2013

Re:creation

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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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EMMET GOWIN
Nancy (above)
1969
Gelatin Silver Print, 5½” x 6½”
### ABSTRACT

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**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.
ABSTRACT

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

INTRODUCTION

The following article was written to document, explain, and synthesize theories that I had researched relating to myth, feminism, language and post-structuralism.

TOPIC OVERVIEW

Postmodern feminist theory introduces the concept of reclaiming history by critically revisiting it. Pairing this idea of looking to the past to recover powerful female characters within mythology can offer a reconstruction of mythology, reclaimed from a non-dominant viewpoint.

Adrienne Rich states in *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,* that "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—as for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (18). Rich’s statement reflects the main argument of early 70s feminism: the rejection of liberal feminism (equality within the public sphere) for a more radical questioning of the unbalanced power relationships (or class systems) within capitalist society (Beasley 54-58). Rich is critically looking to history to understand how woman has been defined within culture and to argue how woman can begin to redefine herself as a transformative act that will allow for the survival of women in history by reclaiming lost role models.

To rebuild the archetypes of the feminine and to revisit these mythologies of the past realizing how they have been subverted to serve new cultures offers a sense of power in the feminine that once existed and can now be reclaimed, reinvested and reinterpreted.

MYTHOLOGY AND ITS FUNCTION

It is first important to examine the reasons why mythologies are made and how they function in serving both culture and the individual. Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung offer insight into the overlapping purpose and the task of mythology.

For Jung, the term myth is used in two distinct ways: The first is that of evidence of the unconscious of the individual, which manifests as a personal mythology. Conversely, he views established mythologies as a “repository of the unconscious in culture over time” (Rowland 38). So, for Jung, traditional mythologies serve outward cultures, which are constantly in flux. Jung’s unconscious deals with inherited latent patterns, which he calls archetypes. Rowland describes Jung’s archetypes and the idea of the collective unconscious by stating, “Jung’s unconscious is collective because all people inherit more or less the same archetypes as basic structures. I have referred to archetypes very carefully as ‘potential structures’ and ‘substances,’ because there is a common misconception that Jung’s archetypes are inherited images. This is not true. An archetype is an inborn potential for a certain sort of image” (29). Jung’s archetypes are therefore not fully fleshed out for the individual, though the capacity to form them is present in every human being, each will realize these archetypes in a personal construction that is formed, in part, by their experiences within outward culture.

For Jung, all mythology and indeed all human experiences is subjective, because everything, including established mythologies (or religions), is filtered through the individual psyche. “The Jungian unconscious is fundamentally religious for two related reasons: one is that religious mythos is a necessary narrative resource for the unknowable and uncontrollable dimensions of the unconscious as well as the fact that the unconscious is the ego’s source and future fate (in individuation). In a sense that is hardly metaphorical—Jung’s archetypes are gods and goddesses because they are the most active powers in the formation of the human subjects who constantly affect her encounters with the outer world. Like gods (or goddesses), archetypes make the person by representing themselves in the person’s life (through mental images)” (32).

The personal mythology is something unique to each individual which “refers to the conscious experiences of the person as a subject in history, culture and time” (29). Jung’s view of a personal mythology is one of subjectivity, which requires personal interpretations derived from the conscious (outer world) and unconscious (inner world) that manifest as archetypes in the individual ego.

Campbell speaks of mythologies from both a collective and cultural sense. In general, he sees them as guidelines for ways to live a human life. He states in *The Power of Myth* that “On the immediate level of life structure, myths offer life models” (Campbell 13). His view takes a more constructive stance, in that he believes that mythology can help one to deal with the deep inner problems and mysteries of life. “People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning for life. I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking. I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive” (3). His description is that of myth being a vehicle or a place to tap into the eternal mysteries of life.
INTRODUCTION

Similarly, Jung uses the term "mythology" and understanding of one's life in the greater context of the earth and human development of a personal mythology. Campbell and Jung share the idea of relationship with the stories, which inform the individual throughout their lifetime.

Campbell goes further to say that the first function of myth is that of mysticism, you are, and experiencing awe before the universe is, and what a wonder 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 ancient earth cultivating communities of the Egyptian Nile and Mesopotamia are two places where such a sublimation has taken place. These 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.

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.

Campbell and Jung, describe 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 then 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" (31)

The nature-oriented mythologies, sees the two systems of myth, that of the personal and the social, that realized Campbell's nature-oriented mythologies and hence, all that was natural was celebrated and seen as divine.

When you have hunters, you have killers. "And when you have harders, you have killers, because they are always in movement, nomadic, coming into conflict with other people and conquering the areas into which they move. And these invasions bring in warrior gods, thunderbolt hurlers, like Zeus or Yahweh" (169).

"Myths of the goddess began to change during these times into myths of gods and goddesses. There is a fluctuation within the cultures between the two mythologies, the nature-oriented and the social-oriented. Campbell comments, "There was a very strong antecedent 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).

Myths reflect 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.

While exploring visual possibilities for the green project, I photographed an egg in a plastic bag as part of my commitment to document process. This discovery led to a series of photographs, which were used in several projects that semester, but more importantly, taught me to embrace spontaneity in the design process.
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 text 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 logocentricism of the binary oppositions of Western languages by looking towards a ‘feminine language’ of multiplicity. “Dialog 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 (the feminine as unknowable other) and essentializing (the feminine not existing except for the reflection of Jung’s anima) are brought to mind (114). Diverging from Jung, who sees gender as internally performed, Cixous sees “gender as culturally performed, and differences in Cixous’s use of myth, song and poetry to search for and direct attention to the maternal plenitude cut off by the acquisition of language” (117–118).

In Jung & Feminism, Damian S. Wier describes the archetypes of the personal mythology of Jung as being “a cast of inner characters” (Wier 49). Through the act of individuation one comes to know their archetypes well enough to avoid acting out their unconscious impulses in a damaging manner. The goal of individuation as a process is that of getting to know ones unconscious archetypes so that the individual can become truly oneself (50).

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 57). Beasley states in *What is Feminism*, that “he [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 mythology mimicking a Jungian individuation process.
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 installment 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—wearing 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, 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.

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.

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.
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 licence 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 other’s 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.
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.
PANDORA’S DICTIONARY
PROFESSOR PATRICK BELL
MFA Workshop, Fall 2006, Book, 5½” x 5½”
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.
EXPLORATIONS

THE WORK
“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*

**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.
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.
1. THE VIRGIN ARTEMIS

THE WORK

2. THE CREAT DESTROY

THE CREATIVE PROJECT
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. As 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.
PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES


RICH, ADRIENNE. "We We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." College English 34. (October 1973): 18.


FOUR-103 (DETROIT)
Creative Project, Spring 2007
Mixed Media on Canvas, 22" x 28"