

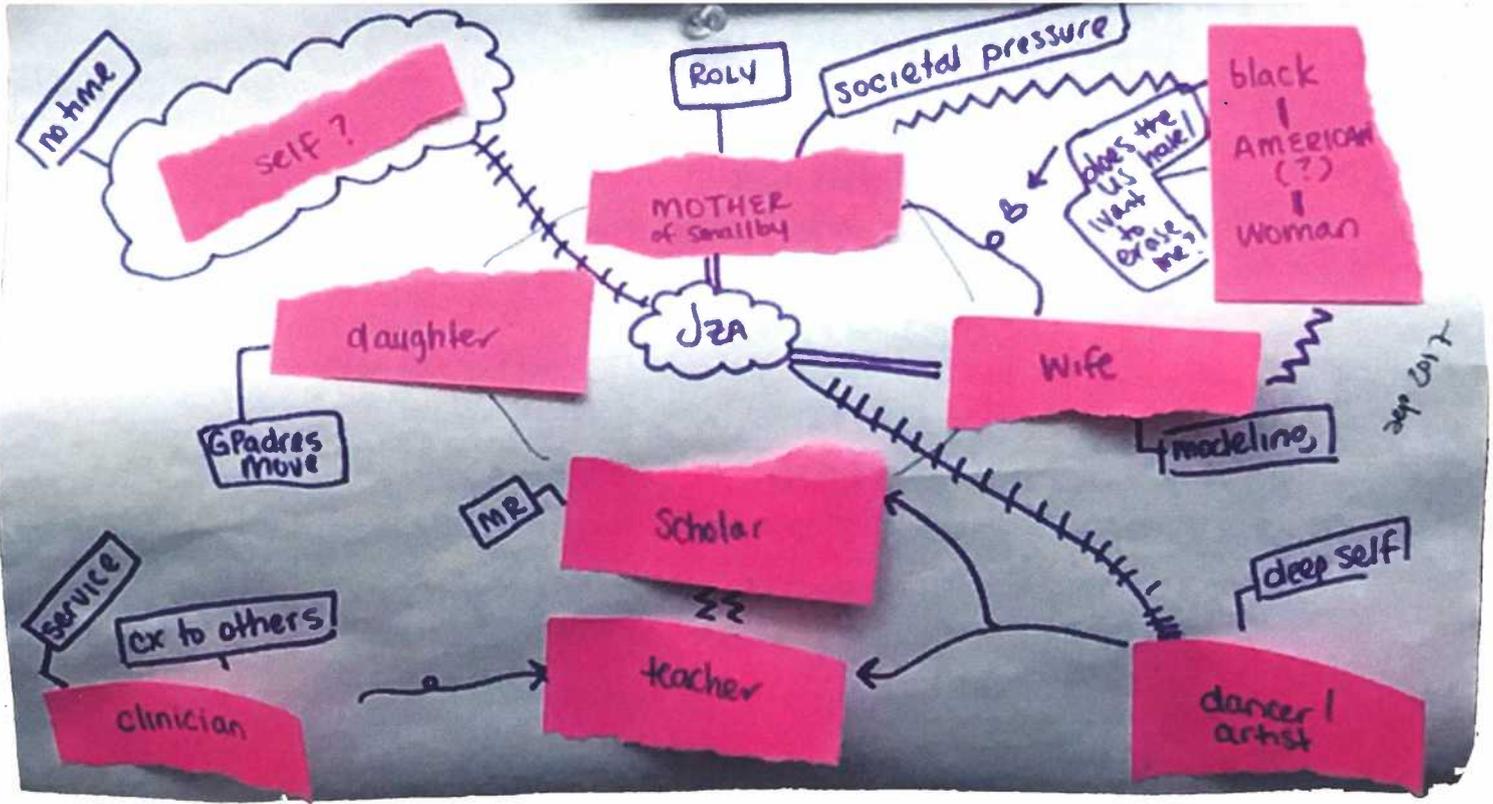
showing
2019
thinking

The program in art and art history at Agnes Scott College recognizes the inherent expressive value of art, its enrichment of the human experience, and the dependence of global culture on visual literacy.

Our curriculum challenges students to create, read, and analyze images through written and oral communication, critical thinking, and experiential learning.

Our mission speaks strongly to the process of creativity, rather than the product. Through a collaborative approach to teaching and learning, we offer an integrated program that compels students to consider the practices required of professional artists and art historians.

We create an environment that empowers students to hone their individual expression, engage in a productive dialogue with their peers, and contribute significantly to the world at large.



March 2019

Ruth Dusseault

James T. and Ella Rather Kirk Visiting Professor of Art

Lilia Harvey

Professor of Chemistry

Associate Dean for STEM Teaching and Learning

Faculty Director, Science Center for Women

Janelle Peifer

Assistant Professor of Psychology

Augustus B. Cochran III

Adeline A. Loridans Professor of Political Science

Curiosity

Nell Ruby
Professor of Art

Now in its seventh year, showing/ thinking is shaping a volume of work tracing and documenting the processes of scholars and creative artists in the Agnes Scott community. This exhibition is a lesson for our students, revealing the nature of critical and original thinking. Using the tools of our disciplines to contextualize and materialize ideas, we are showing the quirky processes that may eventually lead to excellence in publications, performances, and exhibitions.

Each year we highlight professors from various disciplines. The Art 397: Exhibition Processes class is involved in the work of examining the nature of each participant's work. They consider a selection of curated images and artifacts to determine how best to convey individual narratives.

Participants write process statements explaining their approaches to working and thinking. How does a physical body moving through a room prepare a path for intellectual connection? Does fervent reading foment and expand ideology? How does an affinity for patterning dictate a desire to research molecules? What do stories about networks of human habitation tell us about technology? These are some of the questions involved in this year's exhibition. There is no set timeline for discovery, and no guarantee that hypotheses won't fail. Most thinking doesn't become a book in a library or an image in a frame. The common thread among the scholars featured is a drive to be curious—the basis for all original thinking and research.

I love to read. Maybe I'm overcompensating for my traumatic first day of school. Miss (sic) Morris displayed posters of a boy, girl, and cocker spaniel and asked who could read the phrases (e.g., "see Spot run"). I was one of the few who didn't raise a hand. That afternoon I announced to my mother that I needed to learn to read, and I've been reading fanatically ever since. That as much as anything is why I became a professor – I figured teaching was one of the few occupations that would allow me to keep reading.

I read for lots of reasons. Partly it's just a pastime (literally: I'm never without a book in spare moments because, as my daughter once observed, "You don't wait well, do you?"). Mostly I'm greedy: I want more than one all-too-brief life, but since I don't believe in reincarnation, reading is my ticket into other lives, other times, other worlds. Beyond alternative possibilities, reading illuminates the confusing mess of the here-and-now (especially politics!).

Unfortunately reading doesn't provide easy or quick answers. But I plug away – I'm slow. Not just a slow reader, but a slow talker and slow thinker as well. I avoid quick response or decisions. I prefer to take my time, read widely, ponder, stew, flounder a bit. That's my thinking process, if you care to dignify it as such. I lack alacrity, decisiveness, imagination,

and certainty. I try to offset those weaknesses with thoroughness, determination, concentration, and hard work.

My subconscious does most of my thinking for me while my attention is elsewhere. When in a muddle, totally stumped by some problem, I often find that after jogging the perplexity has vanished and the resolution is obvious. Maybe that's why my best thoughts occur in the early morning, after a good night's sleep, or late afternoon, after a day of reading or attending to other matters. It is a strange but not uncommon experience to return to material that has lain fallow only to understand it at a deeper level. Perhaps I should be embarrassed to admit that sometimes after teaching a course several times, I have had an "aha" moment when I finally "get it" and realize "oh yeah, that's what this course is really about." For example, retired philosophy professor Richard Parry and I co-taught the first teamtaught course at ASC about how Marx's thought translated into varieties of Communism when applied in different national contexts. Only gradually did I recognize that Marxism shouldn't be considered a political ideology to guide Communist revolutions, but rather a critique of capitalism (the subtitle of *Das Kapital*), which is why Marx's ideas retain insight and relevance after Communism collapsed. Writing begins with reading. I've evolved

an elaborate system of markings: yellow highlighting (sparingly); underlining (too much – a friend always inquires "How's Gus? Is he highlighting or underlining?"); checks for significant passages (size matters!); Q's indicate quotable material; and stars denote key ideas. A useful trick acquired from retired English professor Linda Hubert is making notes at the end of books - easier to keep track of than separate notes. I take notes on everything, partly to force concentration, partly to aid faulty memory. Law school reinforced focus and analytic thinking, and I discovered there how effectively writing disciplines thinking. I zealously outline and draw charts, great tools for clarity and comprehension, like intellectual maps. Brazilian friends tease me about loving maps. They chart complex spaces abstractly. I adore Portuguese because language is a beautiful tool for turning a confusion of sounds into shared meaning.

Professor Cathy Scott taught me to perceive authors as engaged in dialogue with others, a powerful perspective for comparing and contrasting positions. I tend to focus on synthesis, detecting similarities more readily than differences. Authors' presuppositions and implications interest me as much as their specific arguments.

Gus Cochran

I suspect that even outstanding academics really have only one big idea in their lifetimes (Samuel Huntington in his numerous books and articles is always asking the Hobbesian question, how is order possible). Maybe that's just an excuse for the fact that I've been working on the same dilemma for my entire career. Roberto Michels contended that democracy was impossible ("He who says organization says oligarchy"). I've spent decades searching for ways to prove him wrong.

I prefer writing to speaking. Despite a career talking, I am somewhat shy and prefer to remain quiet except in small groups (a statement that might shock my faculty colleagues who have endured my opinions on many subjects). One exception: lecturing in Portuguese is fun because Brazilians set the bar so low. If you can say good morning and a couple of coherent sentences they will congratulate you on a great talk. They are so generous.

I never expected to be an academic. I planned to go into politics. I just wanted more time to read, learn, and clarify my thoughts so that when I acted, it would be strategic. My one regret is that I'm so slow; I'm still trying to sharpen my ideas, resolve my doubts. Maybe if reincarnation is real, I'll be an activist in my next life. In the meantime, I still haven't read most of the books in my office.



It's better to wear out than to rust out.

*A SILLY SLOGAN THAT I REMEMBER FROM A SELF-IMPROVEMENT
CAMPAIGN AT THE YMCA WHEN I WAS ABOUT IN 5TH GRADE.*



Artists don't take risks, firemen do.

ANDY WARHOL

This is an interesting time to be alive.

I always wanted my work to reflect the present and, in turn, my experience of it. So I looked around me for its mark on the built environment. Architecture is nothing if not a set of proposals for organizing human attention, habit and ritual.

But the spaces of my daily occupation are not only made of concrete and timber. My days are spent in a hybrid material/virtual world. An honest reflection of the present will have to include the digital annex - the databases, media flows, archives, satellite-enabled geographies, and social communities that amend our attentions, habits and rituals.

Here are some recurring questions. How does the media world shape my built environment? What visible traces of current history are unobvious because they are common? How do spaces of flow inform my approach and interaction with material culture? How do we physically occupy a global village? And how do I take a picture of that?

I grew up around tourist attractions in Florida, small parks that you could do in one day. Most of them were created in the early 20th century by amateurs

and entrepreneurs who re-engineered the wild subtropical landscape into mythical interpretations of nature – gardens of Eden, topiary sculptures, jungle cruises, dolphin shows, parrot vaudevilles and mermaids theaters in clear water springs. It was a version of nature from the Modern era, synonymous with leisure, in harmony with our spiritual beliefs. It was how we saw nature before it we knew it was threatened.

In contrast, Disney World was void of native species. It transported me into spaces of total plasticity and immersive fiction. Disney World was where I first met the architecture of Europe - a place I later experienced authentically as an adult, although I still struggle to see it as real. In both places, I remember wanting my vantage point to match the photographs I had seen of them. And when they did, I felt I had arrived. Maybe I should just accept the touristic gaze but change my vantage point?

Returning to Disney as an adult is a different sort of adventure than when you're a kid. Sitting with my young child in a boat on a conveyor belt, we were gently dragged through shallow water on the ride It's a Small World After All. I realized I was witnessing a doll-scaled rendition of a global society. It was the elementary school rendition of the United Nations. Maybe I should think smaller?

Small worlds are easy to manage. Think of an island village or a desert base camp. Whole

systems are visible within limited parameters. It's easier to find and repair problems. It's easier to make decisions; to understand why decisions are made and to gauge their results. Disney World has its own power, water and transportation infrastructure. It also has its own internal politics and its own omnipotent utopian belief system.

The day I realized that a city is the product of human decisions, and not the will of the wind, I felt a sense of existential relief. If the city is created by people, then it can be changed by people - if nothing is true, then everything is permitted. A city is a man-made object and the human element is a constant modifier. Our ever changing imprint is visible in artistic representations, in the landscape paintings of Julie Mehretu and the street photographs of Gary Winogrand.

Architecture implicitly contains a utopian impulse, the desire for an ideal. Utopian expressions in art, books, films and architecture, are generated in response to conditions in the broader society. They are microcosms that can be unpacked and explored.

Utopia is a constructive thought process, in which the building blocks are the values and ideologies of its creators. If we study utopian communities throughout history (and America has had more utopian communities than any other country in the world) then we learn about the values and ideologies of other times. And in a way, that

informs our understanding of the present.

So like a tourist, I drive around looking for utopias, worlds within worlds and material interpretations of virtual places. I found a reflection of the present in the transformation of a steel mill into a shopping mall. I returned to Florida and archived those early 20th-century nature parks, because they told me something about my current relationship to nature. I found sites of spontaneous theater, built from garbage and occupied by video gamers, on interstitial spaces throughout the landscape, where warweary soldiers could revisit their memories on a smaller stage and find healing through the act of play.

In a way, each of us is a record of our time. Collecting stories is an important part of my work. My process is to go slow; return to the same places and people over time; include myself in the experience; and prioritize empathy and observation over judgment. I found that the same technologies that have expanded our horizons into vast (sometimes overwhelming) scales can be used to narrow them. Like self-organizing systems, we form groups on the internet regardless of physical distance. Sometimes groups will manifest on land in the middle of nowhere. Geo-locating one another, we gather to to live or play in small temporary communities. This is a phenomenon of my time.



I like crossing the imaginary boundaries people set up between different fields—it's very refreshing. There are lots of tools, and you don't know which one would work. It's about being optimistic and trying to connect things.

MARYAM MIRZAKHANI
TENACIOUS EXPLORER OF ABSTRACT SURFACES / *Quanta Magazine* (2014)

Crystallization, a technique used by chemists for the purification and isolation of compounds, is a good metaphor for my approach to creative and professional work. In the process of forming a pure solid in a solution, if the right conditions exist, an initial seed crystal forms that attracts other molecules to its surface. If the geometry of a molecule in solution has a good fit with the growing crystal, it becomes a part of the developing ordered network, eventually leading to a solid structure of pure compound. A recent journal article describes the process as follows:

Crystallization starts from initial densification of the precursors. Subsequent evolution of crystalline order is gradual, involving further densification concurrent with optimization of molecular ordering and morphology.

Isn't that similar to the process for generating and developing an idea?

I think so. In my scholarly work, a seed of an idea or problem will develop, usually related to a problem I'm trying to solve, a project I'm organizing, or just an issue or situation I find intriguing (or bothersome). I carry this seed idea around for a while, and it "densifies" as I go through life and work, uncovering and making new connections and gathering additional information. Finding or generating the initial idea is exciting, and I enjoy the learning that takes place to further develop it. I'll revisit and revise, usually as a result of an event or other stimulus that I can relate to the evolving idea.

Ultimately, it's the sharing of an idea or product that provides the final activation energy or push that drives my creative process. If I am intrigued enough to pursue an idea or care enough about a problem to formulate a solution, then I'm usually motivated to contribute to the collective knowledge by presenting the work at a conference or publishing in a journal. Lee Shulman, former President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, proposed that "for an activity to be designated as scholarship, it should manifest at least three key characteristics: it should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one's scholarly community."

I'm a connector and collaborator. My best work always occurs when collaborating with others. My ideas are limited by my knowledge, blind-spots and biases, and collaborators see different aspects of a problem and bring different skills to its solution. Problem-solving is always "better together" since most problems are complex and solving them is arduous. Thought partners are the way to go; they provide different ideas, tools, and ways to connect the dots.

As a way to organize my fledgling ideas, I need to draw and map and illustrate whatever I'm working on. I always carry a notebook to take notes at meetings and keep a small notebook in my purse or backpack. I draw on paper tablecloth covers during meals with friends, family or colleagues (and they all join in

eventually). When my daughter was in school, she would draw graphs in my notebooks to rank her favorite classes and teachers and we would look for patterns. She's in college now and we've moved on to other topics, but the notebooks still get used to illustrate and order and plan. For me, there is a strong connection between the process of drawing, mapping and writing and idea development and problem-solving.

I apply the processes and ways of working described above to scholarship in my field, and also to teaching and other college work. This is a natural outcome of our liberal arts environment, where breadth of knowledge, tools and experiences are valued. Over the course of my (almost) twenty-five years at the college, I have worked on problems in my field (organic chemistry), projects to improve teaching and learning, assessment of student learning, strategies for helping students learn both content and process skills, and developing more interesting and effective experiments for research-based labs.

I'm fortunate to be in a profession and work environment that values and rewards creativity and innovation. Every day I work closely with other scientists who shape my scholarship and teaching. I also work with artists, economists, historians and philosophers who teach and inspire with the approaches and tools they bring to our collective work. They are often the source of the seed idea that gradually crystallizes as my next project or product.



I urge you to please notice when you are happy, and exclaim or murmur or think at some point, If this isn't nice, I don't know what is.

KURT VONNEGUT ·
CAT'S CRADLE

For most of my early life, I identified as a dancer first and most everything else as an afterthought. During my undergraduate tenure, folks often balked when I identified myself as a psychology major and dance minor, Yet, I always felt that the two fields informed each other perfectly. Both strive to capture and untangle what makes us human. Each seeks to engage with a diverse audience; to resonate deeply in a way that helps bond us through our shared experiences while exploring the intense uniqueness of each of our internal worlds. Dance and research both require

Never stop hustling.

BLACK AMERICAN PROVERB

Janelle S. Peifer



extraordinary discipline. Each relentlessly pursues a dynamic, moving target of creative achievement chased through daily rigor--barre, timeline and tasklists, stretching, writing and revising. Those in these fields face constant rejection and criticism. Dance taught me how to accept and harness feedback, how to move through and past unproductive, broken criticism while maintaining clarity of self and vision. Most of all, dance taught me how to create--it made me recognize the beauty and power of being a creator. Beyond my research process, dance has shaped me as mother, mentor, and clinician. Dance showed me how to steward a creative work with respect to its

own power. It helped me know how to delight in the struggle, unpredictably, and volatility of that which I have the privilege of creating. Dance and research marry the parts of myself that are fastidious and fanciful, perfectionistic and passionate. Now, I work like a dancer and notice the balance, focus, obsession, and fulfilment that the art form continues to bring into my life.

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

WALT WHITMAN
SONG OF MYSELF

T H A N K Y O U

Photography: Calvin Burgamy

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Dalton Gallery

Agnes Scott College
141 E. College Avenue
Decatur, Georgia 30030

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Agnes Scott College educates women to think deeply, live honorably and engage the intellectual and social challenges of their times.

Agnes Scott College provides a dynamic liberal arts and sciences curriculum of the highest standards so that students and faculty can realize their full creative and intellectual potential.

Agnes Scott College fosters an environment in which women can develop high expectations for themselves as individuals, scholars, professionals and citizens of the world.

Agnes Scott College strives to be a just and inclusive community that expects honorable behavior, encourages spiritual inquiry and promotes respectful dialogue across differences.

C O L L E G E M I S S I O N



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