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## **Hybridity In Transnational/Transcultural Design: extending the visual design language in education**

### *1. Statement of the problem and objectives*

#### **(Slide 1- title slide)**

Hybrid visual languages can meet the needs of North/South and East/West design education, without compromising the inherent strengths of either.

**(Slide 2-Globalization/scher air map)** We are all acutely aware of how interconnected we are, as we make 'the global turn' into the 21 century through our shared economic, political, technological and ecological interdependencies. Or, as cultural globalization media professor, Marwan Kraidy points out, we have come to the place of "Hybridization, or the cultural logic of globalization" (obviously a reference to Jameson's notion of "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"). For the purposes of this talk, I will use the concept of transnationalism, based on the creation of socio-cultural links that reach beyond nation-state borders, largely because of the speed and interactivity of social networks that have formed. As for transculturalism, this term I use will mean "the pursuit to define shared interests and common values across cultural and national boundaries", or more personally 'seeing oneself in the other'.

As North American design educators, I will argue we have to extend our 20<sup>th</sup> century and Western nation-state notions of visual design language and practices, into ones that are reflective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century transnational and transcultural world our students are about to inherit.

So how might we go about doing this?

First, let's look at two of the four world models of education in use today- the 'Progressive Education World Model' and the 'Human Capital World Model'- (Indigenous and Religious models being the other two). Then, let's explore how notions of transnational and transcultural hybridity may extend and create new social models for global visual design language and education.

### *2. Summary of employed methods or your research approach*

**(Slide 3- Progressive Edu- nasa map )** 'Progressive Education World Model' advocates, see the accumulation of knowledge as an ever-changing process. They suggest looking at and choosing variations international strategies of education, then evaluating and comparing them with their own regional policies already in place, and lastly deciding upon what global components to use that are most suited for their diverse educational needs and situations. In this model, they believe their local cultures may best choose, tailor, and adapt international education practices and ideas, which will align with their own local needs and community. They do not believe any one international strategy of education should be imposed upon them from outside i.e. regional governing bodies, multinational corporations, or financial institutions. Progressive educationalists prefer to maintain an independent sense of agency. Therefore, they reject the notion of any universal standardization of education adopted in its entirety. In other words, they believe in integrating suitable global and regional educational models to suit varied local requirements, thereby allowing them to choose best practices of multiple pedagogies and strategies.

**(Slide 4- Human Capital- Scher world trade map)** On the other hand, the Human Capital World Model of education advocates take a different approach. Aligned with and supported by international governing and financial bodies- such the United Nations, the World Bank, WTO, multi-national learning corporations, etc.- they consider a standardization of learning as the key to the world's monetary growth. These multinational economic and political organizations are witness to how financial flow depends upon a primarily Western-based and English speaking knowledge economy. So, if such a worldwide standard of education is in place, the Human Capital World Model is better able to assure multinational corporations, governing bodies, and financial institutions, etc. that their future international body of workers will have comparable learning experiences, and a common knowledge base. In contrast to the Progressive Education World Model, the Human Capital model is more efficient. Advocates of this model may more confidently produce known qualities and larger quantities of workers, who are suitably educated to readily transition into the larger global economy. This model borrows heavily from the 20<sup>th</sup> century's Western notion of industrializing and regulating education. As a result, these systems were designed for mass; or universal education institutional practices requiring standardized curricula, consistent learning outcomes, harmonized testing and grade progression.

### *3. Significance of the proposed topic*

**(Slide 5- globalization, scher air map-)** Given either model of education, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – ‘global turn’ or ‘cultural logic of globalization,’ do we educators advocate for the ‘Progressive Education World Model’, where global communications may take place, yet remain indicative of the local culture? Will this allow our students to become transnational or transcultural visual communicators, whose messages may extend beyond national, cultural and semiotic borders? Would it be possible for our students, and we as teachers, to then extend our provincial North American visual design language, into a hybrid model that communicates more globally?

Alternatively, should we take the stance of the ‘Human Capital World Model,’ given its allure and alliances with multinational corporations, financial bodies and global governing institutions? Could we create a common visual language in road signs installed throughout the European Community, or in the iconography devised for multitudes of travelers and tourists who move through international airports and attendees at world sporting events such as the Olympic Games ?

**(Slide 6- AIGA/ICOGRADA)** Let’s look at how two international design organizations took up each model of education and their recent design education conferences- the AIGA’s 2012 *Geo/Graphics: design, education*, and the transnational terrain and ICOGRADA’s 2011 *Design Education Manifesto*. Each gathering points towards their opposing educational model positions. The differing titles of their session names and contents will give you an indication of their divergent stances.

The AIGA educators primarily took the position of the ‘Progressive Education World Model.’ Presentations laid out program strategies, activities, and theories implemented or proposed by the educators in different transnational or transcultural contexts. Professor Ella Shohat, renowned cultural studies scholar and author, was their keynote speaker, a choice indicative of the seriousness of their conference’s endeavor. Shohat has been teaching, lecturing and publishing on postcolonial and transnational issues since 1984, or for almost 30 years. Some of her publications are translated into nine different languages.

The AIGA’s session topics give you a sense of their transnational stance:

1. Design Institutions: Transnational Pedagogy, Transnational Environments; Local vs Western Models
2. Design Projects: Transnational Inspirations, Transnational Collaborations, Transnational Media; Serving Distant Cultures
3. Design Ideas: Transnational Pedagogy, Transnational Identities, Transnational Places In History, Transnational Digital Forums. Understanding Local Cultures; Local Perspectives.

On the other hand, ICOGRADA speakers advocated ‘the Human Capital paradigm ’ i.e. to “relay models of cross-cultural ...communications and for global –market collaboration with industry, users, and ... stakeholders.” Unlike the AIGA, who were gathering to exchange ideas, projects, and institutional forays into the transnational terrain, ICOGRADA primarily met to update their decade old Education Manifesto from 2000. ICOGRADA’s goal was to agree upon new and specific tenets, that the membership would like to see instituted in current design education practices worldwide. In preparation for this convention, two years of research, study, and writing had gone into creating revisions for the Manifesto. Speaker topics included:

The new public sphere and the design field,  
Where the borders are,  
The change we seek: an African perspective,  
Respectful design: a journey of design education.

It should be noted here that ICOGRADA’s membership is more broad-based than AIGA’s, as it includes a wider variety of institutions, organizations, countries, and stakeholders’, so therefore their decision making and the positions they choose to take reflect this membership assortment. What’s more ICOGRADA claims to be “*the* world body for professional communication design. ... which promotes the value of design practice, thinking, education, research and policy, representing more than 200 organisations in 67 countries and regions globally.” As a result in finalizing their ICOGRADA Manifesto 2010, the proposition creates a declarative assertion and a call to action in which the membership has endorsed a global standard for preparing (quoting from their own policy document now) “the ground for formulating ...competencies,” so design can have “an active role in addressing social and global change (ICOGRADA, 2010, p 51).

The AIGA however, put forth a platform that appears exploratory in nature, rather than declarative. Topics and speakers seem to be investigating *how* to map the new transnational terrain they find themselves and students in today.

## 2. Presentation focus

**(Slide 7- Progressive Edu- nasa map)** I believe the ‘Progressive Education World Model’ should be put into practice by global visual communication educators and students, as it allows freedom from possibly

over-riding standardization strategies, which might be best avoided while seeking to extend our 20<sup>th</sup> century visual design language. As Kraidy argues in his book, “Hybridization, or the cultural logic of globalization”, the term and theory of hybridity should be used only with the utmost specificity and contextualization, given the word has been overly used, thereby rendering it into a meaningless cliché. Furthermore, Kraidy believes because of the numerous and exhausted linkages between hybridity and power, it is even more vital to move beyond the conventionally applied tensions of resistance and domination. He argues for more deep seated interpretations of hybridity and globalization germane to avoiding ambiguous views of transnational and transcultural interactions.

**Slide 8 – (transnat/cultu- scher pop map)** As educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s ‘cultural logic of globalization’, we know our students need to be self-reflective and re-frame problem-solving and form-giving design projects of the past. And they need to visually dialogue and re-contextualize our North American visual language to keep up with ‘the global turn’.

I propose that not only our students, but also we as educators, engage in global dialogic encounters of visual communication principles and practices by having a fully immersive experience in a country other than our own. This latter notion would mimic the best practice of those seeking to learn a foreign language. Although this is not a new idea, it has proven to be a highly effective one. Having daily encounters in another culture’s visual communications environment, within its actual living context, can increase one’s learning exponentially. As symbolic anthropologist, Clifford Geertz maintained, culture is “a system of meanings embodied in symbols. ...” and “...cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses.” For him, symbolic anthropologists must be interpreters by applying “thick description” to comprehend symbols, which can only be known by directly observing them in use. Therefore, Geertz’s interpreter of cultural symbols must be empirically thorough and a perceptive observer, much like a practitioner of semiotics.

**(Slide 9- china map)** What follows are three examples of designers, who through their personal transnational and transcultural experiences, devised a hybridity of design that communicates to their Eastern and Western audiences. These designers (and teachers) exemplify global turning in Hybridization, or “the cultural logic of globalization” and a ‘visual logic of contemporary cultural globalism’ throughout the world at present. I will focus on contemporary Chinese design, as this is an area I have been studying since my first visit there in 2004.

“Hybridization, or the cultural logic of globalization.”

To summarize, these three designers are positive models of transnational and transcultural designers. I trust that through their work and this paper, you may begin to imagine how hybridity in our 20<sup>th</sup> century, nation-state visual design language may be extended. Accomplishments by these ‘dialectical’, cultural translators, and crossover designers’ can be emulated and extended through visual dialogical encounters - a pathway that our students and ourselves may seek to follow.

70 WORD COUNT

**(Slide 9- china map)** What follows are three examples of designers, who through their personal transnational and transcultural experiences, devised a hybridity of design that communicates to their Eastern and Western audiences. Ideally these designers (and teachers) will show how they adjusted to the global turnings in the “Hybridization, or the cultural logic of globalization.” In addition, I will focus on Chinese design, as this an area I have been studying since my first visit there in 2004.

**(Slide 10- Steiner, type)**

Henry Steiner is an Austrian born designer (1934) who grew up in New York, studied at the Sorbonne and Yale University with Paul Rand. In 1964 he founded his own branding design consultancy in Hong Kong, while the territory was still under British sovereignty until 1997 (or 33 years), and has remained there after its ‘return’ to the PRC, which has been nearly 16 years now.

This poster, you see here, he designed for a Japanese typesetting company (Morisawa, 1991. Steiner: 1995, p 20). The white letters are debossed to indicate that both were originally carved into stone. The 841 Tang dynasty numbers, ten and three, and the 1570 Roman letters, Y and P, cleverly combine to create the word, TYPE. (On top of these visual clues, Steiner said that  $10 + 3 = 13$ , which is a lucky or auspicious number in Chinese.)

**(Slide 11- ying/yang)** Furthermore, when I asked him about his ability to devise hybrid designs, such as his ‘TYPE’ poster, he said he did not view his work as such; rather he saw his work interacting like the ‘ying and the yang’ symbol, or dialectically. One reinforces the other, yet maintains its separate, but creates an entity turning into one another, with a bit (or dot) contained within each.

**(Slide 12- rand & wang min)** Wang Min was born (1954) and educated in China, and then left to study in East Berlin, moved to the USA, and went to graduate school at Yale and studied with Paul Rand at Basel Summer School. He taught and worked in the USA and Europe for over 20 years, before returning to China in 2003, when his San Francisco design firm was selected to create the design for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games.

90 WORD COUNT

**(Slide 13- wangmin & Beijing symbols)**

When interviewed for an online magazine, DesignBoom, he said his major concerns were “How can we create ... [a] look that combines the Olympic spirit and Chinese values? How can we create a Olympic look that blends the traditional with the contemporary? How can we create an Olympic look that is uniquely Chinese in color and form? How can we create an Olympic look that touches hearts and minds of the people? How can we create an Olympic look that will enhance athletes and spectators experience?”

These are all reflective questions that a transnational/transcultural migratory designer, such as Wang Min, would even consider posing.

**(Slide 14- wangmin & ancient seals)** Here is an example of what he, as the dean of the Central Academy of Fine Arts with his students and protégées, devised for the pictograms of the Games sporting events. Using the strokes made to create Chinese seal characters, as inscribed on the bones and bronze objects by their ancient ancestors, the CAFA team extracted basic forms to reflect and transform them into contemporary icons for the Olympic Games.

**(Slide 15- bob Appleton @ cafa)** Robert Appleton born (1947) and raised in Scotland, studied at St. Martins in London, worked as a designer in Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Boston, Connecticut, and New York City. He also has taught in the USA, Toronto, as well as given workshops in Istanbul, Portugal, Helsinki, and Nanjing. You see him here as a designer-in-residence at CAFA, where he lived and taught in Beijing for one year in 2006-2007. NOTE: he is the only non-Asian in the photo, as well as in the majority of the classes he taught while there.

**(Slide 16- bob's self-portrait)** This was his first totally immersive experience in non-Western country.

**(Slide 17- student poster of world)** While there, Robert gave his students this Crossing Cultures poster assignment: using type and image create a visual message that expresses a dialogic encounter, which is understood by both a Chinese and Western audience.

**(Slide 18- student explanation)** Appleton's student's written explanation reads:

“The poster graphic becomes “the ruler” and “the map” which comprises “the infinite circle.” This shape takes on the role of principal element. “The ruler” defines “the map” as infinite limitation. Space and time's limitations link to infinite possibility, surmounting the language barrier with a mark of mutual recognition, achieving shared goals.”

To summarize, these three designers are positive models of transnational and transcultural designers. I trust you may begin to imagine how hybridity in our 20<sup>th</sup> century, nation-state visual design language may be extended. Their accomplishments of becoming ‘dialectical’, cultural translators, and crossover designers’ can be accomplished, like them through visual dialogical encounters - a pathway that our students and we may seek to follow.