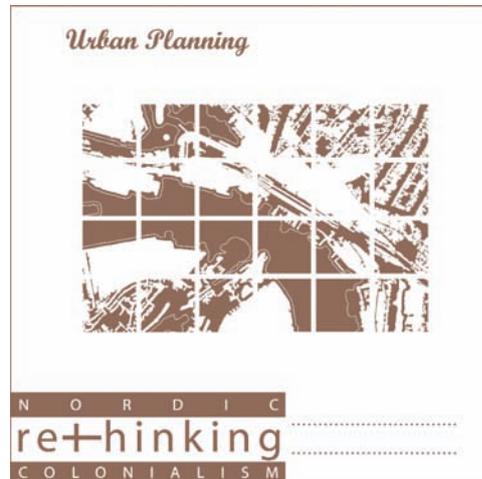


**Plantation Economy and Trademark Capital:
Workshop Notes**
by Steve Ouditt

Act 1: Iceland, March 24 – April 16, 2006



This presentation will use contemporary custom-designed pictograms to reflect and speculate on social, cultural, political and business exchanges and the colonial imagination from the past, through the present and to the future. The aim is to propose a long-term education project – in the everyday world of social and cultural interaction and trade – in rethinking Nordic colonialism by enlisting the support of citizens of all strata to display, reproduce and distribute copies of the pictograms. In this way, a community of rethinkers across professions and disciplines will be able to identify and support each other, in learning and teaching more about critical issues in colonialism, thus enlarging the community of critical thinkers in space and over time. These pictograms can function like a storyboard, identifying key scenes and sites in the continuum.

First I'd like to say how very happy and appreciative I am to be a part of this event, organized as it has been, around a subject that does and will provide so many possibilities for political and educational insight. I see participatory events such as these as learning labs, and this learning is of great benefit to me because: (if I can refer to the words of a great Caribbean political philosopher Lloyd Best, in a conversation we had about getting to understand politics better) "We need many other people to help us to read, we can't read it all and understand it all by ourselves." Of course we all know what he means by reading here, and we all accept his understanding of the protocol of assembling to read. It is not anarchic. And helping to read is helping to see and understand different views. It is helping to think. And this is precisely the agenda of this event, to help us rethink. In turn, this reading, seeing, thinking helps us to develop and implement creative social programmes for wider democracy and a better quality of life. Depending on the social and political conditions of where you live, work and stay or where your home is, you may have a more urgent need to participate more in collective reading and thinking. The irony is, it seems, that the societies that need it the most, do it the least or very little of it. You will find that generally societies with a very developed media industry allow for so many more opportunities for reading and feedback.

The project description of *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* describes two possible directions it could take: one which will look at the historical-ideological sources which structure Nordic societies today, and the other which "entails an encounter with the postcolonial as a process of 'unthinking' old binary systems and engaging with 'difference' as other formations of modernity." I have been all my life, and in one way or another, a participant in the binary systems of the postcolonial at home and abroad, so this strand is of great importance to me, and the one that I would like to address in this proposal.

In my project description that I submitted for this workshop, I wrote that the aim is to propose a long-term education project – in the everyday world of social and cultural interaction and trade – for rethinking Nordic Colonialism, by enlisting the support of citizens of all strata to display, reproduce and distribute copies of the pictograms. In this way, a community of re-thinkers across professions and disciplines will be able to identify and support each other, in learning and teaching more about critical issues in colonialism, thus enlarging the community of critical thinkers in space and over time. These pictograms can function like a storyboard – giving gestalt views – identifying key scenes and sites in the continuum.

It is a simple and common practice of many communities with a shared agenda to show support for their pursuits – from communities of trendy schoolchildren to communities of wily politicians – by their continuing invention and display of icons, signs or pictograms. Many artists, art historians, psychologists, anthropologists and philosophers have, over centuries, addressed the importance of signs and pictograms in specific cultures and eras. In fact, so widespread and relevant has been such research and interest that many international art events have focused on cultures and periods of branding and their impact on audiences and consumers, and many scholars, from Jean Baudrillard to Naomi Klein, have written about branded cultures of consumption. Design museums and centres are also drawing larger audiences to exhibitions that are not solely about aesthetics, but also about use and engineering of products. We remember the Guggenheim show in 1998 *The Art of the Motorcycle*, which at the time broke all records of exhibition attendance. In exhibitions and scholarly articles on communication design, the psychology of rhetoric is also highlighted.

In line with the rhetoric of the image, there could be studies also that might not be very popular, which have looked specifically at the psychological impact of colonial trademarks, goods, advertising and design on subjects and postcolonial citizens. Popular texts that I know of are *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* by Jan Nederveen Pieterse and *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising* by Anandi Ramamurthy and back in the 1960s in a wonderful issue of *DOT ZERO, DOT ZERO 2* (1966) designed by Massimo Vignelli, there was a typically analytical essay entitled “Visual/Verbal Rhetoric” by Gui Bonsiepe, who was at the time the editor of the *Journal of the Ulm School of Design* in Southern Germany.

However, images of colonial rule have been present in the minds of subjects whether through overt images and dictums or in their imaginations, informed by often more subtle forms of infiltration such as urban and land-use planning. An example of this can be seen in the case of old Spanish colonial cities in the West Indies and the wider Caribbean states, which were constructed since the 1500s according to colonial Spanish Planning Ordinances known as “Laws of the Indies”, which in turn were based on Roman precedents. It could be said that it was these laws that helped to brand colonial cities and helped to create rigid spatial models that would have informed the ontology and psychology of native human interaction as well as slave and master interaction. That land-use planning policy and all government policies executed in these states were regulated from far away by one or another European Crown or absentee capitalists, gives us an insight into the concept of the “Plantation Economy” of the great Trinidadian and Caribbean political philosopher, Lloyd Best.

Lloyd Best has theorised the Plantation Economy as consisting of a relationship between a “Metropolitan Economy” and a “Hinterland Economy”. In this theory, the single most important feature is the form of business organization owned and run by absentee capitalists in the Metropolis, who in turn have a series of managers to execute their business on the Hinterland sites of production. Best points out that this relationship between a Metropolitan Economy and a Hinterland Economy has existed nowhere else in the new world but the Caribbean, and is still the dominant economic paradigm in the contemporary Caribbean because it is a fundamental component in the genesis and survival of the institutions of globalization as well as trans-national and multinational corporations.

However, the question remains, did the people who were living under this dominant Plantation Economy of absentee capitalists ever notice what the everyday products, services and systems that they consumed looked like? How did some of them, who were not political economists, get to know about the nature and value of overseas colonial products and services in ways other than economic and social theory? Was there an art history of Plantation Economy, a cultural history of Plantation Economy or a media history of Plantation Economy? Was there an iconography of the Plantation Economy? Did people ever research and enquire into what would be the impact of the advertising and promotion of Cadbury chocolates, Red Rose tea, Sunlight soap, Sheffield stainless steel, Raleigh and Humber bicycles, BBC world service, Redifusion radio, Oxford blue, Clarkes shoes, Morris, Vauxhall and Hillman cars, Ponds cream, Old English lavender, Old Spice, Tide soap, Quaker oats, Dettol, Huntley and Palmers soda crackers, Ovaltine, Nestles sweetened condensed milk, Lactogen powdered milk and Colgate toothpaste on their psyches?

In those earlier decades of the modern Plantation Economy when the digital image was yet un-proliferated, the Metropolis still dominated the Hinterland and subjects were still buying into the quality of (the) Crown goods and deferring to the authority of the local agents of absentee capitalists. In this climate, it would be reasonable to assume that an aspect of the cultural imagination of the citizens of the Hinterland was largely being shaped by the “object and image culture” of the Metropolis, which was being enforced by local agents. It would be reasonable to also assume that businesses and services from the old colonies were constructing a psychological, sociological and cultural profile of the colonial consumer and developing a commercial language and imagery to communicate these constructed meanings. In what ways were the views of the consumer, the

society and the culture of the subjects constructed by the culture of colonial trading and branding? Have these meanings changed over time? Along with the coming of independence for many colonies between the 1940s – 1960s (in particular the British colonies) and the radical changes to the immigration, sovereignty/statehood and racial stratification laws that took place, was commercial language and imagery altered to reflect such changes?

Is there a floating bank of stereotypes in commercial branding where meanings retain their currency and poignancy in spite of changes in the political and cultural status of former colonies? If the absentee capitalists were now mandated to revise their commercial language and imagery to reflect independence, would there have been any guarantee that their managers on the ground, who might well have been natives, would also have had to undergo the same rigid de-programming? How can we know this? How might we begin to assess these constructed meanings and the agenda of agents, new or old, who actively shape these meanings and relationships in international trade promotions? This project is made in the hope that workers in the areas shown by the pictograms will agree to endorse the rethinking of Nordic colonialism by understanding the history and practice of their occupation and trade, and related occupations and trades, in the fields of both colonialism and fair trade. I chose to highlight an investigation into the meanings of Plantation Economy's commercial branding systems, or as I call it "trademark capital", because if the Plantation Economy is made up of Metropolitan absentee capitalists and Hinterland agents (as Lloyd Best describes), then it is their messages that will shape the political and cultural economy.

How close to each other could have been the agents of absentee capitalists, and politicians, of what were newly independent colonies?

In an era of rapidly developing IT, of new media, and increasing capacities to create, manipulate and distribute images immediately across cyberspace to any geographic location, with new markets, in a sometimes questionable digital divide, that also raise the question of whether the Metropolis/Hinterland divide is still so clear cut, what would the image processing culture of the new Plantation Economy look like? From where will it originate? How will it represent its users? How big a part will it play in the psychology of the "self"? How will it negotiate tensions between establishing new trends and breaking with the common post-independence iconography of the "nation"? How will it affect the gatekeepers of old colonial values within the society?

So some of these general issues along with the project description of the new *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* project prompted me to compose a brief for the work I intended to make. For the sake of clarity, I noted them as bullet points.

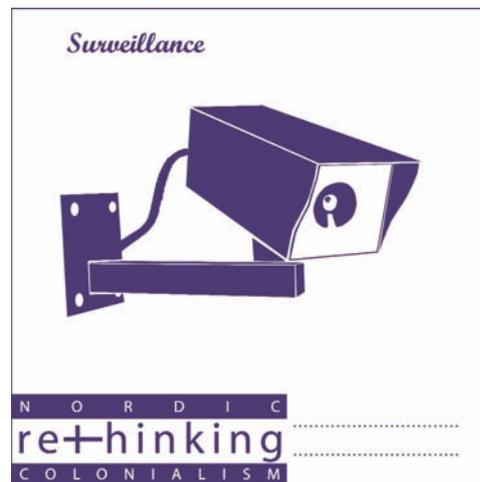
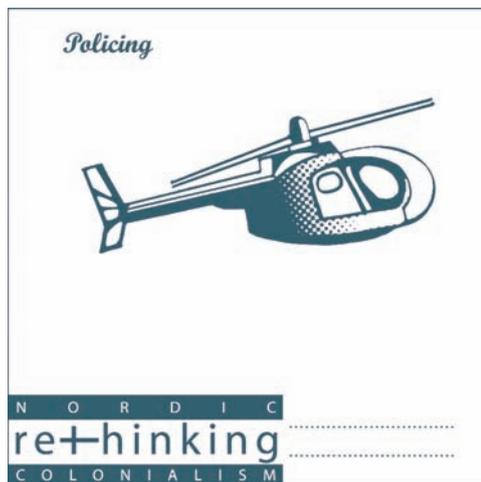
The project should:

- propose ideas for interventions of smart and ambient futures [because I want future citizens to appreciate the reasons for this rethinking initiative, to be agents for the advancement of the initiative which I want always to be widely reproduced]
- look at everyday fields of practice in formerly colonized states [because it is the best place to observe the workings of the colonial machinery and whilst not all colonies are identical in their administration and execution, they are common in their subjugation; a fact which can create an atmosphere of solidarity and learning]
- show up the fuzziness between “us” and “them”, centre and margin, Metropolis and Hinterland [this is to mark the presence of native agents in the service of the metropolitan absentee capitalists, who might be shareholding politicians]
- be aware of a state of auto-primitivism and “the salvage paradigm” [because this is not simply an account of victimization nor is it protest: it is a strategy]
- be accessible and available to audiences of all strata [for this proposal to work, it must appeal to audiences in many professions across class and income lines]
- encourage audiences to support the project [these audiences are usually knowledgeable about their specific fields and about the politics of the trade and are willing to share their knowledge]
- present easily recognizable pictograms of selected areas of trade [projects that aim to reflect trademarks and branding should emphasize the seminal quality of these, which are simple and highly recognizable forms]
- be able to accommodate further applications and transformations [projects that aim to be versatile and provide a framework for further additions must be “user friendly”]
- be devised to last a long time [so that the work of rethinking can continue]
- encourage copying and further distribution [also so that the work of rethinking can spread]

- be easy and inexpensive to ship [always an important factor for artists and organizations]
- be simple to install

I chose to compose and structure these scenarios as platforms for building a project, and would like an opportunity to experiment with them. It is expected that these scenarios will throw up key issues of the metropolis-hinterland divide, including sustainability, job creation and satisfaction, democracy, justice education (as a life-long learning process) and healthcare.

“Duchampian Meditations” on Plantation Economy and Trademark Capital

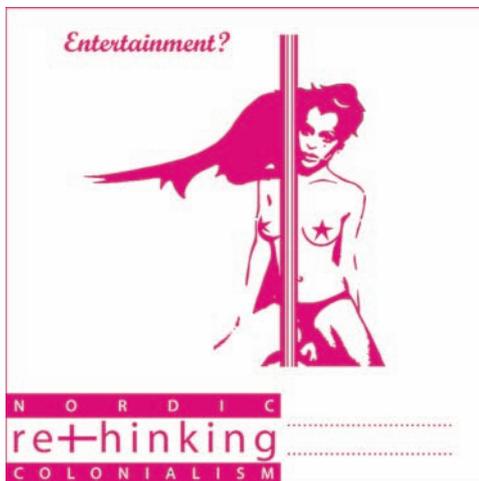


0001: POLICE POWER

Johannesburg, Port au Prince, Kingston, Bhagdad, Los Angeles, Paris

Police helmets fitted with minute speakers through which histories of the psychological abuse of apartheid and violence can be played as they go through their day-to-day beats in the city centres, also fitted with cameras that scan the image and matches them up with images on locally manufactured age profiling software that generally used local subjects. This will allow the police to be more sympathetic to young boys. The boys will then be able grow up to be men. Belts and vests fitted with strong electro magnetic devices that replicate hunger pangs. Goggles fitted with small screens that project macabre scenes of carnage. Helmets and goggles “Wi-Fied” to receive streaming data on all major

international state measures that are being employed to reduce poverty and unemployment and increase social services. Update bulletins with profiles on the state of international human rights to be broadcast intermittently. Face, phenotype and gesture recognition software, also sourced from local “models”, installed on smart cards to smart guns and transmissible to helmets with 360 degree sensors designed to rapidly profile target for user/wearer. Profile scans of targets that will allow gun to shoot or not, based on UN/Amnesty International/Civilian Watchdog agreed upon protocol. Gun user cannot override software instruction. In case of ambush, police and military vehicles contain sensors that alert interceptor arms to deploy in advance of being targeted.

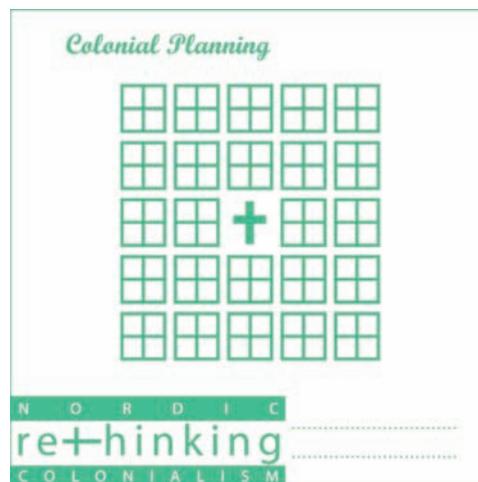
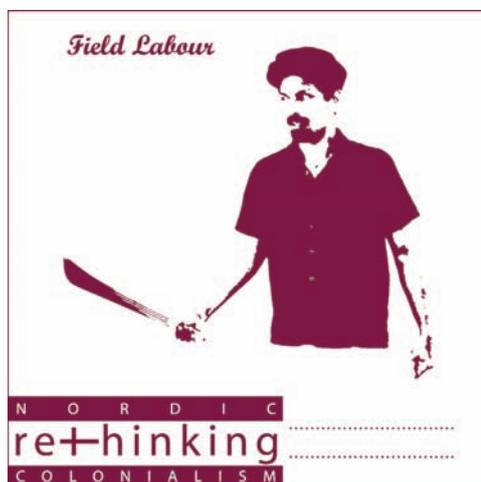


0002: ENTERTAINMENT?

China, South Asia, South America

Why are young women bought and sold in this underworld? Is it usually because of abject poverty? There are too few women for men in a world where there are millions of men who never have a woman. Governments of these countries will invest in “Animated Dancing Movies”, aiming to make it a huge national industry, thus cutting live dancing girls. Sounds and images will be larger than life and visceral. These countries will host the ADM annual awards inviting submissions from international movie studios and “indie” producers. Young women from these countries will lead the entire industry. Artists and production studios will produce TV shows, documentaries, websites and “how-to” DVDs showing “Animated Dancers” demonstrating their dressing, undressing, skin care and make up,

relaxation techniques, exercise techniques and routines, diet, dance moves. There will be Animated Dancing getaway holidays for couples and families. The ADM capitals should be huge, slick, buzzing city centres of bright lights, restaurants, karaoke clubs and hotels. The ADM production studios will lead the way with brilliant graphic artists, photographers, animators, writers, voice over specialists, musicians and software developers. ADM superstars will host huge international concerts across the world, with big name acts, to assist in poverty alleviation, debt relief, child welfare and disease prevention. There will always be large amounts of spin-off merchandise. And the dancing sequences work very well in Bollywood.



0003: FIELD LABOUR

West Indies, Africa, Asia, Central and South America

Field labourers are not usually well paid. Many don't own land. Many are lean, they have lean bodies. City dwellers and office workers desire bodies like those. Those bodies are envied. Field labour will be turned into a sport or a gym activity, where they can invite members of the public to labour for fitness. We will call it *Swiping*. They become leaders of a lucrative *Swiping* industry. They can create cottage industries of field-labour wear called "Swipewear"; hats, bags, shoes, head-ties, gloves, goggles, trousers, sport shoes, water bottles and fluorescent tools in different weights, for light and heavy training. The sugarcane fields can be designed with floodlights for work at night with warm showers, pools and wooden decks for relaxing. There will be the great barrack massage parlour with

exotic sugar cane, guava, mango, coconut, papaya, aloe and citrus oils and masques. There will be warm water pools and private bungalows for those who want a fitness retreat. Tropical songbirds, butterflies, insects and harmless snakes that have been driven away by bush fires and the burning of the cane will be re-introduced to the fields. There will be calculated and controlled bonfires that will be turned into an entertainment event for the warm spirited. There will be sight seeing tours and rafting at nearby rivers for “eco-tourists”. One can become an expert field labour trainer. Like the international golf course designers, there will be sugarcane field designers. There can be collaborations between golf course designers and sugarcane field designers. They will be called *Sweetscapers* [“sweet” from sugar and “-scape” from landscape] or *Sucrotopic* [“sucro” from sugar and “-topic” from topos, meaning earth or land] designers. Also, with increased activity in the fields day and night, labourers will no longer have to fear digging up murdered or dumped bodies. There can be designed supportive industries like a rum and molasses production plant, and a bagasse plant [sugar cane fibre used as animal fodder and the compressed form used for building material].

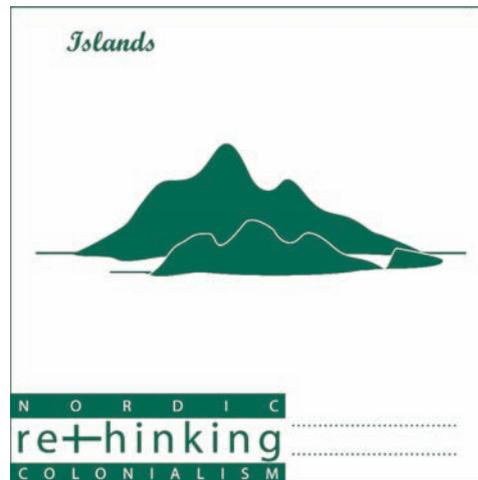


0004: GOVERNMENT

West Indies, Africa, United States, Asia, Italy, Eastern Europe, Middle East.

Fahrenheit 9/11: some people hated it. The UN together with a world court of human rights must have an open communication forum encouraging the production and submission of well-researched movies, sound works and photo

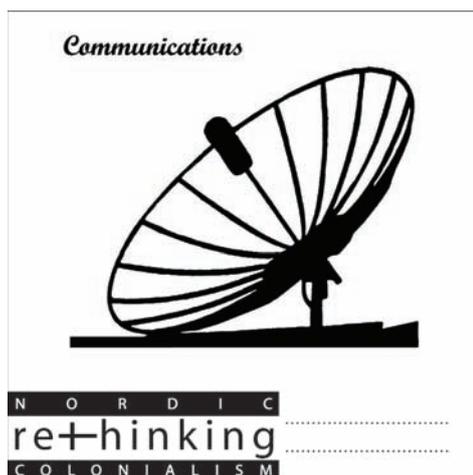
essays that deal with absolutely urgent political, cultural and social issues. They must reveal the identity of the maker/producer only with consent. Civilians must make more TV documentaries about governments. Political advertising is an established genre and so is political critique, but political critique is largely print based; newspapers, magazines and websites. There is a huge market for documentaries of critical investigation and analyses of political organizations and governments. In the Western world, BBC and CNN, as the leaders in this genre, prove that this is viable. But more civilian groups must produce documentaries that will deal with government as it relates to their specific areas of social and cultural activities. These can be self-broadcast, local networks, shared on the internet or sent to huge international networks. Anyone can shoot, even with a phone. This is really one good way of democratising political discourse. International networks can assist in training in exchange for expert guides and informants on the ground in the hundreds of locations that international TV journalists go to for good stories. And small children should be introduced to using cameras and the art of story telling.



0005: MENTAL HEALTH CARE

It is a form of illness when people in developing countries defer to the superiority of metropolitan systems. It is a form of illness when citizens feel powerless, scared and vulnerable. Lloyd Best calls this a “Crisis of Epistemic Sovereignty”, which is the inability to conceptualize and develop intellectual and creative paradigms of one’s own. Perhaps what is needed are centres of creativity to

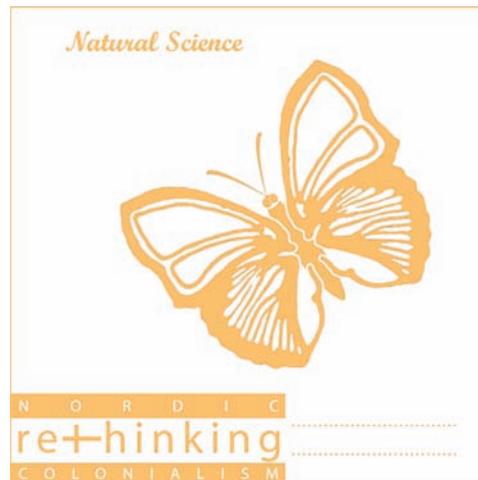
develop suitable systems of education, work and quality of life. There is a role in such societies for experimental work. Radical creative approaches in the restructuring of content for teaching and learning curricula will help. But the societies in developing countries are usually very small production centres that serve the metropolis with some form of goods or service. The name that people use for these simple, dependent economies is “banana republic”, which points to their leadership as much as their developmental vision. And, that the leadership is usually blind to potentially brilliant innovative work, is shown by the “brain drain”. Many well-educated, creative and skilful citizens of these societies try very hard all their lives to move away. If they don’t, then they hope that at some point their children will move away to a “real society”, to a real life. Lloyd Best often criticizes the University of the West Indies, he says that it is not, and has never been, a national university but a provincial one. Does it engage with anything that can provide useful tools in criticising ourselves? Our nation?



0006: COMMUNICATION

The scenario is that students at a truly backward art school get a project to produce a website and resource centre entitled “Contemporary Art for Backward Schools” [CABS]. They pose moot questions like “Was Andy Warhol an artist or a graphic artist?”; “Was Roy Lichtenstein a painter or an illustrator?”; “What does Barbara Kruger do, or what about Richard Hamilton?” Ask also, “Why is Nam June Paik considered a pioneer and who is Rasheed Araeen?” They develop this site because they need to find a strategy to demonstrate to their tutors that

they are connected to the world and that they want to experience the same levels of excitement and experimentation that artists and art students elsewhere seem to be exposed to. These students live on the internet, and are exposed to a lot more than they receive at their art school, and are constantly comparing artists, art and art schools around the world with their own daily dose of dread. They are constantly excited by the prospect of engaging some of the ideas of these artists and institutions, but instead they face the day-to-day drivel of archaic art teachers/bullies who drone on and on about skill and hand/eye coordination and lack of resources. Their school is a technical one. They do not believe as their tutors do that engaging art from elsewhere, especially new media art, amounts to a loss of identity. Usually, these teachers are dullards who have not contributed to any improvement in the conceptualisation or practice of art for generations and continue to lament their victimhood. Faculty and advisory boards cannot change the curriculum, students must. What do students do? They learn new and exciting things and teach others from websites, and do what they are obliged to get their degree, and plan to leave for a “real” school.



0007: MEDICAL RESEARCH

People must begin to know that they can live with illness from the moment they are told that they are ill. In the developing world, illness is perceived to be a death sentence. It must not take months for people to run around in circles to find information, support groups, easy testing and checkups. Some ways of achieving this would be to:

(1) Design medical jargon translating software with a glossary linked to all locations of organizations that treat conditions and those to advise on how to live well with the condition.

(2) Develop inexpensive, wearable wristwatch sensors that read and check blood pressure, pulses and unusual growths, and relays the information via the screen and speakers. Information can be downloaded to PC or mobile phone.

(3) Make it easier to encourage blood, urine and stool sampling by setting up free one-person mobile labs.

We know that pharmaceutical packaging and labelling is big business. Make medical and health care information sympathetically designed and user friendly. Many people, rich or poor, ignore screening and testing largely because they are turned off by the unfriendliness of the testing and screening environments and because of ignorance of the procedures and description of the procedures. Doctors recommend tests for this and that condition and give patients forms with lots of words and boxes. How are patients informed, from screening and testing to final results? Can forms become user-friendly? Can waiting rooms be pleasantly designed? Many of the very ill give up so easily. They are very scared, uninformed, poor, and envision personal suffering, death and hardship for their families. Early screening and professional advice can help, and friendly advice can bring hope to patients. Life expectancy keeps dropping in situations of impoverishment, and in situations with an underdeveloped public health care system children will not survive. It is always said that only the very wealthy and the politicians will get premium health care. Early healthy living and health care education is a priority.