VISUAL COMPOSITION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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ABSTRACT

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In *Visual Composition in Everyday Life* I report on a study of everyday practices as forms of non-alphabetic writing - as visual composition. I want to understand how meaning is made and shared visually, in mundane circumstances. To come to this understanding, I explore everyday practices in the study as visual genre, which is recurrent social action in the visual mode. The artifacts produced by these practices, garage workbenches and workplace cubicles, I examine as sites for building and sharing knowledge. I consider these artifacts as tools, in activity systems, which mediate between the composer-producer, and social outcomes, such as identity building. Central to this work is the theory that activities in the material world affect human learning, and personality.

Visual composition is often treated as a relatively empty term for the arrangement of information on a page or screen. By incorporating genre theory and activity theory with the study of visual elements as rhetorical actors, visual composition can be seen as transformative activity that usefully contributes to everyday social interaction. Currently, in rhetoric/composition scholarship, treatment of the visual is often bifurcated as either semiotic

representation, or as document design. From this study I hope to develop awareness of everyday visual, writing activities and a richer, less polarized scholarly engagement with the visual.

The study is rich with implications for future research. For writing studies, the project connects composition, in a broad, interdisciplinary meaning of the term, with writing lives outside of the classroom. This project adds to genre scholarship, by discussing the possibility of genre in the visual mode. Connecting activity systems, social cognition, and composition expands the terrain of everyday studies.

The everyday artifacts in the study are analyzed through images obtained from Flickr, the digital, social medium for archiving and sharing images. Because Flickr images are freely shared, Flickr enables research on remote and otherwise inaccessible subjects. As a research tool, Flickr opens possibilities for further research into digital, social media, visual genre and visual rhetoric, pictorial autoethnography, and visual composition.

DEDICATION

For Koreen

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PREFACE

How I Came To See Writing On The Wall, And On The Workbench

My wife enjoys arranging fresh cut flowers. I brought her some awhile back, and then hung about to watch her work with them. She took the flowers, trimmed their lengths with a knife, and placed them in some in water, in a vase. Then my wife proceeded to arrange the flowers – I couldn't follow the logic of her placement but my wife was intent on arraying flowers in various positions and elevations.

I understand, from my experience with visual media, that what my wife does with the flowers is visual composition, which is arranging visual information. There is a good deal of visual information in a single flower - color, shape, texture, and repetition. The number of flowers with which my wife works compounds the possibilities for making relationships between shapes and other visual elements.

I also understand, as a writing teacher, that composition is an arrangement of information for meaning. And I wondered if my wife's visual composition could also have semantic, and social meaning, in the way that I understand writing to be comprised of units of meaning, and socially situated.

My wife's flower arrangements are not created for any particular occasion; they don't mark births or deaths. Neither are they arrangements made for a particular audience. When finished, the arrangements are placed on a table, in a

center of a room. Sometimes no one sees a flower arrangement but us, before it withers and is discarded.

I asked my wife about her affection for arranging flowers. She told me that she lacked any formal training in flower arranging, but as a girl, my wife watched her mother, and her mother's sister, an aunt with whom my wife is close, arrange flowers. I began to see my wife's flower arranging as a practice, passed in a matrilineal line from mother to sister to daughter. I began to see my wife's flower arrangements as artifacts that connect her to people with whom she is close, and with people far away in time.

My wife's flower arrangements started to look like a "writing with flowers" that articulated the human relations of my wife and her flower-arranging ancestors, and her actions in arranging flowers in a vase said something about her in a way that was at once personal and yet public. If I could identify a typified form of flower arrangement, and see a visual connection between my wife's flower arranging and that of her mother, perhaps flower arranging could be a genre. Perhaps I could find other groups formed around flower arranging.

SOME INFLUENCES

I was probably reading *The Practice of Everyday Life* around the time this project started gelling (de Certeau 1984). Other influences on this project are the lack of cultural artifacts in my home, when I was growing up. My siblings and I have described that lack of cultural stimulation as a vacuum - something had to fill it. I spent many hours closely examining objects, and puzzling over their representations. For example, I wondered that the Elvis Presley *Blue Hawaii* album cover held such visual promise, but the record was acoustically sterile. Why was Ray Charles' album *Modern Sounds in Country and Western* so rich in sounds but impoverished visually? Why were pictures on record covers, but nowhere else in the house?

Other probable influences on the origins of this project are my practice of drawing, and my time spent working in factories, and in industrial shops. Drawing is something I do all the time, even when I am apparently not doing it - drawing is a way of thinking about visual information as well as a practice. I was probably visualizing my own arrangement of my wife's flowers even as she worked with them. Because of drawing, I can give close attention to people and objects, and their visual place in the world. Factory work is deadly dull, and often visually uninteresting.

NEW SUBJECTS

Alas, researching flower arrangements presents too many difficulties, not the least of which is the ephemeral nature of flowers. If I were to look for visual compositions, arrangements of ordinary things that shared information in the visual mode, I needed something more robust than flowers, something sturdy that left a record of arrangement. The research subjects that I used in this study, garage workbenches and office cubicles, are quite un-flower like, and very unlike each other. They are also artifacts that are known to me.

GARAGE WORKBENCHES

In my childhood, almost every household had some kind of tool bench in the garage. This was true of my grandfather's garage, and my father built a workbench in his garage. My brothers have workbenches in their garages. I do not have a workbench. At times my lack of a garage workbench makes me feel on the outside of a very male social group - the garage workbench club. While I don't have a workbench, I have this document, which is also a record of my people, and a composition that, like my wife's flowers, articulates something about me, and connects me to people from which I can learn - teachers, scholars, family - both close and far away from me in time.

OFFICE CUBICLES ARE NOT SEXY

I know office cubicles; I worked in cubicles, and I worked in offices and supervised the people working in cubicles. Alphabetic writing is challenging for me, but writing about cubicles was a personal challenge. In my work life, I was complicit in the hierarchical structure described in Chapter 4, and in writing that chapter I came to understand more of what happens to people, myself included, because of office regimentation. I felt diminished with every image of a cubicle that I examined, but I also cheered at the acts of resistance seen in visual compositions.

BRINGING FLOWERS

This project leads me back to bringing flowers to my wife. I haven't had much time for that recently, but when this work is finished that is one the first things that I am going to do. From this work I understand much more of the connection between people and things, and how they mutually shape each other. I know that when I hand my wife a dozen uncut flowers, they are more than flowers; they are raw material for connecting her to people who may no longer speak, or be able to guide and advise my wife, except through colors, shapes and lines arranged in a vase.

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Everyday Life: Language, Text, and the Visual

Everyday life is made of recurrences; gestures of labour and leisure…
- Henri Lefebvre (1984 p. 18)

INTRODUCTION

In the preface, I described the origins of my interest in visual composition in everyday life as a research subject. In this chapter, I want to talk about the everyday, and its relevance to visual composition. What does it mean for things, or for activity, to be everyday? The concept of everyday life, in this project, works mostly in the background; therefore, I give some attention to the notion of everyday life here. I define everyday life, and I look at some of the thinking that informs that definition.

In this chapter, and throughout this project, I situate a system of making meaning - visual composition - in everyday life. This chapter, therefore, is a good place to talk about some other large concepts that bear specifically on making meaning in everyday life, and that inform ideas introduced in later chapters. I discuss, in this chapter, the idea of a *natural visual language*, and define the terms *text*, and *the visual* as they are used in this study. The relationship between writing and composition is examined, and a broad definition of *composition* is offered. I finish the chapter with some of the theoretical underpinnings of non-alphabetic writing.

A DEFINITION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

The term *everyday life* in the project title situates visual composition in a particular locale, and points to where visual composition can be found. But if I go looking for a place called everyday life, where will I find it? Similarly, everyday life seems to be temporal. If I wait for everyday life, when does it happen?

For the purposes of this project, everyday life is neither place, nor time; everyday life is what people do with each other, and with things. Everyday life is the sum of non-special, social interaction, in individual contexts[1]. Because the actions and interactions of everyday life are recognizable and familiar, the meanings of these social acts are locally, and perhaps widely, understood or assumed. That the meanings in everyday objects and actions are assumed, and that they are fundamental to human relations, distinguishes my definition from some other ways of thinking about everyday life.

EVERYDAY LIFE IS SPECIAL - AND ORDINARY

Lefebvre identifies the everyday as recurrent, and therefore familiar (2008). The familiar and recognizable in everyday life is shared; beneath the umbrella of *everyday* there is a vast collection of shared activity and experiences. Everyday life, because it contains so much human experience and knowledge, in which many

[1] This definition is indebted to Highmore's observation that Lefebvre sees everyday life not as a place, but as a totality of relationships (2002 p. 143). Social in the definition includes the non-human actors, in actor-network theory (Latour 1990).

participate, is treated by some as a laboratory for social theory. Lefebvre, for example, sees everyday life as the site of enactments of the Marxist class struggle. For Lefebvre, everyday life must be reclaimed for the proletariat, and when that happens the everyday will be made special (2008). Outside of Lefebvre's utopian model, others find everyday life to be contentious.

Everyday life is often depicted as the scene of conflict – the proletariat struggle in Lefebvre's everyday Marxism, for example. Debord sees in everyday life a struggle in which human interaction is replaced by the representational imagery of a dehumanizing consumerism (1967). Along those lines, in Chapter 4, I look at repression, hegemony, and resistance as part of visual composition in office cubicles.

Consumerism and commercially generated images in everyday life are recognized by Willis as malefic, but also deeply implicated with what Willis terms *symbolic work* and *symbolic creativity*, the necessary creative practices essential to "daily humanity" (1990 p. 99). The everyday visual compositions in this project are necessary creative acts; they add to identity, make social connections, and demonstrate resistance. The creative work that Willis finds essential is similar to de Certeau's *la perruque* (p. 28). Creative practice, for de Certeau, is tactics employed by the socially disadvantaged in a muffled clash with the systemically powerful. As part of everyday life, struggle and resistance are reflected in the visual knowledge that people ordinarily make and share.

There is, in the literature about everyday life, a good deal of huddling over what is *ordinary* and the origin of what is *special*. The emergence of new and special within the everyday is much discussed by Lefebvre, Highmore, Willis, Williams and others. In my thinking, s*pecial* emerges from what is *ordinary*. The various discussions about ordinary and special lead to the strange situation of everyday life being at once elevated and reduced. It seems that even talking about everyday life begins to make it special, and so the notion of everyday life as whatever is commonplace begins to slip away.

EVERYDAY LIFE GETS NO RESPECT

Despite the role of everyday life as a backdrop for sweeping social theories, and its unique character, which makes everyday life special, it is largely overlooked. As Highmore notes, "Things become 'everyday' by becoming invisible, unnoticed, part of the furniture[2]" (2002b p. 21). Everyday life may be seen as a void between momentous events, or as non-events that occur on the way to a gathering or activity that is special. According to Vannini (2009), de Certeau sees ordinary activity as "unsigned, unreadable, unsymbolized." (p. 3). Such a reading of the everyday would leave us mostly in a dream state, interrupted by flashes of awareness.

As noted by Highmore (2002b), Debord positions everyday life at the "center of everything" (238); it touches on lived time, creativity, and human relations, a

[2] That everyday life can be at once familiar, ordinary and invisible acknowledges the obscurity of the everyday life concept.

view that points to the importance of everyday life as a site for research into visual composition. Yet Debord insists that some everyday gestures, opening doors and filling glasses for example, are at a "trivial level of reality" (2002b p. 238). Debord's stance begs the question of what is significant about everyday life events and objects. There is an important distinction between *unimportant* and *inconspicuous*. Gravity is inconspicuous – until we fall. Gravity is rarely, if ever, unimportant.

This project counters those views of everyday life, as well as the notion that everyday is special as a social or ideological battleground. I argue that those in-between spaces or moments (if such things exist) are not at all ordinary, in the sense that *ordinary* devalues what is done and made in everyday life. The overlooked and ordinary events and happenings of everyday life, such as a walk to work, include numerous practices that make meaning. The exchange of meaning is invaluable in human affairs, and the exchange of meaning is facilitated by familiarity. People acquire familiarity as they move within social life, and through the visual world.

EVERYDAY LIFE AND A WALK TO WORK

To illustrate familiarity in everyday life, as it contributes to perception and cognition, I refer to walking to a workplace. I enjoy walking, and I hope that my new professional appointment allows me to walk to my office. A walk presents me with a remarkable amount of visual information. Moving down streets and sidewalks, I may see children at play, the paths they cut across empty lots, or only the suggestion of fun, conveyed by abandoned toys in a yard. Those viewed scenes can inform me of local practices and values. The economics of the spaces through which I walk is showcased in visual arrangements of material reality. Social stratification, for example, is represented by landscaping and home decoration. The visual information received by me on my walk is, for the most part, ordinary information. I know streets and sidewalks in general; as visual constructs, they are familiar to me.

An everyday walk to work delivers me to the workplace. At my job I do many small and seemingly empty acts that are not special. I greet people with routine, ritualistic phrases, the "certain gestures repeated everyday" that Debord finds trivial (Highmore 2002b p. 238). In my workspace, I move things about. I arrange objects. Such arrangements are, to some degree, ordinary and recognizable.

The repeated gestures I make towards others, and my arrangement of things in my workspace, Willis (1990) might see as, "communication … achieved through roles, rituals and performances that we produce with each other" (p. 11). In socially determined roles, in everyday life, people arrange material stuff - including their

bodies - in recognizable and familiar ways. Or, as Lave puts it, "meaning is mutually constituted in relations between activity systems and people acting" (p. 18). I talk more about activity and making meaning in Chapter 4, but I point out here that some, and perhaps all, of the activities that arrange materials and objects in everyday life are visually communicative. In later chapters I show that, as people move through life, these arrangements or visual compositions, make social connections, provide guidance for behavior, and enable transformation.

EVERYDAY LIFE IS BASED IN THE FAMILIAR

The subjects of research in this project can be considered everyday because those objects and actions are for the most part, recognizable and familiar. For example, to many people an office cubicle is a familiar space; its shape and form are readily recognized. The familiarity of office cubicles promotes certain behaviors. This familiarity, or recognizability, is characteristic of visual genre. In subsequent chapters, visual genre and familiarity as manifested in a typified form is discussed at some length.

For many, work and school are familiar and therefore, according to my definition, part of everyday life. And for some, visual composition is a familiar part of everyday experience in work or school. I am thinking for example, of graphic artists whose professional activities are much concerned with visual composition. I want to avoid distinctions between professional and amateur visual composition, and instead bring forward the universality of visual composition for discussion. I

suggest that, in his or her own everyday life context, each person is a visual composer.

The idea of visual composing in everyday life presupposes the existence of an everyday visual language, and visual literacy. There is a visual literacy in everyday life, especially in local contexts; through a natural, visual language, meanings in everyday objects and actions are shared.

NATURAL VISUAL LANGUAGE

Visual composition in everyday life is the manipulation of material stuff, or what Vannini (2009) might include in "an understanding of sociality and culture as a form of *making*, *doing* and *acting*" (p. 3). What is made in everyday life contexts, are artifacts that are semiotically meaningful. As I begin to show in Chapter 3, everyday artifacts, as units of meaning, can perform semantically in the visual mode. I see in that semantic performance a visual language. Visual language appears to have, as Mitchell (1986) notes, some characteristics of verbal language (p. 28). Despite their similarities, visual language can operate quite differently from spoken language. As Rose (2007) notes, the “image itself has its own effects” (p. 35). Images can carry unique meanings because the socio-cultural connotations of images are rhetorically affective, as are the visual elements inherent in images, line, shape, color etc.

Hart-Davidson (1996) and Wysocki (2008) observe that words on a page can also be viewed as what Hart-Davidson (1996) describes as a visual unit; therefore

an alphabetic representation of verbal language (letters, words etc.) is also an image. Images straddle both visual and verbal languages, as noted by Mitchell (1986), and others. Barthes (1977) acknowledges a linguistic message in images (p. 38).

The dual linguistic nature of images is associated with a dichotomy in how the visual is interpreted. A single artifact can be writing and image; a page of alphabetic writing is read, with different tools, as Hart-Davidson's (1996) "visual unit" (p. 71) and as a page of alphabetic text. I discuss this dual nature of images at more length in Chapter 2.

Language, most would agree, has syntax as well as semantics[3]. Those terms originate in the study of verbal language, and apply most aptly to the use of words, sentences, and paragraphs etc. There is a suggestion of semantics and syntax in visual perception. The Gestalt principles, for example, seem reliable for identifying units of meaning, (semantics), and to some extent indicate how the production of meaning is governed (syntax). But any expectation that visual meaning is made and transmitted in exactly the same way as verbal language is bound to disappoint. The problem of a consistent syntax for visual texts is beyond the scope of this project. My purpose in this project is to show visual composition at work in everyday life,

[3] An emphasis on the rules can be seen in the repeated attempts to establish a grammar for visual language (Kress and van Leeuwen [1996], Dondis [1974], Leborg [2006], Stebbing [2003]). Some attempts to find structure in visual language originate in an inappropriate comparison to verbal language, as if verbal language were the model for all language structure (Mitchell [1986], Barry, Saint-Martin [1987], Moriarty [2002]).

and connect it to human activity. The rules that direct the making of knowledge by everyday visual compositions can best be addressed in another study.

The idea of a visual language in everyday life helps to explain how people can visually assess their surroundings, and share that understanding. Because it is a natural language, the visual language of everyday life facilitates sharing knowledge. Lyons (1991) provides a definition of natural language, "… a natural language is one that has not been specifically constructed, whether for general or specific purposes, and is acquired by its users without special instruction as a normal part of maturation and socialization (p. 86). Moriarty (1996) speaks directly to the naturalness of visual language (p. 173). Comprised of images and their visual elements, visual language in everyday life is a means by which social meaning is visually made and interpreted. Visual language is learned by example and through participation in social situations. As Moriarty (1996) points out, "much of what we know that is language or code based, including most visual symbols, is derived from social learning" (p. 175).

I suspect that natural visual language may be learned locally, as part of a visual linguistic tradition, not unlike heritage languages (Van Deusen-Scholl). For example, interpreting what I see on my walk to work is made possible by the naturalness of visual language. To recognize and understand the implications of toys in a yard does not require formal lessons in visual language. However, the meanings that images hold for people may be influenced by prior and local visual experiences.

Moriarty describes this learning phenomena, "Not only do humans understand things using the eyes and the brain, we also understand things using internally derived information learned from experiences combined with externally based conventions" (p. 175).

We can understand and participate in visual composition in everyday life without instruction. Indeed, formal instruction in visual composition may even preclude it from being considered *everyday*, since instruction would introduce a different sort of special visual literacy[4] [5]. As one component of visual literacy, the ability to understand visual information requires juggling the dual nature of images.

[4] The idea of a natural, visual language is a quandary for some. Kress and van Leeuwen say in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996) that a lack of visual literacy proficiency could be socially detrimental (p. 3). Visual literacy, to Kress and van Leeuwen, consists of fluency in their version of social semiotics, a system that requires instruction. Social semiotics is also entirely a system for reading images, and ignores the production of visual meaning - at least half of what it means to be visually literate. I argue that people are highly literate in the natural visual language of everyday life. Visual information is produced and shared in everyday social activity without the necessity of formal instruction.

[5] The goal of this project is not to instruct in visual composition. I explore the visual meaning of everyday artifacts and the social implications of the activities that produced them, without promoting any pedagogy of the visual. The implications of this work for technical communication and for the historiography of writing are discussed in Chapter 5,

TEXT & TEXT-OBJECTS

Fundamental to this project is the idea that objects made or used in everyday life convey meaning. The idea comes from many sources. Shove (2007) looks at the social implications of consumer choices in everyday products. De Certeau (1984) points to hidden narratives in the tools of laborers, and artifacts produced on "company time" that show resistance to power. In particular, this project extends de Certeau's concept of *la perruque* to see how that practice contributes to identity, and to tactically resist systemic power.

Essential to understanding how everyday objects visually convey meaning is the concept of *text*. The term text raises an image of a bound and static collection of alphabetic writing, but a text is more productively thought of as a gathering of knowledge. For a definition of text that is appropriate to this project, I look to Ricouer, Derrida, and Bazerman.

Reading fulfills the destiny of a text, according to Ricouer (1981), which is to say that a text is not fully formed until it is read (p. 164). The role of the reading function in forming texts is clearly meant by Ricouer (1981) to apply to texts originating in speech or alphabetic writing. However, if the reading function is the final determinant of textuality, a text can be thought of as that which is read, including everyday objects. Chapter 2 explains the reading of everyday objects through textual analysis, semiotics and visual Gestalt principles.

The most generous definition of text comes from Jacques Derrida. At the conclusion of an interview in an unremarkable, suburban Paris restaurant, Derrida gestured to the scene and exclaimed, "This a text. Everything is a text! (Smith 1998). In that everyday context of a restaurant, Derrida shows one way that text is produced. Everyday visual compositions, such as the restaurant to which Derrida gestured, are created not only by the manipulation of materials, by an author or composer, but also through the assignment of meaning by a viewer/reader in a dynamic process of recognition and interpretation. My walk to work is another example of a text: I bring meaning to what I see. There are several levels of significance to the image of toys in a yard, but at whatever level of representation, I textualize the image by assigning meaning to it. I can understand the toys as representations of childhood, of play, or the end of play. I am also affected by the toys as visual objects arranged in space.

I think that there is something to what Ricouer (1981) and Derrida are saying, that the viewer/reader completes, or constructs text. However, in Chapters 3 and 4, the effect of visual composition on identity is considered; I have difficulty connecting a relatively passive/receptive form of textual production, the way that Ricouer and Derrida describe it, with changes in someone's self-concept.

Earlier, I introduced the idea of visual language as a role player in visual composition. Bazerman, Little and Chavkin (2003) provide a definition of text that reinforces that connection, "As language in use, texts mediate human activity, take

on its meanings from its roles in the activities, and influence thought as participants" (p. 456). The perspective that Bazerman et al bring to text is enormously helpful to this project. As language in use, texts are portable and agile tools for mediating human activity. As visual texts, visual compositions in everyday life can mediate activities such as identity building, and resisting power.

At times, I use the term *text-object* in this document to describe the products of everyday practices, including garage workbenches and cubicle personalization. I like the term text-object on many levels; it is a nod to the activity theory that informs Bazerman et al's (2003) definition of text as language in use, and some of the analysis done in Chapters 3 and 4. Text-object is also a term used by de Certeau (1984) when he encouraged resistance by making creative text-objects (p. 30). The term text-object mitigates the gap between the pragmatic roles of objects in everyday life and their communicative and rhetorical purposes.

THE VISUAL

I consistently rely on the term *the visual* to mean all matters pertaining to visual perception, visual analysis and interpretation. The visual includes the production or creation of visual information, as well as visual artifacts and texts. Selfe (2004) describes the visual as "broadly…a focus on visual elements and materials of communication" (p. 69). *Visual elements* in this project means the rhetorically effective components of images, such as shape, line, color etc. In this

project, I avail myself of an expanded definition of the visual, one that recognizes activity and process in visual communication. The visual in this project is closely bound up with composition, and with writing. I see the practices that produce visually meaningful arrangements of everyday objects as composition, but I also see those practices as writing.

WRITING AND COMPOSITION

The term *composition* has a wonderful interdisciplinary sense about it. Music, the visual arts, and of course, rhetoric/composition all make use of the term, and in much the same way: composition is the arrangement of information for meaning. Composition as a term, for those in writing pedagogy especially, can have problematic connotations, but I think that it is time to reclaim that word to mean writing in a broad sense. While I use *composition* and *writing* interchangeably, i recognize that, for many in rhetoric/composition, *writing* is and will always be, associated with the alphabet.

There is a theoretical basis for looking at writing as more than the use of the alphabet to convey meaning. Both Harris (1995) and Witte (1992) object to a concept of writing that is exclusively alphabetic, and both their arguments are based in semiotics. Witte (1992) employs the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Pierce, which unlike Saussurean semiology, is not limited to verbal language. According to Witte (1992), "…Pierce's semiotic shows that meaning does not reside in the sign

but is constructed by people through individual cognitive acts" (p. 283). Understanding cognitive acts through the visual information in objects is the very thing this project focuses on.

One consequence of Pierce's semiotic is that the medium of the sign is less important than the act that produced the sign. When the act of making a sign overrides its medium, the idea of writing as only the use of the alphabet is destabilized. For example, a garage workbench as a visual composition is not as important, or as informative, as the activity of arranging tools on the workbench. This is one reason why I look at visual artifacts in order to understand something about the activity that produced them.

Harris' (1995) approach to the problem of defining writing is similar to Witte's; however, Harris (1995) abandons the semiotic binary of subject and object, and instead turns to the concepts of *forming* and *processing*. Forming is any activity that produces a written form, and correlates roughly to writing (p. 64). Processing, not surprisingly, is the examination of a written form for the purpose of interpretation and is similar to reading (p. 65).

A *written form* is produced in communicative act, or through interpretation. A garage workbench is a written form because, like other human artifacts, it communicates information to users and viewers (Shove 2007). Harris' approach to semiotics provides ample space for visual composition in everyday life. As Harris (1995) observes, "Forming a written message does not have to involve scoring a

surface or leaving traces upon it; the formation might consist of arranging a set of freestanding objects, or showing a pattern of colored lights, or even planting flowers to grow in certain configurations" (p. 65).

I recognize that the arrangements of visual information in everyday life are part of human relations. People make visual arrangements that develop and define identity, or resist external forces that would constrain or impose a shape on identities. But how do we read those marks and arrangements in everyday life? What are the mechanisms for understanding the visual arrangement of everyday artifacts? In Chapter 2, I look at ways to interpret to visual information of everyday artifacts.

CHAPTER 2

Concepts and Methods: Gathering and Understanding Images of the Everyday

> *How are we to speak of these 'common things', how to track them down rather, flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they remain mired, how to give them a meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally, speak of what is, what we are.*
>
> - *Georges Perec* (2002 p. 177)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I take stock of the ways of thinking that inform my analysis of the everyday situations shown in the Flickr images, and some of the choices I made in collecting those images. The concepts and theories, on which I rely for qualitatively analyzing the data, are genre theory, activity theory, semiotics, and discourse/textual analysis. Other theorists are introduced in this document when required, but the theories I listed have a large presence in this study.

Because images can perform as texts or as visual artifacts, the methods and concepts in this chapter include Gestalt visual psychology, and the visual grid. I provide some background on the duality of images because that duality bears on the conflicted way rhetoric/composition treats the visual. At the end of the chapter I talk about Flickr as a source for data, and about the rhetorical choices I made in selecting search terms.

GENRE THEORY

From Miller (1984), and Bazerman (2002), I have the understanding that genre is social action, and summarized as rhetorical responses to recurrent social situations. The idea of visual genre is not discussed in the literature; however, Bazerman (2004) observes that genre includes forms of texts that are patterned, typical, and therefore intelligible (p. 311). This would appear to allow for room for non-alphabetic texts within the genre concept. Wysocki (2004) points in a similar direction when she identifies visual arrangement as a textual feature doing some of the work of genre (p. 601). I contend that texts in the visual mode can be regarded as visual genre. Like genre as it applies to alphabetic texts, visual genre is socially constituted, and connected to what people do, together.

The concept of visual genre is not widely recognized in linguistics and is under-reported in the literature of those disciplines working with visual subjects. As noted earlier, Kress[1] (2003), in fact, expresses some doubt about visual genre as a category (p. 86). Objections to the notion of visual genre may include the historic

[1] Kress (2003) presents two suppositions; either the notion of genre and thinking about the visual in general is influenced by "linguistic underpinnings" or genre is limited to alphabetic writing and perhaps some other expressive modes, such as dance, or gesture (p. 86). Kress chooses the latter. I see the linguistic orientation of, not just Kress, but alphabetic writing, influencing the way the visual is treated. Prior (2009) finds a third approach to genre in other modes, "... all genres are irremediably multimodal; the question then becomes what particular configurations of multimodality are at work in a particular multimodal system" (p. 27). In that sense, the compositions of everyday life in tis study are multimodal, and I am selecting the visual mode/component for analysis.

basis of genre studies in verbal language, and alphabetic writing. For example, I feel certain that when Carolyn Miller (1984) uses the word “text” in "Genre as Social Action", she means communication originating in verbal language[2]. Some may object to visual genre because the semantic and syntactic characteristics associated with language are not evident in texts originating in the material world. Genre, according to Miler is situated in language and not materiality.

> In sum, what I am proposing so far is that in rhetoric the term "genre" be limited to a particular type of discourse classification, a classification based in rhetorical practice and consequently open rather than closed and organized around situated actions (that is, pragmatic, rather than syntactic or semantic) (p. 30).

I want to propose something different - the idea of a visual genre, that is rhetorical, and that does work comparable to genre associated with verbal and alphabetic discourse. Visual genre is a cognate genre, that originates in language use, but whose syntactic and semantic characteristics are distinct, and possibly disconnected from verbal language.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, language is structured by rules, and with units of meaning. There is visual language, as noted by Cohen and Anderson (2006), Gombrich (1960), and others, but a dovetail fit between the workings of visual and

[2] The digital era challenges the privileged position of alphabetic writing in print media – Miller now writes on the possibility of blogs as genre (Miller 2004).

verbal languages is unlikely. This incomplete correspondence between the visual and verbal may be true also of genre, as Miller explains it, and visual genre. Both may be categories of discourse that accomplish similar work, but with different cognitive mechanics. The Gestalt visual principles correspond, approximately, to syntax in everyday visual compositions, for example visual perception first looks for patterns and consistencies in visual information. Gestalt may also define, in a limited way, semantic meaning in the visual. Individual shapes, for example, acquire the significance of a group when in close proximity. The Gestalt principles are not exactly semantic or syntactical in the way verbal language is structured.

The search for a pictorial grammar is not uncommon in the literature. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), among others, work to build a rigid and repeatable grammar for images. My interest in this study is not in a visual grammar, which seems elusive, but in the meaning of visual compositions as they connect to the activities that produce them. The choices people make in arranging visual information in everyday life are rhetorical, and therefore meaningful. In Chapters 3 and 4, I look for semantic meaning in the arrangement of everyday artifacts.

The idea of visual genre seems to me viable, especially if genre is considered for what it does. The "homely discourse" that Miller (1984) would include in genre, "the letter of recommendation, the user manual, the progress report, the ransom note, the lecture, and the white paper, as well as the eulogy, the apologia, the inaugural, the public proceeding, and the sermon," are not substantively more a part

of human discourse, than are human artifacts (p. 30). Because genre is predicated on what is recognizable and expected, genre assists people in making sense of the world (Bazerman 2002, p. 15). The role of the visual in making sense of the world is powerful and pervasive.

Making sense of the world must include making sense of oneself, as a separate identity in the world. From Medway (2002, p.149), and Bazerman (2002 p. 15) I understand that genre recognition is connected to identity. I see the everyday visual compositions in this study as visual genre, deeply implicated in identity development. The relationship between visual genres, visual composition and identity is examined in the analytical Chapters 3 and 4.

To analyze everyday artifacts as genre, I look to Miller and Shepherd's (2004) genre analysis of web blogs as a guide. Three characteristics, or aspects of genre, used by Miller and Shepherd in their analysis include formal features, pragmatic action, and exigence or social action. In Chapter 3, I use these concepts in a genre analysis of garage workbenches. In their studies, Miller and Shepherd focus entirely on the alphabetic writing in weblogs. In contrast, this project is concerned with only non-alphabetic composition. My definitions of the genre aspects closely follows those of Miller and Shepherd, but are adjusted to reflect my focus on the visual in this study.

The formal features of genre constitute a typified form - a presentation or make-up that recurs, and therefore is recognizable. A recognizable, typified form

helps people to understand social situations, and points to possible responses. Office cubicles, for example, are immediately recognized as workspaces in which certain behavior occurs. In this study, images that match selected typified forms of workbenches and cubicles are sorted from the Flickr image data. The typified forms are described in detail in the Methods section of this chapter, as are search methods and terms used to gather the Flickr image data.

Pragmatic action is the typified social action that the visual genres produce. Garage workbenches, for example, are displays of capability, and create and reaffirm relationships with groups and ancestors. I see the visual compositions in workplace cubicles as acts of resistance to the hegemony of institutionalized space.

Where pragmatic action might be glossed as people doing things together, exigence is the motivation behind action. Exigence, according to Miller (1984), is "an objectified social need that functions as rhetorical motive" (p. 157). It is assumed, in this project, that the usefulness of everyday artifacts includes communication. Garage workbenches are rhetorical, as well as utilitarian. An objectified social needs that motivates building and using garage workbenches may be to share information about oneself: to display skill or to declare competency, to heuristically share knowledge, or to build relations with other workbench users. In an office cubicle, a visual composition may address an objectified social need by showing loyalty to family and friends, and connecting a worker to a social reality that is outside of the workplace.

ACTIVITY THEORY

As I mentioned earlier, the everyday visual compositions in this study are analyzed to understand something of the activities, and therefore the people, that produce them. I've described everyday visual composition as genre - it can also be understood as *activity*. The relationship between genre and activity theory appears natural. Bazerman (2002) has no difficulty making a valid and real connection between genre and (social) activity. Connecting activity systems and genre preserves the relationship between what people do, their "different activities, interactional patterns, attitudes, relationships" and texts. (Bazerman 2004, p. 312). Texts, as Swales (2009) observes, are enmeshed with genre (p. 14). Unlike genre, text(s) is not a required component of activity systems.

Activity theory originates in the work of Vygotsky (1978), especially his interest in the relationship between the use of tools and the development of speech (p. 19). While not nominally an activity theorist, Vygotsky connects activity in the material world, such as using tools, to alterations in human psyches (Engeström 1999 p. 29). Building on Vygotsky's work, Leont'ev (1978) developed a theory of material reflection, in which the human psyche reflects material reality, and reciprocally acts upon the external material world (p. 13). The relationship between internal and external activity that Leont'ev explains, I use to associate everyday visual composition with identity development. An important premise in this project

is that the visual compositions in this study reciprocally affect the identity development of the people who made them.

People use objects in everyday life to mediate activity, and through interaction with artifacts people are changed. In a simple model of action in activity, the subject interacts with the object, in order to achieve an outcome (Engeström 1999 p. 30). Between subject and object there is a mediating artifact. As shown in Figure 2-1, all actors in an action model are reciprocally affected.

In this project, the everyday objects depicted in the Flickr images are considered to be mediating artifacts. For example, a workbench user will arrange tools to demonstrate affiliation with a social group. The activity in which the

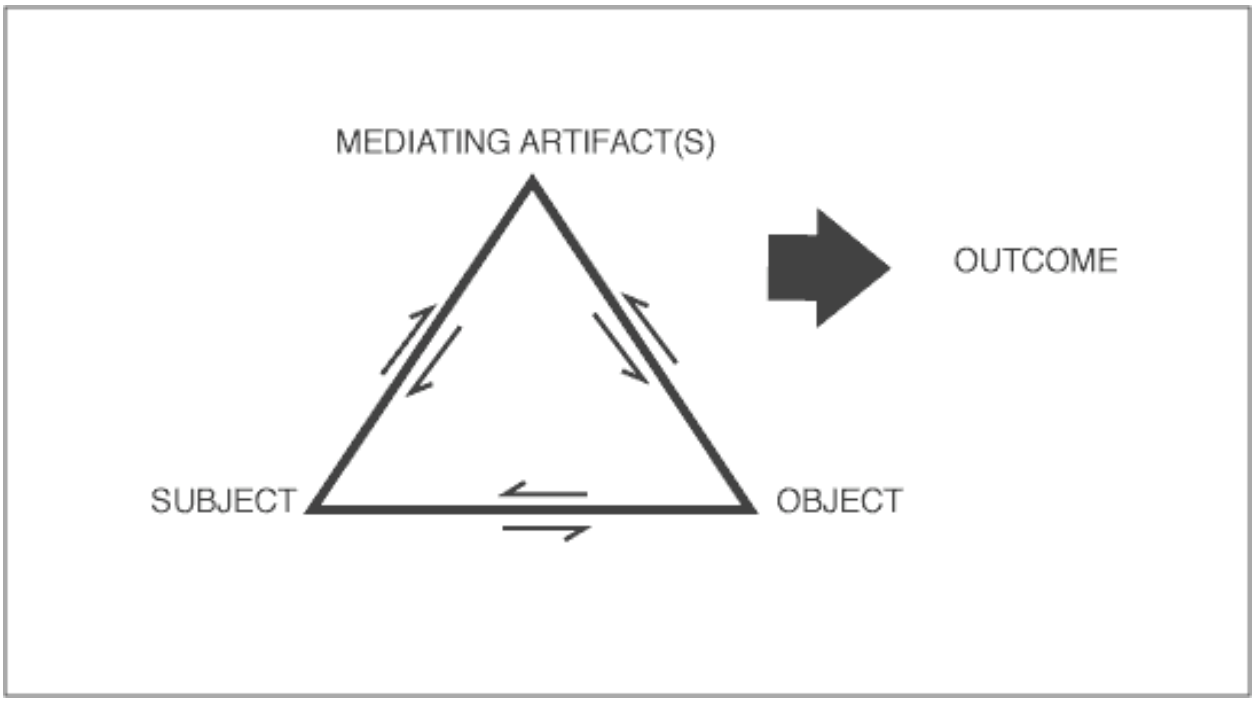

Figure 2-1: Action Model

workbench user participates alters a field of visual information to achieve a desired outcome. In this study, application of the Gestalt visual principles and a visual grid help in the identification and assessment of changes to visual information depicted in the Flickr data images.

GESTALT PRINCIPLES

When I open my front door and step onto the street, I receive a tremendous amount of visual information delivered in a burst, as it were. Horizontal shapes of the street and sidewalk, the elevations of buildings, the colors of the un-orchestrated movement of traffic are components of what can be a chaotic, visual jumble. Yet from this chaos I find meaning and associations. I make connections between shapes. Connections among disparate visual information, and relationships among visual elements, are explicated in the principles of visual Gestalt psychology.

Making sense of the abundant visual information outside my front door begins with a holistic interpretation of the environment (Barry 1997 p. 40). I am affected by the entirety of what I see, but fairly quickly I sort out component parts. The street scene outside my door is made up of visual elements that, in sum, create a larger visual unity. The visual elements interact, and my visual perception recognizes patterns in those visual relationships. To understand the visual information of the street means bringing coherence to visual information by recognizing patterns within that visual unity (Gordon 1989 p. 53). Gestalt means a

“unified whole” (Barry 1997 p. 39), and in Gestalt theory, humans make sense of the totality of their visual environment through pattern recognition, which is dynamic, and somewhat automatic (Gordon 1989).

Gestalt theory originated with the psychologists Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Kohler, and Kurt Koffka (Moore & Fitz 1993 p. 390). Ancillary to their psychological theories, Wertheimer et al developed visual Gestalt principles to account for pattern perception. Continuing research in visual perception supports Gestalt principles, which has long been used in psychology and communication. The Gestalt principles are still considered useful in understanding relationships among visual elements (Ware 2004 p. 189).

Gestalt is not an abstract method of analysis, in the way visual social semiotic analysis seems to be disconnected from the making of visual texts. Gestalt purports to be the theory that represents innate visual perception (Gordon 1989 p. 68). Perhaps this is why Gestalt principles are often employed in the production of communicative visual materials, both print and digital. The technical communication community for some time has looked to the wealth of rhetorical information in visual elements, and Gestalt principles are often referenced in texts on technical communication and graphic arts. Bernhardt’s (1986) often cited "Seeing the Text", for example, focuses on the performance of visual elements in a document design, as understood through the Gestalt psychology of visual perception.

Not all of the Gestalt principles developed by the Gestalt psychologists are used in this project - my interest here is not to build an overarching theory of visual analysis, but instead to begin the work of understanding visual composition in everyday life. I prefer to start that work incrementally, therefore, some visual elements that are clearly rhetorically operative, such as color, are not referenced in this project.

For this project the Gestalt principles of *proximity*, *relative size*, *symmetry*, and *continuity* are especially useful because they can be easily related to what we see in everyday life. Proximity is the spatial relationship between visual objects. Relatively close proximity results in those objects being assigned to a higher unit of visual perception, in other words, we notice objects that are close together, and the degree of closeness informs about the association among those objects (Moore & Fitz 1993 p. 396). Proximity is a simple and powerful method for emphasizing relations among visual data (Ware 2004 p. 190). For example, on my walk to work I may see pedestrians clustered together. Grouping suggests some commonality, or reason for being close; perhaps the people in clusters are waiting for a bus, or for a traffic light to change.

The symmetry of visual elements and groups contributes to the perceived coherence of visual data (Ware 2004 p. 190). Asymmetrical elements can seem unbalanced or can dramatically grab attention (Moore 1993 p. 391). On my walk, my gaze is drawn to people gathered on one corner, waiting to cross to the opposite,

unpopulated corner. While symmetry can create a sense of balance, it can also be unremarkable. If both corners were similarly populated with pedestrians it is less likely that my attention would focus on one corner in particular.

The continuity principle states that visual entities are more likely to be recognized as connected, or in a group, if the visual elements are smooth and continuous (Ware 2004 p. 191). This is the visual equivalent of fitting square pegs into square holes. For example, while walking to work I pass a number of bungalows built in the 1920's. Their consistent shapes and lines contribute to my sense of being in a neighborhood. In their midst, the lone brick ranch from the 1960's seems disassociated from the wooden houses around it.

The sense of familiarity that is pervades what can be considered everyday, is due in part to Gestalt perception. Visual information is recognized as shapes, groups and patterns through Gestalt perception; The relationships among recurrent shapes become recognizable familiar. This familiarity is the basis for the typified forms of the research subjects

THE VISUAL GRID

As I continue on my walk, I perceive some regularity in patterned visual information, conveyed by relationships between numerous horizontal and vertical lines. Horizontal spacing strips divide the concrete path on which I walk into measured segments. While walking, I see stratifications of horizontal electrical lines

intersect with consistently spaced vertical utility poles. The walls of commercial buildings are made from staggered cinder blocks. The mortared block edges create evenly parsed horizontal and vertical lines that fitfully suggest a comprehensive grid.

A visual grid is suggested in the physical make up of many human-made artifacts, (at least in Western cultures), including the design of city streets (Higgins 2009 p. 89). This influence on human perception has been around for a long time. The incorporation of a visual grid into objects and constructions may be as old as writing As Higgins (2009) notes, "The history of the grid is a living history of crafted things …" (p. 11). Historically robust and seemingly ubiquitous the grid, like everyday life, seems scarcely noticed.

As Helmers (2006) defines it, a grid is "Intersecting horizontal or vertical lines that cross the surface of the image …" (p. 36), but that hardly touches on what the grid does for understanding visual information on my walk to work. Leborg's (2006) take on the grid provides some important characteristics and helps to explain why the grid is often present but rarely directly perceived, "Module system, skeleton, structure. Dividing the composition into smaller compositions that determine the design of the object or the placement of elements in the format" (p. 91). As skeleton and as structure the grid is integral to made things, and therefore its appearance is often incomplete, or suggested. An example of this is the

underlying structure of steel beams in tall buildings that is not visible, but is suggested by the location of windows and other architectural surface features.

I may not recognize grids as such on my walk, but my understanding of the visual information presented to me is greatly influenced by grid structures. The "placement of the elements" is what the grid mostly affects, and it is a characteristic of grids that is important to this project. Grids are about the "organisation of objects in space" (Roberts & Thrift 2002 p. 19). When images are looked at through a grid, the relationships among the image's components parts are made more clear, as Roberts and Thrift (2002) observe about graphic design, "Often, a layout that to uninformed eyes is a random arrangement of photographs, type and space is seen quite differently once its grid structure has been pointed out. The perceptual shift can be quite dramatic: what had looked arbitrary suddenly looks immutable" (p. 33). What Roberts and Thrift (2002) observe about grids I regard as rhetoric. It is characteristic of grids to persuade, inform and contribute to cognition, because grids emphasize or privilege some visual information. For example, the Western convention of reading from top to bottom, left to right is grid-based, and creates a hierarchy of information on a page. The application of a grid to an image is particularly effective for revealing the Gestalt principles of proximity, consistency and symmetry. Gestalt and the grid reveal the hierarchy of a document's visual order. As we will see in later chapters, the grid also clarifies the hierarchy among everyday objects.

Gestalt is also associated with alphabetic writing; designers in print media have used grids since the advent of moveable type (Behrens 1998 p. 294). The spatial relationships among letter-forms and white space are manipulated by typographical grids and design layout grids. This document is created using a word processor application, which has a default grid that determines leading, kerning, and other typographic characteristics. A grid can be seen on any lined notebook paper; the vertical lines are mostly left undefined, but the horizontal lines serve to constrain handwritten text (Roberts & Thrift 2002 p. 20). Similarly, Higgins (2009) notes that the "first known writing – cuneiform script – was engraved within drawn grids on clay and stone tablets" (p. 33). That the grid is used in alphabetic writing and graphic design, and to understand the visual compositions of everyday life, points to a commonality among inscription practices. The grid formalizes writing and composition; it minimizes ambiguity and makes the symbols used more effective at communication tasks.

In the visual analysis of specific images in this project, grids are superimposed over some images. The grids consist of evenly spaced horizontal and vertical lines, which help identify the visual elements of the research subjects (or, as they are also described in this project, their rich textual features) and clarify the Gestalt principles at work.

Grids probably guide decision-making in arranging everyday things. For example, the holes on workbench pegboards may influence the placement of tools

on what is essentially a writing surface. Incorporated grids, like the pegboard holes and the rectangular structure of office cubicles, are used in visual compositions to arrange visual information, not unlike the function of lines on notebook paper. The use of the grid is an important intersection between visual composition in everyday life and writing; both alphabetic writing and visual composition are organized by grid structures.

SEMIOTICS

The Gestalt principles and the visual grid add important perceptual understanding to what I see on my walk, but other socially and culturally based knowledge is conveyed to me through signs. The everyday artifacts in this study perform as signs that inform about social and cultural practices and relationships; however, there is an abundance of competing ways to interpret visual information through semiotics. I do not champion any particular semiotic approaches, but I am informed by these ways of signification in my analyses of everyday visual compositions.

The semiotic systems for visual interpretation differ mostly in the severity of their rules; some semiotic approaches are rigid, others more flexible in interpreting images. Lepponen (2006), at one extreme, uses a loosely structured semiotic approach that tries to comprehensively understand human relations through visual arrangements, which Lepponen (2004) terms visual orders. The concept of visual

orders lacks the rigor of visual composition as both process and product, and is not carefully articulated; however, Lepponen makes a compelling connection between what is seen in everyday life and social structure.

At an extreme distance from Lepponen are the rigid systems of Saint-Martin (1987) and the social semiotics of Kress and van Leeuwen (1984) that rely on rigorously determined systems of visual analysis. Near the center of semiotic formulation is the work of Moriarty (2002), who calls for recognition of the importance of the semiotic theories of C.S. Pierce to visual communication. It seems that rigidly formulated semiotic systems de-emphasize visual language.

There seems to be a good deal of agreement, even among semioticians, that an emphasis on linguistics and verbal language in semiotic analysis of the visual is unattractive. Barry (1997) points out that "most semiotic thinking imposes a verbal (postperceptual) structure on the visual image" (p.117). Moriarty (1994) argues for recognition of a signifying system that is not based in verbal language. Saint-Martin questions the "phonocentric dogmatism" that dominates discussion of visual syntax, and concedes that visual semiotics uses the instrumentality of verbal language (p. xii). Mitchell (1986) refers to "linguistic imperialism" in the analysis of images (p. 56).

A method of visual analysis much concerned with rules and grammar, and that is often referenced in rhetoric/composition literature, is Kress and van

Leeuwen's *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1984). Both Kress and van Leeuwen have published extensively on linguistics, education and language.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1984) see a lack of attention, presumably by the visual disciplines, to the meaningful regularities in image elements (p.1). They address that gap because, they contend, a deficiency in visual literacy may have negative consequences in a global culture increasingly turning to the visual. To remedy that lack of attention, Kress and van Leeuwen (1984) prescribe their own system of visual analysis, and essentially their version of visual literacy. Combining Michael Halliday's principles of linguistics and social semiotics, with some of Arnheim's thinking about visual analysis, the authors apparently attempt to structure a cast-iron system of visual analysis that covers every exigency.

Kress and van Leeuwen are advocates of social semiotics, a semiotic system that includes socio-cultural analysis. Social semiotics sounds a great deal like rhetoric. And many of the concepts that Kress and van Leeuwen apply to the visual are familiar to those who work in visual arts or visual rhetoric, but are described in unfamiliar ways. For example, Kress and van Leeuwen (1984) rely on something like the concept of grid, which the authors label "framing" (p. 203). There are differences in function between the grid and framing, but it is difficult to imagine a system of visual analysis that does not extensively reference prior thinking on the subject. The grid is historically and scholarly significant; there is evidence that the

grid has been part of Western culture for thousands of years (Higgins 2002). Alberti discussed the grid in 1435, as a formal element in visual art (Grafton p. 127).

Despite the literature about the influence of grids on understanding visual information, neither the grid, nor the Gestalt visual principles are mentioned in *Reading Images*. The linguistic imperialism that Mitchell (1986) associates with the semiotic analysis of images is exemplified in a disregard for the scholarship of other disciplines. I find social semiotic analysis unreliable and ultimately nonessential as an analytical tool.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Visual Methodologies, Gillian Rose's (2007) excellent compendium, includes discourse analysis, or textual analysis, as it is termed by Bazerman and Prior (2004) in a survey of approaches to visual analysis. In this section, I look at the textual approach to visual analysis described by Rose (2007), and by other writers, with an eye as to how these analytical tools might be applied to the Flickr visual data.

Discourse analysis is especially pertinent to this project; it can be used to "explore how images construct specific views of the social world" (Rose 2007 p. 146). Bazerman and Prior (2004) too, are interested in how discourse analysis, which they extend as textual analysis, is exploratory. To be accurate *discourse analysis* is the more encompassing term and textual analysis originates in discourse

analysis. However, I prefer the term *textual analysis* in this project because that is what I am doing with everyday visual compositions – analyzing texts.

In a quote that can be easily applied to everyday visual composition, Bazerman and Prior (2004) look to practices to comprehend a way of making meaning, "To understand writing, we need to explore the practices that people engage in to produce texts as well as the ways that writing practices gain their meanings and functions as dynamic elements of specific cultural settings" (p.xi). To understand visual composition in everyday life also requires an exploration of socially situated textual production. The everyday artifacts in this project can be analyzed as texts to understand the activities that produced them.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS-RICH FEATURES

The text-objects in this study are like other texts. Someone engaged with a text, must understand a text's language conventions (Wysocki 2004 p. 124). Language conventions are most helpful to cognition when they are repeated; textual features recur and are understood as arrangements of information.

Labeled "rich features" by Ellen Barton (2004), textual features contribute to the shared meaning in texts (p. 75). "Meaning" according to Barton (2004) "arises in part out of the patterned and repetitive use of rich features: If a feature is repeated within and across texts, it is likely to be typified and conventionalized as to appearance and significance …" (p. 66). Recurring, visual features characterize the

text-objects in this study. A garage workbench can be identified as such because of visual characteristics – rich features - that correspond to a conventional understanding of how a garage workbench should look. The typified forms of garage workbenches and workplace cubicles, which were used in Flickr searches, are described later in this chapter.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS – METAPHOR AND NARRATIVE

I don't explicitly rely on metaphor and narrative to analyze content in the Flickr images, but I find it necessary to talk about metaphor and narrative because they are often the basis for understanding images in rhetoric/composition. For example, King (2008) describes a module on race for a writing-intensive course, in which student writers are asked to "read" images as social and cultural artifacts for the racial metaphors contained within (p. 89). In another example, Nedra Reynolds (2007) analyzes imagery in a film about undergraduate writing, produced by Harvard University, where Harvard's bucolic scenery tells a skewed story of that institution (p. 258).

In the kind of visual analyses used by King and Reynolds, the connotations of relatively few images report on expansive cultural, social and institutional concerns; pictures of Native Americans represent race relations; idyllic campus scenes convey a narrative of Harvard as "another world". Analyzing visual information in this way can build knowledge of social and cultural landscapes, but it is also, to borrow from

Wallace Stevens (1954), discourse around ideas of the thing, and not the thing itself (p. 534).

Visual analysis that references metaphor or narrative tends to focus on a solitary reading rather than a large sampling of data. In that sense I see these forms of analysis as very much like literary analysis, where a single piece of writing informs about larger concepts. In part, because genre theory and activity theory are used in the analysis of the data sets, this project references a fairly large number of images from Flickr.

IMAGES AS TEXT

The images I see outside my front door can be read as texts for their social and cultural connotations, but they are also visual artifacts, comprised of visual elements, such as shape, line, texture, etc. I consider the dual nature of images in this chapter because it is a general problem for visual analysis in rhetoric/composition, and because I exploit that duality in this study - I look at everyday artifacts as texts and as images.

Compositional interpretation is the term Rose (2007) gives to the visual scrutiny of images in ways that do not explicitly consider social aspects (p. 38). When Rose looks (2007) at "the compositionality of the image itself" (p. 38) she considers, among other things, the components of the image, which include color and spatial organization (p. 41-50). A concern for formal, visual elements,

independent of social connotations, is one way that rhetoric/composition can deal with images. To consider only the rhetorically affective visual elements in an image is to ignore its social exigency.

METHODS OF DATA SEARCH AND COLLECTION

In this section I explain some of the choices made in gathering data for this study. I am aware that the search terms, and even the use of Flickr, in this study are rhetorical.

FLICKR

As mentioned earlier, Flickr is the source of images referenced and analyzed in this study. Flickr is an on-line, social media site for sharing digital images. Membership in Flickr is free and provides the ability to post images, and search over five billion images that are shared among Flickr members (Flickr). The collection of images available through Flickr can be searched in several ways; by a descriptive word or phrase, by tags, and by the display name of a Flickr member. Descriptive names and tags can be assigned to images when they are posted for sharing in Flickr. Searches using a descriptive phrase or phrases provided more images than did tags. Only the results from descriptive phrase searches are used in this study.

SEARCH TERMS

It makes sense to begin the search for the subjects of this study by using their common names – "garage workbench" and "cubicle". Also, I wanted to use search terms that aligned with an urge to share; joining Flickr and posting images suggests a need or desire to display information, or share with a large and anonymous audience something about oneself. I thought perhaps adding a possessive would point to a larger sense of investment in sharing the image, so I searched for "My Garage Workbench" and "My Cubicle." I also searched for "Garage Work Bench" (the misspelling produced a surprisingly large number of images), "Office Cubicle", and "Pegboard." The pegboard on a garage workbench is the most obvious writing surface. I reasoned that the pegboard search may not produce many images of the typified garage workbench form, but I might find images that would help me to talk about garage workbenches as composition and genre. The heuristic pegboard (Figure 3-6) in Chapter 3 was located in the "Pegboard" search.

SEARCH RESULTS

The searches resulting in the largest number of images, or hits, and therefore the searches referenced in this study, are below.

Search Term: Garage Workbench

Total Images: 1, 444.

Images That Show The Typified Form: 156

Search Term: My Cubicle

Total Images: 11,165

Images That Show The Typified Form: 2,981

The rather large number of hits produced by the “My Cubicle” search compared to “Garage Workbench” may have something to do with the size of populations; the number of people who work in cubicles probably greatly exceeds those who use garage workbenches. The numbers produced by the searches may also have something to do with proximity to digital technology. Office cubicles are often the sites of computer use; it may just be convenient to post images to Flickr from within office environments.

My feeling is that the significance of the numbers from both searches, while impressive, are eclipsed by the simple fact that people record and share images of mundane artifacts. In a rough census of the data sets, the Flickr images that were obviously altered in a digital image editing application, such as Photoshop, were very few - perhaps less than ten. The relatively "untouched" quality of the data images, combined with their mundane subject matter, reflect a real need or desire to share everyday circumstances, and connect author and viewer in a representation of reality. Bolter and Grusin (2000) differentiate between photographic images on the basis of their immediate, as opposed to altered, contact to reality, "The photograph

that presents itself to be viewed without irony expresses the desire for immediacy, while the photograph that calls attention to itself as a photograph becomes a representation of that desire" (p. 110).

Sharing visual compositions in everyday life is enhanced by the on-line, digital space in which Flickr operates. Flickr provides a massive and largely anonymous audience, and a way to share information about oneself with little or no risk of criticism or rejection (my impression is that Flickr aggressively polices comments about images). Flickr also greatly expands the range of rhetorical delivery. Everyday visual compositions, such as garage workbenches, used to be local, and only viewable in the home or neighborhood. Flickr, as a neighborhood, is enormous, and facilitates connecting with persons and groups with similar visual interests[3]. In a way, Flickr becomes not just a neighborhood or an office environment but an everyday life space. In Chapter 1, I describe everyday life as the sum of non-special, social interaction in individual contexts. Social media, such as Flickr may be emerging as sites or reservoirs of social action and interaction that are addendums to, or replacements for everyday life.

The Flickr searches are what Latour (1987) describes as a means "to act at a distance on unfamiliar events, places, and people" (p. 223). Indeed, data from the

[3] Flickr has a feature for building social groups, within the Flickr realm, around image subjects or shared interests. For example, there is group focused on images of home workshops.

Flickr searches comprise *collections* and are a way to "bring home" people, events etc. for study (p. 223). Latour points out that, before returning with specimens from collections, it is necessary to invent means to change the gathered items, to make them mobile, stable and combinable (p. 223). Flickr, and probably other social media that collect and store data, provide those means.

The Flickr search results have a cartographic quality; they share common characteristics that are the margins of a specific terrain. With the Flickr data I can make the many and continuous struggles for identity that take place in office cubicles, into a size and shape that is available for study. However, the portable, shareable, and manageable depiction of office cubicles is not actually made by me, but is the result of textual production by Flickr users.

Flickr users digitally record everyday events, and thereby create texts. Flickr users create the image collections; they upload their pictures, and assign names and tags that make the collection searchable, able to be refigured as another more specific (or "centred") collection. Data collections such as Flickr are useful for researchers. They are also remarkable as collections that are assembled by the items and persons being collected. Flickr images comprise "self-collections", that are also part of an expeditionary and collective "self-mapping" of everyday life, the material world, and the events, places and people of which those concepts are made.

SELECTING FOR TYPIFIED FORMS

I filtered the results of the Flickr searches for images that showed the formal features on which the typified form is based. The formal features that recur in the typified form are a bench, a pegboard mounted above the bench at 90 degrees to the bench surface, and tools placed on the pegboard. An image containing all three formal features, even if only partially, was counted as representative of the typified form.

The typified form of the garage workbench is shown in Figure 2-2. I decided to select for that typified form of the garage workbench because of my recollections of my father's workbench, and the workbenches of my brothers. There are possibly other typified forms of workbench; however, I feel strongly that the workbenches with which I am familiar are of a type, and the search results confirm that thinking. This is true also of the office cubicles examined in this study.

A typified form consists of, and is recognizable because of, recurrent visual features, which in sum result in a familiar type, or form, of artifact. The Gestalt principles have a role in the quick recognition of artifacts and objects. The subjects of this study are visually comprised of shapes, and groups of shapes. The relationships among those shapes contribute to the meaning associated with the objects of everyday life. The authors of visual compositions on workbenches and in cubicles work within recognizable forms, and also depart from those forms to create new knowledge.

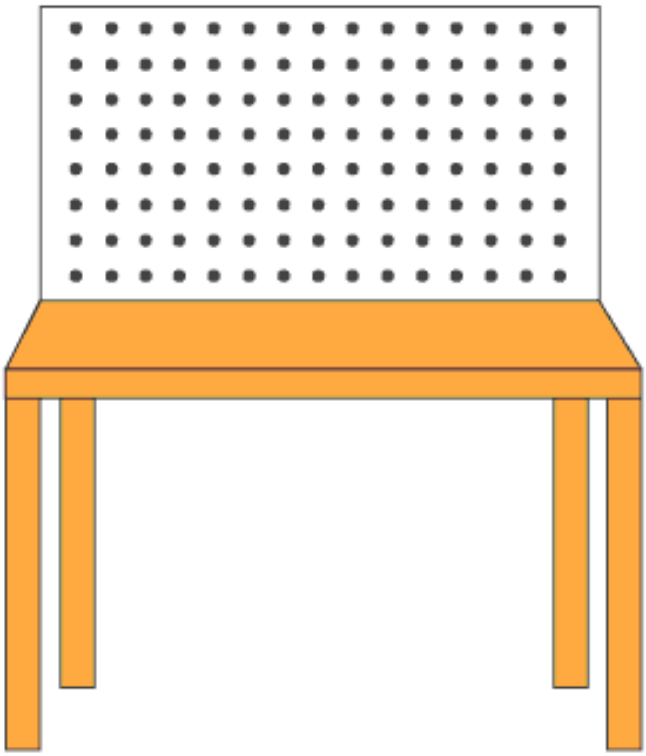

Figure 2-2: Typified Workbench Form

For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.

Figure 2-2 shows the typified form of the office cubicle. Standardization makes a typified form of office cubicles easy to identify. Indeed, One of the purposes of an office cubicle is to be a pre-determined, typified form. The formal features of the office cubicle are cubicle walls, a desk or table-like surface, a computer monitor, and personal artifacts i.e. objects that were probably introduced to the cubicle by a worker, and that are unlikely to be part of the cubicle space as supplied by an employer. If all formal features of the typified cubicle form are evident in an image from Flickr, I count it as representative of the cubicle type.

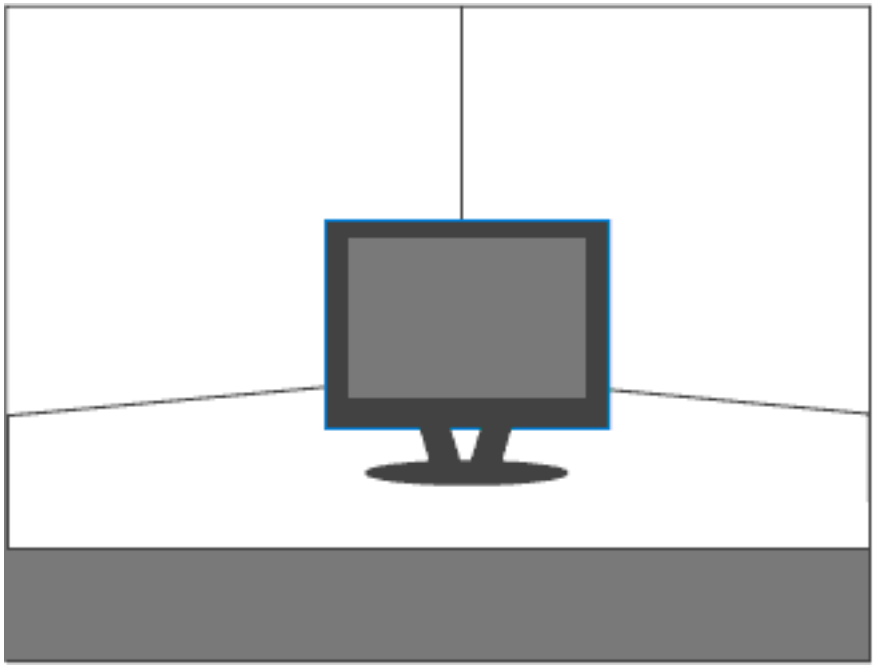

Figure 2-3: Illustration of Basic Office Cubicle

CONCLUSION

The collection of data for this study proceeds from an awareness of the social nature of Flickr, and of the implications of the choices I made in search terms, and in sorting image data.

The analyses of garage workbenches and office cubicles in the next chapters are informed by the ways of thinking about images that I present in this chapter. Because of the dual nature of the visual, I analyze the data from Flickr as images, with rhetorically active visual elements, and as texts that are signs, genre, and components in action models.

CHAPTER 3

Visual Genre, Garage Workbenches, and Composing Identity

I am not sure that I exist, actually. I am all the writers that I have read, all the people that I have met, all the women that I have loved; all the cities that I have visited, all my ancestors . . .

- Jean Luis Borges (unsourced)

INTRODUCTION

In Borges' take on identity, our selves are external, and made from parts of the world. By engaging with others, and from experiences with material things and with places in which people live, identities grow and develop[1]. I ask, "How does moving through a world that is material and social, establish and add to who we are?" More to the point of this project, I look at how arranging the material world in visually recognizable ways contributes to identity.

Identity development is but one possible outcome of visual composition in everyday life. I focus on identity because a powerful connection between identity

[1] The concept of identity on which I rely comes from Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), "The thing's *identity* would be here its uniqueness as an entity in itself and by itself, a demarcated unit having its own particular structure" (p. 21). This definition is at odds with Borges' amorphous structuring of self, and with criticisms of a sovereign self. However, in this project I am trying to connect identity to texts and textual production, and not support the "fiction of unchecked power in self fashioning" (Anderson 2009, p.167).

and writing has long been recognized[2]. The focus of this project is the meaningful arrangement of visual information in commonplace ways and circumstances. In this chapter I use identity building to demonstrate meaningfulness, and the cognitive system at work in everyday visual composition.

Implicated in identity development, according to Bazerman, (2002) are genre and activity, "These organized complexes of communications shape our ongoing relationships and identities, and within these complexes we change and develop through our sequences of mediated participation" (p. 15). By contrast, in Borges' model, the process of developing an identity moves in one direction only. We gather the makings of ourselves, but we leave no mark on the people we meet, and on the places we visit. In Borges' scheme, we read but not write.

I see social action - the products or outcomes of making knowledge[3] - contributing to identity development. For example, to visit a city is additive; the experience adds to who we are. However, to be immersed in a city is to change it.

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[2] The connection between writing/composition and identity, especially as it pertains to this chapter, is summed up in de Certeau's (1984) discussion of space for writing in contemporary life, "The child still scrawls and daubs on his schoolbooks; even if he is punished for his crime, he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it" (p. 31).

[3] "Knowledge can be seen as a product of human labor and activity: we make knowledge in universities; or, more accurately, we deploy academic genres in order to make knowledge… That making then has consequences or outcomes; it performs social action" (Pare', Starke-Meyerring, McAlpine 2002, p.182).

We add to the places in which we live by affecting people in that place, and by leaving traces, or marks of our time there.

If I were to extend Borges' recipe for identity, I would include "all the marks I made upon the world, on the people, places, and things in it." Making meaningful marks on and with things is writing[4]. In other words, writing/composing adds to who we are.

ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

The everyday subjects of this study, garage workbenches and workplace cubicles, are made artifacts whose components are arranged visually. I see these arrangements as visual compositions. Like many everyday objects their forms tend to recur. In Chapter 3, I point to a recurrent form of garage workbenches by analyzing the Flickr image data for rich textual features – visual characteristics that consistently appear in the Flickr images (Barton 2008). In this chapter, that typified garage workbench form is analyzed as visual genre.

The possibility of visual genre is previously addressed in Chapter 2. In this chapter I move beyond possibility and demonstrate an analysis of garage workbenches as visual genre. The arrangements of tools on workbenches are examined as composed texts that contribute to the development of identity and social groups, and to building social knowledge. In the course of that analysis I

[4] In Chapter 1, I make the case for an expanded definition of writing, and discuss how the term *composition* is appropriate for this project due its use in multiple disciplines.

revisit some terms and concepts that were introduced earlier in this document; Gestalt principles of perception, the visual grid, and natural language.

VISUAL GENRE ANALYSIS

To analyze garage workbenches as visual genre, I look to Miller and Shepherd's work with weblogs, and three terms that Miller and Shepherd use in their genre analysis: *formal features*, *semantic content* (substance), and *pragmatic action* (exigence). Unlike this project, Miller and Shepherd's research gives little attention to the visual nature of their subjects. Therefore, I adjust Miller and Shepherd's semiotic terms to reflect the visual aspect of the data, and the visual mode of writing in the workbench genre.

I begin the genre analysis with a section that revisits the formal features of the typified garage workbench established in Chapter 3. Formal features in garage workbenches are the rich, textual features that tend to recur, and enable identification of a type of workbench. Consistent and repeated features in visual compositions suggest rhetorical responses to recurrent social situations, i.e. genre.

In the following section, the arrangements of tools on workbench pegboards are read for their semantic meaning at the level of text. It is semantic meaning that makes tools on a pegboard a composition. The arrangement of visual information makes tool pegboards visual composition. The spatial relationships between the shapes of tools and with other objects on a pegboard, provides the semantic meaning that connects the tool pegboard to writing. These spatial relationships are

the result of choices in placement. The choices made in arranging tools are rhetorical; they inform about connections to other workbench users, and persuade and inform about the capabilities and skills of the workbench composer. To understand tool arrangements as composition, I use the Gestalt organizing principles, and the grid, a device from fine and graphic arts. Reading the visual elements of tools on a pegboard is a necessary process that leads to understanding the social purpose, or pragmatic action, of garage workbenches.

In the section on pragmatic action, workbenches are discussed in the context of social purpose, and as representatives of the genre. Pragmatic action is the application of genre theory; it is a way of asking about the usefulness, or necessity of the genre to its participants.

FORMAL FEATURES

These formal features that originate in the materiality of workbenches are explicated in Chapter 3. Here I revisit two significant, formal features of the typified form of workbench used in this study - the pegboard and the grid.

THE PEGBOARD AND THE GRID

Positioned vertically, so that it is 90 degrees to the surface of the worktable, the pegboard in our typified workbench can be used to store tools, fasteners, electrical cords and other objects. The position and orientation of the pegboard makes it an effective space for display and a means of delivering visual information. The holes on a pegboard articulate an evenly spaced, internal grid, as can be seen in Figure 3-1. Grids can highlight the Gestalt patterns and groupings among visual objects, point to hierarchies of information, and connect shapes and elements. Grids also have typographic and layout functions in the Western system of document design; they are used to align and orient type and graphical elements on a page or screen. Due to its connection to typography, and to its ability to inform about visual relationships, the grid on a pegboard can affect the organization of visual information, in a manner similar to the way lined pages affect writing by hand. The grid can also reveal the valuation of objects and spatial relationships; for example, the Western document design system places information of greatest or immediate importance in the upper left quadrant of a page, or writing surface.

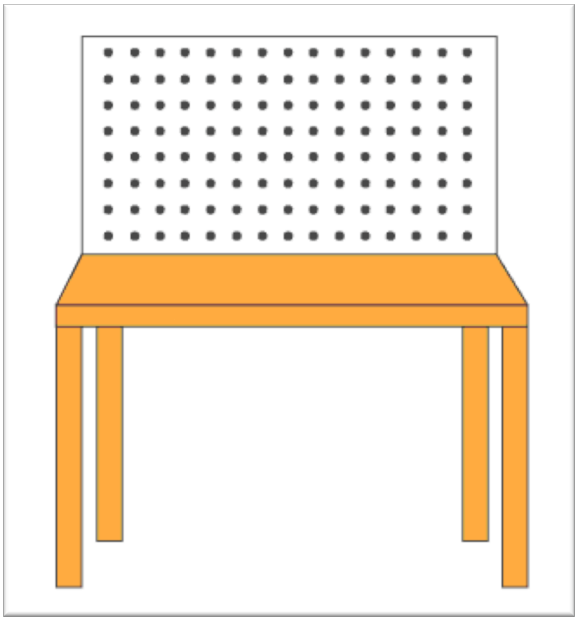

Figure 3-1: Workbench with Tool Pegboard.

The holes on a pegboard function as nodes at the intersections of implied lines; in effect, nodes visually connect shapes on a pegboard (Ware 2002, p. 190). The proximity between tool shapes, and features that shapes have in common are made more obvious by the grid. *Connectedness* and *proximity* are two of the Gestalt organizing principles that I will talk about in a moment. The grid structure, at least during the composition activity, can bring to the fore shape-to-shape relationships, and the relationship of shapes to the pegboard margins. The grid on a pegboard may influence decisions about placement, because the visual elements of tools and implements, and their relationships, are made more visually pronounced by the underlying grid structure. In the following section, I look at several workbenches and the arrangements of implements on pegboards for their semantic content.

SEMANTIC CONTENT, OR SUBSTANCE

For Miller and Shepherd, the content of blogs is meaning made with words[5]. In this study of garage workbenches, meaning is made and imparted by the visual elements of the workbench, specifically by tool shapes on a pegboard. The tool shapes correspond to units of meaning, and the workbench pegboard is the surface on which meaning is articulated.

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[5] In "Blogging as Social Action", Miller and Shepherd (2004) contend that blogs rely on a verbal rather than a visual strategy to emphasize intimacy and spontaneity. I suggest that the impact of visual rhetoric on bloggers may be under-studied as a factor that impacts intimate and extemporaneous on-line activity.

I argue in Chapter 2, that perception of everyday objects and situations relies on a natural, visual language. The shapes on tool pegboards are components of such a natural language. To understand the relationships among shapes on the workbench pegboard, what roughly corresponds to semantics and syntax, I rely on the Gestalt organizing principles. Not all of the Gestalt principles are referenced here; a more thorough discussion of visual Gestalt is provided in Chapter 2. In this chapter I use *figure and ground*, *continuity*, *proximity*, *symmetry*, and *relative size*. Another term that I use and that has already been demonstrated is *connectedness*. I also use *repetition* to talk about repeated visual patterns and shapes – a term from graphic design that is related to continuity. Essentially, Gestalt principles are the ways visual information is perceived as patterns. Patterns indicate similarity among objects, and point to hierarchies of information.

I begin this section on semantic meaning with a detailed description of the arrangement of tools on a particular workbench pegboard. Features of the workbench in Figure 3-1 are used in comparisons with subsequent workbenches, and it is helpful to later discussions to read deeply the first pegboard examined. Before launching into a detailed description of garage workbenches, I want to show an example of reading the semantic meaning in everyday artifacts that will make the analysis of garage workbenches more digestible.

AN EXAMPLE OF SEMANTIC MEANING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

To understand arranging tools on a garage workbench as composition it might be helpful to first look another mundane arrangement of information. A fireplace mantle is a display space; by virtue of being placed there, whatever is on the mantle achieves a certain status. Often framed pictures are placed on fireplace mantles; the pictures are positioned, elevated really - to be seen by those who live in the home and by visitors.

If more than one picture is placed on a mantle some decisions must be made about the valuation of those objects. Each picture will have a particular significance to the arranger. Perhaps a cherished wedding picture is front and center, or a framed portrait of a beloved family member. The content of the picture frames are also interrelated: we can't have Uncle Buddy and Aunt Mae next to each other on the mantle – they haven't spoken in years!

An arrangement of family pictures on a mantle informs about the arranger of the pictures. Decisions of placement report on the arranger's family ties, their relationship to the family at large, to the family history, and uniquely declares their place in that group. The arranger of tools on a workbench makes similar choices in valuation, display and placement that report on him/her in corresponding ways.

A FIRST LOOK AT TOOL ARRANGEMENT

The workbench in Figure 3-2 has four sections of pegboard, framed by a wooden border. This framing accentuates the Gestalt principle of *figure and ground* (Gordon 1989, Ware 2004). The rectangular borders of the pegboard sections establishes the ground, segments the field of view, and provides reference for the size and positions of the objects within the frame. The frame unifies the objects in each section in a common area (Ware 2004 p. 195).

Figure 3-1: Garage Workbench with Four-Panel Pegboard

Because the view of the workbench in Figure 3-2 is at a severe angle, it is difficult to get a sense of the overall pegboard. I provide Figure 3-3 to show the spatially corrected relationships of the shapes on the pegboard sections, and to label the pegboard sections for reference. I refer to both Figures 3-2 and 3-3 in the discussion of this workbench.

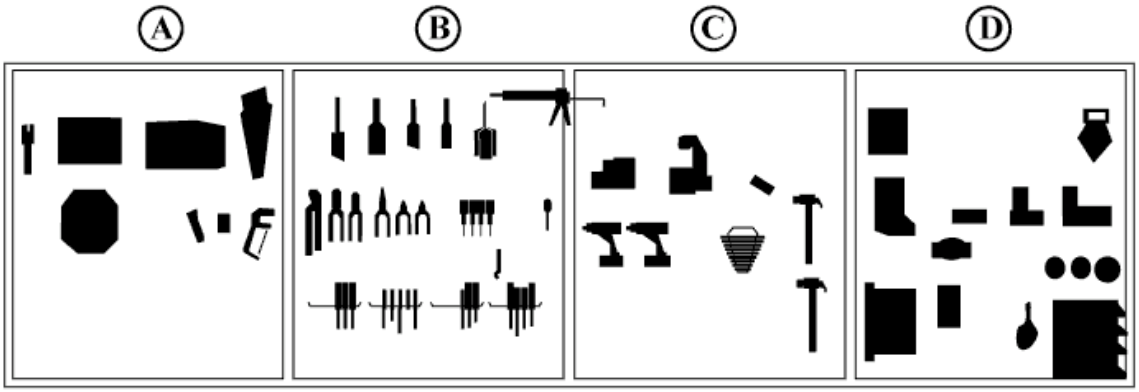

Figure 3-2: Corrected View of a Four-Panel Pegboard

Overall, there is a rough *symmetry* to the distribution of tools on the pegboard sections along a horizontal or diagonal axis. The Gestalt principle of *symmetry* contributes to a sense of a visual whole (Barry 1997, Ware 2004). The unused space in the lower half of section A is partially occupied by the vertical drill press and by the vise that are on the workbench surface. That space is counterbalanced, to an extent, by the shapes in the uppermost row of section D. The rectangular shapes in section A and D that "book-end" the workbench panels suggest a less complete symmetry along a vertical axis.

Function seems to guide the organization of artifacts on the pegboard; pliers, hammers, paint brushes – each tool-type is accorded its own space. However, this strategy for grouping is not absolute. Where function is not obvious, as in the tool cases in the top row of section A, shape can be the basis for grouping.

Each pegboard section has shapes within in it, and each shape has ample space for display, which is to say that the *proximity* between tools allows for clear expression of shapes in most instances. Proximity indicates or establishes

relationships between shapes; closer proximity between shapes suggests commonality.

Uneven proximity between tools creates the perception of groups of shapes within the frame borders. Some groups have latitudinal shapes, such as the screwdrivers in section B. For the most part, the groups are in closer proximity horizontally than vertically. Proximity, as it is used in the Figure 3-2 workbench, creates the perception of horizontal rows. Horizontal rows are most clearly perceived in section B of Figure 3-3.

There looks to be a clear effort to arrange tool shapes in rows, but two vertical groups are also evident: saws and hammers. These are longitudinal shapes, paired along vertical axes, and each saw and hammer are in line with a horizontal row. Even though they are longitudinal shapes grouped vertically, the proximity of saw and hammer shapes respectively, reinforces the dominating sense of horizontal rows. Due to the *repetition* of hammer-shapes, the second hammer suggests another step in a final, incomplete row.

Also reinforcing the sense of horizontal organization is the *continuity* of screwdriver-like shapes in section B in Figure 3-3. Shapes are more easily recognized as distinct visual entities when they are smooth and continuous (Gordon (1989), Ware 2004). The arrangement scheme resembles text on a page or a screen; when one line or row fills a section, the shapes wrap, or are hard-returned to the

next row. This is especially the case in section B in Figure 3-3, where the horizontal rows are most fully articulated.

What is the semantic meaning of the workbench in Figure 2? What does the arrangement of tools tell us? By looking at the workbench pegboard, what do we know of the author(s) of that arrangement? From the visual elements of the observed workbench image, I see the following indications of semantic meaning; a sense of careful placement, emphasis on horizontal rows, and the wide distribution of tool shapes.

A SENSE OF CAREFUL PLACEMENT

The arrangement of tools on the pegboard in Figure 2 shows regard for organization. Tools are grouped according to type or function, e.g. hammers and saws. Grouping tools in that way, can of course, reflect practical necessities. Those tools used most frequently, or those with awkward shapes that preclude other storage choices, are obvious candidates for placement on a pegboard. Tools are also grouped according to shape; as noted earlier, section B in Figure 3-3 has a predominance of groups of vertically oriented shapes. Creating micro-groups based on shape, within a larger shape-based group (section 3-3 B) indicates an awareness of several things; the space available on the pegboard, the relationship between shapes and the ground on which they are placed, i.e. the pegboard. It also shows consideration for the relationship between shapes, and for sensitivity to the Gestalt principles of continuity and repetition. Multiple authors can also affect the use of

pegboard space. The objects on a workbench may not be under a single person's control; there is the possibility that competing or conflicting organizational schemes impact the placement of tools.

Even so, the workbench user or users, makes choices about the placement of tools and other items on the pegboard. These choices are informative and rhetorical. They demonstrate a preference for certain tools and strategies for display, and can point to claims about the workbench user's skill with tools. When tool arrangements are looked at as information, the practicality of tools on a pegboard becomes complicated[6].

The arrangement of tools we see in Figure 2 is visual composition; effort is expended to produce the specific arrangement that we see. A visual composition of tool shapes on a pegboard is a display of the tools available to that composer, and reports on the expertise implied by those tools. The visual composition in Figure 2 is writing about workbench users in general, and about a specific arranger of tools.

[6] The term "practical", when it is used to denote efficiency or convenience, can be misleading. The social nature of humans makes communication a practical necessity. As Latour (2007) points out, the range of "social" includes the technological devices and artifacts that facilitate our activities as humans. Every arrangement of tools is practical in that it informs about a workbench user, to themself and to others. Part of the practical work of tools on a pegboard is to communicate something about the arranger of the visual information.

EMPHASIS ON HORIZONTAL ROWS

The rows on the pegboard in Figure 3-2 bring to mind the lines on a page. It is a stretch to say that the arrangement of tools in Figure 2 follows the Western system for organizing alphabetic symbols. But as we will see in this chapter, there are many possibilities and rationales for the use of pegboard space. That some tool arrangements on pegboards resemble the layout of print texts is probably not accidental. Correlating tool arrangement on a pegboard to the form of print text points to the workbench user's awareness, on some level, that tool arrangements are informative, and even heuristic.

Arranging tools in ways that echo alphabetic writing may be a default strategy by the workbench user; we may be seeing, in the placement of tool shapes, the influence of alphabetic literacy. However, the resemblances between alphabetic layout and tool arrangements are always incomplete or inconsistent, because tools arranged on a pegboard is not alphabetic writing - it is visual composition, and has its own internal structure[7].

[7] I am careful about seeing connections between visual arrangements and the way text is composed on a page. Certainly, there are similarities among all of the compositional modes, which is one reason I use the term "composition" in this project. However the similarities among modes only extend so far. The visual compositions of everyday life at times also resemble graphic art and "reading" tools on some pegboards is not unlike reading hypertext, "The process of reading a hypertext is something akin to reading a text and, at the end of each paragraph, instead of moving to the paragraph directly following, choosing among a number of paragraphs that might be read next" (Johnson-Eilola 1993, p. 382).

Perhaps most importantly, the generously spaced horizontal rows in the Figure 3-2 workbench is an effective way to retain grouping by shape and function, while maximizing the distribution of tool shapes within the pegboard sections. This workbench arrangement is informative as a whole; the specifics of the pegboard content are not emphasized. Overall, the Figure 3-2 pegboard suggests a certain level of capability, and conveys a sense of readiness. What generates this perception of skill and readiness in Figure 3-2?

DISTRIBUTION OF TOOL SHAPES

A result of distributing tools across the pegboard in rows is that all tools and objects are available for display. Such a display declares the workbench user's proficiencies[8]. As each tool shape is associated with kinds of operations, more tools suggest more skills. It may be that no particular visual information is most important to the arranger of tools in Figure 3-2; what might be paramount is the totality of visual information on the workbench. Shapes and rows that parallel the horizontal dimension of the pegboard prevent gaps in the visual pattern, and preclude a corresponding sense of vacancy. Gaps in pegboard space may equate to gaps in skills.

[8] A similar observation is made by Shove (2007) about kitchen practices that are "organized around a physical landscape of material possibilities. It is in this sense that we observe an enduring connection between 'doing' and the appropriation of specific artefacts and of kitchen spaces…" (p. 37).

A sense of readiness is conveyed by all pegboard arrangements - the tools on a pegboard are “at hand”. However, tool arrangements vary in the effectiveness of presenting tools as available, and as we will see, some arrangements obscure or minimize the visual impact of the tools.

A SECOND ARRANGEMENT SCHEME

I introduce Figure 3-4 as a contrast to the arrangement in Figure 3-2. Tool arrangements are the products of choices, and to understand the activity of arranging tools, i.e. to see that activity as composition, it is useful to compare arrangements that show different responses to similar problems.

Figure 3-3: Sparsely Populated Pegboard

Both tool arrangements show an internal organization. Where Figure 2 has horizontal rows and a mostly even distribution of tools, the objects on the pegboard in Figure 3-4 are arranged on the margins. Some horizontal rows are evident near the lower edge of the pegboard in Figure 3-4; otherwise, tools are crowded vertically along the left and right pegboard edges.

The figure and ground relationship is exaggerated in Figure 3-4. Placing tool shapes along the margins makes the ground a prominent visual element in the composition. What we see in the Figure 3-4 arrangement are some tools - the figures, and a large area that is void of tools - the ground. Indeed, the composition informs about the lack of tools, unlike Figure 2, where the arrangement suggests an abundance of tools. The pipe wrenches and the yellow handles of the large crescent wrench on the left, the diagonal shape emerging from the grease gun and the yellow triangle on the right, point to the unused, center space in Figure 3-4.

Where Figure 3-2 shows a display of tools available for use, the arrangement strategy in Figure 3-4 emphasizes the space that is available for tool placement. Given the abundance of space on the pegboard in Figure 3-4, there are no apparent spatial limitations on where tools could be placed. The vacant space in the center of the pegboard is the result of choice, as is the distribution of tool shapes across the pegboard in Figure 3-2. The semantic meaning of the arrangement of tool shapes in Figure 2 is declarative: the visual composition in Figure 3-4 is low key. In Figure 3-4, the placement of tools seems tentative, and the user appears reluctant to display what tools he/she has. The Figure 3-4 arrangement suggests something like wallflowers at a social function, too timid to interact in the social center.

A THIRD APPROACH TO ARRANGEMENT

Figures 3-2 and 3-4 do not comprise a binary of possible tool arrangements; the possible combinations and configurations of tools are probably endless. The

variety of tool arrangements seen in the Flickr data are due to differences in available space, the tools at hand, and in personal choices of workbench users, which are likely influenced by connections to other workbench users and arrangements. The significance of these differences is discussed later in the section on pragmatic action.

A third tool arrangement, shown in Figure 3-5, is also a response to the problems of arrangement and distribution faced by the workbench users of Figures 3-2 and 3-4. This workbench user has chosen to group tools on one half of the pegboard. Tools are placed on the pegboard in an area flanked by a wall on the right hand side, and by the wire baskets near the center of the pegboard. The left side of the pegboard is mostly unoccupied. The large empty space on the Figure 3-5 pegboard brings to mind the empty center in the Figure 3-4. There is an important difference, however, between the workbenches.

Figure 3-4: Workbench with Partially Populated Pegboard

Unlike Figure 3-4, the workbench user in Figure 5 has ample tools to fill the pegboard space, yet chooses to limit tools to the right hand side of the pegboard. The tool arrangement shows both horizontal and vertical organization, and the arrangement of tools in Figure 3-5 appears to have proceeded from the right to the left side of the pegboard. I say this because visual organization on the pegboard is more pronounced on the right, and diminishes as I look to the left side of the pegboard. The level, the coping saw and the large, rectangular drill index form a column on the far right of the pegboard, due to commonalities in their shapes (*continuity*) and by proximity. Left of that column, a hammer and a socket wrench/index are arranged vertically. However, columns become less structured towards the left side of the pegboard.

Some rows are evident in Figure 3-5, but not the extent seen in Figure 3-2. One row is along the lower right of the pegboard. Another row is arranged along the upper right edge of the pegboard. The hammer shapes are aligned with the level and the coping saw. Again, the rows are less structured on the left side of the tool arrangement.

Tools are placed in ways that fill unused space, but do not articulate groups based on shape, function or proximity. An example of this, near the top of the pegboard, is the clamp positioned in the area between a hammer handle and a large screwdriver. Other examples of shapes that fill space without contributing to visual

patterns are the triangle and the horizontal channel locks. These shapes are not clearly in either rows or columns, and are unrelated in function.

Another placement that disrupts the formation of groups and patterns are the hammers near the top of the pegboard. Hung in opposite, vertical orientations, the arrangement of hammers reduces the space required by the hammerheads, and allows for closer proximity, but runs counter to the principles of continuity and repetition. The hammers are not in a clearly articulated group because of the abrupt change in the orientation of the hammer tool shapes. Also, the proximity between hammers is scarcely different from the proximity between all other tool shapes.

A consequence of the way figure and ground is used in the composition is that most of the unoccupied space is concentrated on the left side of the pegboard. On the right side of the pegboard the strategy seems to be to eliminate as much negative space as possible, to "fill up" that side of the pegboard. Negative space, what some call white space, is unoccupied space that is necessary to semantic meaning. In alphabetic writing, for example, the spaces between letters, words, sentences etc. are informative, and necessary for the audience to understand what is written. What meaning is conveyed by this exaggeration of figure and ground?

The space on the left may be reserved for additions to the tool arrangement. Perhaps these tools are larger, or are specialty items associated with specific uses, or skills. The effect in this composition is one of leaving an empty seat for the

expected arrival of a colleague; there is a sense that more tools are on the way. Another way to read this arrangement has to do with mastery of the genre.

The Western system for arranging information creates a hierarchy from left to right, and from top to bottom. Information in the upper left quadrant is elevated in importance, while the lower quadrant is the least valued part of a page. This workbench user begins his/her arrangement on the right; what is to come is either highly valued or the workbench user is uncertain, or unconfident, in his/her choices in arrangement. Starting on the right is a way of hiding in plain sight. This is not unlike the arrangement in Figure 4 that devalues the tools on display by placing them on the edges of the pegboard.

I surmise that the workbench user started the process of arranging tools by positioning the large, rectangular drill index. The user then had to make choices, based on the location of that one object, about using rows or columns, and about creating groups by differentiating space between shapes. Spreading from the rectangular drill index, we see in Figure 5 that all possible options in arrangement are enacted. There are hints of rows and columns, as well as groups and disconnected, individual shapes.

It is unclear in Figure 5 arrangement that the workbench user has decided on an arrangement strategy. By contrast, in Figure 2, we see a comprehensive presentation of tool types that maximizes the use of pegboard space. It is plausible that the workbench user in Figure 5 made some early choices in composition that

resulted in difficult problems later in the process. As we know, this happens in writing.

SUMMARY OF SEMANTIC MEANING

Each workbench looked at in this section shows distinct responses to the organizational possibilities presented by arranging tools on a pegboard. Working within a form that recurs, each pegboard is an opportunity for a workbench user to write/compose. There is no single correct way to arrange tools on a pegboard; there is only the form that the workbench user recognizes, and a space within that form in which to meaningfully arrange visual information. Drawing upon tools and materials, workbench users transform pegboard space into a text that uniquely reflects the workbench users themselves, depicts their range of skills with tools, and their relationship to the workbench form. The semantic meaning of tools on a pegboard emerges from the tension between adhering to a form and making choices in arrangement that depart from it. The variations in tool arrangements reflect the workbench users as individuals. At the same time, working within a typified form declares affiliation with groups or communities of workbench users. In the next section on pragmatic action I discuss the social significance of the workbench genre as individual expression and as a recurrent, ancestral form.

PRAGMATIC ACTION, OR EXIGENCE

Miller and Shepherd ask about the social exigence of blogs, "What typified social action do blogs perform? How do bloggers talk about their own purposes and

audiences"? Such questions are more easily asked of the alphabetic writing in blogs that is explicitly communicative. However, one argument in this project is that when people act in everyday life, those actions are inevitably communicative: human action is rhetorical[9].

As rhetoric, the semantic meaning of garage workbenches is informative and persuasive. Pragmatic action, on the other hand, is about social purpose; it is where genre theory meets everyday life. In this section, I take stock of the pragmatic action of garage workbenches. I ask, as a visual genre what does arranging tools on a workbench pegboard have to do with people's lives? I connect the social purpose of garage workbenches to their function as *topoi*; knowledge is made and shared by interacting with garage workbenches.

I see garage workbenches associated with concerns of self and relations among selves that Miller and Shepherd recognize in blogs, "…we must characterize the generic exigence of the blog as some widely shared, recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self…" Similarly, I recognize the visual compositions on workbench pegboards as a kind of self-writing that substantiates and adds to

[9] In reviewing the development of do-it-yourself as a practice, Shove observes an "on-going' dialogue between person and property through which actual and potential projects are conceptualized and realized." In this ongoing dialogue between people and things recursive functions of tools (as in hand tools), "objects are not semiotically communicative, they are also pragmatically useful".

identity. Visual composition connects workbench users to other users, some of them ancestral.

SHARING WORKBENCH KNOWLEDGE

The *topoi* function of workbenches is heuristic. The order and placement of tools on a pegboard may act as a guide to the sequence of actions in a fabrication process. Also, a tool arrangement may inform new workbench members about the use of tools and methods of working. Figure 6 shows just such a heuristic.

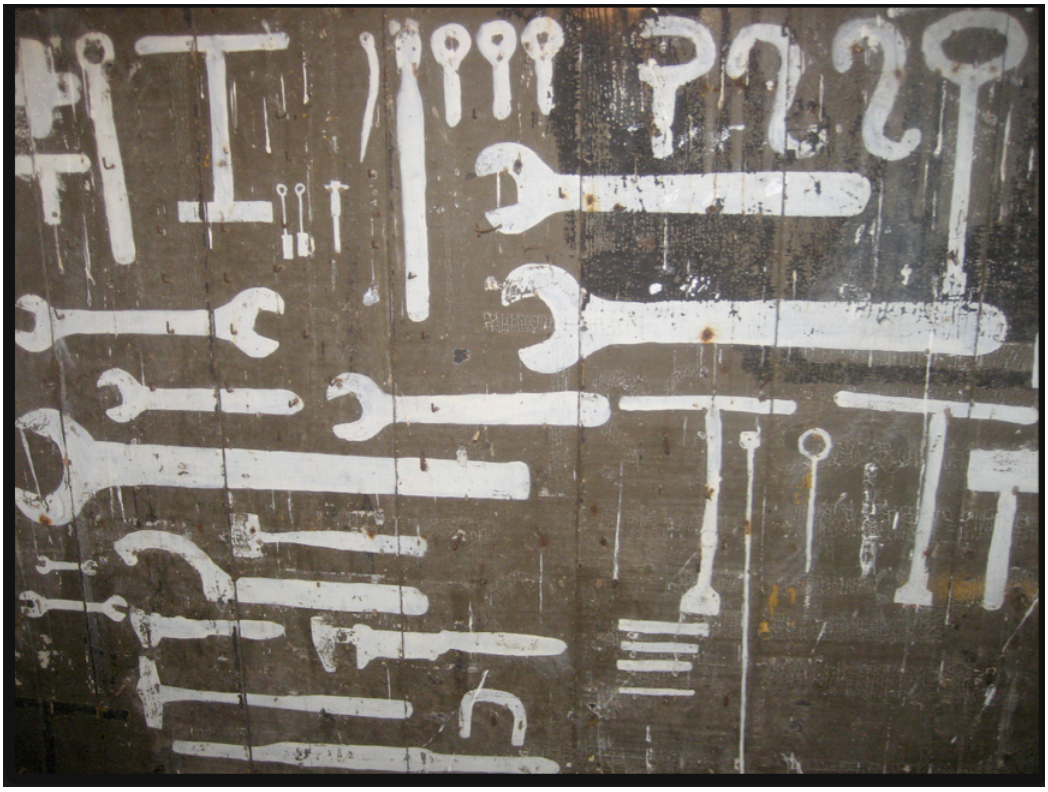

Figure 3-5: Painted Tool Shapes

The painted shapes on the pegboard in Figure 6 indicate assigned positions for tool placement. Assigning tools in this way ensures consistent organization; the

tool arrangement does not have to be re-configured each time tools are removed from the pegboard. The shapes also indicate when tools are absent from the pegboard, and prevent the loss of implements.

The painted shapes may also help novice users or apprentices to identify tools, and learn about tool applications. In effect, the Figure 6 board is a pedagogical device; users of the pegboard are inculcated into a way of thinking about tools. The tool shapes articulate relationships between tools and families of tool types, and each time a tool is returned to its respective shape on the board the arrangement scheme is reinforced.

As *topoi*, the tool board in Figure 6 is not only a place to go to find things, it is also a relatively stable resource for information about those things, about how tools fit into a prescribed system. The tool shapes are a system for passing on an understanding of tool, processes, and activities.

As a writing surface, a tool pegboard may be especially conducive to making connections with “ancestral” workbenches, or with a community of workbench users. Bolter (2001) observes that, "each technology of writing supports a different relationship between memory and the writing surface" (p. 108). Workbench arrangements to some extent may be re-enactments of remembered social situations and activities. Located in mostly private spaces in home settings, workbenches are part of places that reproduce social structures, such as family and neighborhood. For the user of a typified workbench, displaying tools on a pegboard

affirms connections to other people and to traditions of activity. Using a garage workbench also presents possible outcomes in identity development.

My grandfather had a workbench in his garage, as did my father. My brothers too, have garage workbenches. My father's workbench visually instantiated certain activities, many of which had to do with cutting metal, since he was a machinist by trade. The possibility for acts of repair or fabrication always seemed latent in the visual presentation of his workbench. My father's ability to act, to do things with objects was represented by the pegboard display of tools and materials. The tools displayed on my father's workbench could be said to depict the range of his skills and practices. The workbench announced his self-sufficiency, and signaled my father's willingness to act in certain ways, and to attempt certain tasks. My father's workbench represented one view of him as a person. In the logic of Borge's list of identity components, my father's workbench was my father. And to continue Borge's thinking from the beginning of this chapter, I am also, to a degree, my father's workbench.

My grandfather, father and my brothers constitute a group of workbench users. Admittedly, membership in that group is limited and patrilineal. Even though the group is small, it seems unlikely that my grandfather was entirely original in his decision-making about workbenches. Somewhere in my grandfather's history there was another user of that workbench form.

Similarly, other genre participants informed the users of the workbenches in Figures 2,4, and 5. This may have happened on a local level: "The meaning of objects for a person arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him by others with whom he interacts" (Blumer 1969, p. 11). Family members, or guests in the home, can see workbenches in a garage, and speak with workbench users. And a workbench may be visible to passersby when a garage is open to view. The concept of what a garage workbench should look like, and what it means to people, is shared within social groups and local communities.

Along with views of workbenches, members of local communities share in what a workbench represents. As *topoi*, garage workbenches are local sites of predicated knowledge, based on traditions of activities and social meaning. Kress observes that "…all representation is always affective, while it is also always cognitive" (2033, p. 171). A workbench is a source of representative knowledge about workbench users present and past. I associate certain things with the remembered image of my father's workbench. Those associations are revived when I see my brothers' workbenches, and when I look at the images of workbenches in this study.

WORKBENCHES AND IDENTITY

My engagement with the world, which in Borges' terms is my self, is informed by views of workbenches. This is true also for workbench users, who share in the activities and behaviors connected to workbenches. Interaction with a typified

workbench form is cognitive; it provides insight into possible roles and actions for ourselves and for others, "As we understand the behaviors of others through typifications, we also develop the terms by which to direct our own behavior and participation, for we believe we are acting in that same typical world as others (Bazerman 2002, p. 20). To illustrate the mechanism by which genre influences identity, Bazerman (2002) depicts a situation from everyday life.

> You also know that if you hang around a certain place long enough you will become the kind of person who hangs around that kind of place – you know your way around the place, how to act there, what to say there, who fits or misfits, and who is a newcomer, The places you habituate will develop those parts of you that are most related to oriented towards the activities of that place. (p. 14)

Like places that people habituate, the recognizable garage workbench form orients community members to certain activities: people see workbenches and they understand the role of workbench user. By participating in the workbench form, workbench users share in characteristics and values represented by tools on a pegboard. To paraphrase Bazerman, if a person hangs around a workbench long

enough, they become the kind of person that uses a workbench, which includes composing tool arrangements for display.[10]

Becoming a certain kind of person entails more than "hanging around"; arranging everyday artifacts is activity whereby people transform into group members and into uniquely expressed individuals. In the next chapter I examine the role of everyday visual composition as mediated, transformative activity.

[10] Genre also informs about a lack of possibility. By convention, women in my family do not work with tools or use workbenches. Emmons (2009) points to the power of genre to limit, "This is the power inherent in choices of genre; to position subjects and to allow them to inhabit (only) particular social roles" (137).

CHAPTER 4

Office Cubicles and Identity: Activity, Resistance, and Transformation

As our grandmothers warned, if you hang around the race track long enough, you become one of those race track characters.

- Charles Bazerman (2002 p.14)

INTRODUCTION

Figure 4-1: Novice Workbench

Bazerman makes an analogy between the influence of place, and the effect of writing genres on identity. If one writes or reads in a writing genre long enough, they acquire a way of thinking and acting reflective of that genre, as part of their identity. The transformation of identity through genre to which Bazerman refers is suggested in the images of garage workbenches seen in Figures 4-1 and 4-2.

The workbench in Figure 4-1 appears to be commercially produced; perhaps the bench was sold as a kit that can be assembled. The tools look to be newly purchased - many of the tools we see in

Figure 4-1 are in still in their packaging. The user of the workbench in Figure 4-1 also appears to be new to the genre, based on the arrangement of tools. Tools are grouped neither by shape, nor by function, and despite having sufficient space the arrangement chosen by the workbench user does not accommodate all of the tools on the pegboard. The Figure 4-1 workbench points to a user who is early in their participation in the genre, and makes what might be imitative moves towards becoming a more competent, and self-realized, workbench user.

In sharp contrast to the workbench in Figure 4-1, the Figure 4-2 workbench is an articulation of a master of the genre. In the very comprehensive arrangement in Figure 4-2 tools are arranged by shape and by function. Indeed, the workbench in Figure 4-2 could probably function heuristically; something of the use and application of tools could be learned by studying this workbench arrangement. The workbench in this image says something about the level of expertise and commitment of this workbench user - the user of this workbench is very much a kind of workbench "character", to use Bazerman's term.

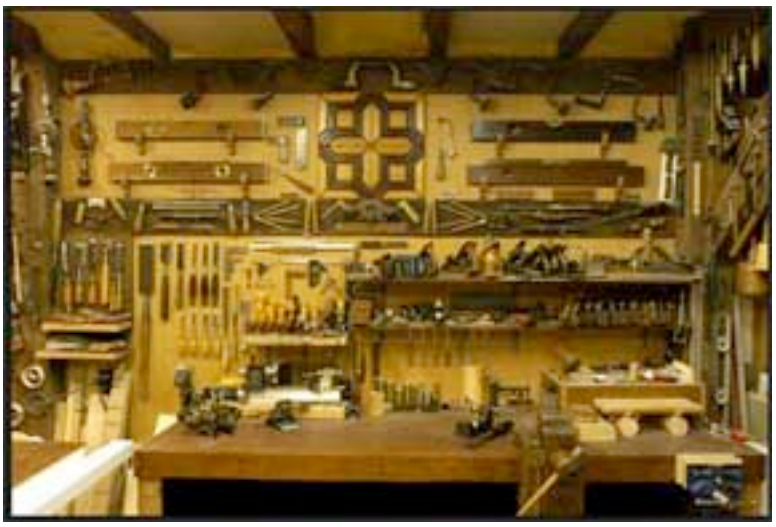

Figure 4-2: Master Workbench

The mechanism by which the transformation of identity through genre occurs is not fully explained by Bazerman, but as I read that Bazerman quote I think of my father, who could be described as "one of those race track characters".

Whether in the grandstands with other racetrack characters, or railside watching the horses, my father spent a good deal of time at horse racing venues. Contrary to the claims of Bazerman and some grandmothers, my father didn't become a race track character by hanging around race tracks, osmotically uptaking from his surroundings. The central purpose of a horse race track is to facilitate betting on the outcome of horse races, and my father availed himself of that possibility. My father's goal or mission was to play the horses, and in the process of achieving that objective my father became a race track character.

It is reductive to refer to my father as a "character" of any stripe; there was more to him as a person than his devotion to gambling, but reduction goes with the notion that genre has associative properties, and that hanging around a "type" of genre is alone sufficient to form and shape a "type" of person. Genre is best understood as social action, not social reception. Genre is not a place, in the strictest sense, but is instead rhetorical responses to recurrent social situations; genre is people doing things. Writing is one thing that people do to respond rhetorically to social situations; as a kind of writing visual composition in everyday life makes and/or contributes to genre, and to identity formation.

My father's situation as a race track character is revisited at times in this

chapter to illustrate the relationship between genre, action and identity; however, the primary subject of analysis in this chapter are the visual compositions that workers add to office cubicles. The office cubicle in Figure 4-3 shows a visual composition of personal items arranged near the laptop computer. Like garage workbenches, workplace cubicles is a writing genre and has an identifiable, typified form. Meaningful variations on that genre form are seen in the personalizations that people bring to workplace cubicles.

Figure 4-3: Office Cubicle Personalization

I want to show the mechanism in genre that is absent from Bazerman's model of identity building. In this chapter, I look at everyday visual composition as part of action models that involve identity in various ways. As an active and dynamic writing practice, everyday visual composition in cubicles adds to the articulation of individual identities as more than types of characters. Workplace cubicles are contested spaces – visually. There are at least two, parallel, visual compositions in cubicles that affect identity; one created by the office authority or management, the other created by workers to resist workplace hegemony. Visual composition in cubicles can materially and semantically articulate the tension between an identity

that exists outside of the workplace, and a mandated role as worker.

In this chapter, I provide background on office cubicles, their role in hegemonic domination and resistance by workers to cubicle space. I refer to Vygotsky and activity theorists to connect the material activity of visual composition with internal changes in people. The chapter includes a series of analyses of visual composition in cubicles as resistance, and as identity negotiation. And, as in the analyses of garage workbenches, I use the visual grid to highlight relationships among visual elements in the genre form, and to point to semantic meaning. Unlike the preceding chapter, I forgo a formal genre analysis of workplace cubicles - the typified cubicle form is very well represented in the Flickr data, and the pragmatic meaning of visual composition in cubicles is explicated in a series of images.

CUBICLES AS SUBJECTS FOR ANALYSIS

As subjects for visual analysis the compositions in workplace cubicles and the visual arrangements on workbench pegboards differ in their spatial contexts. Garage workbenches are in mostly private spaces that may at times be available to public view (as when the garage door is open). The compositions in workplace cubicles are produced and displayed in spaces that can be described as semi-private, and even contested. Also different from garage workbenches is the presence of multiple visual compositions in cubicles; the everyday visual compositions created in cubicle spaces by office workers compete with the regimentation imposed by the

office or corporate management, and may be said to resist it.

It is common knowledge that cubicles are arranged and controlled by an administrative entity; employer, management, supervisors etc. Cubicle space is, in a sense, "on loan" to employees. The extent to which office workers can change their immediate environment can vary, and may be quite limited; for example, workers may not be empowered to re-position cubicle walls, and equipment placed by management in cubicles may be difficult or impossible to remove or even reorient.

Cubicles are often associated with regimented uniformity, characterized by a poverty of visual information. Perhaps they are visually uninteresting to workers, but standardized work environments are attractive to employers; cubicles in an office space that are nearly identical in size, shape and equipment probably reduce costs and possibly save time. (Schlosser).

CUBICLES AND HEGEMONY

Partitioning office space into cubicles may be shrewd fiscal practice, however the uniformity of cubicles calls to mind Gramsci's thinking about hegemony, in which a social class consents to the current arrangement of power, because it is understood to be the norm (McNally p. 24). Common sense, as Gramsci pointed out, is often a mechanism by which people consent to accept the hegemonic arrangement of power, even when doing so is against their best interests. In one view, the standardization of cubicles is just common sense, and appears to be the

best way to arrange workers in limited space. The "common sense" of working in a cubicle, and of being an "office cubicle character" is sustained by the visual genre of the cubicle space.

Office cubicles, like horse race tracks, facilitate certain practices and actions, and the becoming of a certain kind of identity. Part of an active process of identity transformation, the action of arranging visual information in cubicles is performed by workers and by employers alike. In a study of textual practices in an engineering firm, Winsor (2003) comments on genre, "But when a genre has been institutionalized … then the recurring form of the genre can also be used to encourage people to perceive situations as similar and to behave in ways that the genre calls for. That is, genres can invoke a situation as well as result from it" (p. 16). Genres can also invoke, or contribute to identity. The office cubicle, as arranged by the employer, is a recurrent visual composition that helps to render the external components of worker identity, such as memories and family relations, extraneous.

CUBICLES AND REALITY

As first conceived by the Hermann Miller Company, office cubicles were meant to accommodate change and facilitate the flow of information in the workplace. Non-permanent office walls would allow for flexible work spaces that could be adjusted to reflect the needs of workers (citation). Indeed, Probst and the Hermann Miller Company saw the modern office reflecting the changes in social

norms experienced in the 1960's (Probst). Central to the Action Office, Hermann Miller's initial cubicle product line, was the idea that workspace mirrors an external reality (Probst 1968 p. 33). Robert Probst (1968), a former Director of Research at Hermann Miller, sees the office as a manageable, and representative space, "The management of symbolic representation of reality is the function of offices" (p. 19), The Probst quote resonates with the regulatory effect, noted by Winsor (2003), that institutionalized genre can have on behavior (p. 16)

The irony of Probst's statement about the function of offices is profound in light of the rigid standardization of work space accomplished through cubicles. Cubicles are a managed representation of reality, but probably not a reality that Probst imagined. Cubicles reflect a reality desired by the employer, an ideal, minimally distracting work situation. The cubicle, as constructed by the employer, visually communicates – and calls for - worker participation in a consensual, and probably fictive reality. "Employee communication - purposeful communication through official (controlled) channels, that is designed for employees and, in conjunction with other means, aims to inform them about, involve them in, and commit them to, approved representations of an imaginary organisation - is closely bound up with the perceived need to motivate and involve employees" (Connell 49).

In the following section, I write about the basic cubicle as visual composition (produced by the employer) to dispel the notion that the cubicle is a blank slate on

which the cubicle occupant makes graffiti-like inscriptions. Cubicle occupants create visual compositions from a particular situation as employees, which must be recognized in order to understand their meaning-making. I argue that the basic form of the cubicle, as shown in Figure 4-4, is purposeful communication, in the form of a visual composition created by the employer. This visual composition is rhetorically affective in two ways.

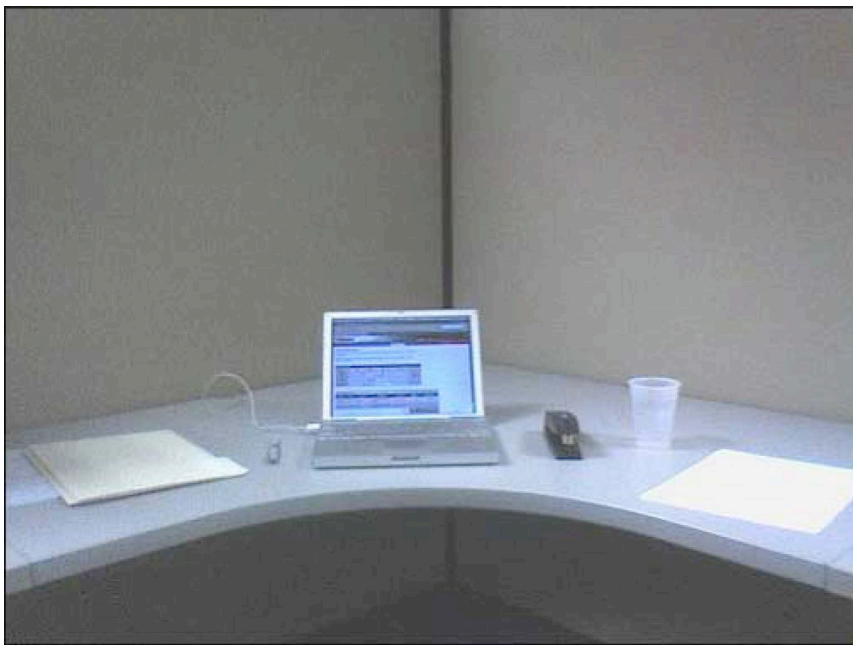

Figure 4-4: Basic Cubicle

1. The visual poverty of the cubicle is selective, and excludes references to an exterior reality.

As shown in Figure 4-4, there is little in the basic cubicle composition that does not refer to work, or could divert a worker's attention. Few, if any, artifacts are provided, and the colors are what I term "aggressively neutral." A table or bench allows for a computer/monitor to be centrally positioned.

Workspace standardization makes cubicle space the default norm for certain

classes of employees. And workspace arrangement reflects the arrangement of power in the workplace. The hierarchical regime is materially and visually represented in the work environment, or as Probst (1968) puts it, the office cubicle manages the symbolic representation of reality (p. 19). Cubicle occupants must accept the physical, visual space to which they are assigned, and the place in the hierarchy to which the space corresponds. In Winsor's (2003) excellent book on the dynamics of text and power in the workplace, there can be seen a clear separation in workspace that reflects differences in worker class. Bosses and supervisors work in offices; engineers and other technical personnel work in cubicles (p. 64). Accepting an assigned workspace is a form of consent, and consent is essential to maintaining the office hegemonic structure.

The basic cubicle imposes a narrowly defined and limited identity on the cubicle occupant. Separated from references to a life outside of the workplace, cubicle occupants are given alternative references on which to base a self-schema, such as office tools and materials, and most notably the computer monitor. Cubicles contribute to the hegemonic structure by reinforcing, or enforcing, a commonality among cubicle occupants - consent must be shared among workers for it to be effective.

2. In the employer version of the cubicle visual composition, the computer monitor is a locus for the worker's attention.

In the Flickr image data, computer displays are frequently seen positioned centrally in the cubicle space. Indeed, cubicles often appear to be designed around the location of the monitor. The computer/monitor is a bundle of representations about work and identity; therefore, the location of a monitor or monitors in a cubicle is usually controlled by the employer as an important part of managing office reality. To be a worker is to accept assignments and to perform tasks. If a cubicle is equipped with a computer, work assignments probably entail some engagement with the computer display.

The presence of the monitor in the cubicle is constant and insistent. It quite possibly enacts an Althusserian-like call to the cubicle user, a call to work (Jasinski 2001, p. 320). It is possible to occupy a cubicle and not be a worker, but it is difficult to see how an employment relationship might continue if a cubicle occupant defers from using the computer, if that is part of assigned work.

Engaging the monitor signals acceptance by the cubicle occupant of assigned tasks and with that acceptance comes entanglement with the ideology of the workplace, the structure of the organizational regime, and one's place in that structure. To be interpellated as a worker is to assume an identity as a worker. Of course, everyone using a cubicle already has identity components in place, before arriving at the cubicle on the first day of employment.

CUBICLES AS REFLECTION

As with all compositions, the basic cubicle is the result of rhetorical choices made by the employer. Color, arrangement, materials, and most telling, the decision to use standardized cubicles in office design, reflect an employer's priorities and values. The manifestation of the worker identity is a by-product of the process of production in the office environment/office cubicle. I don't know if employers' intend to transform the identities of their employees; I suspect that identity transformation is a natural outcome of the visual rhetoric of the basic cubicle, and the work performed there.

Up to this point I have argued that the workplace environment, specifically the visuality of the cubicle, affects the psyche or identity of those working in cubicles. This apparently contradicts my initial position that environment alone is insufficient to transform identity. I used the example of my father and his predilection for betting on horse races as an example of identity affected through action, rather than from simply spending time in a place. A similar transformation is accomplished through engagement with the material environment of the cubicle. In other words, identity transformation occurs when people do things, with stuff, in places like race tracks and cubicles. The primary stuff in cubicles, as seen in Figure 4-4, is the computer monitor. Significant adjustments to identity can happen through engagement with computer/monitors.

A large assumption, at the core of my argument, is that people are changed

internally by external actions. I come to that understanding through the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev (1978), and from the work of Engstrom (1996), Kaptelinin and Nardi (2001) and others who work with activity theory. Vygotsky (1978) observed that humans control their behavior through external means (p. 40). The external activity through which people engage the material world has material consequences, and also has consequences for those engaged in the activity. A good deal of human activity is in fact, mediated by objects in the world. "Tools or artifacts - physical artifacts mediating external activities - are easy to recognize, and their impact on the everyday life of everyday individuals is obvious (Kaptelinin, 2001 p. 42). These mutual transformations are possible because the human psyche reflects the material world. As Leont'ev (1978) puts it, "The reflection of reality arises and develops in the process of the development of real ties of cognitive people with the human world surrounding them; it is defined by these ties and, in its turn, has an effect on their development." (p. 13) When Probst claimed the office's purpose is to manage the symbolic representation of reality, he was, perhaps unknowingly, identifying the means by which people are transformed by the activities in which they engage in office spaces.

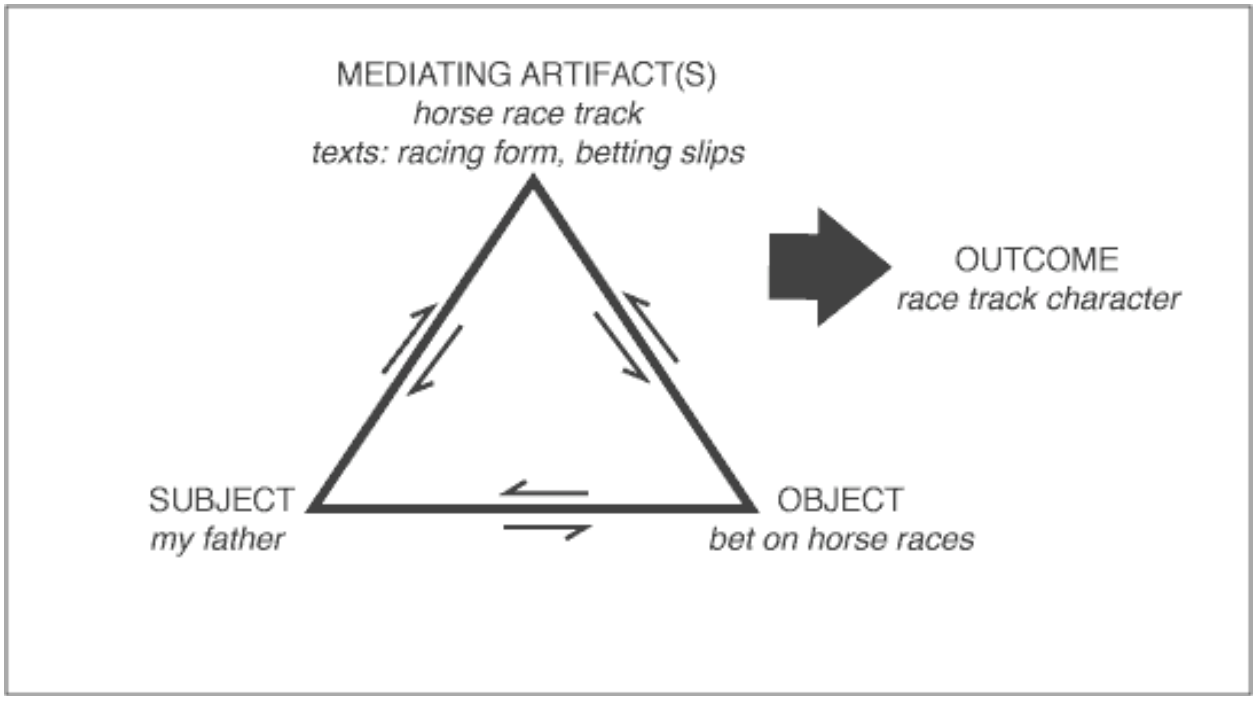

Figure 4-5: Action Model for a Racetrack Character

Let me revisit my father for a moment and look at a small part of his race track world. As I said earlier, my father acquired his race track character persona by wagering at race tracks, rather than from pernicious exposure to the race track environment. In an action model of my father's wagering, the reciprocal effect of activity can be seen.

In the Figure 4-5 model, which is based on similar constructs developed by Engeström (1999), reciprocal effects among subject, object and mediating artifact are illustrated. The outcome, while perhaps not intended, is the transformation of my father into a race track character, as Bazerman et al would describe him. What drives this pump-like arrangement is motivation or desire, which would be positioned in the model between subject and object. The temporary gratification of

the desire, or compulsion to gamble, in my father's case, would be the reciprocal effect on him from the object.

By wagering on horses my father alters the world in a number of ways, and those alterations are reflected in his identity. Leont'ev (1978) explains transformative interaction this way, "Acting on the external world, they change it; at the same time, they change themselves. This is because what they themselves represent is determined by their activity, conditioned by the already attained level of development, by its means and the form of its organization (p. 13). More succinctly, Kaptelinin and Nardi (2001) describe the relationship between internal and external transformation, "Internalization of m

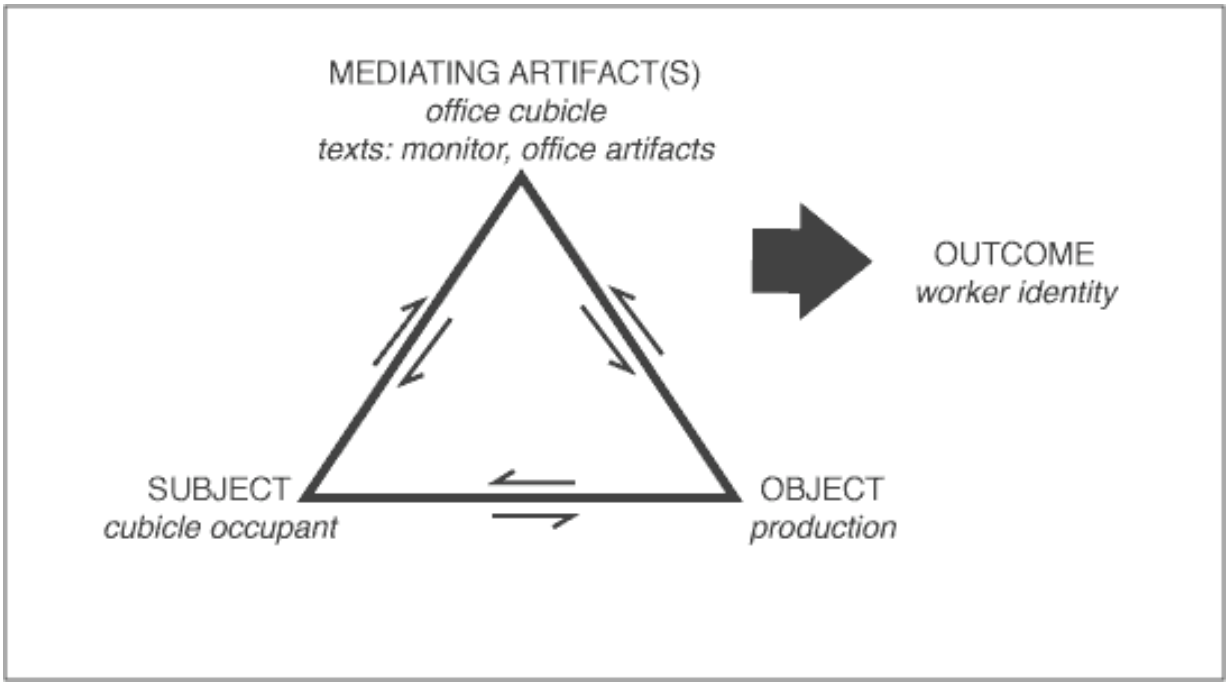

Figure 4-6: Action Model for Cubicle Production

ediated external processes results in mediated internal processes. External mediated functions become internally mediated." (p 43).

ACTION IN OFFICE CUBICLES

One example of the external effect of the workplace cubicle is shown in Figure 4-6. The cubicle occupant as subject uses tools, specifically the computer/monitor to mediate work activity. As discussed earlier, interaction with the monitor is a transformative act that reifies the cubicle occupant as worker. Of course, the model shown in Figure 4-6 represents only one instance of action in a workday that, for most of us, consists of myriad actions. And, not all of the actions performed by workers bear on their assigned tasks. People talk, move about, and interact with objects other than computer monitors. Some of the actions performed by cubicle workers includes the arrangement of personal objects in their work spaces.

CUBICLE COMPOSITIONS AS RESISTANCE

It is easy, I think, to see the personalization of cubicles as resistance. After all, the cubicle appears designed to remove the individuality of cubicle occupants, and as the action models show, engagement with the computer/monitor and possibly other office artifacts can contribute to the formation of a common worker identity. However, the effect of cubicles on occupants has less to do with de-personalization, and is much more akin to identity replacement.

There is an ongoing struggle in cubicles between a worker-identity, endorsed

and cultivated by the employer, and the identity the cubicle occupant carries with them from beyond the office space and the work place hegemony. Workers are always at a disadvantage in this struggle because extreme changes to the cubicle are probably not within the agency of the worker; the computer/monitor, for example, is essentially permanent in the cubicle environment. With limited control over their environment, cubicle workers adopt de Certeau-like tactics to resist alteration of their identities.

CUBICLES, STRATEGIES, AND TACTICS

The contention between employer and workers in office cubicle spaces is a neat fit with de Certeau's (1984) dynamic of strategies and tactics. Strategies are "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated (p. 31). With the autonomy of isolation comes a de-limiting of space (management of office reality), which the isolated power/employer makes its base or "environment" (p. 36). Strategies are a rationalization of the employer, and account for the hierarchical division of space in office environments, and the othering of cubicle workers (p. 36).

Tactics, the art of the weak, are the maneuvers cubicle workers make to resist identity transformation, and to some extent to resist the workplace hegemony (de Certeau 1984 p. 37). Visual composition in cubicles is a tactic; arranging personal

items in a cubicle serves to claim a space and an identity, and is analogous to a child marking a textbook, “The child still scrawls and daubs on his schoolbooks; even if he is punished for this crime, he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it" (de Certeau 1984 p. 31). As discussed in the previous chapter, making marks, the material arrangement of reality, is a contributor to identity.

The response to the othering, to which workers are subjected by cubicle activity and visual rhetoric, is active and creative. Like de Certeau’s North African, faced with the “constraining order of language and place” in Paris, superimposes his own language on French, and introduces his own cultural sense of place, “He superimposes them and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity” (p. 30). The cubicle worker, Like de Certeau’s North African bound to an assigned space, visually superimposes on the basic cubicle by creatively arranging personal items in her workspace.

Earlier, I observed that the office cubicle is space on loan to office workers. Like space, time in workplaces is not entirely controlled by workers. Workers, in effect, sell to employers the time that makes up a workday, which then becomes “company time.” Using company time and resources for other than work purposes is a way to resist, for which de Certeau (1984) has a term - *la perruque*. The purpose of

la perruque, according to de Certeau, is to signify the worker's capabilities "through his work and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through spending his time this way" [emphasis not mine] (p. 25). Visual composition in the cubicle is *la perruque*, which is to say that it is resistance. Visual composition connects cubicle workers to an external life, and displays human relations that are beyond the scope of office hegemony.

Arranging personal items in the cubicle space is probably most often done on company time; the moments in which a cubicle worker looks at a visual arrangement, and recalls people and movement in spaces far different from the basic cubicle, are stolen from the employer's till with company space, and using the company materials; cubicle, monitor etc. Cubicle workers appropriate company space and company materials (cubicle walls, monitor etc.) for the purpose of visual composition.

When de Certeau (1984) makes his bold call for *la perruque* resistance, "we can divert time owed to the institution, we can make textual objects that signify an art and solidarities," it is I think, with awareness that resistance is an affront to power and control (p. 28).

The tactical nature of visual compositions (which de Certeau calls text-objects (p. 27), a term that is especially apt for talking about everyday visual composition) puts them "within the enemy's field of vision" (p. 37). The text-objects in cubicles, products of visual composition, are always potentially in the employer's view, and

therefore are constrained in scale and in content by the authority of the employer. If visual compositions are present in a cubicle, it is at the whim of the employer; were visual compositions not controlled, the employer would no longer be managing the symbolic representation of reality, and the hegemony of the workplace would be destabilized.

The cubicle in Figure 4-7 is, not surprisingly given the standardized appearance of cubicles, very similar to the basic cubicle shown in Figure 4-4. The monitor is centrally positioned, and the other artifacts in the space appear to be work related - with a few exceptions. Among the personal additions to the cubicle is a framed picture located to the right of the monitor, a not uncommon trope in the Flickr image data. In the preceding chapter Gestalt principles, such as proximity, were used to understand recurring patterns of tools in garage workbenches. Proximity is the relative distance among objects that allows viewers to visually recognize objects in groups, or in degrees of separation. The close proximity of the framed image to the monitor is

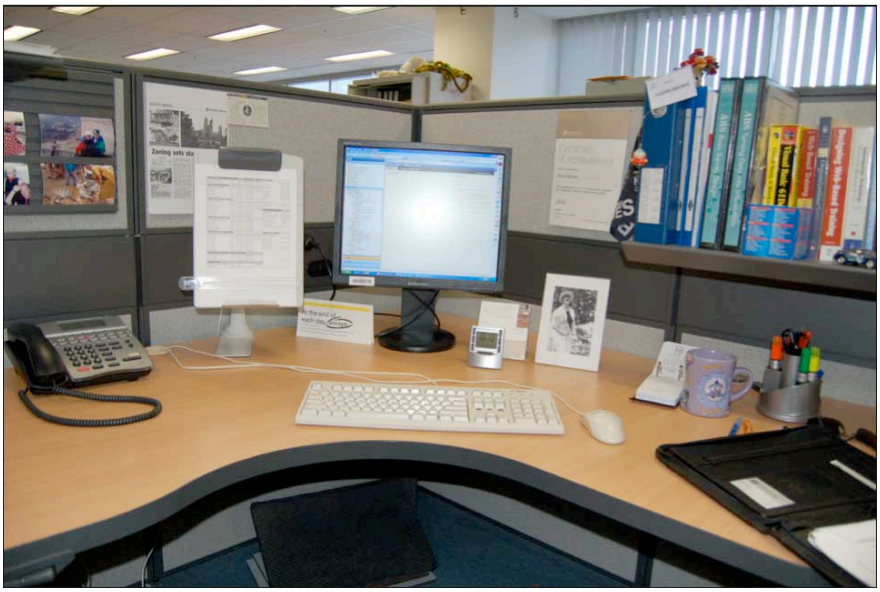

Figure 4-7: Cubicle with Framed Image

meaningful, given the multiple significations associated with monitors in offices - work, productivity, office hierarchy etc. - and the role of the computer/monitor in creating the worker identity.

It is fair to assume that the framed image has significance for the cubicle worker. Those significations however, are likely very different from what the monitor represents. Within the context of a workplace cubicle, the monitor can signify a number of things; work, authority, technology. The monitor can also signify the worker's role. I suspect that what the monitor and the framed picture share is that they are both compelling artifacts. This cubicle occupant appears to be countering the highly significant computer monitor with her own very significant artifact. By manipulating proximity in the visual composition, the cubicle worker establishes an equivalency of affect, if not size, between the monitor and the framed image. The framed picture may be said to be intruding on the computer monitor's space, and competing for the attention of the cubicle worker. Positioning the framed image in such a way visually and symbolically challenges the centrality of the computer/monitor in the cubicle space.

CUBICLES AND RESISTANCE TO THE GRID

I want to detail the rectilinear nature of office cubicles, in order to point out how resistance is tied to the visual environment. Figure 4-8 shows the same cubicle as Figure 4-7, but with an overlaying grid. The grid brings the rectilinear visual environment of the cubicle into sharp relief. If standardization of space is a tool of workplace hegemony, then the emphasis on squares and rectangles in office cubicles represents a visual oppression.

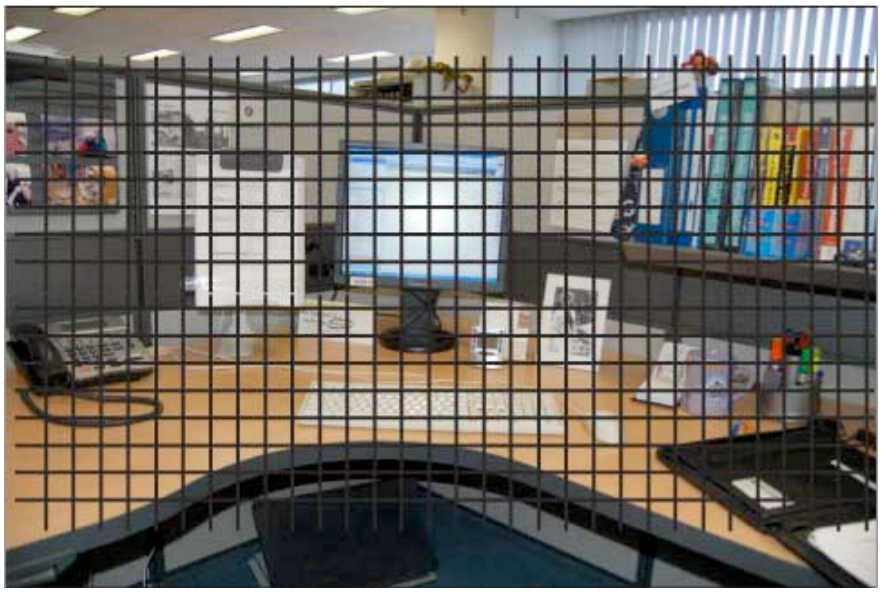

Figure 4-8: Cubicle with Framed image & Grid

A very basic choice for cubicle workers when making their own visual arrangements in cubicles is the extent to which they follow or work against the inherent grid structure. The most dramatic departures from the grid in Figure 4-8 are the telephone cord and the inward-curving worktable both probably supplied by the employer. This visual composition shows a degree of resistance in the personal items -coffee cup etc. - and the framed picture. But the show of resistance is overt;

the framed picture, for example is smoothly integrated with the other rectangular shapes; monitor, paper-holder, keyboard, etc.

Resistance, in Figure 4-8, is modulated, and consists of the introduction of personal items, relative to the monitor, and few, if any, disruptions to the visual grid. If visual compositions are thought of as inscription - and I do think of them as such - Figure 4-8 shows mark-making activity that is careful rather than bold, and does not call attention to the author.

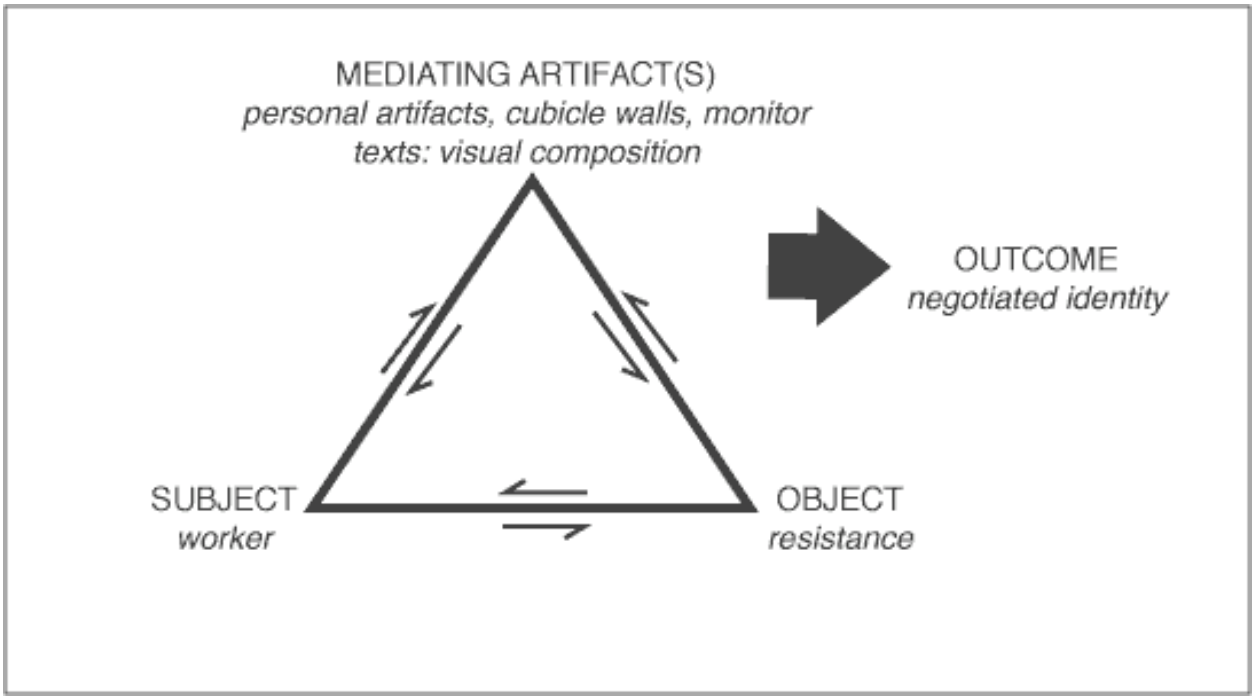

Figure 4-9: Action Model for Resistance with Visual Composition

MODULATED RESISTANCE

Visual composition, like the action of wagering on horse races, transforms. When an office worker resists the hegemonic office cubicle through visual composition, the worker identity imposed by the employer is mitigated. In Figure 4-

9, the process of resistance through visual composition, and an identity outcome is shown. I label the identity outcome depicted in Figure 4-9 as "negotiated" because resistance neither restores an original external identity, nor removes, or precludes, the worker identity shown in Figure 4-5. I contend that resistance to the outcomes of working in office cubicles is nuanced, as shown in Figures 4-8 and 4-9, and the outcome is negotiated.

Visual composition is resistance, and mitigates the worker identity that is the outcome of productive work. Employers however, may be stakeholders in identity negotiations; by accommodating visual composition in cubicles employers might preserve consensus. Gramsci points to concessions by the hegemony - usually economic - that manufacture the consensus necessary to prop up the hegemonic structure (Thomas, 2009 p. 138).

The extent to which visual composition is allowed in cubicles varies among employers, and the investment in resistance may vary among workers. Visual composition in cubicles is individualized, probably due to a combination of employer allowance and employee motivation. Identity negotiations are individualized as well: some people are quite happy in their work and with the arrangement of power in the workplace.

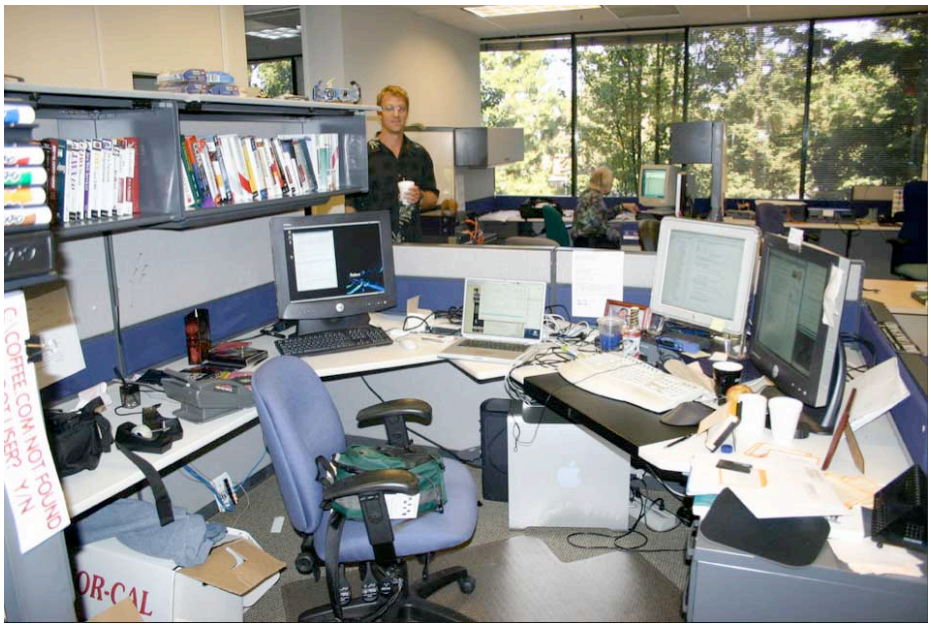

Figure 4-10: Cubicle with Clutter

The occupant of the cubicle in Figure 4-10 appears to have attained an equilibrium with her work space. The cubicle is outfitted with several computers/monitors, and as in Figure 4-7, there are also framed images that bookend the two monitors on the right. There are also, in the Figure 4-10 cubicle, some beverage containers, but little else in the way of personal additions to the cubicle.

Papers piled on the desk surface, and disposable cups and containers may obscure the view of the framed images. The four monitors - the representatives of work - overwhelm the personalization shown in the Flickr image. It may be that visual composition in cubicles is actively repressed by this employer; however, there is a sense that this cubicle worker is deeply invested her work, or at least engaged by it. However, the general clutter may itself be a less direct expression of resistance. Categorizing messiness as a visual composition raises some questions about intentionality. Yet the visual presentation of this cubicle space is the result of

choices made by the cubicle worker, and is rhetorical. It is possible that this worker resists by deconstructing the materials of work. What appears to be clutter might be resistance to deadlines, or workload that offsets an apparent enthusiasm for work.

A very different, more aggressively resistant, identity negotiation can be seen in Figure 4-11. There are two striking features to this visual composition; it involves a significant amount of the cubicle space, and the visual composition directly contacts the monitor. The effect is one of subsuming the monitor into a larger cubicle-wide, visual composition (although I don't think the monitor is fully integrated into the arrangement, due to a lack of cohesion among the artifacts, from left to right).

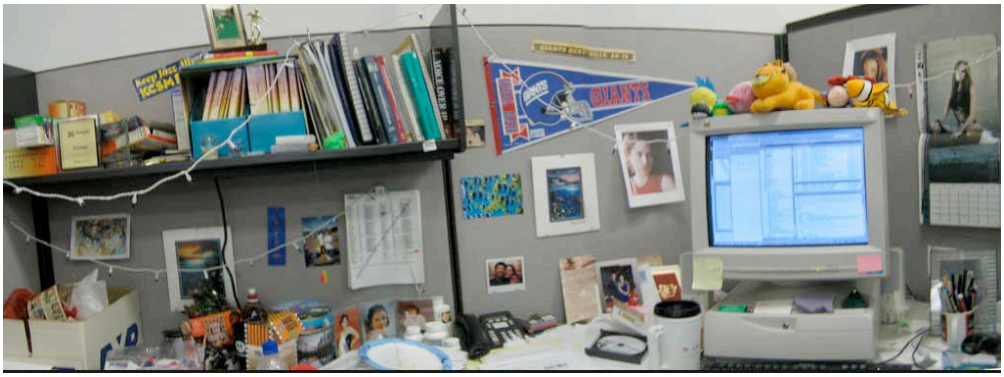

Figure 4-11: Cubicle with Visual Composition on Monitor

This visual composition also seems to work against the centrality of the monitor by creating an alternative space. The area to the left of the monitor is made more significant by the addition of 2-dimensional artifacts, lights and objects. However, a tactic, according to de Certeau, lacks a proper locus (p. 37). I don't agree with de Certeau entirely, but placing objects on or adjacent to the monitor in a cubicle challenges the monitor, and at the same time, acknowledges the monitor's supremacy in the cubicle.

The visual composition in Figure 4-11 disrupts the order of the visual grid. The diagonal lines in the pennant, and the curve in the string of lights, and the unstructured, organic shapes of the objects on the monitor are counter to the grid. The monitor is challenged by proximity of artifacts, and also by the breakdown of the cubicle space order. The visual composition in Figure 4-11 is a tactical move meant, perhaps, to shock, or as de Certeau phrases it, "...a tactic boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order suddenly to produce a flash shedding light on the language of a place and to strike the hearer" (p. 37).

Characterizing visual compositions in cubicles as resistance creates repression/resistance binary (that is also present in de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*). Visual composition, as practiced by office workers, is probably not completely disconnected from the work of the office. The visual compositions in office cubicles may contribute to identity, and assist with work efforts.

The self-healing cutting mat on the desk in Figure 4-12 informs me that the cubicle worker who created this visual composition is probably someone whose work is connected to images, or visual design. The cubicle occupant's area of work may account for the pervasive sense of order this visual composition conveys. Rather than a tension between artifacts and the monitor, the computer display seems integrated into the composition. Indeed, the entire cubicle is a visual composition, but it is difficult to tell if the visual information introduced by the worker is personal or work-related. A visual composition such as this mediates

resistance, but the negotiated identity appears in harmony with work and a sense of self.

It may be that, because of the nature of the work performed in that cubicle, creating this visual composition is necessary to production. The cubicle occupant, as a creative worker who relies on invention, may benefit from a complex visual arrangement in the workspace. The visual composition may also be a display of capability, not unlike the garage workbenches in Chapter 3. If the interests of employer and worker are closely aligned in this visual composition, as they appear to be, several boundaries or distinctions begin to break down, such as the difference between work and creative composition. Also, the cubicle worker has a good deal of autonomy to compose visually; creative, autonomous, workers would seem to be counter to rigorous hegemony.

Figure 4-12: Cubicle with Comprehensive Visual Composition

CHAPTER 5

Implications and Future Research

To understand theories is not enough. Much practice is necessary …

- Kimon Nicolaides (1975 p. xiv)

SOME THINGS LEARNED

People arrange the world in visually meaningful ways.

I came to this project with some awareness that what people do in social situations can result in meaningful visual information. The flower arrangements that my wife creates, for example, are rhetorically affective visually, and also connect my wife to other practitioners of flower arranging in her extended family. After looking at and analyzing many images from the everyday lives of people, I now consider visual composition to be ubiquitous in everyday life. All human actions are visually informative, and are therefore rhetorical.

These arrangements are both writing and visual composition.

This project suggests that writing is immanent in the human situation, and that people write throughout everyday life in many ways. Certainly, people write in everyday life using alphabetic representation, but beyond school and work people also write with their bodies, and with the material stuff around us.

I have long felt that visual communication and visual rhetoric are the equivalents of their verbal and alphabetic counterparts – I felt whatever could be done in alphabetic writing could also be accomplished with non-alphabetic, visual representation. Since working on this project, I am more aware of the overlap between modes of composition, and more mindful of the affordances, and influences that accompany the different compositional modes. Because it is situated in everyday life, and because it is non-alphabetic, visual composition affords the author certain possibilities, that alphabetic writing does not. Visual composition in cubicles, for example, provides employees a way to resist prescribed identities and assigned spaces in a way that is less directly confrontational than what could be done with speech or alphabetic writing.

Visual Composition is produced by human action.

The writing of everyday life arises from what people do, together, in everyday life, and as I have noted elsewhere in this document, human activity in everyday life is rhetorical. Where academic writing, for example, may be perceived as explicit communication, visual composition in everyday life is what could be called parallel activity. An example of parallel activity can be seen in garage workbenches. Arranging tools, on a workbench, is organization, and it is equally and simultaneously communication. All human activity can be described as multi-

purposeful, because all activity communicates something about the actors in the activity, and their situations.

In everyday life these compositions declare attributes, display social connections, contribute to learning, and can be used to resist systemic power.

It may be that visual communication in everyday life is a necessary social practice; how else can someone announce, without a good deal of social awkwardness, a proficiency with tools than by arranging them on a display surface? From within a cubicle, how can someone declare allegiance to a life and identity that is outside of the physical, visual and social limitations of that very space, if not by arranging visually arranging personal information on the cubicle walls? Visual composition in everyday life provides an alternative and essential way to articulate human concerns, to share knowledge, and to connect with others.

In semi-private and public spaces, visual compositions by persons and by systems overlap, and interact.

My awareness of overlap in composition extends to the distinctions between private, semi-private, and public spaces. From this project, I have come to understand that there are systemic visual compositions - architecture, public and shared spaces, pubic thoroughfares - that interact with, and perhaps compete with, the visual compositions made by individuals in everyday life. For example, a

personal visual composition in a workplace cubicle is a semi-public, written announcement of allegiance and affiliation that overlaps and interacts with the visual presentation of the basic cubicle. This everyday visual composition project provides me with a more rich awareness of interactions between public and personal compositions, and between alphabetic and visual systems of making meaning.

IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE WORK

The visual composition in everyday life project is also rich with implications for rhetoric/composition, and with areas of future research. For the discipline, research into visual composition in everyday life may add to the historiography of writing, contribute to writing pedagogy, indicate new areas for research into technical communication in private and public spaces, and influence the way the discipline works with the visual.

This project points me towards more work with the idea of visual genre, and with visual rhetoric in contested spaces. Working with the Flickr images of people's everyday situations was a compelling experience; I intend to look further into writing that people do with mundane materials that impacts notions of self. The Flickr images in this study reveal what I see as autoethnography in social media. As a writing teacher, with an interest multimodal composition, I recognize in everyday

visual composition a way to help writing instructors think about and use multiple modes in the teaching of writing.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WRITING

Writing, according to Schmandt-Bessarat (1996), developed out of economic need. Ceramic tokens, which preceded cuneiform writing, were used in record-keeping in Sumeria. The tokens represented quantities of livestock, or agricultural products. Tokens were probably especially useful for representing quantities that exceeded the number of human digits. They could also be combined in ways that created sets or groups, and marked to indicate kinds of animals, or staple goods (p. 82).

Schmandt-Besserat (1996) is probably correct in her claim that alphabetic writing springs from clay tokens made in Sumeria for economic purposes. I appreciate that Schmandt-Besserat identifies what are essentially materialistic roots to writing practices; however, it is challenging for me to accept that stories did not precede inventories of goats and sheep as the purpose of writing. Story-telling too, is economically based. Through the sharing of information, problem-solving, and relationship-building that storytelling makes possible, many social endeavors can be realized, including herding sheep, raising and harvesting crops, and market activities.

Histories of writing sometimes point to a moment where people were making marks on trees or rocks, and then advanced to some more complicated system, be it cuneiform or ceramic tokens (Fischer 2001 p.16). I argue that as long as people have participated in material life, objects have held significance. I also contend that the arrangement and ordering of significant artifacts, as a way of making meaning, logically must be at least as old as the use of other symbol sets, given the role of tools in human learning (Vygotsky 1978).

Frankly, I do not know how to research that claim. I suspect that visual composition in everyday life precedes writing with inscribed symbols, but evidence to support my suspicion might only be found through archeological practices. I am uncomfortable with that kind of research; it has a colonizing aspect.

WRITING PEDAGOGY

Since Selfe (1999) advised us to pay attention to technology and literacy, there has been a noticeable change in the nature of writing instruction. Technology in writing classrooms seems to be more available to teachers and to students. Writing assignments in general seem to incorporate work in modes other than alphabetic, even in first-year writing courses. Yancy (2004) points to composition, in the broad way that I use it in this study, as the subject of writing courses, and writing teachers.

However, alphabetic writing remains the *de facto* way for students to compose in academic situations, if not in real life. Stephen Westbrook (2006) shows a devaluation of student work in multimedia, and in visual rhetoric. Westbrook (2006) lays some blame on institutional obstacles to teaching multimedia in writing classes, but in my view, a serious obstacle to an expanded view of writing in classrooms resides with teachers.

Among the reasons for the marginalization of alternative modes of composition in writing classrooms is the difficulty of teaching non-alphabetic writing. It is hard and unfamiliar work, for which many writing teachers are unprepared, and for which the learning outcomes are sometimes unclear. In the uncertain world of digital media, Westbrook (2006) says, writing teachers rely on familiar paradigms and lore (459). We teach what we know.

The question of how to bring knowledge and training to writing teachers that will help them to work with new paradigms of writing and writing instruction is one that i brought with me to graduate studies at Michigan State. The subject is no longer my primary research interest; still, I have a feeling of unfinished business about the pedagogy of multimodal composition. I may make a brief foray into research on this subject, perhaps as part of my professional responsibilities in a writing program.

What teachers of writing know, or should know, are ways to get students to think about arranging information in meaningful ways. Rather than re-train

teachers of writing in skills and practices that don't interest them, I propose making connections for writing teachers, between writing using the alphabet and other ways to write. Visual composition in everyday life, as a component in writing courses, can help to bridge the pedagogical gap between alphabetic writing instruction and teaching multimodal composition. Everyday visual composition could be a useful addition to writing curricula: it is both visual and textual; it is relevant to the lives of students and teachers; the technology of everyday visual composition is not sophisticated.

There is, I suspect, a divide in thinking about writing that separates the visual from the alphabetic. I see this divide as somewhat artificial, and unhelpful to teaching alternative forms of writing. To move across that divide, writing teachers will have to think of images or pictures in ways similar to how they regard alphabetic writing. One way to do this is to focus on what an image does rhetorically, as genre. Genre theory may very useful for bridging the visual/alphabetic divide.

Through genre theory and everyday visual composition, writing teachers may, as Wysocki (2004) says, "come to see visual composition as rhetorical, as a series of choices that have much broader consequences and articulations than visual principles ...suggest" (p. 173). Of course, as writing teachers we want that understanding for our students in all forms of writing.

Teaching genre in writing classes is not new, but teaching images/visual composition as genre seems underexplored. For research purposes, I suggest the development of workshops for writing instructors that link genre, alphabetic writing and visual composition in everyday life. Efforts to inform teachers about multimodality, or visual rhetoric, will be most effective if the workshop subjects include alphabetic writing in classrooms.

The relevance of everyday visual composition to people's lives is explicit; it is a product of everyday activities in everyday circumstances. The relevance of academic writing to people's lives is less obvious. Crowley (1998) challenges the relevance of the academic essay, but I still hear writing teachers talking about assigning and grading "papers" as if communication in people's lives was limited to paper and ink (p. 233). Visual composition in everyday life shows that writing is one of the things people do in the material world, on a daily basis, and with great consequences for human relations. Writing is more than what some students may imagine it to be, locked up in classrooms, or wrapped up in paper; visual writing/composition is how we arrange the world to state our identity, and declare our allegiances. By proxy, all forms of writing share in that relevancy.

I see future research into everyday visual composition and writing pedagogy; perhaps I will report on workshops for writing teachers on connecting writing and the visual through everyday artifacts and practices.

The everyday (familiar) actions and activities in workplaces and schools are especially appropriate subjects for technical communication studies. It seems as if research into workplace communication has focused primarily on verbal and alphabetic discourse. However, the visuality of any formal setting or work situation, such as a physician's office, can be analyzed with the combined textual and visual approach used in this study. The idea of a visual genre may bring an equal depth of understanding to visual situations that genre studies bring to alphabetic texts. As an analytical tool, visual genre can contribute to understanding the interplay between material and visual environments and human activity. Medical facilities, factories, and classrooms can be regarded as visual texts that are socially constituted, and as patterns comprised of rhetorically affective visual elements.

In subsequent research, I want to present visual genre as a possibility, and not as a certainty. The premise under which Miller (1984) defines genre as social action, is that the subject is writing and speech, traditionally defined (p. 155). What Swales (2009) describes as, "the puzling relationships between the verbal and the visual" makes it unlikely that visual genre is exactly like, or even a replacement for, traditional writing genre (p. 15).

The subject of text and genre is especially important now, with some current thinking that limits text to only writing, or to that which is seen. I agree with Bazerman et al (2003), that text is language in use, and as such can be useful in

talking about many rhetorics; visual, digital, embodied, etc. (p. 456). However, an expansive, rather than a limiting, view of text, requires recognizing both the confluence of modes, and respecting their boundaries.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY IN SOCIAL MEDIA

As I surveyed the image data from Flickr for this project, I was moved by the everyday situations depicted in the pictures. Looking at these images (and I looked at many) was not unlike entering peoples' houses. The images posted on Flickr are invitations, at some level, to participate in the lives of individuals, and families, and larger social groups. Moreover, I found the narratives that presented themselves within some series of pictures extremely compelling.

I decided to not pursue the narrative aspect of the Flickr images in this project. One reason for that exclusion is that narratives expressed in a series of images by a single author were not common. Another reason that eschewed a focus on narrative is that is not in line, critically thinking, with other considerations in the project that are more useful, and contribute more to the field than would pictorial narratives.

There is something of a narrative nature happening in the Flickr images however; some collections of images clearly show a change over time, or a detailed examination of a situation. Some groups of Flickr pictures seem to be a search by an author for a resolution, or a denouement, to a problem, or a difficulty. An example of

a search for a resolution may found in a particular, lengthy (perhaps 20 images) survey of one person's office cubicle. This cubicle occupant captures images from unusual perspectives in the cubicle, and takes pictures of unusual arrangements of his body and artifacts within the cubicle space.

In this collection of images from a cubicle space, and in other Flickr collections by a single author, I see a kind of self-writing, that can be best described as autoethnographic. Johns (2009) describes autoethnography as a written self inquiry that is reflexive and transformative (p.103). The difference between autoethnography and other self-writing, such as a diary, is the connection between the author's situated observations and larger themes. The cubicle occupant, for example, writes about himself, but is also working out the limitations - on his body and intellect - of the space to which he is assigned.

I have near-term plans for a project about autoethnography in Flickr.

THE VISUAL IN RHETORIC/COMPOSITION

Throughout this document I refer to a dichotomy in how rhetoric/composition relates to the visual. Certainly that issue is not decided in this project, and it may never be concluded. The problem, I think, may be in the use of one mode to describe the workings of another. How images and pictures work is discussed primarily with verbal language and alphabetic writing. I cannot help but think that, working within verbal language leads inevitably to comparing speech

structure to visual structure, and to attempts to find equivalencies where there are only approximate similarities.

This phenomenon is not unusual in the analysis of music, or dance. A written description of a musical piece is only a representation of an abstraction, or as I described earlier, ideas about the thing and not the thing itself.

The approach I take in this study to analyzing the Flickr images has possibilities for visual analysis, because it brings the visual to text, and not the obverse. I look at visual artifacts and compositions with some of the tools used to understand alphabetic texts, but with exceptions that reflect the difference between visual and verbal knowledge. I am working on an alternative to the Kress and van Leeuwen social semiotic system that may be useful to those working in technical communication. My approach is not perfect, or complete in this study. However, I will have a chance to revisit this topic when I write about visual composition in everyday life for publication.

FLICKR

I leave this research subject for last, since it is the least clear to me, and most difficult to articulate. In Chapter 2, I talk briefly about Latour's concept of immutable mobiles, and how the Flickr images correspond to that concept (222). Since reading that Latour passage I have wondering what it means when the items in a collection collect themselves - and information about all subjects in the world. Flickr is like

that; people upload visual representations of not just their world, but of anything really. It is as if each Flickr contributor is a lone voyageur, or explorer, collecting bits and pieces and sending it off to a library or a museum. Some of the bits and pieces are parts of the Flickr contributors - images of their people, their place, the events that hold significance.

Earlier I spoke of Flickr, and other online environments and systems, as perhaps replacing everyday life. The possibility to make people, objects and moments familiar, and therefore *everyday* may be impossible to exhaust in social media. I find that idea staggering, and intriguing.

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