Eric Dammer
Lisa Crocker
Humanities 2510
1 May 2001

Journal

Activity 1: The Conversation: This movie appeared on Bravo the day before Essay 1 was due, and I recorded it. It sparked my interest because there was very complete development of the main character, more so than many films. The topic of corporate and politically sanctioned eavesdropping was on everybody’s minds in 1974, the height of Watergate’s media escapade.

Today, we have more sweeping privacy issues involving genes and our rights to keep private information like this; it makes the concerns addressed in the film seem shrink in comparison, but the style of the film is brilliant and works itself into a form-content explaining the dangers and needs of audio privacy interception that would probably be tough to do if a filmmaker were addressing genetic privacy, as the provocative film, Gattaca (1998). The subject matter of privacy and its infringement is probably a modern archetype, the burden of which humanity will probably carry everywhere technologically enabled society reaches.

More recently, I’ve seen Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, and Enemy at the Gates. The actors are top notch in both films, and it becomes increasingly clear that symbolism more directly involves participation than archetypes that may underlie presented content. While movies may be long and drawn out, once this fact becomes apparent, many movies that one might, without insight, consider boring in fact become fascinating and engaging narratives about concepts rather than history—knowledge versus wisdom in Crouching Tiger, an exploration of FDR’s “great man” theory of history in collaboration with old-fashioned propaganda on the eastern front. I’d have to say, though, movies like Oliver Stone’s JFK will still probably be boring and drawn-out, nonetheless.

Activity 2: ‘Pops I’ at the Naples Phil, 27 Jan: This concert was my first experience at the philharmonic. I have heard and really like Rimsky-Korsakoff and Haydn pieces before, so it was a joy to analyze them in terms of the music chapter. I saw two additional concerts since and am very impressed with the breadth, agility, and connections that the orchestra has with as wide a variety of music as vocals, Broadway choruses, marches, ragtime, classical and solo pieces.

What seems to make music such a unique art is its reliance on one sense almost exclusively. But when one thinks of the “texture” of music in terms of tempo and melody and harmony, and percussion adds physical vibration that even the deaf can experience, it becomes clear that music is multifaceted and multidimensional like the other arts. The challenge then is to nail down its subject matter. This seems to be a necessarily individual activity because we all associate differently with the context of words, and the language of music has even more esoteric definitions and grammar than
the languages we are accustomed to. I found that Hemholtz theorized music to be a mathematical language, but this seems a contrivance. Of course, maybe the facility of language and logic is not primarily active in experiencing music for most people. If this is the case, then the text’s explanation of music as interpretation of feelings is complete. Music theory is definitely outside the scope of this class, but it does seem fascinating in the same way that geophysics is—the question is how to apply it (the theory) for a good use, or in the scope of the class, how music can be applied to explain the beginnings of such theory or applications. It seems a much more difficult question to answer how music has changed the world and arts in particular as opposed to a similar question regarding sculpture and architecture, for example.

Activity 3: Giambologna & Mannerism in the late Renaissance: I remembered the reviewed piece from my trip to Italy three years ago because of its three-dimensional appeal and spiral content—though I couldn’t put its effect into words before reading our text. It was insightful to read what I came up with in terms of content. My own description showed me that there is a lot of intrinsic meaning in works of art that can only be accessed through critical perspective.

It also became apparent that without renaissance sculpture, our world would probably not be recognizable, but rather void of the abundant forms and transformation of subject matter and space to which we have access today. Buildings transformed space and sculpture did the same to figures before the Renaissance, but it becomes apparent that so much art incorporates and relies on the technical achievements of that which preceded it in order to achieve communication of its intended meaning. More and more, these achievements have elevated art from esthetic transformation to a means to discover meaning through transformation of subject matter.

Activity 4: My 1994 photo portfolio: I enjoyed photography tremendously in high school but always refrained from figuring out the reason for my decisions on content in these sandwiched negative prints—except in terms of aesthetic appeal. Even so, it became clear that the images, like artistic photography, indeed were transforming their subject matter for more than aesthetic results. The analysis led me to understand a bit clearer why people seek out symbols—the answer seems to be intertwined with memory, metaphysics, and philosophy.

I learned about why my teacher instructed me the way she did, in developing a “photographic eye.” Including a “third element” or interesting subject can turn a picture of an esthetically presented landscape into a meaningful transformation of or comment on the reality being presented.

Activity 5: Analysis of the Arcade Theater’s architectural context: I first saw the buildings related to the Arcade and was concerned that there wasn’t as much to say about earth-resting architecture as the more glorified forms in our text. I proved myself quote wrong, though. The details and historic context of the area were rich and intertwined with city planning and improvement that is inspirational to see. Our group established
and maintained contact with the Repertory Theater’s marketing department and we were able to share the pictures and paper resulting from our collaboration.

It was exciting to uncover some history through primary sources and people involved with the theatre. I would recommend this approach to anybody researching the collaborative essay. It turns out that without speaking to the marketing department, we would not have been able to so completely respond to the social and architectural context in our essay. For example, there would have been no direct link to the Edison Theatre just a block away on Hendry, but the fact that I was told the original owners were one in the same, and later, both buildings functioned as movie theaters, additional community links were uncovered. This linkage is what the historic revival outlined in the City plan (included in portfolio) has enhanced both by design and simply by preserving the entertainment district and enhancing the context of historic venues—that is, the entertainment value for visitors—with additional new venues for entertainment and dining. The research led me to uncover an example of city planning in action.

My home in New Jersey is called to mind. It turns out Jamie had lived there in Hoboken when he was younger and the community then was mainly industrial and made up of working families of varying background. In the case of Hoboken, real estate value inflation has fueled development and shifts in the population over the last 20 years. By the time I moved there in the late nineties, the community had become fragmented into 1) riverfront with the main street (Washington) and 2) a western industrial and residential area. A town of only one square mile, this is a perfect of city planning that is too late. After the fragmentation, political interests were dominated by the riverfront, which was developed and redeveloped into residences housed on formerly industrial piers and parks, some quite large and luxurious.

Intra-community transportation was not materially altered or improved from bus services, while long distance commuters increasingly moved to Hoboken, further increasing values and tying those values to the greater area—particularly New York City. The ultimate result has been a loss of the original charm of the community, and its original working families—in favor of individuals who commute to professional commercial industries outside of town. The western side of the town has lost its industries and is now subject to the political whims of unfriendly interests, which hope to and likely will transform that part of the town as the riverfront politicians see fit. The point: without loyalty to the history of an area, or with no history in an area (eg. SW Florida), development on a grand and speedy scale is a mistake that alienates the existing members of a community. In a greedy race to wealth and power, a few individuals can basically evict those that provide the basis for both.

All this leads me to consider transportation and civil engineering, such as that which P.L. Nervi’s projects focused on (reviewed on Architecture web board section) to be a form of art that communicates people directly, and in so doing, transforms them and the communities that the transportation spans. City planning is the medium, the content is people, and the everyday transformation of the population and community is thus form
content. What a concept! Few other works of art work on such a large canvas, and fewer so directly enable so much other work to take place as a direct result.

Aspects of the Course:

Some of the videos were dated without the addition of more recent critical content—David Green on his films, for example. Maya Angelou’s narration and insights were helpful, though. The web board posts irked me in that I found my responses echoed rather than responded to in the early weeks, so I was encouraged to wait to post my responses. Later, that improved, and I enjoyed posting more as a result—especially in the activities in which we built on each other’s work—week seven’s literature activity.

I think the book is insightful and a companion course should directly tie into and further develop the applications of philosophy in human values, keeping art and its central role in the transformation of those values ever in focus. It could help a lot of people develop critical perspective and live the examined life. By itself, especially without interactive discussion with the entire class, the course does not achieve the latter goal so effectively. I see composition courses assigning web discussions in which the teacher can record and review everyone’s real-time participation. In a totally virtual course, (usually) reticent people like me would probably have a lot to say and hear a lot of responses to consider in transforming their individual perspective.

Music should be addressed in the course. A paper like that provided for dance, and the incorporation of real audio could complement the text’s references to particular pieces like Bach and Beethoven. The cost of development would be low, but the school could perhaps copyright the material and format and partner with other learning institutions online to provide the content for other courses at other campuses.

Likewise, discussion lists could encourage more open and insightful free-flowing discussion from people, if students are encouraged to take insights from there to complete one or more of the written papers. Not everyone reads these lists otherwise, and then they are missing one of the resources the course creates for them.

It might also be profitable in terms of knowledge and dollars to keep an opt-in list of people both in the class and out to receive regularly sent content in a sort of newsletter format on one or more of the arts. If the letters are targeted, and permission is sufficiently established on the online signup form, and that form were registered on search engines and given some presence on public school web pages, then the databases might become valuable, salable marketing resources, and the newsletter might be a sufficient vehicle for targeted advertising that could recoup costs of the project and systems involved.

If a newer text is brought into the course, I think it should include an introduction to philosophy as a vehicle for discussing perspective that is developed to later interpret all the arts. Another approach may be to centralize a discussion of literature and address development of styles such as the naturalist school (eg., Peter Mathiessen’s historic
interpretation set in the local area in passages from his Watson series) as a means of introducing philosophy and understanding of the world or particular events in terms of varying philosophies. The parallel goal would be to explain epistemology, metaphysics, classical philosophic ideas and ideals (or more properly, precepts of ideal/idea versus reality), etc. in order to approach the arts with an expanded vocabulary of humanist concepts.