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Crime and Corporation

Integrative Project Thesis 2008

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Introduction

When I originally began my journey through IP ideas I became attached to notions of conformity, counterculture, and the world of corporations. I was reading books such as *Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* and *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* that lead to a greater understanding of conformity and counter culture within corporate identities. A reoccurring theme I noticed was the idea of the business suit. "People have always used clothing not only (or even primarily) for covering, but for communicating" (Heath and Potter,163). I decided that instead of stressing the idea of covering something up – I would push the point of communication. The uniform of the business suit was an ideal symbol because it has a dual role in society by distinguishing members of an elite social group while trying to impose group conformity. The business suit became my constant throughout my study of these ideas. Counterculture and conformity also brought me another path towards body modification in the form of tattooing. Tattooing, especially the beautiful renders of Japanese Tattooing (Irezumi) and the culture presence Japan exudes, has always been a particular interest of mine. Tattooing in relation to counterculture has always coincided with descriptions of criminals and people who make it a habit of going against the norms of society. Looking at these polar opposites, one organization based around conformity, the other around counterculture, I began to see similarities between them. My concept is based on the parallels between large corporations and organized crime.

Project Description

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The business suit was the constant of my studies, so I decided that was an important symbol that I could not afford to lose. The suit jacket is used as the symbol of corporation, as that is the uniform people gravitate toward in these organizations. Tattooing, on the other hand, has always been linked to delinquency and crime, especially organized crime groups like the Mafia, Hell's Angels, etc. I decided that tattooing would be my symbol for the organized crime circle.

My project is based on altering four suit jackets with hand drawn imagery specific to Japanese themes and tattoo placement. The themes are loosely based around major themes of bushido, or the samurai codes of ethics, themes that I believe are essential to both organizations of crime and corporation. The style of tattoo is based on the detailed pieces created by irezumi masters.

The first jacket is justice: maintaining the quality of fair and reasonable. This tattoo was selected to be a full sleeve, as the arm is often used in reference to carrying out the form of justice. Imagery that was incorporated was carefully selected for its meaning of justice or rectitude. Fudo Myoo, the god of punishment and rectitude is placed on the forearm. The blue demon holds a rope in one hand and a sword in the other as symbols of "slashing away material connections and binding up evil-doers." One eye looks towards the heavens and one eye looks towards the earth. He is also constantly shown surrounding by flames; so much of the forearm has flames scaling up towards the next image - the phoenix. The phoenix itself is highly important in Japanese imagery because it alludes to the traits of humanity, decency, wisdom, faithfulness, and gentleness as well as justice. This phoenix stretches the rest of the way up the arm with its tail feathers encircling the shoulder to finish the top of the arm.

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Underneath the arm, I've drawn bamboo and a crane, which when paired together within Japanese woodblock prints, symbolizes justice.

The second jacket is courage: facing difficulties, danger, and enduring in times of adversity. For the courage piece, I decided on the back tattoo since it left me with a large amount of space for the many images I wanted to use. The main focus is a warrior in the center of the back based off of the 108 Suikoden Warrior story and prints. The Suikoden heroes were known and lauded for their strength and courage to go against the norms of society. The samurai is drawn mid-motion, holding up his sword fiercely with his many layers of clothe dancing around him. Opposing him is a tiger, a fierce creature that also represents courage and strength. Below the samurai's feet is flowing water with a koi fish swimming against it. The koi fish is a symbol of strength, ambition, and courage to fight against the odds as the koi fights to go upstream past the dragon's gate to become a dragon. Above the warrior and tiger is a falcon, also a highly prized image of courage, success, endeavor, and power, surrounded by plum blossoms and oak leaves which have connections to strength and courage.

The third theme is based on benevolence or compassion visually represented on a chest and shoulder piece. On the right chest is a Kirin, an animal that has scales of a dragon, the head of a wolf with a single horn, an ox's tail, and the body of a horse that is the size of a deer. This spiritual creature only appears in countries that are ruled with compassion. The right shoulder is completely covered with a Tenin, or Buddhist angel, a symbol of guidance and compassion. The left chest is decorated with the Goddess of Mercy, Kannon, dressed in a white robe surrounded by lotus flowers. Fujin and Raijin, two of Kannon's tenants don the left shoulder. Raijin is the God of Thunder and

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Lightning and is pictured surrounded by drums, which he beats in order to create the thunder. Fujin is the God of Wind, releasing gusts from the bag he carries on his shoulder.

The last jacket is completely covered in imagery to represent a full-body piece based on the theme of glory, honor with a slight touch on loyalty. Imagery includes the God of Glory (or War) in full armor holding a staff and pagoda on the left arm, peonies on the left shoulder, a dragon coiling around the right arm and shoulder, koi swimming on the side area towards the dragon (koi change into a dragon once they pass the dragon's gate), the moon and a cuckoo (when paired mean honor), sakura (cherry blossoms), a ronin samurai that has ties as ancestors to the Yakuza, and a rabbit. All have significance within Japanese culture of glory, honor, and loyalty.

Display

The jackets will all be displayed within photographs of models wearing the pieces in scenes that can be construed as having both crime and a corporate feel. Having the jackets worn in these locations or shot from different angles will support the idea behind corporate vs. crime showing the duality of the entire works. One jacket will be displayed in addition to the photographs on a model.

Background

In order to compare two vastly different organizations, one of corporation and one of crime, I felt the need to narrow down these broad terms to more specific examples of each.

Yakuza

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The crime organization I picked was the Yakuza or the Japanese mafia, which has ancestors dating back to the 1600s. The Yakuza are said to get their origins from either the Machi-yakko or the Kabuki-mono. The Machi-yakko, who the Yakuza prefer to derive from are skilled gamblers that were tied to their leader. The Kabuki-mono (the crazy ones), on the other hand, were ronin (masterless) samurai who banded together with remarkable loyalty towards each other, protecting their own no matter the cost. The Kabuki-mono terrorized and harassed those not apart of the group, picked up slang, and called their gangs names to be feared. This group often wore odd clothing and haircuts with long swords to get everybody's attention and to go against the norms of society. The Yakuza are similar to both groups. The name Yakuza means 8-9-3, which in a hand of Oicho-Kabu (A black jack game whose objective is 19 instead of 21) is worthless as its total is 20. This idea of without any worth is connected with the idea they have no use in society because they do not fit the standards. They are the misfits of society. To embellish upon this idea of being the outcasts of society, the Yakuza began getting detailed, full-body scaled tattoos that could be completely hidden under the business suit.

Tattoos in a more ancient Japan were used as punishment for these criminals and misfits, especially after Buddhism spread from China where tattoos were thought to be barbaric. Foreheads and arms were tattooed with symbols of their crime so all of society would know of their deeds, and they became outcasts. Many were ronin samurai. Having no home or place in society, these outcasts had no choice but to band together into gangs and began developing tattoos of their own. Once tattoos were embellished to the point that the crime initiated ones were covered up, they became

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less connected to crime, and more revered. Tattoos were part of the Ukiyo-e (woodblock print) culture as well. Prostitutes from the pleasure district would tattoo themselves to become more attractive; fireman would be tattooed with body suits. Tattoos often included images from woodblock prints - meaningful imagery for the Japanese culture. Especially popular were tattoos of the 108 Heros of Suikoden. The Heros of Suikoden were master-less samurai that had banded together to go against the norms of society, etc. The woodblock prints by famous artists depicted these warriors in acts of violence, bravery, and honor. Artists like Hiroshige, Hokusai, Yoshitoshi, Kuniyoshi were among some of the most revered Ukiyo-e masters.

The Yakuza were and still are a criminal organization. Known as a syndicate of prostitution, gambling, robbing, drugs, etc., the Yakuza were aggressive profiteers of illegal activities. Nowadays, there are changes occurring within the Yakuza system. Criminal activities are becoming more sophisticated according to what profits the most in the world, corporations. Kaplan and Dubro say they are becoming more intellectual, “white-collared crooks, financial racketeers”. Learning English, the “language of commerce through much of the world, “ the Yakuza are now going international. “They now understand financial markets, corporate takeovers, and large-scale development projects, and they have solidified their influence over key segments of Japan’s entertainment, leisure, and construction industries.” It has become a “great new wave of economic crime” where Yakuza “prey on legitimate businesses.” “Fraud, looted companies, extortion, intimidation, money laundering, plus the old racket of drugs, gambling, and prostitution” are what the Yakuza base much of their profit on.

Halliburton

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The corporation I chose to create a comparison to the Yakuza is Halliburton. Halliburton is an oil-well construction and services firm that helped make oil well cementing a standard for oil drilling (this involves cementing the well so contaminants and water cannot destabilize the oil, allowing drillers to extract easier). Much of the companies' crime-oriented behavior is linked with the arrival of Dick Cheney as CEO, when the company rose from 73rd to the 18th largest defense contractor due to government-backed loans. Halliburton was the number one U.S. Army contractor in 2003 at \$3,731, 725, 648. *The Halliburton Agenda* by Dan Briody described the company's relationship with Cheney as "the embodiment of the Iron Triangle, the nexus of the government, military, and big business."

One of Halliburton's major botch-ups included ignoring the hazardous material their products contained which endangered and fatally affected its workers. "Halliburton and its subsidiaries had for years manufactured construction products that contained asbestos, which was later found to cause scarring of the lung tissue and lung cancer."

A second major dent to the corporation's image was its association with war profiteering and its known link to bribery, fraud, and trading with the enemy. Halliburton is connected with bribery of foreign officials in Nigeria that is prohibited by the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Halliburton also profited from deals with Iraq during the reign of Saddam Hussein, Iran, Libya, Burma, and Azerbaijan and Indonesia.

Halliburton is closely connected with kickbacks, gasoline overcharges, and meal overcharges as well as its fourth blunder. Halliburton admitted that two employees accepted kickbacks of \$6.3 million for provided Army supply contractors to a Kuwaiti sub-contractor. The president, connected with Cheney, subsequently ignored the

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kickback situation and awarded Halliburton another \$1.2 billion contract. Then, Halliburton is found to be charging \$2.64 per gallon of gasoline to be imported from Kuwait to Iraq while its competitors are charging nearly half. To cap it off, Halliburton overcharged the government for meals supplied to troops overseas in Kuwait and Iraq, nearly quadrupling the amount per day actually supplied from 14,000 to 42,000.

Another major finding was it's Enron-style accounting fraud by stating cost overruns as revenue instead of losses, greatly overstating the revenue the company brought in. The company also plundered about \$25 million in pension money from employees by selling a business unit. Nine months later, CEO Cheney was awarded a \$20 million dollar pension. Cheney also has connections with the main people of the Enron debacle, Arthur Andersen, David Lasar, and Ken Lay. (Political contributions to the Bush/Cheney campaign)

Halliburton, while a respected multi-billion dollar company, is largely connected with behaviors of corruption that is expected more of crime syndicates.

Conclusion

My integrative project was based on showing the parallels between large corporations like Halliburton and syndicates of crime like the Yakuza. As supported by my background research, Halliburton was a profitable corporation that turned to fraudulent behaviors, bribery, war profiteering, and provided goods to the enemy. The Yakuza on the other hand, have gone from a crime network to becoming more established and involved with the financial market of corporations by profiting from construction, leisure activities, and entertainment. I wanted to create a visual representation of the connections between two worlds by using two key symbols, the

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business suit jacket and the tattoo. When displayed, the merging of these two symbols shows a duality between individuals in the corporate world who are to be respected and those in organizations of crime who are to be feared.

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