SURFIN' WITH
ABE VIGODA
DEFENSE OF MY PROCESSES AND STRATEGIES IN PRINTMAKING AND BOOK ARTS

by

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of my grandparents Josephine Palombo Mastrovita (1909-2000), Isidoro Mastrovita (1910-2001) and John J. Gerardi (1910-1985). I will not forget that you sacrificed your trade, your mother tongue your homeland, even your names in hopes of providing your children and grandchildren with comfort and choice. This book is also dedicated to the memory of Myra Wells Thompson (1948-2001), and to her husband Terry, for teaching me that life and books are one in the same.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to my one surviving grandparent, Evelyn Dorothea Poppel Gerard(i), who instilled in my sister and me a love of books that has grown into our lives’ work, and to the memory of her mother, my great-grandmother Emma Lange Poppell, whose last written words to me (at the age of 102) were to “stay in school”, and whose ghost is still chirping at me to “check every stitch on both sides.”

Thanks also to my sister Poppyann Robin Mastrovita Longsjo, brother-in-law Mark Longsjo, and parents Poppy Gerard(i) Mastrovita, and Robert Paul Mastrovita for offering support even when they didn’t always understand where I was going, and for the long walks on the beach that are the grounding of my soul. Long live the glorious complexities of all things Mastrovita.

Without the support of my family and friends, none of this would have been possible for me. This is especially so for Devlin Thompson, my partner, comrade, and truest of allies.
I. Introduction

"... the ideological effect of the media...is a reaction to experienced changes in the institutional framework of working-class life...the media have progressively colonised the cultural and ideological sphere...As social groups live increasingly fragmented and sectionally differentiated lives, the mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an image of the lives, meanings and practices and values of other groups and classes; and (b) for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces can be coherently grasped. So, a credible image of social cohesion can only be maintained through the appropriation and redefinition of cultures of resistance..."

(Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style)

From my early childhood, I have had a deep and long-standing interest in books, and printed ephemera. I loved smelling the unique cool and sweet scent of mimeograph toner, and always enjoyed the ritual that my parents made out of reading our Sunday newspapers. My grandmother was a librarian who would seek out children’s books with something “extra” for my sister and me as children. She trained us both to appreciate the Charles Tuttle Publications books on Japanese tea ceremonies and origami, and to not save our places in books by turning page-corners or leaving a book open to its desired page with its spine in the air. My sister and I created our own personal libraries with her library card paraphernalia, and checked books out from each other’s rooms.
As I grew older, and began looking at Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly’s earlier editions of *RAW* (see fig. 1), I learned about the potential flexibility of commercially-printed books. In high school, my beloved English teacher and faculty advisor for our school newspaper, William Batty made a point of taking us to Amherst, Massachusetts, where we watched a bunch of crusty old guys in filthy lead-and-ink stained aprons hand-set the type for our newspaper. These gentlemen were friendly, and happy to show us their print shop on their smoke breaks.

It is because of experiences like these that I have become absorbed in virtually all aspects of the production of the written word — from punk band flyers, comic books and candy wrappers to newspapers, books, journals, and artist books. During the past decade, I have been employed in various aspects of book, magazine and journal publishing, both commercial and academic. Before coming to graduate school for printmaking, I was a copy-editor and graphic designer for several years, and have also been a ‘zine editor for the past decade. Looking back at each of these experiences now, I think about how each one involved a different kind of institutional printing process. My affinity for these older
processes has manifested itself in an unruly collection of zines, mini-comics, punk rock flyers, eight-track tapes, cassettes, vinyl records, and old video games. Participation in our media choices is a means of preserving our cultural longevity—be it print, audio, or video, and I believe that this is what has motivated me in working towards my M.F.A. in printmaking and book arts.

As a student of printmaking and book arts these past three years, I have learned many new and old printing techniques which I have incorporated into my work, building upon ideas that were germinating at the end of my undergraduate education (see fig. 2). However, I feel that it is important to define myself as an artist in a broad sense—not exclusively as a printmaker— and that my primary goal is to learn from my influences, which will in turn facilitate my ability to choose or reject traditions and techniques of printmaking, book arts, painting, etc. as applicable to each piece.

In the following sections of my thesis, I have cited several examples of writing and interviews with some of the greatest influences of my work. Some of these include work created by visual artists, others include my personal commentary, and still others are merely transcriptions, to which I felt that there was nothing left to
add. I will then discuss the body of work that includes (a) what I consider to be some of the seminal pieces that I created during graduate school, and (b) the work that I chose to exhibit in the Georgia Museum of Art as part of my thesis exhibition.

**Part II: Printing Philosophies, Formats and Strategies that I Have Employed in my Work**
(see fig. 3)

Our world is dominated by predatory and manipulative commercial interests that devalue the assertion of individuality, of free speech, and of the longevity of media. It has therefore become necessary to acknowledge and seek out non-traditional or subverted environments for the expression and circulation of these ideas. The last thirty-five years of zines, mail art and band flyers demonstrate work made by artists who have continued to work in either a manual, de-centralized, or low-tech fashion. In doing so, they have exercised resistance against the runaway train of technological subjugation, and have succeeded in defining a new dialogue that initiates a critical investigation of all media.

**Punk**
(see Fig. 4)

"Just because the media moved on to glorifying shit metal or dance crap after they squeezed all they could out of punk doesn’t mean punk died, it means it went back into the hands of
those who actually give a shit about it. However, now that punk has built itself a respectable following—largely through the do-it-yourself efforts of the youths themselves—the music business smells money and are now moving in big-time.

Punk won’t die after shit rags like Spin or Billboard move onto the next trend. The people who are involved in punk for the music and/or for its potential for helping foment social change will still be here...if we have any say in the matter, punk will remain a movement for and by the people who love it and not by those who judge it only by its “market potential.”


When Sue Coe, printmaker, illustrator and political activist came to UGA as a visiting artist, she mentioned that political activists need to accept that they may only see success in small changes, and that these small changes may one day aggregate into larger ones. Her point was that we shouldn’t get discouraged when the larger issues that we care about may not come to fruition, but to keep our faith with the small things that we can change. In an interview in Punk Planet, she answers a question from Peter Brandt:

“...I wanted to ask you about something you wrote in Dead Meat: ‘Every dollar I get drips with blood too,’’ Does that have to do with your commercial work?"

‘Sure. I think that we’re all complicit in this society. What we can say is that we aspire to be better, and that’s the best we can do. But we live in this state of capitalism where our existence is at the exploitation of other worlds. We are on this pyramid, but we must be conscious of that and aware of that to change it. I think everyone knows that in some subliminal way (p. 51)”

—from “For art to become a weapon, it first has to be art: Sue Coe,” interview with Peter Brandt, in Punk Planet # 39 September/October 2000, p. 51.
Zines

Longtime zinester and former staff member of (the now defunct) Factsheet 5 Jerod Pore answered the following questions about the definition of a ‘zine here:

When did zines start? What was the first zine?
It depends on whether you place more importance on spirit or form. Some of the most popular answers to this question are: the Revolutionary-era pamphlets of the 1860s, the mimeographed science fiction fanzines of the 1930s, and the punk rock fanzines of the 1970s.

What’s the origin of the term zine?
The word zine comes from the word “fanzine”, which in turn owes something to the word “magazine”. Fanzines are short run publications written by fans, a definition which applies to many zines as well.

What are zines? What aren’t zines?
In various incarnations, this is probably the most frequently asked question on alt.zines. With regards to form, most will agree that zines are paper publications with small print runs, usually serialized. With regards to spirit, most will agree that zines are driven by passion rather than profit. Beyond this, few blanket generalizations can be made, though people love to try. Some argue that a zine ceases to be a zine as soon as it sells more than 5,000 copies, or adopts a barcode or International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), or accepts advertising, or costs more than $3, or has a glossy cover, or looks professionally done, or has readable text... and so on.

More information can be accessed at:
http://members.tripod.com/altzines/faq.html
or on Usenet under alt.zines
Revival of Older Media Technologies
(see fig. 5)

Eight-track collectors are the archivists of a unique and glorious technology. We embrace a machine that has ceased to exist in the present...The format is not so important as the information within it, so the plan of corporations to make you re-buy the same music over and over again on different formats is, as one tracker puts it, “backwards thinking.” Commit an act of consumer disobedience with us and reject the unjust laws of a marketplace ruled by greed. Follow the way of the 8-track and reap the spiritual rewards that come with renewing and recycling instead of stepping in line with the cattle so captivated with the consumerist culture that ultimately benefits only landfill brokers.

Russ Forster, 8-Track Mind

Russ Forster is the editor of the zine 8-Track Mind, and director of the film So Wrong They’re Right. In both projects, Forster explored the simultaneous death and revival of the 8-track tape and tape-player. All the while, he has encouraged thousands of people to become, in his words, “the archivists of a unique and glorious technology...(to) embrace a machine that has ceased to exist in the present...(and to see that)...the format is not so important as the information within it.” Adapting the 8-tracker philosophy to the printed image, I have collected, created, or recycled a number of images reproduced from zines, mail art, punk flyers, agitational propaganda and graffiti.
Each of these text and image-based genres—flyers, mail art, and zines—have incorporated varying degrees of high- and low-tech printing along with a collage/assemblage aesthetic in an attempt to neutralize and re-interpret mass-media images to assert personal identity, individuality, and resistance to our corporate culture. These images reflect the ongoing struggle to produce meaningful work in a range of available print media—regardless of its commercial viability.

Mail Art
(see Fig. 6)

"an enormous, pluralistic, global communication phenomenon. Senders and recipients from around the world daily exchange expressive, provocative mail by recycling the contents and altering the surfaces of mailing tubes, envelopes and parcels. In time, these original, collaged surfaces resemble layered palimpsests of artist postage stamps, rubber-stamped images, cryptic messages, and slogans. Mail art networking, however, encompasses and exceeds alteration and manipulation of material sent by international post. Creative communication by concepts, visual symbols, signs and languages is a prime objective that influences the way artists use media like papermaking, painting, audio, video, computers, artist books...Xerox, stamp art, zines and performance art." Within this continual, networking process of conceptual transformation and exchange, the incredible collage of global expression emerges."

—Chuck Welch

The following text is excerpted from an interview between
Canadian mail artist Anna Banana and Dutch mail artist/archivist Ruud Janssen)

AB: I am enjoying reading the interviews, and found the current one you sent,arto posto's to be quite stimulating. I was interested to note her making a distinction between the original mail art network, and the rubber-stamp net being spawned by (the commercial/craft trade periodical) Rubber Stamp Madness. I've been watching Rubber Stamp Madness 's development for some time, and note that many of the advertisers are running CONTESTS to get readers to send in artworks, with PRIZES offered for the best work! This is NOT in the mail art tradition, nor is all the "how-to/techniques" articles that are run in Rubber Stamp Madness. What I see happening there, is the gentrification of mail art, ie. the "taming of the shrew." ...The focus in this rubber-stamp movement - moving into mainstream America - is decorative, rather than revolutionary. This focus on craft and technique produces "pretty" art-works, but entirely misses the CONTENT with which mail art rubber stamping began; ie. the usurping of an initially business technology (the rubber stamp) for the expression of radical, anti-established, anti-consumerist sentiment.

I find it amusing and ironic that mail art, which while radical and critical in outlook, was always about inclusive; anyone can do it - everyone has something to say, everyone's work is to be of equal value, etc. etc. etc., is now being watered down by this great rubber-stamp connection to mainstream America via Rubber Stamp Madness. In place of discussion of political, economical, human rights or artistic philosophies, we now find techniques and how-to articles flooding the pages. Criticism of the status quo has definitely taken the back seat, if it has not been left behind all together...

...In the past five years or so, a number of practitioners (Michael Jacobs, John Held, Peter Küstermann, for example) seem to have become crusaders, and with an almost religious zeal, go about giving workshops to "get everyone to join in," rather than simply continuing to explore and enjoy their existing contacts. Providing information about the network seems OK to me - if people "get it," and want to participate, fine, one has facilitated that connection. However, these workshops in techniques seem self-serving in that, in the guise of
“spreading the word,” the motivation behind them is either to get paid the fee for doing the workshop, or to sell products; rubber stamps, supplies and equipment - which is a long way from the original critical stance of those engaged in mail art.

All that said, I must come back to your question and say I don’t believe there are any valid "shoulds," in mail art. Mail art is an ever-changing, evolving networking practice, and it is futile to attempt to tell anyone how they "should" do it. For me, it is not as interesting to exchange with persons who focus on how-to/techniques, or concern about producing decorative, saleable greeting cards and the like, as with those whose focus is a critique of the society in which we live. (Reproduced with the permission of TAM Further reproduction without the written consent of Ruud Janssen and the Artist is prohibited. TAM Mail Art Archive http://www.faximum.com/jas.d/dlib_tam.htm)

Garbage/ Dumpsters

From Kurt Schwitters’ Dadaist “merz” or “commercial” work, (see figs. 7 and 8) to the Minutemen’s “Project ‘Mersh,’” or Shinro Ohtake’s garbage books (see figs. 9 and 10) the interpretation of discarded sound, image and print has served an important role universally in asserting that what we throw away has not only an afterlife of symbolism, but is also a means of diagnosing how an all-encompassing and ever-growing commercial culture perverts the better interests of humanity.

"...I cruised dumpsters in downtown alleys and pilfered a ton of junk just begging to become art:... What I began to realize was that almost all the junk I collected, from liquor labels to fashion magazines, from tabloid newspapers to toy cartons, had specific political and social meaning that played a role in
my life and the culture that defined my existence. When I started breaking these things apart and rebuilding them into my own image, I was able to understand the intricate forces that had molded me and driven me away from mainstream society.”
—Kim Nicollini, San Francisco cut-and-paste artist

DO YOU WANT NEW WAVE OR DO YOU WANT THE TRUTH?

A word war
I set off the keg
my words are war!
should a word have two meanings?
what the fuck for?
should words serve the truth?
I stand for language
I speak for truth
I shout for history
I am a cesspool
for all the shit
to run down in
—the Minutemen

Printing as A Subversive Act

“...I spent my evenings sneaking into (a) closed-up office building, which was above a strip club on Market St., to use the Xerox machine and the computers. First all by myself, chain-smoking and gazing out the windows at the esoteric glowing eyeballs and clouds on the Oddfellows Temple across the street, at the drunken brawls outside the check-cashing place on the corner, following with my eyes the saunters of pony-tailed girls on their way to work at the peepshow downstairs. Later I got lonely and started throwing zine parties. The kids I invited would stand on the street six stories down, the lively corner of 7th and Market, and they would scream ‘Revolution!’ and I would take the elevator downstairs and let them scurry in. It was really fun. After getting completely wired on coffee, I would start in on wine, René Junot, six bucks for a wide bottle, or some squat green grenades of Mickey’s or whiskey, or what-
ever people brought, and everyone who came would have to write something and it would get printed out on the computer and I would stick it all together with a gummy yellow glue stick and crank it out on the Xerox machine...

Iris chose a really cool font for her anticapitalist tirade. It looked very handsome folded into the book and was my favorite page. Bobby wrote a funny bitch about the O.J. Simpson thing, Laurel wrote a love manifesto for a girl she had a crush on, George Xeroxed his tongue and wrote about stealing from his job, and Suzanne wrote about waiting in line for food stamps. It was a great zine and it took us 'til six in the morning to finish it. I was just so blasted, moving around the office filled with cigarette smoke, collating the pages, and then boom the Xerox machine ran out of ink and I went into some kind of mania, determined to finish producing this zine that we had put so much earnest love and creativity into. There didn’t seem to be any more ink cartridges. A bunch was actually on the shelf above my head, but I never looked up. Instead I found a plastic jug filled with the leftover toner of other dead ink cartridges, a fine black powder, some inches of it. I removed the spent cartridge from the humming machine, and I stabbed a good-sized hole into the plastic. I made a crappy funnel, and I poured in the recycled toner...I was so bitter and disillusioned with the union I didn’t much care about the theft...in this back room was a little porcelain saucer of a sink, above which I transferred the toner, creating small but potent clouds of toxic black dust that settled in thick clumps to be washed into the bay...I patched up the gash in the toner cartridge with masking tape, plugged it back into the machine and finished all the zines. The head of the union called me for weeks afterward, needing to “talk to me about something.” I never called him back. Ultimately he changed the locks and that was the end of the zine parties Michelle Tea, Valencia. Seal Press, 2000 (pp. 46-47)."

**Xerox/ Mimeograph: Printing as direct action**

In February of 1962, I was sitting in Stanley’s Bar at 12 and B with some friends from the Catholic Worker. We’d just seen Jonas Mekas’ movie Guns of the Trees, and I announced I was going to publish a poetry journal called Fuck You, a magazine
of the arts. There was a certain tone of skepticism among my rather inebriated friends, but the next day I began typing stencils, and had an issue out within a week. I bought a small mimeograph machine, and installed it in my pad on East 11th, hand-cranking and collating 500 copies, which I gave away free wherever I wandered. Fearful of getting arrested, I nevertheless mailed it to my heroes around the world, from Charles Beckett, from Picasso to Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg. Fuck You was part of what they called the Mimeoograph Revolution, and my vision was to reach out to the "Best Minds" of my generation with a message of Gandhian pacifism, great sharing, social change, the expansion of personal freedom (including the legalization of marijuana), and the then-stirring messages of sexual liberation. I published Fuck You, a magazine of the arts from 1962 through 1965, for a total of thirteen issues. In addition, I formed a mimeograph press which issued a flood of broadsides and manifestoes during those years, including Burroughs’ Roosevelt After Inauguration, Carol Bergé’s Vancouver Report, Auden’s Platonic Blow, The Marijuana Review, and a bootleg collection of the final Cantos of Ezra Pound. —Ed Sanders, author of 


“Direct access to mimeograph machines, letterpress and inexpensive offset made these publishing ventures possible, putting the means of production in the hands of the poet. In a very real sense, almost anyone could become a publisher. For the price of a few reams of paper and a handful of stencils, a poet could produce, by mimeograph, a magazine or booklet in a small edition over the course of several days. Collating, stapling and mailing parties helped speed up production, but, more significantly, they helped galvanize a literary group. The existence of independent bookstores meant that it was actually possible to find these publications in all their raw homemade beauty...

...These extremes of production quality and availability are comfortably subsumed under the concept of the “mimeo revolution,” the unprecedented outpouring of poetry books and magazines that took place roughly between 1960 and 1980; the writing and publishing with which this survey is concerned are
those which emerged precisely at the point at which the New American Poetry met the memo revolution. The “mimeo revolution” as a term, is a bit of a misnomer in the sense that well over half the materials produced under its banner were not strictly produced on the mimeograph machine; however, the formal means of production are not as important in identifying the works of this movement as is the nature of their content. Looking back at them now, the books and magazines of the mimeo revolution appear imbued with a vivid purity of intention which it is nearly impossible to conceive of creating in today’s publications.”(from A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, by Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips. The New York Public Library/ Granary Books, 1998, pp. 14-15).

Agitprop/ The Situationist International

On May 16th, 1968 in Paris, artists, art students, and striking workers formed the ATELIER POPULAIRE, occupied the École des Beaux Arts, and worked together in the school’s litho shop to produce posters that would, “Give concrete support to the great movement of the workers on strike who are occupying their factories in defiance of the Gaullist government.”

(see fig. 11)

The posters of the ATELIER POPULAIRE were designed and printed as an anonymous, unified collective, were distributed without charge, spawning similar work in other countries. The political vein of these flyers continues in the work of West Coast cut-and-paste artists like Winston Smith and Art Chantry, (see figs.
who have made a life’s career of dismantling our nation’s political propaganda and commercial mythologies in works like these, all the while refusing to use computers. The work of Smith, Chantry, and other cut-and paste flyer artists continue a tradition of political satire whose roots are in Dada, Fluxus, English satirists like Jonathan Swift (literature) or William Hogarth (illustration/caricature circulated to the public via newspapers and journals), and punk.

Shepard Fairey
(see fig. 14)

This last fake poster satire, circa 1993, is of an OK Cola ad. Coca-Cola commissioned alternative comics artists like Dan Clowes, author and creator of the comic serial Eightball, and Charles Burns, of Black Hole, both published by Fantagraphics Books. Some good and not-so-good-natured ribbing was directed towards Clowes and Burns for accepting these commercial gigs, and “selling out” alternative art to the mainstream, much in the way commercial punk bands like Green Day and Nirvana were criticized in the early ‘90’s for working with major recording labels to distribute their music.
The flyer, designed and strategically hung in public subway stations by the printmaker Shepard Fairey, emblemarizes a critique of the commercial niche marketing of punk and youth culture. Fairey is best known for the "Andre the Giant Has A Posse" sticker and stencil phenomenon, (see fig. 15) which began back in the late 1980's. Fairey's work adopts the strategy of the San Francisco's Billboard Liberation Front, skate(board) punk sticker-ing and grassroots poster-ing. His work commonly requires its audience's participation in (petty) criminal activity. (e.g. I had to steal this flyer from a subway train in Boston back in 1994, and have also placed Andre the Giant Has A Posse stickers on both public and private property).

Fairey has maintained the momentum of an ongoing proj-ect involving the image of Andre the Giant, a (now deceased) pro-fessional wrestler, by selling stickers, encouraging people to place them in public places, rewarding people who have produced boot-leg versions of these stickers, and archiving the results. He has published "the Giant Manifesto" to explain why he began this project over 10 years ago in Providence, Rhode Island, and why it is still going strong today.
He says:

"The Giant sticker seems mostly to be embraced by those who are (or at least want to seem to be) rebellious. Even though these people may not know the meaning of the sticker, they enjoy its slightly disruptive underground quality and wish to contribute to the furthering of its humorous and absurd presence which seems to somehow be anti-establishment/societal convention."

It is significant that Fairey has managed to keep this project going for over a decade, and that he has taken the time and effort to document its massive participatory element. This project’s roots are in graffiti tags, yet unlike tagging, which tends to remain localized to a single urban area, Andre the Giant Has a Posse has managed to infiltrate hundreds of areas, urban, suburban and rural, throughout the United States. Of course, these posters, graffiti and stickers are still ephemera, and municipal clean-ups periodically remove all evidence of their existence.

Its subversion lies in the fact that it encourages thought about our own absorption of commercial images, as well as the legal implications of our possibilities to respond in dialogue. How we create dialogue with this image defines the extent to which we are willing to break the law. We may never respond, but place the sticker in a notebook, or drawer. Or, we may engage in copyright infringement by copying the sticker, or vandalism by placing the
sticker in a public place. Fairey incorporates the process of agitation into his project by documenting the results.

Stella Marrs

(see fig. 16)

Stella Marrs runs a successful business that manufactures calendars and postcards of her design that employ the use of (now-) kitschy postwar commercial imagery lifted from domestic manuals and women's magazines. She subverts the message of the photograph's original intent by including captions that represent her own radical feminism. The effect of the postcard on one hand is enjoyable as an in-joke, where we can laugh at how ludicrous life would be if we actually believed the propaganda that is targeted to women in the commercial media by immediately recognizing how dated the photographs are. On another level, she forces the viewer to read the political message of the postcard by "looking backward to look forward. While on one hand, we can fool those who expect our passive conformity via our consumption of the products that make us "desirable" we are also reminded to remain engaged with the media, because it is inevitably trying to coerce us into passivity and powerlessness.
Her relationship with American culture as a first-generation American is also interesting to me, because she has the ability to observe and critique as both an outsider and insider. Her identification with aprons, food, and the postwar "necessity" to move women back from the factories and into the household also taps into many of my own experiences.

Stella (Marrs') work with large groups of young women in the 1980's provided the essential social and aesthetic link between the Womens Lib movements of the 1970's and the Riot Grrrl expressions of the 1990's.

I've looked at your project and your work and some of the work from people you've collaborated with as a way of connecting back to energy sources such as "girl" energy and "grandmother's homemade apron" energy...this is the way to go to connect with women, with the culture that is available to women. As opposed to just simply, "This is my personal objection"

"There were one-hundred-thousand images in my brain of what girls and women looked like. How do I resolve the fact that powder blue, this particular haircut, this particular fabric and this particular dress shape that actually translates form to a certain archetype of female—what do I do with that image having been embedded in me so deeply? I had to redefine it."

What does it mean to you to be an American?

That's an overwhelming question. You asked me that when we spoke earlier too. I was thinking about it and thought about the 1940's. There is something about those images of women with their aprons on, in the garden or the kitchen, in the laundry, on the street, doing what they think has to get done to make the world good somehow. The thing about those particular '40's images is that in some weird way, they're connected to European peasant imagery—ruddy-cheeked, physical, earth-bound, faces uplifted, the sun, the wind and spirit. Something
about this is what drives me. Some kind of European idea about making things.

**Do you mean it's European in that so many Americans are European if you go back to the old country?**

"Exactly. But I'm also talking about the way things are made there or the way food is dealt with."

(Stella Marrs, in an interview with Lloyd Center, from Punk Planet # 37, May/ June 2000, (p. 43)

**Noam Chomsky**

Noam Chomsky, a renowned linguist and social critic has managed a career-long critique and analysis of the effects of America's military-industrial complex and its effects on the world media, the American academy, and on society-at-large. His ability to size up the truths and fictions of America's diminished democracy and diplomacy abroad is unparalleled. His life's work is an unrelenting testimony of speaking truth to power, and has deeply influenced my dedication to fulfill my obligations as a visual artist and writer.

"When you have total control over the media and the educational system and scholarship is conformist, you can get that (the falsification of information) across...the picture of the world that is presented to the public has only the remotest relation to reality. The truth of the matter is buried under edifice after edifice of lies upon lies...If we want to understand our own society, we'll have to think about these facts. They are important fact, important for those who care about what kind of society they live in... (but it) is not simply disinformation...The issue is much broader. It's whether we want to live in a free society or whether we want to live under what amounts to a form of self-imposed totalitarianism, with the
bewildered herd marginalized, directed elsewhere, terrified, screaming patriotic slogans, fearing for their lives and admiring with awe the leader who saved them from destruction, while the educated masses goosestep on command and repeat the slogans they’re supposed to repeat and the society deteriorates at home…(Noam Chomsky, Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda. Seven Stories Press/ The Open Media Pamphlet Series, New York, 1991(pp. 31—58)

Mark Dery

I first read the following essay by Mark Dery in a Cambridge, MA bookstore in 1993, and promptly purchased the pamphlet thereafter. Dery’s prophetic analysis of then-contemporary media and technology has served as a framework for the strategy of much of the past decade’s media criticism on grassroots and underground levels.

Reality isn’t what it used to be. In America, factory capitalism has been superseded by an information economy characterized by the reduction of labor to the manipulation, on computers, of symbols that stand in for the manufacturing process. The engines of industrial production have slowed, yielding to a phantasmagoric capitalism that produces intangible commodities—Hollywood blockbusters, television sit-coms, catchphrases, jingles, buzzwords, images, one-minute megatrends, financial transactions flickering through fiberoptic bundles. Our wars are Nintendo wars, fought with camera-equipped smart bombs that marry cinema and weaponry in a television that kills. Futurologists predict that the flagship technology of the coming century will be “virtual reality,” a computer-based system that immerses users wearing headgear wired for sight and sound in computer-animated worlds. In virtual reality, the television swallows the viewer, headfirst…
Meanwhile, the question remains: How to box with shadows? In other words, what shape does an engaged politic assume in an empire of signs?

The answer lies, perhaps, in the "semiological guerrilla warfare" imagined by Umberto Eco. "[T]he receiver of the message seems to have a residual freedom: the freedom to read it in a different way...I am proposing an action to urge the audience to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation," he writes.

"[O]ne medium can be employed to communicate a series of opinions on another medium...The universe of Technological Communication would then be patrolled by groups of communications guerrillas, who would restore a critical dimension to passive reception."

Eco assumes, a priori, the radical politics of visual literacy, an idea eloquently argued by Stuart Ewen, a critic of consumer culture. "We live at a time when the image has become the predominant mode of public address, eclipsing all other forms in the structuring of meaning," asserts Ewen. "Yet little in our education prepares us to make sense of the rhetoric, historical development or social implications of the images within our lives." In a society of heat, light and electronic poltergeists - an eerie otherworld of "illimitable vastness, brilliant light, and the gloss and smoothness of material things" - the desperate project of reconstructing meaning, or at least reclaiming that notion from marketing departments and P.R. firms, requires visually-literate ghostbusters.

...Culture jammers answer to that name. "Jamming" is CB slang for the illegal practice of interrupting radio broadcasts or conversations between fellow hams with lip farts, obscenities, and other equally jejune hijinx. Culture jamming, by contrast, is directed against an ever more intrusive, instrumental technoculture whose operant mode is the manufacture of consent through the manipulation of symbols.
The term “cultural jamming” was first used by the collage band Negativland to describe billboard alteration and other forms of media sabotage. On Jamcon ‘84, a mock-serious bandmember observes, “As awareness of how the media environment we occupy affects and directs our inner life grows, some resist...The skillfully reworked billboard...directs the public viewer to a consideration of the original corporate strategy. The studio for the cultural jammer is the world at large.” Mark Dery, *Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs*. The Open Media Pamphlet Series, New York, 1992.

**Nexus Press**  
*(see Fig. 17)*

At the end of my second year in graduate school, I had become acutely aware that teaching jobs in printmaking were difficult to obtain. At that point, my strategy was to diversify my book experience, which, before graduate school, had already involved several years of commercial and academic publishing. Before my internship at Nexus Press in the fall of 2000, I worked in the Preservation department at the University of Georgia Main Library. Working with at the library was enjoyable, because there was a constant stream of books that had either been vandalized or neglected, and it was fun to try and formulate exactly how, when and where the books had been scribbled into, or liberated of their nude pictures. Repairing these books, and learning about different types of
adhesives and conservation tools helped me look at the structures of my own books with more confidence.

Nexus, in short, was the most enlightening experience of my career in books. Aside from being immersed in the work of dozens of book artists, I had the privilege of working closely with Jo Anne Paschall, a veteran (and renegade!) librarian and publisher of artist’s books, and Brad Freeman, a master offset lithographer, book artist, and publisher of the *Journal of Artist’s Books (JAB)*. Nexus is in a unique position as a non-commercial publisher, in that the press is not beholden to a corporate mission.

In apprenticing with Brad at the press, I learned (a) to shoot negative film onto plates, (b) about how complicated a Heidelberg press is to operate and maintain (which then taught me how much I have taken offset printing for granted), and (c) about how much work is actually done at the press after the pre-press work has been completed, or “put to bed,” a term that in the publishing trade means that everything has been sent to be printed, and that the book has been, essentially, completed.
Having experience communicating with commercial offset printers as a managing editor, and having been a student of print-making, I understood lithographic processes, inks, non-commercial grade papers, and so on. But in spite of this familiarity with commercial print terminology and fine art printing, working at Nexus forced me to realize that my previous understanding of book production was faint at best, and that the labor of a professional pressman is, as a norm, separated and de-emphasized. The publisher and author are separated as the “brain” of the book, while the pressman is the “muscle,” much in the way an architect’s role is held in higher esteem than the builder. Deconstructing the creation of a book by asserting the presence of the printer is one (of many) points made by Brad Freeman in his book MuzeLink, which I was fortunate enough to see while I was an intern at Nexus (see fig. 18).

Jo Anne taught me about cultivating an audience for the Press’ books, and about establishing each book’s role as a link in a chain of of noble sacrifices that originated in Nexus’ establishment as a student cooperative in the early 1970’s. Each book was in fact, a collaboration that encapsulated the work of both the artist as well as the staff at the Press.
From having seen and learned so much about different artist books and larger book editions, Nexus has helped me understand my own work as a book artist who has created mostly one-of-a-kind books. In becoming privy to each phase of a book’s creation, it then became necessary for me to concretely define each phase of labor that went into the production of the book.

Once I managed to do this, it then became possible for me to evaluate my own books by how their message was to be delivered to an audience. On one hand, I see my one-of-a-kind books as ready-to-view manuscripts. In their current state, they can be viewed as complete pieces of work, that is to say that their content is complete. Each book embodies the processes that I have wanted to work in: mostly printmaking, painting, and surface techniques that cannot be duplicated in a large print run. On the other hand, they are also ready to be re-interpreted as books that may yield a much larger print run. This would make them less precious, easier to distribute, and ultimately available to a wider audience. Although the production of these books in larger editions would not necessarily make them more “democratic” as vehicles of information (since their production costs and distribution apparatus are all variable factors in determining their ultimate audience), there would
certainly be more books.

**III. Clarification of My Work and Processes**

My earlier work involved the archiving and assemblage of historical mass-media images that reflected my identity and responses to my class, cultural, and body (mis)representation in American commercial media. The images that I most closely focused upon originated from everyday American commercial sources: food packaging, cookbooks, sewing patterns, Girl Scout handbooks, paper dolls, secretarial supplies, ladies’ magazines, and beauty guides. (see figs 19, 20, 21, and 22). My approach to making art at that point had been influenced by different cultures, their resistance to assimilation, and their methods of subverting the imagery and traditions of the systems that dominate them in public and private space.

These influences came from music and print: the former being Jamaican cut-and-mix (ska, bluebeat and early reggae) music, the collaged sounds arranged by musician-producers like Phil Spector, Brian Wilson, or Billy Childish (see fig. 23), as well as British and American punk rock (see figs 24, 25 and 26), culture jammers like John Trubee, and the band Negativland. The latter,
print, was influenced by the image and text movements of Fluxus (see fig. 27), the Situationist International (see fig. 28), mail art (see fig. 29), alternative comics (see fig. 30), and fanzines (see fig. 31). I have been influenced by the manner in which these art, text, and musical movements have incorporated varying degrees of high- and low-tech printing and reproduction in an attempt to neutralize and re-interpret mass-media images to assert personal identity, individuality, and resistance to our highly manipulative corporate culture.

**Appropriated Imagery**

**Cakes**
(see fig. 32)

I find cakes interesting because they speak deeply about the social hierarchies in which they were created. Cakes have a history of having been crafted from the most expensive ingredients available, symbolizing the wealth and prosperity of their consumer. They are difficult to bake and decorate, yet their success is hinged upon the successful concealing of all efforts to create them. They are matrices of how we present ourselves to others.
On the outside, they are often linked to religious feasts and semi-public family celebrations; while on the inside, they are a composite of oral histories, hand-written recipe exchanges, and other de-centralized modes of communication.

Aprons

(see fig. 33)

Aprons are linked with our notion of labor (something I have become quite conscious of as a printmaker)! The apron is universally perceived as part of one’s work “uniform.” I am specifically interested in the frilly “domestic” apron as a symbol that represents (a) subordination and (b) the suppression of the evidence of that subordination.

Betty Crocker

(see fig. 34)

A 1936 version of Betty Crocker appears consistently, though not invariably, throughout my work. I chose her image precisely because she is a generic/ composite embodiment of an American female consumer, and because it was initially distributed on a propagandist scale in ration-recipe pamphlets during the World War II era. Her name and image still evoke cake-baking, cooking, and “traditional” domestic ideals.
“Betty Crocker was invented in 1921. (The name) Betty was thought to have a warm and friendly sound: Crocker was the name of an emeritus director of the company. A male correspondent answered her mail using this name until 1936, when she was finally given a face and torso modeled after a number of women in the Home Service Department of the company. As of 1990, her face has been repainted six times.” Charles Goodrum and Helen Dalrymple, Advertising in America.

Working with the image of Betty Crocker has forced me to think critically about perpetuating the use of older technologies of printmaking, as well as of the meaning and distribution of the printed word and image to the viewer. On one hand, I have been perfectly aware that Betty Crocker is not “real.” But at the same time, what she represents is. Her role as an American cultural icon is to convey that an American woman’s proper duty to is strive for domestic perfection, and that the fulfillment of that duty is patriotic. By convincing American consumers that it is their (or their wives’) responsibility to achieve this domestic fantasy (the perfectly baked cake, the perfectly clean home, etc.), their preoccupation becomes patriotic. Since so many Americans at the onset of the First World War were only first- or second-generation Americans, many of them, like my parents, were extremely self-conscious about their own assimilation as “proper” Americans.
A contemporary example of this self-consciousness would be Martha Stewart, herself a first-generation American of Polish descent. Her media empire reflects the use of many similar marketing strategies, with the additional burden of amplifying the middle-America Betty Crocker-isms with the very real anxiety and preoccupations that many first- and second-generation Americans’ place upon upward socioeconomic mobility. I chose against using her image, because I felt that a reaction to her presence would look too “knee-jerk,” due to her current level of media saturation.

At the end of my first year, much of my work resulted in low-volume matrix printing and monoprint collages. These prints incorporated varying degrees of high- and low-tech methods of printing and reproduction in my work, using both pre-digital paste-up methods and digital typesetting/imaging processes. During the fall semester of this year, I wanted to do something that (a) involved the participation of other people, (b) reflected the democratic roots of printmaking, and (c) incorporated the use of an alternative (i.e.) non-gallery space.
In figs. 35, (see fig. 35), you will see an example of an altered cake-cutting template from a 1956 Betty Crocker cookbook ("to get more pieces and daintier ones"). I carved several linoleum blocks with this image, hand-printed slightly over 100 of these cake patterns, and distributed them by mail to 100 people in pre-weighed, postage-paid envelopes. This particular cake was altered by one of the piece's participants. I did not solicit my peers or professors in the School of Art, because I was really interested in responses from people outside of the academy. Most people returned their pieces by mail; the more unwieldly and three-dimensional pieces were hand-delivered to me.

These pieces were initially displayed in a studio space at the bottom of the Foundry Building, 112 Foundry Street, downtown Athens, GA) because I wanted a controlled space in a non-traditional gallery environment where I could collect my cakes as they came in, assemble and arrange them, and encourage the participants of this project to view them. (see fig. 36). A pleasing irony was that the Foundry Building also houses the pre-production/editorial offices of Athens' local newspaper Flagpole, and adds another layer to my finding comfort in the spaces where the printed word is generated.
I am now making one-of-a-kind books that I alter with my own writing, graffiti/marginalia, and cut-and-paste techniques that are influenced by a necessity to incorporate varying degrees of high- and low-tech printing and reproduction in an attempt to neutralize and re-interpret mass-media text and image. Working within the structure of zines and other de-centralized media, my work is based upon the exploration of the class and gender implications inherent in the devaluation of non-commodified communication and labor in print. I have archived and collected hundreds of images for reproduction and, ultimately, redefinition, as a means of opening up a dialogue with restrictive definitions of beauty, identity and consumerism. These images and objects are gathered from places where they have been discarded by their previous owners: garbage dumpsters, yard sales, or flea markets. By cataloguing and re-interpreting these images and objects that I have selected for my books, I am then able to engage in a critical recalibration of social values and rejection that ultimately strengthens my sense of self-worth.

In creating a body of work that includes a variety of one-of-a-kind books, I have developed a greater flexibility and spontaneity in the application of printmaking and surface design techniques. In addition to drawing, painting and machine-sewing, I have printed
with stamps that I have made from doll clothing and accessories, toy printing presses, Sintra plates, commercial and hand-cut stencils, and pieces of pasta. I have been compelled to work largely (though not exclusively) in pink in attempts to visualize a depth within this color range that is socially prescribed to femininity, while at the same time reflecting a struggle with the narrowness of choices and expectations in living up to the "feminine" that demand a denial of self.

At this point in my career, I have worked in—or at least witnessed—virtually every stage of a book’s life. I intend to continue making one-of-a-kind books, perhaps expanding upon their accessibility by altering them slightly so that they can be printed in larger editions on an offset press. To fulfill this goal, I have arranged at my new job as assistant director at Nexus Press in Atlanta, GA to apprentice one day a week with the press director Brad Freeman, an internationally renowned master offset printer and book artist, on a Heidelberg KORD one-color lithographic offset press for the next few years. The notion of printing in larger editions, at this point, however, is secondary to the realization of my one-of-a-kind books as intimate, single objects. I may also expand upon my books by translating them (or parts of them) into per-
formance, correspondence, or digital film/animation pieces.

**IV: Detailed Description of My Work and Processes**

**Cake Matrix**
*(see fig. 36)*.

The matrix that I used for this project was a cake-cutting template from a 1956 Betty Crocker cookbook that was designed “to get more ‘dainty’ pieces to serve from a cake.” I printed around 100 of these cake patterns, sent them to 100 people by mail, along with a recipe card on which I asked each participant to record either a cake recipe or a memory about a cake. I placed each cake piece that was delivered back to me inside of an individually stamped cake box, and arranged them in this space.

*(see fig. 37)*

Each written index card was recorded and archived into a recipe box that was displayed with the rest of the cakes. I hung aprons on the wall of the space that I sewed and silkscreened with related imagery, and repeated the cake-cutting template as wall and floor spraypaint stencils to blend in with the building’s pre-existing graffiti.
Cakes and recipes are a composite of oral histories, written exchanges, and other de-centralized modes of communication. As a printmaker, I find myself constantly struggling to develop greater flexibility and spontaneity in my application of printmaking and surface design techniques. It is my goal to create a body of work that includes a variety of nontraditional prints and books that respond to my influences and surroundings, and express my ideas of the relationship between text and image to their fullest.

¡Viva El Coche! (2000).

(see figs. 38-41)

This book was an example of where I responded to my surroundings, and responded to a pre-existing piece of 3-D graffiti as though it were a found object. Two students built this fake car, or “El Coche” as a protest to UGA’s unfair parking regulations. I “detailed” the car by adding on mudflaps, dice and other bits of ornament, having no idea who originally built the car.

I took photos and then placed them inside of a book, which I then editioned for myself and the two artists who built the car. The Spanish “El Coche” sparked the Mexican revolutionary cry of “Viva Zapata,” which I altered to Viva El Coche!! Now that the car
has finally been destroyed, these artists have a commemorative piece of their work.

Spontaneous. (2000).
(see fig. 42)

Another “found object” piece is this small book that I developed like a zine. This was another example of trying to loosen up. After spending a year of taking printmaking VERY SERIOUSLY and having copyedited for the five years preceding graduate school, I found that I was editing, analyzing, and proofing myself into a creative shutdown. As you can see, this book is left wanting in technical execution, but I think that is precisely what I find charming about it and other zines and artist’s books that I encounter.

(see figs. 43-46)

One-of-a-kind book, Coptic-bound from machine-made Lana and Kitakana papers, and handmade paper made with hand-dyed cotton and linen fibers. Printed and collaged, using a combination of oil-based inks, face makeup and fixative. Processes included stamping, linoleum relief-cuts, Sintra relief-rolled plates, hand-cut and “found object” spray paint stencils. The materials I have used include a combination of handmade and institutional
papers and fabrics that have been printed and bound with various hand, mechanical, and digital printing techniques such as relief carving, ink-jet printing, silkscreen, stencilling, photocopying, perforating, and machine-sewing. I have also used a variety of substrates such as ink, paint, dye, spray paint, food coloring, and makeup.

Punk-As (s) Fuck. (2000).

(see figs. 47-50)

One-of-a-kind book of handmade gray paper and machine-made posterboard. Bound at edge with duct tape, army fatigue canvas, safety pins, a green Mohawk, and multiple piercings. Pages bound with surveyor's tape and machine-sewing. Printed and collaged with a combination of letterpress (with type gathered exclusively from the hell bucket!), inkjet, handcut spraypaint stencils, Xerography, found objects, and paint.


(see figs. 51-54)

spraypaint stencils, stone lithography tearaways, IBM Selectric typewriting, gum litho transfers, and acrylic paint.

**The Magic of Love.** (2000).

*(see figs. 55-58)*

One-of-a-kind transformed book (originally published as *The Magic of Love*, by Vida Hurst. New York: Gramercy Publishing Co., 1947). Book was removed from its original case binding, repaired with Japanese mulberry paper, re-arranged and re-bound with a Coptic binding. The book was also printed and collaged with a combination of acrylic paint, Prismacolor pencil, hand-cut and "found object" spraypaint stencils, machine-sewing, hand-dyed and screened fabric, inkjet-printed fabric, handmade paper, wallpaper, contact paper, Xerography, clippings from ladies' home journals and tabloid magazines.

**girl_glyph-gâteau I.** (2000).

*(see figs. 59-60)*

One-of-a-kind book of handmade paper. Printed and collaged with a combination of handcut spraypaint stencils, silkscreen, and blind embossing.

(see figs. 61-62)

One-of-a-kind book of handmade paper. Printed and collaged with a combination of handcut spraypaint stencils, silkscreen, and blind embossing.


(see figs. 63-67)

One-of-a-kind book. Collection of zine articles, songs, and treatises printed and collaged onto handmade paper with a combination of digital printing, xerography, silkscreen hand- and machine-sewing, found objects. Binding replicates a World-War II-era recipe-collection book that belonged to my grandmother. Design on the book's case are altered girl-scout merit award medals. There are also several Japanese stab-bound zines encapsulated within the piece. The images that I feel compelled to respond to in this spirit originate from everyday American commercial sources: mostly old cookbooks, sewing patterns, Girl Scout handbooks, ladies' magazines, or beauty guides.

This book adapts the structure of an old cookbook that my grandmother, a librarian, recently gave to me. Here I am repeating
the theme of recipes and zines as decentralized publications that deliver important, though marginalized information. Instead of collecting recipes from women’s serial magazines like my grandmother did, however, I collected zine articles, and catalogued them with a hierarchy of altered and subverted Girl Scout medallions, within which I have placed vibrators, shrunken heads, rat-tail combs and skull-pipes. I also included several tiny zines and a pouch of bad-girl tchotchkes.

The Sequence of a Uniform. (2000).
(see figs. 68-72)

One-of-a-kind book, structure made from machine-made Arches 88 paper, with handmade paper from hand-dyed cotton and linen fibers. Printed and collaged, using a combination of oil-based inks, face makeup and fixative. Processes included stamping, linoleum relief-cuts, Sintra relief-rolled plates, hand-cut and “found object” spray paint stencils, IBM Selectric typewriting, gum litho transfers, and acrylic paint.
List of Figures

Fig. 1  RAW, edited by Françoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman.

Fig. 2  Mandy Mastrovita, "Happy Homemaker," 1992

Fig. 3  Winston Smith, "The Spoils of War"

Fig. 4  Aaron Cometbus "Punk Rock Love Is"

Fig. 5  Russ Forster, 8-Track Mind

Fig. 6. Original One-Inch Art Show

Fig. 7. Kurt Schwitters, Copi

Fig. 8. Kurt Schwitters, Vend

Fig. 9. Shinro Ohtake, Retina (Silver Cheese) Scrapbook # 50.

Fig. 10. Shinro Ohtake, ATlanta 1945+50

Fig. 11. Atelier Populaire poster

Fig. 12. Artist Unknown, The Blackouts

Fig. 13. Art Chantry, Sex Therapy

Fig. 14. Shepard Fairey, AG

Fig. 15. Shepard Fairey, Andre the Giant Has A Posse sticker

Fig. 16. Stella Marrs postcard

Fig. 17. Ruth Laxson, \((\text{Ho} + \text{Go})^2 = \text{It}\)

Fig. 18. Brad Freeman, MuzeLink

Fig. 19. Mandy Mastrovita, untitled, wax monoprint, (1999)

Fig. 20. Mandy Mastrovita, detail, Cake Matrix, (1999-)

Fig. 21. Mandy Mastrovita, untitled, (1999)
Fig. 22. Mandy Mastrovita, untitled, (1999)

Fig. 23. Billy Childish and The(e) Headcoats record sleeve

Fig. 24. Jamie Reid, God Save the Queen

Fig. 25. The Trashwomen record sleeve

Fig. 26. Shawn Murphy, The Jesuits flyer

Fig. 27. Ben Vautier, Total Art Matchbox

Fig. 28. Atelier Populaire flyer

Fig. 29. Heart of A Networker

Fig. 30. Henriette Valium, Primitive Cretin

Fig. 31. Factsheet 5

Fig. 32. Mandy Mastrovita, cake pattern, Cake Matrix, (1999-)

Fig. 33. Mandy Mastrovita, apron, Cake Matrix, (1999-)

Fig. 34. Mandy Mastrovita, Betty Crocker shrine, (1999)

Fig. 35. Jeff Johnson, cake pattern, Cake Matrix, (1999-)

Fig. 36. Mandy Mastrovita, et. al., Cake Matrix, (1999-)

Fig. 37. Mandy Mastrovita, recipe box, Cake Matrix, (1999-)

Fig. 38. Mandy Mastrovita, ¡Viva El Coche! (2000).

Fig. 39. Mandy Mastrovita, ¡Viva El Coche! (2000), detail.

Fig. 40. Mandy Mastrovita, ¡ Viva El Coche! (2000), detail.

Fig. 41. Mandy Mastrovita, ¡ Viva El Coche! (2000), detail.

Fig. 42. Mandy Mastrovita, Spontaneous, (2000).

Fig. 43. Mandy Mastrovita, Pink Collar Ghetto, (2000).

Fig. 44. Mandy Mastrovita, Pink Collar Ghetto, (2000).
Fig. 45. Mandy Mastrovita, *Pink Collar Ghetto*, (2000).

Fig. 46. Mandy Mastrovita, *Pink Collar Ghetto*, (2000).

Fig. 47. Mandy Mastrovita, *Punk As(s) Fuck*, (2000).

Fig. 48. Mandy Mastrovita, *Punk As(s) Fuck*, (2000).

Fig. 49. Mandy Mastrovita, *Punk As(s) Fuck*, (2000).

Fig. 50. Mandy Mastrovita, *Punk As(s) Fuck*, (2000).

Fig. 51. Mandy Mastrovita, *Mercy Fuck*, (2000)

Fig. 52. Mandy Mastrovita, *Mercy Fuck*, (2000)

Fig. 53. Mandy Mastrovita, *Mercy Fuck*, (2000)

Fig. 54. Mandy Mastrovita, *Mercy Fuck*, (2000)

Fig. 55. Mandy Mastrovita, *The Magic of Love*, (2000)

Fig. 56. Mandy Mastrovita, *The Magic of Love*, (2000)

Fig. 57. Mandy Mastrovita, *The Magic of Love*, (2000)

Fig. 58. Mandy Mastrovita, *The Magic of Love*, (2000)

Fig. 59. Mandy Mastrovita, *girl-glyph-gâteau I*, (2000)

Fig. 60. Mandy Mastrovita, *girl-glyph-gâteau I*, (2000)

Fig. 61. Mandy Mastrovita, *girl-glyph-gâteau II*, (2000)

Fig. 62. Mandy Mastrovita, *girl-glyph-gâteau II*, (2000)

Fig. 63. Mandy Mastrovita, *If You Can Bake A Cake, You Can Build A Bomb*, (2000)

Fig. 64. Mandy Mastrovita, *If You Can Bake A Cake, You Can Build A Bomb*, (2000)

Fig. 65. Mandy Mastrovita, *If You Can Bake A Cake, You Can Build A Bomb*, (2000)
Fig. 66. Mandy Mastrovita, *If You Can Bake A Cake, You Can Build A Bomb*, (2000)

Fig. 67. Mandy Mastrovita, *If You Can Bake A Cake, You Can Build A Bomb*, (2000)

Fig. 68. Mandy Mastrovita, *The Sequence of a Uniform*, (2000)

Fig. 69. Mandy Mastrovita, *The Sequence of a Uniform*, (2000)

Fig. 70. Mandy Mastrovita, *The Sequence of a Uniform*, (2000)

Fig. 71. Mandy Mastrovita, *The Sequence of a Uniform*, (2000)

Fig. 72. Mandy Mastrovita, *The Sequence of a Uniform*, (2000)