Navigating cross-cultures, curriculum and confrontation

Addressing ethics and stereotypes in design education

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acceptance that demonstrates the subject people's developmental deficiency and hence their difference from European culture. In this way, historians' conceptions of printing, typography and the book's "beginnings" in the United States become reiterations of European printing's early hardships. What a historian happens to identify within United States history as a "pioneering" methodology or publishing genre may simply be that person's attempt to preserve the established historical continuum within a novel environment. This model of indigenism becomes a repeating one throughout the Americas as many different nations and peoples work independently to emulate the countries of Europe and to position themselves within printing history's expanding global trajectory, while bringing about a truly modern and misleading sense of what it means to be "indigenous."

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the non-importation agreements, he or she would need to deal with shipping delays and unexpected cost increases; the impending war further disabled timely deliveries. Finally, when the Revolution prevented importation entirely, North America's printers began working to improve the quality of their local equipment and materials. Yet many printers continued using their deteriorating presses and worn-out printing types because American craftsmen would not come to equal England's manufacturing standards until some time after the new country became independent.

The American printers' ability to sacrifice optimum conditions for print production and accept insufficient typographic quality becomes a mechanism that historians use to express American culture as a "pioneer" virtue. The term "native" becomes an attribute of the publications and printing types that come about through local sources of production. This introduces a sense of indigenism as a discursive *return* to nativeness. What I call "Creole indigenism" appears in printing history as that which second-generation settlers and revolutionaries are making for themselves as first-generation American "natives." Creole indigenism comes about because of the need for American historians to construct and promote an ideological foundation to represent their newly emerging nation as independent of England. In his essay "The Origins of Typefounding in North and South America," Lawrence Wroth designates Abel Buell and his long-primer font of 1769 as the first successful instance of North American typefounding because Buell's letters were molded from "native-made" punches and matrices rather than "foreign-made" ones. As the American frontier expands outward from the Eastern seaboard, the location for "native" American culture moves with it. Indigenism is once again the representation of difference between a worldly and an isolated society, yet now the "center" shifts away from London and moves into the American printing centers of Boston, New York and Philadelphia. The typographic historian Rollo Silver writes that Elihu White expanded out of his Boston shop to start the Cincinnati Type Foundry in 1820 as an "indigenous" enterprise (1967, 67), given the city's position as an up-and-coming economic center in the United States' "new" West, and the residents' interest in keeping their money out of the eastern states.

In contrast to the nineteenth-century models of history as a chronicle of human progress, Creole indigenism takes a developmental step backwards and is represented as a cultural slippage. In contrast to the Guaraní encounter with the Jesuit missionaries, historians define North American colonial printers as "indigenous" not through their successes in duplicating the European technology, but through their prideful inability to equal it. Indigenism becomes a badge of

therefore not surprising that the printers who came to the western shore of the Atlantic Ocean were not of outstanding ability; they were but representative of the class from which they sprang" (1937, 1).

Yet when the contemporary historians Hugh Amory and David D. Hall assert the "continuity" of the printed matter moving back and forth within what they call "the Atlantic World," it is difficult not to reconsider America's supposed equality with England as the representation of a cultural power struggle. From the outset of their collaborative history, theirs, they claim, "is a history of beginnings" (Amory and Hall, 2000, 1). Amory and Hall criticize what they call the "enterprise of favoring American originality and difference" (2000, 7) as a faulty research objective given the dependency of the original thirteen North American colonies on England's culture and economy:

> Eschewing, we trust, a perspective that values any book printed in America more highly than those imported from overseas, we use the term "colonial" deliberately in order to emphasize the continuing dependence of the book trade in the mainland colonies on its European (chiefly British) sources of supply for paper, type and presses, as well as for books, texts, and wider cultural practices. Within cultural and social history, the colonial situation meant that the colonists were minor figures in a commercial and intellectual traffic that originated within cosmopolitan centers on the other side of the Atlantic (2000, 8).

When one reads deeper into Wroth and Oswald's histories, one discovers similar contradictions. The ill-printed English and North American books of the colonial period were equally poor, while the best North American books of the period could not match the quality of the finest English editions, and the typical printer working within the colonies, so Wroth says, made no special effort to produce anything out of the ordinary (1938, 280). Wroth, in one example describing the typographic output of the Harvard College Press, writes: "Its average work was little worse after the first few years than the common run of English printing of its day, but it must be added that its best was well below the standard of the best London production" (1949, 33).

There is, in fact, much evidence to suggest that North American printers did not easily retain the high standards of their English counterparts. On the American side of the Atlantic, there was little opportunity for novice printers to train with experienced professionals and limited outlets for purchasing the printing presses, type fonts, inks and paper that were readily available overseas. If an American printer wanted to order type or paper through an English supplier, in spite of

also as something to excite the interest of European audiences and appeal to their pride. As Isaiah Thomas puts it, *Up-Biblum God* was "a work of so much consequence as to arrest the attention of the nobility and gentry of England, as well as that of king Charles [II], to whom it was dedicated" (1810, 241).

Despite the recognition that James Printer has received as an exceptional figure in printing history, his historians largely deny the hybrid nature of his identity, and James *himself* becomes a product of Western culture. Hugh Amory notes that James Printer used the name James Wowhaus before working with Samuel Green (2000, 89), and Thomas informs us that James had two brothers named Anaweakin and Tarkuppawillin (1810, 290), yet we never learn James' birth name. Identifying James with the surname "Printer" not only conceals his native subjectivity but also makes his "otherness" palpable and mysterious through a naming abnormality. James "Printer" appears within colonial histories and imprint bibliographies not as an indigenous man, but as a representative worker of the missionary service industry. By disregarding James as a native benefactor of typography's European heritage, historians promote the illusion of colonial conformity, and close off the possibility that James's presswork might reveal something unique about his hybrid subjectivity.

making indigenism modern

As the timeframe for North and South America's colonial histories comes to a close, the representation of indigenism becomes more complex as historians encounter the need to distinguish the New World's emerging national identities from the established colonial and indigenous ones. In the beginning, North America's printers could not help but to reproduce the cultures from which they came. It is the consensus of Lawrence Wroth and John Clyde Oswald that the English printing of the seventeenth century exhibits a salient aesthetic mediocrity, and that the early North American printers, especially those departing from England's provincial printing establishments, carry this unremarkable tradition to North America with them. In his essay "British Influence on American Printing," Wroth counts "innumerable" editions reflecting the "haste, ignorance and tastelessness" of the English printers of the time (1949, 33), and he introduces the "colonial printer" into his eponymous history by writing: "If these generalizations concerning the characteristic features of his time be allowed, they place the colonial printer in a class from which we should expect little that is pleasing in typographical form" (1938, xv). As Oswald confirms at the outset of his *Printing in the Americas:* "It is

identification of Isaiah Thomas's history as one of his three primary references, he describes Eliot's work as "the culmination of a courageous effort on the part of the translator and printers" (1938, 17), placing all the credit with Eliot, Green and Johnson. Wroth doesn't set the record straight until his later essay "British Influence on American Printing," in which he identifies *Up-Biblum God* as a book "composed and printed under pioneer conditions in a barbarous tongue" (1949, 33). Like Oswald, McMurtrie identifies Eliot's project as "the first edition of the Scriptures in any language to be printed in North America" (McMurtrie, 1938, 407), and, like Wroth, he does not mention native participation anywhere throughout his global history of the book.

Do any of the aforementioned histories provide evidence that the Massachusett people identified with or benefited from the translated scriptures? We have nothing in the way of reactions from the Massachusett people themselves, understandably. Isaiah Thomas cites the Corporation's notice that Eliot's *Catechismes* were "much wanting amongst the Indians" (1810, 243), and he quotes Eliot as encouraging funding for the second edition of *Up-Biblum God* by describing the natives' "constant use" of the first edition (1810, x). With no other evidence that the Massachusett people welcomed Eliot's civilizing motives, we encounter conceptual difficulties if we identify projects like Eliot's as "indigenous." The online *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies one sense of the term *indigenous* as something "of, pertaining to, or intended for the natives" (second edition, 1989). In other words, that which is labeled as "indigenous" can gain its identity through an act of cultural production. The products that a historian can rightfully attribute to being "of the natives" would be the products of a peoples' own making, including the manifestations of their spoken and written language. John Eliot effectively appropriated and transformed the Massachusett language to create *Up-Biblum God* as an object "of" the colonial power structure that was "intended for" native use. The Eliot histories demonstrate the ways that historians of the Americas characterize native languages not as autonomous cultural entities but as secondary linguistic vernaculars, languages that owe their print identities to imperial typographic models. Through the process of vernacularization, native languages come into history as linguistic symbols of colonial authority and control; in Eliot's case, by following the English typographic tradition. The formal durability and portability of mechanically reproducible alphabets ensured that traveling printers could reproduce European writing systems with accuracy and consistency across great spans of distance, thereby reinforcing what were quickly becoming international standards of cultural "sameness." We can therefore view *Up-Biblum God* not simply as a product "intended for" native use but

leaders, artists and non-profits to develop creative and innovative solutions to the challenges facing contemporary society. But, as these challenges become more global in scope, participatory design research becomes a critical tool to address cultural differences in visual and verbal messages. Often, design curricula lend themselves to a more linear design process focused in production that ignores the larger issues of community and the environment in the scope of their solution. The question then becomes "How, as designers, can we begin to see and then solve design problems at a higher level? How do we get students to see design in terms of systems and communities rather than artifacts or even components of an artifact?"

increasing complexity of design problems

In his book, *Design Methods*, J. Christopher Jones writes about the scale of design problems within contemporary society. At the smallest scale, design solves only a small part, a component of a problem. At this level, design research is largely formal and concerned with issues of aesthetics and content hierarchy. At the product level, design looks at an entire artifact or problem. Design research may involve formal and content research. Designers are responsible for the entire making process. Within the component and product levels, design is largely concerned with the production process; in this case, it is responsible for creating a visual system and hierarchy that can be continued through a variety of media but is not as concerned with its life outside of the product. At the system level, design problems become more complex and require thorough research and thought into the context of an artifact or problem. The most expansive of Jones' hierarchy levels, the community, requires an in-depth examination of the depth of a design problem. At this level, designers must address issues of sustainability and life cycle as well as aesthetics and hierarchy. Jones tells us that contemporary design problems are most often at the community and systems levels, and not at the levels of products and components where our design curricula are most often centered.

Before asking design curricula to solve more complex design problems we need a better framework in which to conduct our research. The process of participatory action research allows students a broader frame of collaboration within the classroom and the community as well as a process of formal self-evaluation that allows students to better address the issues of a global community within their designs.

participatory design research

Thinking about the people for whom we design as participants in the design process, action research, is an iterative process that balances collaborative problem solving with data driven analysis or research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Action research has several distinctive features including the following:

→ Collaborative enquiry
→ Reflective practice
→ Participatory problem solving
→ Self-evaluation

Action research requires that students analyze and develop concepts and theories based on experiences. Concepts and theories are self-evaluated at multiple stages in the development process. Students involved contribute equally to the enquiry and collaborate both as partners and as those affected by the problem and its solution. Allowing the students to experience a problem as both designer and intended audience gives a heightened sense of responsibility as well as the sense of being expert at some part of the problem solving process.

Perhaps the most important aspect of action research to the classroom process is its use of collaborative enquiry. In order for students to understand the problem outside of a largely formal framework, they need to directly observe, interact and design with other designers, developers and end users. Working in and observing multi- and cross-disciplinary teams builds accountability and user testing directly into the design process. Students venture into the community in order to better understand the complexity that surrounds a problem.

Participatory action research is a diverse approach to research. In recognition of diversity within this type of research, Reason and Torbert formulated a three-person framework. These three separate, yet integrated pathways are described as first-, second- and third-person action research. First-person action research fosters self-inquiry and increasing awareness of the researcher's own everyday life as the process unfolds. Second-person action research focuses on interpersonal encounters and the researcher's ability to collaborate with others in their community of inquiry. Third-person research activities extend the inquiry within a wider community with the intention to transform the politics of the issue.

Bradbury and Reason differentiated first-person practice as 'work for oneself,' second-person as 'work for partners' and third-person as 'work for people in

the wider context' (Bradbury and Reason, 2001). It is within the third person that students are pushed to think about design and issues of sustainability, the environment, the community and life cycle.

conclusion

Undergraduate and graduate education plays a pivotal role in the development of the future designers of the world and our educational institutions must rise to and meet the challenges facing the designers of tomorrow. Design curricula must do the following: educate design students of the future; foster current, innovative creative research that will positively impact the field; and provide a space for faculty, students and the community to come together to solve multidisciplinary problems for the betterment of a global society.

Design problems have become increasingly faceted and complex. Designers must address lifecycle, wildly varied audiences and increasingly tight timelines in addition to communication. In addressing the increasingly complex problems facing our global community, we must ask the question, how can the use of classroom collaboration, participatory design research and multidisciplinary teams encourage creativity, innovation and critical thinking in student and professional designers; and, can it create more sustainable designed solutions?

In order to address the changing role of the designer we must first address the problems facing our current design curricula. We need to address the gap between where the field is going and where the design curriculum has stagnated. This is a question of what challenges our future designers will face—what our design curricula can do to address them.

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