WANDERINGS

Jorge Raúl Silva Jetter
“It is beautiful, not because it changes beautifully, but – simply – because it changes”

- Nam June Paik
Jorge Raúl Silva Jetter

Bachelor of Arts
Psychology, 2011
University of Puerto Rico, Río Pierdas
San Juan, Puerto Rico

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
Design/Visual Communications
10 May 2013
Richmond, Virginia

Roy McKelvey, Primary Advisor
Associate Professor
Department of Graphic Design

Steven Hoskins, Secondary Advisor
Associate Professor
Department of Graphic Design

Pamela Turner, Reader
Associate Professor
Department of Kinetic Imaging
CONTENTS

Abstract · 3

A Random() Introduction · 5

Definitions · 7

Problem Statement · 15

Three Projects · 19
  This Is Your Script · 21
  Anything Worth Saying · 37
  The Street Algorithm · 47

Related Work · 55
  Cheyenne Rivers Lecture Poster · 57
  Monument to the Roma · 61
  The Algorithm · 65
  Walking Walking Walking · 67
  Walking Walking Walking Database · 71
  Floyd Avenue · 75

Critical Evaluation · 79

Bibliography · 83
While it implies aimless movement, the act of wandering is an act of discovery and can become a search for the unexpected. Wandering, as a metaphor for making, creates opportunities to work in ways where the final outcome is unknown. This can be accomplished by the creation of methods and instructions designed for wandering—the act of discovery. In the field of design, these ideas can be incorporated as methods for making that guide the design process in ultimately unknowable ways, resulting in products that bear little trace of preconception. The role of chance and indeterminacy as methods for relinquishing control and generating narrative are explored in three projects relying on video and interactivity.
I guess it all starts with a simple programming function: random(). In the Processing programming language random(a) provides a decimal number between 0 and a and random(a,b) provides a random decimal number between a and b. Similar functions exist in practically all programming languages: Math.random(), random.randint(a, b), new Random(), rand(). All these functions generate a random number, or to be more precise, a pseudo random number which is statistically random, but not a product of a random process. The definition of a random number is the outcome of a process in which all possibilities are equally possible, and the result is not affected by a previous iteration. During my time at graduate school, almost all my endeavors had some relationship to this function. The reason was twofold: I enjoyed the process of renouncing control over what I was creating—letting this function make decisions about how a project would evolve; and, by virtue of this process, I wanted to let the universe have a voice in what my work turned out to be.

I recognize that the decision to incorporate randomness into my work was a consequence of not wanting to make decisions, of not wanting to take responsibility for my own undertakings. Perhaps, randomness was a way to hide my own insecurities as a designer? Coming from a background in Psychology to study graphic design, the idea of having complete control over every element and having to defend those decisions was continually paralyzing. This is especially true in a graduate setting where students are constantly asked to talk about, explain, and defend their decisions. This might have turned out to be a positive thing, since my hesitancy in making these decisions led me to a path of exploration where the possibilities and permutations of my work were expanded.

Originally, I focused on creating systems of designs or rules that would guide my design process. These rules were meant to be open, providing an array of possible outcomes. A key part of these early experiments depended on the random() function. Yet, in developing projects based on this conceptual framework, I quickly started to notice its limitations. Allowing all the variation in a piece to be determined by random() seemed redundant and pointless. In a way, my thesis has developed as a response to this problem. I wondered: How can chance factors be incorporated to my work in ways that are meaningful? How can the idea of random() be used to tell an interesting story? My response was to exit the realm of purely digital randomness and to use the world around me as a random generator.
The act of *wandering* serves as a spatial metaphor for a way of working. This metaphor provides a useful way to discuss key concepts used throughout this document.
All my projects can be understood as journeys. The projects themselves are journeys, documented and presented through the medium of video. They have a beginning, an end and a path connecting these two points in time and space. The possible combinations of positions are endless since the space in which these locations reside is infinite.

All these journeys embody a narrative. Narrative is the relationship between all the points in the path connecting the beginning and ending point.

The viewer invariably creates meaning from the relationship between these different points. In this way, the meaning of narrative is twofold: the relationship between these points and the meaning extracted by the viewer from his/her interpretation of the relationships between these points. Since different individuals can extract different narratives from this set of points, the narrative proposed by the relationship of points is inevitably ambiguous and pluralistic.
In any given journey, the maker must decide in which direction to move at every point along the path. **Control** is the mechanism by which movement is determined. Every movement is an exertion of control. Control can be taken by the maker, but can also be delegated. At the same time, partial control can be delegated by the maker, while still retaining control over others aspects of the journey.

When a destination is not decided, it is **undetermined**. An undetermined journey implies that only the starting point is known.

When the final destination is previously decided, but the path is not, the journey can also be considered undetermined since the points along the path influence the narrative.

Having an undetermined journey can be independent of the degree of control afforded to the maker. Sometimes, the maker can have full control over the process, and yet, have an undetermined outcome, since the way in which control is exerted can welcome chance.
Related to the undetermined is the concept of the unexpected. When making undetermined journeys, the outcome can be unexpected. The making of a journey always carries with it certain expectations about what course the path will take. These expectations can be confirmed or denied. Yet, when there are many possible paths that are equally probable, expectations become irrelevant and all possibilities become unexpected.

The act of wandering implies that a starting point is determined but the final destination and/or the path by which to get there are not. The movement and creation of points along the path is chosen at the time of movement and, hence, always results in some level of unexpectedness.
Making can be a process of encountering the unexpected. In the search for the unexpected, I create and execute methods of wandering that lead me to the unexpected and expand the possibilities of my work. Through this methodology, I can challenge my own role as the initiator of the work. Ultimately, my undertakings become a lens that enables and documents my conversations with the world.

My process encompasses a variety of methods that lead me to this conversation. Most start with a set of instructions that I carry out and by which I attempt to renounce control over my wanderings. Sometimes a project is based on other people giving me instructions. At other times, I write instructions for individuals or machines to execute. These instructional catalysts are motivated by my own desire to question rather than to answer. These procedures are not intended to provide a final piece, but rather to arrive at a destination that is ultimately unknowable.

Of particular importance is encouraging narratives to arise as a direct result of these processes. I see narratives as a collection of events that, through their sequence, create meaning. I believe wandering provides narratives through showcasing the relationships between different events, usually connected by an organizing entity (my execution of instructions or a question that runs across a project). These methods create narratives that are ultimately impossible to predetermine. A journey can be understood as a cohesive narrative, in which all events have a relationship to each other.

I attempt to challenge the notion of a designer as a creator of meaning. Instead, I propose that a designer can create work that is inherently ambiguous and pluralistic. In this kind of production, multiple interpretations are not only possible but embedded into the way something is made. These ideas are increasingly relevant to graphic design since, in a world that is increasingly complex and heterogeneous, designers should also be able to create in a way that reflects that heterogeneity. In this framework, designers position themselves as initiators. This might be contrasted to the idea of the maker/author, who is responsible for assigning meaning to a work which is later embedded into the execution of that work. An example of this is the design of database-driven interactive systems, where the designer might no have control over the ever-changing content of a project. In this case, the designer is obliged to design something that lacks absolute meaning and is open to multiple interpretations.

Instead, I align myself to Barthe’s idea that “the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination.” The reader, not the author, is the one who completes the text. Barthes proposes that, in the context of literature this is a revolutionary act.

---
In this conceptual framework, a maker can refuse to assign an ultimate meaning to any piece and, instead, let the reader complete the work. As a result, the maker can reaffirm the absence of ultimate meanings and a world that is fundamentally ambiguous.

**CONTEXT**

Initially, my work was significantly influenced by generative design, in which an algorithm determines an output which serves as the design. I felt that the idea of creating systems to produce design seemed very powerful. I attempted to create such systems, but grew increasingly disillusioned with these ideas. Questioning the role of chance in my own process, I started researching the work of John Cage. Cage was not as interested in what he created as he was in his own process and its accompanying conclusions—an idea embodied by what he called “purposeful purposelessness.” The purpose of his pieces was precisely the lack of purpose, which lead him to his artistic journeys.

His prepared piano, for example, made him relinquish control over his instrument in order to make sounds that were both unexpected and a result of his own process. In a prepared piano, objects are placed between or on top the strings. In this way, the sounds created by the instrument are different from those normally expected. Since a great variety of objects can be placed inside the piano, the possibilities of affecting the music are almost limitless. More importantly, the performer opens himself or herself to the unexpected, thus making each instance of a piece unique. The use of this instrument can be seen as a beginning to Cage’s later questioning of the role of control in his own compositions. While Cage exerts some control over the sounds emitted by the prepared piano by giving detailed instructions about its preparation, there is an openness and unpredictability in the sounds made by the instrument. There is still a great distance between this piece and what will eventually become 4′33″ and similar pieces, but these more radical pieces have their origins in the prepared piano and in the *Sonatas and Interludes*, written for the instrument.

In Cage’s most famous composition, 4′33″, the performer is instructed not to play a single note for exactly 4 minutes and 33 seconds. The audience only hears the sounds emanating from their surroundings and this is precisely the piece’s intention. “4′33″ is not a negation of music but an affirmation of its omnipresence.” Cage made no distinction between music and noise, ultimately believing that there was no such thing as noise. Music to Cage was everywhere. When he talked about music, he used the term ‘music’ to mean all sounds, including noise, and even silence. Cage, for example, talked about the ‘noise’ of traffic as music. He found this music to be much more interesting than Beethoven’s, or any other composer’s music, because the sound of traffic is different every time. It cannot be repeated.

This is in contrast to the way in which music and composing are traditionally seen and heard, as fixed pieces that don’t change. As a composer, Cage believed that his role was to consider these sounds as the basis of his music. His intent was to compose with sounds as they were, rather than shaping them to his will. As a composer he lived by the mantra of “Let Sounds be Sounds.” His compositions did not impose a specific order on sounds and noise, but rather took them as they were. He also aspired to find ways in which unexpected noises/sounds/music could emerge. While Cage’s work is considered to be quite Avant Garde, he exercised a lot of discipline in his adherence to his own instructions. His pieces function as entities that have a life of their own. They are able to change every time they are executed. There is an inherent relationship between the idea of a piece and all its consequent permutations.

---

To illustrate the role of chance and indeterminacy in my work I will focus on three particular projects. While these are certainly not all the projects realized in the course of my graduate work, they are the most pertinent examples using wandering as a method for making. These projects represent iterations on different configurations of my most important concepts: wandering, seeking the unexpected, relinquishing control and generating narrative.
In one of my first projects that addressed the concept of relinquishing control I created a video in which I would be the actor and my “script” would be generated randomly from the input of others. In order to do this, I created a simple website by which people could submit instructions to me. About 20 people submitted nearly 40 different instructions. Using these instructions as a database, I created a program that would automatically generate a PDF document with ten instructions randomly selected from the list. My task would then be to go out and perform each instruction while a cameraman recorded my actions. As an added feature, the instructions also included random ways in which the video was to be shot.
The recording began as I received my list of tasks from the program (2□). The first instruction read, “Bark at a dog, while shooting upside down,” so I set out on my hunt for a dog I could bark to. At the corner of Grace Street and North Harrison Street stood a young twenty-something walking her dog. I approached her and started complementing her about her dog. As we talked about the dog’s breed I proceeded to ignore her, knelt down and barked at the dog as loudly as I could (3□). The first out of ten instructions was completed. I went on to do the nine remaining tasks that evening, culminating in “The actor shall floss his teeth while running and the cameraman films without looking at the viewfinder while the actor is running.” (2□)

Submitting myself to the somewhat humiliating execution of others’ instructions was a more interesting process than executing instructions of my own. The results were often silly, given the nature of the instructions, but the outcome of this process could not have been imagined at the moment I generated the script. The resulting narrative emerged through the interaction between the ten events. Seeing these events in a sequence through the moving image forces the viewer to see the relationships and connections between seemingly disparate events. My interpretation and execution of these instructions also became an important part of the narrative since I served as the common element in each event.

Another important aspect of this project was how intriguing I found the interactions with the people I encountered. Individuals asked what the project was about, danced for the camera (5□), and one even promoted his hip-hop single (6□). Their actions were always unexpected, and I had no control over them. At no point during the conception of this project did I imagine other individuals actively participating with me. Because of this, however, I was able to add another unexpected layer of meaning to my project.

Refer to selection of video stills and quotes from this piece on pages 28–29.
Hi, is this your dog?

Do you drink a lot of Rolling Rock?

Yo, check it

Yo, can I ask you question, can I ask you a question... Are you a dancer? For real? I was like, what the hell, what the hell are you doing? Recording me? This like a science project or something...

- What type of music do you do?
  - I rap, Hip-hop, R&B. Got a whole group. Again, the council music group. Ty Sinatra. Find me on YouTube. Look up my single, Ms. Martinez.

- Why Ms. Martinez?
  - Well, Ms. Martinez because it's about a woman you want and you can't have but you can have her but in the same sense you can't. So, it kind of confusing but it's great. I just performed it...

- Do you have your own Ms. Martinez?
  - Yes, I do. Yes, I do.

- Can I get two lottery tickets?
  - Two lottery tickets, what kind?

- What kind... I've never bought the lottery actually but ah... but, oh, what kind do you have?

- What you guys filming?
  - Just a video... Yeah.
  - I have to follow the instructions that are on this paper. That's the video and the next one is "act like a gorilla for two minutes."

- Act like a gorilla for two minutes?
  - That's the instruction and I have to follow it.

- Good morning.
- It's the afternoon!
To explore the nature of these instructions more extensively, I created another iteration of this project (with a newly generated script) in which two cameramen accompanied me while I executed these instructions. One of them followed the instructions formulated for one of them (7☐), while the second stayed at a distance recording, not only my actions, but also the interactions between the cameraman and myself (8☐). Because the project included specific instructions on how the video would be recorded, the final video became an intersection between the documentation of this execution and the execution itself.

Refer to selection of video stills and quotes from this piece on pages 32–33.
Don’t mind him.
He’s just a little crazy.
Yo, crazy man, come back here!
Quit being a gorilla!

Fucking Jimmy John’s. Girl, let me tell you about Jimmy John’s last night.

I had to go OFF on Jimmy John’s.

...He was like, would you like to take my name?
YEAH, what’s your name. His name was Rasheed or something...
In this project, the external input of instructions along with the random algorithm that selected them from the database determined the specific points in my journey. While I had very little control over the direction the project would take, I had full control over the way in which these events were connected and executed. I could execute and create a framework for the journey I would take.

This project became an important turning point. I executed methods by which I renounced significant control over my process, forcing myself to create more unexpected results. The project also reinforced my interest in using wandering as a methodology. Finally, this was the first project to incorporate a more human dimension. This would become more important in subsequent work.
In an attempt to reverse the relationship between creating instructions and executing them, I decided to develop a project where I would give instructions in a place where people would not be expecting them and see how they would react. Taking the idea of instructions rather loosely, a simple question was formulated: “Do you have anything worth saying?” The question was open but strangely profound.
I went to several locations, including Shafer Court—a busy outdoor pedestrian walkway on the Virginia Commonwealth University campus. I set up my camera and started recording, while holding up a sign that read, “Do you have anything worth saying?” (9/3). I walked around convincing people to respond by facing the video camera and saying anything they liked. Some of the participants tried to give advice, some tried to say something funny and others were quite creative with their answers. A man showed me his tattoo of a (left-facing) swastika in the middle of his chest (10/3) and explained to me what that symbol meant to him. A student talked about his difficulties with the police and how his friend was run over with a car only to be later arrested.
While I was comfortable with the control I exerted over many aspects of this project, I was concerned about how to approach the editing of the video. Video editing implies complete control over every frame. It doesn’t permit randomness or unplanned relationships between the content elements. For my other projects, video served as a chronological documentation of an execution of instructions. In these projects some decisions where made about what to show and what not to show, but these decisions did not interrupt the natural sequence of events. In *Anything Worth Saying*, I decided that the best way to experience the results of the project was to present the question and answer sequences non-linearly.

To achieve this I set out to create a web interface by which people could view these videos in random order (11 ☐). By taking this approach I would renounce both the creation of a hierarchy of responses and the ordering of content. The interface presented the video segments as a sea of floating thumbnail images bouncing around the browser window. The X, Y, Z positions and their X and Y directions are random and regenerated each time the page is reloaded.

*Refer to selection of video stills and quotes from this piece on pages 42–43.*
I think you should have an awesome day because you are an awesome individual and there is nothing wrong with having a bad day and turning it into a good day.

Family means everything.

Why can't we have world peace?

I'm out here, I play the buckets out here, Atlanta, VA.

I think life is great and I'm here for a good education so I can support a family when I'm older.

Watch out, Richmond is not safe.

Check out my clothing line, man!

HIV is a real thing.

You're beautiful.

So you can see how I'm upset that I'm...

No Obamacare and no higher taxes.

Why can't we have world peace?

I've experienced it first hand by the death of an uncle...

You know what I mean?

Take each birth and each rebirth seriously.

Don't just do it all at once.

Heeeeeeell yeah!

You know what I mean?

Let me step back so you can see my logo.

You know what I mean?
As in the previous project, a narrative is created through the relationship between all the different events and what the viewer is able to interpret from them. Yet, as the initiator of the project, I did not serve as a connector of the events. Chronological order was not important to this narrative, since the relationship between the events was mediated by the presence of the common question. In my previous project, I—the executioner of instructions—connected the different events. In this project the relationship between these responses and its responders connect the events.

In *Anything Worth Saying*, my control of the process is nearly absolute. As the initiator, I exercise full control over the instructions, framing, potential participants, location and questions. However, after the question is asked there’s very little I can do to determine how a participant will respond, especially considering the openness of the question. The responses were varied and the topics were quite unexpected. While highly structured, the moment a question is asked to a random, passing individual, control is lost and the only option is to record what is happening at the moment.

The project is a good example of wandering, of creating a piece that wanders through a crowd of people. It seemed as though every time a question was asked the project took on a new direction.
After analyzing *Anything Worth Saying*, I concluded that the increased level of control seemed problematic. Even though it provided a wide array of outcomes, the use of a single question seemed to limit the movement the project could take. An active mechanism of control (in this case, a web application) was more effective in reaching more compelling paths for wandering. While the use of a question provided a strong central theme, I was more interested in delegating the process of asking questions, as a way to renounce control.
My response was to create a web application that used a user-submitted search term to extract questions from the Internet (12(5)). The application generated a list of five possible questions, taken from Twitter’s online database, from which the interviewer would choose one. The application would query Twitter with the search term and return 100 tweets. This list of tweets was filtered to those where the search term and a question mark were present. As a way to limit the interviewer’s control, these questions had to be asked at a specific location determined by a set of GPS coordinates. When the user submitted a search term, he/she also submitted an initial address (12(7)). The software then calculated a set of random GPS locations within about a third of a mile and showed the path by which the user could get to that location. When a location was reached and a question was asked, the user could push the “Re-Generate” button to create a new set of questions and a new, nearby location. By making location and the set of possible questions so specific, the interviewer would have much less room to influence the direction of the project.

Using the keyword ‘truth’ as the initial search term and ‘325 North Harrison St., Richmond VA’ as the initial address, an interviewer and myself went to several randomly generated locations around Richmond, VA asking questions generated by the application to individuals. It was exciting to ask questions that were completely out of context and which made little sense to the individuals being interviewed.

Refer to selection of video stills and quotes from this piece on pages 50–51.
We're going to Cary Street.

... even if you try to figure out the truth you won't fully be able to grasp its meaning, because it's much bigger than we are.

Would you tell a five year old that his favorite team sucked, even if it was the truth and he was dressed in a Santa costume?

Why do people lie. Good question.

- What are you looking for, a better future, wealth, or a better life?
  - aaaaaaaaaaahhhhh-hhh, a better future

- Can I ask you a question then?
  - Not if you're with a camera...
  - I've got my hood covered up.
  - Alright, I'll just block you.

Why is the truth always so painful and why are lies always so easy to take?
In this project, more than any other, control was delegated. In this case, delegating to the software determined the movement and the content of the project. Certainly, the interviewer had some control over the way in which these questions were asked, and in selecting who would be asked the question. The person recording these interactions also had control over distance, angle and framing of the video documentation. Still, the content of the piece ultimately fell upon the software and its use of randomness.

More than any other project, this was very much a wandering. The narrative developed on the spur of the moment, dictated by movement. Because the main activity consisted of walking from location to location with no ultimate destination, it was spatially a wandering as well. Every new location seemed to change the character of the journey.
This section is a presentation of some of the projects realized during the course of my graduate work. These might not be central to my thesis argument, but they help to exemplify some of my interests and ideas at various points in time. I find it important to see my development as a linear process, rather than as a cohesive body of work, where every project became a rethinking of a previous idea.
This poster was designed as part of the Objects and Methods Lecture Series in the Graphic Design Department at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). I explored the idea of designing through open rules and proceeded to program a Processing script that generated countless iterations of the same design based on a set of properties such as color, rotation, angle, position. The poster served as an interesting exploration into designing through systems and lead to extensive questioning of the effectiveness of systems of design.
As part of my second-semester graduate workshop, I was required to build a monument to a specific culture. In my case, I chose to build a monument to the Romani people. Rather than make it myself, I created a base and put it in Shafer Court, a popular path for walkers around the VCU campus. The task of building this monument was delegated to the people passing by. Individuals would light candles and place them on the monument base where the melting of the wax would create different textures, colors and shapes. This project furthered my interest in renouncing control over my own work and letting external forces play a role in my process.
After researching algorithms and their impact on society, I made an interface by which an algorithm, not the user, had control over the experience. The piece had three different sections (Beginnings, Today, and Future) with different kinds of obstacles emerging as the user interacted with the text. Pop-up windows, changing of text style, or the addition of random characters throughout the text made the interaction with the writing almost impossible. Through this, I tried to stress the point that, in the present day, algorithms have increasing control over our lives. The project provided new directions in which the renunciation of control could be executed through interaction.
As a way to explore the idea of making through the creation of instructions, I decided to walk from the Pollak building on the VCU campus to Pony Pasture Park taking a picture every minute of my six-mile walk. The resulting video montage served as an interesting example of creating meaning by increasing the distance between myself and my work.

I walked from Pollack to Pony Pastures. It took 2 hours and 7 minutes. I carried a stopwatch. Every minute of my walk, I took one picture.
Using the photos taken during Walking, Walking, Walking, I created a database with the following information: date, order, gps location, image file, and time taken. These were then fed into a Processing script that randomly displayed one of the information types associated to each photo. Through this project, I attempted to see how strong the relationship between these different elements was. While I found the video to be interesting in itself, I later attempted to distance myself from this kind of making in which everything boiled down to a primary concept.
Floyd Avenue is a street near the VCU campus. As an investigation into the relationship of rules and space, I photographed 15 blocks of it and then wrote a Processing script that would generate a video that included visual transitions between them. The order of the images, however, was intentionally disjointed. The result, however, was that the images seemed adjacent by the use of a visual system that stipulated their presentation and their formal relationship. The video strengthened my interest in the narrative quality of my projects, rather than their formal ones.
My thesis work is a culmination of processes which incorporated chance into my projects through the use of computer programming. Developing a process for wandering expanded upon these methods by incorporating the outside world as a vehicle for exploring the undetermined. My methods were also useful in creating a way of making in which the possible permutations of one system were virtually endless. This was one of the original goals I set out to do when formulating my thesis problem. The conceptual framework I created was successful in providing a language by which to analyze the three projects considered in this document. This conceptualization of wandering was *ex post facto* and was useful in analyzing the differences and similarities between projects. Yet, it also provided some limitations; most importantly the concept of control, the undetermined and the unexpected. I wished to renounce control over my projects but came to realize how problematic the concept of control actually is. For example, if it is I who initiate a project, don't I bear ultimate responsibility for it? If I delegate control to some other agent, isn't this still ultimately under my control? I make decisions about how, when, and where to delegate. Ultimately, control is embodied in any act of making and renouncing control is still embedded with other types of control. Full renunciation of control becomes possible only by ceasing to do anything. I now recognize that my endeavors were ways of implementing alternative mechanisms of control, rather than renunciation of control. A similar relationship arises with the concept of the undetermined. If we strive for something to be undetermined then we are attempting to determine its outcome. In the case of the unexpected, when we desire for an event to be unexpected we're creating expectations about the "unexpectedness" of that event. Hence if something we attempted to make unexpected is unexpected it begins to meet our expectations. These concepts are obviously problematic and not fully resolved. This might be a confirmation of the inherent ambiguity that my projects carry.

Another important result of my work is how my process dramatically evolved because of these undertakings. I went from being very systematic to being more intuitive and spontaneous. I began including myself in my work as the protagonist of what I made—something I hadn't been able to do before. *This is your Script* is an example of this, where my participation in the project became a central part of how the viewer understood the project. Through including myself in this project, my relationship to what I was making changed dramatically. Later work such as *I Love Islands* developed into something more playful and less conceptual in which my motivations for making were very different. Not only was another part of my personality shown in this poster, but a new manner of making emerged in which ambiguity was welcomed and multiple interpretations were part of the design process.

---

1. See the Definitions section of this document, page 7.
These new approaches were made possible because of the insights provided by my earlier projects. I believe these are hints of new directions I am about to take—directions still simmering in the back of my mind.

Recently, I have also begun to further question my underlying rationale. What I have found is that the ideas embodied in my work and my conceptual framework mirror my own worldviews. Through my projects, I attempt to renounce control over process by delegating control to other entities. I have come to understand that this act of delegation is based on my own skepticism towards all mechanisms of control and decision making. My way of thinking and working exhibits an intrinsic distrust of all methods by which we make decisions. If any decision is based on using reason, knowledge or aesthetics as a mechanism for decision making, what direction should I take upon the delegitimation of these mechanisms? What is the artist’s relationship to meaning when “all meanings are suggestions”? My response to this question is the act of wandering, moving without a final destination. Wandering implies the belief that we do not have all the answers and that we might never find them. Ultimately these wanderings embody my own belief that the world we inhabit is inherently ambiguous and pluralistic. Ultimate meaning is unattainable and what we are left with is a polyphony of meanings, all equally valid. Perhaps, wandering is the closest thing we have to Truth.

1. Gary R. Browning, Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 2. The book explains how “Lyotard is unremittingly sceptical over the claims of reason to explain reality.” He also uses clouds as a metaphor to exemplify the distance between thought and reality. “Clouds are introduced as a metaphor for thought as to highlight the insubstantiality of thinking in relation to the reality that is to be conceived.”

2. Zygmunt Bauman, Postmodernity and Its Discontents (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 106. The full sentence reads: “In such a world, all meanings are suggestions, standing invitations to discussion and argument, to interpretation and reinterpretation; no meanings are made definitely, and none is definite; none made.”
At the beginning stages of my thesis, Gerstner’s ideas about design systems proved to be very influential in my own thinking concerning the possibility of visual systems.


Ishizaki proposes that there is too much information to be designed and that, because of this, designers should focus on creating systems of design. His ideas on improvisational design serve as a framework for the design of visual systems.


This book showcases the work of John Maeda. Maeda’s work as a pioneer in the marriage of graphic design with the digital realm was influential on my own thinking regarding the possibilities of design.


This book is, perhaps, the most influential one on this list. It provides strong, innovative and interesting framework for the development of new media. His thoughts on the opposition between the database and the narratives are particularly insightful.


This book explores the issue of how the notion of “craft” translates into digital work. It argues that digital craft is much more conceptual than its analog counterpart. The computer becomes, not a tool for automation, but for abstraction — an idea that runs throughout my work.


This seminal essay suggests a departure from the centrality of the author and examining texts through the reader and the examination of language itself. This implies the possibility of renouncing the creation of ultimate meaning in any literary work.

This collection of writings by Cage contains some interesting insights into Cage’s way of thinking. Included is the idea of “Letting sounds be sounds.”


Clarkson provides an extensive account of Cage’s ideas on music and composition.


DeVisscher’s description of Cage’s experience in a sound-proof room proved to be important in understanding Cage’s ideas on silence.


This book’s multiple essays on the use of chance in art probed extensively useful in generating ideas for my own work and attempting to position my work in relation to other artists’ work.


Through this book, I was able to further comprehend the differences between Eastern and Western thought through the lens of Wabi-Sabi. This was useful in understanding Eastern influences in the work of John Cage.


Kostelanetz explores the role of intention in Cage’s work and describes his idea of “purposeful purposelessness.”


This essay describes Cage’s views on chance and its relationship to nature and Eastern thought.


Pritchett provides an excellent account on the ideas behind John Cage’s music. It also deals with Cage’s ideas on chance and their relationship to Eastern thought.

POSTMODERNISM AND CONTEMPORARY CRITIQUES OF ART


Bauman’s approach to postmodern art resonated with my own ways of working in which the relationship between meaning and art grow increasingly problematic.


Browning explains Lyotard’s skepticism towards Reason and explains why Lyotard found the idea of “Grand Narratives” so problematic.


Although Lyotard’s report is concerned primarily with scientific knowledge, his account of postmodernism as the delegitimation of metanarratives proved important to understanding the relationship of my work to the fall of grand narratives.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My most sincere thanks to my committee, Roy, Steve and Pam for their guidance and help. I'm grateful for all your support and patience and for continually trying to challenge me throughout this process.

Many thanks to Sandy Wheeler, Rob Carter, John DeMao, John Malinsolki, and the rest of the graphic design faculty for teaching me so much over the past two years and for continually encouraging me to expand my horizons.

Thank to all my classmates: Aich, Daniel, Jim, Karolis, Lucy, Sang, Hong, Laura, Laurie, Sarah, Anne, Cassie, Mitch, and Virginia. It’s been a pleasure sharing this time with you. I’ve taken a bit of all of you along with me.

¡Gracias a mis padres y a mi familia por apoyar a este loco a través de estos dos años! Obviamente, todo esto hubiera sido imposible sin ustedes.

COLOPHON

This book is typeset in Minion Pro, designed by Robert Slimbach and DIN, designed by Albert-Jan Pool.

Printed and bound by Blurb.