2013

Re:creation

Heather Boone
Virginia Commonwealth University

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for Cairo + Luxor
Submitted to the faculty of the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Fine Arts in Design, Visual Communications.

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- HEATHER CHRISTINA BOONE
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NANCY (above)
EMMET GOWIN
1969
Gelatin Silver Print, 5½” x 6⅞”
**GREEN PROJECT, INVESTIGATION I**
**PROFESSOR SANDRA WHEELER**

MFA Workshop, Fall 2005, Manipulated Photographs, 3¼" x 2¾"

Professor Sandy Wheeler initiated the “Green Project,” which began with choosing a black and white photograph (see page 2) that represented a personal interpretation of “green.” Subverting the intention of the image led to numerous typographic and photographic explorations based on the concept of original sin and eventually led to investigations dealing with the feminine role in creation mythologies.

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ABSTRACT
This intent of this project is to explore the importance of handmade objects in the age of information.

PERSONAL INTEREST
One hot day in the summer of ’78 I stood in front of my mother’s sewing machine in the garage of our modest family home weighing the pros and cons of what I was about to do. I knew that if I proceeded, things could go awry and I could perhaps, aggravate my Mother. I didn’t like the feeling of possibly upsetting her, so I scanned my surroundings for alternative instruments. I just couldn’t find a better option. Sure, there were other sharp objects around, but I didn’t want to get hurt in this process. The sewing machine was clearly the perfect tool for the task at hand.

It wasn’t that I wanted to break anything, but I just had to figure out what was inside of Stretch Armstrong that made him so, well... stretchy. It was indeed an uncontrollable curiosity, and I had been planning the inevitable experiment from the moment that I laid eyes on the fascinating toy. I pressed my foot to the pedal. After several dutiful stitches, the needle became lodged inside of the doll and broke in my attempts to remove it. Now I knew there would be trouble, but Stretch’s new wound began to ooze a syrupy looking substance and I was distracted by my next dilemma—what was this substance, and do I dare taste it?

I’ve always been a bit of a tinkerer—I inspect things—take them apart in the hopes that this process will help me to better understand how things work. This curiosity led me to foolishly accept and ultimately excel at a job in web design before there were even courses devoted to the new media at most universities.

It always seemed like an accident that I was working in such a technical field—as I never pursued the job—rather, it found me. The pressure was low, if I didn’t like it or wasn’t any good at it, it wouldn’t matter, because I never really wanted it in the first place. I could just leave the job and get back to what I loved, because I was the girl who earned an undergraduate degree in fine arts without ever touching a computer. I liked making things—with my hands. I liked painting and printmaking with incredibly heavy pieces of limestone. What I didn’t count on was that I would actually be good at interaction design and so, I worked for the next decade in this intangible medium and found that I quite enjoyed its unique challenges.

Ten years later, in my first semester at graduate school, I realized that I had all but stopped working with my hands and had come to believe that I was no longer capable of such skill. It was during a workshop with the Dutch portfolio maker, Anneloes Grimbergen, that I realized I had enjoyed making digital artifacts in my career but, I was ready to escape the intangibility of my life’s work, to use my time in graduate school to concentrate on the hand skills I had lost.
“Everything in our background has prepared us to know and resist a prison when the gates begin to close around us...but what if there are no cries of anguish to be heard? Who is prepared to take arms against a sea of amusements?”

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

As crazy as it sounds, in 2006 Marianne Jørgensen decided to protest the war in Iraq by knitting. The Danish artist was outraged by the war, so she began making a pink blanket. She informed a few people on the internet about her plans and soon she had a community of crafters assisting her in reaching a goal of exhibiting the blanket draped on top of a tank in front of the Contemporary Art Center in Copenhagen. “The tank is a symbol of stepping over other people’s borders,” Jørgensen says on her website. “When it is covered in pink, it becomes completely unarmored and it loses its authority.”

One of the definitions of the word “craft” can be understood as a form of self-serving deception. So, it is of little surprise that Jørgensen isn’t the first artist to use craft in protest. If pressing fears about consumerism have become a status symbol, this new hip generation of connected crafters and a community was created for this newnatalist movement loosely organized around three central causes: environmentalism, third-wave feminism, and anti-capitalism. Railla discusses what she calls The New Domesticity, in her book, *Get Crafty: Hip Home Ec*, a webzine for radical craftiness, dubbed “a webzine for radical craftsmanship.”

Domestic endeavours, like crafting, were rejected during the second-wave of feminism in the pursuit of equal opportunities for women in the public sphere. Third-wave feminists have since reclaimed these traditionally feminized activities in order to reconnect with the female-dominated art forms and legitimate their importance, while encouraging women to build meaningful, personal identities in spite of prescribed stereotypes delivered via mass media. In 1998, Railla launched a website she dubbed “a website for radical craftsmanship,” and a community was created for this new generation of connected crafters that identified with third-wave feminist principles. Railla discusses what she calls the New Domesticity, in her book, *Get Crafty: Hip Home Ec,* “crafting is a form of political statement and a protest against chain stores that are turning America into one big mini-mall” (Walker).

In a related project, artist Stephanie Syjuco recruited participants to create counterfeit handbags. The bags, which they promised to use so that these strange new variations would flow into the stream of consumption, are documented on the project’s website. It can be said that craft is the opposite of technology and just as the industrial revolution introduced the means for the over consumption of physical goods, the age of information has made way for the overconsumption of information. Like it or not, much of our daily lives revolve around interacting with digital artifacts.

If pressing fears about consumerism have fueled the renewed interest in crafting, a realization of our increasing cultural dependence on the digital world has led to a natural and human desire to experience life in more direct and tangible ways. Such cultural leanings become evident in movements like the Subbath Manifesto, a creative project designed to slow down life by dedicating one day a week to unplugging from digital devices. It is also apparent by the faux-physicality of current digital interfaces (think ribbons and atmospheric noise) and the revival of the handmade object in shopping malls and digital marketplaces such as Etsy.

In his book *Technopoly*, Neil Postman states that, “Technological change is neither additive nor subtractive. It is ecological. I mean ‘ecological’ in the same sense as the word is used by environmental scientists. One significant change generates total change. If you remove the caterpillars from a given habitat, you are not left with the same environment minus caterpillars: you have a new environment, and you have reconstituted the conditions of survival; the same is true if you add caterpillars to an environment that had had none. This is how ecology of media works as well. A new technology does not add or subtract something: it changes everything” (19).

Technology has changed both the methods of production and the means of delivery of book and magazine design. Designers are increas-ingly divorced from the production of the artifacts they are tasked with creating. Indeed, with each advance in technology, designers must redefine the nature of their profession. As an ever-increasing number of objects exist only in digital format, what is the role of craft in design?

The effects of digital media on the future of book and magazine design are, perhaps, the most interesting. Dutch book designer Irma Boom speaks about the changing role of the book with the advent of digital technology: “I think the internet has changed books as a phenomenon. Making a book has in fact become a status symbol. It is a very slow and still medium. The types of books I make tend to have an object-like quality. I think that’s important to me and to the book’s existence. A really good book has a permanent quality, I think. I hope.” (Holt)

My project explores two things: a design process rooted in avoiding technology and the construction of personal identity through information consumption. My hope, goal, and intention is to generate awareness and critical discourse concerning the changing role of technology in design, contemporary society, and our individual lives.
“In his shirt blinks the small red light of a tape recorder taking down every word. As the Earl asks, ‘Who’s the bigger fool?’ The reporter who refuses to invent a meaning for life? Or the reader who wants it? And stands ready to accept this meaning presented in the words of a stranger?”

Chuck Palahniuk, Haunted
Campbell goes further to say that the first function of myth is that of mysticism, which relates directly to the personal mythology of Jung. “Realizing what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are, and experiencing awe before the mystery that underlies all forms. If you lose that, you don’t have a mythology. If mystery is manifest in all things, the universe becomes, as it were, a holy picture. You are always addressing the transcendent mystery through the conditions of your actual world” (31).

The nature-oriented mythology would be Campbell, like Jung, describes two types of myth: one that serves nature or the natural instinct and one that serves society. Nature-oriented myth is a product of planting cultures and social-oriented myth serves a nomadic or hunting society. “There is the mythology that relates you to your nature and to the natural world, of which you’re a part. And there is the mythology that is strictly sociological, linking you to a particular society. You are not simply a natural man, you are a member of a particular group. In the history of European mythology, you can see the interaction of these two systems. Usually the socially oriented system is of a nomadic people who are moving around, so you learn that’s where your center is, in the group. The nature-oriented mythology would be of an earth-cultivating people” (22–23).

Similarly, Jung uses the term myth as a transition between the personal and the cultural, so it is seen as a vehicle for the development of a personal mythology and understanding of one’s life in the greater context of the earth and human development of a personal mythology. “There is the mythology that relates you to your nature and to the natural world, of which you’re a part. And there is the mythology that is strictly sociological, linking you to a particular society. You are not simply a natural man, you are a member of a particular group. In the history of European mythology, you can see the interaction of these two systems. Usually the socially oriented system is of a nomadic people who are moving around, so you learn that’s where your center is, in the group. The nature-oriented mythology would be of an earth-cultivating people” (22–23).

Where Campbell sees a strong divide in mythology is where the two men’s theories begin to diverge. Jung, while describing two systems of myth, that of the personal mythology and that of established mythologies, sees the two systems as interconnected in the formation of the individual. Campbell’s interpretation of the nature myth and the social myth is that they are often in opposition within culture.

**MYTHOLOGY OF THE FEMININE**

In considering a revisionist history of mythology one must look back to the myths in their original intended form in an effort to trace the subversions that the merging of cultures and subsequent translations have produced. Campbell states, “There have been systems of religion where the mother is the prime parent, the source. The mother is really a more immediate parent than the father because one is born of the mother, and the first experience of any infant is the mother. I have frequently thought that mythology is a sublimation of the mother image” (165).

The ancient earth cultivating communities of the Egyptian Nile and Mesopotamia are two places where such a sublimation has taken place. “There are early civilizations are examples of Goddess-centered mythologies, where societies saw a sacred link between the life giving abilities of the female with that of the life giving capacity of the earth itself. These were cultures that realized Campbell’s nature-oriented mythologies and hence, all that was natural was celebrated and seen as divine.

Campbell states, “Myths of the Great Goddess teach us compassion for all living beings. There you come to appreciate the real sanctity of the earth itself, because it is the body of the Goddess” (165). Every living thing that exists is indeed of the earth and therefore divine in and of itself. Once the herding and animal-oriented hunting cultures began to invade these lands, the myths began to change to suit a particular society. The mother is really a more immediate parent than the father because one is born of the mother, and the first experience of any infant is the mother. I have frequently thought that mythology is a sublimation of the mother image” (165).

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Myths of the goddess began to change during these times into myths of gods as she no longer plays a prominent role in these new mythologies and in some cases extreme measures bring in warrior gods, thunderbolt hurlers, like Zeus or Yahweh” (169).

Some goddess cultures were very resilient and in some cases extreme measures had to be taken to wipe out local deities. During the Hebrew invasions the name for the Canaanite goddess is translated as “The Abomination” and many things are condemned for worshipping at mountain tops, which are a symbol for this goddess. There is a fluctuation within the culture between the two theologies, the nature-oriented and the social-oriented. Campbell comments, “There was a very strong sentiment against the Goddess in the Hebrew, which you do not find in the Indo-European mythologies. So, it’s an extreme case that we have in the Bible, and our own Western subjugation of the female is a function of biblical thinking” (172).

Myth reflects the current needs of a given culture and what Campbell describes as the subjugation of the feminine is a result of the patriarchal power structures within the conquering dominant culture—myth serves to reinforce the cultural climate by validating the new patriarchal order.
To know these opposites as Campbell speaks of them require that human beings think in terms of binary opposition.

### BINARY OPPOSITIONS

The introduction of oppositions as a result of the Fall of Man that Campbell presents is directly related to Derrida’s theories on language. In considering the oppositions that language must use in order to communicate abstract ideas, an opposition must be created—to know what good means, one must understand what evil means. Campbell speaks of the opposition of good and evil and Derrida’s theory deals with the idea that there is always a hierarchy created within the binary, so for good/evil, good is the valued concept and evil is the devalued one.

### POSTMODERNISM

Deconstructionism has had a great deal of impact on feminist thinking—that women must critically inspect a test and release it from the inherent male bias within language itself, supposing that “such binary hierarchies can often be shown to underpin ‘common-sense’ notions, such as traditional beliefs in the inferiority of women” (Rowland 99).

Hélène Cixous is one such feminist thinker who seeks to undo the logocentrism of the binary oppositions of Western languages by looking towards a ‘féminine langue’ of multiplicity. “Dialogue can immediately begin with Jung when Cixous argues that binary oppositions demonstrate death at work by suppressing the plural feminine.” Jung’s complex uses of binary terms as both deconstructive (as feminine as unknowable other) and essentializing (the feminine not existing except for the masculine) effectively demonstrates Campbell’s theory that the Fall of Man that Campbell presents is that of biological difference. Shifting focus to social construction allows for the artist’s act of reinterpretation of the feminine based on ever-changing cultural forces.

Derrida introduced his theory of deconstruction by explaining what he calls “difference.” Difference posits that in writing there is a persistent leakage of meaning as a reader encounters a text because meaning is unfixed and subjective and based heavily on context.

Cixous coined the phrase écriture féminine, which is the act of embracing Derrida’s theories of difference and writing in a manner which interrogates the binary oppositions in language. “She [Cixous] uses the language of myth and the Bible in order to imagine the ‘feminine’ base as signifying all possible subject positions. As the attempt to recapture the ‘fem’ of writing there is a persistent leakage of meaning as a reader encounters a text because meaning is unfixed and subjective and based heavily on context.”

The idea of gender being primarily socially constructed has informed the work of many feminist thinkers and opened a door to reconceptualizing duality. To move out into the world you have to act in pairs of opposites” (Campbell 49).

Our personal archetypes are constructed and reconstructed over time based on our experiences within culture. Derrida posits that language “for deconstruction, is not a transparent tool for communication or knowledge. Rather, it is an unstable entity that constructs fragile cultural forms and disputes the very possibility of a unitary gendered self” (Rowland 97). Beasley states in What is Feminism, that “for [Derrida] is concerned with the deconstructing or unpacking of the cultural/linguistic assumptions regarding the fixity and inevitability of forms of power with the aim of opening up alternative possibilities” (Beasley 73-74). If meaning is not fixed because of the instability of language, then this offers an entry point for the artist to reinterpret and re-examine the intent and meaning of any given text.

The content of my project develops a visual and verbal vocabulary for six female archetypes from a vintage book about circuses. It presents themes of creation, life, death, consumption, and mythology by juxtaposing photographs taken during workshop explorations with the narrative of the circus book. It was my first experiment with concurrent, and sometimes oppositional, narratives. Subtext based his building interests in pluralism and deconstructionist theories with a method for bookmaking that was physical not digital.
The Dinner Party
JUDY CHICAGO
1979
Installation

The Dinner Party is an installation in the Brooklyn Museum’s Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art that presents a commemorative banquet for thirty-nine historical women with place settings at a large dinner table. Artist, Judy Chicago’s intent was to share a vision of the world in which women’s history and perspectives are entirely recognized and integrated into all aspects of life. The entirely handmade installation took six years to complete and includes over four hundred collaborators showcasing “traditional” women’s arts and crafts such as needlework and china painting. The Dinner Party revisits aesthetic and practical techniques with which women have traditionally been associated—weaving and needlework—with the intention of freeing these activities from dismissive categories such as folk arts and crafts, which was an important tenet of second-wave feminism.

Strange Little Girls
TORI AMOS
2001
Album Art

Strange Little Girls, is a concept album created by singer-songwriter Tori Amos that reconstructs twelve tracks originally written by men, most often about women. Amos performs each song from the perspective of a cast of invented female characters. This act transforms the original narratives making the new songs her own.

Biddy Mason: Time and Place
SHEILA DE BRETTVILLE
1990
Monument

Artist, designer, and academic, Sheila De Bretteville designed this public monument to honor former slave, Biddy Mason. Mason was a midwife who, in 1847, walked over 2,000 miles for her freedom. She went on to become one of the first black women to own land in Los Angeles. The poured concrete wall documents Mason’s life from the time of her slavery to her final days as a philanthropist. It is erected in the place of her former home and contains the actual deeds to her property and her freedom papers. Biddy Mason: Time and Place represents it’s subject from multiple perspectives, allowing viewers to contemplate the significance of her life.

Bears
KENT ROGOWSKI
2007
Book Pages

Bears, documents a visually arresting experiment conducted by Kent Rogowski and his self-proclaimed twisted curiosity. In the book, the photographer documents stuffed animals that he has taken apart and reassembled inside-out. The resulting portraits of each creature’s appearance echoes its manufacturing process—resulting in photographs that are oddly familiar.
Knitta is a group of artists who began the “knit graffiti” movement in Houston, Texas in 2005. They are known for wrapping public architecture with knitted material. Their mission is to make street art more personal. Knitta’s founder, Magda Sayeg, has inspired nearly a dozen groups worldwide and has exhibited her work internationally.

Wicked is a musical based on the novel, Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West, which is a parallel novel that takes revisionist license with L. Frank Baum’s 1900 novel, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. The work presents a commentary on the nature of good and evil focusing on Elphaba’s struggles in her early life and how she becomes the notorious Wicked Witch of the West.

The Dirt Palace is a feminist art collective in Providence that was founded in 2000 in an abandoned library building. The members work in a variety of media and as a cooperative, support each others’ creative work, the community and the environment through collective, low-impact living. Dirt Palace fosters the growth of strong, thoughtful, independent women who use their creative awareness of the world to change it.

I Send You this Cadmium Red, documents an amazing visual conversation between friends and artists John Berger and John Christie. In 1997, Christie asked Berger what their next project could be. To which Berger replied, “just send a color.” Christie then sent a square of cadmium red to Berger and the visual conversation began, which this book presents in the form of letters, notes and drawings created over the course of the project.
INTRODUCTION

Irma Boom is a Dutch book designer who has created more than 250 books in her lifetime—50 of which are part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She believes that the best books are tactile objects that communicate ideas or stories and engage each of the human senses. She is the youngest recipient of a Gutenberg prize for her work. Each of Boom’s books has a distinctive physical quality which could never be duplicated as a purely digital experience.

Counterfeit Crochet is a global, collaborative project initiated by Stephanie Syjuco, an artist who creates large-scale spectacles of cultural objects often with a public component that invites viewers to directly participate as producers or distributors. In this project, Syjuco works with crafters to counterfeit high-end consumer goods—forming a parasitic art counterfeiting event, which is documented on the web.
Floyd is a collaborative book created by VCU's graduate graphic design students. In it, I show a large-scale book that utilizes photography, typography, and language from an imagined conversation with author, Simone de Beauvoir about the nature of the feminine. This book is shown as a series of photographs in which I interact with the pages—reiterating its physicality. The photographs are arranged around the transcripts of an actual conversation with a close friend about work and life that semester. Floyd is the first piece in which I began to work with simultaneous and seemingly disconnected narratives.
At first I thought that this creative project might be based on the theodicean mythology of Pandora. I was fascinated by the myth’s commonalities with Christian creation myths. In order to visualize research, I created a time line that juxtaposes a diagram of Ancient Greek mythology with quotations about the nature of the feminine.
This handmade dictionary presents terms relating the evils that Pandora’s curiosity let loose upon the human race. It is not meant to define, but rather asks the viewer to define the terms by arranging photographs in pockets that make up the book’s pages. This experimental format offers the viewer an opportunity to participate in the construction of the meaning of the piece.
During the course of creation myth research, I realized that I was very interested in the source of mythologies. I began to research and articulate the roles of feminine archetypes in this limited edition book.
My research into feminine archetypes culminated with the assignment of six primary archetypes. The content of this book visualizes these archetypes through potential, unique visual languages.
process + methodology

One central concern of second-wave feminism was equality in the public sphere. This work paved the way for third-wave feminists to shift focus from public inquiry to that of a personally driven investigation. Now, women are invited to define (or design) feminism on their own terms incorporating personal identities into the tenets of what the movement currently is and can become through the inclusion of individual stories. This project is a visual representation of my personal construction of feminism.

This creative project became a series of handmade books which highlight visual content generated using mixed media on canvas. Six canvases were developed to represent six archetypes of the feminine. Each canvas was photographically documented over the course of several months of creation. The resulting imagery is the content of six books that are housed in a single white slip case.

Throughout the development of the project I found that the following four themes were incredibly important to my process.

physicality
I began this project with a desire to unplug from digital methods and experience the design process through handmade, physical objects. It was important to me that evidence of these physical processes be obvious in the resulting work.

documentation

Documenting the process of design was something that I hadn’t done well prior to graduate school—at the advice of a professor, I began to diligently document project progressions—often this practice yielded serendipitous discoveries leading the work in unanticipated directions. Documentation is also important to the project as it is a primary way of preserving a history.

subversion

This project has a strong revisionist intent. Through toying with the act of translation’s role in the construction of meaning the work reveals the unfixed and therefore unreliable nature of communication.

dialog

The conversations that I share with those that I admire often help to refine my personal philosophies and certainly aid in the construction of my character as an individual. For this reason, my project often documents real and imagined conversations. Storytelling is a common and valuable method of historical preservation.

“Madame Morrible, for all her upper-class diction and fabulous wardrobe, seemed just a tad—oh—dangerous... Galinda always felt as if she couldn’t see the whole picture. It was disconcerting, and to her credit at least Galinda felt inside herself the ripping apart of some valuable fabric—was it integrity?—when she sat in Madame Morrible’s parlor and drank the perfect tea.”

Gregory Maguire, Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West
While studying the life cycle of human hair, I began working on canvas and making daily photographic records of the progression. A sort of exquisite corpse, this is the method that I used to generate unplanned imagery for the creative project.
Once I had captured the visual raw material for the books, I began the process of planning the physical qualities that each of the books would possess.
THE WORK

1. THE VIRGIN ARTEMIS

UNBOUND

2. THE CREATIVE PROJECT

ABSOLUTION

RE: CREATION
EVALUATION

Two solid years of focus on oneself and one’s process is a luxury afforded only to the graduate student. This project offered an experience that I’m sure will remain unmatched in my life.

My fine arts background often made me feel as if I were an imposter in the world of design. This acute awareness of my educational deficiencies eventually subsided and I began to feel a new sense of authenticity as I merged my fine arts and design processes during the execution of this project.

I believe that this project could have been more successful if I had narrowed my topic. Some earlier experiments like Pandora’s Dictionary feel more finished to me because of their sharp focus. However, it has been liberating allowing myself the time and space to be misunderstood or worse yet, to fail.

Prior to these explorations, I never imagined that I would have the confidence to teach design. My continued efforts as an educator are influenced by this project as I watch another generation struggle with technology’s role in their lives. I try to encourage them to unplug and trust their minds. An internet addiction disorder (IAD) is now in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and smart phones are altering our brain structure, I believe that this topic will remain timely.

THANKS.

Quinn and Kenny.
Mom, Dad and Chris.
Sandy Wheeler and Liz Canfield.

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FOUR-DIMENSIONS
Creative Project, Spring 2007
Mixed Media on Canvas, 22” x 28”