FAST IDENTIFICATIONS!

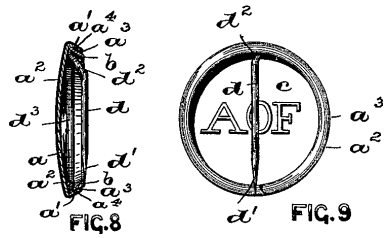

FIG.8 FIG.9

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pin-back buttons
and their political and commercial material history

When Maureen Daly Goggin describes needlework as "an innocuous pastime and a powerful political weapon," in what ways does the pin-back button possess a similar function in its history and current use for a wide range of purposes?

history

Benjamin Whitehead obtained the patent for the pin-back button in the United States in 1893 (the right image on the banner above is from his later, 1896 patent application). Before patenting a way to produce buttons with their own self-fastening pin, embroidered patches or metal medallions (like embossed buttons) sewn onto clothing marked political or other affiliations. Josiah Wedgewood's 1787 porcelain cameo produced with anti-slavery slogan "Am I not a man and a brother" with image is considered the first political slogan on a worn product (People Power Press).

Almost immediately after their patent and mass production, the use of pin-back buttons exploded for two primary purposes – political activism and commercial advertising. They were used immediately in the 1896 presidential election between William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan. In the years that followed cigarette and gum companies gave out "free" buttons with branded characters or other identifying marks to incentivize purchase. In wearing pin-back buttons, then, individuals worked to both send a message ("Vote for McKinley"), but also express identification with that message, arguably because of its intimate placement on the wearer's clothing or possessions. What does it mean for a medium to develop political and commercial purposes simultaneously?

pin-back button types

Advertising-Business / Art / Ask Me / Animals / Cause / City / Club / Entertainment / Events / Humorous / "I Heart" / Innovative / Music / Political / School / Self-Referential / Smiley Faces / Social Lubricators / Sports

Joel and Christen Carter offer the above button "categories" (we've modified it slightly to think more generally about specific categories they collect, such as changing "Chicago" to "City"). The taxonomy they have created (with examples of all on the site) shows the expansion of the use of buttons since their inception for political and commercial purposes. They maintain The Button Museum in Chicago, Illinois and an online site about pinback buttons at <www.buttonmuseum.org>.

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costs

The primary startup cost (including shipping) for a buttonmaking machine ranges from $250-400 depending on the manufacturer, diameter, and bundle you select. Avoid a proprietary machine (such as "badge a minit") so that you can source future purchase of backings from a range of online retailers. The bundles may include a rotary cutter to punch out button circles and 50-100 pinback button backings. The machines can also produce other items (such as magnets) depending on the types of backings you purchase. Additional backings to create pin-back buttons can be obtained in lots of 50-500 for $30-100). Some colleges or departments may be able to purchase these supplies or at least the initial button-making machine with supplies or other miscellaneous course fees.

pin-back buttons in writing studies pedagogy?

- Students consider ways they can communicate with **rhetorical "constraints"** – like the way a "tweet" version of an argument or idea distills or summarizes and links to a larger idea or reference. The button creates an opportunity to make visual images or alphabetic text they want to communicate and fashion on their clothing or bags.

- Viewing famous (or infamous) buttons used in campaigns or connected to campaigns you are already studying can spark discussions about **visual rhetoric and identification**.

- Even without access to a button-making machine, students can still compose a button design as an in-class writing activity to spark discussion about visual rhetoric and pin-back buttons as forms of communication as well as identification.

- When students are working on a larger, multimodal project I may bring the buttonmaking machine as they are peer reviewing rough drafts. I ask them to compose buttons that work to communicate some of the ideas or messages of their project. It is a fun activity that helps relieve project stress, but more importantly, many students emerge more intentional about the genres and compositional choices they have made in their project when they have to "compress" some of its ideas into a button.

- In the CSUF Writing Center we have made buttons for a staff "bonding" activity and tutors have also brought our machines to do outreach with LGBT youth this spring semester at the LGBT Center of OC.

discussion

Have you designed your own pin before?
What pins have you worn to identify an interest in the past? Recently?
Has there been a connection between your sense of self and the pin(s) you have worn?
Has anyone ever asked you about a pin you've been wearing out of interest or challenge?

select sources

- History of pin-back buttons and their predecessors:
  < http://peoplepowerpress.org/blogs/news/3506742-a-short-history-of-pin-back-buttons-the-button-guy-blog>

- Antique/vintage pin-back buttons (images and historical information): <http://www.collectorsweekly.com/medals-pins-and-badges/pinbacks>

- Photoshop templates to create digital designs for pin-back buttons: <http://www.umakebuttons.com/pages/templates>

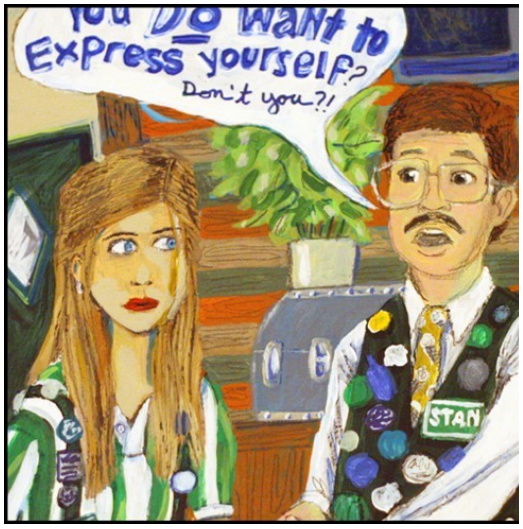
steps for composing pin-back buttons

1) **Trace Pin-back Button Outline onto Paper**
Trace outlines for 2.25 buttons on your paper and **draw a dotted "boundary" about ¼ of an inch within the original, traced circle** – this amount of the paper will be folded by the machine around the metal backing so any writing/design in that ¼ of an inch margin will get cut off. There may also be printed templates available.

2) **Design Pin-back Button**
Start drafting messages or designs within these circles. Formalize your designs using ink or other elements. Consider using pencil, pen, or the markers at the station.

3) **Cut Out Design Carefully**
Cut out the circles carefully: cut right on/within your traced line – it's better to have a little more to trim than to have trimmed too much to start). When individuals mass-produce buttons, this step can be replaced with a rotary or punch cutter. I tend *not* to travel with those on an airplane since they make TSA nervous!

4) **Manufacture with Machine**
When you're ready I'll show you how to use the buttonmaking machine to produce your buttons. Based on enrollment, everyone at the workshop can produce three 2.25" buttons to start. If the station is less popular, then participants may have the opportunity to produce more.



J. Rodriguez's rendering of
"flair scene" from *Office Space)*