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In Search of the Artist: The Influences of Commercial Interest on an Art School - A Narrative Analysis

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In Search of the Artist: The Influences of Commercial Interest on an Art School—

A Narrative Analysis

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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DEDICATION

To my parents: your love and support give me the courage to create.

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ABSTRACT

The current study will investigate how identities and roles of the artist converge with competing identities and roles fostered at the institutional level within an art college as revealed through the marketing literature that they produce to attract students and business partnerships. The sociological focus for this proposal is the tension between art as a creative expressive endeavor and art as a commodity that has entered into social transactions unintended by the original expression of the artist. The researcher documents and describes (via narrative analysis) how an art school negotiates competing relationships between the pressures to teach and promote art for the sake of aesthetic and personal value (autonomy) versus the pressure to teach and promote art for school subsidized market values.

The data for the current study will come from the Ringling College of Art and Design website and brochures from the school that advertise the educational opportunities available to prospective students. The analyses will focus on the particular language, cultural codes, and stories that the school uses to describe the 1) identity and purpose of the institution, 2) types of students (ideal students) they are looking for to attend the school, 3) artistic opportunities open to students, 4) types of collaborations with organizations/businesses outside of the institution, and 5) goals, and production/consumption of art.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Fiction calls the facts by their name and their reign collapses; fiction subverts everyday experience and shows it to be mutilated and false. But art has this power only as the power of negation. It can speak its own language only as long as the images are alive which refuse and refute the established order.

—Herbert Marcuse (One-Dimensional Man)

Artists assist us in the discovery and preservation of the symbolic resources that help sustain our personal autonomy and collective cultures. Using art to enchant an often times disenchanted world, the artist can help to revitalize and renew the personal and collective meaning and significance of our material and symbolic cultures that are daily homogenized and standardized by a hyper-rationalized society (Marcuse 1964). Many contemporary sociologists of the arts (Wolff 1983, Zolberg 1990, Chiapello 2004) attempt to situate the role of art and the artist in society within the sociological literature via the tension that art worlds experience as they face processes of rationalization from non-aesthetic commercial interests. The tension that is felt by art communities and art consumers is partially caused by the incongruity between the purpose and value that is accorded to art and the purpose and value that is expected from the rational pursuit of profit. The exigencies of the market determine the presence and cultural vitality of the arts in society to a large extent (Vazquez 1973) and this dependency on the market is what threatens the autonomy of the arts. Thus, the artist's responsibility for the renewal

and re-enchantment of their culture's symbolic resources can be undercut by their dependent relationship to impersonal and standardized markets.

It is common practice for governments (local and national), for example, to cut funding for the arts during economic downturns (Cash 2009, Urice 2005, Armbrust 2002). These cuts not only affect local and national arts organizations, but, also affect K-12 schools and colleges (e.g. the 2009 budget cuts at University of California, Washington State University, and Arizona State University) where young artists begin to develop their sense of artistic purpose and identities. Consequently, art schools have found it necessary to collaborate with businesses outside of art communities in order to attract investors (Scheff 1996). While these collaborations may help to mitigate the fiscal crisis, they also alter the relationship that artists have with their occupation.

When art schools open their doors to the pragmatic and efficient world of business enterprise, the artistic autonomy that students are developing must now be shared with identities that do not practice or value the same aesthetic experiences and cognitions. When schools work in tandem with companies to produce certain types of artists and to create particular types of business-friendly curriculums, a young artist's identity and artistic sensibilities are reshaped and trained to foster artistic inspiration by way of ideas and mediums that prove marketable but, may also be stifling the development of individual artistic vision and identities. This process of reshaping and training is the practice of rationalization upon aesthetics. Critical social theorists (Marcuse 1964, Adorno 1966) in the mid-twentieth century were cognizant of this rationalization upon aesthetics and generally pursued the topic through macro-level analysis of culture industries and consumer behavior. I intend to analyze the same

phenomenon on a more micro-level, but, with the same commitment to the theoretical foundations advocated by the early critical social theorists.

Following this tradition, the sociological focus for this manuscript is the tension between art as a creative expressive endeavor and art as a commodity that has entered into social transactions that may be modifying the cultural codes and narratives that determine present and future roles for art students. Concentrating on how a private art school communicates their institutional identity and organizational structure in the marketing literature that they produce, I document and describe via narrative analysis how this art school negotiates competing relationships between the pressures to teach and endorse art for the sake of aesthetic and personal value (autonomy) versus the pressure to teach and endorse art for school-subsidized market values. In other words, I am attempting to locate and describe the tension between art and commerce to the extent that it exists between incompatible narratives found at the institutional level of an art school.

With the exception of Adler (1979), the vast majority of literature that has attended to the topic of art/commerce tensions has neglected the art school as an institutional site where this tension can be explored. I selected Ringling College of Art and Design (a private 4-year arts-college) due to its role as an internationally important institutional site where the tension of art and commerce converge on the training of future artists. The data analyzed comes from the marketing literature that Ringling produces and uses to communicate their definition of art and artistic success. I analyzed the data as narratives (stories) rather than nodes or variables in a social system that purportedly tells a different, more “objective” (economic/structural) story

than the people who actually narrate the story. This approach emphasizes the symbolic “meaning-making” processes that I have located in the school’s marketing literature.

Focusing on how an art school represents itself, its students, and its sponsors through the public use of carefully constructed narratives, I examine how an art school promotes and encourages particular symbolic and material relationships between aesthetics and business. Given that the sociology of art is still a nascent subdiscipline, studies like this are important when they provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of the ways in which artists, art representatives, and non artists respond to and think about art’s relationship with other sectors of society. Heeding Janet Wolff’s (1983) call for sociologists of the arts to avoid ignoring the unique variety of meaning that arises out of aesthetic intent from the core of their research; this manuscript provides a unique reading of current relationships between art and business, artists and entrepreneurs, and aesthetics and instrumental rationality as communicated by an art institution. This study is a small step towards identifying the symbolic margins and intersections between art and commerce that are being drawn and negotiated by art communities and the markets that they enter.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL/HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Art Schools: Educating and Employing the Artist

Weber (1919), nearly one-hundred years ago, observed that the artist lacks a fixed social classification because of an inherently uncertain occupational destiny. This inherent displacement gives artists and their art a certain multiplicity of social meaning and function while at the same time limiting art's autonomy due to its malleability (vulnerability) and consequential economic exploitation. The art school is one of the only formal institutions that assists in the professionalization of the young artist, and consequently is a very powerful arbiter of the occupational destiny of many future artists (Adler 1979, Thomas 2013). Art schools are a place where future artists work towards creating an identity – be it as an autonomous artist and/or as a marketable entrepreneur (Adler 1979). The use of the cultural codes (*the shared symbols and meanings encoded in our collective discourse*) and narratives (stories) that a school endorses is vital to the process of creating a learning environment where artistic identities can be formed since these narratives and codes are implicitly and explicitly being transmitted to the students.

Thomas et al. (2013), in their study of creativity and identity formation in art students, locate narratives of identities (artistic identities) within the school in the context of artistic growth overlapping with educational development wherein the student is

found to discover “creativity as an attribute of the self, ways to use friends to shore up identity and compete for creative assets, kinds of assertions that privilege the student’s creative autonomy and reasons for taking on what a teacher proposes in the belief that it is in the student’s best interest” (264). Drawing on Bourdieu, Thomas identifies the institutional habitus where students are implicitly taught to see the importance of art in terms of the norms endorsed at the art school,

In the art school, students acquire a "feel for the game" in the development of their know-how of the norms associated with the kinds of images and artworks that are valued or frowned upon, artistic methods, techniques, and knowledge of specific artists, art histories, and art theories. While students gain technical competence in selected disciplines like painting or digital media, they also learn, by covert and more overt means, ways of seeing, thinking, working, and certain attitudes and sensibilities that constitute the artistic habitus. (262)

In other words, students develop their artistic autonomy and identity by way of interacting with the norms and values that they associate with the aesthetic culture of their school.

The art school is also an institution where the artist learns to speak “on his/her own artistic terms” or through the discourses borrowed from non-aesthetic sources (the negotiation of narratives). The “borrowed” narratives that artists must use as a vehicle to bring their art into non-aesthetic spheres, says something about the marginalized and “deficient” status that art is given in a capitalist society. When young artists choose to enter into formal art training, they will eventually have to determine how their art work

will serve them outside the walls of the institution, and how their work will be used to communicate to people outside of traditional art communities.

Some art schools (e.g. School of the Art Institute of Chicago) choose to principally focus on training students to practice their art as a traditional aesthetic endeavor by way of a curriculum that is aligned with a liberal arts and humanities pedagogy. These schools embody an aesthetic vision closely associated with the founding purpose of the National Endowment for the Arts. This vision is of an artist who is independent and unexploitable, and who demonstrates freedom of creativity in America (Lingo 2013, Brenson 2001, Dubin 1987). Other art schools, such as Ringling College of Art and Design, are more commercially driven and adopt a curriculum and school culture that encourages students to consider art's economic potential and future collaboration with innovative technologies and corporate business partnerships. While both types of institutions may very well offer a first rate art education, it is with the latter type of institution where a microcosm of art's appointed dependent relationship with non-aesthetic social spheres can more readily be observed. For the purposes of this paper, I am considering this microcosm as both a site where these relationships are reproduced directly and internally by the school and also a site where these relationships are merely indications and reflections of general cultural and economic trends surrounding the school.

The occupational siloing that occurs in a contemporary professional art school may draw artists away from the core activities with which their work is symbolically identified (Adler 1979). The pedagogical organization of aesthetics is also affected by

the bureaucratization of the curriculum which occurs in order to mirror the divisions of labor in the culture industries for which the students are being trained for:

Whereas the university has brought different arts together in a single organization, the promise thus raised of new creative synthesis has not been fulfilled because a bureaucratic work organization has encouraged ever more narrow specialization and rigid demarcation of discrete domains of aesthetic activity. (Adler; p 15)

In fact, Ringling College describes its curriculum as “focused and highly specialized” in order to more accurately reproduce the corporate and organizational structures that will provide opportunities for work. Young artists become dependent on the school’s “focused organizational structure” to obtain the resources that will support the practice and reception of their art in the current market. In other words, the primary goal for this type of art training is to prepare students to become specialists in their occupational niche.

Young artists are pursuing this formal avenue of education through the art school in order to increase the likelihood of finding opportunities to practice their art as entrepreneurs (Kearney 2013). Thus, some schools find it fiscally prudent to open their doors to businesses and institutions outside of the academy to accommodate this influx of entrepreneurial students. These schools are well aware that the majority of students are not looking to stay in academia (as teachers of art) so they adapt and make their “product” more valuable by turning their school into a training center where students can reproduce tasks that try to model industries outside of the art world (Adler 2003). This training makes students valuable to companies seeking artists who can work with

equipment and technologies that help promote their product and image. Consequently, the college and the students must find ways to adapt their aesthetic goals and identities to the demands of the market.

The art school becomes the crossroad from which the art student must negotiate his/her identity as an artist. At the same time, the art school is negotiating its own identity by maintaining links with tradition while at the same time adapting to market pressures and new technologies which may influence the student's conception of art and the role of art in their society. Consequently, there is a two-way interactional correspondence between the art school's cooperation of aesthetic interests and non-aesthetic business interests. These business interests invest in future talent while endorsing particular kinds of art training:

Cultural entrepreneurs, patrons and mediators play a similar role to organizational gatekeepers in promoting particular kinds of art. Typically they will make use of their economic or social capital to sponsor particular forms of creative activity that they believe to be worthy or profitable.

(Smith 2001)

Consequently, a collective identity as artists may be curtailed by the entrepreneurial opportunities that art students pursue through the school's partnership with commercial industries. These partnerships reach out to young artists in training not as future artists but as future workers, and this may conflict with the artist's personal narratives or preclude personal identification with alternative forms of art:

... the artist as worker is part of a social category or type of the (merely) ordinary- the routine. Intrinsic to this ordinariness and, consequently,

predictability, is its *incompatibility with the romantic (and popular)*
conceptions of the artist as divinely inspired creator. (Zolberg 1990)

It is important that we pause over two concepts at this juncture to clarify their appearance in this manuscript. *Artistic identities and aesthetic autonomy* are key terms for this research going forward. For the sake of this paper, *artistic identities* will refer to the cultural codes and stories that an individual artist or collection of artists use to represent themselves as artists and to perform the embodiments of their aesthetic practice. These representations of identity are performed in public discursively as narratives, and so interact with other narratives of identity that may be competing in the same social field. As Loseke (2007) argues, “The core of my argument is that understanding how narrative identity works and the work narrative identities do require examining reflexive relationships among stories of cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal identity” (p.663). Recent research (Oakley 2006) finds that some artists still hold a romantic idealism about the potential of art in society despite the frustrations they faced caused by the pressures of commercial success. This is an example of locating competing identities negotiated through narratives that artists used to articulate their personal location within the broader cultural spaces of art-worlds.

The second term, *aesthetic autonomy* can be characterized in two ways. Art can be conceived of as having a separate discursive function apart from institutional forms of social organization and is therefore capable of affecting change through critique as practiced by the artist. Menke (1998), identifies this potential,

According to this interpretation, art brings to bear potentialities, capabilities and insights, which, though still unrealized in society, can, in principle,

remove themselves from the esoteric reality of the aesthetic and become incorporated into social relations... critical negativity occurs within the framework of a potential identity of that which is distinguished, art and society. (p. 4)

This type of autonomous art has enough distance from society to critique it and enough association with the society to affect it. In other words, a state of autonomy for the arts is only possible in a social context that allows art to function with enough material and symbolic independence from the status-quo to provide spaces of resistance and to offer symbolic resources for counter -identities to flourish.

A second way in which art can be characterized as autonomous is through a purist interpretation of art (where pure art means autonomous), "... the intensification of lived experience that art promises retains its purity only through its indifference to social reality" (Menke 1998). Both of these aesthetic visions would conflict with any institutional agenda which defines art by its utility in serving industrial and business sectors.

Ringling is an institution that has both a history of representing itself in terms of its traditional artistic integrities on the one hand and a new burgeoning identification with markets outside of the insularity of art-worlds on the other. The negotiation between these two institutional agendas necessitates a hybridization of traditional aesthetic stories with "bridging tropes" (images which connect stories) that justify and normalize dependent relationships with non-aesthetic business sectors. Judith Adler (2003) examined newly forming bureaucratic structures at the California Institute of the Arts and the influence that these structures may be having on the art students. This

ethnographic work used interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to investigate the California art school. While Adler's study looks at organizational structures as they operate for students on a day-to-day basis, the study also examined how the school marketed itself to potential students through specific tropes which successfully bridged the world of academics to bohemian lifestyles:

More implicitly, such associated imagery suggested that the Institute, like Woodstock, might be seen as a counter-cultural event. People could hope that at Cal-Arts the historical drama in which they were involved principally as spectators would finally be opened to their full participation, that- in the telling jargon of their time- they would finally be where it was at. (71)

In contrast with the art college that I have located, the California Institute of the Arts adopted a counter-cultural narrative to advertise the value of their institution. The school used this narrative to engage with the *cultural codes* about art that existed at the time.

The cultural codes that are being used by Ringling have values that are very different from the ones embodied in the past by the California Institute of the Arts, and this may have to do more with exogenous corporate entities rather than endogenous changes in artistic life-styles and aesthetic expressions. Donileen Loseke (2013) describes the impact that narratives have on clients of an organization:

These narratives are authored by planners and workers in organizations, programs, groups designed to do something with/for/to people who define themselves or who are defined by others as requiring help...These stories justify the need for the organization/program/group as well as how the

organization/program/group is structured (such as rules, services offered.

(1)

Depending on the interpretation of this narrative, the student will decide whether to take the role of a future art teacher and become an academic, to reach out to firms and other for-profit businesses outside of the art world to practice a market-driven entrepreneurial art form that resembles early forms of patronage, or even to reject academics and business to practice art on their own terms (as the National Endowment for the Arts would have it) by allowing inspiration rather than opportunity or profit to determine their art production. This negotiation of artistic roles has a very long historical legacy. The subsequent section will focus on this legacy and provide a historical context to the current significance of artistic negotiations in diverse sectors of society.

2.2. Art and Industry: Tensions and Partnerships

The relation between art worlds and non-art worlds in advanced societies has always experienced various tensions (Heywood 1997). The division of labor in modern societies can bring with it incompatible relationships between artists and non-artist support groups. Historical analyses of art worlds in relation to non-art worlds (specifically political and economic relationships) have been pursued by both humanists and social scientists to explain art's function in society (e.g., Hauser 1982, Wolff 1981). Artists have always sought some form of patronage for their work and used this patronage to justify the role of art and the artist in society. Different epochs saw different relationships between the artist and the benefactor. During the Middle Ages in the West, the artist or artisan was beholden to a court and was commissioned to produce works of

art that supported the symbolic power and political ideology that prevailed in that court. The Renaissance also brought with it a role of centralized dependency (economic and social) for the artist and the craftsman but, towards the beginning of the Enlightenment this dependency was less centralized and the artist was no longer obliged to serve one court or ideology. Instead, the artist was beholden to the masses (a more anonymous relationship), and to an incipient market economy where heterogeneous social forces began to determine the new trajectory of art (Hauser 1979, Debeljak 1998).

A more acute form of market-dependency arrived during the Industrial Revolution with the rise of the mechanical reproduction of art works and the demand for new art to fill the growing needs of for-profit museums and art galleries. Debeljak (1998) notes that, "The direct dependence on the anonymous public has emancipated the artists from the patrons and corroborated their self confidence, while forcing them to offer their services and products to those with the highest buying power" (44). Popular culture and the explosion of technology propelled art into new mediums for new purposes including advertisements for commodities and lifestyles, "... the work of art as an impersonal commodity and the enjoyment of art as a distraction and emotion instead of as clarification and absorption" (Hauser: 607). Hauser understood that when aesthetics became synonymous with the commoditization of the life-world, art lost the power of its negative capacity of subversion because past cultural codes and narratives about art that had some measure of autonomy have now been absorbed and neutralized by non-aesthetic economic sectors.

The need for visually stimulating images to promote consumption of the products coming from the culture industries created the need for new breeds of artists:

With the growth of the large scale consumption of goods which brought the possibility of 'conspicuousness' to an expanded sector of society- and with the mass production industries having reorganized their operations such that their goods, images and services could meet the taste requirements of the mass market place- the need to clarify the nature of the design process and the work of the individuals involved in it became increasingly imperative. (Sparke: 55)

Corporations became dependent on visually trained artists to create an aesthetic aura around their products. This was the aestheticization of mass-produced homogenized goods; a borrowing of aesthetic narratives to heighten the desirability of products and services which would otherwise serve instrumental-rational needs:

In short it remained the task of a wide range of diverse individuals- established fine artists, teams of lowly and anonymous art workers, architects, engineers, artisans, decorative artists and a new breed of visualizers referred to as 'commercial artists'- to contribute in different ways to the creation of the visual face of the emerging modern material world. (Sparke: 55)

This material alliance with commercial services would have consequences for the training of young artists at private and public art schools and also symbolic consequences for the cultural relevance of aesthetics in the everyday world. When the medium for art's content is shared with non-aesthetic commodities, the message of art (the symbolic content and cultural aura) becomes indistinguishable from the message of other forms of production:

In general terms, however, art and industry increasingly developed a strategic alliance with each other with the aim of creating products, images, and spaces which would appeal to the expanded body of consumers, and which contained the complex sociocultural messages that were required of them.” (Sparke)

The blending of non-aesthetic and aesthetic messages for the sake of commerce affects the integrity and autonomy of the aesthetic content while strengthening the image and reception of the commodity. This absorption into the commodity is what Hagtvedt, et al. (2010) calls “art infusion”:

More specifically, we theorize that perceptions of luxury associated with visual art spill over from the artwork onto products with which it is associated, leading to more favorable evaluations of these products.... this influence does not depend on the content of the specific artwork—that is, what is depicted in the artwork—but rather on general connotations of luxury associated with visual art. (379)

Art sacrifices itself in order to stay “relevant” in a materialistic society. Ringling College understands the importance of keeping art “relevant” and they have shown this by expanding their curriculum to include majors in design and advertizing, business of art, and game art; this curriculum expansion opened the “flood gates” of corporate sponsorship

Early critical theorists (Marcuse 1964, Adorno 1966) employed a polemical and political discourse of the arts in order to contest the tensions created by the culture industries that manufacture art through an ongoing production assembly line to facilitate

the growth of industrial sectors. The ideological and political significance of the arts is found not only in its material and symbolic practices but also within its qualitatively distinct epistemological potential:

Creating and moving in a medium which presents the absent, the artistic language is a language of cognition- but a cognition which subverts the positive. In its cognitive function, art performs the great task of thought... Naming the "things that are absent" is breaking the spell of the things that are; moreover, it is the ingression of a different order of things into the established one. (Marcuse: 68)

This inherent subversiveness of aesthetic consciousness is crucial to understanding the nature of the cultural codes and narratives about art that circulate in society. The importance of the discursive function of art as critical-epistemology allows the symbolic content of art to, "bear potentialities, capabilities and insights, which though still unrealized in society, can, in principle, remove themselves from the esoteric reality of the aesthetic and become incorporated into social relations" (Menke, 1999). This is the same aesthetic potential that the National Endowment for the Arts was founded upon as mentioned above.

In contrast to the critical perspective, the more structural/conservative theorists (Becker 1982, Florida 2003, Caves 2000) position art within a symbiotic relationship with other market structures; art becomes the hand-maiden to business. Accordingly, aesthetics is fully incorporated into the cultural codes and narratives of all forms of production and consumption and is fully realized in the instrumental-rationality of economic sectors. This sociology of art-worlds brackets out aesthetic meaning to focus

on the context of production (Eyerman, 1998). This perspective is pursued in the work of Richard Florida, who has collapsed the category of artist into an all-encompassing entrepreneurial “creative class”:

The Super Creative Core of this new class includes scientists and engineers, university professors, poets and novelists, artists, entertainers... I define the highest order of creative work as producing new forms or designs that are readily transferable and widely useful- such as designing a product that can be widely made, sold and used. (2002:68)

We will later discover that the administration at Ringling College has adopted many of the same positions on art that Richard Florida and other structural theorists hold.

Howard Becker (1974), who is an actual participant of art worlds, is more cognizant of the conflict between artists and other creative workers. He recalls a story about an artist who wanted to exploit a malfunction in the technology that was being used to print his art work:

He had not known about roller marks and talked of using them as part of his design. The printers said, no, he could not do that, because roller marks were an obvious sign (to other printers) of poor craftsmanship and no print exhibiting roller marks was allowed to leave their shop. His artistic curiosity fell victim to the printers’ craft standards, a neat example of how specialized support groups develop their own standards and interests.

(769)

Becker’s example illustrates the difference between an artist’s creative work style and a technician’s bureaucratic and formulaic work style. The anecdote also reveals two very

different types of cultural paradigms. The printers are participating in a highly organized and stable world where efficiency of production and standards of design are essential to the cultural images they help reproduce. The artists, on the other hand, are more interested in the possibility of creating new meaning in their work by collapsing the false dichotomy between perfection and flaw in the creation of art. Art schools that endorse the autonomy of the student-artist would be more apt to support an experimental aesthetic over a highly standardized technologically driven one but, because the relationship between art communities and bureaucracies can become interdependent, schools are pressured to push students to conform to the standard technologies that reproduce the corporate standard through institutional dependencies. Artists have always experienced forms of institutional dependency as conflictual and or supportive and this is reflected in the common cultural codes and narratives about art that circulate throughout society; the same narratives that will be found in the marketing literature produced by Ringling College.

2.3. Competing Narratives of Signification

As in every specialized social role, the artist (and his/her work) is situated within a shared narrative (relative to time and place) of public expectations and cultural representations of that role. While culture is fragmented across social groups (Dimaggio 1997), social behavior is organized primarily by shared cognitive abstractions of cultural representations of everyday life and experience. These shared representations of physical and symbolic cultural content are the cultural codes that influence personal and public narratives. Cultural codes shape and organize cultural

content while narratives give contextual meaning to the content. Per Polleta (2011), “Narratives are interactively constructed, institutionally regulated, and assessed by their audiences in relation to hierarchies of discursive credibility” (110). In other words, cultural codes, cultural content, and narratives derive their significance and power from the social location(s) from which they arise. The cultural codes that represent aesthetic labor do not operate in artistic isolation but rather form a symbiotic relationship with other non-aesthetic codes from non-aesthetic social locations.

While the current study is focused on the narratives and cultural codes used by Ringling College, we will find that these narratives point to locations and relationships outside of aesthetics that operate to link forms of cultural capital that were once separate from the arts in order to achieve new forms of economic capital. These non-aesthetic codes (originating in different social spaces for purposes other than aesthetic ones), become hyphenated codes and transform the meaning of the original aesthetic code. Edmund Feldman (1982) supports this observation,

When we encounter an artist today, he or she is likely to be a modern incarnation of one of the historic types we have described- or if not a reincarnation, then a hybrid of several of them. Even among practitioners of new forms... we can recognize the persistence of old, well-established types. The fastidious craftsman, the conservative guildsman, the genius-inventor, and the fierce revolutionary- they still circulate among us.” (221)

Sociologist Vera Zolberg (1990) describes the artist’s identity metaphorically in terms of real social contexts:

... artists used to be indistinguishable from artisans; both was attributed the sign of Mercury, 'the patron of cheerful, lively men of action... but with the emancipation of artists, they came to be characterized as born under the sign of Saturn... the planet of melancholics. (1990:118)

Zolberg addresses the change of perception about artists in terms of stereotypical generalizations constructed during two distinct periods in history. The first part (Mercury) was a point in history when the artist was a craftsman beholden to a supervisor of labor and commissioner of the art work (patronage). The second part (Saturnalia) was the construction of the artist as an independent romantic who was no longer beholden to the patronage provided by the nobility or aristocracy. This is an exemplar of the changing nature of the cultural codes and narratives that determine public perception of the artist. An influential art school such as Ringling can continue to participate in the modification to the story of the artist to coincide with more current economic/social dynamics by way of their relationship with future art practitioners and the companies they align them with.

This cultural modification may include a change in the public perception of the influence of the artist from a visionary and critical conscience of a culture to a corporate-led entertainer and shill. Eve Chiapello (2004) argues that there has been a historical weakening of the artistic critique not only in art schools but in the entire Western cultural arena:

Our argument is that artistic critique has fallen into a severe crisis over the past twenty years, becoming not only less virulent but also - and this is probably no less worrisome – fulfilling less and less its social function,

which is to maintain an active critique within our capitalist modernity in the name of such values as freedom or the refusal of commoditization.

(2004:589)

Chiapello goes on to describe how artistic critique has been co-opted and incorporated into dominant capitalist discourse where there no longer remains a difference between an artist and a businessman because both are visible and influential only within the context of the market and the technologies that pool both business and art into one commodified form.

As Roberts (2012) notes, “Artistic inspiration and the unique artwork turn into collective creation and the collaborative project, the avant-garde into institutionalized innovation and the aesthetic sphere disappears in the aestheticization of everyday life” (110). But art itself does not merely disappear or evaporate- it adapts- now acting as a catalyst for new developments in media, thereby closing the loop between art and technology and further relinquishing control of its cultural content:

The imagination of artists, often inspired by the art of the past, now functions as a driving force of media development, and it is reinforced by the coalescence of the various media into one digital hyper-medium... so virtual art presages the emergence of a new generic mutation in art, based on a productive alliance between art and technology and art and the economy. (110)

In other words, the artist’s imagination and craft, by partnering with industry, has become a hand-maiden to hyper- capitalism and as a consequence the role of art is recast as a form of technology that merely functions to assist economies.

The relationship between art and technology is an important factor when considering the commoditization of art forms and the cultural codes that represent the fusion of art and technology. This is especially important, for the purposes of this paper, when we consider the impact that a Ringling College can have on the reproduction of art forms as commodities and the production of new narratives about art and technology that can be passed down to future artists . Ringling's curriculum is designed to modify traditional aesthetic techniques to better fit the technologies that they invest in. This is evident in their marketing literature entitled "*Create*" which even describes the purpose of their Fine Arts program as, "reshaping traditional artistic techniques for our technologically advanced era." The technologies advanced by companies and markets outside of the art world are impinging upon the training of future artists by forcing them to adapt their aesthetic vision to the mediums that businesses supply (remember Howard Becker's example of the printers).

The intersectionality of art and technology also affects the narrative power of art, the cultural codes of the aesthetic, and art identities. Per Lyotard (1988), what was once achieved with the painter's brush has now been replaced, in a digital form, by the camera. Lyotard maintains that technology has interrupted the whole field of aesthetic representation to better facilitate the values inherent in a world organized by a capitalist techno-scientific apparatus. In essence, the cultural codes and narratives that support the symbolic salience of art in society is affected by the cultural codes and narratives associated with technology. For instance, when these technologies advance to the point of producing most of the aesthetic content with minimal participation on behalf of the artist, the task for the producer (including the art-student) is one of mere technical

skill and expert knowledge about the apparatus. With this expert knowledge (artists becoming specialists) comes an entire lexicon and practice that physically and symbolically merges the world of the artist with that of the technological bureaucrat.

Ringling College invests millions of dollars in any and all technologies that are used in the culture industries in order to make sure that their students are fully trained technicians before entering the job market. When and if a student-artist embraces these technologies will determine to a great extent their personal embodiment of the aesthetic act. While there is no question that digital technologies can help produce and enhance aesthetic intent, they also have “intentions” of their own.

Cultural, institutional, and technological narratives that do not originate within art communities operate on their own symbolic terms via socially circulating cultural codes to organize and shape stories about the social significance of art. These stories and codes enter into the social spaces of art schools, are institutionally embedded in the curriculum and culture of the school, and are then interactionally passed off to students who use them as scripts for artistic identities and artistic futures.

2.4. Summary

In summation, the art school can be sociologically investigated as an institution where artists are likely to be introduced to the competing cultures of business communities and art communities during a very crucial period in their development as artists. Art students must negotiate and attempt to reconcile the competing narratives and cultural codes that businesses and art communities communicate to the student (at the college) as legitimate sources of artistic identity. Aligning their artistic identity with

business cultures may provide the artist with access to occupational security but, may limit their aesthetic autonomy; this is because their art must support current markets and institutional authority in order for them to remain employable- which precludes their using art as a counter-cultural negative aesthetic. Noticing a gap in the sociological literature concerning how colleges communicate their current relationship between businesses and art as it pertains to an artist's education, I have located and analyzed the narratives and cultural codes that one school uses in order to gain preliminary insight into the relative influence and control that businesses may have over the available symbolic and physical resources that young artists depend on.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS AND DATA

The art school is a critical location to investigate the current trends and possible futures of artists and art worlds. It is where young impressionable artists first formally learn their craft and are introduced into various possible networking opportunities within and outside of art spheres. The art school is an institution where artists can choose to speak on their own artistic terms or through the discourses borrowed from non-aesthetic sources (the negotiation of narratives). I ask the following questions about the art school: *What cultural codes and narratives does this art school use to represent its mission and identity? How are these codes used to legitimize art's place in society? How are these codes and narratives used to attract potential art students and business partnerships?* This research project is a narrative analysis of trends and representations endorsed by a particular art school (Ringling College of Art and Design) where there is an explicit convergence of art and commerce. I will describe how the institution's narrative account of art and art training construct both art-identities and economic opportunities.

Founded in 1931, Ringling is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA). The school offers 14 majors for their BFA including Painting, Fine Arts, Business of Art and Design, Advertising Design, Illustration, and Graphic Design. During the 2012-2013 school year, there was 1,364 degree seeking students including students from 53

foreign countries. 65% of the student body identifies as Caucasian and 32% are designated as minorities (Hispanic being the largest group at 13%). 61% of the student body is female and 39% are male. Tuition for attendance is 33,960 a year (not including living expenses) and 7 out of 10 students have some form of financial aid.

The data for the current study will come from the Ringling College of Art and Design website and brochures from the school that advertise the educational opportunities available to prospective students:

Table 1. Source material and rationale.

Source	Documents	Rationale
Ringling College Website	<i>www.Ringling.edu</i>	<i>Chosen because of its role as a primary source of information about the college to the public (prospective students, advertisers, businesses) and its easy accessibility.</i>
Career Pamphlets*	<i>Titles: "84 Reasons why you Should Study Art and Design", "Context", "Perspectives", "Converge"</i>	<i>Chosen based on their accessibility on the campus for visiting prospective students and their inclusion in the packets mailed out to prospective students. Pamphlets communicate career paths to students.</i>
Recruiting Pamphlets*	<i>Titles: "Where you Want to Be", "This is Proof", "Proof: Destroying the Myth of the Starving Artist"</i>	<i>Chosen based on accessibility to students and as literature which communicates the school's goals and value.</i>

** All pamphlets were created by students at Ringling under the guidance of school administrators who approve the content of the pamphlets. The content of the pamphlets emphasizes the career paths and opportunities in various culture industries, the school culture and student comments (cited quotes) about the school and the occupations they are pursuing or have chosen.*

The analyses will focus on the particular language, cultural codes, and stories that the school uses in the above literature when describing the 1) identity, purpose, and goals of the institution, 2) types of students (typical students) they are looking for to attend the school, 3) artistic opportunities open to students, 4) types of collaborations with organizations/businesses outside of the institution, and 5) the school's description of the production/consumption of art.

Narrative analysis in the social sciences borrows methods and frameworks from the humanities in order to empirically analyze social events and discourse within and between four structural levels of the personal, organizational, institutional, and or cultural level of social organization. In other words, stories can be told by individual people, by groups of individuals who are working together to provide services, institutions where bureaucratic hierarchies create, enact, and sustain policies for populations, and finally on the cultural level where stories are shared collectively as universal paradigms or common themes and meanings (Loseke 2013, Polleta 2011). Stories at each of these levels can be conceptualized as containing settings, plots, characters, and morals. A narrative analysis on the above sources will help to organize the data analytically in order to identify the specific plots, morals, and major characters that the school endorses. The plot is the major themes that the school uses in their marketing literature to explain what is happening in the school artistically and pedagogically. The major characters are the representation of artists at the school, administration, and business interests outside of the school, while the moral is the explicit and implicit values that the school endorses in their literature and the

assumptions that must be made about art in order for the school's narrative to make sense.

Because stories are more effective as vehicles of persuasion than are statistics or scientific propositions, people will use stories through a variety of mediums to communicate ideas in order to accomplish particular ends. Stories are particularly effective because they not only communicate ideas but encourage emotional reaction as well. In contrast to statistical data or blunt propositional statements, stories appeal to an audience's imagination, using metaphors, character development, and ambiguity.

The goals of narrative analysis have been broadly identified by Loseke (2013):

Data analysis involves identifying generalities and patterns. When data are several stories, the task is to identify what stories have in common. What words, concepts, themes recur across stories? Just as important, what words, concepts, themes that reasonably might be expected are missing from all/most stories? Rather than focusing on how stories are unique, the descriptive focus is on exploring the social nature of narrative.

(3)

I will transcribe in full passages from the school's website and pamphlets in order to properly account for the "story" as a gestalt. Per Loseke (2013), the analysis will set out to categorize the data in order to locate associations between words, concepts, themes, ideas, cultural codes, and symbols related to aesthetics and the autonomy of artists and or relations to values outside of and in spite of traditional aesthetic narratives. The recurrence of themes and concepts is particularly important in narrative analysis because patterns identified in data (just like with statistical analysis) may point to

significant associations between the categories and or codes which organize the telling of the story.

Agendas are often implicitly communicated through narratives written/told by multiple authors who are institutionally situated. By identifying inconsistent or parallel narratives on the school's website and pamphlets, the analyses may be able to discover multiple agendas and voices existing within one institution. The website and pamphlets have explicitly been created to advertise to potential students and parents. Regardless of the extent to which this advertising actually does convince people to purchase these services, the narratives contained there are encouraging audiences to think of art and art education in a particular way within a particular social context.

The school also creates links between what it does (art education) and institutions outside of the school (partnerships with businesses). In order for the school to successfully make these associations, it must use some of the same language, cultural codes, and narratives that are more likely to be found in social spaces outside of art communities and aesthetics. Identifying language and codes that are more traditionally associated with business and commerce will be an effective way to analyze the current narratives being used by an art school to shape the social meaning of art education and art production.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS

This section is devoted to a narrative analysis of documents produced by Ringling College of Art and Design. These documents include the marketing literature and student career pamphlets that serve to advertise the school to potential students, parents, business entities, and financiers/supporters. These documents explicitly communicate the school's goals, pedagogical philosophy, and the social value accorded to art. Together, all of these data below (passages written in bold) tell a story. Ringling represents itself in these documents through the narratives, words, and symbols that they have chosen to include. I have carefully chosen the passages that are reproduced here in order to provide an accurate retelling of the story. Because space is limited (preventing full reproduction of the documents), passages were chosen based on how well they capture the general themes and plots of all the available literature. Framed as cultural and institutional narratives, the data can be understood as reflecting the school's support for particular types of artists being trained (produced) at the school, and what types of art (products) the school endorses.

4.1. Communicating the Value of Their Brand: “Success” and “Proof”

For this section, I will concentrate on the narratives that Ringling uses to communicate the value of their brand of art education. Two code words, “*success*” and “*proof*”, appear throughout Ringling's website and recruiting pamphlets, and are used by Ringling in their narrative account of the college's institutional value. The narratives that

are lumped together under these code words serve to communicate the school's value through their "*proof*" of educational and occupational "*success*" for their students. This section is concerned with the nature of this value in terms of what it tells us about Ringling's relationship with businesses and how these relationships are being promoted as pathways to success in the arts.

The Ringling College website and pamphlets serve the explicit purpose of providing information to people concerning the school's history, current opportunities, mission statements, public impact, institutional associations (accreditation, partnerships), projects, and varied marketing advertisements. Ringling's website and pamphlets are visually impressive on many fronts: There are videos, short films, and slides on the website which exemplify the work of students using high-tech instruments and state of the art computer systems. The pamphlets are similarly designed with pictures of student art projects and student cartoon illustrations.

On the surface, the website and pamphlets give the reader the impression that the school is focused on the practical intersection between technology, businesses, and the visual arts. The images and texts that are used throughout the website and pamphlets merge artistic expression with figures and facts from economic sources and or specific industries and visuals of how artists from the school are connected through the companies they choose to work for. High-definition photos of student paintings, sculptures and illustrations are organized next to names of sponsors. The student's work and advertised sponsors are varied: advertisements are placed next to fine art while experimental photography is placed next to video animation, and the names of companies (e.g. Sony, Hallmart, and Walt Disney) that use or market these types of

artworks are mentioned on the same pages. The artworks physical proximity to various sponsors communicates an explicit relationship between a student's art and the opportunity to use artistic talent to attract corporate sponsorship to ensure a student's success.

Ringling includes a "*proof*" section on their website which attempts to offer a description of student success. The word *proof* is usually not associated with art but, rather with science or business. Ringling is communicating to its audience that the school is offering a result-oriented environment where students will get a financial return on their investment (success). *Proof* becomes the code word that is synonymous with art's practical payoff. Instead of letting the art that the students learn to create "speak for itself", the burden of proof that attests to the young artists success is placed on their fit within a particular narrative. The school is advertising itself as a prudent investment and creates a setting for the student's story to unfold. The following message appears at the top of the "*proof*" section:

But not all degrees in art and design are created equal. It's an expanding field- but also highly competitive. The backing of a first-rate art and design college is more vital than ever. That's where Ringling College of Art and Design comes in. We grasp the critical role that artists and designers play in a global economy, and we begin preparing you for world class careers the moment you set foot on campus. (Website: www.Ringling.edu; Proof)

The first statement informs us that there is a hierarchy of art degrees and some degrees are therefore more valuable than others. We are then informed that the field is expanding (more opportunities for artists) but that competition is a factor, and Ringling

gives students a competitive edge over the competition. Success in competition is here implied to come with the backing of Ringling College. In the final statement, *critical role* is not referring to an artist's capacity to critique (a negative aesthetic). The role here is referring to the artist's place within a global economy where competition, career paths and hierarchy are the norm, and the moment the student sets foot on campus the preparation for this role begins. The artist's role is completely situated within a demanding market economy, and the college is preparing the student to create art that can serve the imperatives of capital.

A student's success through competition and the "right" career path is linked by Ringling on their website to national and international corporate recognition. This recognition is Ringling's version of artistic success. Flickering at the top of the website is a screen which announces current news and positive recognitions that the school has received: *"The Hollywood Reporter Ranks Ringling as one of the Best Film Schools"*, *"Ringling Wins Gold and Bronze at Academy Awards"*, *"Alumnus Awarded Fellowship"*, *"Students Win Product Packaging L'Oreal Competition"*. These announcements advertise and try to legitimize the value of the school through the recognition it receives from various culture industries. These industries serve as the "gatekeepers" to artistic success and recognition where the school and the student's art can be validated by way of earning the cultural capital that these industries provide.

Following these announcements, on the bottom of the web-page, Ringling then includes verification and legitimation statements from outside institutions:

But don't take our word for it: Ask the talented people, who run the world's top art and design companies... including Disney, Pixar, Hallmark, Target,

DreamWorks, Sony, and Apple. Each year, we host recruiters from these companies- and each year, a host of Ringling students are offered internships. Many go on to pursue careers with the same companies.

(Website: www.Ringling.edu)

Ringling associates the proof of their value with the endorsement of culture industries and companies outside of the institution and the immediate art world. The companies highlighted are top conglomerate industries that have never been directly associated with aesthetics. The companies are more known for their financial wealth and monopoly over certain industries. The “proof” of “success” here is in the list of conglomerate companies that have an interest in the artist. Statement three informs us that recruitment from these companies is direct and inevitable each year and is obviously closely aligned with the purpose of the school. As a narrative, the plot here is being pushed in a particular direction. The artist is being trained to pursue a particular biography (a corporate artist). Careers are made virtually inevitable with these companies and so the school is describing its purpose as a training center to pass on talent to companies that can provide the careers that Ringling identifies as artistic. Thus, the proof is the result of talented people from top companies recruiting the artist.

The *Proof* section then goes on to use quotes from recruiters at these companies to reinforce the direct relationship that Ringling has with them. Ringling gives these recruiters the authority to discern valuable artists and the authority to help in the training of these artists:

Quotes from recruiters of major business: Pixar Animation Studios:

Ringling College graduates have a proven track record with DreamWorks:

We've had an ongoing relationship with Ringling's Computer Animation department since it was first created. Its curriculum was designed with a focus on our industry. We know the students who come to us from Ringling are ready to go to work. That makes them very valuable, indeed.

(Website: www.Ringling.edu)

The proof of success has now moved from the school to the performance in a company. This type of “proof” does not inhere within the artist’s work or aesthetic vision but, instead is confirmed in their participation with specific companies. The relationship with the company had begun since the inception of the school department and since the inception of the actual curriculum. The company is an extension of the program and the training was created to accommodate the needs of the industry. Finally, a global statement is made about the value of the student (artists who are ready to go to work for the company) which reaches its apex when the value is recognized at the institutional corporate level.

Included within the “*Proof Section*” of the website and peppered throughout the recruiting pamphlets is a mission statement that the school makes which is supposed to serve as a vision of success:

At Ringling College of Art and Design, we prepare our students for a lifetime of amazing possibilities. In fact, we are shattering the myth of the starving artist.

“Shattering the myth of the starving artist” is a copyrighted school mission statement that Ringling created which serves to promote the value of their education as a transformative opportunity for artists and the future of art in the market place. The

“starving artist” (a cultural code) has been turned on its head within the context of the setting and plot that the school has created within their “proof narrative”. The starving artist, traditionally, could also refer to the asceticism, determination, and dignity of the artist who sacrifices economic opportunities for the sake of his/her art (Nicholson 2003). A traditional cultural model of this can be found in Kafka’s (1922) work, “A Hunger Artist”, whose protagonist was the embodiment of the starving artist in that his “starvation” became a part of his art. Ringling is “shattering” this myth in order to appropriate it as a mission statement of success.

Narratives about success and proof can be convincing and compelling coming from the former students of Ringling. The following are quotes from alumni about their experiences in their new art career from the website and in the recruiting pamphlet, *“This is Proof”*. The emphasis is placed on the student’s career to highlight the payoff from investment in the college (Tuition is approximately \$210,000 for four years including on campus living expenses). These quotes were chosen by the school not only to justify investment, but to represent the “ideal” types of artistic success (and ideal artist) and identify the “appropriate” social locations to practice art and the purposes behind this practice. The quotes also show how alumni are navigating the terrain between their aesthetic autonomy and their practical identity as workers in a market:

Alum 1: My voice is in my creation and the idea that people are responding to it in a working marketplace is thrilling. (Jennifer Bruss, Class of 2007. Chief Designer/Engineering Assistant Winco Inc)

While creation and voice are used in a statement of empowerment and autonomy, the “thrilling” part for the artist is the response that he/she gets from a “working

marketplace”. The alum’s voice and creation are here tied directly to its interaction with the market and the response (success) that is found there.

Alum 2: I design, draw or paint every single day. Ensuring that art has remained a huge part of my life has led to a lifestyle that suits me, and continually enriches and inspires me. Also, I’m not at all poor!” (Amy Kligman, Class of 2001 Designer, Hallmark Cards)

While the first statements appear to not require any justification outside of the satisfaction this person gets out of art. In fact, this statement is a positive recognition of art’s power to inform and inspire one’s lifestyle. However, a final statement about pecuniary status is given to justify what initially appeared to be a statement that suggests art is fulfilling in and of itself. This quote also ties into the “Shattering the Myth of the Starving Artist” mission statement.

Alum 3: My interest is rejuvenated each and every day because I not only love the art I create but enjoy creating it. To be able to take an idea, execute it and be able to see the final project completed, then see how much pleasure it brings to the client, keep me motivated and ready to start on my next project. (Barbara Rau, Class of 2000)

Following a “business and professional narrative”, this quote incorporates a lexicon that can be found in any business or computer manual: “execute it”, “final project”, “client”, and “next project”. The most explicit link between the arts and business that Ringling makes through their alumni was presented through a contrasting of image and text. A picture of a woman working alone at her easel with brush in hand is concentrating on a detail in her painting while below this Ringling tells us that she was chosen for a

particular internship because of her business background. Ringling chooses to say nothing about the photo of her as an artist. Ringling then chooses this quote from the alum to highlight her business acumen:

Fourth Year Student: *My job with Disney Imagineering's character paint department is to manage anything painted within the parks. Much of the work I do is documentation, managing contractors on site, and communicating with other departments and organizations. My business courses helped me to understand the organization of the company, and how to professionally execute my ideas. Since I work with so many people, I need to understand the functions of a large company, as well as art direction. The business program at Ringling was fantastic preparation for that.* (Katie Gibbs, 4th Year Student)

Again, code words such as “execute”, “managing”, and “business” are used instead of words that could highlight the artistic work she performs like that shown in the picture. Shifts in cultural codes such as this create new possibilities for businesses and the arts to align themselves discursively and in practice in order to support economically rewarding relationships.

4.1.1. Summary

In summation, this section identified the narrative links that Ringling makes between the “*proof*” of student “*success*” with business alliances, curriculum design with corporate partnerships, and artistic success and value with financial success and value. The story that emerges from these literatures is invariably rational-instrumental in tone

(or voice) precluding any opportunity or discursive space for a romantic or critical artistic voice to join the conversation. Missing from this conversation are the voices of artists actually talking about their creative process as it relates to their aesthetic vision or how they want their art to be interpreted qua art. Ringling's advertised relationship with companies places their educational training outside an "aesthetic autonomy" narrative and into an instrumental-practical narrative more common in STEM fields or technical/trade schools where students are pipelined into careers.

The school characterizes the companies that they partner with as the inevitable location for art to be practiced and cultivated once the student leaves the school; companies that provide occupations that lead to "success" in the arts and "proof" of Ringling's value. This symbolic placement of corporate entities within the advertisements places the school, the students, and art directly into a narrative relationship with the culture industries. The symbolic relevance is enhanced when we factor in the student involvement with the advertisements. Students design the pamphlets and website for Ringling and so the stories and cultural codes that they are required to use to represent their school may become part of the stories and identities that students use in their own art and artistic identities.

4.2. Communicating Artistic Identities

This section is concerned with identifying the cultural codes and stories that Ringling uses in their literature to evoke individual artistic identities that are representative of the school. The artistic identities that Ringling endorses in their literature demonstrate the school's institutional commitment to particular types of artists

and art work. The data comes from the school's website and from the career pamphlets (*"84 Reasons Why You Should Study Art and Design"*, *"Context"*, *"Perspectives"*, *"Converge"*) that the school sends to prospective students. The school communicates the types of artists that they train through the use of student and alumni testimonials and articles that depict alumni working in particular industries with well defined goals. The following analysis will focus on these communications with particular attention paid to recurring themes and context.

Artistic identity is communicated by Ringling through the use of student and alumni testimonials featured in the school literature. Analyses of these representations of identity are a good way to better understand Ringling's culture of aesthetic training and the types of art they want associated with their institution. The career pamphlets that Ringling creates give us some insight into how the school depicts an artist's role and identity in the context of career paths and occupations. Lingo et al (2013) discuss the importance of art identities that face non-aesthetic counter roles which may or may not challenge the integrity of their identity as artists:

Consistent with the bohemian ideology and reinforced through public discourse about contemporary art, artists often see themselves as outsiders... [But] artists increasingly work in settings that require a different set of personality characteristics and dispositions... Thus, today's creative artists might best be described as having complex personalities that allow them to succeed in multiple contexts. (p.351-352)

The authors here confirm that the old cultural codes that were associated with and maintained by artists have been challenged by the social context in which artists must

commit to in order to practice their craft. Again, “But the old tent poles of this identity are strained by structural changes in not only the art world and the economy but also by new artistic practices and contexts that challenge traditional notions of who an artist is and what an artist does.” (352) Confirming the observation that artist identities must adapt to new and unexpected contexts, the personal statements from alumni at Ringling (found in the career pamphlets) attest to the merging of idealism and artistic autonomy with professional identities and economic viability:

Alum 1: I love my job. It really stretches me creatively. I find the same open-minded spirit at Apple that I came to love at Ringling. (Melody Hammer, Visual Designer; Class of 2007)

Using the same emphasis on creativity to link business with art that Ringling does, Alum 1 equates the corporate spirit at Apple with the spirit of Ringling. This quote achieves what Ringling appears to be after within the plot of their marketing literature: linking their educational environment and name with that of major companies.

Alum 2: My instructor’s taught me that a photographer’s most important tool isn’t the camera- it’s the mind. Not your own thought in isolation, but as part of a creative dialogue. Ringling taught me to hear criticism and not take it personally. That gave me the ability to brainstorm with clients and art directors without my ego getting in the way. (Jason Rogers, Class of 2000)

The first statement from Alum 2 uses a romantic vision of art- the technology used is not the important part of the aesthetic performance. The alum then tempers this statement by limiting the romantic vision and artistic individuality to one that fits with a business

ethos. Additionally, included on this page is a brief statement about the alum that mentions the companies that have used him as a photographer. This addition insures that the story being told about this alum's art is associated with the companies that can use this art. In other words, his photography does not stand alone as a story about artistic success or as an end in itself (art for art's sake).

Alum 3: To be able to start a business on next to nothing and operate it on a grassroots level creatively is innate to artists. An artist has an almost maddening drive to bring the idea in her head to fruition and will sacrifice food and sleep to get there. (Diana Stewart, majored in Graphic Design)

The artist is here equated with a business entrepreneur but the “starving artist” who sacrifices their material dignity is also present. Alum 3 is communicating a hybrid-identity where the artist and the businessman can co-exist through a shared need to express creativity. The quote echoes Richard Florida's opinion that art is most productive when linked with business production. In fact, the following Richard Florida quote appears in the very same pamphlet before all of the alum quotes appear: “Human creativity is the ultimate economic resource.” Perhaps the quotes from these successful students were chosen because they most accurately reflected this introductory quote.

And yet, these successful students are not practicing their art with a false-consciousness. They are aware (as their statements suggest) of the balancing act between their talent as artists and their employment as workers. Their language is not entirely business-oriented. They do not adopt the rhetoric and narrative of the college

entirely. These alum statements were approved by the institution before they were published in order to fit the overall consistency of the narrative that the school endorses but, once in a while a glimpse of concern and suspicion about the optimism of the art-business alliance comes into focus:

Alum 4: I chose a major in Advertising Design because it lets me work collaboratively with other designers and gives me hope that I can work in a high-end corporate environment one day without stifling my creativity.

(Unattributed Quote)

Some alumni communicated their feelings of empowerment that art gives them. They identify with their artistic profession as a means towards autonomy:

Alum 5: Studying fine arts taught me a fundamental visual language. That fluency gives me the ability to communicate in all fields of creative work... every day, I become aware of different paths that empower me to be the kind of artist I am. (Lesley Flanigan, 2001)

Alum 6: With the help of Ringling College, I am finally able to do what I love to do and still prove to my family that I really can succeed as a designer and artist! I want to inspire others and change the thinking about artists and designers in my country. (Design Major, 2008)

Alum 7: Self expression is one of the most difficult things to do, yet it is remarkably rewarding even when you fail. There is no reason to be afraid or skeptical of what other people say about your work. (Fine Art Major)

These quotes are more “romantic” in nature and give us a glimpse of alumni’s feelings about art outside of the dominant theme and plot of Ringling’s marketing literature.

These voices approximate the transformative power of art upon consciousness and society that is found in thinkers like Marcuse and Adorno. For the first time, we encounter voices talking about self-expression and the possibility of reaping aesthetic rewards even if you “fail” in the eyes of others. The content of these quotes contrasts very well with the narratives about art found in the work of Richard Florida and the majority of the content in the pamphlets created at Ringling.

In contrast with the above, Ringling offers its own narratives about artistic identities (also found in the career pamphlets) in addition to the personal statements they chose to include from their alumni:

As a Fine Art major at Ringling College of Art and Design, you are a pioneer of new artistic terrain- reshaping traditional artistic techniques for our technologically advanced era. (“Perspective” pamphlet, 2011)

Those skilled in digital filmmaking and computer-generated imaging have the best job prospects in the future of the motion picture and video industries. Being here is like being in the working world of professional filmmaking. That’s because we are practicing professionals and know the people and the industries you’ll go on to serve. (“Create” pamphlet, 2013)

Firms from all over the world look to Ringling College for the best and brightest computer animation artists because our students possess the proper balance of technical skills, aesthetic development, and the ability to tell a compelling story. (“This is Proof” pamphlet, 2012)

Artists at the school are primarily identified here in terms of their potential artistic contributions to industries. Absent from the descriptions is any emphasis on “art for art’s sake” or an artist’s ability to critique society or any identification with an artist’s counter-cultural potential. Ringling explicitly describes the fine-arts majors at their school as those artists who reshape traditions in art to fit a technological era. This description, along with the other two quotes that emphasize artists working for industries, fits in perfectly with the theme of Ringling’s narrative that art is becoming a hand-maiden to business and its technologies. As the second quote explains, Ringling provides the necessary networking for students to go on and serve the industries that need their expertise. Absent from all of the quotes included in the pamphlets is any narrative that may conceive of the young artist as a potential critical voice that could challenge the monopoly that these industries have over artistic production. Ringling is communicating that the artist as *servant* and *professional technician* for existing industries and technologies is the dominant persona (or character) that the artist is uniquely fit to portray within the story line of artistic success.

4.2.1. Summary

This section looked at the ways in which students from Ringling talked about themselves as artists. A majority of students primarily identified with the opportunities they found with the businesses they represented while a minority of students emphasized the personal empowerment that art has given them regardless of whether they served a particular industry. The art student passages that emphasized the autonomy gained through work in business and occupational success instead of an “art

for art's sake" ethos mirrored the identities that Ringling described in their description of the types of artists trained at the school. The art school is endorsing particular stories about the artist's place in society and the legitimate ways in which they can express their artistic identities.

4.3. Aesthetic Autonomy vs. Creative Dependency

This section is devoted to the analyses of Ringling's website and printed literature in the attempt to identify and analyze the major cultural codes and tropes that the school uses to narrate their philosophy on art in society and to identify and analyze their advertized partnerships with businesses that are featured and endorsed within the various literatures especially as they emerge from the school's descriptions and statements on the relationship between technology and art. Ringling is doing more than just advertising their school to prospective students with the literature they have their student body produce. They are also advertising to local and national businesses in order to communicate the economic impact that art can make. Careful attention will be paid to the "bridging tropes" (images which connect stories) that Ringling uses to make connections between art and non-aesthetic business sectors in order to better understand how the school uses certain cultural codes to promote particular types of art practices and to determine how these codes and narratives are used to describe Ringling's understanding of art in relationship to the business entities that populate their marketing literature.

Changing the language of discourse about the arts to a more economic-friendly lexicon, creates a shift in the balance of power between the arts and industry and any

remaining autonomy in the creative arts is being replaced by discourse fashioned for service industries and profit (Oakley 2009). This is verified in Richard Florida (2004) who offers a theoretical perspective that sees art worlds and business worlds working together through a new “creative class” (an integrated narrative). Florida sees art as a way to help serve the burgeoning new creative enterprises that are tied to new industries of technology. The artist is here seen as an entrepreneur who can help revitalize the economy and help improve the image and corresponding cultural codes associated with business and free-market enterprise. By tying creativity exclusively to economic outcomes, Florida reduces the symbolic resources that artists provide to nothing more than decorations to advertize products and promote a capitalist ethos. This perspective would seem to favor the reorganization of art schools to model service economies and industries that have been historically located outside of art-worlds.

Ringling has made a lot of economic gains by building bridges to businesses and culture industries. A local magazine of cultural opinions and essays, *The Sarasota Magazine* (2010), explained that this institutional success prompted board members of the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota to elect Ringling’s president to serve as their chairman. The magazine article provides us with a glimpse of the president’s ethos on the significance of art:

We hear often that Sarasota has the arts institutions other places would die to have, well, now those other places are no longer just dying to have what we have, they are spending the money to create or enhance arts institutions of their own. They understand what arts and culture can do in terms of economic development and tourism. They are trying to wrestle

the moniker of 'Cultural Capital of Florida' away from Sarasota. A host of other cities, from St. Petersburg to West Palm Beach and Daytona Beach, are really stepping up. So we can't just stand pat. (Huisking 2010).

The arts have become Sarasota's economic backbone and have helped to attract families from high socioeconomic backgrounds to take up residence in the area. According to Ringling's president, Ringling has achieved a one-hundred million dollar yearly economic impact on Sarasota alone. The president's perspective that the "success" of the arts and the institutional sectors outside of the arts depends upon a continued unabated partnership is fully consonant with the narratives published by the school. This narrative of "institutional dependency" is predicated on the assertion that "success" in the arts is equivalent to the measured success of sectors outside of the arts.

The following data show the explicit link that Ringling attempts to make between artistic growth and economic growth. The data is taken from Ringling's booklet, "84 Reasons Why You Should Study Art and Design", the story about art here is a story about financial opportunity. Statistical figures about the economic significance of the arts (see appendix, figure 3) are inserted before and after personal stories are told about student and alumni success (linking personal and economic narratives):

In an uncertain economy, the visual arts keep growing: Employment of artists and related workers is expected to grow 16% through 2016, faster than the average for all occupations. Employment growth by arts-centric businesses since 2007 was 11.6%, more than four times the rise in the total number of U.S. employees of 2.4%. The creative sector is estimated

to be worth 6.1 trillion internationally within 15 years, the largest economy in the world. Art and design permeates all aspects of global business. The right brain and left brain come together when art enters the marketplace.

(From: “84 Reasons Why you should Study Art and Design”)

This opening statement which serves as a heading for what is to follow, describes the arts as a safe investment. The arts are being equated with economic growth. Economic growth is still equated with art but now the title “artist” is synonymous with occupation. The school has coined a term “arts-centric” in order to identify businesses that are associated with the arts. This term helps to conflate the growth of the arts with particular types of businesses. The final sentence attempts to communicate a perfect partnership and equilibrium between rational pursuits (left-brained) and artistic pursuits (left-brained) when they interact in a market economy.

The narrative approach in this booklet was to organize the relevance of art around the financial success of occupational and business growth. The final page within the booklet reinforces this theme: *Design, in short, is becoming an ever more important engine of corporate profit.* The merging of art and business in these narratives was discussed at the National Art Educators national convention in 2009 by the president of Ringling. As the keynote speaker of that convention, he spoke about “Crusading for Creativity: The Critical Convergence of Art Design and Business in our New, Global Economy”.

The merging of art and business within the Ringling narrative hinges on the code word “*creativity*”. This word appears time and again throughout all of the printed literature and website created by the school. This code word is also the same “linking

term” that Richard Florida uses in his research that ties the arts to the economy and future innovations. In the 2011 edition of the “*Perspectives*” magazine that Ringling publishes, the president of the college uses the notion of a creative-economy to link the arts with business:

Creativity: Fueling our Future: When I see our country’s stagnation and economic woes, I cannot help but think that we need a creative revolution that is embraced by business... a unique feature of the United States is that it historically has been very creative and inventive... when a group of individuals from diverse backgrounds creatively determined our country... ideas and imagination, working in collaboration with people from diverse backgrounds- is what is needed to spawn creativity. (“Perspectives”, 2011)

Linking our collective past with creativity and our future success with creative innovation, this narrative endorses the linking of creativity (that is associated with the arts) to successful business endeavors. The article then goes on to make this link:

For nearly a decade, I have passionately expressed to top business folks the criticality of infusing art, design, and creativity and design thinking into their business strategy in order to ensure future growth and economic vitality. In order to reclaim America’s creativity differentiator, we must be able to provide businesses with a workforce of imaginative employees who will pave the way to a new future. The challenges of business and our economy today are all part of a burning platform to shift our thinking, and to embrace the importance of applying creativity and innovation to solve today’s business problems. The design thinking skills our students

possess involve creatively satisfying human needs with the practical constraints imposed by business principles. ("Perspectives", 2011)

The president of Ringling has now positioned the future of the arts, via creativity, into the service of business and wider economic factors. In other words, because business relies on creativity to innovate, this creativity is generalized (no distinctions made between forms of creativity) and equated with the creativity that takes place in the arts. What is left out is any mention of aesthetics in terms of its own agenda, autonomy, and distinct qualitative use of creativity. Art, according to this line of thought, follows the principles and ethos of business agendas in order to actualize its own creativity and needs. The narrative has established a fusion of art and business by way of collapsing the category of the artist into a shared quality of creativity that is materialized on the economic platform of business and technology.

This fusion is most salient within the school's narrative when it appears in the context of the technology that the school invests in. Ringling's 2012 yearly magazine, *Converge*, an article entitled "*ArtTech*" appeared which boasts of the new technologies which have recently converged upon the school. The title fuses aesthetics with technology and the opening synopsis of the article makes a global statement about all of the art students attending the college:

Technology is innovating, enabling, and enhancing the learning experience of today's Ringling College students and is a vital tool in the creation of their art. ("Converge", 2012)

This statement leaves out any mention of alternative artistic visions outside of a tech-centered aesthetics. Technology is praised and represented as always enhancing the

power of art. This one-sided view is especially pronounced in the passage that describes Ringling's original purchase of a computer:

The decision to purchase a sole computer in the mid-1980's helped to transform a small town art school into an internationally recognized technology powerhouse producing some of the world's most renowned art and design talent of our time. ("Converge", 2012)

This passage seems to suggest that the renowned art the school is known for could only have been possible with the technology they invested in while the artistic talent of the individual students is not mentioned. The article then pursues a narrative that contrasts an earlier more primitive aesthetic vision with a current more successful tech-art:

So how does computer science merge with art? : At its founding, Ringling nearly focused exclusively on the fine arts: painting on the beach, drawing from the figure, etc. While we still focus on the fine arts, today we are best known for our dynamic digital arts... Folks often think art and technology don't mix; that could not be further from the truth!... But why do we need this? After all, aren't we just painting pictures? Wrong! Our technology is helping us shatter the myth of the starving artist. ("Converge", 2012)

These statements seem to confirm Lyotard's observations that older forms of aesthetic practice and content are being replaced with market-friendly technologies that are tied directly to the engine of capital. Particularly relevant in the data above is the final sentence where Ringling takes ownership of the technology with the pronoun "Our". This rhetorical strategy uses the personal pronoun in order to take ownership of these

technologies and equating them with the aesthetic process. Technology here becomes the saving grace which shatters the old symbolic identity of the starving artist by merging the arts with innovations of business, and by serving these innovations (aestheticizing them) saves itself from obsolescence and symbolic or actual starvation.

4.3.1. Summary

In summation, this section identifies the cultural codes that Ringling uses to align their institution with non-aesthetic narratives. The investments and capital that is generated from the school act as an economic engine for the Sarasota. The president of Ringling has adopted similar rhetoric to Richard Florida, who espouses artist's full cooperation with businesses to help create economic stimulation. Artists are depicted as part of a "creative class" that adapts their art to new innovations in the tech world in order to better serve the companies that invest in these technologies. The ambiguous use of the term "creativity" serves as a bridging tool to democratize the practice of art and to collapse the identity and role of the artist into categories that are interchangeable with any other "creative" endeavor. These narratives of identity are linked to the ubiquitous dependence on technologies and their implementation for rendering services.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

This narrative analysis located and described the tension between art and commerce to the extent that it existed within narratives found at the institutional level of an art school. I identified and contextualized the cultural codes and recurring motifs within these narratives in order to understand how an art school promotes and encourages particular symbolic and material relationships between aesthetics and business. The marketing literature from Ringling College of Art and Design served as a microcosm where these relationships are reproduced by the school and also as a site where these relationships are reflections of general cultural and economic trends surrounding the school.

The major findings of the analyses include the identification of data suggesting that *Ringling College of Art and Design privileges the conservative/structural model of art's relationship with society by maximizing language and images that are synonymous with corporate and economic structures while depicting art as serving as a hand-maiden to industry, minimizing art's role as an autonomous activity.* The narrative that Ringling uses confirms what Marcuse, Adorno, and other critical social theorists have identified as the commoditization of aesthetics. Mirroring Richard Florida's narrative (art's use as an economic catalyst) Ringling's literature merges stories about economic success and innovation with aesthetic tropes of creativity and artistic success. Corroborating Chiapello's (2004) arguments, the narratives produced by Ringling illustrate how narratives committed to artistic critique have been co-opted and incorporated into

dominant capitalist discourse and are visible and influential only within the context of the market and the technologies that pool both business and art into one commodified form.

The majority of narratives that Ringling uses depict art exclusively as an economic force while ignoring or marginalizing art's capacity to foster aesthetic, spiritual or critical engagements with society due to its one-sided monolithic depiction of student-artist identities and their success in the arts as being contingent upon and sometimes becoming synonymous with business and venture capitalism. While there were instances of text from alumni within the Ringling pamphlets which would suggest that these former students are navigating their way between artistic identities and corporate identities, the vast majority of texts confirm Smith's (2001) observation that particular mediators (cultural entrepreneurs, patrons, businesses) can work through the school as organizational gatekeepers by promoting particular kinds of art (and discourse) that they believe to be worthy or profitable. The narratives that Ringling uses in their literature suggest that the school acts as mediator to a host of business interests and culture industries. Also relevant is the fact that Ringling's pamphlets were physically created by the students as part of their art work. This has many implications for the development and formation of these student's art identities. Guided by the school's artistic agenda, these students work aesthetically with the narratives about art that Ringling endorses. This type of labor may be reinforcing a feedback loop where young artists are identifying with the ideological content endorsed by Ringling and then later practicing this perspective in their own work as artists.

Finally, *cultural codes and tropes such as "starving artist", "creativity", and "innovation" were used in the literature to promote a discursive link between business*

friendly relationships and traditional aesthetic concerns. As Oakley (2009) argued, changing the language of discourse about the arts to a more economic-friendly lexicon creates a shift in the balance of power from the arts to industry. In other words, in order for industries to align aesthetic production and consumption with material corporate power structures there must be an uneven symbolic exchange between the two spheres. Using cultural codes (like *innovation* and *creativity*) as linking tropes to bridge any remaining space that lies between narratives of aesthetics and capitalism, will further push what is left of the unique symbolic cultural autonomy of aesthetics into the rational-instrumental economic exchange between culture industries.

These findings draw attention to the imbalance between any future practice of aesthetic autonomy by artists and the occupational opportunities that artists are being trained to pursue. Aesthetic autonomy is limited when young artists are trained to specialize in their field only to the extent that it fits the professional ethos of the culture industries that will eventually hire them. And while complex technologies that are developed by culture industries and endorsed by schools like Ringling provide new mediums for art to inhabit, this creates new pressures on young artists to focus on becoming expert technicians instead of creators of better and more personal art. This technological encroachment can also become a financial obstacle to a future artist's aesthetic autonomy in that the more art becomes dependent on new expensive technologies, the more a poor artist must depend on the monopolized resources of the culture industries.

The findings also underscore the precarious social position of artists and the threat to any possibility of a socially relevant critical art to emerge from the next

generation of artists. If the narratives and cultural codes that are associated with aesthetics continue to merge with the narratives and codes of economic and capital exchange, art will cease to function apart from the symbolic exchanges initiated by corporate interests. And while the data are limited to one school, the themes and issues that emerged are part of a much wider social field including the companies, markets, and communities that interact with Ringling College by way of material or symbolic relationships.

Future research that can contribute to the validity and generalizability of this data would include comparative institutional ethnographies between art schools whose mission statements are more aligned with traditional romantic conceptions of aesthetics versus schools like Ringling where emphasis is placed on training for professional careers in industry. These ethnographies would include interviews of students, administrators, and career counselors to better understand how their artistic identities and their perspectives on the arts converge or diverge. Interviews with students should focus on their understanding of what it means to be an artist and whether or not they experience their training at school as part of this artistic identity.

Extensive document analysis of school records, school historical documents, and student-artists' original work would contribute to better understanding how schools communicate to potential art students about art, future occupational opportunities, and how art students negotiate their art identities through their work. Document analysis may also reveal how different schools are choosing to allocate their budgets, and this may help to determine the differential levels of resources afforded to particular

departments within the school and to identify any businesses or special interest groups that invest in the school.

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