Imagomachines

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IMAGOMACHINES
by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis document is a submission in consideration for a degree of Master of Fine Arts in Fine Arts Studio from the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences. It describes the concepts within the body of the artist’s work that includes imagomachines; the name given to the thesis’ mixed media kinetic sculptures. Also included in the thesis are large-sized, non-toxic prints. This document describes the methods of printing, fabrication, and construction used to resolve the works and have them ready for their installation at the MFA exhibition in the Bevier Gallery at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Within the thesis, associations are drawn between the psychological activity of forming an imago or characterization and how this process influences and is affected by consumer culture. Art is held up to notions of consumer culture in order to show the ways in which it is often disenfranchised by trends and suggestions produced by that very culture.

Other aspects of the work include nods to the subliminal ways in which ideas are formed. Our minds streamline assemblages of information. Over time, through repeated conveyance to others, the new patchwork manifests as a stereotype or a commonly held understanding. This process allows us to create works of art as well as produce expectations for how we are to act or behave in society. Two sides of the same coin, the means for creating a stereotype and for freeing one’s self from it, are forced together in this work to create a tension capable of exposing them both at once.
“That perception of regularities, and then compression of those regularities into a brief 
schema or model or theory, that's what characterizes what I call complex adaptive 
systems, including living things.”
-Murray Gell-Mann

"Dreams cannot be told; they dissolve when the rational mind tries to grasp them in 
words."
Carl Spitteler

THE CONCEPT OF THE IMAGO

Imago: (psychoanalysis) an idealized image of someone (usually a parent) formed in 
childhood and stored in the subconscious.

Machine: 1. any mechanical or electrical device that transmits or modifies energy to 
perform or assist in the performance of human tasks, an efficient person, “the boxer was a 
magnificent fighting machine”

The earliest use of the term “imago”, as it would influence psychoanalytic thought, dates 
to 1906 when Carl Spitteler made it the title of his novel. The book dealt with how the 
subconscious of an unwavering creative mind was affected when faced with the 
restrictions and predominant views of the middle class. Carl Jung adopted the term in 
1912, using it to replace the staple term “complex.” Later on, his works would use the 
term “archetype” in place of the word “imago.”

In psychosocial terms, an imago is a functional, idealized caricature a person assigns to 
another human being as an identity. Usually formed early in life and often with the parent 
as the subject, this caricature is created from one’s emotional reaction to a narrow set of 
characteristics they have determined the subject to embody. Throughout life, the rigid

1 Mishlove, Jeffrey. "The Simple And The Complex Part II: The Science of Complexity with Murray 
2011).

2 Liukkonen, Petri. “Carl (Friedrich Georg) Spitteler (1845-1924) - Pseudonym Carl Felix Tandem.” Books 

3 Miller, George A. "WordNet Search - 3.0: imago." <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?o2=1&o0=1&o7=&o5=&o1=1&o6=&o4=&o3=&s=imago&i=0&h=00#c> (accessed November 24, 2010).


imprint of the initial imagoes continues to affect the way we perceive others and assign value to our interactions with them. In this way, we build more sophisticated imagoes from the original prototypes.

It is obvious when considering another person that there is more to them than a caricature. If we truly felt that we knew everything about someone, we’d probably stop thinking about her. However, an unlimited array of life’s circumstances produces inconvenient obstacles that compromise our ability to easily know the subtle layers of others. Time will not allow for us to invest equally in every person we encounter to get to know them as well as possible. On top of that, we may even have had an adverse emotional reaction to someone and not wish to associate with them long enough to understand who they truly are. The result is that, based on the lessons learned from testing past imagoes, we navigate through the situation with social tools we’ve learned that allow us to still get what we want. Perhaps, in all the years we have known our neighbor, she always seemed a bitter person or a sunny person. The narrow form we’ve attributed to her, her imago, contains only as much of a versed identification as we’d prefer to or are able to acquire. When we actually find we can be present and mindful with someone, the imago naturally will change and expand. Regardless, we will always have a subjective definition of her based on how we feel when we are interacting, no matter how expanded and open we are in our minds for even our most intimate of friends.

THE MASS APPEAL OF CUSTOMIZATION

Advances in digital technology have allowed products geared toward owner modification to flood the marketplace. The trope of modification originally applied to early do-it-yourself computer programming and Internet web page creation from scratch, and then transitioned through to the first forum and chat room activity. The onset of more consumer based means to use a canned script to create a web page about their own subsequently produced blog activity created the fallacy that one is an authority just for the ability to publish their thoughts and thereby making them immediately available to a potential audience. The high interest in customization generated from these developments has been overlaid onto all kinds of products and made “cool” by limiting the need for thought yet containing a solid capability to enhance and broadcast an aspect of one’s image, or imago. For example, people advertise that their iPod carries their song selections. The notion of this independence runs from their pockets to their ears along distinctive white wires. A higher echelon of inclusion is conveyed as well, with all the requisite marks of status, intelligence, and trendiness that connect one to the Apple brand. These users may also become music critics on iTunes, highlighting and advertising parts of the Apple Store’s exclusive music catalog (and usually avoid talking about anything that isn’t available to purchase). In similar fashion, digitized books (are they books then?) are available to download to a tablet that can be used in public to inform others of one’s intellectual bent. People have begun to use the shorthand of commercialism to create imagoes of themselves in order to establish a sense of control and to obtain what they want from life.
In an online article, market analyst and business owner Nancy Wurtzel writes:

Today's consumers want their buying experience to be tailored and personalized just for them. Sure, Wal-Mart will still be the destination for household staples and buyers will visit Costco for the best electronics deals. But for many other purchases, buyers are looking for companies and choices that are outside of the big box. Instead of a name brand that is mass-produced (and marketed to the hilt), they want products that relate to their life, a product that makes a personal connection. They want to "have it their way.

That personalization could be as simple as a first name on a mug or a soft nursery blanket with a baby's initials. It might be custom-designed sneakers for the obsessive runner or make-up that is blended to perfectly match someone's skin coloring. It might even be personalized stationary and postage stamps customized with a photo of the family pet. Today, the personalization options are practically endless.6

The above quote may indicate that people are now looking for products that compliment a more natural, less commercialized way of being who they are. The result of the search is a product that advertises a blurb-sized bit of who they truly are and allows for products to act as personal branding.

Those looking to exhibit an even greater degree of independent thought to their personality might turn to modification. The groups who knowingly embrace the degree to which they've been marketed tend to become the most involved in this extreme form of customization. By doing so, these trend setters advertise the pre-existing products as well as practice a form of research and development that the proprietary company or its competition can monitor by googling itself and visiting the special pages of user groups. For example, someone may modify an Xbox in order to be able to store the contents of a game cartridge on the system’s built-in computer. They might create an app program for the iPhone that provides an unexpected, novel way to use the device. They may choose to submerge the innards of their computers into a clear, form fitting tank and fill it with mineral oil so they can show off this means to liquid cool their hard drives by posting pictures of the “build” on the internet.

They rarely contribute this content to forums or blogs using their real name. Instead, they select an avatar graphic and name that they feel best represents an idealized aspect of themselves, thereby creating a catchy mini brand to attract other users to their content. The length that they are willing to go and the time that they are able to spend imposing the metamorphosis on the product is based on how much they care about exhibiting a sort of dedicated, knowing savvy in the face of a compromised world. The perpetual liquid

coolant they’ve introduced to their computers and the niche audience allows them to play the hard-wired, independence-tease product World of Warcraft for hours on end.

If you aren’t that deep into tech modification culture, no worries. For everyone from baby boomers to young professionals with some money to spend on novel forms of convenience, there is the universal remote of the new tech age, Bluetooth home automation control, which allows you to man everything from your popcorn maker to your big screen TV using your cell phone. It also makes for the perfect conversation (read: imago forming) piece.

THE SCIENCE OF ADVERTISING REMAINS THE SAME

Regardless of advances in technology or new trends, the standard means of effective advertising remain the same, and are rooted in how people relate.

Our understanding of people informs our understanding of the culture we belong to, and so thusly informs the existing modes within our consumer culture. A lexicon of symbols (which visually indicate, for example, a desirable personality, the onset of a desired sexual event, strong backing of family values, etc.) and adept use of buzz terms, the nature of which are considered by the greater part of society to represent the ideal or something potent, are constantly juxtaposed in different degrees in order to create an original sales pitch that aims to create a visceral, pro-active response. Simultaneously, these messages often indirectly promote a mental petrifaction of imagoes in order to create a navigable conceptual foundation for the potential customer. When an observer mentally alights upon this platform, they can then decode the ad in such a way that would lead them to buy the idea (signified) in the form of the “product”(signifier). The feeling of a positive (and negative) result that the buyer may experience also does its part to reinforce the process of imago creation; the narrow, manipulated conditions depicted (note root also of the word “picture”: when breaking up the roots of these words one finds that a depiction is at heart simply a suggestion) in the pitch lead to an action producing the result; a personalized life experience that was owned and defined in a comfortable, familiar, yet convenient and limited way.

ARTISTIC DIFFERENCES

There are marked differences between this general model for the advertising and selling of consumer goods and paying for access to view art. The largest difference is that, regardless of whether or not someone considers it, the experience of viewing a collection of art does not have to be accurately forecast or guided for the viewer to get their value add. When an attempt is made to overlay an advertising scheme onto a body of work, be it for a large exhibition of a well known artist’s work or a summer camp art show, the is often an imposed deadening focus upon the idea of art’s artiness. This result is often caused by the institution using the content to bolster their identity. On the cliquish side, the promotions for more “sophisticated” work will often combine notions of high culture with the trope of the discerning connoisseur. We have developed our cultural read to the point that even placing the work in a frame suggests a sort of condescending pinnacle of
high culture experience, in which the world has been turned upside down for a month and an invite printed upon an exquisite sliver of soap-white ivory has been extended to the plebes. The opening night is sure to be a real Cinderella experience. Oh yes, and there will be art as well. (The audio tour may even be downloadable to your iPod).

"When you go to an art gallery you are simply a tourist looking at the trophy cabinet of a few millionaires." 
Banksy

Reinforced by a consumer culture in which customization is king, a new irony is produced in which the viewer is made to feel like a master over the work without even having to take a cursory look at a piece of it. Supporting the artist by eating hors d'oeuvres makes attending socialites visionaries by proxy. The process or personal journey the individual undertook is downplayed by the finished, framed pieces, crystallized visions upon pristine pedestals, or corner- dominating installations, as well as the culture that flows through the gallery. Thus, the aspect of the art that is played up is its commodity, an idea of “art.” This is an idea easy for patrons to immediately lord over. The definition of the work is based on a very narrow and popular take on what it can do for the person. Everyone walks out wearing a vaporous glass slipper facsimile.

Despite this emphasis on art’s commoditization, the process rarely includes a take-away experience, where a piece of art is bought and further ownership of the buyer’s subjective read can be regularly imprinted, expanded, begun or changed in a private setting. When art is purchased, it is often done so in relation to pre-existing home furnishings, color palette, and amount of space available. Perhaps if the work was chameleon-like and could change its palette via iPhone app (I’m sure someone out there is creating art like this), more of it would sell.

The reality is that art is quietly asking for an investment or it is using its nature to grab your undivided attention for a handout. Yet, it cannot promise an exact return. While art is able to guarantee an elegant matrix of options as well as a standard transmission car can, the qualities of it that automatically go straight to the viewer’s subconscious storehouse to be mixed with other ideas can’t be inventoried. Art is a standard machine, a vehicle. It has that in common with every product ever made.

IMAGOMACHINES

Imagomachines are art works I have created that advertise their ability to be manipulated so as to unlock the mystery in the art. They are a trap (traps don’t always work). They are

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stations designed to turn a person on to viewing other art around them as well as the
world in a more involved, subjective way.

**Invitation to modify the experience**

The well-absorbed cultural notion of being able to treat a product like a subjective,
customizable experience is inlaid into the body of the imagomachine in many ways.
Functioning bill and coin collectors, decorative lighting, and structural portrayals of
vending machine forms and private booth stations are manifested as a way of
broadcasting (advertising) that there is something the viewer can do with the object.
These familiar elements are also there to invite approach. The result of further
exploration by the viewer may be to draw a blank, to find nothing more.

Art has suggested active customization for ages; be it the business aspects of art (portrait,
mural, and style-based commissions) to the subjective process of interpreting the work, to
the actual artistic process of creating the work. This quality is referenced in elements of
the imagomachine that provide a hands-on component that is now so popular within
current product lines that strive to give the buyer more ways, albeit limited, to customize
the product once purchased.

It is ironic that addressing this aspect of art by translating it into actual features of the
work, for example, culturally coded means to feed the sculptures money with electronic
bill collectors, cranks, and vending machine gates, contributes to its mystery. The explicit
way I’ve chosen to merge this intrinsic act of active subjectivity when viewing art with
the idea of investing money in order to get a result blurs both in a way that intends to
make the viewer curious and want to explore what’s really there. By using an artistic
method to portray the present blind spot, which I feel exists within two very different
regions: the actual creation of a freestanding, knowing, unique self; and product
customization that is intentionally being created to sell products; conflicted space within
the psyche can be entered into and meditated upon.

An imagomachine basically puts art in a commercial context. The art advertised may be a
found object or it may be a film or an impressionistic painting. Whatever the case, the
piece is subjugated to a framework which is normally coded as consumer friendly, and
which cues the viewer to ask, what will this work do for me? The answer the machine
gives usually causes confusion. The reason is because an imagomachine entices with the
promise of a narrow result and subsequently produces the unexpected; an approximation
of the result or a completely different one altogether. It is a machine for unwinding and
dissolving congealed notions.

For example, consider the piece *Imagomachine: The Lovers*, a piece with two stations,
projector, and pneumatic actuators. The imagomachine leads you to believe you will see
something steamy or taboo because of our associations with the lit marquee in a private
area with a dollar deposit slot. Yet instead, after having been enticed to invest a bit of
physical and monetary energy, you’ve been presented with a strained, contradictory
relationship; a symbolic representation of the wider picture of a sexual discourse rather than one showing graphic and visceral sexual intercourse between two lovers. Therefore, as the primary depiction has ended up being one of tension and the background being one of intimacy, you are only correct in saying that you have observed the idea of a relationship.

The combination of codes, some which illicit specific expectations or guesses from the viewer and some that produce results that are partially related to the original expectations or guesses, enforces two ideas. The first is that the system presented to the viewer is faulty or broken because it fails to deliver on the initial expectations. The second is that the system is an effective tool for inspiration and exploration because it withholds any suggestion that it can do more for viewers than they can do for themselves.

Imagomachine 1: Spectre & Sons Repeating Action Pianola, lower “vending” section

List of Requirements

Imagomachines can take on different qualities: they can be made with different media and comment on numerous man-made products, such as politics, religion, global warming, etc. All that is required is that the imagomachine relate to a custom held by the
majority of an audience and that it helps a person reflect on certain expectations for an outcome that they have been conditioned to hold. The imagomachine will hint, or even insist, that the user expect what it advertises, while simultaneously giving them indicators that they may not receive exactly what is advertised on the surface.

• An imagomachine must create a sort of “cold” tension.

• The work must take on an appearance of a crystallized, fully realized machine or device, with industrial attributes.

• All or part of the machine must substitute an actual working system with the representation of a system. Aside from internal mechanics, this may be accomplished by using an industrial-looking shell over the piece, manufactured machine parts, etc. to create “punctuation” or assurance of a system that can deliver the suggested result.

• The machine must lie well enough so that the representation of the system it houses will perform as an actual working system.

• The imagomachine must be able to remind an observer that they regularly make habitual associations out of subconscious habit and will most likely continue to do so in the future without noticing.

• It must advertise a definite, compelling result (presenting familiar signifiers for a designated user function which would normally lead to investment, ownership or even mastery).

• It must include elements that, when combined with parts of it that indicate a specific service, blur expectations. Examples of these would be an object held in a showcase loosely related to what someone is led to expect, or a receiving station for an unknown product which will be produced upon activation of the machine (upon the audience’s investment).

• The key that starts the machine up is a system that is constantly making associations that are primed to be tapped (the human mind).

If all these parts are assembled correctly, the imagomachine can help people remember that they are constantly making passive and active choices, and can also help them understand their own personal balance between the two.
DESCRIPTIONS OF THE TWO MACHINES

Imagomachine 1: Spectre And Sons Repeating Action Pianola

Upon a three foot by 3 foot by .25 inch steel plate is bolted a 7-foot tall steel case. It houses concealed mechanisms in its lower level and an object in an upper level display area.

A screwdriver or coin is required to open a back door in the lower part of the unit. The inside of the unit is only accessed for maintenance and is not generally opened by the public, although, if a curious viewer wished to open and see inside I would have no objection. Bolted to a rack in the box is a circuit board, which powers a fan from a computer, a chip that has an audio recording stored on it, and a floodlight aimed upward in order to shine light through a glass shelf positioned directly above it. An electronic switch running from the board is positioned so it can be triggered by the gear of a coin collector mechanism mounted to the front of the box. Further below the coin collector mechanism is a plastic tunnel attached to an outer vending machine gate that dispenses the airflow from the fan if lifted.
Activation of all the components requires the deposit of a coin (penny or dime) into the front of the machine and a turn of the crank. When the coin is inserted, it triggers the switch, which powers a ten second timer and allows for the simultaneous activation of the fan, sound piece, and floodlight. After ten seconds, everything is automatically shut off so that another coin can be inserted.

The light shines upward upon the back portion of a piano, which rests on its side in the top case, and is viewable through plexiglass windows. The dusty piece continues to fall apart, and has the words Spector And Son Repeating Action printed in gold lettering across the span of its front crossbeam. The top of the sandblasted steel case has a fabricated lid affixed by four screws. The steel platform at the very bottom has special screws at each corner to allow for level adjustment on slanted surfaces. A power cable runs from the back of the machine. Inside the case is a drain and nozzle, which would be used if thirty gallons of mineral oil were to be added to the top case as originally intended.

The appearance of the sculpture is meant to resemble a vending machine that would be anchored in a public commercial space, possibly outside. The steel plate resembles those I’ve seen outside of grocery stores that are rusted and intended to weigh down vending machines that sell small toys and trinkets. The plate in my imagomachine is practical as well in that it is a good weight for actually keeping the tower from tipping over. They are bolted together on the inside of the tower’s case.

The combination of additional vending machine elements (the coin slot and crank, the gate, and the top showcase for an advertised object, as well as the solid character of a structure which looks like it is one of thousands of mass produced machines) is juxtaposed with the object advertised on the inside of the case, the back of the piano, which is nothing like what would normally be for sale. It is an object that appears immediately to have the capability of providing something from itself. Its capacity for producing a definite result can still be read even though it cannot really provide that result anymore. It is like an animal carcass that no longer contains life, yet still conveys the idea of being alive through its biological nature. So, this piano back and its case form the notion of a reliquary, a suggestion that something may be able to magically commune with the living world around it and produce magnificent results. This read helps to suggest further that something special, magical, and unique can be gained by interacting with the machine by investing effort and energy, by depositing a coin. The coin is a representation of a personal energy cultivated by the individual and made manifest in copper or nickel, along with whatever else is in a coin. Yet, this invitation to invest with currency also contains the idea of expecting a provided service whose value approximates the value of the coin and the physical requirement of bending over to do the work. So the work promises that there will be a service, and also that the service will probably be spectacular and possibly priceless.

Yet, a purchase cannot necessarily guarantee the miraculous intangible result that is possible when interacting with a piece of art. It illustrates this fact within the phenomena produced upon turning the coin crank. The results are very mundane, yet add stimuli,
which may help viewers to independently immerse themselves in a subjective connection with the work. The flood light illuminates about 10 percent of the piano piece in the top part of the case; the sound piece is very low grade; and the only product to come out of the gate at the bottom is a subtle draft of cool air. For certain people, this simply brings more attention to the sensory realm, as three senses: sight, sound, and touch, are delivered at the same time. The advertisement, the piano part, could actually be seen to be false advertising. An expectation for some audio-animatronic result is dashed. The sound piece contains audio effects that only create an illusion that there are more intricacies within the machine than there really are. This is another lie that ultimately gives the machine a gilded quality while commenting on the potential magic of independent association that can be made within the viewer’s mind. The tropes work against allowing the piece to be approached in a rich subjective fashion by being overbearing. They tell the viewer how they could use the piece from the beginning, and are also overbearing with the confusion they cause. The work then becomes an illustration of how commercial expectations on the part of the public can diminish the ability to journey into a piece subjectively and form a highly detailed, self-actuating read. It also describes how the marriage of commercialism and ideas of independent modification and customization do not really yield a high degree of true independent metamorphosis on the part of the user. The general result, which occurs today, an, “I am what I like” derivation, becomes so predominant and regular a mental activity by viewing ads or taking part in social advertising (commercial products are advertised much more often than works of art are), that it is on a par with actual acts of independent creation and expression.

The work, by adopting service tropes to the point of limiting the creation of meaning, is meant to point out their limitations to the viewer, and comment on the sales process. Attractive associations that have nothing to do with the actual product are made early on. An invitation to invest is offered. The result ends up being as ambiguous as use of the product really is. None of the initial appearance and its preparative suggestions is tied to any take-away material result, nor does the sophistication of the initial appearance lead to a sensory spectacle equal to its magnitude.
Imagomachine 2: The Lovers

Two pinewood and plexiglass bi-level cases on casters sit several feet apart and are angled toward each other. They are connected by a conspicuous power cable that runs between them. Both cases have one recessed side, which has an electronic dollar bill collector and is trimmed with concealed lights. A switch is attached to the back of each dollar bill collector. Insertion of a bill triggers each switch. The switch in one box triggers a 1940’s era home movie projector to play a film loop on a twenty second timer. Resting below the working projector’s shelf are two projectors. One is identical to the top one and the other is a model from the twenties.

Both sit on their sides in disarray with other pieces of film equipment like movie cores and small pieces of 16 mm film stock. The film loop is 16mm black and white and shows two individuals, a man and a woman, sitting at either side of the frame. In the center is a dissolving and reforming Nosferatu character (See the below illustration).
Imagomachine 2: The Lovers. Film still from 16mm loop projected within sculpture.

This film is projected across onto zinc plate cutouts that are elevated by pneumatic actuators to the top part of the second case. These pneumatic actuators are also set on a twenty second timer, and fall to resting position in the bottom of their case when the time is up. When this happens, the actuators also lower the zinc plates into the bottom of the chamber through slots cut in the shelf that divides the sections. There are 6 zinc plates total; each is cut to its own unique shape. Two are elevated in the first row, one in the middle, and two in the last. Ghost prints, which are made using a one color, non-toxic intaglio-type process, are mounted to each plate. These prints, when viewed straight on, comprise the composition still of a full frame of the film loop projected onto them.

Because each case has its own timer, viewers must coordinate their actions in order to view the relationship between the two for the maximum time allowed. Or, one person must trigger one of the timers and then run over to the other in order to view the effect for as long as possible.

The sculpture is meant to facilitate a limited relationship. The relationship is a limited or flawed type of relationship between two people; the type that is suggested within the sculpture itself. The people who invest their money in order to activate the sculpture become part of the piece. They are entering into the work with questions, and then deriving enough of an understanding to form a plan for how to best manifest what they
have come to expect and want. Namely, they want to create a kind of balance, which will allow them to fully experience a phenomenon. The mundane phenomenon that is created as a metaphor for this deeper phenomenon is the projection of the film loop onto the zinc plates so that the film image is laid as well as possible over matching prints, for the maximum amount of time possible.

COLLABORATING WITH GEORGE ZIMA

A collaborative process was required to realize the imagomachine sculptures. I was fortunate to have the help of George Zima, an engineer who I worked with on fabricating the sculpture. He could tell me how things needed to work.

I do not have any background in metal fabrication or in any forms of engineering including electrical. Yet the work called for a correct industrial look, finished structures that would be safe for the gallery or any place of installation, and elements requiring an engineer’s knowledge in order to function together properly.

George Zima, a structural engineer who works at Getinge in Henrietta, was an invaluable aid to the realization of this work. My role in our collaboration was that of an artist with the vision, and George, with his expansive knowledge of options and know how, told me what could and would definitely not work, and offered mechanical solutions that I would not have ever considered.

So I would describe the cause and effect relationship I wished to create, as well as the feel and character that I wished to evoke via the presentation of these processes, and little by little we carved out a plan. The results would allow the finished pieces more closely to fit the definition of an actual fabricated machine with an industrial character.

Along the way, there were certain compromises that had to be made as the result of physics. For example, originally the Spectre and Sons Repeating Action Pianola sculpture was to contain mineral oil. I described the conceptual reasons for including this to my engineer friend in the following way.

Mineral oil is a preservative, which does not decay. The broken and wasted piano instrument contained in a display case evokes the impression of a reliquary. The addition of a preservative element would reinforce the idea of getting further use out of the object through study, as well as describe a feeling of the object’s transformation from functional piece to art object/element. The fluid would also suggest the preservation of perishable goods, such as pickled foods. Presentation of a fluid would indicate that part of the product “advertised” at the top might flow down through the machine because of gravity and be collected at the gate. Lastly, mineral oil, as described early in this document, is used nowadays as a liquid coolant in order to allow a programmed system to function. The piano back presents itself as a closed, blocky, yet elegant system that has functional triggers in the form of mallets and springs. This emphasis would be added to this mix in order to confound the viewer into wondering.
George ran equations and we did pressure tests in his garage using a vacuum pump to determine the amount of pressure that would be placed on the plexiglass if the case was filled completely, and it didn’t take long to rule the use of the mineral oil out. In order to use the oil safely, the piano box would have to be fitted with thick aquarium glass and sealed. Even then, the chance for something to leak in the gallery still existed.

Furthermore, if the piece was shipped and installed in a gallery by an attendant, along with maintenance of the electrical features; there would be a very cumbersome process of having to open several buckets of traveling mineral oil, standing on a step stool, and filling the chamber. When packing the piece to ship back, the person would have to empty the oil through a drain (which was built into the sculpture in the interest of this option) into the giant buckets and ship the slightly decreased amount of mineral oil on its way along with the very heavy and unwieldy sculpture.

A private owner would have to undertake some of the same responsibilities. While this process is perfectly in step with the notion of getting more immersed in the piece, the step
was excluded in the interest of safety, time and money before the thesis show. The vats of oil still reside in my garage.

*Imagomachine 1: Spectre & Sons Repeating Action Pianola*, interior works

But situations like this determined the final look and function of each machine. Further assistance on constructing the sculptures was provided George’s friend, a welder named Anthony Powell, and my friend, Jon Warren. Jon programmed the sound piece I made for the pianola sculpture onto a circuit board that could be triggered by the machine’s crank. The metal bending and punching of the pianola casing was performed after hours in the shop at Getinge.

**SLEEPWALKING THROUGH THE PROCESS**

It is my thought that the formulation of an imago has many shared functions with the act of dreaming, that is, a state in which the subconscious combines people, object, and place imagery into a unique schematic that can be experienced while asleep. The details are readily accepted as real, and the emotional associations with each component are mixed together, sometimes bringing about a strange, force-fed overlap of disparate emotions.

The print work I did for my thesis fits into this conversation, as there is one print that describes the formulation and selection of attributes before project execution (before
creation of the *Spectre and Sons Repeating Action Pianola* sculpture was made into a 3D piece). There are also two prints with imagery drawn as precisely from an actual dream as I could manage.

*Olympia Mock-Up.* Four color inversion intaglio type.

The overlay and interplay of both is meant to portray the artistic process along the same lines as sleepwalking, whereby the artist consults his or her dream images in order to better refine and manifest the meaning and vision behind them in the shared realm of 3D space.

The dream images show as exact a representation as can be of scenes from a dream I had, in which creatures were floating down a stream in large glass jars. Upon seeing them, I felt compelled to release the creatures from their limiting confines. Their further imprisonment would have guaranteed an indefinite period of stasis in an infant like state. Assigning symbols, which can then be interpreted by considering the dream when it is over, correlates very well with actively selecting dimensions and symbols when planning the manufacture of a product. This will cause an awakening of sensory experiences when made available to view.

As with the instinctive creation of an imago, both the processes of dreaming and creation necessitate the formation of a limited figure to illustrate a point of meaning. Certain aspects of dream logic are exactly like waking logic. Both processes exclude vast numbers of attributes in order to create perceived relationships that can be used for the benefit of the human being. Assigning meaning from a stream of infinite forms occurs in both. The purpose of which is to process what is happening or has happened, to digest the moment in order to be able to more effectively digest the moment in the future, and have a greater chance to thrive upon the order created.
PRINT PROCESS

The process for creating the prints is called four-color inversion intaglio type. This process was one of many innovative new printmaking methods created by my professor, Keith Howard, and has been further refined through several years of extensive print tests undertaken by Keith himself and the graduate students at the Non-toxic Printmaking program. The name of this process comes from the four colors (black, yellow, magenta, and cyan) that are used and that the plate is actually placed on top of the paper during printing rather than being the bottom layer that the paper is set upon.

To create these particular prints, I made use of many tools and materials. The original images were hand drawn, scanned into a computer, and then collaged and colored using PhotoShop. The artwork was then prepared for the print process. Each image was converted to CMYK mode and separated into the four requisite channels: cyan, magenta, yellow, and black. The curves for each channel were adjusted for a percentage reduction of black to allow for optimum printing. The dot matrix pattern that resulted was printed in black onto a clear plastic substrate.

I used large Vivek plastic sheets as well as a material called ImagOn to make the four plates needed for each print. ImagOn is a laminate normally used for the purpose of mapping out circuit board schematics. Because it can be applied to a surface and then, once developed, can actually be inked, ImagOn is a very effective, reliable counterpart to traditionally etched or carved surfaces. The Vivek sheets served as the base on which to apply the ImagOn.

At this stage the ImagOn is a monomer. The laminated plate is placed on an exposure unit, and a dot matrix pattern transparency is overlaid. I would expose a plate for twenty
light units. Through light exposure, the molecules of the ImagOn are adjusted and become a stable polymer. Immediately after light exposure, I would immediately peel the protective layer of plastic off of the ImagOn so it can be exposed to a soda ash and water developer bath. The developing time varies depending on the strength of the bath; when the soda ash is first dissolved, the bath is generally too strong to develop the plates with any kind of marked time consistency. For this reason, I would mix a new developer bath the night before I created the plates, inked and printed them.

The developer is neutralized by the application of distilled vinegar, and then the plates are rinsed and dried. A properly developed plate is able to catch and hold the right amounts of ink in order to replicate the original saturation of each color channel. However, even with the perfect plate, the inks (I used Akua color inks) must be adjusted, especially the blue and red (50% transparent base in total blue mixture, and a varying amount of a viscosity agent in red and often black), so as not to over saturate that color and to make it easier to apply to the plates.

Originally, I would soak my paper for a period of time before printing. Immediately before it was to be run through the press, I would lift it out of the water, stick it to a plexiglass sheet, and use a squeegee to press out the excess water. I found that this method would allow me to print but often the colors and detail would be a little washed out. By working with other grad students, I learned of another method whereby the paper would be aligned on the press and then misted with water across its surface to a point where it was damp enough to receive the ink from the plates but not oversaturated. In this way a duller image can be avoided.

This misting method is a challenge, however, because it allows the paper to dry and shrink back to its original size much more quickly. Because the paper is not completely saturated, the fibers constrict more rapidly and, on the occasion that the misting has been inconsistently applied, unevenly.

The reason why this shrinkage is important is because it affects image registration. As the paper dries, less and less of a square inch area of the image can be cleanly registered with each new plate, so this registration must be undertaken as quickly, yet as deftly as possible. With skillful registration and printing rhythm (lifting and carrying plates to the correct side of the press as the previous plate is moving through, having good communication with assistants as you register and then lowering the plate completely on the paper), the registration is tight and the variance between colors becomes nominal.

With the right amount of experience, it is possible to pull several good prints per day.

**INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS**

This grouping of work for my thesis aims to help people actively question how they define art in relation to media utilized for commercial purposes, which tend to become homogenized. I can draw correlations between these intentions and those of artists who practice culture jamming. Through use of culture jamming, anonymous artists like the
Barbie Liberation Organization would re-appropriate popular commercial images and icons in order to create a new, self reflexive form that was directly related to the original, yet so much more real and layered. Through this practice, commercial tropes could be dissected and reclaimed in a sense. Mascots and logos could be rendered ineffective and could actually be “owned” intellectually by the people. Elements of commercial propaganda could be exposed and diluted in a clever and humorous way.

While my work does not outwardly exploit or re-contextualize popular commercial icons in order to subvert a blind investment into commercial machines, it uses popular point of purchase identifiers to invite the viewer in to an experience that is, by definition, alien to commercial suggestions.

Mimicry with a slight, yet smoldering deviation are token practices of culture jamming artists. In this way a redefinition is able to occur as close as possible to the source, thereby allowing for a stronger, more lasting, and, depending on the goal of the culture jammer, a sometimes more confusing association with it. Using the original image against itself is very key. Culture jamming is often undertaken to point out how narrow a point of view or popular the mainstream commercial option really is, and to influence the viewer to look a bit further beyond the standard or convenient norm to find a richer variety of concepts and understanding.

Negativland have made a career of using popular artist’s recorded material in new compositions designed to be recognizable enough to generate crossover interest, yet completely effacing at the same time. These songs are dissimilar to hip hop and current pop songs in that their samples are not selected to enhance the quality of the song’s groove nor to draw an association to the song in a way that promotes sales of both the original and the new creation. Much like the Residents, another group that got their start in the San Francisco bay area during the 70’s, Negativland obtained sound clips of popular recording artists and personalities and wove that material through highly derivative songs composed primarily of collaged sections of the pirated artists’ work. The work that drew the most attention was their album entitled “U2,” which featured a U2 bomber plane on the cover and contained twisted versions of U2’s song, “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” enhanced by profane rambling outtakes of Casey Kasem in the radio booth. The release drew several lawsuits. Through this process, the original work took on a new set of qualities and gained the ability to draw attention to issues of ownership, censorship, fair use, and the ubiquitous control the music industry had at the time over an entire art form. Negativland and other artists were working in part to liberate listeners and compel them to seek out a wider array of forms that thrived beneath the surface. Once the surface was cracked, those without the means to alter and redistribute popular media themselves discovered interesting new options. They now had

the ability to delve deeper than the limited realm in which big commercial marketing campaigns regularly courted the collective buyer’s psyche.

Ron English doesn’t speak as much to art as custom commodity, yet uses pop culture iconography to describe the degree to which consumerism has merged with our American psyche and has penetrated our value system. His work depicts the power that we give to highly plastic, lo-fi commercial mascots and symbols, and how we regularly allow these commercial constructs to sway us into believing that unhealthy, throw-away culture is actually alluring or means more than it actually does.

English does not approach recent ideas of customization within the market in his work. At the center of it is a circa-twentieth century commercial element, which he augments to create a moldering, garish, over-sexed kitsch factor. Colors are ultra saturated and forms bloated to the point of making viewers feel like they have a sugar-induced fever. English points out the parts of our brains we may wish we could reclaim from junk food ideas, and what those parts have begun to look like, or that they may have melted toward.

I create my imagomachines by juxtaposing a network of cultural codes to create mental conflict over whether a thing is more of an art object or a product. Although there is no doubt that it is both, I mean for the work to hold that relationship in flux so that the viewer can enter into it. It is absolutely clear that Ron English’s work is not an advertisement for any product, no matter how he composes it. Yet, he is juxtaposing conflicting meanings in order to draw attention to discrepancies or places where things are crudely and even unintentionally overlaid. He and I share a goal in wanting the viewer to realize the ways in which the middle and upper classes contribute excessively and blindly to markets by not asserting independent thought. Often, people habitually accept the commercial images and suggestions playing before them without question. They can forget how powerful and repercussive the choice to do so indeed is, and how much this choice reinforces a limited, festering, and inbred vocabulary and understanding. Trading what would be a temporary fear of the unknown for cozy, languid repetition results from a choice, no matter how much someone indirectly resolves to work against having to choose by deciding to just invite commercial images and glossed-over notions into their headspace.

I don’t see a strong correlation between what Ron English does and my print work for this thesis. Although they both make use of illustrative figures, mine are highly personal and private representations, while his are widely recognized characters he contorts further to effectively portray fallacies within our American consciousness.

There are other artists who do not necessarily use direct hallmarks of culture jamming, yet still exploit predominant cultural conceptions in an effort to show just how unsettled and indeterminate these accepted definitions really are.

Chinese artist Hong Hao is interesting to consider in this respect, in that “much of his work deals with illusion, appearance and preconception.” Hong Hao’s intent is to “confuse and thus challenge orthodox perceptions.” His work includes a series called
Selected Scriptures (1989-2000), which are several large false books open to random silk-screened pages. An illusion is created which suggests that the closed pages would seem to also carry the same amount of information that the open pages do. For one piece in the series, each country name is replaced by a large corporation’s name on a map. In another, China is now in the place of the US; Northern Europe is now part of Africa. These rearrangements comment on the ambiguity of commercial interests existing now in the world, and how these new parameters are in some ways truer than the original demarcation. From a review at Absolute Arts:

The work is perceptive and satirical, dealing with illusion, appearance, and preconception. Selected Scriptures contain a series of maps … In other maps Hong redistributes geographical land mass according to military and economic borders, or replaces the names of capital cities with popular expressions or words. Beijing-based Hong Hao, not only challenges our known physical world, but our use of language and our belief in books.9

From an article at China Art Archives:

Hong Hao's silkscreen series "Selected Scriptures" (1989-2000) are a direct rip-off of old Chinese tomes opened at two random pages. The maps in his "book" no longer provide accurate information of geographical or administrative regions. Instead their symbols, texts and graphics become real "misleading clues," giving a more realistic picture of contemporary life: multinational companies seizing territories; missiles and submarines spreading all over the place: rampant murders and tortures, as well as omnipresent brand name products and commodified sexuality. As Enrique Chagoya observes, "The world is endlessly re-mapped and re-named, with new rules and rulers in recurrent holocausts."

Hong Hao's latest creation, "My Things" (2001-04) is a series of scanned photographs of arranged ordinary objects, which are trails of the artist's personal life. "My Things No. 7" (2004) features all of his books, from revolutionary comics from his childhood to famous Chinese literature classics, to publications on Western contemporary art, to all kinds of art catalogues from his recent exhibitions. It reveals how the whole cultural, social and political climate can influence and restrain an individual's development.10

The nature of the invitation of Hong Hao’s Scriptures is very similar to the level and quality of invitation that exists with the imagomachines. A recognizable object, form, or process is presented in a straightforward, authoritative manner, and then further observation leads to understanding the ways in which the qualities within the trusted object negate their traditional read.

Hong Hao’s work comments on the collective psyche’s process of constantly defining, tearing down, and then redefining again. Part of my print work for this series describes a place that is absolute, yet completely subjective and subject to change at any moment.


Original CAD drawings delineating a structurally sound construction have been fragmented and dispersed across snapshot translations of dream images to portray the transitive nature of language and concept forming.

Russian artist Anton Olshvang is a huge inspiration for the concepts of my work having to do with creating an undefined or hard to define mental space in the psyche. In his print series Empty Crosswords (1999), Anton has created a new matrix where every clue is written in a way so as to negate the ability to give a one-word answer and fill in the spaces. About this work, Olshvang writes:

In the project "Empty Crosswords" the questions are put towards [a] notion that is familiar but there are no such words in the language. For example, "simulation of health", "fear of continuous relationships", "neighbors in a hotel". Using these questions, one can see hollow places in the language (emptiness).\textsuperscript{11}

This form of loaded construction to point out subtle disconnects is also evident in his series of re-photographed found photos displayed in 2001 as part of The Place of Happiness show at the Watari-Um Museum of Contemporary Art in Aoyama, Japan. Olshvang purchased discarded photographs from photo processing labs, which were originally tossed because of exposure, focus, or framing issues. He then re-photographed them in his home in such way that parts of rooms and furniture became new frames of sorts around the outside of the originals. From an article in the Japan Times about the show:

It's a kind of psychoanalysis of society," explains Olshvang. "As an artist, I became a viewer of culture not only as a product of the conscious activity of society, but also of culture as a product of the unconsciousness of society. Values which do not belong to systems and society, but values that sometimes people belong to.\textsuperscript{12}

Olshvang’s work helps to suggest the way in which people might enter into the point past meaning and realize the place where they can begin to form their own sense of being. If I were to have a show with Anton Olshvang, perhaps his work would act as guidepost for people in that it succeeds easily and quickly in the way I would like my work to succeed within a slightly slower timeframe. My sculpture would complement his Empty Crossword series well. The juxtaposition of loaded ideas produces a sort of cold and closed figure in both, yet simultaneously there is a sort of a freeing break in language that is built into both if someone chooses to invest.


THE FUTURE OF THE IMAGOMACHINE

As I have considered the concepts behind the imagomachine, I feel that the line would be more effective if it contained interfaces from trending technology, as well as ways for viewers to “customize” the work. The marriage of old and new technologies would make this possible.

For example, a machine could be constructed that uses a smartphone app to control mechanisms that rearrange a composition in different ways. This tighter, yet customizable set of results, powered by a popular device, would allow for a more direct connection to be made between subjective reads on art, art as commodity in today’s age, customization, and expectations for a result. The downside of this undertaking would be a possible tendency to read the work as an enthusiastic application of modifiable technology in order to praise the flexibility of this technology and spread awareness of it. However, knowing that this would be a possible way that viewers would enter into the work is helpful. The entry and expectation would be much more charged, and then the result could be designed in such a way that it strongly counteracts the original read; or is even more exciting and charged and leaves the original entry point and references in the dust.

The goal of future imagomachines will be to merge both general and contemporary symbols of consumerism with technological innovation. These machines will highlight the degree to which we subvert what is deemed extraneous information in order to create a stereotype or caricature. The reason we create these concepts is so they might function as tools to serve us. These tools might take the form of a persona or a commercial product. The persona might be used by the mind to determine a source point for emotional exchange, or the transient trigger person we need to convince to let us in to an exclusive club. The product might be a piece of art that our being connects to very strongly, or it may be bioluminescent Velcro shoes, which we’ve convinced ourselves we must have (or a mixture of both!). Regardless, imagomachines function as stations, which allow people to experience the intersection between the expectations that imagoes make and the limitless potential of an open mind.


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