

Seeing and being seen: Teaching visual culture to (mostly) non-art education students

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Abstract

This article focuses on the development and implementation of a transdisciplinary undergraduate course on visual culture. The course content focuses on the critical analysis and interpretation of various images, how they function in terms of social diversity, and how they help regulate, categorize, and identify cultures and ideas. The article begins with a theoretical overview of visual culture. Next, the article describes the course structure and content, and provides student examples. The article ends with a summary and conclusion.

Key Words : Visual Culture, Art Education, Transdisciplinarity, Social diversity

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From Taipei to Tampere, and New York to New South Wales, everyday life in contemporary times often unfolds and is mediated through a swirl of visual imagery. LCD screens, television monitors, digital film, the internet, medical imaging devices, cell phone cameras, satellites, newspapers and magazines, and a host of other multi-media devices convey information, represent ideas, enhance our sight, and help human beings see and be seen. Attempting to understand this cultural condition, its material and symbolic manifestations, and the effect on our individual and collective identities is, for many, the project of *visual culture*. As a hybrid enterprise recently formed through the convergence of a variety of theories and methodologies, visual culture examines relationships between individuals, societies, images and imagination—how we see and how we are seen. Visual culture is the characterization and examination of meaning making primarily through the visual—what we see, what we can't see, what we are not allowed to see, who sees us, how we are seen, and so on—beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, particularly in the West, scholarly texts, professional journals, new course and program descriptions, and conference proceedings specifically focusing on the concept of visual culture began to flourish across disciplines. These disciplines included art education, art history, cultural studies, English, and media studies. Although for decades prior there was scholarship on visual images and representation, the more recent movement draws upon new transdisciplinary formations and contemporary postmodern theories which was unavailable or non-existent a few decades ago, and the subjects and content of visual culture include the experience of how networked and mediated subjects see and are seen by others in a globalized 21st century (Darley, 2000; Elkins, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Tavin, 2005b; Walker & Chaplin, 1997).

There are three interrelated definitions of visual culture woven through the literature emerging from these more recent areas of study. The definitions suggest that visual culture is 1) a condition in which human experience is profoundly affected by images, new technologies for looking,

and various practices of seeing, showing, and picturing, 2) an inclusive set of images, objects, and apparatuses, or 3) a critical field of study that examines and interprets differing primarily visual manifestations and experiences in and on culture (Tavin, 2003). Often the three definitions overlap, converge, and inform one another. In some cases, scholars use the term visual culture to mean all of the definitions simultaneously. Notwithstanding the potential source of confusion, all three definitions of visual culture deal in large part with the process and pressures of seeing and being seen while constructing individual and collective identity through everyday life.

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Visual culture: How we see and are seen

The term visual culture can connote a shift or turn in society where the increase in production and consumption of imagery in concert with technological and economic developments has profoundly changed much of the world and the context in which awareness of the world and one's identity in it is rooted (even if only temporarily). Visual culture is thus defined as a shift in our perceptions of reality and a present day condition where images (still, moving, digital, real or imagined) play a central role in the creation of knowledge and the construction of identity, including how we see ourselves and how we imagine others see us. Although one could argue that the "visual" has always mediated an understanding of identity, it is undeniable that experience in much of the world today is deeply affected by an abundance of visual imagery in a variety of global contexts, in a different respect than in the past. For example, images may flow across borders almost instantaneously to convey information, offer pleasure, and initiate and reinforce values and beliefs, and mobilize or arrest political action. These circulating signs affect the formation of individual identities and inter-individual power relations in some ways that were unimaginable for many even a few decades ago (Rogoff, 1998).

The relationship between humans and their experience in visual culture is engendered by what some describe as an endless placement and displacement of meanings through the proliferation of imagery, as well as the

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negotiation of social relationships through images and the process of imagining (Darley, 2000). Like the postmodern condition described by some scholars (Best & Kellner, 1997; Giroux, 1992), identity in visual culture depends largely on images and the tendency to “see ourselves” (visualize ourselves) and how we imagine we are seen as pictures in our imagination. On the one hand, these pictures may come together in our mind with purpose and direction. On the other hand, we unconsciously learn to look and practice interpreting meanings of images around us on a daily basis (Jameson, 1998; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). For many human beings around the globe, visual culture is how the feeling of life in contemporary times is toned, colored, and textured. The increased visual stimuli mediated through humanly constructed instruments help mobilize these feelings. These feelings impact how one or a group of people may identify themselves, or may be identified through how they are seen by others, including notions of ethnicity, race, nationality, sexuality, friendship, family life, independence, and citizenship. In short, in this new cultural condition visual representations and their mediating resources do more than “represent” a world already out there; they shape and limit visions of the world and are constitutive of identity itself through practices of seeing and being seen.

Visual culture: The things we see and see us

When the term visual culture is used by scholars to describe a cultural condition it often emphasizes the identities that are constructed in and through culture. While images cannot be easily separated from the values and beliefs they imbue, another definition of visual culture focuses on the substantial things of culture—the “stuff.” Scholars who use the term visual culture to describe the substance of culture offer examples of images, objects, sites, and instruments. This register of stuff includes, for instance, advertisements, architecture, artworks, automobiles, computer games, fashion, films, graffiti, internet sites, landscape design, malls, magazines, medical images, newspapers, packaging, photography, performances, popular images, satellite images, scientific illustrations, simulation rides,

videos, tattoos, television programs, toys and textiles (Barnard, 1998; Walker & Chaplin, 1997). Although some of the things mentioned here in the attempt to catalog visual culture's constituent parts include fine or high art, most of them come from outside of the art world—outside the museum realm (Elkins, 2003).

When describing visual culture as stuff, scholars also refer to new technologies designed to enhance biological vision, to see or to be seen. In recent years, for example, apparatuses for monitoring and tracking individuals, such as surveillance cameras, global positioning systems, spy-cams, thermal imaging devices, and biometric machines have become visual objects of interest. These things are of particular interest to scholars writing about how one is seen or remains invisible in a time of global war on terrorism (Darts, Tavin, Sweeny, & Derby, 2009). Some theorists, however, focus less on technology and more on “natural” objects and scenery. Examples of these things include landscapes, geographic conditions, outer space, and animals. Although these forms may seem to fall outside things that are culturally mediated, they are in most cases encountered by individuals who have been affected consciously and unconsciously by previous representations of nature and the entire history of imaging nature in a particular society. All natural objects and sites are part of visual culture when people bring cultural knowledge to bear on their experience with them, as well as making themselves seen within the context of those objects. Of course, none of the substantial parts of visual culture are exclusively visual. Applying the term visual culture to a thing does not exclude the multi-media aspects of that thing. Using the term visual culture to describe a particular image, for example, does not negate the fact that images appear in a variety of contexts and are viewed in different situations. These specific contexts and situations, whether watching television, playing a video game, leafing through a magazine, or standing in a museum, affect the available senses to one degree or another. While one representational register may be more acute than another, usually we cannot voluntarily immobilize all other senses and view an image in complete optical isolation (Mitchell, 2002; Shohat & Stam, 1998). Walker and Chaplin (1997) argue that visual culture should not

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be seen as inherently exclusionary of the other senses. They believe that visual culture does not exclude “the haptic (the sensations of touch, texture and contour) and the kinesthetic (the sensation of movement or strain in the muscles, tendons, joints) . . . images, designs, textures, words, music and sounds interrelate” (p. 24). Our experience with visual culture, similar to our identity in general, is also always situated and incomplete. For most scholars of visual culture, however, the content for study is not simply “things.” The experience of human subjects interacting with, and seeing and being seen through, the substantial parts of visual culture is of primary concern to visual culture when defined as a field of study.

Visual culture: A project to interrogate seeing and being seen

Besides referring to a cultural condition or suggesting a range of images and objects, visual culture can be defined as a field of study. As a critical set of projects, visual culture attempts to interpret the wealth of visual (multi-mediated) experiences in culture and the visual practices of a culture—the interactions between viewers, what is being viewed, and how they are being viewed while viewing. While some theorists prefer to use the term *visual culture* to refer to a field of study (Mitchell, 2002) other scholars prefer to deploy the term *visual culture studies* (Walker & Chaplin, 1997) or *visual studies* (Elkins, 2003). For those who prefer to use visual culture to connote the project, the term is usually employed as a field of study not abstracted from its substantial content (stuff) and historical presence (cultural condition). For others, the attempt to extricate formations of the visual from the cultural is mainly based on the belief that the term visual culture is a potential source of confusion. Either way, whether one uses the term visual culture, visual cultural studies, or visual studies, there seems to be no categorical formations or fixed components of the field. There are, however, two general themes that seem to cut across most scholarly writing around the subject of inquiry and methodological process. One is the contextualizing seeing and being seen in everyday life and the other is the notion of transdisciplinarity.

Contextualizing seeing and being seen in everyday life

For many scholars interested in visual culture the subject of inquiry and methodology for their project is often determined around issues that stem from the practices of seeing and being seen in everyday life. The concept of everyday life is important since it is through the seemingly endless array of visual images we encounter on a daily basis that meanings and identities are created and contested (Mirzoeff, 1998). The questions involved in the study of visual culture may be determined by the circumstances of seeing and being seen through the proliferation of visual representations that function within public and private spaces everyday. When the inquiry turns to specific forms of visual culture, such as artwork or film for example, understanding the context of production and reception is vital. Context includes the cultural purposes of the development, production, distribution, and regulation of images. Context also includes the sociopolitical, economic, environmental, and historical conditions around the production and reception of images. Reception includes how the artwork may be gazing back at the viewer. In this sense, the context does not begin and end with the artwork itself, but extends to the inner psychic workings of the viewer and how they see themselves as a stain the picture.

Although many scholars of visual culture often refuse to adopt a predetermined methodology, there are central questions around seeing and being seen that seem to be common across disciplines. For instance, these questions may revolve around how identities have been fashioned through the visual in the past and how they are being refashioned in the present (Mirzoeff, 1998). Other questions may deal with the politics of identity as constituted through social categories of spectatorship, gazing, and glancing. In addition, there may be questions of what it means to be looked at, seen, not seen, or made invisible (Rogoff, 1998). In this sense, the project may focus on who is privileged as producers of images and as consumers of images, what aspects of history circulate as visual representations, and who is empowered and who is subjugated through the process of being seen or

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not being seen. Other inquiries in the field of visual culture revolve around the concept of vision as a totality, the ubiquity of vision in a particular era, or how images play a central role in representing certain parts of the world (Jay, 1993). Additional questions may focus on differences and similarities between so-called high and low culture, or fine art and vernacular images (Tavin, 2005a). Although these questions and issues can be understood as part of a larger rubric of inquiry, as stated earlier, the methodologies to engage these issues are usually quite fluid.

Visual culture's methodological fluidity is connected to and dependent upon its ability to destabilize traditional notions of disciplinarity—the legitimate knowledge base of a discipline. Therefore, visual culture is transdisciplinary by crossing and challenging disciplinary boundaries in order to provide a useful set of provisional theoretical collaborations. Transdisciplinarity can be understood as a gleaning of knowledge and practice from a myriad of disciplines while pushing against and permeating the rigid boundaries of those disciplines. Visual culture as a transdisciplinary field of study does not negate disciplinary areas of inquiry—it merely refuses to remain confined to restricted parameters defined by experts in a given field. The following disciplines and areas of study are usually implicated in the field of visual culture: Anthropology, Archaeology, Architectural Theory, Art Criticism, Art Education, Art History, Black Studies, Critical Theory, Cultural Studies, Design, Feminist Studies, Film Studies, Linguistics, Literary Criticism, Marxism, Media Studies, Philosophy, Post-Colonial Studies, Post-Structuralism, Psychoanalytic Theory, Queer Theory, Semiotics, and Sociology (Walker & Chaplin, 1997). Scholars interested in visual culture work in these fields and appropriate ideas from them. They reject doctrinal disciplinary foundations on the one hand and patch together whatever works for the study of visual culture on the other.

Teaching visual culture: Seeing and being seen in the classroom

Recently, across the globe the discipline of art education has joined in the field of visual culture (Eca & Mason, 2006; Lindstrom, 2007; Park, 2007;

Tavin, 2003). At its best, this can be seen as an attempt to reconceptualize art education; an attempt to shift from traditional modes of art making and “art thinking” towards a profoundly critical, historical, political, and self-reflexive understanding of culture, coupled with meaningful and transformative student production (Carpenter & Tavin, 2009; Park, 2006). Advocates for this reconceptualization in part challenge the canonicity of art curricula, and advance the study of an expansive range of objects and images including popular culture examples. While the current reconceptualization of art education in the U.S. is struggling through its challenge to traditional and operational curricula in K-12 art classrooms, it also propels the development of interdisciplinary courses at the post-secondary level. Such courses attempt to help all university students make explicit their critical investigations of visual cultural practices and interpretations of daily visual experiences, regardless of their major area of study. One such course that I developed and now teach at The Ohio State University (OSU) is Art Education 255, *Engaging Visuality: The Power of Seeing and Being Seen*. This course was developed and is now offered as a General Education Curriculum (GEC) class. This means it needs to meet the guidelines for general education in the areas of *social diversity* and *cultures and Ideas*, and should be open to all students across OSU, not just art or art education majors.

OSU's motto is *disciplina in civitatem*: training for citizenship. *Engaging Visuality* is a course designed to help develop and sharpen students' critical capacities to interpret, analyze, and respond to contextually significant images in, and clarifying ideas of, visual culture. In this sense, the course facilitates the development of critical citizenship through the study of visual culture. Critical citizenship values egalitarianism, social difference, democracy, and justice. A critical citizen is one who has a deep concern for the lives of others and actively questions and challenges the social, political, and cultural structures and discourses that comprise everyday life. In an ever-increasing visual culture, critical citizens need to be able to actively engage a variety of images, sites, and media that help construct views of the

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world (Tavin, 2000). In *Art Education 255*, critical citizenship means an active, engaging, and questioning relationship with a variety of images, sites, and media in order to understand how meanings are produced in various historical, political, and cultural contexts. This definition of critical citizenship is based in part on Sholle & Denski's (1994) principle that "individuals and communities should have a direct role in the determination of the conditions of their own lives" (p. 26). This definition also extends Giroux's (2000) point that any in project that investigates visual culture should "begin at those intersections where people actually live their lives and where meaning is produced, assumed, and contested in the unequal relations of power that construct the mundane acts of everyday relations" (p. 355).

Engaging Visuality was designed to attend to the general principles of the GEC in *social diversity* in part by having students explore through interdisciplinary theories and practices how representations help construct beliefs, assumptions, and norms about themselves, nature, and social and cultural conditions in a pluralistic society. The term "representation, used here "refers to the use of language and images to create meaning about the world around us" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009, p.12). Systems of representation have rules, codes, and conventions about how they are organized and ultimately and often unconsciously give meaning to the material world around us. This theory of representation helps students understand that representations are not simply a reflection of the world as it is, but an active construction of the world through ways of seeing and ways of being seen.

Other general principles of the GEC in *social diversity* are met in *Art Education 255* by having students investigate and reflect upon the relationship between seeing and being seen, and understandings of race, class, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual identity, and other facets of social diversity in the U.S. and beyond. The goal for *social diversity* is to develop sensitivity to social concerns and, in particular, to foster sensitivity to race, ethnocentric, and gender biases; enhancing a student's awareness of, and respect and appreciation for, the physical and cultural diversity of individuals within society and of societies within the larger world community.

In terms of the *cultures and ideas* GEC, students enrolled in Art Education 255 investigate how forces of the past help shape their current ways of seeing the world and how others may see them, and how that might affect the material and symbolic conditions of life. This introduces students to contemporary knowledge and also gives them a sense of the historical context in which it arose. Traditionally, “culture” in the West has been characterized as “fine art,” “classic works,” and conflated with “high culture.” High culture has been framed as a collection of and a path towards the greatest achievements of the human race (Tavin, 2005a). In this course, however, students begin to see culture as an ongoing and irreducible set of signifying systems which societies produce, reproduce, and contest (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). Rather than seeing culture as static, the course builds on Hall’s (1981) theory of understanding culture through its articulation—the practices of seeing and being seen between members of a society or group, contextualized through the discursive practices around images and objects:

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The meaning of a cultural form and its place or position in the cultural field is not inscribed inside its form. Nor is its position fixed once and forever . . . The meaning of the cultural symbol is given in part by the social field into which it is incorporated, the practices with which it articulates and is made to resonate. What matters is not the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of [visual] play in culture relations. (p. 235)

The structure and content of Engaging Visuality

Art Education 255 is offered each quarter, for ten weeks, and meets twice a week for approximately two and a half hours. During that time, instructor led lectures and student directed and small group discussions provide opportunities to apply theories of visual culture, including perspectives on representation, spectacle, spectatorship, surveillance, and voyeurism, to a variety of cultural forms including mass media, photography, the internet, shopping malls, art museums, virtual reality, and corporate, military, and popular culture.

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On the first day of class I display images for the students to interpret. To illustrate the power of seeing and being seen, for example, I usually start out with a black and white photograph by the artist, Weegee (see figure 1). The photograph from a half century ago shows a group of excited and puzzled schoolchildren and adults on a street in New York City. At first glance, the image seems to reflect a positive atmosphere, but in fact, the people in the photograph have just witnessed what Weegee describes as *The First Murder (after 1945)*. I ask students to discuss what they think it means to be seen in this image. We interpret how the individuals in the photograph respond to being looked at, captured on film at that particular moment. Students try to understand what is happening outside of the picture frame by interpreting the look of being looked at. Students then relate their own stories of seeing themselves being seen by others.



Figure 1. Students interpreting notions of seeing and being seen through “The First Murder.”

After spending some time with the Weegee image, the students work in groups to interpret other images, mostly advertisements. In the past I have

used a print advertisement for MTV which displays a young woman staring directly into the camera and asking “I am itchy. Do I have MTV?” (see Figure 2). We discuss as a class what it means to look directly at the woman in the image while she stares directly at us. Does she want to be seen? How is she seen? How do we see ourselves being seen by her? We also discuss how the image and text are combined to create meaning. In a more recent class, I displayed an ad for “Discover America” that uses a scene from the movie *Forrest Gump* and the text, “You’ve seen the film. Now visit the set.” At first, I ask students to imagine how they see themselves visiting the “set.” We discuss the meaning of “the set” and whether or not it is real, imagines, or both. After long discussions about seeing movies and being seen in them (the set), I disclose to students that the image was taken from the London Underground in 2005 (see Figure 3). For the most of the students in the class this information changes the way they respond to the image, re-contextualized through history and geo-political events at that time such as the war on Iraq and European perspectives on that war. These exercises lead into a discussion on various definitions of seeing America and being seen as American. This discussion unfolds into a conversation on “culture” and the role of visual culture in shaping perceptions through social interactions among images, viewers, and contexts.

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Figure 2. Advertisement for MTV.

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Figure 3. Advertisement for DiscoverAmerica.

During the ten weeks of course instruction, students continue to explore notions of culture by “seeing” culture and being seen as a cultural subject through transdisciplinary lenses--ongoing set of signifying systems which societies produce, reproduce, and contest. Students bring in and discussing their own examples of visual culture, and attempt to draw upon and apply key concepts of visual culture covered in class and through the text-book, *Practices of looking: An introduction to visual culture*, by Sturken and Cartwright (2009). Key concepts include Representation, Ideology, Interpellation, Hegemony, Commodity Culture, Spectatorship, Power and Knowledge, and Scientific Gazing. Some of the examples students bring to class include personal family photographs where they are being seen, film clips where they are seeing something, and advertisements, personal artwork, and a variety of other images. While exploring the concept of hegemony, for example, one student brought in an advertisement that states “He already knows what he wants to be when he grows up” (see Figure 4). The image is of a young boy. He is wearing a soldier’s uniform, guns, and grenades. The student in my course critiqued the hegemony of the discourse

that Israel is “the front line of the free world.” The student then compared this to the popular phrase in the US, the “Land of the free” and connected it to Israel’s foreign policy. The student discussed how this advertisement links being “seen” as an American to being seen as naturally supporting Israel. The student was uncomfortable being seen in this way, and challenged the hegemony of vision and imagination.

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Figure 4. Advertisement advocating US support for Israel.

During the quarter, students also present a more formalized display around one or a small set of images for a mid-term and final project. For both projects, students work individually or in small groups to engage the class, through critical interpretations and theories learned in the course. Students investigate issues and questions such as what/who are represented and how particular ideologies are produced, affirmed, or challenged and/or resisted through practices of seeing and being seen. During the mid-term, students ask their peers questions about, and discuss with the class, how their image or site is encoded and decoded, how particular knowledge (about race, class, ability, sexual identity, consumption, behavior, for example) is produced and validated, and how each member of the class sees themselves through the image/site. For the in-class mid-term presentation, students may create a

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video, digitally mediated document (PowerPoint, etc.), or display and interpret portions of a film, scenes from television, or digital images, or take the class on a brief site-specific field trip. For the final project, there is an option for students to build upon one of their previous presentations in the course or from the mid-term project. The students may also choose to make more explicit connections between theories and practices of visual culture they learned throughout the quarter and their professional or academic interests.

Some recent examples of mid-term and final projects include students focusing on ideology, hegemony, and interpellation through a discussion of how we watch popular television shows and see ourselves through them, such as *Jon and Kate plus 8*, *Fear Factor*, *South Park*, and *The Daily Show*. Additionally students have chosen images from magazines where they see themselves engaged in different visualizing practices such as *National Geographic*, and *Time*, and films such as *Harry Potter* and *Ghost World*. Some students turned their attention to their own major field of study and investigated the visual culture of food management services, military police, and art education, for example. Other students focused on visual spaces and events.

One group of students in particular critiqued a newly developed shopping and residential area near campus (see figure 5). They discussed the history, planning, and development of the space through theories of consumer culture, commodity fetishism, and surveillance and display. In particular, these students presented photographs of how college students were represented throughout the area, and interviewed individuals on what it meant to be seen in that space. The discussion centered on the relationship between seeing oneself on display through commodity representations and being seen as a consumer, “enjoying” the good life offered through this “new” space. Another student in the same class used theories of semiotics and representation to interpret how street signs around campus signify what is legal and illegal. Having received a parking ticket in Columbus, she gathered and presented to the Parking Fines Court photographic and documentary

evidence about the particular “sign in question” including images of streets and signs across Columbus Ohio, and a series of written interviews with residents and students, and police officers (see Figure 6). She presented her case in court and won, and re-presented it to the class contextualized through theories of visual culture. In this sense, she made herself seen to those that had once made her invisible. She helped the class understand the relationship between power and knowledge, and seeing and being seen.

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Figure 5. Seeing and being seen at the South Campus Gateway in Columbus Ohio.



Figure 6. Seeing and being seen parking in Columbus Ohio, by Kendra Girardot

Art and non-art majors seeing and being seen

As stated earlier, most of the students in the course are not art or art education majors. Most students express no real interest in art and most cannot recall visiting museums or galleries, except for required field-trips. When asked why they chose to take the course, most students reply that they were struck by the course description and/or they were simply interested gaining the requisite credits in the GEC area. One of the interesting and significant insights from teaching the course over the last few years is the different ways in which non-art and art related majors approach the study of visual culture. At the risk of over generalizing, the minority of students who come from an art or art education background seem to have internalized, as common sense, an approach to interpreting visual culture that is entrenched in a modernist view of art—an epistemology that often separates form from content, autonomy from social construction, and art from other forms of visual culture. Some of these modernist pre-suppositions seem to exacerbate a-historical and a-political perspectives of visual culture, which sometimes unconsciously translates into a method of analysis—a process of seeing and a way of knowing forms of visual culture (Freedman, 2001). While it is not always the case, those that come to Art Education 255 with an art or art education background often come to class blinded by a faith in form isolated from content that seems to extend into a kind of art world universalizing vanity of the past. In other words, the non-art and non-art education majors seem to come to class with a different set of expectations, attitudes, and beliefs about visual culture. Most of students coming from fields of study outside of the art world have not been inculcated into the modernist art paradigm in ways that art and art education students have. Although both types of students engage visual culture new and sophisticated ways, art and art education students sometimes think about “seeing and being seen” through a modernist lens—an understanding of art that defined a communal habit for seeing (McEvilley, 1995, p. 92). It is my goal through Art Education 255 to help all students, both art and non-art related fields,

interrogate the ideas they may have taken for granted and to see visual culture as a “polysemic construction with many open points of interpretive entry and exit” (Surber, 1998, p. 194)

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Summary

Visual culture is a term used to describe a social and cultural condition (historically and contemporaneously) where visibility and visualizing practices have a profound effect on individual and collective identities. Visual culture is also a way of referring to the images, objects, and instruments tangled-up in the complex process of understanding what it means to see and be seen, and to picture something or someone—including ourselves. In addition, visual culture is a transdisciplinary field of study that attempts to recognize, theorize, and interpret, in all of their contextual richness, the interactions between subjects and objects, and viewers and what is being viewed.

With these three concepts of visual culture in mind, I developed and now teach a course on visual culture at the university level that is primarily designed for non-art and non-art education majors. It is my goal that in the end the students who have taken the class, *Engaging Visuality*, are able to explain visual culture’s role in shaping cultural perceptions and ideologies, in and through the complex social interactions among images, viewers, and contexts. Another goal is that students can critically analyze the complexity of ways that images are integral to systems of power and ideas about knowledge, and clarify how visual culture is a pedagogical site. My hope is that these goals are met, even partially, by way of the opportunities I give students have to share examples of their own visual culture and articulate their own ideas about the world--while always being self-reflexive about the shared modes of seeing and shared practices of looking at the world.

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Notes:

The author wishes to thank Kendra Girardot for her contribution to the development of the course and her exemplary images.