

**PORTRAIT OF A CULTURE WORKER:
IDENTITY, AGENCY, AND THE EDUCATIONAL GENESIS
OF THE GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

by

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ABSTRACT

This socially grounded study examines the tension-filled discourses and social pressures that influence young graphic designers in the construction of their occupational identities. The discursive practices of recent graduates from a graphic design college are examined, in order to uncover the negotiations and compromises that sustain their occupational identities. Identity is formulated as multifaceted and negotiated in dialogue and social practice. In seeking to develop agency, this study concludes that education for creative workers may take a cue from their own discourses of creativity. By integrating self-reflexivity into the educational curriculum, they may begin to dialogise the educational process itself, thereby rescuing creative agency from the structural constraints of fetishized discourse.

Keywords: graphic designer; culture industries; culture workers; ideology; figured worlds; dialogical self; flexible labour; creativity; education; agency; occupational identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Creative workers occupy a central node in the culture industries, and are a useful site of study, as they both directly influence and are influenced by the cultural trends that generate social realities. Given that they consciously engage with these trends, they can also be expected to have a sharpened (and perhaps critical) awareness of social meanings embedded in cultural products, even as they undergo strong socializing influences in their education in order to perform their normative tasks. Normative meanings and expectations meet critical and subversive points of view in the multifaceted occupational identities of these cultural producers.

Because culture workers are specifically trained to explore and deploy social dialogues in their creative work, they can be expected to have developed an awareness of the intersecting social meanings that underlie their creative endeavours. At the same time, the commodity-system and labour practices provide strong motivations for them to develop essentialist notions of their own occupational identities, and for the fetishization of their work. Examining how new graduates from a graphic design school navigate these social pressures and discourses provides us with a view into the subject-positions whose tensions are resolved into social identity. In investigating the stories that new media designers tell about themselves, we discover the traces of these ideological-linguistic formations, and the power struggles between them.

By studying the situated knowledge developed in their educational experience, I trace the ideologies and self-management techniques that young people develop as they undergo an identity-shift into a “creative economy” worker, delineating some of the ways in which authentic agency is curtailed and channelled into the media system. In examining discourses of creativity, labour and education, this study exposes various subject-positions that are adopted, rejected, and negotiated by students of graphic design, developing a multifaceted portrait of the graphic designer. Although comprised of an examination of graphic designers in particular, it is hoped that some of the observations and insights obtained through this study will be applicable to creative workers in general. This study concludes with some educational approaches that may free agency from structural constraints, with the goal of contributing to an enhanced pedagogy for the critical education of culture workers.

Cultural pressures

Students of graphic design must negotiate cultural tensions in revealing ways. On the one hand, they undergo an ideological process of socialization as they learn the discourses, design histories and industry-standard processes as they are channelled through the institution. These students internalize the methods and tools that govern the workflows and design processes of their professional field, and the histories, stories and interpretations that are understood to be correct within the ideological order. More often than not, cultural and technological rationalizations overlap, as the heuristics of the structured

workflow and social expectations combine to control the student designer and his expressions.

Yet at the same time the students are expected to be 'original thinkers', to be 'creative', to 'think outside of the box', to test boundaries and develop new cultural expressions. To do this they are trained in creative techniques that involve social research and the creative use of symbols. Yet this cultural work is quickly appropriated by the commodity-system, severely limiting their symbolization options, and testing their commitment to this system. As they practice techniques that challenge the cultural clichés of design, they simultaneously learn to follow a normative ideological order – to commodify their own creativity, in order to get a job in the cultural industries or peripheries. These tensions at the heart of their education, the institutional pressures and the ways in which students express and develop agency as they transition from being 'a creative person' to being 'a graphic designer', is the central focus of this inquiry.

The subjects in this study develop through their educational experience a deep practical awareness of the power of visual communications, along with a socially rooted approach to solving design problems. Their education presumably also helps them to develop social and historical awareness of the culture of which they are a part, making them perhaps more critical of the messages that they receive and more careful about the messages that they themselves convey in their cultural productions. But this presumption may only be valid up to a certain point, or in certain contexts. Students may express a desire to be socially rooted and critical thinkers for the purposes of creative problem solving in design,

but wider social critique may be discarded when they are confronted with the financial pressures of an unstable working life. Even more, they may be perfectly willing to claim the markers of an occupational and social identity, even though they 'know better', in exchange for professional recognition, social status or ontological stability, all the while claiming 'freedom' of expression and personal agency. How subjects navigate these competing pressures reveals the social contradictions and negotiations between diverse social discourses, and provides a basis on which we may evaluate notions of occupational identity and claims of agency in the development of cultural productions.

Identity, creativity, labour, and education

There are two competing views of creativity that contribute to the development of the identity of the graphic designer, which lie at the heart of this study. On the one hand, romantic discourses of creativity emphasize individuality – the genius applying his creative powers to generate new cultural and social artefacts. This notion of the individual genius underlies copyright and ownership law, insofar as the copyrighted work 'belongs' to the individual or firm; it also contributes to the foundation for a notion of self-fulfilment that becomes a substitute for authentic agency.

By contrast, the practical methods of creative work do not rely on essentialist notions of individuality and the mysterious powers of Romantic creativity. To excel in creative practice, creativity can be defined in terms of social or cultural processes that are expressed through individual actors. The fields of meaning pre-exist the individual, but they rely on the individual within the

social to give them voice, and to develop them. Creativity in this view is historically rooted, and relies on other people in a socio-linguistic exchange; it results from complex social and psychological processes that integrate the other into the very core of the self through language. Such creative practices support the rich intertextual interplay of discourses out of which new cultural meanings are generated, in conjunction with agentic decision-making. However, it also inherently challenges normative structures and expectations. Therefore, it must be kept within certain boundaries so as not upset the apple cart of commodity-fetish and copyright.

In the culture industries, these twin discourses of creativity overlap and intermingle. These discourses sustain the fragile egos of young designers, they support the commodity-system, they challenge the normative expectations of design, they express social realities in design work, they confront and alter the social order, they commodify creative expressions, and more. It is important, therefore, to examine the contradictions and negotiations made by students about creativity, as they are influenced by various institutional and social pressures.

While the subjects in this study express very clearly that creativity is rooted in social life and discourse, and the methods of their creativity are very consciously those of improvisation within and between cultural worlds, any challenges to the industry within which their creativity expresses itself are sidelined. Digging deeper, this study examines the social discourses of labour and education that conspire to deflect attention from critical analysis, in order to

determine how educational pedagogy might enhance agency in these multifaceted contexts.

The cultural discourses that surround post-Fordist labour practices, in particular those that surround the notion of the “creative economy” are also not typically free of essentialist prejudices, as the reified notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘self-expression’ in the workplace act as important tools of psychological management and control over labour. In examining these practices, we find negotiated identity constructions that rely on various challenges to normative discursive frames, yet these challenges are quickly integrated into new frameworks for control.

Related discourses of education both support and challenge these control structures. On the one hand, one of the central goals of education is to train students for the workforce. Therefore, it may seem as if the students are merely learning how to use tools for deployment into industry. However, liberal education also maintains the tradition of educating the ‘whole person’ and students often presume that education is a good thing ‘in itself’, to make one a better, more rounded and knowledgeable person, outside of the strict confines of industrial training. Of course, these two missions of education frequently come into conflict, in particular when creativity and practical skills for employment in the creative industries are taught. Educational institutions are a contentious site of struggle between control society and emancipatory politics, and the ideologies and structures that underlie occupational identities are at the centre of that struggle.

In formulating the notion of an occupational identity, this study first looks at the notion of identity itself. The first section of this study develops a notion of identity that is embedded in culture and constituted and maintained in discourse. Identity is not essentialized but is discursively constructed and maintained, and is a mediating construct between the individual and society. As such, identity itself is subject to the tensions and contradictions of cultural discourses that the individual weaves into a more or less coherent sense of self. This multi-faceted view of identity is nevertheless not relativistic or purely protean, but juggles competing discourses to develop an individualized sense of ontological security. Rooted in language and dialogic exchange, identity is multiple and negotiated, provisional and even contradictory at times, but nevertheless stable.

In examining the interacting social discourses that shape the identities of graphic designers, this study found that although challenged by conflicting pressures, the subjects display an ongoing struggle to enact social closure around their occupational identities. Although they frequently denigrate many of the rhetorical expectations of their occupation, they express pride in their technical mastery, and comfort with industry jargon and social expectations. Interestingly, the cognitive and aesthetic aspects of their *métier* frequently act in tandem while they are designing, but in practical life this interaction breaks down into a mutual distrust and cynical negotiations between aesthetic and cognitive discourses. Professional discourse appears to some of the study subjects as a kind of lie that they must embrace in order to attain occupational stability and the

social status of a graphic designer, while aesthetic markers of visual success take a more personal and meaningful place in their identity construction.

This study concludes that graphic designers are trained to balance visual and cognitive expressions when developing designs, but do not reflexively apply these balanced problem-solving techniques to their own lives or to the greater social situation. Instead, misled as they are by the conflicting discourses that surround creativity and pressured by labour realities, they weave narratives based on the heuristic efficacy in subject positioning, rather than reflexively exploring and critically managing structural contradictions. The resulting subject positions that they adopt rely on reified notions such as ‘flexibility’, cynicism, or total immersion into commodity-culture.

Freedman (2003) argues that both art and art education are forms of mediation between people, in which a range of professional discursive practices play important roles (3). Just as the painting mediates between the object painted and the viewer, so curriculum mediates between the author of the text, the instructor, and the students in the act of local appropriation. As mediator, curriculum is an important site of cultural intervention. Education ought to expand cognitive and aesthetic reflexivity beyond the mere analysis of designs, and into the social contexts of production, viewing and use. This would result in new integrations of aesthetic and cognitive discourses, allowing for new negotiations, where subjects would be more likely to express purpose and agency in their roles as cultural producers. In this way, students may then be able to better focus on “creating meanings, as well as products” (113).

METHODOLOGY

In order to determine the subject-positions and the negotiations that enable and constrain agentic self-determination of the young graphic designer, this study examines the discourses surrounding creativity, labour and education. Accordingly, discourse analysis is the primary mode of interpretation employed in this study, in conjunction with a socially grounded mode of inquiry inspired by ethnographic approaches.

Institutional context

The Art Institute of Vancouver (AIV) is a member of a group of schools wholly owned and controlled by the Education Management Corporation (EDMC). EDMC owns and controls approximately 100 schools across the United States, including The Art Institutes, Argosy University, Brown Mackie College, and South University, mostly specializing in career training. While many of these schools offer Bachelor and Master's degrees in their various fields, the major focus across these is on career training rather than academics. They are privately owned, for-profit institutions, with a quantitative marketing focus on the number of employed graduates and their starting salaries as the main markers of excellence.

The predominant administrative discourse has a decidedly sales and customer-service orientation. Educationally, the predominant discourse is on tool

mastery and industry-skills, rather than cultural, philosophical or critical approaches to art and design, as is further explored in the education section of this study. Over an eighteen-month program of full-time study, students are trained in the tools and discourses that make up an industry, and are the building blocks of occupational identity.

Demographics

The vast majority (90%-95%) of the students in the graphic design program are between the ages of twenty to twenty-five. The average ratio of male to females is approximately 60% female to 40% male, but because the average cohort is in the range of 20-30 students, there is some variation from term to term. Most students self-identify as 'middle-class', although most (90%) obtain student loans in order to attend. Visible minorities are present in small numbers (15% of the total student body), mostly Asian with a small number of East Indian or Spanish-speaking students, and only very occasionally (less than 2%) other ethnicities.

Investigator's role

I have taught at The Art institute of Vancouver for the past five years, and have had previous interaction with the students as an instructor. As such, I have developed some understanding of the student body and the individuals of which it is comprised. Subjects were not entirely randomly selected for interviews, but selected on the basis of their ability to articulate a range of opinions and worldviews. Both high and low academic achievers were targeted for interviews,

along with a range of lifestyles (those who live with their parents, are from out of town, have studied abroad, and so on).

Sampling

Subjects were not asked more than once to take part, and in many cases did not respond to interview requests. The study was conducted by targeting specific students and then snowball sampling. Saturation of data was reached, and the narratives began to take on familiar stories, after about ten interviews, although twelve subjects were interviewed in total. These subjects were fairly representative of the average group makeup, in that there were two Asians and one Spanish speaker interviewed, while all the others were Caucasian. The overall male/female ratio of the interview group was seven females and five males.

All interviewees were recent graduates of the Graphic Design program at the Art Institute of Vancouver. Students were interviewed within a range of 2-5 weeks after their completion of their program of study. The decision to interview only recent graduates was made for several reasons. First, since I currently teach at The Art institute of Vancouver, I reasoned that current students might feel constrained by the social roles of teacher and student in an interview situation, along with the weight of the institutional context, and perhaps be less willing to reveal their personal views. Once students had graduated they might feel freer to express any critical views that they may have had. Second, examining only students who have graduated removes any possible misunderstandings of grading bias, or other improprieties on the part of the

teacher/investigator. Third, recent graduates were selected because they are finished the school and so have had some time to reflect on their experience, and develop some opinions outside of the institution, yet they are still close enough to the institution to recall their feelings and thoughts, and express the discourses which guided them through their study from a situated perspective rather than from a remembered one.

Interview process

All interviews took place off-campus in neutral locations around Vancouver, such as coffee shops. In most cases, the subjects selected the specific locations and times. In each case the discussion began with some general discussion about current circumstances (what-have-you-been-up-to type of conversation), prior to any recording. The informal setting and personal nature of the conversation then led to a more targeted discussion, which was recorded, and later transcribed. Follow-up email correspondence was also employed in about 50% of the interviews, where required for clarification or further discussion. In most cases study subjects were eager to follow-up after having devoted some time to reflection.

Ethical considerations

Subjects have been assured that their identities are obscured, confidentiality maintained, and that their responses will not in any way affect their standing in the school. Although there may have been a desire among some subjects to 'leave a good impression', this is not likely to be any different than the

problems faced by other researchers in a position of social authority. Note that there is no conflict inherent in these interviews because, although I have taught these students in the past, I will not be doing so again. Moreover, my previous relationships with the subjects is likely to make them more relaxed and thus more likely to express themselves more fully. All conversations were purely voluntary, as detailed in the informed consent forms signed by each interviewee.

Subjects were interviewed in pairs wherever possible, so as to stimulate discussion and dissent, and also to minimize the appearance of any possible improprieties. All recordings are stored on a portable mp3 player purchased for the sole purpose of this research for a period of two years, after which the device and all recordings will be destroyed. These recordings are stored in a locked in the home of the investigator, for the duration of this period.

Discourse analysis

Because we are not studying individuals *per se*, but rather individuals as producers of and products of social texts, discourse analysis is a central component of the study. For Fairclough (2003), texts are seen as social events. Social practices and social structures shape texts, along with actors who are socially constrained but not totally determined. “Although the discourse element of a social practice is not the same as for example its social relations, each in a sense contains or internalizes the other – social relations *are* partly discursal in nature, discourse *is* partly social relations” (25). Bakhtin (1996), usefully distinguishes between the natural and the human sciences in this regard, asserting that the natural sciences are directed towards mastery over reified

objects which do not take part in discourse, whereas in the human sciences we are forced to talk about and with discourse. This follows Clifford Geertz' (1973) semiotic concept of culture, who states that "believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (5). "The object of the human sciences is therefore not just man, but man as a producer of texts" (Todorov, 1984, 17). In the sense that text is in between the social and the individual, it both structures and enables identity-formation in conjunction with social life. Discourse analysis thus illuminates both identity and social formation. The conclusions of this study about the development of identity and agency are therefore not expected to be universal, but valuable in the sense that they express situated configurations of identity-formation and social structures.

Grounded inquiry

Although not an ethnography, this study follows Burawoy (2009) in attending to lived experience through language and the visual arts. In explicating his ethnographic method, Burawoy notes that reflexive science requires an awareness of intersubjectivity that dovetails with semiotic and dialogic notions of culture (68). Burawoy's method merges ethnography and intersubjectivity, with an emphasis on situated knowledge that can inform a line of reasoning, using the historically rooted and specific present to refine and develop theory. Evans (2006) employs Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, or 'being-in-the-world' to draw out

the idea that in case studies one does not rely on a dualism between the self and the world – in fact these define one another from the very beginning (54). Such situational analysis aims to “produce a scientific picture of social life but to do so by showing social life as it is lived” (59). Through such grounded inquiry, we can “extend a critical theory and political practice of the contemporary multitude of knowledge workers” (Brophy and dePeuter, 188).

This approach corresponds nicely to the comments of Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) on immaterial labour, and the requirement that the “immaterial products” of culture workers must be tied to the flesh of living labour in order to see the exploitative aspects in the creation of capitalist value. By making this a grounded inquiry, we obtain a clearer sense of where discourses become reified and disconnected from social life, and serve the interests of domination.

Figured worlds

Holland, *et. al.* (1998) make some practical headway in formulating this socially rooted “dialogical” construction of identity for research purposes. Their dialogic analytical frame merges identity with debates about agency and the role of actors in re-authoring social scripts. In this vein, they have produced some studies that are an important methodological guide for Bakhtinian analysis of historically situated identity, which are invaluable for the purposes of this study.

For Holland, people develop their identities within figured worlds – historical processes and traditions of apprehension, social encounters in which participant’s positions matter – which give the human voice and tone to the

landscape (41). By figured worlds, Holland means “cultural realms peopled by characters from collective imaginings: academia, the factory, crime, romance, environmental activism, ... A figured world is peopled by the figures, characters, and types who carry out its tasks and who also have styles of interacting within, distinguishable perspectives on, and orientations to it” (51). This construct provides a means to conceptualise historical subjectivities, consciousnesses and agency (42).

The figured world brings together accounts of humans as both and simultaneously social producers and social products; both identity and culture are co-developed in its webs of meaning. Words, images, artefacts and behaviours are interpreted within these contexts of signification. An analysis of identity in this view therefore relies on cultural production and heuristic development (46). While subject positions are important component of identity, it is the development of common-sense cultural discourses and processes that are analysed in this approach, to get to the heart of identity-construction.

Of course, these heuristics and figured worlds function within larger institutionalised structures and convey power. A figured world is “a social reality that lives within dispositions mediated by relations of power. ... Identities form in these figured worlds through the day-to-day activities undertaken in their name” (60). Therefore, in examining these webs of meaning and the construction of social life and identity in discourse, one runs up against questions of power and agency.

Agency

For Holland, human agency arises through the art of improvisation within a social field of figured worlds. “Improvisational responses to social and cultural openings and impositions elaborate identities on intimate terrain, even as these identities are worked and reworked on the social landscape” (270). Although there can be no independent or autonomous creative author, space remains for personal authorship that has an effect upon the social field as a whole, one’s place in it, and one’s identity (both inner and outer – indeed these are overlapping). For Holland, improvisation is an important means of agency that “even the most powerful and hegemonic of social regimes cannot preclude” (277). The study that follows unveils some improvisations as they support the development of cultural heuristics and subject positions that constitute more or less cohesive identity constructions.

Situational insights and the problem of typicality

Theoretical analysis developed from situated studies are often criticised on the basis of the typicality of the case material; lacking statistical data and inference, to what extent can the case study be considered “typical” of others in the same or similar situations? Mitchell (2006) answers that such material can be used in an analysis of the social situation. A social situation “is a collocation of events which the analyst is able to construe as connected with one another and which take place in a relatively restricted time span” (Mitchell, 28). Although the specific case may or may not be typical, the case study allows the researcher to unravel the social situation, thus drawing out the forces and powers that govern

that social situation. Therefore “the validity of the extrapolation depends not on the typicality or representativeness but upon the cogency of the theoretical reasoning” (Mitchell, 39). Such studies may therefore be used analytically, functioning as a jumping-off point into the greater social analysis, allowing the researcher to develop theory around the totality of the social situation.

This study attempts to identify discursive and cultural configurations in the identity-formation of the subjects. Following Eckstein (1975), this is a “disciplined configurative-ideographic study” that looks at descriptive material, reflecting particular circumstances, and attempts to interpret patterns in terms of general theoretical frameworks or postulates (121). The primary interpretive framework employed in this study is the construction of both culture and identity through discourse, and the structural tensions between figured worlds that allow for negotiations between structure and agency in the development of occupational identities and their corresponding social realities.

IDENTITY IN DIVERSITY

Examining how new graduates from a graphic design school navigate social pressures and discourses provides us with a view into the contradictory subject-positions whose tensions are resolved into their occupational identities. In examining the stories that new media designers tell about themselves, we discover the traces of these ideological-linguistic formations, and the power struggles between them.

Modern common-sense notions of identity assume that who we are is formed in childhood and remains relatively stable over time. These assumptions, which rely on modern psychological paradigms, open the door to the exploitation of the individual on the basis of the reified notion of individuality. Further, such conceptions of identity are limited for critical studies because they downplay the contradictions and tensions in the ever-evolving social languages that surround and shape the subject over a lifetime of discursive exchange. Additionally, such relatively fixed views of identity do not adequately account for the interrelations of agency and structure, and the conceptual and often contradictory subject-positions that are deployed in the narrative processes of identity-construction.

By contrast, this study rests on a construct of identity that continually mediates between the individual and society through discourse. Rooted in the social, identity is discursively constructed, and therefore evolves in conjunction with the socio-ideological circumstances and discourses in which it is expressed.

In formulating identity as discursive, we avoid reified notions of identity that 'common-sense' dictates, and open up space for a critique of power in the formulation of who we are.

For Bakhtin (1984, 1990), the novelistic form reflects the multiple discourses of modernity, in which everyday ideological contradictions are revealed in dialogue with one another, and where these contradictions are not resolved but stand together in a multiplicity of voices. Individuals internalize and contribute to this multiplicity of voices, in order to navigate the social world and maintain ontological and social stability. Holland (1998) formulates Bakhtinian social languages as figured worlds: socio-linguistic environments that are internally consistent yet are continually shaped by their interaction with other figured worlds. Identity develops in and through these social settings, through the mediation of discourse, even as the discursive worlds themselves are subtly altered and sustained.

For Holland, individual identities are socially situated between the self and the other, and are formulated in a process of contextual narrativisation. Like the language that mediates the discursive construction of identity, identity itself is constructed in the discursive forces that constitute social reality. In this way, the social reality is in the subject, and vice-versa. However, the subject does not get reduced to the elements of semiotic theory, but remains embodied, even as the individual is shaped by the social dialogues. In this way, identity is a mediating structure between self and society, and reality is co-constructed in discursive

exchange. The process of narrativisation is one of selective assimilation, where agency and structure intersect, either to sustain power or to challenge it.

Because identity results from the ongoing interplay of social discourses, both internally and externally, Hermans (2003, 2004) develops a theory of the dialogical self that is a useful formulation for discerning the various strategies that are deployed by individuals in managing these competing discourses. Hermans' approach provides a formulation where discursive negotiations and contradictions are developed into a multi-polar view of self, and where combinations of cultural discourses are appropriated in order to come to provisional yet stable multifaceted resting places. Identity in this view is complex, multifaceted, even contradictory at times, but not necessarily fragmented or psychologically unsustainable.

Herman's Bakhtinian approach is especially useful in examining the interacting narratives that Art Institute of Vancouver (AIV) graduates deploy to develop and sustain identity. As a group they express an emphasis on technical mastery and elite knowledge that generates social closure around their occupational identity. At the same time, there is a strong tension between aesthetic and cognitive judgments, which result in negotiations between the validity of these ways of knowing. Technical knowledge and professional discourses are starkly painted next to non-technical aesthetic discourses, resulting in conflicts and negotiations between these ways of knowing, and in the construction of the identity. Subject-positions adopted by AIV graduates typically narrow the range of 'valid' discourse to those supported by the normative

expectations of the figured worlds in which they produce and sustain these identities. Negotiations between subject positions are settled by the efficacy of the discursive positioning in maintaining identity. More specifically, aesthetic and cognitive modes of experience are reflected in discourses of “the artist” versus “the professional”, and come together only by merging the creative with the commercial in the commodity-form.

Reification and identity

Giddens (1991) argues that in pre-modern society, ontological trust and individual identities are formed in a familiar context, characterized by interaction with kin, peers and other familiar people, thus grounding identity in historical and social relationships. By contrast, modern society is a society of strangers, where most of the people who you encounter on a daily basis are unknown to you. The bonds of kinship and neighbourliness are weak, and there is great freedom from the constraints of place and traditional structures of identity-formation. In order to provide some measure of stability in this context, Giddens argues that abstract trust in tokens and systems has largely replaced the intimate trust of close social relations for identity-formation. Since the individual can no longer point to a set of self-evident social relations for ontological stability, trust is placed in a framework of systemic expectations that derive from the rationalized system. Identity is derived from occupation, bank account balance, birth certificate, and so on. In this manner, not only are we individuated and thus cut off from others, but the social aspects that provide the structural components to who we are ourselves

reified abstractions. Modernity has replaced social and personal trust with trust in the reified abstraction as the primary basis for ontological security.

One important stabilizing force for identity in the modern context is therefore the social closure around occupational identity. Yet many studies of occupational identity neglect the social aspects, and in focusing on the psychological they end by supporting the illusion of agency within the reified structure. For example, Gagnon (2008) examines how regulation and insecurity interact in identity-formation, and she concerns her study of corporate management and identity development with the “insides” of workers, rather than their behaviour directly (376). Conformity for Gagnon is comprised of three categories: the notion of “work on self” and changing one’s way of being; “enacting required self”, which is behavioural but results in no fundamental changes to self-image; and “resistant self”, which expresses deep alienation from the programmed reality (378). Typical of psychological management approaches, Gagnon assumes a self that can be fundamentally separated from its own discourses and behaviour, presupposing an essential, disembodied inner self that is at least partially removed from the social structure. In focusing on the “inside” of workers, Gagnon’s study has limited critical utility because she does not examine the co-development of inside and outside in a socio-ideological setting. This focus on an “inner self” dichotomizes self and society to sustain the illusions of agency in a reified system of control.

Psychological management

This approach is in keeping with psychological methods of consumer and worker management, which became the natural extension of the industrial machine in late modernity. Foucault (1979) laid the foundation for the view that psychological management can be seen as a system of control operating at the level of the individual psyche. In this view, the ruling classes come to dominate society, and ideology serves the interests of class domination, through the governance of the self-evident social reality and self-management in relation to that reality. For Rose (1990), “contemporary government ... operates through the delicate and minute infiltration of the ambitions of regulation into the very interior of our existence and experience as subjects” (10). Ideological structures of control invisibly influence and shape the individual through language and socio-bureaucratic formations. “The government of the soul depends upon our recognition of ourselves as ideally and potentially certain sorts of person, the unease generated by normative judgment of what we are and could become, and the incitement offered to overcome this discrepancy by following the advice of experts in the management of the self” (11). Thus has organizational life inevitably taken on a psychological hue (2), along with consumer life and every other area of human experience where the psychological government of the self can be made to serve dominant interests.

The consumer experience

The consumer marketplace is a central signifying realm of modernity, and unsurprisingly the techniques of psychological management are embedded in

every aspect of consumer experience. A consumer has 'free choice' in that they can choose any of two hundred flavours of ice cream, but they are systemically are cast as a consumer; any real discussion of their social role is sidelined. The myth of individuality proclaims its importance in every ad: be different, be special, be yourself – by using this product. This displacement of feelings into exchange value is emblematic of commodity fetishism. Borne out of the cultural biases of rationalism and the ontological insecurity of modern life, we place our trust in abstract systems for ontological security, but insist upon the illusion of differentiation. The abstracted notion of individuality is thereby used against the power of agency in consumer culture. Social meanings and identities are created and sustained at the point of consumption, as marketing focuses on the individual to make identity-formation even more customized, and 'subjective' (Bilton, 140).

In this context, the self-image dominates the self (Boorstin, 1975), generating narcissism as the heuristic of social expectation and identity-formation. Thus, according to Lasch (1978), "today men seek the kind of approval that applauds not so much their actions but their personal attributes. They wish to be not so much esteemed as admired. ... They want to be envied rather than respected" (59). In reifying its own existence, the self legitimates ideological structures of control under the illusion of personal agency. Relying on essentialist notions of identity thus makes us suitable subjects for the methods of psychological management as they operate in the consumer society. Although Gagnon's "resistant self" is alienated from structure, such deep alienation

expresses only the inevitability of structural power. Alienation is a poor substitute for agency, which only strengthens structure in the end by expressing its inevitability.

Post-modern identity and flexibility

Modes of expression and structures of control are ever evolving. While the consumer discourse continues apace, fragmenting social realities require new discourses to maintain hegemony. By late modernity, the radically functionalist nature of social roles has largely undermined the sense of permanence of even the modern functionalist identity-claims. As a result of this insecurity, the notions of flexibility, versatility and adaptability appear ubiquitously across management and social studies literature in describing the postmodern workforce, and the postmodern self. Lifton (1993) argues that the postmodern era is characterized by the development of a protean self – an unstable self, modelled after the form-shifting Greek god Proteus. All identity-claims in the protean self are in principle open to revision and may at some point have to be abandoned. These circumstances of anxiety and ontological doubt contribute to an environment where relationships are temporary and reward-based, hence opportunistic and protean. Inevitably, ‘flexibility’ becomes the new stability, as the abstract notion of change allows a new reification with which to maintain continuity in the midst of the shifting sands of social power and meaning. While “the modern self is aware of the constructed nature of identity and that one can always change and modify one’s identity at will” (Kellner, 1992, 142), this protean identity also legitimizes power and domination under the illusion of agency and nominal freedom.

As the Frankfurt School has pointed out (see Adorno, 2002), the humanist individual who was supposed to result from rational self-objectification was replaced with a slave to the rationalized forces unleashed by modernity. Identity becomes a product of rationalized social forces relying on reified constructs rather than socially grounded, embodied freedom. When “everything is transformed into representational ideas”, the result is an age without passion or personal agency” (Kierkegaard, 1962, 40). As the social components of who we are are themselves reified abstractions, we are cut off from others at the very point where we seek community and agency in social practice. Reification in the formulation of identity leaves us with a self who is structured in social practices operating under the illusion of independence, with impoverished human potential and freedom.

Language: identity is part of the other

Rather than essentializing the self, Holland *et. al.* (1998) study identity as a *mediating* construct between self and society. This provides a basis for critical studies to examine the broader discursive and cultural forces in which identity is developed, and provides a theoretical exit from the fully rationalized systems of psychological management. To do this, Holland relies on the Bakhtinian notion of dialogue.

In his analysis of Dostoyevsky’s work, Bakhtin (1984) argues that the notion of dialogue not only represents a literary genre but also the very essence of personality (Hermans, *et. al.*, 1992, 28), because language lies between beings, on the borderline between oneself and the other. One’s identity is never

fully one's own. All language – and thus all ideology and all identity – relies upon the other in dialogical exchange. Ideological assumptions are thus social, and obtain their validation and their development between individuals in a social exchange. For Bakhtin (1990), “language ... lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's” (280). For Hermans (2004), “in a similar vein, it can be concluded that the self lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The self is half somebody else's” (124). Thus power and identity are distributed throughout the entire network of social exchange.

Competing ideological structures

Modernity is not a monoculture, but an intermingling of dialogues. Historical interpretation and identity-formation thus cannot be totally programmed by a ruling elite, because modern life provides too much ground for the manoeuvring of all social actors within discourses. For Holland (1998), figured worlds are relatively stable ideological-linguistic social formations that provide the basis for cultural and linguistic cohesion within groups. These worlds overlap, intermingle, merge and separate in social exchange and discourse, and the possibilities for expression and meaning multiply endlessly. Bakhtin (1990) provides a theoretical basis for the embodied view that takes into account this perpetual ideological interplay between self and other, through the medium of language. For Bakhtin, it is the *intermingling* of language systems (figured worlds) that differentiates the fully regulated worldview from the current clash of cosmologies that we encounter every day. This is why the novel is so important

to Bakhtin, as an expression of the various linguistic and ideological worldviews that comprise modernity (296). Each voice in the novel is endowed with a validity and historicity that cannot be dismissed and cannot be fully reconciled with the other voices. In the midst of these tensions between figured worlds, each identity is constructed and sustained, even as ideological structures are subtly altered in the process of identity-formation and perpetual re-formation.

Heteroglossia

Bakhtin (1993) sees an almost Manichean struggle between the forces that keep ideas apart and those that make things coherent. On the one hand, there must be a fixed system of repeatable symbolic elements in order for language and culture to function in any coherent way. Language at its deepest level expresses and sustains a cosmology – a figured world – that is ideologically saturated with shadings and meanings. These “centripetal” forces that keep language alive unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought, “creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language, or else defending an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia” (271). For Bakhtin, the authoritative world (religious dogma, scientific truth, law, current fashion, social expectations, bureaucracy) demands acknowledgement. It is a discourse *a priori*. It seals itself off from centrifugal social influences and plays an important role in domination. It is “poetic” in the sense that it obscures its social origins, and is its own justification. “Novelistic” dialogue, on the other hand dialogue engages

acknowledges the other and finds its validity in the tensions and negotiations between social discourses.

A priori language – poetic expressions – surround us in the form of commodity fetishes, but also more subtly as essentialist selves, thus obscuring the dialogic origin of identity, and serving as an important psychological tool of control. Ybema *et al* (2009) point out that while everyday people often employ essentialist notions of self in terms of fixed character traits and so on, the matter-of-factness to their identity claims serves to legitimize the role-behaviours associated with such identities (305-306), largely in support of cultural biases and forces of control. When individuals proclaim the loudest that they are a “certain sort of person” out of their “own free will,” then these are precisely the areas where we should be investigating the basis of these ontological claims, and suspicious of their claims of agency.

Centripetal social and professional languages overlap with one another, and intermingle in each utterance. Furthermore, the contextual nature of language can colour these elements with any hue, allowing for enormous flexibility in the meaning of the utterance. So although all utterances are ideologically-laden, the fields of competing meanings are overlapping and the possibilities for new patterns are effectively endless. For Bakhtin therefore, “alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward”

(272). In this view, the ideological fabric of language is always in tension, while discourse both holds it together and generates new historical patterns.

Every utterance for Bakhtin therefore refers back to the social language from when it sprang, and is modified by the context within which it is expressed. Heteroglossia stresses the specific (embodied) moment of speech, which implies a speaker, a listener and a context of exchange. “Every utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)” (272). Every speech act is thus a social language. This multi-voicedness refers not only to the polyphony surrounding every social encounter, but also to the simultaneous speech of the individual and the group that occurs in every utterance. “Consequently, people’s view of the world and of themselves may be more or less dominated by the voices of groups ... to which they belong” (Hermans and Kempen, 1993, 78). This discourse is *interactive*, and is coextensive with the ideological struggle within the individual and society for hegemony. It is creative and productive, not isolated and static, and it is “not so much interpreted by us as it is ... freely developed, applied to new material, new conditions” (Bakhtin, 345).

Language as embodied practice

Language in this view is not merely structure, but is a set of embodied practices, which cannot be separated from thought or from social or historical context. By extension, you cannot project socially situated thought to universal validity. Embodied in social practice, Hermans and Kempen (2009), insist upon

“the inseparability of thought and symbolization and, in addition, of symbolization and context” (30). This view of language integrates the subject into the social interaction, and embodies the interaction in practice. The subject is acting on the world just as the world is acting on the subject. “The interaction is so complex that the environment is in a way *in* the subject” (31), while at the same time the subject is embodied and effecting the historical reality of the social.

While forces of control seek to maximize their hegemonic rule, they rely on the subject to effectuate ideology. By integrating the other into the notion of the self, a complex identity can be negotiated and sustained that can wield some real social power. Because identity relies on a plurality of voices in tension and negotiation, social identities can be theorized as a refracted articulation of agency and structure, playing out in different forms in different discursive domains and locales (Ybema, *et. al.*, 2009, 303). Embodied practice and the acknowledgement of the other in the self lead to pragmatic and non-fetishized notions of identity, where the development of historical linguistic-ideological patterns are the locus of agentic action within the ever-evolving structures.

Such socially grounded situated identities are carved out of discursive regimes, using a wide variety of strategies. Recent studies (McAdams, 1997) have demonstrated that whereas individuals with high ego development develop highly personalized ideological settings that evolve over time, individuals with low ego development “tend to create stories of ideological stability that follow conventional, authority-driven scripts” (67). Reality is therefore co-constructed, and individuals actively sustain ‘poetic’ discourse, or ‘novelistically’ generate new

identities and cultural realities based on their circumstances, training and predispositions. These strategies of identity-development can be plotted along a spectrum where, at one end agency depends upon actors “ignoring, being oblivious to, or acting in defiance of the prevailing cultural constraints; at the other end, structures appear durable despite the assertion of the ‘self’ and the liberating enticements of contemporary individualism” (Ybema, *et. al.*, 2009, 311).

Defining a dialogical self

Dialogical-self theory applies these features of intersubjectivity and dominance to the self, providing a theoretical basis for the self as a multiplicity of potentially agentic subject-positions. In this view, narrative and dominance relations are not just a feature of the outside world, but also the inner world of the self. For Hermans (2004), “the self functions as a society” (13). “There is *not* a multitude of characters and fates within a *unified* plurality of independent consciousnesses and worlds,” but rather “multiple voices accompany and oppose one another in dialogical ways” (19). The ideological-linguistic worlds that are embedded in language intermingle within the individual. “Each individual lives in a multiplicity of worlds. ... The individual consists of multiple authors entering into dialogical relationships with each other and creating a complex organization of the self” (19).

Identity in diversity: Multiplicity of subject-positions

The dialogic self thus is not unitary, but comprised of a multiplicity of subject-positions, which are sewn together into internal coherence and social

differentiation through narrative. A study of manager identity by Watson (2009) explores the tension where both reality and subjectivity are narrativized and become self-evident in the telling (448), bringing together narrative, identity and the social construction of reality. Human culture for Watson (see also Newton, 1998) is a mass of narratives, which we make use of in choosing what we are going to do with our lives, who we are and how the society is constructed and sustained. Neither the subject nor the structure in this view is essentialized – both are constituted and continually re-constituted in social discourse, and agentic potential resides in the ongoing weaving of these discourses.

“The / has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The voices function like interacting characters in a story” (Hermans, *et. al.*, 1992, 28), resulting in a complex, narratively structured self. Just as all characters in a novel do not have to agree, inner struggles and turmoils are the result of the interplay of social and linguistic forces within the individual. Multiplicity is not conceived as fragmentation, but rather as multi-voicedness, and unity of self “results from dialogical relationships between voices” (Hermans, 2008, 189).

For Hermans (2008), the self can only be properly understood when “social interchange and intersubjectivity are considered as intrinsic to its nature” (187). The other is not outside but rather inside, formulating the self as a multiplicity of positions and “ideologically-interacting selves” (Hermans, *et. al.*, 1992, 23). The individual is required to contrast voices and express an opinion or perform an action, embodied in the social world, and thus the subject-positions

adopted by the individual are embedded in social action. This view provides a basis for agency in the development of the self, and innovation within the field of perpetually competing ideological discourses, between self-presentation and labeling by others, and between regulation and resistance (Ybema *et. al.*, 2009, 301).

This does not imply that post-modern identity is ontologically fragmented or opportunistically protean. On the contrary, identity can be decentered and still remain a unity in the sense that it can be a collection of subject-positions that maintain a dialogue with one another and with the world. Moreover, two or more subject-positions can support each other or develop “some form of cooperation so that they form a new subsystem in the self” (Hermans, 2008, 194). These subsystems develop through the selective assimilation of discourses that are developed in narration.

Selective assimilation

The stories that we tell about ourselves play a central role in maintaining the continuity of identity over time. For Bakhtin (1990), the narrative process brings the self together with the other in an embodied socio-linguistic context. When narrative and identity work come together, as when a person tells a story about themselves, they need to deal simultaneously with the consistency of their identity over time, and the changing reality over the course of their story. For Bakhtin, because language lies between beings, “on the borderline between oneself and the other”, one’s self-image is never fully one’s own. “The ideological becoming of the human being ... is the process of selectively assimilating the

words of others” (341). As subjects come into contact with the various ideological voices, they construct a narrative of their identity. It is “the struggle and dialogic relationship of these categories of ideological discourse [that usually determines] the history of an individual ideological consciousness” (342). The competing social discourses that surround the individual perpetually vie for hegemony, and identity is constructed in this process of selective assimilation and social action. The meta-narratives “are permanent and powerful ingredients of everyday sensemaking ... however, there is always the possibility of self-defined meaningful escape through agential choice” (Ybema *et al*, 2009, 311).

In Bakhtin's (1990) view, an individual's development is most frequently characterized by a gap between authoritative discourse on the one hand, and internally persuasive discourse on the other (342). Although discourses can be simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive, it is most often “the struggle and dialogic relationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness” (342). Hermans' (2008) notion of imaginary dialogue is helpful in teasing apart the power relations between these voices. For Hermans, imaginary dialogues play a central role, and constitute an essential part of our narrative construction of the world (189), as “power differences between the collective voices in a particular community appear as power differences or power struggles between positions in the self” (192). In this narrative-constructivist process, inner dialogue is as important for the formation and sustenance of the self as outer dialog is for the social formation.

For Gadamer, (2004), “because our understanding does not comprehend what it knows in one single inclusive glance, it must always draw what it thinks out of itself, and present it to itself as if an inner dialogue with itself” (422). However, internal voices are deeply penetrated by the culture of institutions, groups, and communities, in which they participate, and stronger voices may overpower weaker ones, both internally and externally. “Like external voices, internal ones may be silenced, suppressed, or marginalized” (Hermans, 2008, 191). Dialogue then has two main features: intersubjective exchange and dominance. “In their combination, these features imply that dialogue is the activity of co-construction of reality, in which at any moment in time one party is more dominant than the other” (Hermans and Kempen, 1993, 78). This operates at both the level of the social formation and the individual – indeed, they are inseparable.

Reflexivity

Following Giddens, for Alvesson and Wilmoot (1992) self-identity is a “reflexively organized narrative derived from participation in competing discourses and various experiences that is productive of a degree of existential continuity and security” (625-626). The reflexivity of this narrativising process is where selective assimilation of social discourses meets agentic self-determination in the construction of identity. For this reason, Lasch and Urry (1994) explicitly focus on “reflexive subjectivity” – self-aware recounting of experience to oneself – to theorize a process of individualization, in which “agency is set free from structure” (4).

Usefully, Lasch and Urry point out that this reflexivity is twofold: it is both cognitive and aesthetic (5). Both modes of apprehension conjoin to provide the materials of identity-formation. At the confluence of intellectual cognition and bodily experience, a multifaceted narrative construction produces identity and society itself in day-to-day activities and discourses. Agency resides in self-reflexive narrative, and the decisions negotiated between cognitive and aesthetic awareness in the real social world.

Collectively, these views correspond nicely with Paulo Freire's (1987) emancipatory pedagogy, which requires conscious participation in the reconstruction of society and critical comprehension that "is generated by participatory practice that actually reflects upon itself" (65). Just as outer dialogism is responsible for the social construction of reality, inner dialogism is the guiding dynamic in the social construction of identity. Composed of a multiplicity of subject-positions, the dialogical self is sewn into internal coherence and social differentiation through (internal and external) narrative expressions.

Reflexivity and the culture worker

The following dialogues reveal the various subject-positions that are adopted by the study subjects, and the ideological-linguistic worlds that collide in the construction of their occupational and social identities. The professional discourses of the graphic designer provide a centripetal core for ideology, but as the subjects work to narrativise their experiences and views, they effectuate their social identities. In maintaining and developing social closure around these identities, they both perpetuate and evolve normative notions of the 'graphic

designer' identity. Interestingly, many of these identity-constructions centralize technical or cognitive discourses and sideline aesthetic ones.

Social closure around occupational identity

All of the subjects in this study express a rejection of the simplistic label of graphic designer, but not until they've appropriated various aspects of it. In particular, they maintain economic and ontological interests in their occupational identity because, as Alvesson (1993) notes, the self-interest of professional groups motivates essentialist statements about themselves in order to prevent other people from the right to certain jobs or tasks. This represents a crucial aspect of social closure that sustains the notion of the professional (1999). Knowledge or competence in the core tasks required by the position retains its centrality to the worker and organization, but "this becomes rather a matter of knowledge for the sake of being socially recognized as an expert, *i.e.* knowledge about how to act in an 'expert-like' way. The persuasive or rhetorical element then is vital. Being perceived as an expert is more crucial than being one" (1004).

As a result, we discover a tendency to denigrate those who do not express themselves appropriately, and thus do not meet the standards for inclusion. Attempts by other groups to appropriate the social label of 'graphic designer' are resisted, thus maintaining social closure. The following exchange is typical of the expressions of subjects in this study in terms of denigrating the non-professional, while simultaneously expressing humility for their occupational identity in a social setting.

- DJ So what does the label of graphic designer mean?
- PK It's trendy nowadays. You say that you're a graphic designer, people automatically assume that you're ... it's almost becoming like an indie thing. People associate graphic designers with indie music and odd little cartoons. It's a trend right now. Everybody's a graphic designer. If you can illustrate, you're a graphic designer.
- Here's a perfect example: right now, all over the Internet you can find, you know, a photo of nothing in particular, it doesn't even have to be a good photo, you put a filter effect on it, and you write something on it in Helvetica New Bold. Oh my god, some enlightening quote like 'we were all children once' or something like that and all of a sudden like you're a designer. It's ridiculous. The label is like in the 90's saying that you skateboard. Even if you can't do it well, even if you just own a skateboard, you skateboard.
- DJ What do you say when people ask at parties, you know, what do you do?
- PK I expect a whole lot of questions. I go into detail and I'm honest. I tell them I work for this crappy little company and it's kind of a shitty job. No big deal. I don't make it like I'm so awesome, which a lot of people do.

While the subject in the above exchange expresses humility in her occupational identity, she notes that others desire to adopt the cachet of the label, but rejects their right to do so on the basis of their ignorance of professional methods and approaches. She claims not to take the label very seriously in terms of her own identity, but she clearly expresses frustration with

others whom she considers to be not professionally qualified. This delineates the figured world around technical discourses and excludes other markers such as “indie music and odd little cartoons”. Thus two subject-positions are adopted simultaneously, and provide a target against which one can express both professional elitism and humility. Social closure is enacted around the occupational identity, even as this identity is expressed to be “no big deal”.

Technical knowledge and occupational pride

Study subjects universally express pride in their technical knowledge, and the elitism and the social camaraderie of such pride supports occupational identity, both through their actions and their dialogue. Most subjects at some point proudly related a story of their technical knowledge, usually revolving around criticizing some technical aspect of advertising or design work. They express a “knowing look” with their cohort when they see cliché typefaces, they laugh at poor kerning (the spacing between the letters) in public communications, and shake their heads at unprofessional colour adjustments in advertising. One subject proudly related the teaching of a typography lesson to her young child using sidewalk chalk; another related a story about how, when walking with her classmate, both stopped cold in the mall and laughed spontaneously at some poorly produced signage. These dialogues and behaviours speak to the social markers of identity within their figured world, around which they maintain closure.

Interestingly, although these are creative workers, technical knowledge predominates in their identity discourse rather than the aesthetic expressions that one might expect. In the following discussion, the subject expresses tool mastery

and creativity in a commercial context. It reveals that the subject identifies primarily as a technician rather than as a thinker or producer of cultural experiences.

DJ What do you think of the design work you see every day?

ML I definitely notice it a lot more than before I started school. I notice everything. I try to stop myself and I can't. I was looking at a sign in the mall the other day and laughing at the terrible kerning.

DJ So you notice the technical aspects more.

ML Yeah, definitely.

DJ Do you think that your idea of public communication has changed over the course of your study?

ML How do you mean public communication?

DJ Well, you know you see a big billboard or a big sign, or a logo, you know that's all public communication. So I guess I mean what did you think of that stuff before and now?

ML Before I never really thought about it. It was just there. But now I look at it more critically like how did they do that or what did they do? Mostly from a technical point of view. And then there is stuff where it's like, oh, that's a really good one, where there message is really clear. So now I get more excited about seeing that kind of stuff.

Clearly, an important aspect of their occupational identity is the awareness of specialized tools and approaches that bespeak professionalism. Another subject expressed the following:

DJ So what would you say is the difference between art that you do at home and graphic design?

JT Professionalism is the difference. My paintings at home I'm not trying to please anyone, other than myself, which I'm probably my own worst critic or whatever. But my paintings at home may start at an idea now, but there aren't the constraints that I lay on myself when I'm designing. It's ok if I don't use the correct ratio of purple and yellow, or something. Like it doesn't matter. I find there's a little bit more freedom when I'm painting.
When I'm designing, even if I do it just for myself, I still approach it with a professional attitude, because ... I don't know it's hard to put into words but it's important that it's done properly.

DJ Ok. And properly means according to the correct technical rules?

JT Yeah. I'm sure if I went to school for painting, I would probably feel the same way about painting after. But right now it doesn't have the same constraints maybe because I don't know the constraints. But in design, I know the constraints and I appreciate and respect the constraints.

While professionalism for this subject means that work in design ought to reflect the discourses and professional methods of industry, the notion of professionalism arises not only in technical discussions about how one performs one's tasks, but is also expressed in opposition to a non-professional mode of visual expression. Frequently characterized by the study subjects as the difference between "designer" and "artist", this generates closure around

professional identity while providing a space for more ‘personal’ expression that is separate from the professional identity.

Negotiations between art and design

These dichotomous discourses (I-as-artist versus I-as-designer) interact and are frequently employed to carve personal out of professional discourse, relegating strongly felt moral positions to private life. All of the subjects express the need to “make money” and “be practical”. Moreover, the widespread assumption among the subjects was that one must make a choice between making art and making money, although compromises are desired, and the negotiations vary. One mode of negotiation is to switch hats.

DJ On your business card, you have both artist and graphic designer. What’s the difference?

DL I can do both now. From the beginning I think I was an artist. But you have to really be considered by others to get recognition.

Graphic design is a machine is that you follow the purpose and then you just work. The instructions are right there. You just need to learn how to work the machine. Art it’s something that is totally dynamic, art reflects another side to society, like a mirror. ... design can utilize art but it won’t criticize art. Art is more emotional, more meaningful.

DJ So the graphic designer doesn’t hold a mirror to society?

DL As a graphic designer, you are reflecting yourself. But in the art way, the art can think about the meaning inside of the [design] concept. The [design] concept is to sell something,

but art can hold a mirror to the meaning of the concept. Art is the soul of the design concept.

This subject expresses an ethical argument for art in that it raises social awareness, contrasting it to design, which is a “machine”, “for selling”. The occupational identity of this subject is that of a professional just doing his job, and significantly this means that one does not criticize society in one’s job. He hasn’t abandoned his ethical requirements or his requirements for self-expression or social criticism – to have a soul, as he might put it – but has categorized these discourses as art, and relegated them to something that is done outside of professional life. Many other subjects reveal different negotiations between these roles of artist and designer, often sidelining social criticism and self-expression as “not realistic”, or “great if you can afford it”. In this way, technical discourses are centralized in the occupational identity, and both socially critical and aesthetically oriented discourses are sidelined in favour of “the machine”.

Challenging bullshit

Another example of simultaneous subject-positions and negotiations between visual and verbal discourses is the oppositional stance taken by many subjects to industry discourses about design. In the following exchange, the subjects are challenging the “bullshit” in graphic design – the finely detailed discourses that justify sometimes mundane design decisions. The process of “selling your idea” comes under fire here. Although the subjects recognize the importance of articulating their design concepts clearly to clients, they cynically challenge the “bullshitting” aspect that is an important part of industry discourse.

In adopting a resistant posture to this discourse, they express a desire to reclaim some aesthetic markers of value.

CG I think a lot of graphic design is just bullshit.

DJ That's quite an interesting statement.

KL It is. I actually really agree with that.

CG When you think about an ad campaign, it's all bullshit in the end. Really.

KL Sometimes your instructor or a client will ask why did you choose the colour blue. You don't want to just say "because I like the colour blue". So you're like "oh, it expresses the tranquility of ..." you know you're pretty much making stuff up.

CG Like, an ad campaign, yes there's meaning to it bla bla bla, but like, maybe they want a space theme. But like I don't know. But if you had to come up with a reason for why you chose space, you'd have to come up with some longwinded bullshit.

DJ If that's the case, then how do you measure good design?

CG I think a campaign has to have a concept to tie it together, but a concept statement is more ...

KL Your concept statement should be basically summed up in your tagline. And then you need to have like six paragraphs of text that justifies why that is your tagline. And sometimes I feel like I don't know why I chose that typeface or that colour. I'm sorry.

DJ Do you think that somewhere in your head you maybe have the idea, but then you just have to say it?

KL Yeah, But I think in the saying it is where all of the BS comes up.

Underlying this exchange is an important distinction between visual and verbal discourses, where the subjects argue that the bullshit arises with the verbal justifications, not the visual cues. In expressing little confidence in verbal justifications for design decisions, aesthetic decisions are therefore considered more pure or honest. The subject sees the bullshit aspect as a cynical but necessary part of “reality” of the labour market. She calls such discourses bullshit because they are commercially oriented, and reduce her creative decisions to a verbal discourse that reduces the value of aesthetics to a profit motive, indicating some critical awareness. She resents the imposition of industry discourse to her creative decision-making process.

This denigration of industry expression is typical of the study group, and an intriguing reversal of the typical modernist pattern, which tends to value text over image. Here, image is valued over text. According to Freedman (2003), “part of the mystification of visual culture in school has been a separation of image from text and a valuing of text over image” (123), whereas the subject in this case seem to be responding against such rationalization of artistic inspiration, especially when it serves primarily to justify financial commitments to design, rather than aesthetic ones.

Yet this simple opposition to verbal justifications obscures the role of the graphic designer in perpetuating *visual* discourses that serve domination. In rejecting cognitive justifications, the subject adopts a position of 'inspired' design, reducing the possibilities for critical reflection of visual discourse. This tendency is explored more closely in this paper in the creativity section that follows. Rather than being simply oppositional, I argue that there remain untouched possibilities for agency in finding ways to bring cognitive and aesthetic oppositions into a unified mission for design.

Integration of cognition and aesthetics in the commodity

Another approach expressed by study subjects was to integrate aesthetics and cognition in a less oppositional view, building a public persona built around one's designs.

DJ Do you think that you changed over the last eighteen months? Do you feel like a different person?

JL I think even though it's not that long, the change is pretty drastic. I just realized that there are so many career opportunities that have to do with design and art. Which is kind of cool. With illustrators for example, you just know them and you know their style and what they typically do. And you can just sort of see them and you know their style and there's this nice little package. They've put so much effort into creating this sort of branding for themselves. And I think it's cool that you have like a public persona that's based around your art.

In this case, the subject expresses clearly a public identity based around commercial designs as a professional and personal goal. This may be some agentic aspect in this approach, as long as one's image is not reduced to a commodity-fetish, and one's social dialogue remains ongoing and self-reflexive. On the other hand, the subject clearly utilizes the terminology of commodity-culture, so there seems to be more capitulation than challenge to normative structural forces.

Identity in diversity

Among the most prominent discourses expressed by these new professionals as they graduated was a rejection of simplistic identity labels, and a complex engagement with their social identities. While there is clear evidence of an emphasis on technical mastery and elite knowledge, there is also a struggle between aesthetic and cognitive modes of expression that resolve into various supports for commercial culture. Thus we observe a strong distinction between art and commercial design work. Design work is said to be "soulless, a "machine", while art implies self-expression and agency. This sets up a necessary sacrifice of their 'essential' selves to the commodity-system, and a duality of subject-positions at work (I-as worker and I-as artist). At the same time, in a less prominent discourse there is the possibility of self-transcendence through design, as a commercial and cultural icon. This offers opportunities for the potential unification of aesthetics and cognition, but is limited to a unification in the commodity, and so curtails agency even as it claims to express it. While on the surface these discourses appear to be justified cynicism or agentic self-

determination, they ultimately serve to obscure the social roots of visual or cognitive expression, and reduce possibilities for agency to the realities of commercial culture.

COMPETING DISCOURSES OF CREATIVITY

Peters (2009) examines the notion of creativity in the educational institution by contrasting two accounts of creativity: first, 'anarcho-aesthetics' rooted in the Romantic movement; and second, the 'design principle' that emerges from commons-based peer production. He argues that Romantics extolled the passions, but they inadvertently black-boxed the notion of creativity, providing cover for the capitalist control of intellectual property and copyright, deepening the cleavage between aesthetics and cognition, self and society. By contrast, the design-principle model of creativity does not rely so much on the Romantic hero-genius and his individualistic ethos, and is more socially oriented. The essence of this notion of creativity is continual social development, and it has the potential to stand outside of the commodity system as it relies on a continual sharing and reworking of cultural artefacts.

These competing discourses of creativity are some of the central building materials of the occupational identity of the graphic designer. On the one hand, graphic designers learn to uncritically ingest the notions of commodity ownership (and with it the myth of individual genius), while they are simultaneously trained to probe the roots of the social to develop original creative expressions – a process which at least potentially challenges the very commodity system for which they are producing their work. Subjects are well trained in the social and intertextual creative processes, implying a rejection of Romantic creativity that

serves domination. Yet they do not acknowledge the ideology imbuing all language and visual communications, even as they busily rearrange such ideologically laden discourses for use in commercial contexts. An integration of the cognitive and aesthetic modes of understanding in design choices yields an agency that resides in the process of selecting design solutions based on both technical requirements and cultural relevance. Unfortunately, this awareness of intertextual agency, a seat of capillary power, sits mostly empty amid the concept sketches, bills and pay stubs.

Romantic creativity and immaterial labour

According to Berlin (1999), the myth of the quasi-mystical creative 'genius' who labours in solitude, and who is inspired by the divine (or more recently the unconscious) can be traced to the eighteenth century Romantic movement. The Romantics validated intuition and emotion as forms of knowledge, and positioned these centrally in the creative process. In responding to Enlightenment rationalism, the passions, the irrational, the emotions, became positive terms that were to be expressed by the individual artist, the genius, who is somehow in mysterious possession of the creative gift, while others are not so divinely endowed.

Peters (2009) argues that this Romantic myth of the individual underlies the notion of individual creative ownership, and is a central supporting pillar of copyright and intellectual property law (136). The artist as owner of a work is a legal construct necessitated by the system of capitalist production and profit-taking, and the Romantic notion of the creative artist serves the purposes of

capital well in this regard, as it supports a legal framework of individual ownership, directing the profits towards the owners of copyright. According to Peters, “the Romantic notion of creativity and the individual hero-artist are the bulwarks of a system of political economy that juridically enables the ‘creative industries’ as part of the capitalist system” (137). The very reason why these Romantic ideas of the subjectivism and genius remain pervasive across large swaths of the world is, according to Peters, due to the privatization and commodification of artistic creativity (139).

Although it serves capitalism quite well, this Romantic notion of creativity black-boxes the process of generating new ideas. Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that common cultural property is circumscribed in this dynamic, and the aesthetic labours of human beings in creating and responding to creative works have been commodified as “immaterial labour”. “The legal innovation to protect ... immaterial private property rests on a recognition of immaterial labour; in other words, what we previously considered part of nature and thus common property ... is really the product of human labour and invention, and thus eligible for private ownership” (182), turned into dollars on the backs of the creative, immaterial labourer. Romantic creativity thus supports not individualism but domination. Bourdieu (1995) argues that “one may suspend the charismatic ideology of ‘creation’, which ... constitutes the principle obstacle to a rigorous science of the production of cultural goods. It is this charismatic ideology, in effect, which directs the gaze towards the apparent producer ... and prevents us asking who has created this ‘creator’ and the magic power of transubstantiation

with which the ‘creator’ is endowed” (167). This creator, as we have seen, is a product of living ideological discourses. The question of who benefits is left out of the analysis, as Romantic notions serve commodity-capital, in an ideological system that obscures its own origins.

Creativity as juxtaposition

In contrast to the Romantic view, Koestler (1964) refers to artistic creativity as a moment of “juxtaposition” (as opposed to scientific creativity which relies on “synthesis”) that generates new modes of interpretation and meaning out of previously known cultural entities. In juxtaposing known cultural entities in new ways, each is bathed in the light of the other and re-constituted in the moment of co-presence; both are simultaneously seen in a new light. To illustrate this process in a simple way, Koestler refers to the verbal pun, which has a double meaning. Such jokes elicit a giggle (or a groan, as the case may be) because of the juxtaposition of two separate frames of reference that come together in a single, charged moment. The pun is illustrative of the general process of creative juxtaposition, where frames of reference and webs of meaning are juxtaposed against one another in stark and revealing ways to generate new social meanings. Creative thought therefore occurs for Koestler by the juxtaposition of symbolic elements and the interaction of their matrices of interpretation in the minds of participants. Thus the act of viewing a painting is creative in a similar way as the act of creating it. In either case, it is a combination of elements coming together in the creative moment to create resonances that are generative of new meanings in the minds of both the artist and the audience. For example,

Marilyn Monroe's iconic white dress worn by a pregnant teenager, or an underfed African, or a man, is generative of cultural resonances and new insights. But of course, the combinations can be much more subtle and interwoven.

Creativity in this schema corresponds to the Bakhtinian view of heteroglot creation of the self and society. "In our day-to-day creativity ... you and I formally enrich each other and the world. Properly performed, the aesthetic act in daily life involves a reassumption and a reconfirmation of one's own place after the other is encountered. Rather than fuse these together, we produce something new and valuable" (Lacasa *et. al.* 2005, 299). This iterative process implies that text (in the largest sense) is a collective creation generated by living language systems. Even the most innovative ideas build on the foundation of old ones, employing known elements in new ways to create new meaning. New connections are essentially meaningless without grounding in pre-established notions. Even if the new ideas are in opposition to preconceived notions, they require those notions precisely in order to oppose them. In this way, new cultural meanings are generated, and cultural history continually evolves. For Koestler (1964), "the principle mark of genius is not perfection, but originality, the opening of new frontiers; once this is done, the conquered territory becomes common property" (402). For Bourdieu (1995), "the probable future of a field is inscribed, at each moment, in the structure of the field, but each agent makes his own future – thereby helping to make the future of the field – by realizing the objective potentialities which are determined in the relation between his powers and the possibilities objectively inscribed in the field" (272). Creative work can thus only be

understood in relation to others, in a historically-situated field of meaning. Creative developments go hand-in-hand therefore with choices that rely on a dialogical exchange, redefine the field of meanings, and determine the field of future possibilities. Thus some creative agency lies in choosing among and recombining pre-existing social and cultural discourses.

The design principle

For Peters (2009), this is the relational and social creativity of the “design principle” (126), which is closely associated with the notion of creative problem solving in design. In an influential article about design, Richard Buchanan (1996) underscores this notion of agential creative choices in a field of competing ideologies. Buchanan draws a parallel between design problems and complex social problems (“wicked problems”) that challenge rational solution-based thinking. In contrast to engineering problems, design problems are characterized not by objectively correct and incorrect solutions, but by socially grounded assessments of better and worse ones. Moreover, one’s orientation to a problem determines not only the solutions but the very definition of the problem itself. One must first define the problem, and to do so one must adopt an ideological standpoint. “For every wicked problem there is always more than one explanation, with explanations depending on the *Weltanschauung* of the designer” (Buchanan, 14).

Approaching design problems as wicked problems grounds the definitions and solutions to these problems in ideologically saturated linguistic and social contexts. Treated as wicked problems, creative problem solving therefore is

grounded in the social and builds social life. One does not assume that one has all of the answers, but constantly refers back to a cultural reality in a feedback loop that directs further personal and cultural developments.

Furthermore, creative problem solving requires a combination of rational and irrational thinking processes (Peters, 137) that produces creative innovation and new cultural forms. In other words the process is both cognitive and aesthetic. The new meanings cannot be reduced to verbal explanation without weakening their impact or distorting their meaning – they must be “felt” as well as understood, in order to have lasting cultural impact. The definitions and solutions to design problems are thus historically-based, grounded by social structures, relational (to others), and contextual (Buchanan, 14-18), implying the integration of both cognitive and aesthetic markers of success, as well as the possibility of agential choice within the field of competing ideological meanings.

Death of discourse in visual communications

Although he focuses on spoken and written utterance, Bakhtin (1990) asserts that all languages are ideologically saturated, in that they are specific points of view on the world (291). All forms of human communication are discursive, partaking in heteroglossia. In Bakhtinian terms, discourses can be “poetic” and closed, or “narrative” and open. The inner core of an ideological-linguistic structure for Bakhtin is “poetic” in the sense that it proclaims its own eternal value, forgetting its social gestation. By contrast, the multi-voiced “novelistic” tendencies of modernity continually challenge poetic discourse, which continually denies the existence of contradictions and social stresses even as it

is shaped by these forces. “The poet must assume a complete single-personed hegemony over his own language. ... To achieve this, the poet strips the word of other’s intentions” (297). Everything must be bathed in Lethe – the river of forgetfulness –forgetting its life and contexts (297) – an elegant turn of phrase to describe the process of fetishization. Narrative prose, on the other hand, is novelistic, and in continual dialogue with its social contexts.

Visual rhetoric such as a company logo or advertisement is analogous to Bakhtinian poetry in the sense that it depersonalizes and de-contextualizes the content of the communication, leaving nothing but an idealized form where once lived a dialogue. This idealized form (the Nike Swoosh, the McDonald’s M) is tightly controlled by corporate interests, and power is wielded through this relationship of socio-ideological domination. Much of visual culture acts as poetry in regard to the effort to systematically control imagery and crush dialogue with copyright law and endless universal repetition. Ironically, while the designer is expected to “play” in language, the owners of copyright sew up the bag of meaning as much as possible. This represents the end of discourse for Bakhtin, who argues that “when discourse is torn from reality, it is fatal for the word itself as well: words grow sickly, lose semantic depth and flexibility, the capacity to expand and renew their meanings in new living contexts – they essentially die as discourse” (Bakhtin, 353-354).

This leads some theorists (for example, Jameson, 1991) to focus on the replacement of narrative with image in postmodern culture. Postmodern selves are said to be “flat” or depthless, superficial, lost in the moment, or without

substance or meaning, but this disregards the continual social dialogues that occur around and in conjunction with the image. “Poetic” or otherwise controlled visual expressions occur in a social context, which can still be analyzed from this social setting. Thus, Kellner (1992) argues that “interpretive analysis of both image and narrative continues to be of importance (147), because both image and narrative are saturated with ideology. Therefore the critique of ideology remains an important area of study, even in the postmodern circumstance of so-called “depthless” spectacle. Critical awareness of contexts – the de-poetization of the visual – provides a basis for agential choice in creative interpretation and production.

Graphic design as social expression

Graphic designers at The Art Institute of Vancouver are trained to express just such agency in creative juxtaposition, to be intertextual, historical, grounded and original thinkers. However, at the same time they are trained to work commercially, which implies that they Romanticize creativity for the benefit of the intellectual property system, which poetizes (fetishizes) their creations.

The process of creativity described by the subjects in this study reveals a social and cultural awareness in the process of getting ideas. For them, creativity involves thinking through and planning socially and culturally-relevant juxtapositions. This implies that both cognitive and aesthetic processes are at work, and both cognitive and aesthetic markers of success are judging the outcomes. At the same time, it also implies an element of agency in the choices made during this process.

- DJ How would you get ideas before?
- RB Before I could almost not even tell you how. [chatter]
Like it's really hard to explain. It was really unguided. It was really driven by the medium more than it was by the concept. I would say that I had no idea of concept before I started at AI.
- DJ What do you mean by concept?
- RB Any kind of concept. Like an idea that fuels a piece of art. I would just feel like painting and I would just splash colour on a canvas or whatever. Yeah ok I may have made a couple of nice paintings, but there was nothing in it. I would say it was superficial. There wasn't any thoughts put into it aside from visual.
- DJ So your artwork nowadays is more meaningful?
- RB I think so, yeah. It's really hard for me now that I'm done school, and really since I started school, it's really hard for me to pick up a paintbrush or anything and just "do something". There has to be a reason for doing something or a meaning behind it. Even if it's an obscure meaning, there has to be, it has to start at an idea of some kind.

The subject here demonstrates the importance of cognitive decision-making for the generation of meaningful work. He contrasts between 'just being creative' (romantically relying on intuition and inspiration) and developing creativity with design concepts in ways that take into account social meanings and dialogues. The following excerpt further illuminates that the creative processes require thinking (cognition) first and foremost.

- DJ How do you go about solving design problems?
- RB I would say it's more about ideas and thinking first. I tend to do that a lot. What's the best solution to a problem? What can I relate to this, what's analogous? What do I associate with that? And can I bring all those things together in some way that will solve this design problem.
- DJ So you would say that's the creative element?
- RB Yeah. More than the actual doing of the thing. You have to start with the idea first.

This notion of thinking and planning implies a bringing forth of social dialogues into cognitive awareness, and choosing from among the competing social meanings in solving design problems. The subject thus demonstrates that an awareness of socio-cultural webs of meaning, and a conscious exploration of these, are central to his creative process. The following exchange clearly demonstrates an awareness of competing social discourses in the creative process.

- DJ What do you think of creativity now. Has your definition of creativity changed?
- MM Harder.
- DJ Creativity is harder than you thought it was? In what way?
- MM When I sit down to do something I used to just do something right off the bat, but now I have to plan it out. Because I realize when I plan it out it turns out better. And it's more work, and it's harder, but I get better ideas. Concept work.

DJ What do you mean by concept work?

MM Before, when I thought of creativity I could get an idea really quick and just put that on the paper, but the real test of creativity is to come up with multiple ideas. Like, fifty ideas for one thing and then choose. Sometimes it's going to be in the first couple, but sometimes it's going to be the fiftieth one. And then you'll take that fiftieth one and try to make it better, and that really stretches creativity.

This discourse clearly indicates the notion of conscious choice within the fields of competing meanings, and the possibility for agential action in the design decisions. Moreover, this version of creativity is socially and culturally grounded, as subjects recognize the need to refer to social realities in the formulation of their creative ideas. For example the following subject demonstrates a focus on the industrial, architectural, or social reality of the client's business.

JL If I have someone come to me and they want a logo or something, then my ideas generally come from the research that I do. If it's for a company or a photographer or whatever, I try to find out as much as possible about them, and generally something sparks an idea for imagery to use or whatever.

DJ How would you describe that process when something sparks something else?

JL Clarity. It's like if you were to just come to me and say I want a logo, the first question I would ask is what for?

DJ So I'll tell you what I'm trying to communicate. I'm trying to sell shoelaces.

- JL Shoelaces. Ok. And what's the name of the company?
- DJ Um. Vancouver Shoelace Company.
- JL Oh, That's lame. [laughter] Uh, ok. So then making Vancouver Shoelace Company somehow iconic for shoelace fabrication comes from reading about the company, even visiting the company. Maybe it's a really interesting building or something, so I can see getting inspiration from something iconic on the building – maybe there's an archway or something like that. Something that is unique to the process of making shoelaces, the technical process, the chemical process. Something directly related to what they are doing.

In clearly referring to industrial, historical and social reality in the decision-making process of design, the subject recognizes that creative developments go hand-in-hand with social and cultural histories, artefacts and dialogues. In this decision-making process, they redefine the field of meanings, determining the range of future possibilities for expression.

Creative agency curtailed

It seems clear that among the study subjects, social and intertextual creative processes of idea-generation and development are essential to the notion of creativity. Because subjects approach the creative process as a problem-solving one, which requires extensive reference to cultural realities and an acceptance of the conscious choices that must be made in the development of design solutions, it is tempting to claim that an integration of cognition and

aesthetics is implied in this process. This is a strong agential position from which to develop socially rooted and critical visual discourses.

However, as explored in the previous section on identity, the cognitive and the aesthetic coexist in an uneasy relation within these subjects. They seem to have developed a balance between these cultural modes in their *method* of creativity, but this aesthetic/cognitive balance is largely limited to design decisions within the commodity system of values, and hardly ever reaches into the political-economic realm. These seem to be invisible socio-ideological lines that remain largely unchallenged. In the next section I attempt to make some of these lines more visible, by examining various negotiations with industry, and how the culture industries work to separate the creative thinker from business and industrial decisions, including undermining this agentic creativity with romantic notions to support copyright and control. Simultaneously, I examine the discourses of self-fulfilment, and the ways in which the notion of self-fulfilment is made to serve both control and agency, and various negotiations. How the subjects manage these diverse social discourses and pressures reveals the contours of the figured worlds in which they navigate, and which they ultimately sustain as graphic designers.

CREATIVE LABOUR AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRIES

In the culture industries, individual creativity intersects with post-Fordist labour practices to produce cultural realities that guide both occupational identities and wider cultural developments. In their study of the regulation of identity for organizational control, Alvesson and Wilmott (2002) argue that micro-emancipation is possible precisely because organizational control structures exist in tension with other sources of identity outside of the organization. Where the wider social tensions are minimized therefore, agency is correspondingly curtailed. It is apparent that the subjects in this study struggle with these social tensions, but their creative agency is challenged by various social strategies of control.

First, the rhetoric of self-fulfilment combines with the reality of hierarchical systems in the culture industries to carve off creative forces from the business decisions that really matter. Self-fulfilment is narrowly defined within the private sphere, leaving out political and economic realms. In this way, the notion of self-fulfilment works in tandem with industry and elides with essentialist notions of identity to undermine agentic self-expression. Supporting this disconnection between private aesthetics and politics is a mutual distrust between aesthetic and cognitive systems of interpretation. This distrust helps to maintain cynical dialogues that preclude any clear thinking about personal or professional agency.

Second, while there is some faith among the study subjects in the social evolution of design, this is universally cast into the heuristics of commodity-culture. The subjects express a kind of potential emancipation for their socially intertextual creative impulses, but this is heavily influenced and directed by commodity discourses. In subordinating self-expression to the needs of capital, aesthetic and cognitive decisions are further split apart, as artistic work is denied a voice in economic or political decision-making. Interestingly, the Bauhaus movement in the early twentieth century specifically attempted a re-integration of the agentic artist and industry. Their struggles and negotiations are a lesson in the limitations and possibilities of such an effort.

Finally, sometimes more overt forms of control are necessary, so the instability of employment, or labour precarity, bluntly keeps creativity within acceptable bounds for the commodity system. All of these strategies collectively undermine critical reflection and agentic expression, while gathering the fruits of creative labour for profit.

This section concludes that while it may not be possible to fundamentally alter the economic and industrial system, it may be possible to politicize the design process, and re-unify cognitive and aesthetic processes. While the study subjects are well-schooled in the methods of visual rhetoric and systems of persuasion, were these processes to become self-reflexive and socially-rooted, there would be more possibility for what Hardt and Negri (2004) call a “new politics”. It falls to education to develop such a curriculum, for the critical development of the culture worker. Accordingly, I examine the discourses and

the challenges of such an educational intervention in the next section, and in the conclusion of this study.

Post-Fordist work as self-fulfilment

One of the prevailing myths of the 'creative economy' literature is that the alienated labour of the past has been replaced by a more free expression of one's 'true self'. While labour since Marx has been seen as a creative force in nature and culture, this notion has been extended in contemporary discourse to consider work as an essential element on the path to self-fulfilment, psychologically as well as economically. As Marx's revolutionary model has been adapted to correspond with the psychological notion of the need for self-realization, the methods of psychological control have penetrated the workplace. Self-fulfilment and economic survival are considered to derive from the same labour processes.

The writings of Richard Florida (2002) are a strident example of this notion of self-fulfilment in labour that ultimately reduces the possibilities for agency, rather than increasing them. Florida contrasts the rigidly hierarchical model of the modernist factory or the traditional corporate office against the new "flexible, open, interactive" workplace (117), arguing that the psychological strivings for freedom of expression can be channelled through the organization for both profit and individual self-fulfilment. Indeed, Rose (1990) points out that in this view the two spheres cannot really be distinguished. Work is the pathway to company profit as well as the pathway to individual self-actualization, eroding the distinction between economic and psychological needs. As there is no longer any

separation between the economic and the psychological, “the antithesis between managing adaptation to work and struggling for rewards from work is transcended, as working hard produces psychological rewards and psychological rewards produce hard work. The government of work now passes through the psychological strivings of each and every one of us for what we want” (Rose, 118).

Florida’s line of thinking declares an end to alienated labour by making the private self the motivating force behind occupational identity in the new post-industrial workplace. Subjectivity is something to be respected rather than subjugated, as it is also a central determinant of the success of the company (Rose, 56). In the creative industries this ostensibly means that one’s creative autonomy conveniently corresponds with the labour requirements of industry. However, while industry promotes the myth of self-determination with minor adjustments to working arrangements, (flex-time and telecommuting, for example), the reality is that this labourer must flexibly adapt to the needs of industry – not the other way around.

Hardt and Negri (2000) “link the increasing economic significance of intellectual, informational, and semiotic production to labour’s exploitation” (Brophy and dePeuter, 179). They argue that while the central role played by immaterial labour ostensibly offers more freedom and self-development to the worker, these workers are a constituent element of the new proletariat as a class (2000, 53), and thus they remain subject to capitalist discipline and capitalist relations of production. While industry deploys individualist and essentialist

rhetoric to mollify the bruised egos of creative staff, 'flexibility' fundamentally means less individual power rather than more. Developing Lifton's (1993) line of thinking, Brian Holmes (2003, 139) theorizes the "flexible personality", linked to opportunism in work as well as social life, and the self-management of one's own human capital to maximize profit and social benefits. In this way, organizational thinking overtakes cultural life and identity.

Loose control in the creative workplace

In addition to acting as a red herring distracting the new proletariat, the notion of flexibility also operates at the foundation of an organizational framework for the control of creative work. Because "symbolic creativity ... is increasingly central to social and economic life" (Hesmondalgh, 7), creative work must be produced within clearly defined departments, in order to neutralize the tension at the heart of the culture industries: between "business as usual", and the idea that we must "challenge everything". In response to this tension, "companies grant symbol creators limited autonomy in the hope that the creators will come up with something original and distinctive enough to be a hit. But this means that cultural companies are engaged in a constant process of struggle to control what symbol creators are likely to come up with" (18).

As previously discussed, in order for new meaningful ideas to emerge into culture, the creative process must be ready to tolerate paradoxes and contradictions, and juxtapose social meanings against one another in order to come out with powerful new combinations that become iconic in their turn. In order to solidify the commodity however, the autonomy of the symbol creators must

be cut at the level of profit. Culture workers are therefore held by a form of loose control, where “in order to control the risks associated with managing creativity, senior managers exert much tighter control over reproduction, distribution and marketing (Hesmondalgh, 22). Creative workers may have some nominal freedom within their workgroups, characterized by flat hierarchies, flexible hours, ‘creative freedom’, and so on. This fluidity can present opportunities for what Alvesson and Wilmott (2002) refer to as micro-emancipation, “where employees have greater scope for arranging their own schedules and working practices, albeit within the parameters ... set by others” (624), but this merely camouflages the economic reality, and does not in any way challenge it. In the system of loose control, economic decisions are cut off from aesthetic ones, holding creative freedom and commodity culture in a profitable tension that relies on the *notion* of self-fulfilment.

According to Wayne (2003), there is a “close relationship between the specializing in the elaboration and dissemination of ideas and meanings, and acquiring some relative autonomy and independence, at least on a day-to-day level, in the production process”. Because of this autonomy and independence, creative labour poses a problem for the control structures of capitalism. Moreover, management cannot fully reveal its motives to creative staff or to customers, because that would peel back the fetishistic shell of the commodity. Bourdieu (1995) argues that “the only way that they can combine the economic profits of an ordinary economic enterprise with the symbolic profits assured to intellectual enterprises is by avoiding the crudest forms of mercantilism and by

disdaining from fully revealing their self-interested goals” (142). Hence the effort to maintain the illusions of creative freedom, massaging the bruised egos of the creative staff, while cultural products are quickly appropriated, and the wider social dialogue is narrowed to within a range acceptable to the commodity system. Despite the addition of flex-time, bean-bag chairs and latte bars to the office setting, ‘flexibility’ legitimizes power and domination under the illusion of ‘creative freedom’.

The Bauhaus experiment

Interestingly, the Bauhaus movement struggled with precisely this problem of the integration of the creative commodity with individual fulfilment. In an insight that predates by almost a century the notion of the ‘creative economy’, the Bauhaus argued that meaning is social, rooted in language, and finds its value in the discursive economy (Mann, 30). This view made public action a crucial element of artistic activity for the Bauhaus. The handicraft tool and the industrial machine were for them different only in scale; both occupied a central role in the social experiment of economic craftsmanship. While academic training in art was criticized by the Bauhaus movement because it separated the artist from social realities, a merging of craft with industry and economics would bring these two back together. In this manner, the Bauhaus movement aspired to consciously integrate design into the everyday lives of the proletariat by schooling a generation of “actively creative human beings” (Gropius, 22).

To achieve public participation, the Bauhaus allied with industry. Unlike previous art movements, it was willing to work within the system, not outside or

against it, trying to use the everyday object and the market through which it moved as a site of cultural intervention. Alternatively viewed as “hopelessly utopian, simply technocratic, or a cynical acceptance of capitalist industry” (Schwartz, 2006, 115), the movement did succeed in altering the look of products offered to consumers, and also altering some social discourses and behaviours surrounding these social artefacts. But inevitably, the system of capitalist production itself was off-limits for critique. The consumer commodity became a vehicle for “a utopia that was usually aesthetically and not politically or economically defined” (Schwartz, 120). So although the Bauhaus may have provided some space for agentic negotiation within the system of commodities, the possibilities for economic challenges were strictly limited, and the emphasis fell primarily to aesthetic markers of success – matters of taste rather than politics.

The Bauhaus movement revealed the deep integration of the notion of culture with the nature of the sign in the symbolic economy. Pointing out that symbolic value is more important than material value in the new economic reality, Hesmondalgh (2003) argues that the economy of the sign is the central aspect by which we generate social meanings and wield social power. But while this redefinition of culture seems to provide room for agentic negotiation within the framework of political economy, like the Bauhaus project, the definition of agency is aesthetic, not political or economic. In the symbolic economy of the present, we are faced with a similar result: creative workers express autonomy over matters of taste, but are rigidly limited in terms of their political or economic

expressions. The 'actively creative human being' is impossible unless the aesthetic and economic decisions of designers and industry are more fully integrated.

Rhetorical systems of control

For Alvesson (1999), knowledge that does not involve a challenge to the commodity-system is made credible by rhetorical strategies and social forms of symbolism. Alvesson sees these "systems of persuasion" as the core of creative labour (1011). Non-ambiguous organizations can be managed without highly developed rhetorical skills, but ambiguous ones such as we find in the culture or knowledge industries require advanced rhetorical skills in order to maintain social meanings and wield power. Just as visual rhetoric provides value to a company logo or piece of advertising, rhetorical structures sustain the industry through jargon, clothing, activities, personal preferences, and so on. "Rhetoric then, is not just external to the core of [knowledge-intensive firms], but in a way *is* its core" (Alvesson, 1993, 1007).

Alvesson (1993) argues that the rhetoric of advertising employees is replete with references to how these workers are different from those who work in bureaucracies. They are, "aesthetic", "sensitive", "emotional", "individualistic", and so on. These rhetorical strategies provide a rationale for clients to pay money for their services, and at the same time they become the basic rhetorical forms out of which occupational and life-identities are constituted (1009). Of course, these rhetorical strategies further support organizational requirements, or else the individual is sidelined. While relying on these rhetorical systems of self-

persuasion, they remain subject to capitalist discipline and capitalist relations of production. Furthermore, “the production of ideas, knowledges, and affects ... directly produces social relationships. Immaterial labour is biopolitical in that it is oriented toward the creation of forms of social life. ... Ultimately ... the production involved here is the production of subjectivity” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 66). The rhetorical structures of industry thus generate a figured world of heuristic expectations that, in the last analysis, can deploy economic persuasion against any real opposition.

Individual and labour precarity

In contrast to the stability of Fordist labour, post-Fordist labour in the creative industries is characterized by instability. Brophy and dePeuter (2007) define precarity broadly as “the financial and existential insecurity arising from the flexibilization of labour” (180) – unstable income, unstable hours, and unstable occupational identity. In identity, precarity operates on an entrepreneurial model of responsibility to oneself, which has developed as a psychological response to the precarious labour environment. The ‘flexible’ labourers and self-managed ‘entrepreneurs’ of the ‘new economy’ must manage this lack of occupational stability. If the rhetorical structures of essential identity, ‘flexibility’ and ‘creative freedom’ are not sufficient to keep creative workers in line, then they can always be fired.

Brophy and dePeuter point out that this sense of self-reliance and mobility dovetails perfectly with the dismantling of trade unions and the welfare state (183), so in this sense the entrepreneurial model of self serves capitalist interests

well. For Žižek and Daly (2005). “this is a typical postmodern ideological operation, where the horror of never being certain whether you have a job or not is sold as the new freedom” (147-48). Never at a loss for spinning reality to its benefit, capitalism sells this occupational instability as ‘flexibility’ or ‘personal responsibility’, when in reality it is a problem of exploitation.

Creative ownership and control

One of the areas where the study subjects directly experience control is in the area of copyright. The majority of subjects expressed frustration with the question of creative ownership and control of creative work, but have no economic or political power to challenge the status-quo. Granted limited creative freedom and flexible working hours, they are subject to the blandishments of the rhetoric of self-fulfilment, and rely on essentialist notions of self and romantic notions of creativity that only deepen their frustration and lack of power. The following exchange clearly delineates the line between aesthetic and economic freedom and control, expressing the frustration of the designer.

DJ When you work for a client, you put your own blood sweat and tears into it, and then they own it ...What do you think about that?

JC That’s a hard one. Because like I made it and it’s mine, but it’s theirs. But I think I still have a feeling of ownership over it, even though I don’t actually own it.

LM I think that you’re entitled to feel proud of yourself.

JC Yeah but feeling proud of yourself isn't really ownership. But I think on a level you still think of it as yours. You don't think of it as "their" tradeshow materials or whatever. You say to yourself "that's my work", even though they own it. I'd be pissed if they gave it to another designer and they completely rework it. It's within their rights, but I'd be pissed. I'd be like "why didn't you come to me?" They're disregarding your idea and your creative vision to it.

The subject here feels a strong desire to control the products of her own creativity, but is powerless to control them in a copyright system that employs the same essentialist notions of ownership and copyright that she herself uses. She runs up against the aesthetic/cognitive divide in the sense that she claims the artwork as hers in the aesthetic sense, but not in the economic or political sense. Ultimately, she loses even aesthetic control as well.

A less essentialist viewpoint results in less frustration for the designer, as expressed in the following exchange.

DJ What do you think of copyright and ownership?

CK If I've worked on something, then nobody should be able to copy it. I've seen students just copy designs from places on the Internet, and the teachers don't always know. I think copyright is important.

DJ What about if you work on a project for a company, and then the company owns the copyright?

CK I think you should still be able to say that you worked on it, and put it in your portfolio. Some credit is due. I think it's ok if other people work on it after you. You've completed it up to a

point where you are happy with it, and that's fine. You kinda send it off into the world and let go of it. People will do what is needed with it.

In contrast to the previous dialogue, the subject here expresses much less frustration with his lack of social control over his designs. He seems to be more comfortable with the notion that ultimately he is taking part in a social discourse, and is quite willing to let go of aesthetic control, along with economic control, once he has been sufficiently credited for his contributions. In letting go of control, allowing "what is needed" to be done, he expresses a faith in the social and intertextual evolution of design to which he contributes his work. In this, he is taking his own intertextual creative processes and consciously integrating these with the greater social dialogues. This opens up possibilities for the cultural development of his work, and the work of others.

Although the subject respects copyright and the control structures that go with it, he negotiates with these structures a position of social significance by letting go of essentialist notions of his work. But we must recognize that "what is needed" will be largely dictated by the economic priorities of the owners of copyright. Like the Bauhaus, the results of these cultural developments are likely to be aesthetic rather than political. Still, there seems to be some agentic promise in moving in this intertextual direction, because it does not close off the possibility to re-engage the aesthetic decisions of the artist with the economic and political decision-making processes.

Precarity and professionalism

However, any agency outside of the pre-established limits of organizational structures and figured worlds of discourse is likely to meet stiff opposition, ultimately leading to dismissal and financial hardship. The vast majority of subjects in the study revealed that employment security was one of the motivating factors for them to enter the graphic design field, as opposed to the general arts. They soon are faced with the realities of labour precarity and the concerns about steady employment and advancement in their field. While many continue to express the rhetoric of self-fulfilment and personal agency, such agency as there is is deeply compromised by industry practices that require constantly upgraded skills and unexpected expertise. Precarity is thus the dark reality underlying the notion of flexibility.

The following exchange indicates very clearly the reality that flexibility works in favour of the industry, not the individual.

DJ So just a moment ago we were talking about looking for work.

MM Yeah.

DJ So how is it going?

MM Well there are a lot of jobs that [the school career advisor] is sending out, but the thing that I'm noticing is that a lot of jobs that say they want a graphic designer actually want a lot of web design as well. So they want you to be able to design, but they also want you to be able to do php, javascript, css, which we get a little bit of in the program, but we don't have

any idea about a lot of that stuff. They expect us to know that stuff, but they say they want a graphic designer. So it's kind of like ok, I'm applying for it anyways, and if they say no they say no, but if I get an interview at least I have a chance.

DJ Yeah.

MM So it's something that now I guess I'll have to learn on my own. Because I'm not going back to school again. I can't afford it. I guess it was unexpected. I didn't think I'd be asked to program in php.

DJ So you're not finding a lot of jobs in what you wanted?

MM Not really. They want like everything. Actually one job that I found, like it's split. They want you to be part-time salesperson and part-time graphic designer. And you actually have a two-tiered wage. So when you're a salesperson you have one wage, when you're a graphic designer you have another wage that's higher than the salesperson wage.

DJ Really?

MM Yeah, so it's like ... what? I could do it easily, but it's like you have to be two different people. It's very strange.

DJ So how do you feel about your job prospects going forward?

MM I don't know, I guess I have a list of places that I want to apply to, and I'm kind of going through. Not that many of them are hiring. And [the school career advisor] sends out a lot of stuff. So you just have to try, right?

I guess it's ok, but I think it's going to take a while.

Unfortunately, because I want to work like right now. Unless

I just settle for something that has nothing to do with graphic design. Just get a job kind of thing just to pay for bills. I might end up being stuck doing that unless I can find something soon.

Several interesting things are occurring in this dialogue. First, the subject expresses surprise and dismay that the industry demands are for wide-ranging knowledge and skills, and not for specialists. In this sense, she is ill prepared for the reality of the flexible worker, and realizes that contrary to prevailing social rhetoric, the company will not adapt to her, but she will have to acquire new skills. Second, despite the financial pressures, the subject desires to maintain the stability of her occupational identity and challenges the notion of a two-tiered wage. She is trying to maintain the integrity of occupational identity that developed within the figured world of her educational experience. Third, the financial pressures are beginning to make her realize that it might be required to compromise her occupational identity “just to pay for bills”, but she is reluctant to do so. By placing financial pressure on the subject, the industry is structured to force the subject into compromise positions that do not end with the first job, but continue to erode agentic self-determination at every stage of their careers.

Sidelining critical self reflection and agentic self-expression

The notion of flexible labour relies on essentialist notions of individuality and utopian notions of society, where the individual is fully integrated into the workforce. While environments of loose control may seem like an opportunity for more freedom, in practice they cut off economic decisions from aesthetic ones,

so that although the individual might obtain some small amount of autonomy on a day-to-day basis, they cannot be said to exercise agency in any real political or economic sense. While symbolic labour is exploited, the rhetoric of Romantic creativity and self-determination is used to distract the worker from critical economic and social analysis. Essentialist notions of creativity combine with these labour discourses to undermine awareness of the social reality constraining agentic expression.

While the culture industries attempt to unify the individual with industry, agentic unification requires a real flattening of control hierarchies that is more than just window-dressing. This is where the Bauhaus arguably failed, and where today's culture industries have no economic or political motivation to succeed. Further intensifying the pressures and undermining agency, control is wielded through labour instability. While culture workers are rhetorically expected to be self-motivating and 'flexible', in reality this means that their social position is precarious. Thus are socially rooted and creative individuals reduced by rigid systems of persuasion and an unstable labour environment to shorten the considerable length of their creative gaze to next month's rent.

The inevitable conclusion is that these subjects must be trained to apply their creative problem-solving techniques outside of the narrow commercial applications that they are currently encouraged to fetishize. Like the Bauhaus, we conclude therefore that one of the tasks of education is to politicise the design process. The next section explores some of the discourses and shortcomings of

the design education of these subjects, and points towards some potential ways that aesthetics can be more critically integrated with the rest of social life.

COMPETING DISCOURSES OF EDUCATION

Educational institutions are a central locale of competing interests, and the struggle for the worldview of the next generation of culture workers. But education does not simply reproduce the dominant ideology. Rather “the contradictions that characterize society as it is now penetrate the intimacy of the pedagogical institutions in which systematic education is working and alter its role or its replicating work of the dominant ideology” (Freire, 39). Educational institutions are thus important locales where figured worlds mingle and resolve into the various subject-positions that constitute identity.

At the Art Institute of Vancouver, the needs of the students are most often perceived by to be skills acquisition and employability. On the other hand, like other institutions of higher education that have developed in a tradition of liberal democracy, there is a presumption that historical and critical education is a social good in its own right. This represents one of the central tensions within education in general: between critical learning and tool mastery, between training students as workers and training them as independent thinkers. Students must navigate and manage these discourses throughout their program of study, and into their careers as culture workers.

Among the study subjects, these contradictory educational missions resolve into negotiations that, like the institution itself, conflate personal with professional development. This is symptomatic of a wider social trend noted by

Peters (2009), where the educational focus in the creative economy “has exercised a strong appeal to policymakers who want to link education more firmly to new forms of capitalism” (132). Both institutional and subjective values in this environment equate education with tool mastery, and the ‘social good’ of education is reduced to a middle-class lifestyle.

In order to sustain critical education therefore, curriculum ought to provide an opportunity to challenge the goals of education; these heuristics should be challenged within education itself. The students are well equipped to perform social analysis in the areas of creative problem solving, so it seems a small yet essential step to make the curriculum itself interpretive and self-reflexive. This would enable critical discussion of the purposes of education from within the socializing process, thereby challenging the status-quo and providing an educational environment that supports agency in the development of cultural productions and identity.

Critical citizenship and tool mastery

Lasch (1978) distinguishes between two streams in educational philosophy that lie at the core of the ideological dilemmas facing educational institutions today. He argues that education was “democratized” (that is made accessible to all), for two reasons: first to provide the liberal democracy with enlightened citizens who could vote and take a responsible part in civic life; and second to train workers (130). The enlightened citizen approach to education emerged from the Republican tradition in the United States of individual equality and limited government. However, starting in the 1840’s with waves of mass

immigration from Europe, the idea of enlightened citizenship began to gradually conflate the idea of acculturation to the American way of life with industrial training. “By bringing modern culture to the masses, the school system would also inculcate industrial discipline in the broadest sense of the term” (133). Today, the notion of industrial discipline conjures images of drudgery and servitude to the Chaplinesque machine, but at the time the drive for good workmanship “did not imply docile and subservient workers; on the contrary, it implied a labour force ... that did not need to be governed” (134). Such an ideologically acculturated workforce would self-evidently maintain the American way of life while serving their own self-interested goals. Culture and discipline merged, and education began to support the social structure in a self-evident ideological web.

Emphasis on technique over critique

With technique, there is no question of social or critical historical awareness, only the performance of easily measured normative functions. Moreover, from an individual or institutional point of view, as Bilton (2007) points out, skills acquisition is emphasized because it is safe; “technique feels safe, where creativity feels risky” (38). Tool mastery soon took over from the notion of the critical education for the self-governing mass, and education came to emphasize technique. Ironically, because essentialist notions of individuality and self-expression are well ingrained and predominant over the social aspects of the self in American culture, agency can be sacrificed on the basis of the *notion* of individuality. According to Freire (1987), the individualistic frame ironically

“denies all dimensions of human agency” (58) because it creates a dichotomy between the individual and the social, negating social interests, or subsuming social interests within individual interests” (59). As a result, the school system that we have today has a commitment to serving broader social goals, but linked with a culture based on individual financial success, it emphasizes measurable skills that will result in career employment, but curtailing individual agency. It is much better for the stability of capitalist structure to emphasize skills and pseudo-individuality in education. Critical education is lost in the maze of supposed ‘individual self-fulfilment’ and ‘neutral’ pedagogy.

Pragmatic focus

In this study, subjects display a pragmatic focus on technical skills and tool mastery, which is unsurprising given their lack of social power and job insecurity. This focus on technical detail provides them with an occupational identity in solidarity with others in their area of expertise, shoring up their insecurities (jobs, income, etc.), while it also provides a rational basis for their education – if not in dollars than at least in specific measurable skills, and occupational identity and employability. In the words of one student, relying on rationalized structures for measuring value in design, and by extension value in the educational experience is “a lot more objective.”

DJ In general, what would you say is the purpose of education?

PG Well, from a student’s point of view it’s to gain knowledge,
from an instructor’s point of view it’s to share knowledge.
And to widen your experiences. I mean, I would go and take

a class even if it had nothing to do with anything I want to pursue as a career, because it's a learning experience, because learning means to grow and all that good stuff.

DJ There seems to be two things. One is "I want to go to school to get a job." On the other hand there is this more idealistic thing where you can grow as a person.

PG Yeah, I know what you mean. It's like the difference between Emily Carr and AI. Emily Carr to me is like, uh, "let out your inner artist. It can fly" – it's like a personal artist kind of school. It's about you. Whereas at AI, it's kind of about you but its way more technical, and corporate, geared towards the job market. So I would take the technical over the inner artist type of thing any day.

DJ For practical reasons or for personal ones?

PG I don't know. I enjoyed it, so I guess for personal ones. It seems a lot more objective. It's a lot less flimsy and wishy-washy. It's easier and it's more challenging. The other one it's too easy to bullshit your way through it. You could draw a black circle on a piece of paper and say that it's a representation of the void in your life, and that's easy.

In denigrating the subjectivist view of art education as modes of self-expression, this subject clearly expresses the requirement to develop specific skills for industry. Self-expression is caricatured as "flimsy and wishy-washy", while developing specific approaches and skills targeted to industry positions is more "objective". This evidences a Romantic view of art as self-expression, and disregards the social aspects of the artistic dialogue with others. This pragmatic

focus corresponds to the notion that most of the study subjects seem to have about education as being for the smooth integration of the self into industry through the mastery of rhetoric and tools.

DJ What would you say is the purpose of education? In a general way.

MM I guess to better ourselves, to learn more. I just like learning. I guess it's just like with the graphic design stuff most of the stuff I didn't even know existed or the terms for it, and it's like head explosion. And it's like I really enjoy it. So the purpose of education is to learn more, to better yourself, to move ahead.

DJ What do you mean by moving ahead?

MM Well, generally the higher your education the better job you can get. And it betters yourself in your knowledge and your standard of living. Overall.

Like most of the subjects in the study, this subject equates higher education with practical concerns such as standard-of-life and class. This indicates that they seem to be well socialized into a system of social consent.

In the following exchange, the subject reveals evidence of a wide social context, but quickly narrows its definition to a practical, employable output. Time and again in the interviews, subjects expressed an awareness of social-democratic goals in education, but these were consistently weak, and the fallback position in each case was tool-mastery and rationalized measures of value, even into their personal lives.

DJ What would you say is the purpose of education?

CK I think you broaden your skill set and develop a skill set for something that you want to go into. Because before I started at AI I was like “oh, graphic design, cool!” and in high school I had a couple of courses where I learned some Illustrator or Photoshop. I think if I hadn’t gone to school I think it would have been really pointless to go through the world with “Oh, I can do graphic design”, and I kind of hate it that people take it so lightly, actually. Like, “Oh, I know how to use Photoshop and Illustrator, I’m a designer now”, without the fundamentals of typography and what type is and how to actually use those programs to their full potential. I think you come out a more rounded person for the field of study that you want to go into.

In another exchange with two different subjects, they indicate that although they want to acquire “life skills” they also want to be taken for professionals by others. Again, the fallback discourse in their conversation is to tool mastery and a career path.

DJ You said “life skills”, what do you mean by that?

KL You start learning professionalism, like learning how a professional world would be like. So it’s kind of like a launch-point for a career. How to talk to other people ... things about communications. Like, I used to be really, really, really shy, and so just by going to school and talking to other people who were similar to me I’m able to talk to other people now, and I wouldn’t have been able to before, so that’s like, life skills from my education.

- CG I think part of college is that you kind of grow up too. Because high school is very clique-e and all that, and there is less of that in college because our whole class was basically one clique, if you want to think of it like that. There isn't all that bull-crap that there is in high school and I think it leads you to be more your own person and more secure with yourself.
- DJ Would you say that's a function of the education or is it more the period of your life that you are in?
- CG I think it's both. You're meeting in an educational environment and you are put together with the other people.
- DJ What does the certificate of completion mean to you?
- CG I think in the end the diploma is kind of useless. It's a piece of paper and I think your skills show off more of what you can do. Especially in graphic design because there is such a range of skills and skill levels among the people who graduate.
- KL And it's hard to say that your education is ever going to stop because there are so many trends and you're going to have to re-educate yourself, and all of the technology is changing. The document doesn't mean anything, really.
- DJ So is it fair to say that the process is more important than the final outcome of graduating?
- CG Well, we both have diplomas, but K is a much stronger designer than I am, it's the portfolio that actually counts in terms of getting a job.

Interestingly, in this exchange, education is expected to provide “life skills” such as overcoming shyness, but these life skills are subordinated to the professional discourse, and are developed primarily for the purpose of career development. It appears that tool mastery and the practical goals of employment lead to a kind of security, economic as well as ontological. While the diploma itself does not appear as an important marker of achievement or self-development, technical discourses support both personal and professional development. For these subjects, education is practical. Life skills are conflated with professional skills, closing the ideological gap between critical education and normative knowledge and identity.

Critical education is thereby subordinated to practical knowledge that will get a job or launch a career. This attitude lies at the root of the subjects’ lack of agency and their willingness to fall in line with industry discourses around the individualist notions of flexibility and romantic creativity, even in the face of labour precarity. Underlying essentialist notions blind them to the social and discursive dimensions of their own priorities. Of course, labour insecurity is real, but the educational institution obscures its own ideology under the guise of neutrality, and the students therefore are not critically exposed to the conflation of practical technical skills with the idea of bettering themselves. The ostensibly neutral pedagogy of tool mastery obscures its own ideological origins and social gestation, thus sidelining agency in favour of structures of control. The study subjects appear to have absorbed this pragmatism and the assumptions that it

carries, even to the extent that they caricature other potentially more critical forms of artistic expression.

Critical pedagogy is self-reflexive

Freedman (2003) notes insightfully that art is a mediation of the world, and art education is therefore a mediation of that mediation. Art (the painting, for example) objectifies the object that it paints; education objectifies art. In other words, education is an interpretation of an interpretation, a representation of a representation. Objects are therefore transformed in education, segmented and simplified according to the discourses of the figured world of interpretation. Curriculum is thus a mediator between the artist, the instructor, and the students in the act of local appropriation. “Learning occurs through the social mediation of an interdependent world of knowledge. The mediation takes place in a social community as a result of historical traditions that are renewed and changed during mediation. The problem for educators is to develop an approach to teaching that can aid students in analyzing the mediation as it occurs” (80).

Education ought to promote the analysis of this mediation, becoming self-reflexive and transparently interpretive. In this way, the discursive and ideological movements are made clear to the students, so that they can begin to reflexively evaluate the choices and processes of curriculum, and thus develop critical awareness of their own educational process. Then tool mastery may be placed in a wider field of interpretation, and “students can begin to understand how knowledge is constructed through socially interactive experiences that focus them on creating meanings, as well as products” (118). For Freedman this

requires a shift from epistemological models of art interpretation to ontological models. “The expanding world of visual culture is not just worthy of study because *it’s out there*; it is worthy of study because *it’s in here*; through art making and viewing, we shift our thinking about the world and about ourselves” (91).

CONCLUSION

Like most individuals, the subjects in this study work to achieve a stable occupational identity in the midst of overlapping figured worlds of discourse. Although subject to forms of psychological management and control, they are also subject to their own self-narrativising processes, and it is in these processes that negotiations take place, and agency resides.

The study subjects display an ongoing struggle to enact social closure around their occupational identity. To do this, they express pride in technical knowledge, which clearly dovetails with educational emphases on tool mastery. In the words of one subject, these skills make the occupation less “wishy-washy” and more “objective” (graphic design is a “machine”, after all). This supposed objectivity is portrayed by the producers as a way to support industry requirements, resulting in a well-integrated workforce. As education is closely intertwined with labour in the culture industries, the so-called ‘neutral’ curriculum obscures its own ideological roots, and operates against agentic self-determination.

However, the subjects are clearly not fully ideologically saturated. For one thing, they denigrate certain professional discourses, even as they attempt to appropriate others. Occupational identity is tenuously closed around technical methods and intertextual creative processes. They express cynicism around cognitive justifications for aesthetic decisions in calling bullshit, and yet do not

consider the visual discourses of commodity-culture that they develop in their work to be bullshit at all. As they are misled by essentialist discourses that surround creativity, and pressured by industry requirements, they separate the intellectual and the visual components of their identity-formation. The subsequent subject-positions they adopt are multifaceted and provisional, relying on heuristic reifications such as 'flexibility', Romantic creativity, individualism and 'getting ahead'.

At the same time, most subjects in this study expressed an improvisational awareness within and between the figured worlds of interpretation in their creative processes. Creative problem solving involves both cognitive and aesthetic decision-making, however there are numerous forces that prevent such balanced improvisations from becoming political or economic. Agency is cut short at the level of the commodity, and the subsequent discursive negotiations are either to immerse into the commodity system, or to retain a false sense of power in opposition to this system by maintaining normative notions of creative self-fulfilment or flexibility. As a last resort, commercial society deploys organizational constraints and labour pressures in order to keep the creative worker from thinking too far outside the commodity system. In the face of such precarity, these culture workers submit to normative and essentialist notions of Romantic creativity and flexibility. In Bakhtinian terms, both their visual discourses and occupational identities remain as poetry – beautiful yet closed discourses bathed in Lethe, the river of forgetting. In extolling technical discourse and aesthetic 'inspiration', they melt into the commodity system of control.

Recommendations for a critical pedagogy of design education

The reduction of education to practical knowledge that provides an income or launches a career obscures the fact that the jobs of cultural producers are not culturally neutral. Because the productions of culture workers are widely dispersed into culture via the media system, their education is a crucial site of cultural intervention. Educators therefore have a responsibility to prepare students to wield their cultural influence with some critical awareness. Freedman (2003) thus argues for a social history of visual culture in creative education, which emphasizes not only an awareness of culture, but more pointedly a social responsibility for visual culture among those involved in the visual arts.

Educational programs that involve the exercising and development of creativity actively develop skills of cultural improvisation in their creative pedagogy, but this creative training is limited to narrow (commodity-oriented) improvisations. In making these improvisations self-reflexive among students of design, students may become more critically aware of the visual and cognitive rhetoric of the industry, and how it operates not only outside of them but through them and within them.

To develop this awareness, Freedman recommends a focus on relationships and contexts (rather than objects), which shape and are shaped by visual culture. For example, curriculum may add a study of production contexts, circumstances and settings of viewing, and the intertextuality or “intergraphicality” of meaning that makes up visual culture. These social contexts include the notions of cultural groups and power. In taking such an interdisciplinary approach

to the interpretation of visual culture, Freedman argues that students develop the skills and tools for a critical analysis of visual culture, and develop moral responsibility.

An important aspect of this integration is an awareness of discourse in the largest sense – as verbal explanations but also as embodied practice and as visual representations. Structure and agency come together at the confluence of intellectual cognition and bodily experience, in multifaceted narrative constructions of identity. Education can support reflexive awareness of this process, which produces identity and society itself in day-to-day activities and discourses. For Lasch and Urry (1994) reflexive subjectivity – self-aware recounting of experience to oneself underlies a process of individualization, in which “agency is set free from structure” (4).

This implies a dynamic and critically generative interaction of visual and verbal discourses in education. Rather than simply denigrating one or the other, or subordinating one to the other, such discourses ought to be expanded to encompass the greater social production, and the modes of viewing, so that students learn to examine not simply mechanics and techniques, but the entire context of discursive exchange. One recognizes in this process that education and design are forms of social production and reproduction, and one’s identity and place in the social order as an artist or designer is negotiated, not given.

Ultimately, this leads to a realization of the ways in which visual culture interacts with knowledge construction. In curriculum, this can be addressed by recognizing that cultural and individual reflexivity are essential to sophisticated

interpretation and response of contemporary visual culture. Examining the means of knowledge-construction can help students “reflect on the seductive power of visual culture so that they become aware of the continual learning that is part of their daily contact with it” (Freedman, 105), and their agency and moral responsibilities as cultural producers.

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