultural difference. Also important in framing the inquiry into the relationships of students and faculty in the classroom is performance theory. Integral to faculty/student interaction and later

to graduate/industry interface are issues surrounding cultural difference, practice, and performance. Performance is a requirement in both graphic design schools and the communication arts. What is questioned in this study is the level of culture and identity that is given voice and agency in the educational environment.

Ultimately, this study is framed by theory in symbolic interaction, which aids in my focus on relationships between how faculty and students see themselves, how they see others, and how they think others see them. Symbolic interactionism helps determine how and why, even if, meanings are shared, how they are derived, and what faculty and students do with them.

This study takes its meaning from the above four theoretical frameworks that clearly inform it. It is important to discuss at this point a framework that should not. Critical theory is applied when one wants to point out contradictions and distortions in social practices, and inspire themselves and their readers to change a set of beliefs and practices. It is practical and normative, and not just descriptive. It is used to effect social-political

action.[53] As an educator with previous experience working in the design industry, it is likely that I hint at a need for socio-cultural change in design education. But this is not my intention, and I will leave critical social science to the reader. Elliot Eisner writes, "Artistically oriented research does not aim to control or to produce formal predictive statements. It is after explication."[54] The interpretation of this study, both mine and the readers', may indicate a need for change, but I align with Susan Talburt, who writes,

> The narratives and interpretation I provide are not necessarily intended for like situations, but for readers to develop their own senses of possibilities...Narrative as a form of knowing finds its strength in the specificity of time and location, not as a transcendental text to be transported across situations for purposes of "application." I leave the appropriation of these narratives to the reader, to take from them what she will in the contexts she chooses.[55]

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[53] Thomas A. Schwandt, Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 37-38.

[54] Elliot Eisner, "On The Differences Between Scientific and Artistic Approaches to Qualitative Research," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, MA, April 1980.

[55] Susan Talburt, Subject to Identity: Knowledge, Sexuality, and Academic Practices in Higher Education (State University of New York Press, 2000), 37.

Curriculum Theory

Nearly all curriculum theory utilizes a traditional, a modified, or an experimental or progressive rationale based on three common educational objectives: subject matter, student needs, and societal expectations.[56] A subject matter driven curriculum is, or stands a good chance of being, oriented toward academic investigation and accomplishment by its faculty and students. Faculty members are likely to have independent authority and the freedom to espouse their disciplinary traditions.

Curricula emphasizing student needs can vary in central focus and end goals, but they are more subject to societal influence than to subject matter influence. Curriculum planners and subject matter experts can use industry input and academic interpretations to diagnose what student needs might be, but it is the student who has the desires, expectations, and perceptions of his or her future career. Student needs, being measured by why students feel they are choosing a curriculum and what they wish to achieve, are quite dependent on cultural and societal influence. In applied arts schools, societal and industrial expectations will most often effect curricular change. If the influences

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[56] Kliebard, Forging the American Curriculum, 153-164.

of society are material values and success, and if schools can provide graduates that contribute to those needs, then capitalism becomes a driving force in curriculum theory.

Ralph Tyler proposed conservative and capitalistic organizing principles and evaluation procedures.[57] In the introduction to his book in which he discusses the "Tyler Rationale," Herbert Kliebard states, "The curriculum becomes one of those areas in which various interest groups struggle for dominance and control."[58] Kliebard is, of course, on point with the problem statement for this study insofar as he identifies society, and by that I believe he would include the graphic design industry, as an interest group with significant interest and control in curriculum planning and classroom pedagogy.

Karl Mannheim emphasizes the relationship of education and knowledge with social structure. Knowledge is not isolated, but rather is based on the place an individual occupies within a social structure.[59] Mannheim believes students should help create systems of knowledge, rather

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[57] Ralph Tyler, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

[58] Kliebard, Forging the American Curriculum, xv.

[59] Karl Mannheim, Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge (4th ed.), Paul Kecskemeti, ed., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972, 9-14.

than be simply recipients of planned curricula. Greg Wiggan writes,

> When Mannheim's theory of knowledge is applied to education and curriculum, its strengths become apparent. Under the influence of Dewey's pragmatism, Mannheim placed less emphasis on book knowledge and more on the part of linking schools and society. He opposed the disconnection between the individual, and schools and society.[60]

Mannheim wants curriculum to be a negotiated knowledge, which students and teachers create, while he also believes the main educative agent to be the community. Since the community includes family, social, and market culture, we must not be intent upon the sole goal of skill-based professional training. Rather than pursuing capitalistic, economically self-serving purposes, a humanistic educational construct must remain concerned about personal values and the human condition.[61] John Dewey takes up the debate:

> Profound differences in theory are never gratuitous or invented. They grow out of conflicting elements in a genuine problem - a problem that is genuine because the elements, taken as they stand, are conflicting...The fundamental factors in the educative process are

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[60] Greg Wiggan, "Karl Mannheim: A Sociology of Education and Curriculum," paper presented April 24, 2002, Georgia State University.

[61] Karl Mannheim, From Karl Mannheim, Kurt H. Wolff, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

> an immature, undeveloped being and certain social aims, meanings, and values, incarnate in the matured experience of the adult.[62]

Dewey wants us to "abandon the notion of subject matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience," [63] and he sees the student and the curriculum as simply two factors defining a single process.

Dewey informs my inquiry into faculty/student interaction with his equation of means and ends of education and curriculum:

> I believe finally, that education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing.
>
> I believe that to set up any end outside of education as furnishing its goal and standard, is to provide the educational process of much of its meaning and tends to make us rely upon false and external stimuli in dealing with the child.[64]

G. Roy Levin applies a Deweyan philosophy in the visual art program at Vermont College, shaping his program in part around the idea, "just as the process is an essential part of the product in art making, how one

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[62] John Dewey, The Child and the Curriculum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902), 1.

[63] Ibid., 6.

[64] John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed" 1887, in Dewey on Education: Selections, Martin S. Dworkin, ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1959), 27.

teaches is what one teaches."[65] Integral to the purpose of this study, I believe it follows that how one learns is what one learns, and how one creates is what one creates.

So, curriculum theory continues to revolve around the ideas of the nature of the learner, the values and goals of society, and the objective and subjective subject matter. Interestingly, the wide variations in curriculum theory and educational philosophy lead me to believe that, even within a rigidly defined school environment, a faculty with disparate views and backgrounds could, on their own, stifle or contribute to student voice and identity.

Cultural Difference Theory

In a discussion with Professor Benjamin Baez in a methods of inquiry class, an interesting thought regarding difference arose. It was to the effect that we take cultural difference as a point of departure, never really questioning the kinds of artificial knowledge, discourse, ideologies, notions, and languages that create it in the first place. We agreed that it is possible that an individual's view of the world reflects their culture and identity. The individual, in all likelihood, cannot see the

[65] G. Roy Levin, "Art as Cultural Practice," Art Journal (Spring 1999) 58:1, 17.

world any other way due to cultural reproduction, capital, language, discourse, and experience. In attempting to help explain views of difference, Edward Said tells us we can only define ourselves as "being different from."[66] Dennis Sumara elaborated on this different-from view with his discussion of changing us/not-us relationships, writing that "the boundary that separates what we consider to be of ourselves and what we think of as not ourselves is unstable, constantly negotiated, and illusory."[67]

Directly related to visual communication, John Berger discusses cultural meaning and difference in the art of oil painting through history. To buy a painting of a thing or a scene is not unlike buying the thing or the property and putting it in your house. We do not so much buy the product as we do the image, the positioning, not unlike our contemporary responses to visual communications in marketing.[68] Similarly, to allow a photograph of oneself at the rim of the Grand Canyon or in front of one's home is not to say, "This is what I looked like that day," it is to

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[66] Ziauddin Sardar and Borin Van Loon, Introducing Cultural Studies (New York: Totem Books, 1998), 106-114.

[67] Dennis Sumara and Brent Davis, "Unskinning Curriculum," Curriculum: Toward New Identities, William F. Pinar, ed. (New York: Garland, 1998), 83.

[68] John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: The Penguin Group, 1972), 83-112.

say where one was or what one owns, to establish cultural capital and give it cachet, or agency.

So, if we are all in basic agreement, that culture is experience, it is negotiated, it is changeable, and it explains difference, then cultural difference as a theoretical stance must take on a meaning more specific to my area of study in order to be useful. I believe the usefulness of cultural difference theory lies in issues of power and humanity, or humaneness.

Terrence Hawke notes that in the interfaces of cultural difference a perceiver's biases create their own set of perceptions,

> Every perceiver's method of perceiving can be shown to contain an inherent bias which affects what is perceived to a significant degree. A wholly objective perception of individual entities is therefore not possible: any observer is bound to create something of what he observes.[69]

While Lisa Delpit writes of multicultural grade school issues, she aids a study of higher education. She finds that there are codes or rules in a classroom which represent a culture of power, and that the rules of power are representative of the rules of the culture which has the power. Students have rights to their language and

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[69] Terrence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 17.

culture, and they have an important voice in their own learning process. Delpit says students must be taught the codes necessary to participate fully in mainstream society, but still be able to utilize their own "expertness."[70]

While looking into student cultural performance, this study seeks perceptions and insights from three students regarding some questions, including: What is the design school culture encountered by the students, and how might it be different from or foreign to their own? What kinds of biases do students encounter, and what kinds of biases do they bring to the classroom?

Performance Theory

A study of the literature in performance theory as it relates to cultural interaction is necessary in order to study a very basic question, is cultural performance interpretable? More relevant to this study perhaps, does cultural performance exist to be interpretable in the classroom? The opportunities for cultural performance are significant, as might be limitations, and there is a need to reveal and interpret what happens in the classroom.[71]

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[70] Lisa Delpit, Other People's Children (New York: The New Press, 1995), 33.

[71] Talburt, Subject to Identity, 37.

I have referred to the vertical dialog of the elite, and when it exists in the classroom, the student need only listen, take in information, and report it in assessment. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire characterizes two situations in the classroom. One is this vertical dialog he calls "banking," wherein the educator knows and the student does not, and the aim is to maintain the dividing line between oppressor and the oppressed.[72] Theoretically, I think we can generalize his terms to apply to elite teacher and humble student. Freire then characterizes activity in the more open, performance allowing classroom, as "border crossing." The educator respects other cultures and ways of life, does not purport to know everything, and encourages cultural synthesis.

One of the collective statements of The Metaphysical Club[73] regarded their view of creativity as performance, producing cultural artifact and/or language. Cultures give voice and currency to their self-perceived meaning through art practice and performance. Communication in many areas of human endeavor is closely aligned with performance, and the graphic design and communication arts field is one of

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[72] Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 88-89.

[73] Menand, The Metaphysical Club.

the most closely aligned of all. Designers must understand not only their own ways, but also the intended audience's ways of seeing. All of our ways of seeing are affected by our knowledge and beliefs. We never really look at one thing as it is; we look at the relation between things and ourselves, others and ourselves. We each have our own way of seeing, perceiving, and ultimately, practicing and performing based on those perceptions.[74] Of course, Foucault offers support with his view that language structures meaning and any analysis is inherently unstable. Everything is interpreted and meaning is constructed through the self.[75]

Jacques Derrida points out the close, in fact inseparable, relationship between communication, expression, and representation. He says that if men write [and I could substitute the verb "create"], it is

> because what they have to communicate are their thoughts, their ideas, and their representations. Thought, as representation, precedes and governs communication, which transports the idea, the signified concept.[76]

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[74] Berger, Ways of Seeing, 8.

[75] Michel Foucault, This is Not a Pipe, trans. and ed. by James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 15-22.

[76] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," Limited Inc. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 4.

Among the more powerful informants on cultural performance are Pierre Bourdieu and Erving Goffman. In considering the educational environment Bourdieu adds a new voice to the triad of elements in curriculum theory. He bestows the term cultural capital on the negotiated value of interactions in society. Bourdieu claims that cultural capital can exist in three forms: as a disposition of the mind and body [student needs], objectified as cultural goods [subject matter], and in an institutionalized state, for example educational standards and qualifications [meeting industry expectations].[77]

Cultural capital is related to the subjects of practice and performance with Bourdieu's term, habitus. He describes habitus as a system of dispositions that generate practice in accordance with the structural principles of the social world. Habitus can be seen as habitual, automatic, and taken-for-granted. In practice, after having been seen as structured culture, habitus is actually conceived as a grammar that makes possible the generation

[77] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, trans. Richard Nice, John G. Richardson, ed. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

of new forms of expression, which may alter the structure of the grammar itself.[78]

Bourdieu's interest is in how taken-for-granted socialization practices are or are not effective in a cultural group's meeting its strategic ends. The fate of groups is bound up with words that designate them. Social groups continue to develop classificatory systems that encompass their being and define the "us" and the "them." While I do not find that counterintuitive, it is counterproductive in that groups can create their own justification for their different-ness, their special-ness, and their elitism. Earlier I mentioned graphic designers' training setting them apart from, on a higher plane than, the untrained who simply own computers and desktop publishing software. While good reasons exist for professional graphic design education, it is a concern that a rigid professional elitism might foster the "us" versus "them" ideology and perpetuate limitations on pluralistic social and cultural performance.

Bourdieu's work can lead to solutions that change the cultural practices and performances of all members of academic communities, but there is academic debate over

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[78] Bourdieu, Distinction, 172-173.

what some claim is a conflicting dualism between objectivism and subjectivism in his theories. Bourdieu writes of his habitus as being quite objective, earlier defined as the system of automatic, taken-for-granted defined dispositions that make up the cultural capital of a person or a group.

On the other hand, he claims that the very habitus that is defined objectively has agency, giving subjective individual acts an objective social force that takes on social meaning for potential change. Bourdieu writes of this as his "practical theory," which emphasizes virtuosic, intersubjective social practice.

In a discussion of "Agency and the Habitus," Laura Ahearn makes two important points. Bourdieu's habitus would seem to define agency as leaving little room for resistance or change. About his objective stance she writes, "What prevents the creation of unpredictably novel sociocultural products are the (pre)dispositions the habitus embodies in its many forms and structures."[79] However, she then presents a validity argument for his subjective practice theory that envelops the habitus:

[79] Ahearn, "Language and Agency," 112.

> When individuals bring their cultural understandings, as derived from structural principles (what Bourdieu would call their habitus), to bear on new situations, the dynamics of practice can cause unintended outcomes. What starts as an attempt to reproduce social structure may end in social transformation.[80]

Highlighting a possibility of social action, Anthony King reports Bourdieu's reference to social agents as "'virtuosos' who are not dominated by some abstract social principles, but who know the script so well that they can elaborate and improvise upon the themes it provides and in the light of their relationships with others."[81] Simply put, I believe Bourdieu leaves room in the social practice and performance in a school setting which might let us define elite faculty as objective (habitus) and the aspiring culturally different student, or any student for that matter, as subjective (virtuosic).

John Dewey also writes of the virtuosic student in the form of having impulsions and habits. He writes of the creative process as beginning when prior experience (mind, feeling, life) meets a new situation, creating imbalance, which in turn stimulates impulsions. Dewey identifies an

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[80] Ibid., 118.

[81] Anthony King, "Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus," Sociological Theory, 18, no.3 (November 2000): 419.

impulsion as the initial stage of any complete experience, and that impulsions become specialized and particular when they fuse with a background of experience.[82] Dewey believes that an experience is meaningful only as the impulsion, and the end-in-view exists throughout the creative process. Creative activity is problem-solving behavior, and only when students are encouraged to trust and exhibit their feelings in experimental thought, can solutions be seen as having meaning.

Finally, in this discussion of performance theory, I turn to Erving Goffman, because he writes from a symbolic interactionist perspective and explores individual identity, group relations, and interactive meaning. Goffman explores the idea of performance from a variety of views, each useful in studying faculty and student approaches to performance in the classroom. He examines "the individual's own belief in the impression of reality that he attempts to engender in those among whom he finds himself."[83] The performer can be fully convinced of the reality of his performance; she may be moved to guide the conviction of the audience as a means to other ends; he may be deluding the audience for their own, or his own, good.

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[82] Dewey, Art as Experience, 58.
[83] Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 17.

Goffman's discussion of the "front," inconsistency between appearance and reality or manner, is useful. Perhaps students engage in "signifying" a reality that they wish to maintain, are afraid to lose, or that protects their inner psyche. Some performance might be what Goffman calls dramatic realization or idealization. He writes, "when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society..."[84] To my purpose, Goffman discusses the framework of performance theory, writing that significant impact can be felt in all three areas of social reality: personality, social structure, and interaction. He writes, "Life may not be much of a gamble, but interaction is." [85]

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic interactionism is a social theory that is informed by a constructivist epistemology. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln outline the nature of constructivism, writing that the nature of knowledge in this philosophy is individual reconstructions being built around consensus.

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[84] Ibid., 35.

[85] Ibid., 239-243.

Information and knowledge come from the vicarious experiences of participants.[86] Social constructivism focuses on social process and interaction, such as we find in the classroom. It seeks to understand how participants recognize, produce, and reproduce actions, and how they develop mutual understandings, or in some cases, disparate understandings.

Symbolic interactionism has roots in American pragmatism and in social theory figures such as George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, William James, and other descendents of The Chicago School.[87] Mead, Dewey, James, and Oliver W. Holmes were all of this school of sociological thought, and they banded together in what they called The Metaphysical Club.[88] James confirms my assumption that all inquiry is informed by our tastes, values, and hopes, and is subject to change in the future. Pierce also allows for change in cultural meaning and annotation with his position that words, concepts, and symbols represent only points on a long curve of possibilities. The Chicago School's

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[86] Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, The Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001).

[87] Schwandt, Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry, 25. The Chicago School is a name given to a tradition of sociology developed from about 1920 through 1940 at the University of Chicago.

[88] Menand, The Metaphysical Club.

influence is still seen as a primary basis of sociological fieldwork.

The term "symbolic interaction" refers to "the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings."[89] Herbert Blumer says that human beings interpret or define, rather than simply react to each other's actions. He goes on to say that we mediate our interaction through the use of symbols, interpretation, or some other means of ascertaining the meaning of another's actions. He likens it to stimulus/ response interaction. Much of the interpretation and response in human interaction is measured by attitude, the tendency or state of readiness that lies behind, directs, and forms action. On both sides of an interaction, Blumer says, are knowledge of attitude which enables one to forecast appropriateness and results of further action.[90]

Symbolic interactionism as social theory is based on three premises:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;

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[89] Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 78-79.

[90] Ibid., 93.

2. The meaning of such things is derived from social interaction;
3. Meaning is handled through an interpretive process.

Traditional interaction between student and teacher can result in the "banked" meaning Freire wrote about. It can, on the other hand, result in negotiated meaning, which may be an indication of acceptance of cultural practice and performance. In other words, how meaning is interpreted or internalized in the classroom might be up to the student, or it might be decreed. Blumer writes, "The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action."[91]

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that may utilize case study and interpretive methods. As a theoretical framework used in this study, symbolic interactionism provides the focus and assumptions that are appropriate. The framework focuses on functional relationships between how faculty and students see themselves, how they see others, and how they think others see them. It looks into the social reality of the school

[91] Ibid., 5.

from the perspectives of faculty and students who interpret and interact within the school. It seeks to explain understandings and symbols that give meaning to the interactions.[92]

Symbolic interactionism assumes that faculty and students act on the basis of meanings things have for them, and that the meanings are derived from social interactions with each other and/or with peers. It also assumes that meanings are handled or modified through the interactive and interpretive processes.

The utilization of symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework helps determine how and why, even if, meanings are shared, how they are derived, and what faculty and students do with them. The last phrase is essential in determining how opportunities for cultural practice and performance may affect student success.

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[92] Michael Crotty, The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 13.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODS

We know that meaning arises from processes of interaction between people. Applicable to classroom study is Herbert Blumer's claim that, "The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing."[93] In a classroom we might see meaning for one student being determined by the balance of the students and their reaction to a teacher. We might see meaning being defined for the teacher by the group of students, or being defined for most students by one interactive moment between the teacher and a student. Blumer goes on, "The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action."[94] Michael Crotty charts a research design process that begins with constructivism, proceeds into symbolic interactionism, and may then utilize case

[93] Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, 4.

[94] Ibid., 5.

study methods to implement the data gathering and interpret the results.[95]

Case Study Research

Case study research seeks to generate knowledge based on a set of how or why questions in a real-life context. We use case study to look at multiple sources of evidence, and we can choose specific cases to be studied that are instrumentally useful in further understanding the particular problem.[96] Once questions are presented and, more importantly, as new questions are uncovered during interview and observation, they can be framed within the case study as it proceeds.

Sharan Merriam writes that case study is characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic.[97] Particularistic means that the case study focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. In this study, a particular degree program is the general focus, but the specific focus is on the students and

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[95] Crotty, The Foundations of Social Research, 7.

[96] Schwandt, Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry, 23.

[97] Sharan B. Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 29.

situations in the classroom and the phenomena inherent in the students' cultural performance.

Descriptive means the end product will be a 'thick' description of the situation and phenomenon under study; thick indicating dealing with meanings in a complete and literal way. Robert Stake helps define thick description as "description of the case that reveals the perceptions and values of the people who belong to the case."[98] Merriam adds, on behalf of the reader, that thick description provides enough information for the reader to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and whether findings can be transferred or are useful in application.[99] The description is a qualitative narrative, and it documents interviews, events, and artifacts, in this case examples of student work. Heuristic means the case study will illuminate the reader's understanding of the situation and phenomenon under study.

Merriam also tells us that case study is particularly suited to looking at process. In a school setting like higher education in graphic design, it is clear that

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[98] Robert E. Stake, "Case Study Methods in Educational Research: Seeking Sweet Water," in Complementary Methods for Research in Education, 2nd ed., Richard M. Jaeger, ed. (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 1997), 404.

[99] Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, 211.

process can be affected by many factors, including but not limited to elite faculty, skills-based curricula, industry influence, student aspirations, cultural difference, and the interrelationships among all.[100]

Stake writes that case study is particularly adaptable to studying educational programs. He wants us as researchers to "emphasize episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, and the wholeness of the individual."[101] While that sounds suspiciously generic and applicable to any mentoring or analytical situation, I find it relevant to studying the faculty/ student relationship and the cultural practice/performance creative environment.

In this study I selected three students for the research. Each represents one case, an entity with a unique life, and the interest in each begins and ends with the case itself. Stake defines this as an intrinsic case study. When several cases are studied as a part of a work on

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[100] Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, 33.

[101] Robert E. Stake, The Art of Case Study Research (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), xii.

policy, phenomenon, or systemic relationships, Stake calls them a collective case study.[102]

The Setting

This study was undertaken in a post-secondary professional graphic design education institution that offers baccalaureate degrees in a variety of communication and applied arts disciplines. The school is proprietary, which to those familiar with the category explains a definable allegiance to industry expectations. As a proprietary institution, it is owned and operated by a corporation specializing in the education market. The corporate culture is behind the goal of financial as well as graduate success. The two are closely intertwined, and the understanding and fulfillment of industry expectations is inherent in the business plan and mission of the college.

For the purposes of this study the institution is named the Crescent School of Design. The names of all persons – students, faculty, staff, and administrators – who participate in this study, as well as identifying details of the school, its programs, and location, have

[102] Ibid., 133-136.

also been changed to protect individual and collective privacy.

The Crescent School of Design is one of the largest of its kind in the country with nearly three thousand students, two hundred faculty members, and offering thirteen different degree programs. The institution is located in a major city in the southeast United States, and it draws students from forty-nine states and over thirty international countries. The faculty members have all attained a minimum of a master's degree in their discipline, and nearly all have worked in their discipline's professional industry for several years. As reported in Chapter 1, the student body is culturally diverse; the faculty, while seeking to expand its multicultural representation, remains less so.

Delimitations

Realizing that case study interpretation is non-generalizable,[103] my goal is not to present information meant for transfer to other educational environments. It should be evident to the reader that, if the results of this study are meaningful in an accredited academic

[103] Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, 207.

environment, then there may be some level of perceived transferability. In other words, a reader in a non-accredited design program might find content in the interpretation that would help mold his or her program's future, just as a reader working in an accredited environment might find useful similarities and ideas.

Carrying out the study in the Crescent School of Design, I have purposely chosen a high standard, or delimitation, setting boundaries on the study that can make it a credible hallmark for other educators. The school has long held accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and it was recently reaffirmed with minimal recommendations that were easily addressed. The college has recently applied and prepared an extensive self-study for accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD). Accreditation by bodies such as these carries with it the aura of successful self-study and peer approval. Perhaps what is right about an accredited program is perceived as very right, and what is wrong about that same program can be seen as very informative and meaningful.

It is important to note that I am not studying the school itself, but students within the school environment.

Neither am I attempting to describe or attribute qualities to design schools in general.

The Participants

For this inquiry I undertook three individual case studies and subjected the data to both unique and collective interpretive analysis. In this dissertation I present portraits[104] of three students from the graphic design program at the Crescent School of Design: Truman Reed, Selma Balić, and Ricardo Benitez. The collective study originated with a pilot study involving Truman Reed. In Chapter 4 I discuss the learning and discovery process I underwent and why the short initial study warranted further exploration to become a case study in this dissertation.

Each student in this collective case study is in upper levels of the graphic design program and nearing graduation, so they have a bank of experiences to draw upon and demonstrate in interviews, in classroom and group observations, and in providing examples of their work for

[104] Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, The Good High School (New York: Basic Books, 1983) and Elliot Eisner, The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice (Old Tappan, NJ: Macmillan, 1991). Brush-and-pigment portraits are painted over time, requiring multiple sittings or observations. They are interpretive, based on collective impressions. According to this view, each case study herein can be termed collective, as is the collective interpretation offered in Chapter 7.

discussion. The students were purposefully selected to be as far from the traditional norm as possible. Stake writes regarding the choosing of cases,

> It is often more useful to pick one most likely to enhance understanding than to pick one of the most typical. In fact, highly atypical cases can sometimes contribute to understanding of other cases.[105]

Purposeful selection of subjects assures the most definable and useful data for interpretation and the narrative reporting.[106] Utilizing three subjects allowed me to look for replication of data that might shed light on my concerns about cultural practice and performance in the school community.

I have been granted Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to carry out human subjects research, and I have an Informed Consent Form signed by each participant.[107] The pilot study with Truman Reed was undertaken under a preliminary IRB approval, and the follow up contact with him is included in the IRB approval for this dissertation. To avoid undue risk and vulnerability for the subjects who are students in the

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[105] Stake, The Art of Case Study Research, 134.

[106] Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, 62.

[107] See Appendix A, page 172.

program I chair, I met with each selected student to assure them of their anonymity, that there could be neither benefit nor repercussion for their participation, and that they could withdraw as subjects of the study at any time. I also examined their transcripts and degree audits to assure that they would not be put into a class that I teach during their remaining time as students in this school.

My Role as Researcher

Due to my position as department chair in this institution and as a professor with limited classroom duties, I can be defined as both a privileged active observer[108] and a participant observer in this research study. Participant observation, Merriam says, is a "schizophrenic activity in that the researcher usually participates, but not to the extent of becoming totally absorbed in the activity."[109] As researcher I stay as detached as possible in order to observe and analyze, a difficult position to maintain as Merriam advises.

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[108] Harry Wolcott, "Ethnographic Research in Education," in Complementary Methods for Research in Education 2nd ed., op. cit., 330.

[109] Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, 103.

I find Clandinin and Connelly's comments about the participant observer's role encouraging and stimulating. They write that my role in this research is "meeting difference; allowing difference to challenge assumptions, values, and beliefs; improvising and adapting to the difference; and thereby learning as the narrative anthropologist."[110] They write that there is a relationship between the researcher and the participants, and issues of voice arise for both. The students are living on an "edge," on a boundary between their cultural voice and that of the school, on another boundary between being a student and preparing for a profession. The researcher must be aware of the edges and create a text that speaks to the participants' storied experiences and represents all their voices, yet speaks to and reflects upon the audience's voices too.[111]

Merriam writes that the extent to which an observer changes a situation is not clear; in fact, it may be that the research proves to be a catalyst for what is already

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[110] D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 9.

[111] Ibid., 146.

taking place.[112] I see that as a positive situation, that as a catalyst I expedite my own seeing and learning about relationships and meaning-making, the point of my being the researcher in the first place.

James Spradley warns that I might selectively observe and interpret through my own ethnocentrism,[113] which reminds me of a peer's admonishment in predicting results of this study, "be careful you aren't trying to replace one hegemony with another!" Spradley also reminds us that as researchers we can observe social behavior and be unaware that our cultural knowledge is directing what we see. He writes,

> (a) It is impossible to observe everything, therefore selective observation always occurs;
>
> (b) The "facts" we observe do not imply their own meaning; therefore selective interpretation permeates each stage of date collection;
>
> (c) Both types of selection are influenced by the investigator's personal experience and cultural background.[114]

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[112] Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, 105.

[113] James Spradley and David McCurdy, The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1972), 16.

[114] Spradley and McCurdy, The Cultural Experience, 16.

Ethical Issues

I know of no ethical issues in terms of risks and benefits to students, as discussed above. I know of no discomforts to the subjects. Once the students were aware of my role and that there could be no vulnerability to coercion or undue influence, such as class grading or graduating portfolio approval, the comfort level with my data collection became high.

The data collected remains in my personal possession in a secure and locked space for the duration of the dissertation research and writing phase. No details of the data gathering are available to any administrative officer, faculty member, or other student at the college. The students were assigned an alias at the initiation of the study, and the alias has been used for all field notes, narrative analysis, and publication of the case study. Similarly, the school and any referenced faculty or personnel at the school have each been assigned an alias, as is the city in which the school exists.

Data Collection

The data collection steps included three 45-minute to one hour interviews with each students. The initial

interview and two follow-up contacts allowed me to probe, clarify, and expand upon my understanding of the data I collected. The follow-ups also allowed adding questions or changing focus in the interviews as the data gathering and interpretation suggested to me. I also gathered data through observation of the student subject in at least one classroom or group presentation setting and occasional discussion of project work brought to my attention by the students. Interviews were conducted in sidelight-windowed conference rooms in the school building and were tape recorded for purposes of transcription. Class projects were discussed with the student, and I inquired as to instructor comment and reaction in critique or on notes written on returned work. I also inquired as to fellow students' comments and reactions in critique and direct conversation.

All of the activities: interview, observation, and artifact discussion generated field notes. These field notes are extensive and include elaboration and personal comment. Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw write,

> Some field researchers consider field notes to be writings that record both what they learn and observe about the activities of others <u>and</u> their own actions, questions, and reflections. But others insist on a sharp distinction between records of what others said and did – the 'data'

> of the fieldwork – and writings incorporating their own thoughts and reactions.[115]

I align with the first group and keep field notes that are a journalistic reflection, not only of what I see and hear, but what occurs to me during and after each contact with the subjects.

The Initial Interview Questions

Each case study initial interview began with preliminary questions that frame the problem statement and the purpose of the study, and additional questions evolved as the interviews proceeded and the student's story unfolded. In this manner, we began with a semi-structured interview, using a mix of ordered, pre-worded questions and then continued with an unstructured interview format, asking flexible, exploratory questions, more like a conversation.[116] Stake maintains that the distinctive characteristic of qualitative research is its attention to interpretation, and that observers must record what is happening but simultaneously examine meaning and redirect

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[115] Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, "Participant Observation and Fieldnotes," Handbook of Ethnography, Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, and Lyn Lofland, eds. (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 354.

[116] Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education, 73.

observation to refine or substantiate those meanings. Initial research questions can be modified or even replaced in mid-study.[117] The initial interview questions included:

How would you describe your cultural background?

What are your career goals?

How would you describe the culture of this design school?

Tell me about any differences you have experienced between your own culture and that of the school and/or faculty members.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

For Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, experience is a key term in educational inquiry and the narrative that interprets it. They write that one of Dewey's criteria of experience is continuity, the idea that experiences grow from experiences, leading to further experiences.[118] They see classroom experiences and knowledge as expressions of individual and social stories about which we think narratively, and we must write storied accounts of them.

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[117] Stake, The Art of Case Study Research, 9.

[118] Clandinin and Connelly, Narrative Inquiry, 3.

Each case study in this dissertation contains a set of within-case assertions and unique interpretations. I include narrative description of the interactions, developing key issues, providing descriptive detail from the interviews, and offering my assertions for consideration by the reader. Following the three case study chapters I provide a collective interpretation. In the collective interpretation I aim not to summarize superficially or point to obvious themes or variables. That would tell us little. I attempt to look carefully at complexities and local dynamics within each case and to patterns of useful information and meaning that transcend individual cases.[119]

Verification and Validity

We search for accuracy in data gathering for assessment and interpretation. We deal with complex phenomena and issues for which no consensus can be found, yet we have an ethical obligation to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding.[120] Ethnographic narrative is impressionistic in that it describes

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[119] Matthew B. Miles and Michael Huberman, Qualitative Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, 1994), 172.

[120] Stake, The Art of Case Study Research, 108-109.

experiences and presents the inquirer's understanding and interpretation, nothing more. Harry Wolcott, for academic and personal reasons, wrote convincingly about the absurdity of validity,[121] and he invoked John Van Maanen's explanation of the impressionistic mode, which "is not to tell readers what to think of an experience, but to show them the experience from beginning to end and thus draw them immediately into the story to work out its problems and puzzles as they unfold."[122]

Susan Talburt writes, "I am interested in encouraging less predictable higher education inquiry that takes responsibility for engaging complexities whose implications cannot be known in advance and asks its readers to participate in thinking through those complexities and implications."[123] She asks that we acknowledge the always present multiplicity in what we observe and interpret, that it is always undermining our own interpretive authority.

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[121] Harry F. Wolcott, "On Seeking – and Rejecting – Validity in Qualitative Research," in Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate, Elliot Eisner and Alan Peshkin, eds. (Ne York: Teachers College Press, 1990), 143.

[122] John Van Maanen, Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 103.

[123] Susan Talburt, "Verifying Data," Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Sacramento, California, November 21-24, 2002.

My intention is to present meaningful data, collected through purposeful selection of subjects, intuitive question development, and persistence in being as objective as possible in observation and interpretation. I leave it to the reader to assert his or her own interpretive authority, to develop reaction to and utilization of the content of the narrative. The validity of the data and interpretation must exist, or not exist, in the mind of the reader.

Chapter 4

TRUMAN REED

> You are given a gift. You didn't ask for it. You had no idea you were even gonna be placed here in regard to this physical world, and it's up to you what you do with it. There's one of two things that can happen: you can fulfill a purpose that's on your life, or you can sit and just want and not know what it is that you're gonna do.
>
> - Truman Reed

Truman Reed believes his creativity is his freedom, life, and soul. He is a dreamer, a fantasizer, a perpetual planner, and he is convinced that he is on his way to greatness in the world of "out there" graphic design. He calls it "working on the left," and he promises that the end products of his efforts are "gonna be ridiculous."

Truman always carries a huge black backpack that is overloaded with his sketchbooks, textbooks, reference books, and dozens of CDs containing his work in progress. His appearance and demeanor are a curiosity. A tall and slender black man, he uniformly wears baggy jeans, a pullover cotton shirt, and a huge gray knit cap that tries

to cover his ample dreadlocks.[124] Truman is rather ubiquitous in the school building. He is a sort of group leader for the other students who wear "Rasta dreads." He calls these people his associates, and he is always with at least one or two of them, usually leading the conversation or their movement toward some destination. He relishes his self-proclaimed importance.

Just before one of our scheduled conversations, two of his friends came up to him as Truman and I were walking in the hall. He waved them off, pointed at me, and said, "I'm with 'the man' here." That's all he said, and we were alone once again. We stepped into a conference room, and he lounged back in a chair, appearing nonchalant, ready to begin talking, but already tapping his fingers on the table. Truman is full of energy when he talks. He has busy hands, waving, pounding, flexing, tapping, especially when pressed on issues about his creativity.

I ask Truman about his dreads:

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[124] Dreadlocks or dreads are symbols of the Rasta or Rastafarian religion, which is made up largely of Jamaicans, Africans, and African-Americans. The dreads symbolize the Rasta roots, contrasting the straight, blonde locks of the white man. Dreads also depict rebellion against the system and the "proper" way to wear hair, and they are a subject of controversy in American schools and the workplace. Rastas believe in divine blessing of one's capabilities. Religious Movements: Rastafarianism [http://religiousmovments.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/], (Accessed January 7, 2006).

> Well, it’s personal, but it’s also creativity in itself, too. Because in my creativity, I am free. Me having dreads, it’s symbolic of my connection to God, and also my connection to being a free spirit. I don’t put a limitation on the things that I can do, at all, because I don’t know my capabilities. Period. I know my present abilities, but I don’t know how far I can go with it.

Truman does not hesitate in answering my questions and responding to my prodding, although my prodding does not lead to discussions I want to have. He has his philosophy and his goals and his self-view quite practiced, and he will not be dissuaded. Truman has no interest in discussing any hint that his cultural difference is any factor at all in his educational experience. His outward self confidence is remarkable, as is his spirituality. He is determined to open his own company someday. I asked where he intended to open his company.

> Pretty much wherever God leads me. I am planning on going on to grad school, maybe California. I’ve always like Cali. And after grad school it’s like I gotta find out what the next thing is gonna be. I am going to have a master’s degree most likely in graphic design, and after that is finding out the primary focus my life is going to fulfill outside of finishing this degree, and going into the field and becoming one of the best designers out there.

He is insatiable in his search for creativity both inside and outside himself. Always excitable, during a conversation about a big project he is working on that is

bogged down Truman suddenly changes the subject, recalling some inspiring work he wants to emulate.

> Gol, man, I saw this guys stuff online, he was a photographer...stuff was crazy! He had somebody, their hands were toward their face, but they were pullin' down, like toward their chest area and I don't know how he did it, but it was ripped. But it didn't look like the image had been distorted in any way. Like the face had been shifted in different areas, and the lines from like where the hands were, it came down across the chest area...it was ridiculous! I was like, 'what did this guy use?' I mean like, 'is this Photoshop work, or what?' It was crazy! He had another image where it was the back of a person, and the shoulder area was separated like it was peelin' like paper, like when you open up a package or somethin'. It was curlin' like this (hand gesture) under the skin. It was ridiculous! I wanna know how to do that, like right now!

But there are factors in Truman's life, issues he must deal with which seem to be holding him back. He suffers from indecision, and he cannot hide it as well as he wishes.

Truman grew up in the northeastern United States in a fatherless family. All the males in the family, uncles, cousins, and brothers, work in security, law enforcement, or the military. Most have played high school and community college football. Truman's rebellion starts at home, and he begins to show me some uncharacteristic anger and resistance:

> They all in law enforcement. One works for General Motors; a couple of them are correctional officers and police officers. All of them were in the

> military, maybe the Air Force, maybe...but I'm not going into no military...for what? There is not necessarily a meaning to the war other than to generate commerce and basically to bone the economy up. It's like, OK, you are sending innocent people, cats that are working in pizza stores, slingin' newspapers, in school, never got outta school, 17, 18, even 16 years old, some 19, to go fight a war. You give 'em a gun, and ask 'em to go kill people they don't know nothing about, they ain't never seen 'em a day in their life and it's like, 'well they said I gotta shoot you because you said I was ugly and I couldn't read'...you know what I am sayin'? Oh, my Lord, it's terrible! That's the gist of it, they want to pigeonhole us, pretty much keep us at a level where they still have control over the things that we do, and two of the most powerful weapons are the mind and the mouth. Can't nobody read your thoughts, and what initially comes out of your mouth is from your heart and is not just you rambling and making no sense. You're supposed to think before you talk.

Truman becomes very agitated, drifting into a vernacular I had not heard before, and I sense that Truman has a dilemma. His desire for creativity and uniqueness is in conflict with what he perceives as rigidity and conformity from his background. Perhaps his leaving home to go to design school is an attempt to escape and rise above a life he cannot accept. I sense resentment, perhaps anger, in the racial and economic underscript of his statement about the military and his use of "they" and "us" when talking about being "pigeonholed." Through most of my discussions with Truman, I learn little else about his family and his

background. However, I am to learn much more about this and other key issues as the case study nears its end.

Truman and Parameters

When I probe about his plans for after graduation:

> It don't matter! Wherever mostly God is leading me, but I want it to be somewhere where I know I can really maximize my creativity. That's the ultimate thing for me, because it's just like I was telling you before, being limited, like parameters being too close, I don't do too well with those.

Truman wants to excel beyond what is expected of him by the school. He wants to exceed even his own predictions about himself. However, he seems to feel that a job, a daily grind working for someone other than himself, is abhorrent.

> My main thing is it is to be unlimited in my creativity, and I feel like creativity is something that shouldn't be limited. Like when I was doing drafting I had a foyer had to be this high and this room had to be this many feet, and I was like how can people do this for a living? I mean the money must be really phenomenal, because knowing that you have to make something one foot by two feet square is like...I don't like designing like that. I mean give me an idea or a concept or something that you want executed that you can't do your self and let me go ahead and do what I get from the actual worrying that you are giving me.

One particular bit of Truman's dream-wisdom has stayed with me: "Nobody ever looks to like, alright, if you are gonna ask me to do A and B, then why can't you let me do

C through Z?" He believes he is destined to be defined by "C through Z."

Truman and His Faculty

Truman is enigmatic, as many creative people are. He can tend toward grandiosity, and he can be helpless to make his own decisions. He can promise himself he will take on huge and intricate tasks, and he can deflect questions about the progress of those promises. He talks about his difficulties in fulfilling assignments in his courses. We discussed whether he has freedom in the classroom to create his own solutions to assignments or not.

> It's like they want you to be creative with the way you do stuff, but they don't want you get too out there with it. I mean you have to do like a simplified style of your work.

He keeps talking about wanting to do work that is "really out there," but that he can't go really out there. I can not tell if he feels stifled creatively by the teachers or disempowered by his own indecision. Maybe he is using his lack of permission to go "out there" as a euphemism for his imposter syndrome, another hallmark of creative people.[125]

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[125] Tom Monahan, "I'm Not Creative Enough," Communication Arts, July/Aug 1995, 47-48.

> Yeah, like 'out there' is like you really dig beneath the surface as opposed to just scratchin' it. Like some instructors, they want you to do just clean design, and they have their set niche about how they want stuff to look and how they want it to be presented...but who's to say that the way you want to do it isn't?

Truman is showing his indecision, a classic conflict between the grandiose and the imposter self. He resents being told what to do, how to do, even why to do assignments according to dictated parameters. Then he finds himself unable to create his own solutions, and he wants to be told what to do. Even then, not only can he not decide what to do, but also he resents both the instructor and himself for his lack of doing what he knows he wants to do.

> I had some specific classes where we did stuff by the book, strict. It's a different expectation on the level of creativity. We got pushed until our freakin' knuckles bled. I mean like, when is my light switch supposed to go on for this assignment, you know what I mean? You be sittin' there with your brain getting stretched out...you really get burned out on that assignment. When you get pushed so hard, it's like what am I gonna do, how am I gonna do it? I got told when I wasn't getting it...when I was hot or makin' garbage? But I did not get told any ways that I could improve. Actually, one time she did, and I was like, 'Oh my word, she's giving me advice!' Why? Whatchu mean, man? We both started sketchin' out stuff. She started sketchin' out stuff, and she gave me so many different ideas, I was like...I'm like 'pick one,' I mean, 'I don't know what to do now.' Aughhhh! That's what I need, like somebody to push me. Sometimes I just need like a (slapped his own hand loudly) 'Do this,' 'Do that,' you know what I mean. Like I mean, not that I'm not motivated...but

> it's like, sometimes I'll be doin' stuff and it's like I'm goin' for creativity, but I don't necessarily allow myself to just go ahead and execute it like I know it should look.

Truman and His Big Idea

Truman talks continually about his "big idea," the project that will make him rise above all other graduates and make his mark on the world. It has to be completely different from the work of any student that has gone before him. Most of the times we meet, Truman shows up a little late or leaves abruptly at the end, saying he has been sketching or needs to go scan in some images for his big idea. But each time we meet, even though the energy is the same, the project has taken a different direction.

> Just last night, I had a whole new take on what I want to do, and I know I am going to stick with this format, because it's ME. And I'm like, all right, this is what I want to do, and I sketched it all out last night. It's gonna be ridiculous, I mean I have thought about the interactivity that's gonna be on it. I was sort of thinking about it last night, and I saw the colors and everything, and I was like, 'Bad!' All right, now I've gotta execute it.

The big idea is a fearsome thing for most designers. We are afraid of so many things that can happen. We fear ridicule; we fear rejection; we fear losing stature among our peers. We also fear simply not being able to

‘nail it,’ to hit the concept so directly that nothing can take it off course. Truman amuses me with his continual revisiting his decisions and trying so hard to convince himself he is making progress. He tells me he is now “ready to get locked down and get busy.” Then he calls himself a “dummy,” having had a revelation that he could do better if he just waits until tomorrow. He tells me he just hasn’t been thinking “outside the box,” which limited how far he could go. But he promises me, “As time progresses I’m gonna just get better, it’s something I do.” I admire creative people and the way their grandiosity does not concede defeat in the face of indecision and fear. He tells me:

> I don’t care if they like it or they don’t, I’m puttin’ it up. This is my hype. I’m gonna be trippin’, cause I gotta go scan in the images now. I drew it out, like pretty much the way I want it, so I look on the screen and I gotta still figure out where the activity is and I still gotta figure out the navigation on the site. I gotta go scan now.

And he leaves the room.

Later that same day, questions about his big idea project find Truman equivocating, finding reasons not to have followed through on his earlier excitement. Not surprisingly, he is again plagued by indecision and wants

help in deciding. He speaks of a lack of direction from the faculty:

> Well, it's comin'. I laid out the graphics pretty much, I still gotta do my navigation, and um, I gotta take photographs of myself 'cause basically what I wanted to do, I wanted to have it broken up into four areas. It was gonna be the Student, the Professional, the Artist, and...somethin' else. So that's what I'm stuck with doin' now.

Truman hesitates, as if trying to picture a good solution that he does not yet have. His voice gets really quiet when he doesn't quite know what to say next. I remember his exuberance earlier in the day, hurrying off to work on the scans. I ask if his excitement is gone. "Nah! I mean I'll do it. It'll be done by next semester. At the MAX. So, more than likely it will still be getting worked on, because like I'm gonna change it." The instructor inside me decides to challenge him. I tell Truman I am curious to see how it will be different from the norm, how it will be "on the left."

The End of the Pilot Study

In chapter three I noted that my work with Truman Reed originated as a pilot study from which I would frame this larger collective case study. The end of the pilot study became the beginning of the expanded work contained in

these pages. Truman graduated from the Crescent School of Design, still talking and waving his arms enthusiastically about how grand his big idea would one day be. His family did not attend his graduation, and he moved back home to live with them and search for a job.

Truman's outward display of his self-chosen culture with his dreadlocks and his dress are only part of his larger culture; his inward culture is military, very likely always being regimented, being told what to do, helped with decision making. His creative energy is a rebellion, a step outside of the military, and he is having a very hard time carrying through with his decision making. Truman is cautious and practiced when he is in meetings and scheduled interviews. He knows he had better say what fits his carefully developed outward image, so what he says is not necessarily his inner reality.

Having spent the last five and one half years developing a literature base and a passion for my subject, cultural difference and performance in professional arts higher education, I felt quite self-assured in launching this pilot study. I felt that I knew Truman fairly well. I knew him to be open, intelligent, and receptive to me as his advisor. I knew he was culturally and ethnically

distanced from a typical design school graduate. I believed I could gather information from Truman that would help me inductively build toward a simple statement such as, “Yes, indeed, cultural performance must not be stifled if we are to encourage student success.”

But I did not get what I expected. Truman surprised me in his lack of interest in discussing any effect his cultural difference might have had on his success in college. He steadfastly maintained his commitment to creativity, his responsibility to himself to succeed, and that his hard work alone would account for his success or failure. His indecision, self-doubt, and occasional self-flagellation, and his fiercely retaliating grandiosity did not surprise me. While I did not gain data to support an original hypothesis or claim, I did realize the complexity of case studies and the difficulty of making reasonable assertions or interpretations.

It became clear to me that the Truman Reed story was not finished, and I realized that Truman must be one of the studies included in this collective. Upon receiving IRB approval for this expanded study, I immediately contacted Truman at his home near Newark, and we made plans for me to visit with him there.

Phase Two with Truman Reed

As I made my plans to drive to Truman's home, a web site called Google Earth[126] emerged on the Internet. With the software on this World Wide Web site one can see satellite photographs of any point on Earth and zoom in to within an altitude of about one thousand feet. The images of houses, cars, trees, streets, and sidewalks are remarkably clear; not so high-resolution that one can read signs or tell makes of automobiles, but clear enough to make valid assumptions about what one is seeing. Viewing the images of Truman's street address I quickly realized I was probably looking at some form of public housing development, with long and tightly spaced row houses, narrow streets, and curbside parking. I packed the car and began the journey.

Upon arriving in the city and exiting the Interstate, I realized my impression had been correct. The neighborhood was economically disadvantaged, and I was clearly foreign to the area. I called the home and was told by his brother that Truman had gone to deliver his mother to work at the

[126] Google Earth offers maps and satellite images for complex or pinpointed regional searches. See [earth.google.com].

local hospital, and that I should just park in front of the building and wait for him there. When I pulled up and parked, Roy came out wearing a football warm-up suit from the local junior college. He said he didn't know when Truman would be back, but I was welcome to wait right there. He did not invite me inside. Thirty minutes later, Truman arrived with his seventh-grade cousin in the car. He had taken Calvin to Hardee's for his carry out lunch. Calvin had taken a sick day from school, because he was sore from the previous day's football team practice.

Truman checked with his other brothers (there are three other brothers and his mother living in the small apartment, plus two cousins) to see if anyone needed a ride anywhere before he left. No one did, so he got in my car and we left to get lunch and talk. As we leave his house Truman notices that I am looking all around the neighborhood as we travel through. He says something about me scoping out the area. It feels like he is taking care of me and reassuring me, which is something I appreciate. I ask him if he does a lot of the picking up and delivering

of brothers, cousins, and his mother. "Oh, yes, I am Mister Belvedere, I don't have a job yet."[127]

Something is oddly out of place, out of the context I know with him. Truman has cut off his dreads! He still wears hip-hop clothing, a flat billed cap set to the side, a huge gold colored cotton t-shirt with black and green Rasta art, and oversized, bleach-dotted jeans.

We drive several miles to a shopping mall and enter a Panera Bread restaurant he recommended. Truman orders a mushroom sandwich and green tea. He bows his head and prays before beginning to eat and talk with me. He is still a practicing Rasta. The first question I have for him is why he cut his dreads, the symbol of his allegiance to God and to his creativity. He says he is working on his transition to being a responsible adult person. He says he spent so much time away from home without family support and stability that he realizes now he had to get up and do the things that are required to get to the next level.

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[127] Mister Belvedere is an American television sitcom originally broadcast on ABC from March 1985 to July 1990. A middle class family is desperate for a nanny, and they hire Mr. Belvedere, an English butler. The show features the unique problems in the lives of family members, and Mr. Belvedere always comes to the rescue with charm, wit, and intelligence. [http://www.geocities.com/mrbeaverfalls/history.html], (Accessed January 7, 2006).

> I just realized it’s like I basically finished that aspect of my life, and now it’s time for me to move on the next level and go forward, start accomplishing other things. It’s almost like in the military or whatever, like you start off as a corporal or whatever, then you graduate to something else. It’s like how well you perform, it’s like a certain test you gotta do or certain skills you gotta acquire before you get to that next life.

Having seen the size and serious look on the face of his brother, the football player, and knowing that all the males in the family, aside from Truman, are in law enforcement or the military, I begin to empathize with the pressure this former design student is now under.

We talk about the trends in design and advertising and how those trends might affect his getting into the job market. There is more evidence that he is angry, like the comments he made earlier about pigeonholing and the military exploiting people who “were ugly and couldn’t read.” Truman probably gets a great deal of venomous input at home. He says hip-hop is running corporate America right now, but he allows that the opposite might actually be more accurate. He says,

> I know people didn’t think it was gonna do what it did as far a becoming a billion dollar business. It’s ridiculous! It’s like hip-hop is a killing machine right now. And white people’s kids are like breaking out front now with it, and like it’s not even our music no more.

Truman's Job Search

Naturally, I am curious about Truman's experience in the job market. Surely, I think, he doesn't want to sit and home feeling that he is Mister Belvedere any longer than he has to. Truman is a person who claims to dislike parameters, yet he has cut his hair so that he can be a better adult and accept the role of family member.
He has interviewed with a few companies that ran ads in the local paper. Most have asked for three to five years' experience and working knowledge of the software.

> I'm like, alright, if I got all of the skills that you're looking for outside of having that corporate-slash-business-America experience, like why is that an issue if I am bringin' everything else to the table. I'm like, man, the only thing I need is a job. I need you to show me something.

Truman tells me, "Everybody likes my work and so forth and so on, so why can't they just give me a job? What's the problem?" He believes employers all want to hire designers who will listen to assignments and then do the work "to the T." He is becoming convinced that he simply is not supposed to work for anyone and follow a defined schedule. He prefers to work at his computer at home and continue to plan his future, which might include starting a business or

returning to school for a graduate degree. His belief in himself and his God gives him comfort.

> If I gotta grind it out I will, I'm not gonna complain about it. I mean sometimes I feel if things are not going the way that you want them to be going, that doesn't necessarily mean they aren't going the way that they're supposed to. It's like the whole thing of me cutting my hair. It was something that I did because of the next process that I was going into.

Truman's Post-Graduation View of Design School

Truman has been out of school, living at home, and searching for a job for a few months, so I ask him to revisit his feelings about the faculty and the education he received at The Crescent School of Design. He remembers teachers each having their own style, which he thinks is beneficial to the students. Some have corporate experience and what he calls "a real hard edge about how they do their work and want us to do ours." He thinks the majority of faculty members try to create carbon copies of themselves in the graduates. He says, "It's like nobody has a voice." He also feels that most students fall into line and do what the instructors expect.

> I think the main thing you wanna do is like impress your instructors and have like a body of work that's so on-point that they can't tell you that you gotta go back and redo your work 'cause they don't like it. You just go along to get the grade.

He grants, though, that some instructors try to meet the students halfway, allowing students to experiment and do work that is their own voice and creativity, but it is still the norm for them to employ a strict, business-case critique of projects. However, that is insufficient to Truman. He talks about himself and his "associates":

> We didn't do like a revolt or a rebellion, but we just really wanted to say something in like our work was concerned. I was just like 'Yo, we just won't do it.' If they don't like us, then they just don't like us. We faced opposition! I mean like if your main focus is not corporate America as far as design work is concerned, and you're trying to reach people just on a normal level, as far as I mean like everyday people… it's like that's one of the main things that not only I dealt with, but some of my other associates did too. You could see that we had the necessary skills and schooling and all that, but we put things to the left. I mean we dreamed even more.

I ask Truman if, in the end, design school was a good thing for him. He replied that it was, that he needed it to define himself. He went on to discuss his personal desire for the future with seemingly haphazard ideas about furthering his education:

> I'm going to New York next month for an Open House. It's called the California College of the Arts, I think. I can get a masters in graphic design. I could maybe teach and do my business on the side. I was thinking of going to Italy. There's a school in um...I forget the name of the school, but they have a masters in graphic design. School of Florence? Somethin' like that. Florence School of Design? I

> think they're more edgy that we are. A more cuttin' edge style, I'm definitely interested in that.

And, Whatever Happened to Truman's Big Idea?

I ask Truman if he is still working on the left and planning the big idea project from school. He exclaims that he is.

> I keep changing my interface. I basically finished the identity for my company, but outside of that... I don't know if you have my business card (handing me the card). Like, alright, this is my logo right here, and now I have like a elephant incorporated with it.

I see no elephant on the card and make a note to check his web site, which is listed there. I ask, "An elephant?"

> Yeah, and it's like basically what I am gonna have when I start searching for stuff, like before I get into the real cutting graphic, you know, the design aspects of it, like me doing different things with like images and shapes and all that. So like I changed my interface, and I have like a silhouetted elephant on it, and there's a bunch of different things going on with like graphics and stuff now. So I gotta make this work, and it's gotta be really on point with the connections to everything. That's the main thing I am doing now.

When I return home, I log on to my computer and type in his web site address to find the elephant. I receive a message saying the site cannot be found, and it may be offline or may not exist at this time.

Assertions about the Truman Reed Story

Truman Reed has a practiced philosophy, easily repeating the same answers to somewhat similar questions. He relies on his Rasta beliefs and his associates in the faith. He believes himself to be above the daily demands of both home and business. He says,

> I can't be put in a category, because everything I do is so varied. I can do something where it will be totally minor league in terms of presentation or whatever, and then I can come back and a whole other area of my creativity is being shown.

He will refuse to discuss his cultural difference affecting his work and his goals in any way, and he has no interest in putting his cultural identity into his creative work.

Truman is clearly a dreamer and a planner, who has put tremendous pressure on himself to live a spiritual and creative life. He has very personal reasons for walking this path, not the least of which is his family background. He has been surrounded by maleness and testosterone in a relatively traditional and non-creative environment. He sees his creativity as a way to place a personal stamp of self-chosen value on his life. He has trouble, though, with the dualism of creative endeavor; self-confidence versus self-doubt. In his case the self-doubter, the feeling that

he is an imposter, is strong. The self-confident, grandiose Truman fights back hard and is tenacious. We don't know which will emerge in the end and guide his life, but I fear for his dreams.

Truman wrestles with the "us" versus "them" conflict I discussed in Chapter 2, not only when dealing with the school and its faculty, but also when dealing with his family, which is his dominant environment since graduation. Truman still sees himself breaking free, blazing his own trail, and lifting himself out of his Mister Belvedere existence. It appears, though, that his family is not making it easy for him. They don't quite understand his dreams. They apparently made it easy for him to return home after graduation, and they need him to remain. Following the thought of Bourdieu as discussed by Laura Ahern,[128] Truman is probably still trying to live in the virtuosic "subjective" while his family is trying to re-impose their "objective" lifestyle on him. He is in an environment now, as he was in college, which is filled with miscommunication in terms of meaning, language, and thought. Blumer's view of symbolic interactionism claims that every human has meanings which can change at any time, depending on

[128] Ahearn, "Language and Agency," 112.

interaction with his or her environment, and significant change can mean constantly adjusting to others.[129]

As I get to know Truman I find that I have developed a view that I call "symbolic counteraction." It frames individualism and impetuosity, iconoclasm and rebellion. It can also result in resentment, dreams of escape, and anger. Counteraction is the need to improve oneself and correct perceived mistakes and shortcomings. A constant emphasis on eliminating undesirable qualities without the successful development of desirable qualities in one's own mind can result in fear, resentment, resistance, rebellion, or simply indecision and inaction.[130] It can result in underlying anger.

Truman is apparently angry. I question whether it is his personal anger or that of his brothers and his community affecting him. His creative self is open, loving, and spiritual, not seemingly worried about day to day inequities of life. The closed-mindedness of the employers, the force feeding of corporate design by the faculty, the stealing of hip-hop music by white people all seem to be temporary excuses for Truman to use when

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[129] Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, 79.

[130] Jay Chalmers, Motivation Analysis. Accessed January 8, 2006 at [http://www.overbooked.org/motivation/needs/counteraction.html].

he is feeling low, when the imposter is dominating his dreams.

The Last Time I See Truman

On the way back to his home after lunch, Truman begins to weep, just slightly, and he asks if I can turn on the recorder.

> I was watching a preview for a football movie with Samuel Jackson, and in the scene he was talking to different players like, alright, 'Are you afraid that you are not the fastest person on the team, but everybody on the team knows that you are the fastest person on the team? Are you concerned that you are not the strongest person on the team, but everybody on the team knows that you are reason the team is as strong as it is? You're like the backbone of the team.' And then he asked, 'Are you just afraid of being successful? Are you just afraid that you will try to do something that you know you will accomplish?'
>
> And I was just like, it spoke to me. I was like, "Oh, my God!" Like a lot of times, we are free because we can do it, but at the same time we don't know what to expect, you know? A lot of times that's what is prohibiting you from doing what you really want to do.
>
> We basically limit ourselves in how far we really push ourselves. Really, it's about you just pushing yourself beyond what you feel like normally your capabilities are. Like, I had different things that I was dealing with as far as really going forward and just doing everything. You know you can be successful, but you might be afraid of it. That's what killed me.

We arrive at his housing complex. We shake hands, he gets out of the car, and he walks away without looking back.

Chapter 5

SELMA BALIĆ

> I was trying to get a name for a product to design a label. I picked coffee, and I went up to the teacher and said, "Well, English is not my first language, and maybe I am having a hard time with the name, and I don't know what to do."
>
> She said just think of slang. Don't you know other words for coffee? And I was like, uh, no, I don't. She said, "If you are planning on working in this country, you had better learn the slang."
>
> At first I took offense, but then, it really doesn't matter. Does it?
>
> - Selma Balić

Selma Balić survived the War in the Balkans. She grew up in Bosnia, and amidst the turmoil she finished high school in Serbia. In 1995, at the age of eighteen, she left her family behind and moved to England. It was not so much a need to escape the terrors and ravages of war, as it was her stoic determination to restart her life and be responsible for her own future direction. Her parents still live in Bosnia; her sister, in Croatia. Her family has scattered into Austria, Serbia, and elsewhere. She travels

to visit them, but rarely. None of them have traveled to the United States.

After five years in England working as an administrative assistant in an accounting firm, Selma moved to the United States and settled in the mid-west, where she had heard women can lead peaceful and productive lives. She found a community college that offered scholarships to European women, favoring those who had left war-torn regions, and she found a roommate. Soon afterward, the roommate received a scholarship to attend The Crescent School of Design, and Selma came with her.

Selma is now in her final semester as a graphic design student. She is always upbeat, optimistic, and interested in learning and absorbing everything the faculty and her fellow students have to offer. She is determined to become Americanized, to assimilate. She at first hesitates to discuss her background, but later I find her memory of the war is pervasive, a central issue in Selma's framing of her present and future life.

> Sometimes I feel a little bit embarrassed to say where I am from, just because of the war and the media coverage...how we were portrayed in the West. Sometimes I don't even say I am from Bosnia, I say I am from Croatia because it makes it a little easier to...because people say "Oh, wow you're from Croatia! They have a great soccer player, and the

> team is great." You know, they are so positive about that country.

It is difficult for me to grasp Selma's particular viewpoint on the war and the meanings associated with being a Bosnian, a Serb, a Croat, or the relationships between the Muslims, Catholics, and other warring factions. I decide to focus on Selma's personal views on her life as a student, her relationships with faculty members, and her career goals. Her culture and history become intertwined with these stories.

> Officially I am Croatian. I have a Croatian passport, but I am not really from there. It helps me avoid certain questions when people start, "Awwww, aren't you glad you are here?" You know, away from the bombs and all that. And I HATE that! I'm like, "Yeah, yeah." I don't really tell the faculty and student about that, being from Bosnia and that part of the world. But if they ask, I say Bosnia. I try not to lie at school.

We talk more about the school and how graphic design styles differ in various parts of the world, beginning with Bosnia and Croatia. She sees very little of value in Bosnian communications at all. The stigma of war, she says, is everywhere, starting with the attitude of the people.

> I can speak about Bosnia and Croatia together, can't I? I like to observe what is going on in Croatia, because my sister lives in the main city in Croatia. They try to follow the western trends there. Whereas in Bosnia, there is a lot of...I don't know how to describe it...the traditional

> Balkan way of thinking, it just pulls everything down. To the gutter.

She sees the Bosnian people as very depressed "since we had that war." She says the media is hard pressed to present a positive picture. People still don't have jobs, the economy is bad. She remembers only gruesome images on television and in the newspaper when she was a teenager, and she remarks that American media must evidently be censored, because none of the images of war in American media are nearly as graphic as she has seen.

> You know, like we saw blown up people with an arm here and a leg there...very graphic and violent, stuff that's real. Those are not dummies. That was on national tv. It was "hey there was a big bomb here, and this many people died, so they all had these shots on the eight o'clock news.

Selma tells me of a magazine that is still being published ten years after the war ended; she believes the name translates as Free Bosnia. It focuses on corruption, politics, and war crimes still going on at The Hague. Her sense of horror and anger peppers the discussion. She speaks of the invading Mujahideen, and how "they just planted their little feet and stayed in the country, married our local women, and got the citizenship. There is still something going on in the Balkan, I mean it's just

nasty over there, it's just awful." She feels that the war is still being fought in the graphic communications media.

Selma's experiences help illuminate a study of cultural difference in communications. She feels the people of the new country of Croatia, which was spawned by the most recent Balkan war and the segmentation of Bosnia, are purposely creating a culture and a communications style that Selma calls "western."

> When I go home to Croatia, I look at tv, videos, newspaper, and magazines. I think their graphic design is pretty good, a much higher level, really western design.

She is impressed by 'cleverness' in advertising that she sees in Croatia. She tells of a billboard for Coca-Cola that has a headline, "Piti e we nabiti." She is almost giddy when she explains that with a one letter change to "Biti e we nabiti," it would say "To be or not to be." But with the P, it says "To drink or not to be." She says, "Whoever thought of this is very, very clever."

Her tone and mood become remarkably more cheerful and positive as she shifts her attention from Bosnia to Croatia. Perhaps this is indicative of an enlightenment she felt there and later built upon when she decided to move to England and then proceed to the United States. Her attention to Croatian design and its relationship with

western design is significant, not because I believe western design to be something all the world should emulate, but because her enthusiasm is not common among contemporary American design students, at least in The Crescent School of Design. She is very interested in sharing her observations with me and getting my input on her work:

> I try to do that kind of thinking here at Crescent, like you change one letter and it changes the whole sentence and meaning. But it is hard, because English is not my language. I always say I'm not very good at coming up with tag lines and all that stuff for advertising. And then sometimes I come up with things that people think are really great, you know?

Selma learned to speak English in the UK, and is very impressed with UK advertising styles. She finds the advertising in the United States to be a little less clever, less witty, and blatantly commercial. She likes design and advertising solutions that make the reader think, and then say, "Ooooooh! Ahhhhhh! I see now." She exclaims,

> Here's an example of what I mean. I have this friend in the UK that is always sending me ads in his emails, and one said, "Well, with all these storms happening around the world like in China and the US and blah blah blah...well, we had a storm in Britain too! We should appreciate what we have and not take it for granted." And the image is supposed to be the proof of the damage from the storm they just had, and it was someone's deck on the back of

> their house, and you could see rain all over. And plastic furniture. And one plastic chair was just knocked over sideways. I laughed my head off.

Selma's Drive to Assimilate

Tall and slender with long straight dark hair and very fair skin, Selma has an air about her that seems distinctly European. Her clothing shows an understated sense of style and Euro fashion, with soft colors and fabrics, loose fitting pullover shirts, wheat-colored jeans, and comfortable slip-on shoes. Occasionally, she will wear a brightly colored miniskirt with opaque stockings, a style we once called the "mod" look.

> I used to wear European clothes on purpose, you know, sometimes like a long print skirt over jeans… you can do anything over there...but I don't do that anymore. I don't try to be different now. It doesn't work for me.

Selma's goal is to assimilate, become what she calls "Americanized," finish her degree, and join the workforce in the United States. She believes she is accomplishing her goal with the exception of her English and her language skills. She says she cannot avoid people knowing she is foreign, that she simply cannot get her language to pass for American. "People will always ask me...it sets me apart, like I am supposed to think, 'Oh, good, I am different!' But you know what?

Sometimes it’s not a good thing, because I can get singled out, and I don’t want that.” She knows the value of having a different perspective, and she believes there is an advantage to diversity in the school environment:

> I can choose to assimilate or be different, depending on how I feel. When I first came to the states and spoke very British, I was in the Midwest, and I was like a magnet for new friends. These people had never been anywhere. But in this school, it’s wearing off I guess. I am not the only foreigner now, so I am not so special to the Americans here. I assimilate myself as much as I can. I like being different, but I am going to be working here.

She worries about the language skills and her knowledge of everyday English used in the school. She has heard stories about students of different cultures having had difficulties with faculty members. She tells me of a Jewish student who created ads for a line of kosher foods, and was told that all Jewish students try to do that and the designs are always terrible. She fears doing work that looks too European and having it banned from the final student show because it is too different and employers might not like it. She claims this happened to an Asian friend of hers.

Selma then tells me the story of the coffee label and her not knowing the slang, the vignette that begins this chapter.

> I was really taken aback. I just went back to my computer, and I was very mad. I didn't want to be in her class. But I am aware of the fact that you go through a stage when you are mad and then you accept it and say "Oh, what the heck." And then you laugh about it later. I mean I passed and the class was over. It wasn't too bad, I guess. She was just harsh, but I guess she liked what I did in the end. A couple of projects she really liked, and one she completely hated, which pissed me off...but I hated it too, so it doesn't matter if she hates it.

One issue Selma sees as a problem in having industry-experienced designers teaching classes is most of them only know the business as it exists in America. "All the teachers teach you 'how it is in this country,' 'you're going to need to know how to work in this country.' They don't prepare you for just whatever, back to Europe or whatever." She feels that students from other countries who truly want to return to their home country should be able to "bring their own culture to the table." But, she tells me, the students purposely create their work to fit an American expectation, to get them jobs in the United States. She claims that teachers are aware that this is happening, and they cannot or do not prepare students for international expectations.

> One teacher said, "I am going to give you a lecture about you going to an interview, and how an interview goes, what you should say and what you shouldn't say, and how to prepare your portfolio." She said, "but I am going to prepare you for the American job market. Some of you may be from different countries, but I am preparing you specifically for this one and so, those of you who are going back home, you might not get much out of this."

Selma looks pensive, but brightens and says, "I guess it's OK since I plan to stay in this country. You know, I am preparing myself to work in this country."

We discuss the possibility of working with an American firm that has international offices, where she might have added value because of her life experiences. She believes it is a possibility, but could be more of a problem than a benefit. Again, I find her wartime childhood framing her responses and plans.

> Let me give you an example. In art direction class we are supposed to be doing a project to market CNN to younger people. I really squash my brain to come up with something that appeals to 18 to 25 yr olds. When I was that age I was dealing with the war and then living on my own. I can't relate to these kids in the states who are like partying, and all that. So I told the teacher that, and she helped us brainstorm, because another girl in the group is from Bermuda, and she cannot relate to the young people in the states either. We had two Americans in the group too. Since I have been through the war, I did the war themed ad...a serious topic, you know. Serious is better for me, because I am older and I have been through so much. The girl from Bermuda did a homeless theme, and the other girls did light stuff like music and entertainment.

She feels set apart by her experiences and her seriousness, yet she is determined to assimilate. I get a sense that Selma is dealing with some inner conflict over her assimilation attempts. She has a vision of how she will work in the American design industry, and she realizes she must work on her language abilities. However, the idea of working with the American students in the classroom and later joining them in their indigenous workplace concerns her.

> I click well with foreign students. It's easier than working with Americans. We have a different perspective. We combine our own cultures with American culture, and I think our ideas are pretty nice.

Many of the American students do not seem interested in, or in her view "equal to," her experiences and her world view. The European influence on her design work, the simplistic and utilitarian, "less-is-more" design philosophy from The Bauhaus, circa 1935, is something she considers "ingrown" in her sense of aesthetics and design. She says she often tries to "get a little crazy" with her design projects, styling it after music concert posters or hip-hop CD artwork, but it just doesn't feel right to her.

> So I don't do it. I clean it up. I still always want to do something crazy! But I bet it will always still be pretty clean. I don't like the

> really busy design work. You know, the long lasting design work is usually pretty clean and clever. When you look at design from the '40's, you know the Modernists, it's still good design. That's what I like. I was surrounded by Bauhaus influence at home. You can go astray and do grungy stuff, but I don't think that's very clever. I am more about cleverness with words and images. Not busy and "cool, dude, cool!"

Selma Interacts with the Workforce

As Selma's self-confidence grows and she nears graduation, she boldly enters what she believes to be a design contest. A professional organization named Computer and Human Interaction (CHi) announces a "poster" contest, which will feature young computer-human interface designers' posters about their projects that focus on future benefits of computers aiding humans in day-to-day activities. As later becomes painfully evident, the term "poster" to this group represents a new academic arena in sociological research, and poster is synonymous with graphic charting of a research protocol.

Selma teams up with an Argentinean student she has worked with before and prepares a poster showing a mouse running a maze that represents the process of information architecture in interactive media. They actually design a poster showing the process that all the other entrants use daily in designing their protocol. About the formal

presentation of their work in an auditorium filled with over two hundred CHi members, Selma says:

> Oh, we were nervous. The first two or three people presented, and we looked at each other and said, "What the hell are we doing here?" We felt totally out of place. I went back to the web site, afterward, and it said to create some kind of poster...which is what we did, but the others did a protocol or prototype. The confusion was in the words, it said Poster Competition. I almost wanted to raise my hand...well, I wouldn't dare do that...but we were like, where are these other people's posters? I just don't get it. There must be different meanings for the word "poster." You know, it's still relevant...I didn't think we were totally off.

The contest announcement had stated, "For those students new to poster submissions, a poster session is a collection of academic work displayed on poster boards." As graphic designers, Selma and her partner believe that a poster is a uniquely designed visual communication vehicle meant for promotion, such as for a movie, a music event, a product in a store, or in this case a thinking process. Since her poster was about a process of assembling academic work, she decides, perhaps rationalizes, that they were close, "not totally off."

Selma puts the poster contest behind her and boldly searches for an internship for her final semester. She locates an opportunity with one of the most active and creatively demanding design firms in the city. The firm

insists on a talented designer who wants to spend at least six months working alongside the owner doing research, designing possible solutions, and participating in presentations. Selma believes this is her golden opportunity to enter the American workforce with valuable experience upon graduation.

> I went for my interview for the internship, and I took all my projects and we laid them out. The interviewer right at first said, "Ah, I see a European influence here, Bauhaus!" You know, that was the first thing he said. So, I guess I may not even be aware of it. But I guess maybe. I was like, I don't know, you know. I guess.

Selma is surprised to find that there is more to her European background than bombs, bloody television images, terrorists, and countries no longer whole. She finds that American designers might value something from her cultural heritage of which she has been unaware. She is proud that her culture includes something so positive.

> He said, "I can definitely see clean design here." I was a little surprised, because I am here learning with the American kids. So, I guess it's just something subliminal. I always want to do something crazy! But it's not clean enough, it's not simple like Bauhaus. That's where I come from.

Selma is excited that her decision to come to America and find a land of opportunity and peace is beginning to pay off.

A few weeks pass and Selma is very near graduation. She compares her experiences in the internship with her career preparation in the classroom.

> The internship has taught me what the real world is really like. Most of what the teachers tell us in school is good, but some of it is off...way off. They tell us the best design ways to do things, but that is not necessarily the way the real world works. Like, when you create something for the Web, it is ok for the images to be 72 dpi, you know, low resolution. We did a presentation for the local newspaper and printed out screen shots of our work, and they were all pixilated...but that's ok because that's how it is. When I do that in class, I get penalized. The instructors are kind of hung up on a "right" way, and that's not the way it is when you get out there. But I'm like whatever, I am not going to argue...I'm like, OK never mind.

Selma is excited to learn about networking, how the design community is close-knit, friendly, and helpful to talented new designers. She is outgoing and makes friends easily, and she decides to build her career in this city where she is getting her start. But, being away from home in a foreign land still haunts her.

> I am going to stay here in this city. I have no choice. I don't know anybody, so I have to stay where I know at least a few people. People know me, and they remember me. Maybe someday I will move back to England, but that really doesn't matter. I will do what I need to do to get started. I am determined. So, that is what I am going to do.

Selma becomes wistful as she looks forward to graduation. She doesn't think her parents are coming from

Bosnia to see her portfolio show, her graduating body of work. She believes her sister may come from Croatia, but it would be difficult for her to get the time off work. She says, "I sure hope so; I don't want to be alone."

Assertions about the Selma Balić Story

Selma Balić has two overriding personal goals. One, she wants to separate herself from her childhood, which is not uncommon for anyone who ventures off to college. More importantly though, Selma needs to separate herself emotionally and geographically from the War in Bosnia and Croatia. She speaks very little about the war's direct effect on her parents, her sister, or herself. She certainly grew up in conditions so challenging that she left everything behind to begin a more productive and peaceful life, first in England and then in the United States.

Selma's other personal goal is her Americanization. She sees no reason to maintain or demonstrate her cultural difference, with the possible exception of maintaining an aesthetic aura surprisingly perceived by Americans. Her need to disguise her difference is partly due to embarrassment over the war's effect on her people, but

stems more from her belief that her difference is just not useful. She feels revealing her Bosnian heritage serves no purpose for her career goals. I believe she is quite aware of and affected by the conflicting pressures Omi and Winant describe in ethnicity theory: assimilation, which is the dissolution of group identity, versus cultural pluralism, the preservation of group identity.[131] On one hand Selma wants to assimilate completely and as soon as possible, leaving her past behind. On the other hand, she is learning that there may be more in her cultural background that might be of value in her career. Her European sense of style and her Bauhaus-influenced sense of design and aesthetics are welcomed by the design industry she is so intent on entering in America.

Selma's conflict between a desire for total assimilation and her realization that there may indeed be value in her European-ness is very much framed by Blumer's statement, "The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing."[132] She arrived in America with a

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[131] Omi and Winant, Racial Formation in the United States, 48. I will discuss issues surrounding acculturation, assimilation, syncretism, and cultural pluralism in Chapter 7, since these terms frame the interpretation of all three case studies in the book to a great extent.

[132] Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, 4.

set of beliefs about her experiences and what meanings Americans might be giving to her country and her life in general. Now she finds that the interaction between her own set of beliefs and those of the internship employer, for instance, is surprising. Laura Ahearn's discussion of subjectivity in Bourdieu's habitus,[133] as covered in Chapter 2, also aids in understanding Selma's experiences in America. Selma's attempt to assimilate and join the social structure in the design industry might well result in some social transformation both for herself and for the workplace.

In addition, Selma relates several experiences with faculty members who want to teach students how to work in America, perhaps only know how to teach students about American professional methods. They seem to believe that the mission of the school is to send graduates into the American workforce, and that anyone wanting to go work elsewhere in the world is on her or his own.

Like Being in a Foreign Land

Selma has an ability to brush off setbacks and disruptions in her drive for success in meeting her goals.

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[133] Ahearn, "Language and Agency," 118.

She also has a sense of irony, whether she realizes it or not. After the CHi poster design contest ends, she says:

> We were like, OK, we did our part, the best we could. You know? The others were talking a foreign language, and we were like, just hold me back. She was like, I am dying here. What are we doing here, it is so weird. We decided that protocol and poster were the same thing...it just means something else to the geeks.
>
> It’s like being in a foreign land. Something was not right. Some people did not have a poster... we were the only ones WITH a poster. I guess poster means something else. At least to them.
>
> Oh, well, two different confusing things. It really doesn’t matter. Does it?

Chapter 6

RICARDO BENITEZ

> You know, I've never been to Cuba and it's killing me...the feeling that I've never been there. I have more family there than here. See, my mother's half Cuban and half Mexican. Her father is from Cuba, and my father is from Cuba, so I am more Cuban than I am Mexican. I'm dying to go back. I actually want to retire over there in my fifties. Communism will be gone, and you can call me the next Ted Turner of Havana. I'll be happy with a nice ad agency producing in Miami and in Cuba. I'll Americanize all the Cuban people, and I'll live with them, and it'll be great.
>
> - Ricardo Benitez

Ricardo "Ricky" Benitez is a proud man who is strongly attached to his Latin American culture and his family. His allegiance to his Cuban heritage permeates his life and all of our conversations. His family bonds are strong, and he is very ethnocentric about his cultural history. He is entrepreneurial, as his father and grandfather before him. He has a strong sense of duty to his family, himself, his creative talent, and both of his countries, Cuba and the United States.

> My father is Cuban, my mother is part Mexican, and from there we had a lot of tie-ins, Portuguese, Spanish...it's a good mix, I guess you could say. I grew up speaking Spanish at home. My father's parents still don't speak English, that's where I get all my Spanish from. It cleaned up a lot when I lived in Miami. Yeah, it's pretty much a Latin background. I grew up here in the United States, born and raised.

Ricky uses the word "Americanized" when discussing his family and his own position in society.

> My grandparents were all immigrants. My parents weren't totally Americanized. They got married in their early 20's. They went to high school here. I read about it being a generation thing. When an immigrant family moves here, it's like three generations to being Americanized. It happens then. It's true; I see it all the time. There's actually statistics on it and everything. I forgot all the numbers. I'm completely Americanized.

Ricky equates "Americanized" with acculturation. He tells me that Hispanics will one day be the majority ethnic body in the United States, and the word "acculturation" is the right word to use. He brings me a copy of a supplement to Advertising Age magazine, titled the "Hispanic Fact Pack"[134] to help make his point. Within the magazine, in a self-promotional advertisement by Lopez Negrete, an Hispanic advertising, marketing, and public relations firm, the body copy asks, "Does good exist when it comes to Hispanic

[134] "Hispanic Fact Pack," Supplement to Advertising Age (New York: July 18, 2005).

advertising? Is there life after acculturation?"[135] The Fact Pack contains a cluster analysis of acculturation among Hispanics in the United States. The segments indicate "Unacculturated," "Partially Acculturated," and "Mostly Acculturated," and the report indicates that even the acculturated Latin Americans are very comfortable living in both worlds, consuming Hispanic media, and at least occasionally speaking Spanish within their families and homes.[136]

Ricky's sense of allegiance is broader than to his family, his culture, and the island of Cuba.

> When I got out of high school, I was thinking of going into the Navy and becoming a photographer, to learn about photojournalism and serve my country. So that was a good thought, and it was a bad economy, so I said to myself, "Just start working." My Mom convinced me to try college, so here I am.

I am intrigued by his use of the term "serve my country," and he explains that acculturation works both ways. He feels that a good Latin American cannot live in one culture or the other, but must do good things for both countries.

He is deeply committed to his grandparents and his father, in part because they have all been small business

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[135] Ibid., 2.

[136] Ibid., 48.

owners in the United States. After two years in college he decides to move to Miami, live with his maternal grandparents, and become certified as a dealer and trainer in graphic arts software.

> I took two years off and went to school down there to try and get my Certification. It was good; it opened me up a lot for my freelance work I was doing. Because my freelance work has always been bilingual stuff, pretty much, that is my market. I lived in Miami for a couple of years. Miami is completely different. It's its own culture. I lived right on South Beach for one of the years. $1300 for a one-bedroom studio on the beach. It was expensive, but worth it. Every penny.

His background in retailing and distribution of Mexican food products, learned from his grandfather and father, combined with his interest in graphic design and his growing bilingual freelance clientele, excite Ricky. He is convinced that he will receive his BFA degree, build his business, and be in a perfect position to move to Cuba when Fidel Castro dies or is removed from power.

Design for Different Cultures

Ricky's grandfather's small neighborhood grocery store carries a variety of Hispanic food products. Ricky spent a lot of time at the store, and he became intrigued with packaging and label design at an early age. His father saw

the success of one Hispanic food store and started a distribution company to supply the store's products to the Hispanic communities across the southeast. Recently, Ricky has been designing private labels and trademarks for other Hispanic food suppliers in the city. He studies Latino food product labels, and he is developing a sense of what works with the demographic market.

> Latin food product labels...color, branding, you gotta be careful how you do that. In my work, it can get real loud, and if I show this stuff in class as school, it's like, "Oh, there's too many colors and stuff."

Ricky talks about typefaces typically used on Mexican food labels and packages. We talk about stereotypical design styles and colors we see in the international foods aisle at grocery stores. Ricky reacts quickly:

> Oh, I hate that. I use "Latin Wide" sometimes, and that crazy typeface called "Fiesta." People always think we have to use red and green and yellow, too. Man, that's all been used a bit. I hate to say it, but it works in retail.

Ricky talks about being raised different, seeing different styles and images because of being so close to indigenous products and materials from other countries. He resents people getting "too loud" with what they consider good Hispanic design and advertising. He feels

he is close to the Hispanic market and can communicate for them as well as to them.

> I noticed the market with I went to Miami. Every other store down there is a Mexican grocery, a Cuban bakery, something Hispanic. So, you see the advertising at work right there. Well, you can see it needed here in this city, but you don't see it applied. That's what opened my eyes like this. I said this is my market, this is what I do, so I want to just do advertising for Latin American clients. I mean, don't get me wrong, I'll take whoever I can, but I mean every company is going to have to advertise for this market, and it's different.
>
> Like the Spanish market is so big. The whole country is becoming largely Spanish, you know, Latin-American people. And that's just the ones that they know on record. There's a lot of illegals here too, but they're still buying. They're still spending money. I translate a lot of stuff for the Hispanic market. I couldn't have gotten some of this work if I wasn't Cuban and speak Spanish.

Ricky has been working a full time job with a national chain of copy centers, and he has become the translator for all bilingual assignments for most of the stores in the city. He works well over forty hours per week, and he also maintains three freelance clients that he acquired when he was working in Miami. He is back in school, and he has been trying to finish his final semester for over a year. He has invested most of his earnings in new computer equipment for his home. He says, "That's why I don't have a new car, I

have two brand new computers. But they are making me money, so I'm not complaining. That's my life."

Education for Different Cultures

Ricky feels he knows a great deal about Hispanic culture, but he admits that even with Latin American culture, there are so many subcultures within the larger culture that "it's just crazy to try to do something that pleases everybody." The challenges appeal to him, and he sees ways he can help integrate products, design, advertising, and marketing within and among the communities. He feels that is his position, his "calling." He tells me,

> You know, if you're opened up to one culture, it's so much easier to adapt to another. It's just easier to understand how somebody can be different. How people can have stereotypes or biases. Sometimes it's good to use, sometimes it's not, as far as marketing and designing. And that's hard to teach. You don't have a class in cultural advertising do you? That would be great, I think you should.

He showed me a book of Cuban graphic design, containing everything from cigar labels to political posters.

> You don't learn much about Cuban art in school. Did you know Cuba actually has comic books? Yeah, Communist comic books for kids. They start brainwashing them early. I actually read about that

> in my English class. The Advertising of Communism...I did a paper on that. I think I got a B; I have it somewhere.

Ricky has a good idea, not only for this school but also for design schools everywhere, in any country. "It would be great to see these styles in a cultural advertising or some kind of design for cultures class. It would be good to teach cultures." He feels that he is getting a concentrated and fairly well-rounded education, but wishes more could be included in the curriculum. He does not understand students who don't push themselves to learn more than the courses can deliver. He says, "I guess I'm half of my own school, Mom and Dad are not paying for it, so I guess I appreciate it more. And I work for it."

Preparing to Graduate

Ricky has assembled a set of design projects with which he wants to graduate once before. He has taken risks and done some bold, experimental, and often risqué work that did not earn accolades from his instructors. He is working on an ad series for condoms, similar to a series he has found published in Amsterdam. He says,

> I mean you see this stuff in the post office in the red light district in Amsterdam, and everybody's fine with it. The Dutch have a great culture. It's

> fun. And I did push that envelope. That is my market. But I will soften it up a lot, because Americans are a much more conservative people.

He says the first time he failed portfolio was "the funniest." He thinks he "freaked out" the teacher, but more importantly he has decided he freaked out himself. All of his work was purposely shocking or antagonistic. He says the teacher didn't like anything, but "I was good. I never liked her anyway." He is currently working on a second, revised set of portfolio pieces. He plans to do a "truth.com" campaign about the effects of second hand smoke on children that will contain equally shocking imagery, an "Anti" poster series in which he will publish images and messages that demonstrate his opposition to anything he happens to oppose the day he does the work, and he will resubmit the condom ads. He tells me,

> I've gotten some bad criticism about my work from faculty and students alike. It's about how I feel, though. I am a victim of gang violence myself. Yeah, I got my skull fractured by some gang members with a couple of baseball bats. I was jumped by four gang members when I was 18, and got my skull crackled. Two blood clots that were hemorrhaging in my skull. I was out. Two days after my birthday. That's another thing that bothers me, how fat we are in this country, and how they are starving almost everywhere else.

The non sequiturs between critique of his work, his gang attack, and the world hunger situation seem apparent only

to me. Ricky has a look of defiance and determination on his face. I look at Ricky, and all I can say is, "You certainly are a crusader; you truly are."

As Ricky prepares his work for his second portfolio class he requests a meeting with me. He feels unprepared again. He is nervous, yet determined...resigned to the fact that he might not be graduating once more, but he will succeed the next time. Yet, he seems strangely vulnerable and confused. He begins to show me files on his MAC Titanium, the top of the line Macintosh laptop with a huge seventeen inch screen. The screen is filled with dozens of folder icons, and each icon reveals hundreds of files containing ideas and designs for his projects.

Ricky shows me more than I can absorb, and he cannot tell me which are good ideas and which are not. He seems at a loss to make decisions, to choose which ideas to finish. During the semester he has continued to make more and more plans, to create more and more ideas and partial content, instead of limiting himself to the very best work and simply finishing it. Gone are the plans to become the next Ted Turner in Cuba. His talk now is about going to Portugal with an aunt and working in a gallery, or staying here, working at the copy center, and painting at night. He is

freezing up on his portfolio completion, saying things like, “she wants me to simplify this,” “she wants me to change this,” “she doesn’t like this.” Then, he tells me, “It doesn’t matter. Whatever.” Ricky’s spirit is not here. He’s a dreamer who has awakened to find the groundwork for his dreams is disintegrating. But he is quick to rationalize what has happened and to work the setback into his plans:

> I kinda let it happen, I talked a big deal and forgot all the little details and didn’t finish my portfolio. I didn’t want to throw together crap pieces. I already get a lot of good job offers...I forget where...but I don’t care. Just pay me. I can just paint or something. Or there’s an international company that wants to pay me $60,000 or $70,000 a year. I don’t know. I probably will do a lot better in portfolio now with just one last class. It was just too much pressure.

Assertions about the Ricardo Benitez Story

Ricardo Benitez has an undeniable allegiance to his family and his culture. He is, however, quite an individualist, determined to make something of himself on his own. He began working immediately after high school and started college soon after that. He spent two years living on his own in South Beach to both solidify his ties to the Latin American community and to begin building his career in bilingual marketing communications. He affiliates

himself with all Latin cultures, believing himself capable of crossing the fine lines between those cultures and communicating with the Hispanic community as a whole. Ricky tries to balance his work in Hispanic cultures with his own idea of aesthetics and taste from his education. McEvilley advises that values and preferences of "communities of taste," or cultural groups with identifiable aesthetic practices, are both useful and dangerous, because in binding one group they often exclude others.[137]

Ricky is a student of design and of cultural practice in art. He also studies the relationships between cultures in the United States and prefers not to enculturate, but to celebrate the difference Latinos are maintaining in American society. His idea, and his researched evidence, that Hispanics prefer acculturation to assimilation add a dimension to this collective case study.

Acculturation is seen as the mutual influence of two cultures, or the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group,[138] an arms-length, hand-holding relationship in my view. Assimilation seems to represent a more complete absorption of common people into

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[137] McEvilley, Art & Otherness, 24.

[138] Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (New York: Grammercy Books, 1996), 13.

a larger elite society,[139] or "the merging of cultural traits from previously distinct cultural groups."[140] Assimilation is the stated goal of Selma Balić in Chapter 5. The confluence of these terms along with perhaps a third social relationship goal of Truman Reed will be a center of attention in Chapter 7.

He is also a champion for his cultural community and is concerned with the greater human condition in the world. In conversation he can drift out of his own career focus and challenge the ways Americans treat other world cultures. Ricky aids in a subjective interpretation of habitus,[141] as Selma Balić does.

As a student Ricky challenges the taken-for-granted ideas of the school and its instructors and attempts to restructure ideas of appropriateness and quality in his portfolio work. He demonstrates commitment to graduating, but he seems to lack concern about when that graduation might happen. He is busy with his job and his freelance work. He stays busy in his free time creating new ideas on his laptop computer. However, he lacks the ability to

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[139] deCerteau, The Practice of Everyday Life, xiii.

[140] Ibid., 126.

[141] Ahearn, "Language and Agency," 118.

decide which ideas to finish and to not let his work interfere with graduating.

When frustrated with himself or with his work at the copy shop or at school, Ricky tends toward nonchalance. He has vacillated between saying freelance is too much for him to keep doing and saying the copy shop is too demanding and he ought to quit. When committing to another, perhaps final semester of portfolio class, he says the copy shop will not care about him taking several hours a week off, "I am making them so much money in bilingual clients, I can do whatever I want."

Ricky will graduate and will continue to build his career, because as he says, "That's what I do." I do not believe his moments of nonchalance when he says, "Ah, I don't care, just pay me." He may not become the Ted Turner of Havana, but his commitment to his family and his community will demand that he continue dreaming and crusading.

Success Doesn't Come Easy

Ricardo Benitez is an idealist and a dreamer. He will settle neither for the ordinary nor the predictable, an attribute that unfortunately feeds his indecisiveness. He

is always searching through books on design, art, and culture. He says they "drive him crazy." I ask if the books help him with his design and marketing projects for clients:

> Say you do some type of Cuban fashion layout, and you reach back to some Cuban cigar wrapper, it might work for you, it might not. You might just have to do some Ricky and Lucy thing or something, you never know.
>
> Did I tell you I once dated a girl named Lucy? My nickname is Ricky, so that didn't work. It was too easy.

Chapter 7

COLLECTIVE INTERPRETATION

This collective case study was conceived as a work that would reveal cultural practices that I suspected to exist in a particular post-secondary graphic design school. I began with some questions that framed what I perceived as potential areas of importance: Do students have a voice within the environment to demonstrate or perform their identities? Do students want their identity and voice recognized? Does agency exist for the students of diverse cultures, and is that agency recognized and validated by the school? Do they care about having agency or not?

Interestingly, the questions are good ones, but not surprisingly, the use of the collective "they" is not. In my view, there is not a definable they that would apply to any group of students. While collectively the students might perceive a they in terms of faculty, and the faculty might see a they in terms of students, what I discovered were three unique individuals with disparate origins,

goals, and philosophies upon which they were to build their education. I found difference, even conflict, between the cultural identities brought in by the students and the cultural identities they encountered with the school and its faculty members, but more importantly I was able to construct patterns of useful information and differences in meaning that transcend the individual cases.[142]

While the faculty and the curriculum do appear to be aligned toward the goal of preparing students for a particular marketplace, at least from the students' perspectives, the students themselves are the evident variable in the process of graphic design education. They have particular feelings about exhibiting their own cultures and about ways of absorbing or not absorbing information. The students' varied ways of approaching education affect directly their level of success. Moreover their levels of success reflect the importance and belief structures their backgrounds have placed on building careers.

In Chapter 2 I refer to Terrence Hawke's writing that "every perceiver's method of perceiving can be shown to contain an inherent bias...a wholly objective perception of

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[142] Miles and Huberman, Qualitative Analysis, 172.

individual entities is therefore not possible."[143] This statement applies not only to my observation of the subjects, but also to the subjects' unique perception of the opportunities and methods of learning available to them as students. Each brings a unique set of circumstances to the school, having been raised in vastly different families in culturally different parts of the world. In other words, they each live in different subjective worlds, and they each have acquired different sets of beliefs.

Therein might lie one of the questions that remains unanswered for me in my original quest and for readers who want to find a definitive direction to take in educating culturally different student bodies. A student's performance may or may not reflect their cultural beliefs, and the choices they make regarding performance may or may not be within their control. Aesthetics philosopher John Berger writes, "All our ways of seeing are affected by our knowledge and beliefs...we each have our own way of seeing, perceiving and, ultimately, practicing and performing based on those perceptions."[144] While that sounds like permission and support for basing performance on learned cultural

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[143] Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, 17.

[144] Berger, Ways of Seeing, 11.

beliefs, another philosophy is espoused in a Critical Thinking syllabus at this school:

> We should note that critical thinking will not accept the fact that an individual was raised a certain way as justification for any conviction, belief, or practice which that individual holds, accepts, or engages in. The fact that one was taught to believe something, for example, cannot by itself justify one in accepting that belief.[145]

The backgrounds and ensuing performances of Truman, Selma, and Ricky while students at the Crescent School of Design indicate that, in day to day interaction, the words of John Berger are appropriate. Their performances are formed around culturally based knowledge and the beliefs they each developed prior to becoming students. Blumer writes,

> First, the actor indicates to himself the things toward which he is acting; he has to point out to himself the things that have meaning. Second, by virtue of this process of communicating with himself, interpretation becomes a matter of handled meanings. The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action.[146]

While not necessarily performing and revealing their cultural backgrounds, these students can be seen as

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[145] Robert L. Day, "Critical Thinking Booklet: Some Basic Terms and Principles," October 2005, 3.

[146] Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, 5.

directly affected by and making decisions based upon their lived experiences.

Each of these subjects comes from a background of insecurity and conflict of varying levels and definitions. Within each can be seen how family and cultural situations influence and possibly control their voice and their performance. Truman Reed's background is one of economic limitation, family dependence, and seemingly unrealizable personal dreams. He does not fit in with the maleness of his brothers and cousins, and he does not want the daily sameness and limitation of a life in public housing. He wishes for escape. He discounts and disguises his past, but ultimately he fears he will not be able to leave and make a new life.

Selma Balić faced the horrors of the Bosnian war and had to abandon her past to find a productive and peaceful new life. She remains haunted by the terrors she witnessed, knowing that even today the Mujahideen are active in parts of the world. She can not find value in her past, and she has to begin again in a completely new environment. Hers is a single-minded, uncomplicated goal, and she is willing to accept the confusions and hardships of change.

Ricardo Benitez' passion for his Cuban family and Hispanic heritage binds his belief system tightly to his culture. He is not searching for anything new; he is searching for the method to build upon his culture and achieve independence like his father and his grandfather. He feels a sense of duty and obligation, but he is entrepreneurial and grandiose. He will capitalize on his bilingual marketability and likely will continue to dream about becoming the next Ted Turner in Havana. While he credits his family for putting him on the path he follows, he will not look for ways to work with them or join them in business. He is moving forward continually, often leaving details unattended.

So, what do these three people's backgrounds mean in terms of influencing or controlling their performance in design school? They are each coming from culturally different lifestyles into a somewhat normative and idealized environment, a graphic design career education environment that specifically trains graduates to work in the American visual communications industry. They can be seen as what Goffman calls "marginalized" or "discredited" groups. He writes,

> ...those suffering from a discrediting stigma are forced to limit the access of others to information

> about the stigma or assume the character of a discredited individual. The emphasis on idealized, normative identity and conduct limits the ability of the discredited individual to achieve full acceptance by the population that he or she is forced to assimilate into.[147]

While one might feel uncomfortable accepting Goffman's term "discredited" as generally applicable to people of non-dominant cultures, I believe we can see how Truman, Selma, and Ricky might be referenced in his words above. It is a possibility worth considering.

Selma limits access to her past, considering it a liability. She "hates that" when people feel sorry for her and her wartime childhood experiences. Truman somewhat limits access. No one knows he comes from a public housing environment. But he also assumes the character people might accept as an "outsider." His Rasta dreads served him well in establishing a subculture within the design school's social order, and he feels he can resist the idealized identity and conduct with abandon. If, then, he can demonstrate superior creativity, as is his goal, then he is already established as special and different. Ricky does not limit access; nor does he assume the character of a discredited individual; that is, when he is moving forward

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[147] Erving Goffman, Stigma (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 44.

in the curriculum and with his personal life. Ricky vacillates, though, and can shrug off any faculty concerns about his creative work or his progress toward graduation with a nonchalant, "I dunno. I probably will just keep working and do paintings. I paint a lot of Cuban culture."

Differing ideas in socialization

Selma's goal is to assimilate into the American culture and workforce as rapidly and directly as possible. She and Ricky both use the term "Americanize," but each means something different. Ricky wants to acculturate, and he can show evidence published by Hispanic marketing researchers that acculturation is the socialization process that Latin Americans prefer. Even though he is the third generation descendent of two landed immigrant families, he perceives himself as different enough to need to use the term "Americanized." Unlike Selma and Ricky, Truman wants to retain his difference and perform it, to visibly empower it with his dreads, dress, and attitude. His socialization ideal could be called syncretism, although he does not apply any definition or term to what he strives for, other than staying "to the left."

Citing William Sturtevant, curator of North American ethnology at the Smithsonian Institute, James Clifford helps distinguish acculturation from assimilation.

> The former involves the adoption of cultural traits, the borrowing of customs; it is a matter of degree. The latter refers to a relation between societies, the incorporation of one society into another. A completely assimilated society no longer exists.[148]

Syncretism is more open to and hopeful for cultural difference, a compromised reconciliation of different or opposing principles, beliefs, or philosophies.[149]

The divergent choices these students are making in terms of socialization are echoed in their interactions with students and faculty. Two of Blumer's premises regarding symbolic interactionism directly inform these students' choices and actions:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the the meanings that the things have for them, and

2. The meaning of such things is derived from social interaction.[150]

Getting an education and deciding to attend this particular school in this particular city in America holds

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[148] James Clifford, "Identity in Mashpee," Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 325.

[149] Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, 1928.

[150] Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, 4.

meaning for each of them, albeit different meanings for each, and they act toward their education accordingly. These meanings derive from their cultural, economic, geographic, political, and social interaction, or more simply put, their life experiences. For each of them this educational opportunity represents freedom. They have multiple perspectives on that freedom. As Maxine Greene writes, "What they understand to be freedom depends on their traditions and their life experiences, their hopes, and often their dreams."[151]

Truman is a resister, a dissident, perhaps an outcast in many ways. He is, in another view, a dreamer and a visionary to his friends, his associates. He values his difference and wants to capitalize on it. He is angry at times about how his difference has impacted his life. He does not "dress for success" as he searches for work, he does not "talk the talk" of a serious job prospect, and he cannot understand his lack of success, asking "Why don't they just give me a job, man!? What's the problem? Just give me a job."

Selma is studious, a learner, an absorber, and she is quietly determined in her quest to assimilate. She will

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[151] Greene, The Dialectic of Freedom, 87.

undertake any learning experience, even when there may be a language question or a problem of meaning that throws her off. She may occasionally get frustrated with faculty or peers who don't give her a break or act callously toward some lack in her language skills, but she will immediately tell herself "It doesn't matter," and she will carry on.

Ricky is undeterred in his quest to plan and produce more and more work. He is a busy man. By his own admission, he doesn't slow down enough to finish what he starts. He is determined enough that the faculty members all believe he will one day graduate with a good portfolio. His friends have learned not to count on him being in class or finishing courses with them. Hence, he is a solitary person, pursuing his own goals with little support.

Erving Goffman's discussion of how and why we present ourselves the ways we do adds understanding to these oversimplified statements about the students. He discusses the "front," when an individual presents himself or herself before others, the performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society. He also notes that performers will typically want to appear eminently qualified for the role, appearing through no

special deals.[152] As with nearly all students, Truman, Selma, and Ricky each present a front in the school, and each wants very much to appear to belong there. Inside themselves, though, they have multiple realities and contradictory views. Not specific to these three students and applicable to many people, especially creative people, we find the battle between the grandiose self and the imposter self.

Problems of Self-View

Central to understanding Truman, Selma, and Ricky is a brief discussion of the Imposter Syndrome.[153] People often act in grandiose ways when in a social environment, and then seriously question their own abilities and motives when alone. The Imposter Syndrome is well known in creative endeavor, and I suspect it is well know throughout academia. One sits down to paint, draw, or write with bold intentions. They may be convinced this will be the best work they have ever done. Then their nemesis, the Voice of Judgment,[154] creeps into their minds, and by the time the

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[152] Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 35-46.

[153] Monahan, "I'm Not Creative Enough," 48.

[154] Mark Oldach, Creativity for Graphic Designers (Cincinnati, OH: F&W Publications, 1995), 82-83.

project is done, they may say, “Well, that can’t be any good...because it was only me doing it.” The imposter self has taken over the situation; the grandiose self is gone.

Truman is overtly grandiose, but he has an imposter complex as well. He has not finished his interactive project because he simply can not decide what to do with it. The last we hear he has decided to symbolize himself with an elephant, but that has not been done either. Truman settles into his Mr. Belvedere role with resignation. Interestingly, even this role contains a bit of grandiosity for him. He sees himself as the educated and wise overseer, filled with a worldly perception of how he can help his family. He appears content to accept the role, at least until he can find a job.

Selma is neither grandiose nor does she appear to suffer from the imposter complex, with the possible exception of not believing her European-ness has any aesthetic value. She suspects that supposed attribute to be a misconception on the part of her American friends and colleagues. She downplays any display of specialness or self-importance, believing it is best to assimilate quietly. When she has a creative setback, as she did in the poster contest, she does not see it as her being an

imposter, she accepts it as a learning experience and the outward appearance it creates does not matter.

Ricky has no evident imposter complex, but his grandiosity is overpowering to him. He is indecisive and not a finisher, because he doesn't think he can live up to his own expectations. He will say "I dunno; I don't care." But he cares deeply, and he knows that one day soon he will meet his dreams.

Relationships with School and Faculty

Insights into the experiences of these three students at the Crescent School of Design hinge to an extent upon the school itself, although the school and its faculty are not the subject of the study. This is a graphic design school with skills-based career learning that is aimed at preparing students for the workplace. Commendably, in my view, the curriculum also contains twenty-five percent general education and liberal arts courses which are aimed at building a world view alongside the work view for the graduates.

Michel deCerteau discusses two figures who represent the dichotomy that exists in the curriculum: the Expert who teaches a specialty and the Philosopher who reintroduces

the relevance of general questions. He writes that the Expert's competence is seen as social authority, while the Philosopher's relationship to the whole procedure is often seen as ambiguous.[155] In the case of the students in this study, the reactions to the Philosopher were of course mixed, but mostly positive and supportive.

Truman has no interest whatsoever in an educative world view. He is after computer skills, a striking big idea, and a job. His spirituality is his resource in lieu of liberal arts based learning. That is all he needs. Selma is, of course, a sponge for knowledge who purposely absorbs all she can receive. She brings European literature to classes with her, and she sends American works home to her parents in Bosnia and her sister in Croatia. Selma knows from experience how important a world view can be. Ricky likes to pick and choose his liberal arts experiences. His recommendation to the school that more cultural studies be taught is impressive. He asks for multicultural experiences and courses that include Hispanic advertising. He seems quite aware and critical of the literature available in Cuba, as partially evidenced by his condemnation of Communist comic books for children.

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[155] deCerteau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 7.

While the students are largely positive about the liberal arts faculty, they express some displeasure over their treatment by the design and production skills faculty. Truman finds them too straight and unreasonably controlling. Selma resents their teaching for working in America and leaving those with international goals to fend for themselves. Ricky says the faculty simply cannot do it all for him. He says he is not complaining, he just teaches himself.

In my view of a critiquing and sometimes solipsistic faculty, I can see the group as what Thomas McEvilley calls a "community of taste"[156] and that they attempt to enforce their non-negotiable ideas of quality upon students. McEvilley writes:

> The pleasure of exercising judgment is a pleasure of self-realization, self-recognition, and self-definition. One reflects oneself...putting certain things in a class with oneself, excluding others from it.[157]

In any community of taste we must be careful who is in charge of our definitions and standards. He advises us that our own tastes are both localized and temporary, and he

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[156] McEvilley, Art & Otherness, 23.

[157] Ibid., 24.

says we must remember to "relativize our value judgments."[158]

The Key Issues to Consider

In studies of this nature in most post-secondary schools, whatever the curricula, the researcher likely will find that most students make value choices in similar ways to Truman, Selma, and Ricky. All students have to make decisions whether to perform and how to perform their personal identities and whether to give themselves voice. Many students make choices whether they will act as rising professionals or not, to be rebellious or not, and if the time has come to abandon their dreams. Varied preferences for skills-based or liberal arts education exist at most schools.

Three identifiable areas aid interpretation of the three cases in this collective study, with one seeming most dynamic. Very significant to the comparison of these three individuals' approaches is the difference in their socialization goals. Assimilation into American society and the workforce represents Selma's desire to leave the terrors of Bosnia behind and not let her friends and

[158] Ibid., 23.

coworkers see any remnant effect of her past in her day to day life. Acculturation in the same American society is apparently the Latino way, maintaining identity and voice while joining hands with fellow students and future coworkers for mutual success. Then, we find those who wish to maintain different or opposing practices, reconciling and compromising in a laissez-faire-styled coexistence.

Also, the problem of naming is important in making these cases useful to the reader. Maxine Greene writes that we must know the cultural codes we are dealing with before we can name them. We must not name our work or ourselves according to affiliation with an "ism," or out of compliance with a cultural expectation, or through simple inertia. We cannot name out of fear of rejection or in a burst of rebellion. We must maintain the freedom to create, to produce and reproduce, to perform our cultural markers.[159]

I believe Selma is succeeding and will continue to succeed. Her success is fueled by her determination to name herself an American designer, and to unnamed herself as Bosnian or Croatian immigrant. However, we know she gets lonely and feels a great deal of pressure to learn and

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[159] Greene, The Dialectic of Freedom, 55.

assimilate as quickly as possible. She has a strong support group that is made up of other international students. Selma finds that most American students do not share her sense of what is important and significant in life.

Ricky names himself Latino, and makes certain that his fellow students and his instructors are aware of who he claims to be. His naming is, of course, complying with his own cultural expectation, which is a personal choice. Greene's advice seems more toward the instructors, that the naming of Ricky should be based on more personal attention and information, and less on perceptions of cultural codes and cultural expectations.

It is easy to mistakenly name Truman. His Rastafarianism is his banner by which he wants to be measured. His "to the left" ways of acting, talking, and creating are ways he names himself. Although apparently rebellious, he does fear and loathe rejection, so in effect he is giving others a foundation for naming him in ways he doesn't want to be named.

It is important that we attempt to learn about students before making decisions about their performance. The identity and voice exhibited by these three students creates the ways in which they are viewed and treated by

their peers, the faculty, and the administrators of the school. With different attention paid to them before they are named, Selma might seek out an international firm to begin her career, Ricky might finish a semester with a final portfolio, and Truman might start the design company of his dreams.

Experience and Cultural Capital as Agency

I submit that the third and most dynamic area of interpretation for this collective study is the concept of agency. In discussing the interaction of language and culture, Laura Ahearn writes, "neither should be studied in isolation from one another, especially when a researcher seeks to understand a concept as complex as agency."[160]

As I discuss in Chapter 1, Ahearn says the interaction of language and culture is critical in discussions of agency.[161] Agency can be seen in part as the interaction and effect of one's language and culture with one's production. Holmes writes that culture is experience,[162] and Dewey asks,

[160] Ahearn, "Language and Agency," 131.

[161] Ibid., 112.

[162] Holmes, The Common Law, 1.

"How then can objects of experience avoid being expressive?"[163] Dewey also writes:

> All conscious experience has of necessity some degree of imaginative quality...experience becomes conscious, a matter of perception, only when meanings enter it that are derived from prior experiences.[164]

I ask a question in the beginning of this study, "Are cultural experiences and meanings given agency?" I have to ask myself whether experiences can have agency at all. "Can experiences create and nourish agency?" might be another way of asking the same question. I believe the answer is yes, and I believe Ahearn, Holmes, and Dewey would agree.

In these case studies, I find that Ricky is absolutely certain of his cultural capital, or the agency of his cultural experience. His language and his culture have cachet and value to him in his creativity and his career plans. Selma is doubtful about the usefulness of her experience, but she is increasingly surprised to find that among her peers and with her employer her association with European and Bauhaus design aesthetics does enjoy some level of agency. Truman claims to have agency, attempts to signify it, but he finds conflict at home and cannot pursue

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[163] Dewey, Art as Experience, 104.

[164] Ibid., 272.

his dreams. In a way he sheared off his sense of agency along with his dreads. He has found, as we know, that his role of Mr. Belvedere has agency with his family.

So, I believe experiences do have agency, and agency is a signifier for us in looking into student success. It is the student's decision how much agency to grant lived experiences. It is the student's decision how to utilize his or her agency in performance and interaction. It is up to educators to look into the questions surrounding what identity, voice, and agency mean to and for the students. It is up to educators to determine and utilize the benefits of those concepts for the educative environment and for the collective consciousness of the workplace.

EPILOGUE

As I walk the halls I pass by the portfolio preparation class in which the students who are to graduate in four weeks are putting final touches on their projects. Selma and Ricky are both there, and they tell me they have ordered their caps and gowns. They will be graduating. Selma has a full time job already lined up with her internship sponsor, and Ricky is getting a promotion at the copy shop. He will continue to freelance and again has his eye on working in Havana one day. I wonder about Truman, but he has dropped out of contact with any of us with the school.

When I am back in my office, a group of students arrives at my door. They have questions about how to prepare for next semester's portfolio class. The circle completes itself, and the journey begins once more.

* * *

The fruitful application of my interpretations in other educational studies and environments is my goal. This

study does indicate a benefit from increased attention to students' cultural practice and performance opportunities. It is important to remind the reader that this is one person's encounter with a complex issue and complex cases. There are certainly implications for further research.

I have revealed some significant implications for my own academic policy and practice. The professional communications industry might welcome a broader scope of cultural performance in the work of graduating designers. The graduates themselves might benefit from cultural empowerment and feel less molded, more created by their college experiences. The institutes of design education might develop a better sense of themselves as an academic community.

In the Deweyan tradition, I will continue to pursue experience and knowledge with an awareness that the best I can hope for is that I will be 'about to have known.'

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APPENDIX

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Mail: P.O. Box 3999
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999

In Person: Alumni Hall
30 Courtland St, Suite 217

Phone: 404/463-0674
Fax: 404/654-5838

October 21, 2005

Principal Investigator: Deron Robert Boyles

Student PI: Larry Stultz

Protocol Department: Educational Policy Studies

Protocol Title: Cultural identity, voice, and agency in post-secondary graphic design education: Three case studies

Submission Type: Protocol H06069

Review Type: Expedited Review

Approval Date: October 21, 2005

Expiration Date: October 20, 2006

The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the above referenced study and enclosed Informed Consent Document(s) in accordance with the Department of Health and Human Services. The approval period is listed above.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. When the study is completed, a Study Closure Report must be submitted to the IRB.

2. For any research that is conducted beyond the one-year approval period, you must submit a Renewal Application 30 days prior to the approval period expiration. As a courtesy, an email reminder is sent to the Principal Investigator approximately two months prior to the expiration of the study. However, failure to receive an email reminder does not negate your responsibility to submit a Renewal Application. In addition, failure to return the Renewal Application by its due date must result in an automatic termination of this study. Reinstatement can only be granted following resubmission of the study to the IRB.

3. Any adverse event or problem occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB using the Adverse Event Form.

4. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is obtained and that no human subject will be involved in the research prior to obtaining informed consent. Ensure that each person signing the written informed consent form (ICF) is given a copy of the ICF. The ICF used must be the one reviewed and approved by the IRB; the approval dates of the IRB review are stamped on each page of the ICF. Copy and use the stamped ICF for the coming year. Maintain a single copy of the approved ICF in your files for this study.

All of the above referenced forms are available online at https://irbwise.gsu.edu. Please do not hesitate to contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity (404-463-0674) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Ann C. Kruger, IRB Chair

Federal Wide Assurance Number: 00000129

Consent Form Approved by Georgia State University IRB
October 21, 2005 - October 20, 2006

Georgia State University

Department of Educational Policy Studies

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title: Cultural Identity, Voice, and Agency in Post-secondary Graphic Design Education: A Collective Case Study

Principal Investigator: Deron Robert Boyles

Student Investigator: Larry Stultz

I. Introduction and Purpose:

You are being asked to participate voluntarily in a research study in which I will attempt to identify and describe cultural performance opportunities for students enrolled in the graphic design BFA program at the Crescent School of Design. We will be discussing your experiences with creative expression and preparation for entry into the workplace, and we will discuss the ways in which treatment of your cultural identity might be a factor linked to your success as a student and potential graduate. You are being asked to volunteer because you bring a distinct cultural background to the graphic design department, and you will likely have specific insights that will aid in my research. Your participation in this research study will take place during the fall term 2005, from October 21 through December 16, 2005.

II. Procedures:

You will be asked to participate in three 45-minute to one-hour private semi-structured interviews in a conference room, during which you will be interviewed regarding your experiences as a student at the Crescent School of Design. These interviews will be tape recorded for transcription purposes only. No video recordings will be made, and no audio will be kept for research purposes. One observation

of your participation in a classroom presentation and critique prior to the last interview will be scheduled, and you may be asked to show your portfolio of design projects and copies of written assignments in both design and general education courses. We will discuss what you remember of instructor comments and reactions in critique or notes written on returned work.

III. Risks:

I know of no likely risks or discomforts to you. You have been chosen in part because you are not now and will not in the future be a member of a class over which I preside or have influence on the grading or success. Therefore you are not vulnerable to coercion or undue influence by me in my position as chair of the department.

IV. Benefits:

There will be no financial, academic, or any other personal benefit to you as participant in this research study. The benefit will be to the academy of design instruction in our effort to improve and ensure student success for all students of all cultures.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip the interviews and other data gathering phases or discontinue participation at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits or status as a student at The Art Institute of Atlanta to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

The data collected will remain in my personal possession in a secure locked office environment for the duration of the dissertation research and writing phase, and for an indefinite time into the future pending potential publication of the study. All information, records, and collected samples will remain private to the extent allowed by law. No details of the data gathering will be made available to any administrative officer, faculty member, or

other student at the Crescent School of Design. You will be assigned an alias at the initiation of the study, and the alias will be used for all field notes, narrative analysis, and any potential publication of the case study.

VII. Contact Persons:

Call Deron Boyles, the principle investigator, at 404-651-1192 or Larry Stultz, the student investigator, at 770-689-4821 if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-651-0674 or svogtner1@gsu.edu. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep. If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

Subject: _____

Date: _____

Principle Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Student Investigator: _____

Date: _____