

# PACKET NO. 2

NOV/DEC 2016

PCKT 2.- PG 45

11.16–12.16

## SUMMARY

This month has largely been characterized by confusion. Partly because of the type and content of reading that I'm doing, partly because when it comes to my making, the path has not been clearly carved out. Mostly, I'd say, it's attributed to an even combination of both. I've continued my investigation of the concepts of 'peace' and 'conflict', which have inadvertently shifted in interesting directions. I've delved into sacred readings, the discovery of technical descriptions and ascribed methods of design, and insanely mind-blowing philosophies about perception, illusion, meaning and reality. This last part is actually not included in this packet. I'm about two-thirds of the way through Robert Ornstein's *MindReal*, which honestly has blown my mind. Nonetheless, I love what I'm reading and I can't wait for it all to magically manifest itself into something really

cool. Like an insanely large and awesome paper installation that really messes with peoples heads, saying something like "nothing you think is real". When and how does that happen?

In terms of my making, I'm in a weird place. It's a bit unexpected. It really shouldn't be I guess. This entire VCFA journey has been filled with excitement and discovery and joy and newness, closely followed, and seemingly over-shadowed by, uncertainty, doubt, hesitation, and a constant loss of direction. It's in the physical making that I seem to find the least solace, and this, I find counter intuitive. Maybe I shouldn't have stopped my physical making last month. Getting up and going has been so much harder than I thought. I'm back to that awful and super uncomfortable place of uncertainty and doubt, which has been historically paralyzing. I don't know what to do. I don't know if what I'm making is worth the time and effort. I don't know if there's a proper and direct correlation between my ideas and their physical manifestations. I'm a bit disinterested and back again to confused. Ugh, I hate being here again. I'm all caught up in trying to ensure that what I'm making has 'meaning' and 'content'. Who does it have to be meaningful for anyway? Me? Others? Both? At the core of this impasse I believe is an internal conflict, still, between what I used to know and consider to be Graphic Design and the raw, hand-crafted nature of what I am gravitating towards now. I haven't figured out how to bring these together in a wholesome and productive way.

Regardless, this month was still pretty great. I look forward to seeing you Natalia, hope you had a great month too.

SUMMARY

PCKT 2.— PG 47

RESEARCH  
**BOOKS & ARTICLES**

THE ART OF CRITICAL MAKING<sup>09</sup>

Edited by Rosanne Somerson &amp; Mara Hermano

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT REALIZATIONS THAT CAME about from last month's residency is the fact that my work lacks critical content. I spent my entire previous semester learning about and playing with paper to the extent that it became both material and motive. Each piece catapulted the next out of physical curiosity, without much regard to outcome, meaning or message. But I am a designer, after all, and my job is to tell stories. I now understand that when work speaks only to the visual experience, it misses an opportunity for greater depth and impact. It forgoes the chance to speak & connect, meaningfully, with others.

So, while I don't regret subscribing to that experimental tone of making last semester, I know it's time to move beyond. In an effort to understand what 'critical making' actually is, I decided to read about RISD's pedagogical approach in *The Art of Critical Making*. I found the book a bit tough to read. I guess maybe it lacked the engaging story-telling qualities it proposes. However, it was peppered with really amazing and insightful thoughts. I especially enjoyed learning about student projects, & seeing the outcome of their efforts.

“FINDING AN AUTHENTIC VOICE AND  
DIRECTION IN CREATIVE PRACTICES  
IS HARD AND SLOPPY WORK, AND  
EACH INDIVIDUAL IS RESPONSIBLE  
FOR MAKING THAT DISCOVERY IN  
HER OR HIS OWN WAY.”

I don't have many regrets about my life, but if I could go back in time, one thing I would do differently is apply to and attend RISD's undergraduate program. I know it would have not only changed the course of my professional aspirations, but it would have also enriched my personal outlook on art, design and life, so much earlier.

*I chose this quote because it rings true to my own experience, but if I take a second to dissect it further, specifically in relation to the books I read last month, this statement is at the crux of conflict. Why are we encouraged to be individually (separately) responsible? No one is truly alone in their making, even those who seek or experience solitude. Yes, I agree that insight must come from within, but that insight is never rooted in an isolated personal vacuum. Here's how I would rephrase this quote:*

*“Finding an authentic voice and direction in creative practices is hard and sloppy work, discovery must be rooted from within and in direct and honest response to the whole of the maker's life.”*

*Better?*

## “CREATIVITY ARISES OUT OF THE TENSION BETWEEN RULES AND IMAGINATION.”

*But if tension of opposing forces is at the core of creativity, should we ask the question 'what, then, is its own opposing force?'*

Rather than summarize the book in its entirety, I decided to reference my notes and speak to the ideas I found most interesting. I hope that by doing this I can quickly find insight at future creative impasses, and just document potential starting points.

Throughout, I also view the text from the lens of my studies of peace & conflict.

The book begins by asking the question, “how does a new student of art and design transform into a creative and critical maker?” How does one “transform the ordinary into something meaningful”? This, I believe, is a really important point which answers my original question. Critical making is about **creating meaning**, and subscribing to a sustainable personal practice focused on process and exploration. The first chapter of the book is dedicated to explaining specific lessons, my comments on these as follows:

## “CREATIVITY IS THE BEHAVIOR THAT ANIMATES THE INNOVATION PROCESS.”

As defined by dictionary.com, **creativity** is “1. the state or quality of being creative. 2. the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, or the like, and to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, interpretations, etc.; originality, imagination: *the need for creativity in modern industry; creativity in the performing arts.* 3. the process by which one utilizes creative ability: *Reading stimulated his creativity.*”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>. “THE DEFINITION OF CREATIVITY.” *DICTIONARY.COM*. ACCESSED DECEMBER 05, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.DICTIONARY.COM/BROWSE/CREATIVITY?S=T](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/creativity?s=t).

Interestingly, according to the same source, the antonym of creativity is **reality**. I do not agree. We habitually work to imagine, conceive, create, of and beyond our understood sense of reality. The fact is however, that reality is all made up (at least according to the Zanders, Watts, Ornstein and Donald D. Hoffman, to name just a few). If this is true, I would state that creativity and reality are actually one and the same thing. It takes our creativity to understand our reality and imagine, conceive and create of and beyond it. What then, is the opposite, the Yang, to this most basic human behavior and function?

// Lesson #1 Begin by looking at options, which is different from acting at random | As I continue to play with paper I find it easier to see and work from new possibilities. I think my first semester was especially difficult because I was acting at random without knowing how to pave the path of exploration, reflection and informed reaction. // Lesson #2 Learn to see by thinking more complexly about visibility | Of which I thought was most valuable the encouragement to “learn to imagine and interpret what is not visibly present.” This is what I would consider at the core of imagination—the ability to see beyond sight into a realm of ideas infused with mental and emotional energy. I think this is also very relevant to the notions I studied last month that stated that all of us live within an array of hidden assumptions about the world, which frame our reality. By mindfully recognizing our assumptions, whether about rules, or systems, ourselves, or anything else, we open avenues to see the world differently // Lesson #3 Use everything that you know & record everything | I need to do a better job of keeping a relevant sketchbook. I seem to have ideas scattered all over the place, without coherent order or an easy way to digest and reference these ideas. I find this kind of ironic because I am naturally a super organized person. Why is this the one thing that I am least organized about? Am I doing myself a disservice by being so unorganized with my notes and sketches? Or am I opening up opportunities to see things differently? I’m really not sure.

“WHEN EVERYTHING  
IS PERFECT, WHEN  
EVERYTHING IS TIDY,  
WE’RE ON AUTOPILOT,  
AND WE’RE NOT  
NECESSARILY LIVING  
IN THE MOMENT OR  
PAYING ATTENTION.”

*This was at the core of what the Zander’s called Giving Way to Passion in The Art of Possibility. When we are mentally able to transcend our survival instincts, we can tap into a universal source of unshackled ideas.*

*« A couple of days after writing this I listened to a podcast entitled Hidden Brain in which host Shankar Vedantam interviews Economist Tim Harford about his new book entitled Messy: The Power of Disorder to Transform Our Lives. I wrote down a quote, which I really love »*

» **paradigm**<sup>11</sup>  
[par-uh-dahym, -dim]  
noun

- 3 a. a framework containing the basic assumptions, ways of thinking, and methodology that are commonly accepted by members of a scientific community.
- b. such a cognitive framework shared by members of any discipline or group: the company’s business paradigm.

“ART MAKING FOLLOWS AN INTERNAL  
PARADIGM, AN INVISIBLE METRONOME  
WITH INAUDIBLE RHYTHMS.”

// Lesson #4 Don’t try to get to the end without taking all the steps necessary to get there | If there is one thing of immense value that I have learned at VCFA it is this very idea. I used to be wholeheartedly concerned about the end product (the portfolio piece) without much regard to the process, which I now value so much more. “Nothing worthwhile can be achieved in a short amount of time and with the least amount of steps.” // Lesson #5 Understand that what you are learning is not the same thing as what is being taught | This is a super interesting concept seen as both a student and a teacher. I wonder how this applies to a model like VCFA’s where the intention of the lesson is set forth by the student him/herself. Does the quandary then become entirely personal, which then encourages self-discovery, realization and/or conflict? I’d say yes.

Throughout the rest of the book there are additional ideas that I believe will influence my approach to making:

**One**, is the importance of thorough research & mindful introspection that is an integral part of conveying meaning through work. **Two**, drawing is important, at the most fundamental level, to include the physical body in the experience of “exploring, thinking, and visual expression”. Interestingly, this is something I did start doing last semester. I entitled my practice “relearning to draw”. I felt it was something I did a lot of as a child, but cast aside as I began working on the computer. It was great, although much more difficult than I imagined. Self-criticism can be a tough obstacle to overcome. **Three**, beyond thought and exploration we, as designers, have the additional task of giving physical form to our ideas and thoughts. **There can be a huge gap, which I have definitely experienced, between thinking and imagining the work and then producing the physical end-result.** Critiques come into play as a great avenue to receive and render feedback, and assess progress. I actually think VCFA needs to work on this a little. At residency, I don’t feel like we get enough out of critiques, more than anything, because of the chaotic and rushed format. **Four**, learning in the realm of art and design is a “non-linear and open-ended process, integrating conceptual, intuitive, sensory, technical, and contextual components”. Basically, it’s not easy, and it requires loads of work. **Five** as we experience the world in increasingly more virtual and abstract ways, it’s more important than ever to physically make objects to diversify the way we learn. **Six**, know your materials

11. “THE DEFINITION OF PARADIGM.” DICTIONARY.COM. ACCESSED DECEMBER 06, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.DICTIONARY.COM/BROWSE/PARADIGM?S=T](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/paradigm?s=t).

*This is a really cool point of view. I'd never considered it, but see how it could be a great parallel.*

*Statement in line with Alan Watt's theory that we live with a false sense of individual existence and an innate habit of separating to gain singular focal attention.*

» **paradox**<sup>12</sup>  
[par-uh-doks]  
noun

1. a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a possible truth.
2. a self-contradictory and false proposition.
3. any person, thing, or situation exhibiting an apparently contradictory nature.
4. an opinion or statement contrary to commonly accepted opinion.

12. "THE DEFINITION OF PARADOX." DICTIONARY.COM. ACCESSED DECEMBER 02, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.DICTIONARY.COM/BROWSE/PARADOX?S=T](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/paradox?s=T).

and ask questions through them, which should clarify meaning and build a narrative. I spent my entire last semester getting to know my materials and I hope to continue experimenting and working with paper in the future. **Seven**, as graphic designers, the one timeless task we continue to be charged with is the telling of stories. **We are the 'scribes' of our time.** **This is interesting in relation to identity since we, as human beings, form our identity through the stories we tell ourselves, about ourselves. It seems then design has a place and responsibility in defining social identity.** **Eight**, I need to read Michael Foucault's *Power/Knowledge*, specifically in relation to his proposition that "...**conflict, not conformity, is the norm in all relationships.**" **Nine**, outlined in the following paragraph and probably my most important discovery within this book: "By now it should be clear that **creativity is not exclusive to art and design; it is a fundamental human action.** Yet for a simple process that we have been successfully accomplishing for countless millennia, **creativity remains extremely complex, even contradictory.** We might think, for example, that creativity is exclusive & inclusive, or individual & social. It is typical to regard contradictions as dichotomous: as polarized oppositions requiring an "either/or" choice—as in "theory & practice," **which we artificially separate, even though one continually informs the other.** We might also regard contradiction as a dilemma: a choice between two equally unattractive alternatives. Alternatively, we could see a contradiction as a duality: a "both/and" way of thinking, a paradox—a state in which two diametrically opposing forces or ideas are simultaneously present; neither can be resolved or eliminated. Holding on to paradox may help us be more innovative in our practice as we recall that **paradoxes exist not only "out there" but also within us.**" As I read this paragraph, I found many parallels between what I've learned about peace & conflict and the concept of creativity, or to be more clear, the author's definition of contradiction. I'm increasingly intrigued to explore 'creativity', as a basic human function, catalyst for social change and means to knowledge of personal experience.

*This is a statement I feel I've heard repeatedly within many different areas of study. For example, Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, otherwise known as Ba'al Shem Tov, believed others are a mirror image of our own self perception.*

*"Your fellow is your mirror. If your own face is clean, so will be the image you perceive. But should you look upon your fellow and see a blemish, it is your own."<sup>13</sup>*

*By seeing ourselves in and through others, we project our view of reality. **Could conflict with others then be just a reflection of our own inner conflict?** Do we use others to confront (or avoid) ourselves? If so, how does one attain and then maintain peace?*

13. "BA'AL SHEM TOV." NEW WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA. ACCESSED DECEMBER 02, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.NEWWORLDCYCLOPEDIA.ORG/ENTRY/BA%27AL\\_SHEM\\_TOV](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ba%27al_Shem_Tov).

"IT IS IN RELATION TO OTHERS THAT WE COME TO  
KNOW OURSELVES AND SEE WHERE ART AND  
DESIGN MAKE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO  
SOCIETY—BY RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS,  
POSING QUESTIONS, SOLVING PROBLEMS, AND  
PROVIDING NEW WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING."

In my humble opinion, one of the best things about the VCFA experience is its community. The people are amazing and posed to take a positive, genuine, collaborative and overall rock-star attitude, all the time. As I pondered the creativity/reality quandary this month, it was great to reach out through Facebook & Google Hangouts to friends. Below is an excerpt from a very spontaneous and helpful conversation thread on a random Monday afternoon.

Jason Fowler  
Hows everybody doing?

Adam Fiveson  
I'm fracking freakin  
But I got love in my heart

Todd Hilgert  
I'm sleepy

Adam Fiveson  
:-)

Jason Fowler  
I am also sleepy and have love in  
my heart.  
Can't now man. I'm at work.

Adam Fiveson  
Pushed the wrong button

Michael Gerver  
Love and sleep are good

Jason Fowler  
Agreed!

Paulina M Johnson  
How are you??  
I'm trying to get client work out  
the door to focus on packet.

Michael Gerver  
We still have a full week before  
it's due which is nice

Paulina M Johnson  
I know! Haven't quite been able  
to dedicate time to it. But will  
after tomorrow.  
**I'm kind of stuck on this  
opposite of creativity thing.  
What would you guys say it is?**

Jason Fowler  
Netflix.

Paulina M Johnson  
Ha!!

Jason Fowler  
or cell phone games.

Paulina M Johnson  
Yep.

Michael Gerver  
I think there's irony in that it  
takes creativity to think of what  
the opposite of creativity is

Jason Fowler  
But seriously, I would say  
destruction or lethargy.  
Probably, lethargy or inactivity.  
Because even destruction can be  
creative.

Michael Gerver  
Or monotony

Adam Fiveson  
Stasis

Paulina M Johnson  
Right? Agreed. These are good.  
I'm fascinated by how hard this is  
and how differently people see it.  
So creativity entails activity?  
Physical? Mental?

Adam Fiveson  
I've been watching this show  
called westworld... it's BS science  
fiction... but they are talking  
about a maze

Michael Gerver  
I'd say mental and physical

Adam Fiveson  
and how the human mind and  
consciousness evolves.

Todd Hilgert  
No spoilers  
Lol

I haven't seen the newest  
episode

Paulina M Johnson  
:)

Adam Fiveson  
OMG...

ok... shutting up now  
but....

to me creativity isn't activity  
it is self awareness

**Michael Gerver**  
**Can you express creativity  
without mental or physical  
activity?**

Adam Fiveson  
yes

Michael Gerver  
How?

Jason Fowler  
You can?

Adam Fiveson  
you can imagine something  
without realizing  
mental activity happens while  
you sleep

Jason Fowler  
In imagining, you are using your  
mind though...

Michael Gerver  
Yeah that's still mental activity

Adam Fiveson  
so that's a matter of being alive

Paulina M Johnson  
I'm reading about how nothing is  
'real'. We make everything up. So  
creativity is reality.

Adam Fiveson  
so when you're dead you're not  
creative???  
other than that... wham...  
creative?

Paulina M Johnson  
Well, you're not 'you' anymore. I  
guess when you die you become  
(fill in the blank with your own  
theological theory)

Jason Fowler  
I feel like I will be less creative  
when I'm dead, yes.

Adam Fiveson  
LOL... jason!!

Todd Hilgert  
I'd say the opposite of creativity  
is the status quo. Just doing  
things the way they've been done

Adam Fiveson  
stasis

Paulina M Johnson  
Conformity?

Adam Fiveson  
nope...

Todd Hilgert  
Stasis is more accurate, I think

Adam Fiveson  
paulina... you can conform and  
still be creative

**Todd Hilgert**  
**Art movements are creative  
conformity**

Adam Fiveson  
you can daydream... you can add  
your own touches within  
conformity...  
in fact some of the best creativity  
can happen in conformity

Jason Fowler  
I prefer not to be touched in my  
conformity...

Michael Gerver  
Where is the line then between  
conformity and nonconformity?

Paulina M Johnson  
But you can do nothing and still  
be creative too. Especially if  
everything we take in with our  
senses is a creative interpreta-  
tion of your surroundings

Adam Fiveson  
when I know what my limits are...  
who I'm speaking to or for... I do  
my most creative work

Michael Gerver  
Some people say putting  
restrictions on creativity  
enhances someone's creativity

Paulina M Johnson  
Yep. Big VCFA thing actually.

Adam Fiveson  
the line between conformity and  
non-comformity is a good Q...  
since non conformists are really  
conforming to that reality

Adam Fiveson  
I agree with that Michael

Michael Gerver  
Everyone naturally puts their  
own spin on things they are  
conforming to anyway

Paulina M Johnson  
You guys type too fast!!!!

**Jason Fowler**  
**Serious question..... when as  
humans do we ever exist in a  
space that is not constantly  
creative?**

Paulina M Johnson  
Never!!!!!!

Michael Gerver  
In the womb?

Jason Fowler  
The world around us is constatly  
creating.

Paulina M Johnson  
And destroying. It's a flux.

Adam Fiveson  
wait Jason... so now the world is  
creating for us??

Todd Hilgert  
I don't think the act of creation is  
necessarily synonymous with  
creativity

Jason Fowler  
So, given that fact, it may be  
impossible (unless theoretically)  
to define a lack of creativity  
because we may never experi-  
ence one.  
(A world without creativity, I  
mean.)

Paulina M Johnson  
I agree w Todd.

Todd Hilgert  
Creativity is usually novel  
thought or creation

Adam Fiveson  
for this... me too

Paulina M Johnson  
I agree w Jason.

**Adam Fiveson**  
**yep... so... given that definition  
of creation...**

**novel thought or activity  
what's the opposite?**

“...IT MAY BE IMPOSSIBLE (UNLESS  
THEORETICALLY) TO DEFINE A LACK  
OF CREATIVITY BECAUSE WE MAY  
NEVER EXPERIENCE ONE.”

— JASON FOWLER



Jason Fowler  
Adam, I don't think the world is  
creating for us.

Adam Fiveson  
stasis.... LOL

Paulina M Johnson  
We should define creativity

Jason Fowler  
I think it created for itself.

Adam Fiveson  
yes paulina

Jason Fowler  
I may be going way to big picture  
with the definition.

Todd Hilgert  
Stasis or maybe just  
thoughtlessness

Adam Fiveson  
ok... so we are all speaking the  
same language... we need to set  
a baseline. I deal with this all the  
time. Language gets in the way.

Jason Fowler  
I think we are suppose to stick to  
artistic creativity, no?

Adam Fiveson  
probably

Paulina M Johnson  
Creativity as a human function

Jason Fowler  
Got it. I went too big then. My  
bad.

Adam Fiveson  
the opposite of that human  
function is

Michael Gerver  
If creativity exists does that  
mean it's opposite has to exist?

Paulina M Johnson  
Yes!! Mike.

Michael Gerver  
Like would we know creativity if  
we didn't know it's opposite?

Adam Fiveson  
thx

Paulina M Johnson  
According to the Tao Te Ching  
anyway. Yin & Yang

Michael Gerver  
lol that's exactly where I'm  
pulling from

Paulina M Johnson  
Just read it. It was a tad vague.  
But loved it

Michael Gerver  
I think it's supposed to kind of  
mess with your head a little bit

Adam Fiveson  
you just now read all 500 some  
quotes?

Paulina M Johnson  
My microwave broke so I'm  
eating cold pasta cuz I'm lazy.  
Wait, what? No, just the Tao Te  
Ching. Super short.

Jason Fowler  
That meal may be the opposite  
of creativity, Paulina.

Paulina M Johnson  
I know Jason!

Michael Gerver  
There was a phrase in a Dada  
book that works well with this.  
It's called "an interplay of  
opposites"

Michael Gerver  
That's how the guy described  
things like this

Paulina M Johnson  
Thanks Mike! I'll look that up too.

Do you guys mind if I put this  
conversation in my packet??

Michael Gerver  
It's in "Dada: art and anti art" by  
richter. And not at all!

Adam Fiveson  
I just looked it up... why did I  
think this was an immense text?

Paulina M Johnson  
Sweet!!! Thank you. The rest of  
you ok with the packet inclusion?

Todd Hilgert  
I only mind if you put Jason's  
statements in

Jason Fowler  
Hey now!

I'm cool with it.

Adam Fiveson  
Only if you make me look a little  
less stupid

Jason Fowler  
Todd, you got me.

Paulina Johnson  
love you guys.

Adam Fiveson  
We love you too Paulina.

Paulina M Johnson  
Go make some creativity!!!

Michael Gerver  
Love you too!!

Jason Fowler  
All love from me to you guys!

I'm beginning to realize that I'm looking to validate very specific ideas about reality, whether in the context of learning about peace and conflict, the conundrum about what the opposite of creativity is or within a greater span of opposing forces. The word that seems to overlap within all of these is **illusion**.

Starting next month I will focus a lot more on my physical making and the evolution of my visual aesthetic. I'll be honest though, reading, digesting, & writing has been really fun too. Is there a way to make that into a viable job after graduation? I don't want to go back to agency work, ever. Hardly even to client work. Is that horrible and completely naive?

**RANDOM SIDE STORY***Just a Note About Important Victories*

WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN YEARS OLD, MY PARENTS SENT ME away to summer camp. The logistics and backstory as to why they sent me are not quite relevant here, so I won't go into detail. Suffice it to say it was a much needed change of perspective which ultimately changed my whole being. I will always be grateful for that experience and for how it enriched my life. During my 3-week stay at camp, one day, I chose to go on the day's hiking trip. I'd never been hiking before. Up until that day, I was just plain city-folk. We packed our day-sack, put on our most comfortable shoes, and set out to walk in the woods. Maybe an hour into our walk our counselor stopped us and made us look right. He said something like, "you see that mountain there, the very top one?, That's where we're going today." I thought, "no way!" I was mentally already done walking and seeing the height of that climb, in my head, there was no way in the universe I would ever make it to the top.

I looked around and realized there was no one that would stay back with me or take me back to camp. I had to suck it up and find a way to shift my reality about the situation. I had no choice. I began walking with my head down, looking at my feet as they moved forward, one at a time. I began to notice the side seam of my super uncomfortable shoes, I realized how tired my legs were. I zoned out into survival mode. All of a sudden, before I could blink one more time, we were there. I **was there**. I'd made it to the top of the mountain (both physically and metaphorically). Which let's be honest now, was a mild hill. What was outstanding about the experience however was that I learned how to mentally overcome my own self-imposed and invented limitations. I had summited past my reality. The view was the most amazing I'd ever seen, because I'd earned it. It was magical. It was a moment I will never forget. This minimal but powerful triumph may have paved the path for me in many future physical endeavors, like running a marathon or having my babies naturally, for example. Most importantly however, it showed me how malleable and flexible my own beliefs and convictions about myself could be.

The reason I tell this story is because in a similar, but maybe less dramatic way, I have overcome another mountain this year. This time it is the mountain of reading. I am plowing through books like nobody's business these days, which I never thought I'd be able to do, ever. My first semester I read maybe three books throughout the entire six months. That's how many I read this month. It's unbelievable. I attribute it to a fine tuned system of access, a much better-formed habit and plain curiosity. Which probably means I'm on the right track here. I genuinely just want to know more and dig a little deeper.

TAO TE CHING<sup>14</sup>

by Lao Tsu, Translated by Gia-Fu Feng &amp; Jane English

As Alan Watts continues to be an important point of reference in my studies, this month I decided to read a text that may have influenced Watts' own philosophies. Much of his work is rooted at an intersection between Eastern & Western theology/philosophy, where he worked to interpret and popularize Eastern ideas in the Western world. *The Book*, which has been the true anchor of my work at VCFA, references the *Vedanta*, a Hindu philosophy based on the doctrine of the *Upanishads*. I own that book because I took a non-credit Hindu philosophy course after college (who does that?). And so I took it out of my bookcase, set it on my night stand, and bought a popular translation of the *Tao Te Ching* instead. The *Tao Te Ching* is a book I'd never read before, and so much shorter than the *Upanishads*. I didn't know much about the *Tao Te Ching* until now. I didn't know it was written in such a poetic style. I am a bit curious to go back and re-read *The Tao of Pooh* however, which I read many years ago as well. Specifically because I walked away thinking that the text was a bit open to interpretation and, unfortunately, a bit cliché. I hate to say that actually, because Taoism is the closest thing to a religion I'd ever consider subscribing to. Sadly though, I think sayings of wisdom, as those that comprise this beautiful book, have become so 'trendy' they've almost lost their weight. Regardless, I am glad to have read this book this month, and I look forward to seeing how its ideas will shape the direction of my research and work.

*This is probably the reason I'm so hell bent on figuring out what the opposing force of creativity is. According to the Tao Te Ching, because creativity is a basic human function, it must have one.*

The *Tao Te Ching* (The Book of the Way of Virtue), presumably written by Lao Tsu, is a classic Chinese text fundamental to both philosophical and religious Taoism. It speaks to and for the essence that is permanent in all of us, inviting us to recognize that our permanence lies in the vital forces of the cosmos, which exist simultaneously within ourselves. This beautiful and simple book encourages the reader to live in direct relationship to those forces, recognizing their necessary ebb & flow in life. **These forces, also referred to as "Yin & Yang, female & male, return & expression", affect all phenomena.**

"To be fully human is to develop a power of **attention** that allows this relationship (between forces) to take place within one's own psychophysical space."

*Every source I've come upon gets back to this very idea. We are victims of our own mental automation. Which ironically, was developed for our own survival.*

According to the text, we are all "built to be an individual incarnation of the whole"; very much in line with Watts' argument about the nature of our being. The *Tao Te Ching* advocates for silence, stillness and non action. This paves the way to the type of consciousness required to make room for full attention. This, I believe, is where this book is crucial to my studies of peace & conflict. According to the *Tao Te Ching*, **while our goal is to find the path back towards our central selves, this is an "elusive and fleeting experience" given the power, strength, and automatic nature of our action and thought.** The *Tao* is the *Way* to the inner spiritual practice necessary to achieve **attention**. Rather than contest against good/evil, peace/conflict, we must experience and embrace these forces together within ourselves. I find this fascinating. It's like there's something we're missing here. We want peace, but peace cannot exist without conflict, both internally and externally, and so we cause further conflict, turmoil maybe, by not embracing the Yin & Yang of these forces. We must "struggle for an attention of consciousness that can embrace two opposite forces without being swallowed by either". "This war is love. This love is war." Perhaps we innately focus much more on the negative, the struggle, the conflict, of our lives because our brains are wired to pay attention and attempt to avoid or evade their source or cause. However, because we can't avoid negativity, struggle and conflict, we get stuck on a perpetually misaligned focus of attention.

RESEARCH  
**SEMIOTICS**

RESEARCH

PKT 2.— PG 67

15. "ICON, INDEX AND SYMBOL: TYPES OF SIGNS." *ICON, INDEX AND SYMBOL: TYPES OF SIGNS*. ACCESSED DECEMBER 07, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.CS.INDIANA.EDU/~PORT/TEACH/103/SIGN.SYMBOL.SHORT.HTML](http://www.cs.indiana.edu/~port/teach/103/sign.symbol.short.html).

16. ATKIN, ALBERT. "PEIRCE'S THEORY OF SIGNS." *STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY*. OCTOBER 13, 2006. ACCESSED DECEMBER 07, 2016. [HTTPS://PLATO.STANFORD.EDU/ENTRIES/PEIRCE-SEMIOTICS/](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/).

## SIGN: ICON, INDEX & SYMBOL

My absolute hardest attempt at grasping Charles Peirce's Semiotic Theory and definition of the sign. Take One

Unfortunately, I have not received David Crow's *Visible Signs* in the mail yet. Regardless, one of my tasks this month was to learn about philosopher and logician Charles Peirce and identify the difference between his three types of signs: icon, index and symbol. I found a couple of good resources online that compliment each other well in the meantime. Resources noted in the footnotes.

According to Peirce, and the University of Indiana, a sign is "a **stimulus pattern** that has a **meaning**. The difference between the various kinds of sign has to do with how the meaning happens to be attached to (or associated with) the pattern."<sup>15</sup> This is fascinating, especially in relation to Robert Ornstein's concept that our brain is physically unable to truly know and understand the fullness and vastness of **reality**. We invent it through interpretation, association and categorization, which seems very much in line with Peirce's philosophy. We use signs systematically to navigate the world more easily, attaching and finding meaning throughout.

**Icons**, the simplest form of a sign, share in the likeness of what they represent. They are the 'no smoking' illustrations enclosed in red circles and the stick figures, with or without triangular skirts, that tell us to not smoke and guide us to the appropriate restroom. I have been designing and creating icons, for a long time. Many embrace previously used & known icons, in new and hopefully interesting ways, to convey the essence and culture of a company. Icons tell of something we have seen and know, in very simple and accessible terms. They stand in for the object they represent.

In contrast, an **index** carries with it an association of meaning, but does not share in the likeness of what it represents. Instead, it is defined by a sensory experience that corresponds and correlates it to that meaning. When we see someone on TV wearing a puffy coat, hat and mittens, for example, we 'know' the weather is cold. Indices operate through causal connections. Association of meaning is not always right or perfect, but serves to simplify the amount of sensory information we intake on the daily. I believe it is exactly what Robert Ornstein discusses in *MindReal*, a book I haven't finished yet, but that seems insanely relevant here.

Lastly, **symbols**, or rather words as symbols, are associations with meaning, just as the icon and index, but that lack any similarity or direct correlation to the object they represent. Symbols draw their meaning through the understanding of other symbols. They are not context-dependent and are easily associated with similar or related words. Symbols allow us to talk about and understand things or concepts we've never encountered before, such as unicorns or ghosts, for example. **Non-word symbols** are much like word symbols, but lack phonetic form. Examples include the cross that represents Christianity, the U.S. flag that represents this country, or the white dove that has come to represent peace and freedom. I believe some of the most successful corporate identities leverage the power of symbols to communicate ideas about their organization and provoke emotion in their audience. Sometimes side-by-side an icon, sometimes on their own. I also believe that because of the social context, personal back-story, and inventively vague nature, symbols have the most emotional power, both socially and personally. Maybe it's because we exert the greatest effort in attaching meaning that these weigh the heaviest on our identity and our collective mind.<sup>16</sup>



## SEMIOTICS OF PEACE & CONFLICT

*A Collection of Symbols and Design Materials (continued)*

Beyond the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament symbol, 'V' sign, olive branch and white dove, there are a number of other symbols that have represented peace throughout history; many of these stem from varying cultures and circumstances. The first of these new discoveries for me, shown above, was created by Nicholas Roerich in 1935 as a symbol for his influential treaty: *The Roerich Pact*.

*Pax Cultura & The Banner of Peace* // Roerich was a Russian painter and philosopher who, inspired by a deep-rooted admiration for culture and anthropology, initiated a movement for the protection and preservation of cultural artifacts, monuments, institutions and similar cultural values worldwide. *The Roerich Pact* and *Banner of Peace* movement ensured that cultural sites, activities and assets would be protected and considered **neutral ground during both war and peace, internationally**. Each designated site would fly the Banner of Peace, constituting the above symbol, to signify and ensure its safety and neutrality during conflict.



The symbol, consisting of three dots encased by a surrounding circle, references three-dot pictographs Roerich identified in his studies of ancient amulets. He “knew that it represented a deep and sophisticated understanding of the triune nature of existence.” For his own purposes, “Roerich described the circle as representing the totality of culture, with the three dots being Art, Science, and Religion, three of the most embracing of human cultural activities. He also described the circle as representing the eternity of time, encompassing the past, present, and future.”<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Roerich, *The Roerich Pact*, and the *Banner of Peace*, continue to play an important role in the protection and preservation of cultural treasures today. Although the flag and its symbol have not gained the iconic momentum and gravity of other peace symbols, I believe they have furthered social regard and the potential for a more wholesome sense of cultural and historical tolerance, appreciation and peace.

17. “NICHOLAS ROERICH MUSEUM NEW YORK.” *ROERICH PACT AND BANNER OF PEACE*. ACCESSED DECEMBER 07, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.ROERICH.ORG/ROERICH-PACT.PHP](http://www.roerich.org/roerich-pact.php).

Since winter set upon us in the Colorado Rockies, I've started going back to hot yoga. It's something I enjoy doing when it's really cold and when running outside sounds just miserable. At the end of class last week, as we recomposed back to sitting lotus position, our instructor led us to prayer as she chanted the mantra "Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti, Peace, Peace, Peace." Of course it caught my attention and so I decided to do a little reading on both the mantra and the term.

**Om Symbol** // According to *The Chopra Center*, "a mantra is an instrument of the mind—a powerful sound or vibration that you can use to enter a deep state of meditation."<sup>18</sup> In Yoga, mantras help set an intention as they are repeated, in silence, through breathing & physical movement. They are said to be "postures of the mind". The sound 'Om' is used as the anchor, or starting point, of many mantras. It is pronounced as three syllables "A, U, and M, or, phonetically, "aaah," "oooh," and "mmm." which according to *The Mandukya Upanishad*:

1. *AUM stands for the supreme Reality.*  
*It is a symbol for what was, what is,*  
*And what shall be. AUM represents also*  
*What lies beyond past, present and future*<sup>19</sup>

"Experts say these syllables can represent a slew of trios, including: the heavens, earth, and the underworld; the Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva (aka creator god, sustainer god, and destroyer god); and the waking, dreaming, and dreamless states"<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, this coincides with the *Pax Cultura* symbol and its underlying 'sacred three's'.



18. THORP, TRIS. "WHAT IS A MANTRA?" *THE CHOPRA CENTER*. JUNE 23, 2016. ACCESSED DECEMBER 09, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.CHOPRA.COM/ARTICLES/WHAT-IS-A-MANTRA](http://www.chopra.com/articles/what-is-a-mantra).

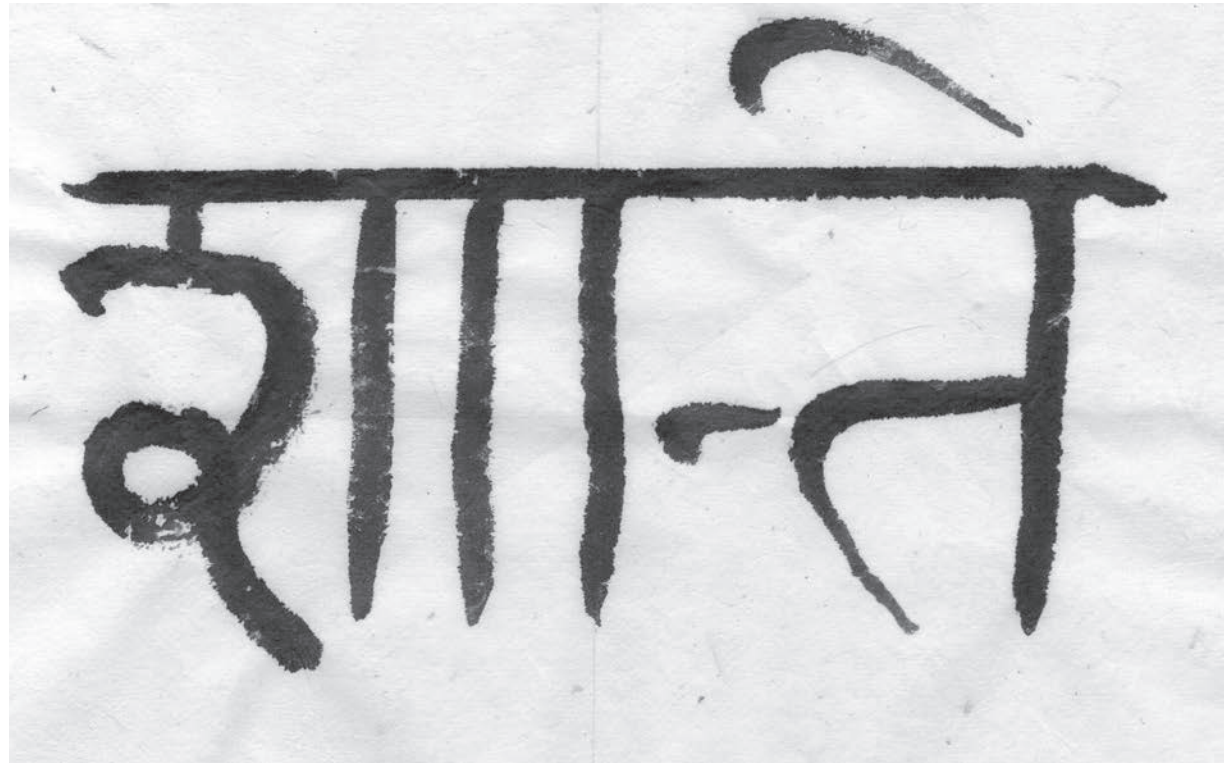
19. EKNATH, EASWARAN, AND MICHAEL N. NAGLER. *THE UPANISHADS*. PETALUMA, CA: NILGIRI PRESS, 1987.

20. REISS, VALERIE. "THE MEANING OF OM." *THE HUFFINGTON POST*. NOVEMBER 2, 2013. ACCESSED DECEMBER 09, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.HUFFINGTONPOST.COM/KRIPALU/MEANING-OF-OM\\_B\\_4177447.HTML](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kripalu/meaning-of-om_b_4177447.html).



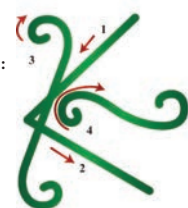
**Shanti Sanskrit Symbol // Shanti** means Peace. “It is repeated three times, as are many chants in Buddhism. In Buddhism as well as in Hinduism the threefold Shanti is generally interpreted as meaning the Threefold Peace in body, speech, and mind (i.e. peace in the entirety of one’s being).”<sup>21</sup>

21. BODHIPAKSA. “OM SHANTI SHANTI SHANTI.” *WILDMIND BUDDHIST MEDITATION*. NOVEMBER 21, 2006. ACCESSED DECEMBER 09, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.WILDMIND.ORG/MANTRAS/FIGURES/SHANTI](http://www.wildmind.org/mantras/figures/shanti).



**Shanti in Reiki //** I’m not clear on the association yet, but the word Shanti is also used in Reiki. “The word Reiki is made of two Japanese words—Rei which means “God’s Wisdom or the Higher Power” and Ki which is “life force energy”. So Reiki is actually “spiritually guided life force energy.”<sup>22</sup> It is a healing tradition in which ‘laying hands’ help the flow of one’s ‘life force energy’ to reduce stress and achieve relaxation. It is spiritual in nature, but it is not a religion. It has no dogma, nor does it require an inherent belief in the practice or methods. It is accessible to just about anyone, and after reading all about it, I’d love to try it.

In Reiki, the Shanti symbol is created like this:



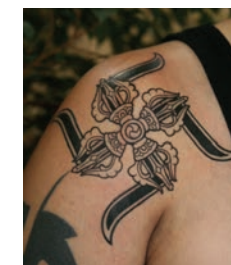
22. “WHAT IS REIKI?” *WHAT IS REIKI?* ACCESSED DECEMBER 09, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.REIKI.ORG/FAQ/WHATISREIKI.HTML](http://www.reiki.org/faq/whatisreiki.html).

Last, since I am delving in Hindu symbolism, it would be remiss of me to not mention the Swastika. “The word ‘swastika’ is a Sanskrit word (‘svastika’) meaning ‘It is’, ‘Well



Being’, ‘Good Existence, and ‘Good Luck’. However, it is also known by different names in different countries - like ‘Wan’ in China, ‘Manji’ in Japan, ‘Fylfot’ in England, ‘Hakenkreuz’ in Germany & ‘Tetraskelion’ or ‘Tetragammadion’ in Greece.”<sup>23</sup> Its earliest finding dates back more than 12,000 years, to modern-day Ukraine. It is a symbol steeped in influence, whose meaning and power has undoubtedly shaped history. The Swastika is a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Odinism and is a prevalent element in Indian and Indonesian architecture, as well as on early Christian artifacts. In Buddhism, the Swastika was tied directly to Buddha and good fortune, while for the Phoenicians it was the sacred sun symbol. “In Hinduism, the right-hand swastika is a symbol of the God Vishnu and the Sun, while the left-hand swastika is a symbol of Kali and Magic.”<sup>20</sup> I do not believe the Swastika has ever had a direct correlation to the word ‘peace’, although its early use and significance was consistently tied to positive and auspicious attributes, physically and metaphysically.

Of course we all know what happened when Nazi Germany appropriated this symbol to further their Fascist and “Aryan Identity” ideals. From my perspective this goes to show the power and volatility of symbols. They can hold immense power when they become attached to identity. As part of our mental vocabulary for understanding the world and finding our place within it, they become part of us. So much in fact, people go to the extent of permanently etching their form on their bodies.



23. BLACK, JOHN. “THE SYMBOL OF THE SWASTIKA AND ITS 12,000-YEAR-OLD HISTORY.” *ANCIENT ORIGINS*. ACCESSED DECEMBER 09, 2016. [HTTP://WWW.ANCIENT-ORIGINS.NET/MYTHS-LEGENDS/SYMBOL-SWASTIKA-AND-ITS-12000-YEAR-OLD-HISTORY-001312](http://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/symbol-swastika-and-its-12000-year-old-history-001312).

ART & DESIGN

# PLAY WITH MATERIAL

ART & DESIGN

PCKT 2.— PG 79

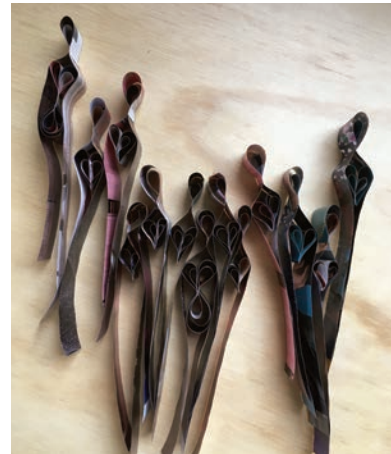
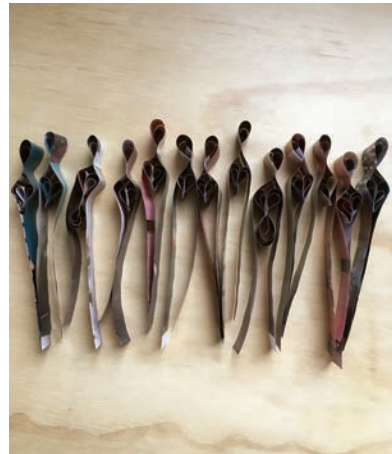


**Iteration #1** Exploration of negative space and the creation of lettering within. Hand-made wooden frame and bent/rolled/glued catalog strips.

*I'm ditching this project. It's not really working for me. It's too literal and not executed very well.*



**Iteration #2** Exploration of simplified human forms anchored by an implied common source and physical connection. Heart symbol embedded within. Made with strips of recycled catalog and informed by iteration #1.



*I love the gestural flexibility of these paper forms. Would love to make them out of a different type and weight of paper, possibly connecting all of them at the bottom. They seem to really want to tell a story.*





**Iteration #3** Exploration of abstract organic forms threaded together. Made with catalog and newspaper strips. Informed by iterations #1 and #2.





*Maybe this direction has some potential. I was thinking about making long strips of these that would hang together. Each one would be made out of a different type of recycled paper, implying we all construct our reality from different sources of information (newspapers, brochures, religious texts, academic volumes, novels, etc.) Each strand could represent something different, all would be threaded and interconnected.*