My written thesis: an attempt at linear communication

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MY WRITTEN THESIS: AN ATTEMPT AT LINEAR COMMUNICATION
by
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You can't expect insights, even the big ones, to suddenly make you understand everything. But I figure: Hey, it's a step if they leave you confused in a deeper way.

from *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* by Jane Wagner
INTRODUCTION

Creating my visual thesis led me through a number of ideas and issues, many of which are interrelated. They include my interest in cultural mythologies which portray various gender roles in society, and play a part in forming each individual's idea of self. These messages about gender which circulate through our culture often seem to be contradictory and lead to confusion. It was necessary for me to abandon the traditional camera "window-on-the-world" style of photography and find a new visual format in order to express these ideas. My own understanding of poetry contributed to creating this new visual syntax.

I will begin this paper by discussing ideas which are especially important to the project, and then give a short history of the development of my creative process, showing how these ideas came into play.
IDEAS AND ISSUES

My thesis was directed towards types of social mythology about sex and gender, and the symbols used to represent and support these myths. I became interested in how society often circulates conflicting messages about the world and how, as individuals, we use this information to develop our own sense of self. Media, family teachers, peers, gurus, preachers, and Walt Disney tell us how to live and behave, and even how to feel.

These messages are discovered within our personal and public experience: finding old books in the attic about becoming a woman and reading about how we are not supposed to ask our dates to carry our compacts in their pockets. Or going across the street to a friend's house and looking at her father's *Playboy* magazines in the bathroom. Knowing a nice couple and sharing their political views but stumbling on boxes of hard porn detective magazines during a visit. Meeting a down-to-Earth-type-of-guy in college, one that is sort of cute, and going to his dorm room only to find pin-ups of buxom women plastered over the walls. Eating pizza with a gay friend in his room and seeing he has pin-ups too. And at band camp meeting girls who have posters of male nudes on their wall, but they have stuck big strawberry stickers over the genitals.

As I worked I found myself especially drawn to gender issues. In the beginning, this was not a conscious effort. These issues just kept appearing in my work. I discovered
content by my interest and work in various forms such as wrestling magazines, teen publications, contact printing advertisements, porno films, Evangelist television programs, wedding announcements, books, my own personal writing, and medical anatomy catalogs. The symbols and metaphors used to represent and support myths of gender are abundant in these.

Many of the teen magazines I looked at (such as Bop and Hip Hop) are directed at pre-teen girls, even though there is no indication of this in the titles or covers of these publications. The typical age of those who read these magazines falls between ten to fourteen years old—an important age because individuals are developing a sense of self, beginning to experience feelings toward the opposite sex, and forming attitudes about male and female relationships. Most of the articles inside the magazines are about male teenage celebrities. Often included are interviews with these male stars describing their "dream girl." For example, "...Besides being a good cook, I like a girl who is simple and humble. Showy, proud, and conceited girls aren't very attractive at all." What interests me most about this is not that this is a sexist view but that this statement floats in a world where there are other opinions and ideals about sex roles as well. I am not necessarily interested in the individual message but how a number of messages start beating against each other and create confusion.

Other messages concerning gender issues are not so obvious or so verbal. Before the fall of PTL, I would tune into Jim
and Tammy Bakker on sleepless nights in an attempt to bore myself to slumber. And although they were both after the same thing--money, they each had their own ways of getting it. Tammy adopted the stereotypical female action and wept for bucks, while Jim was the logical male and reasoned for it. (We now know that Jim weeps too, but this does not seem to have helped his cash flow or his fate.)

All of these forms rely on symbols and metaphors to get their messages across. Symbols and metaphors commonly represent things such as ideas and feelings which we cannot physically grasp nor understand by reason or logic; their strength lies in the fact that they usually connote more than one meaning. The use of symbols and metaphors force people to refer to an inner world--one based on feelings, emotions, ideas, experiences--often the inarticulate, sometimes enigmatic. The relationships formed frequently appeal to the emotions while frustrating the intellect. By bringing up their own store of knowledge and experience, symbols and metaphors function as a way for the viewer to create an understanding inside one's self. Often this process is slowed--resisted because the viewer must change himself in order to understand the meaning he faces. It is an expansive experience rather than reductionary. Joining things which we do not think necessarily belong together encourages the viewer to create a new relationships among himself.

It was this interest in symbols and metaphors which brought my understanding of poetry into play. Before I entered
graduate school I spent much of my free time reading poetry. I was an English major in college. The courses I enjoyed the most, and consequently learned the most from, were those dealing with poetry. The wonderful thing about poetry is the process of reading it: the thinking, feeling, juxtapositions and metaphors which call on the reader's own store of experiences. Most of the good poems I have read are those which I have had to read over and over. I am drawn in by certain images which I may not (and may never) comprehend and go back to the poem to gain a deeper understanding. There is a pleasure in this process. I hate to use the phrase "figuring-it-out" because to me it is much more than solving a puzzle or mathematic equation. It is not just logic, or a process of intellectual reasoning, but the process is based on feeling and personal experience as well. The experience of reading the metaphors, making the associations, filling in the gaps, the juxtapositions formed by the poet--all are dependent on the reader's own experience and knowledge, and the capability to extend him/herself to form a deeper understanding.

This way of understanding poetry is essential to providing a basis for my own work. From the time I first started taking photo classes in the fine arts department at Indiana--I noticed similarities between the visual arts and poetry, mainly because they are both concerned with creating images in a concise and metaphorical form. The photographs and poems I liked the most were not the story telling ones or those with a blatant message, but those which used metaphors and
symbols and made me dig inside myself for meaning. Most of the people who responded positively to my work, were regular readers of poetry, those who had difficulty with the images usually were not poetry readers.

There was one thought which really stuck with me through the whole thesis process, the Black Mountain poet, Charles Olson's statement: "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT" (387), (capitalization his). I felt he was saying that form and content are inextricably interrelated. Understanding this made me feel more comfortable with what I was doing: discovering new forms and realizing those things which interested me. While I concentrated or worked on one aspect, the other was still working in an unconscious way. Much of the content I was dealing with was not visual, or the meaning was not visual. Ideas, intangible stuff, were the focus of the thesis. Content shaped the form, and I discovered content within the form. Olson was against using a pre-existing form to express an idea. For example, using a Spenserian sonnet structure to express an idea conceived today would be inappropriate—the idea must find its true form. For me, this new form was not the normal view of three-dimensional reality that the camera gives.

The traditional camera representation of reality I had been used to, showing the world as a frozen moment in time and limited by the space as seen from one point described through the lens, was inappropriate for the ideas I wanted to express. I still valued photography's ability to reproduce, enlarge, and
reduce, but I was not concerned with stopping time or describing space from one viewpoint. (The camera does this well--its roots lie in the 15th century with the creation of linear perspective--a system to aid the drawing of pictures with so-called "perfect perspective." This method assumes that representation is based purely on a visual understanding of the world. And like the camera it requires the artist to observe the subject from only one spot, with only one eye, decide what moment in time to show the subject, and choose how much of the subject to show.) I was more concerned with showing ideas and messages--not objects. This work is not about the relations of time and space but conceptual relations. There is more than one way of looking at the world; the camera can be used in a way which is not necessarily dependent on the physical relationship of objects to each other. I turned to collage because it allowed me to express an inner world which was inaccessible using traditional methods of photography. Juxtaposing and layering images, text, and objects from various sources encourages viewers to establish new relationships and meanings for themselves. Collage allowed me to make juxtapositions and show ideas which seem impossible to form with straight photography.

Side by side with developing a new visual syntax, came a new sense of my own creative process. No longer was I making pictures the same way as photographers such as Lee Friedlander, Robert Frank, and Imogene Cunningham. I reconsidered what it meant for me to be an artist by finding role models and
teachers who presented ways of working and thinking about art which were more natural to my own. I learned that in order to be an artist I did not have to stick with the way of photography in which I had been primarily trained. I looked at work by photographers and artists who strayed from physical representation concepts. Also, I had to get the whole notion of pre-visualization out of my head—for me, the best results occurred when I did not spend a lot of time thinking but rather relied on intuition.

ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at all points (even, I should say, of our management of daily reality as of the daily work) get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving fast as you can, citizen. And as you also set up as a poet, USE, USE, USE the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must, must, must MOVE, INSTANTLY, ON ANOTHER!

--Charles Olson (388)

I learned by DOING, DOING, DOING, and by making MAKING mistakes, BUDDY. Mistakes became discoveries rather than failures. As I pursued ideas, my confidence in my own
creativity rose.

I brought in other forms of interest, especially poetry. I looked at artists and painters such as Cy Twombly, Robert Rauschenberg, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Robert Fichter. Most of these people are known for constructing their images using a variety of resources. Kruger, Rauschenberg, Twombly, and Fichter all work in collage and montage. Holzer and Kruger deal especially with verbal messages in society and use text as a major element in their art. Twombly caught my interest because of his cryptic markings. All of these artists deal with types of social issues and studying them was important to understanding how my own work was developing.
THE CREATIVE PROCESS

or

HOW I GOT FROM THERE TO HERE

My first year in graduate school I spent a lot of time playing around with a number of ideas. This was good because I found frustrations as well as discoveries. I spent the first few months going through a sort of visual purgatory—photographing in the same manner, shooting similar subjects that I had prior to graduate school. I soon realized though that my interest in that stuff had waned.

I decided to take to the streets of Rochester to photograph because I thought that all photographers should know how to photograph people on the street and I had never done it.
The project seemed scary to me which was another reason to do it. For a long time I thought this project was useless as far as having any connection to my thesis. Now I am aware that some of my subject matter grew out of this series of images and what I was thinking about while roaming the streets. For example, many of the pictures I took during this time were shot mainly because I wanted to catalogue some idea or feeling which seemed inexpressible or undeveloped at the time. I was not concerned with the visual aspects of the image in so far as it related to photography. I remember photographing a Black Velvet billboard on Monroe Avenue which I thought was incredibly exploitive of women. At the time I did not believe I would ever print that image. I just wanted to find a way of documenting the scene hoping it would serve as a reminder of how I was feeling when I took it. A few days later I was walking down Monroe again and noticed that some wild feminists had vandalized the Black Velvet billboard, spray painting
phrases about how sexist the ad was, and making big paint splotches all over the image of the model. So I photographed it again.

Other times I would photograph places that had a special aura—such as the porno theater and the laundromat. This project was also helpful in that I started to make a lot of fuzzy images. I stopped looking through the viewfinder, often guessing at focal distance, letting chance and intuition take over when it came to what was included in the frame. I liked doing this because I began to see part of the world which was not so structured but moving on its own in a somewhat chaotic state—although I probably could not have told you this at the time.

Although there were not many images that I really liked
from this series, this work showed glimpses of interests and varying perspectives which I would pick up on later. It was around this time that I became frustrated with straight, street photography. It did not express everything I wanted it to.

Because I felt my work would become more personal if I took passages from my journals and illustrated or juxtaposed them with images, I began to integrate words with images. (I wanted to make my work more personal. I felt that the images I made in the past were never really my own.) It was important for me not to worry about whether these ideas which I took from my journals were visual but to see if I could externalize them in a visual form.

For a short time I used a color xerox machine to create pictures combining objects with torn pieces of paper on which I written material, sometimes autobiographical, other times fictional. Using the color xerox machine was liberating because it allowed me to introduce color to my work and explore relationships formed by pushing disparate objects together. I photocopied things which seemed silly to me, like the lavender bra my mom sent me in a business size envelope. I had fun color xeroxing red pistachio nuts--seeing how the copier flattened their dimension. Most of the images included a short one or two sentence narrative.

I did not stay with the color machine too long because I wanted more control of the colors and felt the work deserved to be larger in scale. Nevertheless, this was a whole new style of image making for me. I was not concentrating on capturing
the "decisive moment" anymore. I had control over the subject matter and gave myself the freedom to use narrative to help convey my message. It was the beginning of delving into an inner world. I was not interested in using the camera to stop time. Before I used the color xerox, I felt restricted by the arrangement of the physical world which fell in front of the camera's lens. I never thought about changing the physical relationships of objects. I moved the camera—not the subject. By playing with the photocopier I was beginning to explore an inner world rather than an outer world.

During this time I was intrigued with an adult movie theater which was only a block from my house. For a while the management would display titles of the movies shown on the marquee of the theater which hung over a busy street in Rochester. Movie titles such as Daddy's Hot Girl, Teenage Desires, and Liquid Lips loomed over passersby. The marquee itself was painted magenta and green and had yellow light bulbs which when lit gave the place a weird carnival aura. Ironically, because the building once was a legitimate theater it has a classical stone carving placed in the front wall above the marquee of the vestal virgins. One day the management stopped putting the names up and instead placed A-D-U-L-T M-O-V-I-E-S on the sign. I do not know if this was because they tired of changing the letters every two weeks or neighborhood complaints, but I felt disappointed by it.

I was fascinated by the sleaziness of this movie theater, in fact I was attracted by sleaziness in general. The
laundromat was another place I liked because of its slimy nature. But my infatuation with the porno theater was confusing. Although I was intrigued by the whole of the situation, I was offended by the function of pornography itself and its inherent feature of exploiting women.

Using the porno theater as the subject I played around, exposing separate photographic images on the same sheet of paper and handcoloring them with Marshall pencils. This turned out to be frustrating. My skill at applying colors never matched how I visualized them. Improvement was slow in coming. My ideas were developing much quicker than my coloring techniques so I put down the pencils and discovered the thermofax machine.

Thermofax is a clear film used for overhead projections. The transparency is made simply by placing a sheet of the thermofax on top of a photocopy and feeding both through a machine which heats the toner off the photocopy and transfers it to the acetate. Thermofax was the one free thing at R.I.T. I took full advantage of it. One evening I used the machine so much it caught on fire.

The thermofax process was liberating to me in a few ways. In the beginning I used it as an experiment, hand-coloring photocopies which I then formed into books. I liked the sleekness of the material. It had a cheap, yet glitzy, quality (like ferreotyped resin coated paper) which seemed appropriate for my subject matter. Later the thermofax provided me a way of creating a layer of information which was transparent in
select areas.

While I was playing around with these different processes I was gathering information for a history of photography research paper I was writing on words and images. I began by reaquainting myself with pattern and concrete poetry. In pattern poetry, the poem is spaced in a visual shape which reflects the subject of the poem. The early Seventeenth century poet George Herbert used this style frequently, his poems "Easter Wings" and "Altar" are examples of pattern poetry.

On the other hand, concrete poetry, a development of the
Fifties and Sixties, is created so that the meaning of the poem is dependent on its visual structure. The reading is non-linear, non-sequential. With most pattern poetry one can still get the meaning from reading or listening to the poem without seeing its shape. This is not the case with concrete poetry. The reader/viewer can enter the work from different levels.

(Emmett Williams "like attracts like")

Studying concrete poetry was significant. It was important to see how words were used in a non-linear manner. This research paper also lead me to discover an interest in artists' books and the word/image relationships displayed in them. Looking back at the histories of poetry and art, it seems as though book artists took over where concrete poets left off.
I was also looking at the work of artists and photographers who used words or text as an integral part of their work, people such as: Jim Goldberg, Duane Michals, Jack Fulton, Joyce Neimanas, Francesca Woodman, John Baldessari, Bonnie Gordon, Robert Fichter, Robert Heinecken, Barbara Kruger, and Jenny Holzer. Michals and Goldberg were important for me to study, to see the scrawled handwriting on the borders, but their work soon lost its impact, it became too melodramatic for me. The other artists went beyond using text in a narrative sense, their work has much more to do with forming relationships between text and images to express ideas which are not easily articulated. Many of these artists use multiple images to create their work, encouraging the viewer to discover the relationships between elements.

Another artist whose work really opened my eyes was Barbara DeGenevieve. I heard her "Sex as Subject" lecture at a Society of Photographic Education conference during my first year of graduate school. I was impressed because I had never seen such a large body of work which explored issues of sexual identity. And I was amazed that someone would use the medium of photography to work through these ideas.

The next project in which I integrated words with images was a laundromat-thermofax book I made. It was a narrative about my experiences at a laundromat. Most of the images were taken from my straight photographs but with a few of them I began to juxtapose images from other sources. I was concerned with expressing the work in particular colors because I
believed that the choice of colors contributed to showing the feelings I got from the place, the way people acted and behaved, the sense of "sleaziness" I got while I was there, and things of which the laundromat reminded me.

I like laundromats because they represent one of the few communal places left to perform household activities in our society. I like the bulletin boards and soda pop machines at the laundromat. I like the tabloid newspapers and magazines there. I like being able to veg out between wash and dry cycles. I like the big glass windows that most of them have.

Much of this activity with juxtaposing images and experimenting with forms was taking place in a color class Martha Leinroth taught to some of the graduate students in the Spring of 1986. The class was small and we were free to pursue our own interests. We were encouraged to integrate ideas outside of the photography world into our work and discourse. We spent time discussing the creative process. My confidence in my work boosted that spring, even though I did not have a conscious idea of where the work was going.

I became very interested in the symbolism of colors and made another book about color using text from the *Oxford English Dictionary* which has extensive descriptions of word origin, uses in the English language, various spelling, and almost all the possible definitions. There was not a narrative to my color book. All of the images chosen were taken from magazines and newspapers. I remember going from a feeling of frustration to serendipity during the process of making the
book because I wanted to include all of the stuff from the dictionary entry but I could not figure out a way to do that. I ended up showing only small blocks of passages floating on the space of the pages. The visual forms and patterns of the words and letters became as important as their definitions.

It was around this time that I realized I did not have to show all of a subject to express an idea. This allowed me to make visual images which represented more involved meanings. And, although I was not aware of it at the time, the color book was the first project in which I did not attempt to recreate space in a linear perspective.

After making a few books during that spring, I took a visual book class with Judy Levy at Writers and Books. This class was helpful because it expanded my perceptions concerning the visual image and word/image relationships. It was also a nice change to get out of the R.I.T. atmosphere. The class taught me how to play—to trust my own intuition and creativity.

Almost immediately following Judy's course I took a photocollage/montage workshop from John Wood at Visual Studies Workshop. I learned a lot that week. The unspoken motto of the workshop was "making by doing." The projects were assigned such that there was not much time to think. There was a lot of encouragement to extend the process—or extend the image by various processes. The processes were not proscribed, but ones which we discovered on our own or with help from John. We were trying to find forms for our own needs. Perhaps one reason why
these experiences turned out to be so productive relates to the structure of the workshop itself. Eleven people worked together in the same room, five days straight, often working over fourteen hours a day. It is difficult to create that amount of energy in more traditional settings.

I played around with a lot of ideas and processes during the workshop. What appealed to me most was making contact prints of collages, thermofax, and printed material. I had seen Robert Heinecken's "Are you Rea?" series where he contact printed magazine pages in order to show the relationships formed between text and images on both sides of the page. At the time it did not hit me I was doing the same type of thing. Even if I had made the conscious association between that work and my contact prints, I believe it would not have deterred me from pursuing this exercise. The act of doing it was important to my process of discovery, and it was more important than trying to make a final product.

At first, the subject matter I chose for these images seemed random, but then I noticed some social implications emerging and consciously began looking for this type of material. I liked layering material on top of each other so some information would be obscured and other bits would seep through. There were some coherent things and some incoherent things. Some things were fuzzy while others were not. I continued this project for a few months after the workshop was over. A few characteristics of this type of contact print bothered me. The reversed toned image became cliche and did
not necessarily contribute to the meaning of the work. Because of facility and equipment limitations, it was difficult to make any picture larger than 11 x 14 inches. All in all, though, this project was a good exercise because it allowed me to expand my creative source for imagery as well as explore new relationships in the subject matter.

In the fall I became fascinated with the human body and the ways it is considered appropriate to present it. In what situations does society accept people with little or no clothes: pornography, no; big time wrestling, okay; muscle building contests, yes. What or who determines the type of moral values placed on these activities? Sport, entertainment, poses, amount of exposed flesh are not an indicators of pornography or art. Right before I wrote my thesis proposal I was intrigued with big time wrestlers. They are able to display their bare bodies in "skimpy" (a word we usually reserve for females) costumes. Our culture has often labelled these body types as "grotesque" or "obese" and in another setting they would not be accepted. Wrestlers are able to act out an extreme range of emotions. They are also allowed to touch each other. What fascinates me most about wrestling is not the costumes, the flesh, or the fake brawls, but the cult following. People know (or believe) this is all staged yet they are avid followers and, in fact, participants in the sport. Wrestling must be fulfilling some need for people, letting them live vicariously through these extreme, displayed emotions. Wrestlers and fans have developed their own
mythology—their own tales and set of rules, and their own idols.

I was also fascinated by the outpouring of literature on the subject, not academic literature, but magazines and television shows promoting the sport. The quality of the printed pictures and graphics always left something to be desired but the written descriptions of the matches were not bad—in fact they were almost poetic:

"As Sunshine left the ring to the roar of the crowd, an enraged Missy was still trying to get out of the mud. Arguing with the referee over the decision, she shoved him into the slimy goo. Meanwhile, Tatum, escaping from the security people assigned to him from ringside, dashed up to the ring. Luckily he was prevented by WCWA official David Manning from chasing the retreating Sunshine as she made her way back to the dressing rooms. But, it was not long before Tatum and Manning were also swimming in the slime, as the crowd bellowed its approval once again."

(Superstar Wrestler 45)

For an alternative processes course, I made a hat out of transparent thermofax wrestlers. The figures were backed with articles from The New York Times on American/Soviet relations, turbulence in Central America, editorials on the arms race. My own understanding of visual symbolism really began to fall into
place while making this hat. I had always been aware of the power of poetry to create new relationships and meanings, but I never quite recognized or trusted by own ability to do this visually.

During the Fall I was also enrolled in a words and images course taught by Patti Ambrogi. She left it pretty open as to the types of projects we could do. I played around with photographing collages I had made, usually taking material from wrestling and teen magazines, then making gelatin silver prints from those. They were okay but they lacked the sense of
"distorted" space that the earlier contact prints had.

One day I was playing around with the photocopier and began to make copies of things through thermofax. I wadded up magazine pages because I wanted to see how the thermofax would photocopy stretched over a three-dimensional object. What impressed me most was what happened to the words and images on the wads--random juxtapositions, obscurities, phrases, isolations. Scrunching paper allowed me to stuff more information on the image plane. I did not have to show a whole magazine page to transmit an idea. I could just show parts of it to suggest the message; and, in essence, that is how I remember the articles--not in long passages or stories, but as phrases and images clashing with other thoughts and impressions. I liked the idea that some of the new juxtapositions did not make sense, and sometimes new meanings were formed. I think one reason why I stopped using my own narrative as the main subject of my work was because the meaning was becoming so blatant. And it was difficult to express everything I wanted with just my own words and images. I did not want to illustrate the words with pictures, or explain the pictures with words. I included words because I was infatuated by the actual text of the source (magazines, newspapers, advertisements, etc...). I had no story telling objectives. Text was included because it was just as important as other visual information, and played an important role in showing how messages are conveyed. Once I really got into working on my thesis I did not think "these are words, these
are pictures."

The first few batches of images I made with the photocopier were relatively simple as far as the amount of information which was included. Most of the material was from wrestling magazines, muscle man magazines, anthologies of the classical arts, and my own writing. My original interest in wrestlers had spurred me on to think about society's perception of the human body. I was interested in what people considered the ideal form, what was appropriate exposure in terms of flesh, why was it okay for big time male wrestlers to touch each other while we questioned it if regular guys did it— is violence the only reason for touch? Why did the Greeks pick the forms they did for idealizations? Of course they were trying to be godly but centuries before the Venus of Willendorf was also thought to be an idealized form. Today she fits more into the big-time wrestling category than what our society considers a symbol of beauty.
To show this questioning and confusion, I used text and images from different segments in history. I picked a passage from Milton's *Paradise Lost* because when I was studying the history of English Literature I realized just how much people could rewrite myths to fit their perception of reality at that moment. Studying Milton was one of the first times I understood how symbolism is so significant in literature. *Paradise Lost* is propaganda, filled with didactic messages. Though I never liked Milton and never spent more than the required time reading his work, I was both amazed by and angry at his writing. There was a lot of emphasis on flesh in that poem and the idealized state of man, as well as the discovery of sexual identity, and censorship too. For an early image, I took a passage from *Paradise Lost* which had to do with Paradise and the Tree of Life. The typography of the text was an old style which was appropriate for the content. I ripped pages from body building magazines, wadded them up, and sandwiched them with text. Some of the things which showed through were tiny advertisements along the sides of the pages, pieces of graphic design, drawings of bulging muscles, claims of success for body building programs. In terms of content the relationships were not as strong as I would have liked but the picture was a turning point for me. I was discovering all the things I could do with the copier, paper, and acetate to help express meaning.

The photocopy machine is fast, cheap, has a great ability to instantly montage objects, and produces a shallow depth of
field, but it is difficult to make an image larger than 8 1/2 x 11 inches. In fact, since I seriously started montage processes I have always found it hard to make anything larger than 11 x 14." In John Wood's photomontage/collage workshop I explored possibilities of making my work larger. There was a huge xerox machine in downtown Rochester which enlarged images up to 24" wide. We used that frequently during the workshop. Sometimes I used the xerox copy as the final product, other times I used it as a negative for cyanotypes. The big disadvantage of this machine was that because the copier would only take an original less than 1/4" thick, I could not use three dimensional objects as subjects. It was difficult to layer information.

In the beginning I was so concerned with making the montages larger, but those which were successfully large really were not that interesting. It was not until Patti Ambrogi suggested that I enlarge 4 x 5" copy negatives of my small 8 1/2 x 11" photocopies to 16 x 20" that the larger prints seemed relevant. Intricate details which were not noticed in the 8 1/2 x 11s were apparent in the 16 x 20s. The change of scale transposed the pictures from an intimate realm to a public world.

Enlarging the images was a mundane and time consuming process. It was a process I could save for days when I did not want to think. Actually, making the copy negatives and prints was a pain. Getting the right exposure and development time for the negative turned out to be trickier than I thought it
would be. Some of the subtle tones of the photocopy seemed impossible to reproduce in the silver gelatin prints. Printing was a chore because my darkroom at R.I.T. was too small to make 16 x 20s comfortably. The ventilation was lousy. I constantly stepped outside to take walks and get fresh air.

Anyway, I could live with these frustrations. They only inhibited my patience, never my concentration when it came to making the original image. I never worried about the technical processes while creating the 8 1/2 x 11s. The only real problems I had with the photocopier were that: 1) I could not see the image forming until the copy came out of the machine; 2) It was difficult to hold down small and light objects on the glass and press the button at the same time to make the image.

When I went to the copier there was usually more than one idea I wanted to work on. I spent a lot of time and energy preparing to "go to the copier." It usually took me at least 15 to 20 tries before I got the information arranged in such a way to express my feelings and thoughts. Sometimes during a photocopy session I would not be able to create the image the way I wanted, so I would stop and try again another time, after analyzing why things were not gelling. I almost always came back to an idea--sometimes I was successful in resolving it, other times not. Those which are unresolved lingered in the back of my mind waiting to mature.

The works of Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly were important for me to look at during this process. Rauschenberg has had a long history of using found imagery and visual
allegory to express his ideas. Comparing the way he juxtaposed pictures to the way the Dadaists, Surrealists or other contemporary artists did was necessary for understanding the historical context for this type of image making.

I also began to look at Cy Twombly's works--his markings and drawings. I started to include more and more of my own writing in my pictures, not as something to be read word for word, but as markings which function to represent the private or personal. We each have a store of experience which is relevant to our perception of society, culture, gender, and self. I wanted to find some way of including these experiences into the medium.

There was one image that I made in the beginning of the project which a few people really liked. I liked it too but it wore thin by the time my thesis show came around. The images that I used came from classical sculpture--the Winged Victory of Samothrace and the bust of a man in the midst of passion or pain. The text I used was a list of freely associated thoughts about the body and flesh, not necessarily relating to the classical pictures included. I enlarged the text so only a few words could be made out, much of the writing is truncated by the edges of the print. The few words which can be made out include "skin cancer," "lust," "Chaucer." When I was jotting down ideas about the body and flesh, I thought of Chaucer and his stories about base lust and gross flesh in medieval times. I believe this photograph lost its impact on me because the relation between the text and images was too simple. I wanted
to show the deep complexities and chaos of the situation. I wanted to show the confusion. I was always looking for ways to stuff more information into the picture (although I realized that quantity does not necessarily equal complexity, or modicum does not equal simplicity).

I had a few friends who would regularly stop me in the halls and pull me into an empty classroom or office to discuss work. They included Edward Kinney, Judy Levy, John Worden, Patti Ambrogi, and Martha Leinroth. Martha was my thesis advisor so we got together frequently. I always enjoyed our conversations because we did not use photography to talk about photography. Some of our early conversations were about quantum mechanics, chaos and order--how things are constantly
falling back and forth between the two states. These subjects were very new to me. Martha recommended a couple of books for me to read. One was Modern Art and Modern Science: The Parallel Analysis of Vision by Paul C. Vitz and Arnold B. Glimcher. The authors argue that movements in modern art have roots in the basic principles of modern science, especially those which are concerned with investigations in visual perception. Their thesis includes the idea that modern painting is based on analytical-reductionist thought: that artists in the past 150 years have proceeded to break down involved concepts into simple elements just as the strategy in many sciences is to reduce our everyday world into smaller components on a more fundamental level. (The cell theory of biology would be a good example of this.) This book brought up issues and subjects which I had never considered before, at a time when I was questioning traditional understanding of visual perception, how the camera treats physical space, and the difficulty in recording mental and emotional space.

I also read The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics by Gary Zukav about quantum mechanics. Unlike Newtonian Physics, quantum mechanics is not a science that breaks the whole into simple parts. It is not about having to draw a picture of something in order to understand it. It does not assume an outer world existing apart from our own experience. Relating these ideas to my previous readings and own work showed me that there really is another way of thought and perception in our world and it runs parallel with many of
my own views and sensibilities.

Martha and I frequently worked the topic of poetry into our discussions. It seemed like we could find more examples of what I was doing in poetry than in art. My own taste in poetry changed during this period. Although there were many modern poets I read, such as T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, I spent most of my time reading the old Seventeenth century guys like John Donne and George Herbert--the so-called metaphysical poets. I was intrigued with their use of the conceit, an elaborate metaphor employed throughout a poem. I was especially interested in John Donne's secular subjects, and his dual interest in the secular as well as the religious.

During my second year in graduate school my interest shifted to contemporary poetry. I read more and more of Wallace Stevens and John Ashbery--poets who are often labeled by some critics as obscure, ambiguous, and enigmatic.

The balloon pops, the attention
Turns dully away. Clouds
In the puddle stir up into sawtoothed fragments.
I think of the friends
Who came to see me, of what yesterday
Was like. A peculiar slant
Of memory that intrudes on the dreaming model
In the silence of the studio as he considers
Lifting the pencil to the self-portrait.
How many people came and stayed a certain time,
Uttered light or dark speech that became part of you
Like light behind windblown fog and sand,
Filtered and influenced by it, until no part
Remains that is surely you. Those voices in the dusk
Have told you all and still the tale goes on
In the form of memories deposited in irregular
Clumps of crystals. Whose curved hand controls,
Francesco, the turning seasons and the thoughts
That peel off and fly away at breathless speeds
Like the last stubborn leaves ripped
From wet branches? I see in this only the chaos
Around the polestar of your eyes which are empty,
Know nothing, dream but reveal nothing.
I feel the carousel starting slowly
And going faster and faster: desk, papers, books,
Photographs of friends, the window and the trees
Merging in one neutral band that surrounds
Me on all sides, everywhere I look.
And cannot explain the action of leveling,
Why it should all boil down to one
Uniform substance, a magma of interiors.
My guide in these matters is your self,
Firm, oblique, accepting everything with the same
Wraith of a smile, and as time speeds up so that it is soon
Much later, I can know only the straight way out,
The distance between us. Long ago
The strewn evidence meant something,
The small accidents and pleasures
Of the day as it moved gracelessly on,
A housewife doing chores. Impossible now
To restore those properties in the silver blur that is
The record of what you accomplished by sitting down
"With great art to copy all that you saw in the glass"
So as to perfect and rule out the extraneous
Forever. In the circle of your intentions certain spars
Remain that perpetuate the enchantment of self with self:
Eyebeams, muslin, coral. It doesn't matter
Because these are things as they are today
Before one's shadow ever grew
Out of the field into thoughts of tomorrow.

from John Ashbery's
"Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" (190-2)

The four months before my thesis show are a little fuzzy
in my memory. I remember waking up at three-thirty in the
morning not able to get back to sleep. I spent those hours
taking pictures off my television set of Jim and Tammy Bakker
appealing for money via tears. I remember going into the
"Adult Movies" theater on Monroe to see Tickled Pink with my
friend Michael. For a long time I avoided dealing with
pornography directly--most of my experiences with it in the
past were scraps of second hand images, seeing people walk in
and out of the theater, reading articles that academicians had
written on the subject. I felt it was necessary to actually have the experience of walking through the doors, sitting in the dark, watching a movie from beginning to end on the big screen.

I think what I remember most about the months before my show is the support I received from a number of my friends. Many people were confused by what I was doing and had a hard time understanding the work. But the encouragement I received from board members Martha Leinroth and Edward Kinney was wonderful. Edward always had a habit of wondering into the seminar room with his coffee and giving me feedback right after I had taken prints off the drying screen. And I cannot count the number of times Martha invited me over for caffeine
inspiration so we could talk about art and about being an artist. This is not to say they never gave me criticism but they always did it in a way that I could feel their support and interest in what I was doing.
CONCLUSION

To create this work it was necessary for me to understand the intrinsic features of photography and the ways the medium has been used for representation. In the past it has mainly been used to represent a physical reality. I wanted to show ideas, not objects. Once I realized this, finding a new visual syntax for these ideas really was not that difficult.

This whole thesis process helped me learn how to trust myself, follow my own intuition. There came a point where I did not care what other people thought about the work, I was going to follow my inner vision because it was important to the issues I was dealing with as well as my own process of discovery.
Works Cited


Superstar Wrestler. Fall. 1986.


Although not specifically cited in this paper, the following is a bibliography of books and articles which I found relevant in preparing my visual and written thesis.


