

# 'IMAGE' / 'I' / 'NATION': A CULTURAL MASH-UP

MATTHEW SUTHERLIN

Maryland Institute, College of Art

AMY COUNTS

Nacogdoches High School, Nacogdoches, TX

THERE was a child went forth every day;

And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became;

And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day, or  
for many years, or stretching cycles of years (Whitman, 1921, p. 135).

## Introduction

The term Un(precedent)ED conjures 'images' that have never been seen before in education. Too often in the classroom we focus on the classification of objects and practices. The metaphysical question "what is?" is important only in that it must be continually revisited. Through continual re-visitation, the question becomes "what can it be?" Unfortunately, the process of becoming through imagination is a practice that is often relegated to childish whimsy. Un(precedent)ED practice requires the (re)imaging of the current apparatus of education. Precedent is a standard or model that comes before a particular event or moment; components, such as sound, written text, sight, and thought, are pieced together to create the event or moment that collapses in on itself to create the 'images.' Precedent, as it will be described in the following pages, refers to the construction of myth perpetuated by 'images.' The 'image' in imagination is "more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing" (Bergson, 2004, p. vii). We are immersed in a spectacle culture in which 'images' transform and become reality. Therefore, tremendous power lies in the ability to facilitate the use of one's imagination to (re)interpret, (re)(con)textualize, and (re)define. Such practices become a mash-up of cultural understanding in which dominant discourses are remixed. These new imaginings require work and a belief that change can occur. Transformation or change is

not a task that one should undergo without the realization that such change will require a tremendous amount of effort - physical, mental, and emotional. The purpose of this paper is to (re)imagine literacy practice based on the layering effects already taking place within our technologically driven culture. Through the process of remix, the apparatus of social interaction (i.e. literacy) becomes transformed. The ability to imagine something greater than that which preexists allows for the invention of new modes of practice in teaching and learning in the public school setting (Barthes, 1974; Debord, 1994; Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1978; Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008).

### **Becoming I(l)literate**

As educators, we construct new models for literacy practice all of the time. We give them names such as visual literacy, new media literacy, computer literacy, technological literacy, etc. Yet as Jagodzinski (1997) points out, "Madeline Hunter that avatar of efficiency education has given us the blueprint to retro education of the 50's. But print is dead; our illiterates roam the streets, unable to read or write or deal with bureaucracy" (p. 70). Writing and the letter are no longer significations of self. The structuralist belief in the importance of the form or structure of the apparatus has given way to poststructuralist discourse in which representation has been transformed into a metaphysical question. The question "what is?" can be (re)imagined through the concept of embodiment in an 'image' which takes into account the situation, objects, and (con)text of the event(s) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Derrida, 1976; Lacan, 2006; Ulmer, 2005).

"What is literacy?" Interest in this question is situational. Currently in education, we address the form of literacy but not the form's status as literacy; literacy functions as an apparatus, a social machine. As an apparatus, it forms a rhizomatic relationship of interdependent dimensions that includes technology, institution, and identity; it had its beginning with the Greek invention of the alphabet and institutional practice stemming from Plato's Academy as the first school (Ulmer, 2005). Traditionally, literacy is envisioned as a centralized structure in which the physical text contains the meaning; through rhizomatic discourse, dialogue becomes the text through which new understandings of identity and institution are appropriated. The machine or apparatus can connect and disconnect in each situation as a means of creating knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fernandez, 2001).

Circulations of self are produced through the practice of literacy according to Ong (1982) and Havelock (1982). However, teachers and administrators alike reinforce the predominance of a language-based understanding of literacy practice. Traditional language-based literacy practice is about indoctrination into the dominant culture, a hidden literacy (Giroux, 1981). According to Macedo (2006), "What we have in the United States is not a

system to encourage independent thought and critical thinking. Our colonial literacy model is designed to domesticate in order to enable the ‘manufacture of consent’” (p. 36). The consent produced is accomplished through the production of ‘image.’ What Macedo points out is that literacy practices, as they stand, are a perpetuation of the dominant culture. Fernandez (2001) states:

If we think of the term literacy as a semantic field of contradictory and repressed notions, opening the semantic field and revealing its structure, revealing what has been devalued and repressed, will help us to understand how the ideologies of literacy have limited us and how breaking open the discourse around literacy offers constructive promise. (p. 19)

### **(Re)imaging the Apparatus**

The ‘constructive promise’ offered by Fernandez (2001) involves a deconstruction of the current understanding of the apparatus as a method of social control as presented by Foucault (1977) and a (re)envisioning of the apparatus through the eyes of Deleuze (1989). For Deleuze, the apparatus is not the text, but the virtual or physical device that is utilized to infinitely remix the text or in this case ‘image.’ This concept was put into practice in two English I classrooms. Two facilitators, Amy Counts, a teacher at Nacogdoches High School, and Matthew Sutherlin, an art educator instructor at Stephen F. Austin State University, and 35 ninth grade students participated in the process of the (re)defining of the idea of nation through the remixing of ‘images.’ The traditional role of teacher was altered, and in its place, teacher and student roles became intertwined and reciprocal, student/teacher – teacher/student.

Through practice, we (teachers/authors) have sought to invent a neologism of our own: ‘image’ / ‘i’ / ‘nation.’ Each of these words has quotation marks encasing them; the question that resides in the words is what “they” evoke. What is to come in the consecutive sentences comes only from “our imagination.” The apparatus of ‘image’ / ‘i’ / ‘nation’ is a play on the word imagination. It evokes the creative aspects of the process that ‘image’ interpretation and creation require. The concept of ‘image’ serves the purposes of both mental and physical presencing or pre-sensing. It is an artifact of the physical and virtual realms, a product of the culture and the individual. The concept of ‘i’ refers to the self and its decentralization. The ‘i’ is also a prosaic reference to the human eye. The small letter ‘i’ serves the purpose of inverting the emphatic ‘I.’ Furthermore, it is a reference to interpenetration, the collective *i* that existed prior to my birth and born(e) through the ‘image’ of the event(s). The last appropriated component in the new apparatus, ‘nation’ references a group of people claiming a shared history, either real or imagined and who reside in a specific geographic territory. It has connotations that can be both global and local. The concept of ‘nation’ is a de-territorialization of nation, the (de)construction of the

(his)story of a nation through a new narrative, not through the introduction of a new mythos (Ulmer, 1994).

'[I]mages' are starting place for inquiry. As students and teachers engage with an 'image,' they can begin to see how the virtual and/or physical attributes of the 'image' can be remixed to create something altogether different. The interpretation therefore leads to appropriative invention. The 'i' is what allows for dialogue to occur through interaction. In dialogue with that other person or group of people, we become better able to understand and appreciate viewpoints which differ from our own. Engagement with the 'i' requires that I look and see. Dialogue is not simply talk or conversation. Dialogue is conversation provoked by an interaction with the 'image.' The 'image' by itself, an incomplete circuit, is useless without the presence of the viewer. In the case of 'image' / 'i' / 'nation,' the physical and virtual associations are the means by which each of the three terms can be mashed together. It allows the remixing of an 'image' through multiple lenses as a (re)definition of 'nation.' Through the process of remix, students and teacher are not producing a copy of the original. Instead, they are appropriating concepts and techniques into their existing repertoire for inclusion in the process of their becoming complex 'images' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

The (re)envisioning or (re)imagining of the apparatus of literacy and education by proxy begins with the concept of art as pedagogy / pedagogy as art. Meaning resides neither in the object, viewer, or artist, but in the interaction, the precedent before the creation of 'image.' To create an 'image' is to enter into an interaction with the world. According to Nicolas Bourriaud (2005), through relational aesthetics, art can "reprogram the world." Any work of art that a viewer chooses not to engage with collapses into surface just as any concept that a student refuses to engage within a course of study is also prone to the same fate. The richness of pedagogy and art lies in the layers of meaning. Understandings and (mis)understandings within any learning experience or artwork must become part of the dialogue; information and (mis)information contribute to the understanding of the 'image' and its importance to the culture as a w/hole (Derrida, 1976; Eagleton, 2001).

To state "I am an artist" is to proclaim nothing in relation to a fixed state; the dialogue of being is in constant flux. Hermeneutics is the interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions, and the hermeneutic circle facilitates the circulation of meaning through the creation of flow. In traditional hermeneutics, the artist's intent has long been perceived as the defining attribute of a text whether print or visual. Contemporary hermeneutics sees interpretation as the point of interpenetration of artist and reader (Eagleton, 2001; Ulmer, 2005).

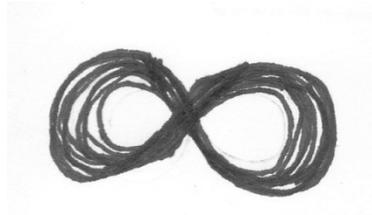


Figure 1. Envisioning the hermeneutic circle as a möbius strip.

Each tracing of the hermeneutic circle illuminates the concepts of fantasy and myth through the identification of both omissions and propaganda. Fantasy and myth can be measures of control that function as blocks of discourse. However, there is a space for unknowability in terms of an/other and the grand meta-narratives that govern praxis (Lyotard, 1984). Those concepts that are automatically engrained in an individual's consciousness as "the way things are" can be unveiled through continual retracing. The hermeneutic circle can be interpreted as a möbius strip. Each time the circle is traced, the meaning is allowed room for change. "I could interpret this sentence forever" (Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1978).

### **Dialogue as a Creative Act**

Over the course of two weeks in November and December of 2009, teacher and students, students and teacher dialogued about the meanings of a series of words: utopia, dystopia, domino effect, capitalism, communism, myth, propaganda, and nation. Traditionally, these would be vocabulary words to be written in a notebook with definitions copied from the teacher's notes or a dictionary. Instead, the classroom teacher began this unit by proposing only two of the terms listed above, utopia and dystopia. All other words and concepts emerged from classroom dialogue during this block of time and were expanded throughout the year.

Students were first asked to create a definition for the word utopia. They could utilize the dictionary, past notes, or each other as resources before writing down their understanding of the word. When finished, the class discussed their findings/understandings of the word or concept. The class repeated the process with the word dystopia. They were asked to come up with past/present and real/fictional examples of both utopias and dystopias. Through their discussions, they developed a series of references to a variety of cultural 'images.' These included Hitler's Germany, the rise of Communism, the founding of America, *Stepford Wives* (2004), *The Matrix* (1999), *Surrogates* (2009), *Artificial Intelligence: A.I.* (2001), *V* (2009-), *Family Guy* (1999-), and many others. Each cultural 'image' circled back to the concepts discussed. Control and manipulation were common themes that reappeared in all of these examples as described by students. Students watched the theatrical trailers for *Stepford Wives* and *Surrogates* and discussed the themes suggested by the images and words presented. Each film presents what at first appears to be a utopia

while asking the viewer to recognize what is hidden under the “perfect” surface. Beneath the facade of beautiful smiles and clothes, this utopia is only achieved through the manipulation and controlling of an other (Ferris & Brancato, 2009; Levin & Rudnick, 2004). In these scenarios, utopia and dystopia exist simultaneously.

### **Conduction of the Classroom Situation**

*Conduction* deals with appropriation of classroom materials, while making reference to the conduction of electricity and its flow (Ulmer, 2003). Beyond student introduced material, the class also engaged in the deconstruction of teacher presented cultural artifacts through reading “Sound of Thunder” and a passage from *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. These readings were the only two required elements in this unit that explored the concept of nation. After reading Bradbury, the class discussion turned to the domino effect, and how one action can alter the course of history; the killing of a butterfly during the prehistoric age can change the outcome of a political election or how the simplification of knowledge leads to the destruction of all knowledge (Bradbury, 2000; 1995). Through a dialogue, (con)text was illuminated in relation to the concepts. By tracing the hermeneutic circle, students and teacher discovered information that was omitted, (mis)represented, and (mis)understood.

To further explore what information was omitted, (mis)represented, and (mis)understood, students looked at both fictional and nonfictional examples of cultural artifacts. Students interacted with a hypertext web constructed by the instructor using Visual Understanding Environment software from Tufts University. In the hypertext they made connections to terms and ideas discussed among each other. This hypertext, which included images, news reports, maps, and artwork from each decade, traced history from the Russian Revolution and the rise of Communism to World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Students were able to see how one event in history led to another, reinforcing the concept of the domino effect. Students were asked questions by the instructor such as: Why did Communism become such a popular idea? What was America’s role in the 1950s? What information were we, the people, not told?

To expand and reinforce this classroom discussion, the instructor showed cinematic and historical clips from films and historical news events that the students had listed during their brainstorming sessions. *Pleasantville* (1998), directed by Gary Ross, and the theatrical trailer for *Equilibrium* (2002), directed by Kurt Wimmer, were shown and discussed, comparing and contrasting these examples with “The Sound of Thunder” and *Fahrenheit 451*, as well as juxtaposing them with depictions of Nazi book burnings from the late 1930s and original informational programs from the 1940s that discussed capitalism verses communism. These cultural artifacts depicted societies where extreme measures were

taken to maintain order and balance. The extreme nature of the measures taken to produce balance forces individuals into an understanding of the world as black and white. By the tracing of the hermeneutic circle, a w/hole or space for the production of new meaning is left. W/hole becomes both “whole” and “hole.” What is left out of the tracing becomes fodder for invention (Ulmer, 2005).

## Mythologies

When the students explored the concept of myth, the discussion revolved around what they knew and the questions they had. Their discussion was an open dialogue in which students were given the agency to determine the content through teacher facilitation. The purpose of this type of discussion was to help students understand the ways in which 'images' construct the reality in which we all live (Debord, 1976).

With all of these cultural artifacts, students were asked to critically analyze and dialogue about what they observed and heard in relation to myth. A key component of the definition of myth is that it is only part of something else. Details, facts, and information disappear from the stories of myth as they have been reinterpreted and retold countless times, changing with each reincarnation (Barthes, 1972).

The classroom teacher then posed the question: “What is your perception of life in America during the 1950s?” The general consensus from the classes was that it was a happy time, but that understanding is only part of the retelling of the 1950s, a myth perpetuated by television shows such as *Happy Days*, advertisements, and film. Students were then reminded of the scenes from *Pleasantville* that depicted this “happy” time. In this film, David and Jennifer, a present day brother and sister, were transported into a 1950s television show titled *Pleasantville*. Here they were known as Bud and Mary Sue, part of the Parker family. This world was comprised of only two colors, black and white, the two extremes of the “value” scale, the complexities of life reduced to binary opposition. This seemingly perfect community was turned upside down as David and Jennifer introduced knowledge and conflict. Within the film the sitcom's characters questioned their existence and felt alive for the first time as their black and white world gradually turned into vibrant color and blank books were filled in with words and paintings. Not all the citizens were happy about this domino effect and the rapid change which followed. The angry, frightened citizens proceeded to burn books and art and, eventually, to put David on trial for causing this chaos (Ross, 1998). Were the characters living in this utopia really happy and satisfied? Did book burnings or metaphorical book burnings occur in this country where citizens strongly believe in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Blank faces and tentative answers followed those questions. This myth of America, during the 1950s, omitted some key events, such as McCarthyism, the Hollywood Ten, and the Black List.

Students then discussed the word propaganda. What is it, does it still exist, and what is its connection to myth? Within the framework of the concepts, propaganda and myth, the viewer is only receiving part of the information, partial truths. Myth refers to the ability to build a community through an imaginary bond. Propaganda is not impartial and is meant to influence a community towards a cause or action. As a one-sided argument it limits the possibilities of myth. It was agreed that propaganda still exists today; one example discussed was both historical and current, the connection between the doom's day clock from the Cold War era and the Homeland Security Advisory System's terror alert levels today. Other examples are the two Levi's commercials (2009) featuring Walt Whitman's poem "America" and a portion of his poem "Pioneers! O'Pioneers!" These advertisements center around an iconic piece of clothing, blue jeans; through the use of imagery and text, the viewer is shown an idealized view of America as a nation and a people.

"America"

Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,  
All, all alike endear'd, grown, ungrown, young or old,  
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,  
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,  
A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,  
Chair'd in the adamant of Time (Whitman, 1999, p. 388).

"Pioneers! O'Pioneers!"

COME, my tan-faced children,  
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready;  
Have you your pistols? have you your sharp edged axes?  
Pioneers! O pioneers! (Whitman, 1921, p. 197)

In these advertisements, the poetry above is paired with a specific set of visuals meant to evoke 'images' of patriotism. The visuals include people of all shapes, colors, and ages interacting with one another, youth running, jumping, and leaping through fields of grain and flowers and around campfires, the American flag unfurling, and fireworks flashing in the night sky. Students and teacher discussed the poems and their presentation of partial

truths. Phrases such as “All, all alike endear’d” and “equal daughters, equal sons,” became starting points for the discussion the mythos these poems reinforced. It is at this juncture that students were presented with the final word for discussion: nation. They were to (re)define or (re)imagine the meaning of 'nation' by utilizing the contextual framework they had constructed. They were to create mash-ups using cultural artifacts (advertisements, music videos, film clips, music, informational videos, etc.) as source materials. With this sort of critical engagement, students were given the power to choose what sound, text, and visuals they pieced together in a one or two minute video that (re)defined or (re)imagined what 'nation' could be. To create the mash-ups students and teacher worked with an art educator as a form of transdisciplinary practice.

### **Mash-ups**

Mash-ups allow one to (re)assemble songs, video, text, etc., as a means of altering the intended meaning or use of a particular software, piece of music, video, etc. The cutup method, utilized by William Burroughs, in which a text is physically cut apart and reconfigured, and musical sampling, the appropriation of music, as a means of remixing sound are but a few common modes of creating mash-ups. Each of these addresses various levels of the process as collective and individual. The text is diced, spliced, and reconfigured as a means of obtaining a new understanding of the work. Some mash-ups are software based in which two or more interfaces are mashed together to create a new interface. Others are video and/or music based. In relation to 'image' / 'i' / 'nation,' mash-ups enable the intermingling of discourses through the slash or cut and serve as a form of heuritic invention (Miller, 2004; Ulmer, 1994).

In the construction of mash-ups, the myths created through the emblematic structure of television and cinema can be deconstructed by critical analysis of sound, image, and duration. As students engage with the cultural myths inherent to film, they remix those images and sounds to create a new narrative that is at once collective and individual. Common associations exist given the perceived original purpose of the film clips, and at the same time, new associations are made through the perception of the remixed (con)text (Ulmer, 1994).

Mash-ups enable poetic montage. Students interacted with the concept of nation as a means of (re)imagining what nation could be rather than relying solely upon what they were told it “is.” Concepts were presented through a wide range of juxtapositions. Clips chosen for the mash-ups were generated through in-class dialogue. The clips utilized were combined and recombined to re-contextualize both image and text. These activities enabled students to look more closely at concepts they had previously taken for granted. In the (re)envisioned apparatus of literacy, a term used with some hesitancy, information production and usage

in a networked society becomes a folksonomy where the collective has a voice in the interpretation. In the realm of Web 2.0, folksonomies involve the process of social tagging through which users tag or label information with specific semantic tags as a way of classifying. The process can be as simple as adding a simple key word to any image, video, article, or other piece of online information. This is a practice that can transfer to the classroom situation as a means of self-organization of content through dialogue. Like grains of sand dropping from moving water to form a sand bar, individual comments construct a shape that embodies the classroom as a collective, as a w/whole. Meaning is produced and (re)produced through relational interaction of objects, images, ideas, concepts, contexts, and various other elements of interpretation (Bruns, 2008; Ulmer, 1994).

Appropriated elements utilized in the mash-ups allowed students to construct identity as a complex network of associations created through collaborative dialogue. Instead of following the modernist notion of individualized creativity, many students chose to work in pairs becoming collective incarnations of self in which individuals are embodied in an 'image.' Recursive thinking about these artworks become a way of understanding culture as dynamic and multifaceted. Students appropriated notions of community and nation merge to form a w/whole. This will be an ongoing process, allowing students to continually (re)define and (re)interpret (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Mason, 2008).

The student products varied greatly in style and message. Fireworks, war footage, ads, music videos, movie trailers, civil rights footage, news reels, atomic bomb tests, nature scenes, and 9/11 images, as well as others were all spliced, cut, and rearranged while music and text was added or taken away using Windows Moviemaker™. After completion of the project, students viewed each other's works. They were asked to explain their process and the ideas they were trying to convey to the viewer. The audience evaluated the validity of the ideas presented in relation to the 'image' construction. They were asked to consider, in what ways were the students successful and in what ways were they unsuccessful? During this dialogue, constructive criticism was given to groups whose mash-ups produced confusion rather than a complex message regarding the concept of 'nation.' Students were able to rethink both process and product as a unified structure, object as process. Other questions were asked. Was the message being sent considered "politically correct" by today's standards? Was it necessary that it be "politically correct?" What concepts did the mash-ups evoke: racism, political extremism, binary opposition, etc.?

On the wiki you will be able to view the embedded videos: <http://image-i-nation.wikidot.com/>



Figure 2. Formula for combining two separate blocks of representation facilitated through the hermeneutic circle of 'image' interpretation and the application of the heuretic slash.

Heuretics is the flip side of hermeneutics. While hermeneutics asks what can be made of a given text, heuretics asks what can be made from a given text; it is artistic invention. Gregory Ulmer (1994) reintroduced this concept into the contemporary dialogue. Artistic experimentation is the primary model for heuretic practice; it allows for the circulation between outside/inside, body/mind. A heuretic approach to curriculum seeks to teach the applications of interpretation and invention together noting how meaning circulates through invention. The slash in the formula functions as a means of illustrating both gap and connection. It is the stitch that holds together the interpretations as well as the signifier of a chasm of infinite possibility. The chasm provides an opening through which student and teacher, viewer and artist can produce new understandings of each other and the world (jagodzinski, 2002).



Figure 3. 'image' / 'i' / 'nation' as a formula for infinite interpretations of image, self, and the collective experience.

### Shifting Strata of Mythologies

An interesting case of the ability to shift mythologies was brought to light by the entertainment news anchor Stephen Colbert and appropriated into the classroom conversation. In July of 2006, Colbert made the following statement on his Comedy Central show *The Colbert Report* regarding the Internet information wiki, Wikipedia: "You see, any user can change any entry, and if enough other users agree with them it becomes true." After completing this statement, Colbert proceeded to erase all references to George Washington's owning of slaves from the George Washington Wikipedia entry. Slavery as an exploitation of other human beings could have never been a practice of one of the founding fathers. Furthermore, America as a nation could have never been built on the backs of slaves. By erasing this information Colbert aids in the erasure of oppression from the

collective imagination. *Wikiality* (Colbert, 2006) is a form of democratic information; it has become a space where if enough people believe something, it does become “true.” It is the written form of the collective social myth (McCarthy, 2006).

The strength of *wikiality* was made evident in a very real and literal way when Colbert asked his viewers to change the Wikipedia entry for African elephants to state that the population had tripled in the last six months. Viewers took up Colbert’s request in such a substantial way that the server for Wikipedia subsequently crashed due to the overload (McCarthy, 2006). “While this is a dangerous concept for the uncritical individual, it presents tremendous potential for students as producers of their own culture” (Sutherlin, 2009, p. 8).

At one point, during the discussions in the classrooms, students were asked to write down the name of a historic figure and list six facts about that person. They were then instructed to mark out three of the facts and invent new information. Using these facts, they wrote a mini-biography. Students then volunteered to read the biographies to the class. Both teacher and students were challenged with the task of deciding what was fiction and what was fact. For the more famous historical personalities, students and teacher were able to discern fact from fiction, but for figures who were not as well known such as Clarence Birdseye, an American inventor, the process of separating fact from fiction became almost impossible. Students decided that we, as a nation, can construct, manipulate, and control our own reality until, ultimately, we no longer know what is real or false. Students then watched the clip where Stephen Colbert discussed the term *wikiality*; a process or place where all information can be constructed, (re)constructed, arranged, and (re)arranged. As long as the majority of people believe it to be true, it becomes fact. Just as in their construction of a new concept of nation through their own mash-ups, if enough people believe it to be true, fact becomes fiction, fiction becomes fact, proving that all fact is ultimately situated in fiction (or story).

### **Memory and Perception**

The concepts of memory and perception were discussed in class. From our discussions, we concluded that memory and perception are imperfect, and it is the artifacts of history that serve as our way of making meaning from the past. However, because of the imperfection of memory and perception, historical (con)texts and concepts that are omitted permit individuals, communities, and nations to (re)image the past. The physical relies on artifacts or data collected from the event(s), while the virtual relies on the viewer associations to the event in question. In this way, a trace and a virtual existence of the past is exhibited through the concept of ‘image.’ The ‘image’ allows for the circulation of meanings between the physical and the virtual (Bergson, 2004; Deleuze, 1988).

According to Bergson (2004), every present is a past that is come into being. In his terminology, the past is “contemporaneous” with the present that has been. This becomes a paradox of memory. The past therefore coexists with the present. Bergson’s cone illustration of memory defines the past as AB which coexists with the present S and includes all versions of AB, A’ B’, A” B”, etc. Each section of the past belongs to a being of the past in itself. It is a totality of the past or a collective past that resonates in the present. Contraction memory and recollection memory converge at point S as ‘image’ or the current perception (Deleuze, 1988).

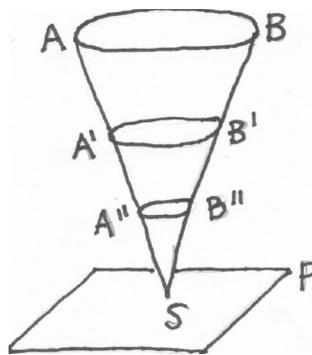


Figure 4. Bergson’s cone illustration from *Matter and Memory* p. 211

Memory and perception allow for multiple interpretations of the same ‘image’ as a means of creating a new narrative of the event. The Michael Gondry film *Be Kind Rewind* illustrates the power of a new narrative in the construction of community identity. The film takes place in Passaic, NJ, the supposed hometown of Fats Waller. A video store named *Be Kind Rewind* is also the physical birthplace of Fats. In the VHS video store all of the tapes are erased in a freak accident. In order to keep the store afloat, Mike and Jerry, played by Mos Def and Jack Black, must create their own versions of popular films. Jerry creates the term “Sweded” to describe this personalization of these films. Metaphorically speaking, the Sweded films become a rewriting of social history. Memory plays a role in the construction of history, and in this case, it is a new memory recreated and remapped in the streets of Passaic. As Kerr (2009) points out, the film functions through the endorsement of memory’s flaws. “Paradoxically, memories – especially when aggregated – are often flawed, incomplete, imperfect, or even inaccurate. However, instead of being considered detrimental, this ‘human error’ is implemental to social memory, as indeed it privileges the common bonds between people and their pasts” (para.1).

Eventually, the Sweded movies are confiscated due to copyright issues since legally, the tapes, as objects, are property of the studios. As the story unfolds, we discover that Fats

Waller was never born in the store. That story had been created to give hope to the character played by Mos Def. His belief in this story was so strong that he made others in the community believe it as well. At a critical moment, the community comes together to create an original film of their own. One of the community members played by Mia Farrow makes the following statement at the beginning of the process, "Hey, our past is ours so it can be whatever we want" (Gondry, 2008).

The personalized films in this movie embody the community of Passaic. Through a process of mash-up, they created a new history for the town and enlivened the community. The power of collaborative art, in this case the remade films, is in its ability to move between the domains of the personal and the communal. It works in the space between the communal and the personal as a way of producing a connection that bonds individuals together. The collective myth of film can be remixed through the collective practice of reflexive making.

## **Conclusion**

'image' / 'i' / 'nation' serves as a theoretical model rather than a prescription of practice. Engaging in interpretation and invention as a continual flow of meaning-making gives students the ability to (re)envision previously inscribed notions of self and community. (Con)textual information generated through classroom dialogue as well as teacher appropriated materials enables an UN(precedent)ED change in the way we view and engage with reality. Through the construction of both physical and virtual images, we are able to reshape the world in ways that make openings for change.

We have sought to produce a (re)imaging of literacy that questions the status of what it means to be literate. Myth produces a collective way of seeing the world; these ways of seeing can take on both positive and negative effects. The purpose of 'image' / 'i' / 'nation' is to break apart blocks of discourse and reconfigure them in the spaces between. These spaces are embodied in the slashes of 'image' / 'i' / 'nation.' Through hermeneutic interpretation and heuristic invention, students are better able to make an impact on the world by becoming active participants in the production of culture. This act of cultural production produces new blocks of discourse that enter the flow as incarnations of self or avatars.

Technology allows for dynamic collaborative interpretations of self. Individuals experience the world in different ways, and their interpretations of those experiences are equally different. However, it is important for students to realize that within their individuality, there is a connection to all other aspects of reality. One cannot exist without the connection to the w/whole. In the public school, which is marked by grades and performance tests, these concepts are unprecedented. Teaching and learning allow for multiple incarnations of self

that change depending upon the (con)text and the situation in which the student is placed. As Miller (2004) points out, rapper Biggie Smalls and Walt Whitman grew up in the same borough of Brooklyn and one of them once said, “So what if I contradict myself—I am large I contain multitudes” (p. 65). It could have just as easily been Biggie as Whitman.

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