Approaches to Visual Culture in Art Education

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to summarize various approaches to visual culture in art education, both in theory and in practice. As related to theory, I will synthesize an understanding of visual culture in terms of how we approached (came up to) the need for visual culture studies in our transition from modern to postmodern society, as well as how visual culture is approached theoretically in studies. In the shift from modern to postmodern, we see an expansion of notions of "art" to include mass/popular culture; the inclusion of popular culture as a significant site for critical investigation in cultural studies; the increasing pervasiveness of media and its communications; an extension of the term "aesthetics" to include not only the "finer senses" disciplined by the mind but also the uninhibited bodily sensations; and an emphasis on the consumption of goods and the manufacture of desire for these goods, as opposed to the modern ascetic emphasis on the production of goods. All shifts led to the carnivalesque nature of today's global capitalist society, which lures with aesthetic pleasures while simultaneously relaying ideologies via omnipresent media communications. Visual culture studies are necessitated as a means of giving agency to students as viewers, by teaching them how to see past the mask of aesthetic pleasure, and expose the potentially corrupting underlying ideologies relayed by vehicles of visual culture.

This theoretical exploration to how we approached visual culture in art education is followed by examples of approaches to visual culture in practice, in both the undergraduate preservice art education classroom, and a k-12 art

room. In these examples, visual culture investigations are utilized as a means for giving agency to the art educator and student artist to empower themselves, as well as viewers of their artwork, to critique consumerism cognitively; and, in doing so, navigate beyond the layers of visual culture artifacts' appeal to their bodily consumer desires.

Keywords: Visual Culture, Carnivalesque, Aesthetics, Hegemony, Ideology

Expanding the Definition of Art

Sturken and Cartwright (2001) argue that in today's postmodern culture, the line between high culture and low culture conceptions of art has been "blurred" as the "distinction between fine art and popular culture" has eroded (p. 50). Duncum (2014) eschews differentiations between high and low culture and offers many ways to envision Premodern fine art as popular culture. Walker and Chaplin (1997) contend that "many theorists think the aesthetic dimension of art is its defining characteristic because it distinguishes art objects from non-art objects and from mass culture" (p. 153). To contest this view, they point out that "aesthetic qualities are also found in media which are generally not classified as fine art-for example, advertising, design and television" (p. 153).

Chapman (2003) capitalizes on the "blurred" line between fine art and popular culture, and enfolds *mass arts* under the definition of art as they are "descendants from more traditional art forms," are created by those trained as artists, and use formal techniques and devices (p. 231). Under the umbrella of visual culture, Chapman defines mass arts as the "images, artifacts, environments, and events" created under conditions in which they are mass-produced and mass-circulated within a consumer driven economy in which corporations aim to profit (p. 231). They are a pervasive part of popular culture. With the turn to the twenty-first century, numerous scholars (such as Carpenter & Tavin, 2010: Duncum, 2001, 2009; Freedman 2000, 2001; Tavin, 2000, 2003) recognize visual culture as inclusive of both fine art and popular culture.

With these ideas in mind, practicing art educators are encouraged and challenged to understand that the realm of the content in their curriculum has expanded, from a focus on solely fine arts, to include artifacts that comprise our popular visual culture.

Popular Culture Within Cultural Studies

Sturken and Cartwright (2001) assert, "We cannot understand a culture without analyzing its production and consumption of all forms of culture, high

and low" (p. 50). Duncum (1987) contends that the everyday life of the masses, the popular culture, embodies American culture, and reflects its attitudes and concerns. He explains that liberal pluralism and functionalism are fundamental to Popular Culture Studies in America. What is valued in this pluralist society is "the servicing of different levels of taste, different audiences and consumers" (p. 3). Duncum (1987) highlights the functionalist nature of popular culture studies in terms of "needs gratification", and contends that the production of popular culture serves to satisfy "deep instinctive and/or social functions" (p. 103). As such, the benefits or pleasures-the satisfaction of needs-derived from visual culture encounters are emphasized (Duncum, 1987, 2014). Noteworthy in this positively oriented American liberal pluralist stance is "the general absence of evaluation" in which "ideological criticism is ignored" (Duncum, 1987, p. 2). Duncum (1987) asserts that in this vein the approach of Cultural Studies in England is more powerful in exposing the underlying values being conveyed and reinforced by the hegemonic powers within a capitalist society through popular visual culture sites.

Cultural Studies take as their object of study "all works of primarily symbolic function" through which a social order is constructed, and which "provide a central articulation of the dominant meanings and values organized and lived in society" (p. 6). Duncum (1987) explains that intervention on behalf of the oppressed is fundamental to Cultural Studies in England. Its theorists emphasize recognition of the idea that the dominant class in power establishes "what is acceptable as definitions of reality" for itself as well as all subordinate classes, until these definitions are "so pervasive they come to constitute the primary 'lived' reality of subordinate classes" (p. 5). This is otherwise know as *hegemony*: Here, hegemony can be understood as the perpetuation of a dominant group's control and influence over others through the spread of ideology[1] that serves to attain people's conscious and/or unconscious assent to this domination (Balibar, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Williams, 1977). This lived reality in

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[1] I refer to ideology here as both the unconscious and conscious beliefs, values, or ways of thinking that impel individuals' thoughts, interpretations, and interactions with the world (Decker, 2004).

which hegemony is embedded, is a reality in which hegemonic ideologies are so natural that they become invisible, and "secures consent" passively from the oppressed even though it may not be in their best interest (Duncum, 1987, p. 5). It thus reproduces this same oppression without resistance. Hence, ideologies are assimilated without question, and become a construction akin to Marx's "false consciousness" (Williams, 1976, p. 127).

Based on these theorists' discussions, we can see that a focus on the hegemonic ideologies being communicated via a vehicle of popular culture, a visual culture artifact, becomes imperative to understanding the context and culture in which an artifact circulates. Visual culture investigations seek to reveal who the oppressors and oppressed are within a given culture, and what ideologies are being perpetuated to hegemonic ally maintain their hierarchical roles, and to rein scribe inequities of status. Without such interrogations of visual culture vehicles, these hegemonic narratives often go unacknowledged, and seep into minds of the populace as unquestioned truths.

Media Proliferation and Dissemination of Ideology

This unquestioning passive acquiescence, this naturalization of hegemonic ideology, is of primary concern in visual culture studies, which parallels Cultural Studies in England. Sturken and Cartwright (2001) assert that ideologies are the "means by which certain values … are made to seem like natural, inevitable aspects of everyday life" (p. 21). Images of advertising and consumer culture are forms of ideological transmission through which "we persuade others to share certain views or not, to hold certain values or not" (p. 21). Walker and Chaplin (1997) share this disposition, and note the pervasiveness of such transmissions: "Production and circulation of symbolic forms have … become increasingly and irreversibly caught up in the process of commodification and transmission that are now global in character" (p. 23). With the permeation of the media in our everyday lives, ideologies seem "natural or given" (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p. 21).

Williams (1977) argues that resistance to this "naturalization" of ideologies does exist, and expounds upon segments of culture that hold "alternative or even oppositional views to the dominant culture" (p. 122):

"residual culture", which was once dominant, and is now marginal (p. 122), and "emergent culture", which present wholly new ideologies to the dominant (p. 123). Both alternatives are unincorporated into dominant culture, though they are in constant "danger of incorporation" (Duncum, 1987, p. 7); this area of resistance to incorporation is seen as "a constant struggle within which there is … room to offer alternative definitions of reality" (p. 10). Sturken and Cartwright (2001) elaborate on this area of resistance to dominant ideology. They present Gramsci's theory in which individuals are empowered with a sense of agency in constructing the ideology in which they live, and in which "dominant ideologies must constantly be reaffirmed" as they struggle against "*counter-hegemonic* forces" (as cited by Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p. 54). Thus, the status quo is constantly negotiated as alternative ideologies struggle to effect social change. This idea is resonated in Stuart Hall's concept of *negotiated reading,* in which "consumers are active meaning-makers" who interpret meaning by accepting or rejecting ideas (as cited by Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p. 57). In its efforts to serve the oppressed, Cultural Studies in England and visual culture studies serve to activate these counter-hegemonic forces and promote negotiated readings. Hausman, Ploof, Duignan, Brown and Hostert (2010) advocate that such curricula, which enable viewers to critically negotiate issues of power in society, are key to promoting transformative education. Similarly, Amburgy (2011) argues that such critical understandings are crucial to challenging existing social injustices.

The forces of capitalism, however, aim to suppress consumers' resistance to the naturalization of their prescribed ideologies. Their weapon is aesthetic pleasure. Walker and Chaplin (1997) assert, "Pleasure is *the means* by which visual culture persuades and seduces us to look and listen while the ideas, etc. are delivered" (p. 150). Chapman (2003) affirms this notion and claims that "mass arts are instruments used for aesthetic persuasion in ways that tend to suppress deliberative thinking about them" (p. 241). Duncum (2002a) echoes this philosophy, and states, "Ideology works best when it is hidden, and the aesthetics of sensory appeal work to hide ideology" (p. 10). This "aesthetics of sensory appeal" (p. 10), a deference to

the pleasures of the body, becomes an overriding concern for visual culture in capitalist consumer society.

The aim of visual culture studies in art education, then, is to guide students to take a critical look at vehicles of visual culture. Teachers are encouraged to guide their students to peel back the pleasurable aesthetic layers obscuring the hegemonic messages that often lie beneath. Once revealed, students can be guided to reflect on and deconstruct these hegemonic messages, take a stance, and resist such oppressive ideologies. This may not be such an easy task in our era of global capitalism and gross consumerism, as aesthetic appeals target the body and its craving for sensation, and thereby bypass the mind, as will be discussed next.

Expanding Aesthetics

Duncum (2005) stresses the body's significance as it "is emerging as a principle target of consumer capitalism" (p. 10). He asserts a theory of the "aesthetics of embodiment" to frame this discourse (p. 17). The Kantian positive aspects of aesthetics, the "finer feelings" of the sublime and the beautiful, disciplined by the mind, no longer bind postmodern notions of aesthetics (p. 12). Duncum draws our attention back to the Greek definition of *aesthesis* that includes both pleasant and unpleasant sensation, to reframe a broader definition of aesthetics which incorporates not only the body, but also its sensations of a both a positive and negative nature including the sublime as well as the vulgar, gross, and mundane. Walker and Chaplin (1997) illustrate that the aesthetic has historically encompassed the pleasurable as well as the displeasurable: Modern art often depicts ugliness, or shows "suffering, torture and… horrors", as in works by Goya (p. 159). Williams (1977) also extends the definition outside of the pleasurable and includes "the dulling, the lulling" within aesthetic experience (p. 156). Duncum (2005) contends that such an expansion of the notion of aesthetics-to include the body and all its sensations, positive and negative-is necessary "with the increasing appeal that global corporate capital makes to our bodies rather than our minds" (p. 18).

To illustrate the importance of the body in public discourse even during modern times, Duncum (2005) invites us into the world of the carnival that

prominently featured the body and senses in all their excess, and was highly popular in feudal Europe. But with the age of Enlightenment promoting rationality, industrialists valorizing ascetic productivity, and Protestantism condemning all temptations of the flesh, the carnival was "systematically suppressed" during the 19th century (p. 13). The development of efficiencies in production in the 20th century, however, led to the abundance of capital surpluses and leisure time. This decreased emphasis on production and shifted import to consumption. People began to identify themselves more as consumers and less as producers. With this transformation, Duncum (2005) asserts, "Consumer culture requires the manufacture not so much of goods, but of a desire for goods" (p. 15). In an effort to tempt and tantalize the consumer body into purchasing global capitalist commodities, the carnivalesque, hedonistic indulgences that were suppressed in the modernist era, have come to be promoted by corporate capitalist advertising and media productions in our postmodern times.

Langman (2003) declares that the "lure of the carnival, a place for otherwise submerged desires and identities, has been renewed in the form of commodified simulations of carnival", in which "'forbidden pleasures' have become an integral feature" (p. 85). Consumerism, Langman claims, "now depends on the production and diffusion of carnivalesque 'dream worlds,' fantastic realms that promise and often provide more pleasurable moments of bodily gratification" than that found in the status quo (p. 85). In societies that divide experience into structure and antistructure, these alternative sites provide "antistructural releases" or "liminal times and places of resistance, inversion, and repudiation in which social norms can be safely flaunted" (p. 67). As such, these spaces, ironically, "serve to secure the structure" and allow it to endure (p. 68). Like the carnival of feudal times that served as a "liminal space for the ludic that granted feudal peasants pleasure release," Langman illustrates that the Carnival in Brazil and America's Superbowl are contemporary forums for carnivalesque discharges (p. 68).

Similarly, Manga (2003) illustrates how TV talk shows "provide dispersion of and access to the carnivalesque on an unprecedented scale" (p. 181). Like feudal carnivals, they present forums for debaucheristic excess and "symbolic inversion" (p. 161), but unlike feudal carnivals, talk shows

occur with a "vastly greater frequency", and are aired at predictable times as opposed to the unpredictable times at which the carnival surfaced, which added to the carnival's sense of danger (p. 173). Talk shows do not serve as breaks from "production… from 'everyday life'", and with their constant availability are "encountered as a mundane daily occurrence" (p. 175). They are not found on the margins of society nor marginalized, but are omnipresent and are "literally mobile image[s] performing the carnivalesque, encountered across disperse (national and international) geography" (p. 178). Lastly, sanctioning is no longer possible: "While containment and marginalization have historically been strategies for suppressing or controlling the carnivalesque, in its contemporary displacement in the form of the talk show such control is near impossible" (p. 180). The carnivalesque inversion now permeates our daily lives freely.

Viewers claim they feel "pulled or compelled to watch the shows, even against their own 'better' judgment" (p. 182). Manga (2003) claims this compulsion to watch is explained by the *haunting* need for the "sociality of the carnival" that is "missing in an integral way from our society" (p. 193). In the absence of an actual carnival-an unusual, marginalized, sanctioned, collective, physical forum for pleasure release-TV talk shows are fulfilling viewers' latent, haunting desire for a pleasure release they cannot explain.

Duncum (2002b) claims TV wrestling is another forum that provides viewers with the "carnivalesque joys of inverting social norms": TV wrestling literally provides a ring in which the "vulgar, obscene, and erotic", otherwise forbidden expressions by civil society's standards, can be flagrantly displayed (p. 109). While the pleasure, the gratification of needs, is the appeal of TV wrestling, Duncum presents a critical cultural studies exposition of the corrupting dominant ideologies embedded within the spectacle: racism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, anarchy and violence. He asserts that such visual culture sites are significant because they reach a mass audience, and present a very clear example of the exploitative nature of global capitalism: "While offering the indulgences in the pleasures of excess… it acts to reinforce dominant values" (p. 115). Through such omnipresent, carnivalesque vehicles, these hegemonic ideologies of dominant groups in a society are forwarded.

As we can see from the carnivalesque exemplars of Carnival, Superbowl, TV talk shows, and TV wrestling, such media have pleasure appeal and gratify needs. Unfortunately, as illustrated by Duncum (2002b) with TV wrestling, they also relay questionable ideology. Chapman (2003) asserts that the mass arts "'teach' values by disseminating images about proper and prohibited behavior" (p. 236). But with the "carnivalization of the world of global capitalism" (Langman, 2003, p. 85) via omnipresent media, the "proper" or prescribed behavior appears to be what was traditionally "prohibited" behavior. Capitalism is promoting corrupt ideologies.

Reflecting on these vehicles of the carnivalesque, we note not only the unsavory ideologies they may promote, but also the omnipresence of these artifacts of visual culture. Driven by the billions of dollars of global megacorporations who can afford to produce the most intense, wildest, dreamiest of alternative carnivalesque worlds for audiences on a regular basis, their aesthetic lure is heightened and more frequent. The logic checks of the mind are circumvented as they strongly and frequently appeal to positive and negative bodily sensations, and all those in between, with the aim to titillate, and create pleasure and desire within viewers.

While the carnival was once instigated by the common as a form of resistance against the governing hegemonic powers, and required the sanctioning of these powers, the carnivalesque is now being produced and sold by hegemonic powers in global capitalist society. This shift has caused a saturation of our daily lives with commodified communications that tempt the body, and has naturalized the carnivalesque within our global capitalist society. This naturalization is cause for great concern. With such communications naturalized, society takes it for granted as a normal state of being and no longer tends to question the messages-the ideologies-that are being constantly disseminated and assimilated into society. The innocent are being indoctrinated without being cognizant of it. Blinded by the dazzling lure of the pleasures of the carnivalesque, society is weakened in resisting it, and the powers that once curbed it are now its most avid promoters.

In our contemporary global capitalistic society, those in dominance are, by definition, the ones with power, and they are the ones with the power to proliferate messages through media vehicles, and other such articles of

visual culture, with carnivalesque levels of appeal. If we, as educators, seek egalitarianism within society, rather than the inequities of the status quo, we must assist our students in deconstructing their visual worlds. This is particularly important in regards to the popular visual culture artifacts that saturate their daily lives. Through visual culture studies, art educators can guide students to recognize and resist the carnivalesque appeals of the media, and to become cognizant and critical of the underlying messages reinforced by them. With this as a goal, approaches for the art room are discussed next.

Approaches to Visual Culture Art Education in the Classroom

As Hermann (2005) asserted, there can be no one lock-step approach to visual culture art education in a postmodern era. One of her primary critiques was that, "Even if the lessons originate from visual culture theory, they often result in lessons that go back to modernist ideas and formalist principles of design" (p. 42), and formalist evaluations disregarded the social context of creation and viewing that is paramount to visual culture understandings.

Rather than formal analysis, as often espoused for art analysis in the modern era (Duncum, 2010; Hermann, 2005), advocates suggested that visual culture studies concentrate on unraveling the ideological constructions conveyed through narratives in images (Amburgy, 2011; Duncum, 2010; Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, & Knight, 2007; Vidiella & Hernandez, 2006). While there are a number of articles focusing on how visual culture has been or could be approached within the artroom [see, for example, Ballengee-Morris, & Stuhr, 2001; Barrett, 2003; Duncum, 2010], a commonality is that they utilize and advocate this deconstruction of narratives as a pathway to uncover ideologies which reinforce the status quo values of the dominant in society. Recommended approaches appear to capitalize on a critical pedagogy in which carnivalesque aesthetic appeals to the body are recognized and decentered, and the mind is intentionally activated to excavate deeper meanings conveyed by visual culture artifacts.

Preparing Preservice Art Educators to Embrace Visual Culture

I firmly believe in the benefits of critical pedagogy championed by visual culture art education theorists. As such, within my preservice undergraduate art education classes, I guide my future art educators to understand how visual culture can be implemented within the artroom, and why it is so important to do so.

The how to. To give us context and a base of understanding, we read articles about strategies for *how* visuals might be deconstructed a la visual culture studies, and how such approaches to deconstruction might be applied within the art room. For instance, we might learn to deconstruct visual culture artifacts using lenses such as those proposed by Duncum (2010): power, ideology, representation, seduction, gaze, and recognizing the multimodality and intertextuality of much communication today. Or we might employ strategies recommended by Barrett (2003), such as scrutinizing linguistic (text), denoted (explicitly shown or stated), and connoted (implied) messages in a visual. Vidiella and Hernandez (2006) guide us to recognize the importance of research in inquiry-based approaches to visual culture that mirror the steps of action-research (identify question or issue, research, implement action [respond through art], reflect on action, identify new/connected question or issue; and the cycle continues).

The why. After this review of potential approaches, we look at how Disney can been envisioned as disseminator of cultural pedagogy, "a process of teaching and learning through social sites, often outside of sanctioned educational institutions" (Tavin & Anderson, 2003, p. 23), an how this definition can be applied to the visual culture artifacts surrounding us. This is where I typically first meet resistance from students: A number of students will voice their dissent and argue that it is unfair to villianize Disney as such. They argue that they never thought about Disney characters like that when they were children growing up, so such underlying messages were not relevant or taken in by them. I let the resistance percolate and be debated by students with opposing perspectives. For example, a female

student who was open about her lesbian sexuality noted the privileging of heterosexuality, "I remember growing up and being attracted to the princesses and I wanted to be the prince," but Disney storylines implied that she couldn't, because she was female. Furthermore, many females argued that the sexist, "steps-for-life" prescriptive, princess story always taught them that you need to find a powerful man to save you, then you get married, and live happily ever after; "What kind of inferiority complex, false reality, and dashed hopes does that set little girls up for!" one student scoffed. After this debate, we then watch selected clips from "Mickey Mouse Monopoly," (Sun et al., 2002) in which we witness young children's responses to Disney videos and hear parents' and scholars' critiques, echoing those claimed in the Tavin and Anderson (2003) article read earlier. The young children imitate the look, dress, vocalizations, and sexualized movements of, for instance, Cinderella and Pocohantas. The resistors in my preservice class begin to shift their perspectives, but not completely.

The resistance that still persists at this point: Preservice undergraduates insist that little children don't absorb these racist, racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, and so on, ideologies. They explain that the children are merely repeating what the characters say and do. I follow this argument by showing a clip from "A Girl Like Me" (Davis, 2005). In it, a number of black female teens discuss what they have witnessed as dominant perceptions for what is considered ideal in looks for a black woman: fairer skin, straight hair. The standard for ideal looks was to look more White. This is followed by a clip of a little black girl who has just identified, out of the pair of black and white baby dolls before her on a table, the white doll as the doll she likes best, and as the one she thinks is the "nice doll," "because she is white." She identifies the black doll as the one that "looks bad," "because she is black." She is then asked, "And can you give me the doll that looks like you?" My students and I, as an audience, cringe-some are brought to tears-as we see this little girl's moment of hesitation as she reaches to again push forward the black doll, who is the "bad" doll. I stop the video. We end the session by discussing how youth are absorbing the dominant messages that they are bombarded with in the world that surrounds them; and how, at such young ages, they have not traditionally been taught how to negotiate these messages. As art educators

whose main concern is teaching toward visual imagery, we conclude that we have a responsibility to help our youth negotiate the messages they are receiving. This, in large part, means teaching our young students how to negotiate the visual culture that they are confronted with on a daily basis.

A Preservice Teachers Approach Visual Culture in the K-12 Art room: An Example

In the above-described ways, my preservice undergraduates begin to understand some key strategies, merits and the importance of bringing visual culture practices into their art curricula. They embrace and act on these understandings by integrating visual culture studies into their art curricula in various ways. For instance, during a spring 2015 practicum in which my preservice students taught art to k-12 youth on Saturday mornings, one of my undergraduate student art teachers, Zoe[2], created and integrated the following lesson for her 12-14 year old students.

An overview of her visual culture lesson. The title and "enduring idea" (Stewart & Walker, 2005) of focus for the curriculum that Zoe created was, "Make your Mark." With her curriculum, she aimed to guide her 12-14 year old students to investigate and better understand their impacts (positive and negative) on the world, and the impacts that the world was having upon them. She sought to engage them in critically reflecting upon these impacts so that they would be empowered as agents to make choices that, in turn, would help them to shape the world in a more positive direction.

The objectives of the first lesson of her curriculum, were twofold:

1) First, students sought to scrutinize consumer goods that they consistently carried around with them daily in their life, and considered how these items were possibly impacting how others saw them (i.e., what mark these items made on their lives, and what mark each student was then leaving behind). These items reflected who they were by virtue of the fact that these were items that others constantly associated them with as they carried these visibly on their person. Additionally, these were items that each individual

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[2] Pseudonym used to protect student teacher's anonymity

carrier likely took for granted as reflective of him/herself, because of the item's normalization in his/her life due to its constant presence with him/her.

2) Secondly, students aimed to express this critical reflection on their personal consumerism in a public way through their art, and to foster similar reflective critiques within their audience. Investing in research online, drawing on the inquiry-based tactics exemplified by Vidiella and Hernandez (2006), and reflecting on the pop art genre (see, for example, Livingstone, 2009; Pop art, 2015; Pop-art movement, n.d.; Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2015; Wolf, 2015), they discovered that numerous pop artists sought to critique the rampant consumerism of the U.S. This genre would become the vehicle that they would use to portray their objects, and to therefore connote the critique of consumerism that they sought to engender in their audiences as their artworks were viewed.

Approaches to visual culture in k-12 practice reflect approaches in theory. Zoe's approach to visual culture, with her integration of the above-described lesson, is reflective of our earlier discussion of how we have theoretically approached (come up to) visual culture in theory. Following are descriptions of how her lesson mirrored theoretical components in our approach to visual culture.

Expanding the definition of art. Students expanded their definition of art to include elements of popular culture. They investigated artifacts of visual culture – everyday consumer items such as nail polish, fancy pens, high-top sneakers, colorful purses, chunky hiking boots, and so on – rather than what might be traditionally considered "fine art" or "high art."

Popular culture within cultural studies. Through discussions and reflection, they unpacked and critiqued the hegemonic ideologies connoted by each item on a macro-scale, with the overarching themes focusing upon materialism, consumerism and capitalism. They considered how corporations benefit, potentially at these students' and others' expenses. They interrogated which societal group's values were privileged, and whose, then, were underprivileged. Who was shaping what "ideal" versions of themselves should look like by virtue of what consumer items they were

being persuaded to carry? How did these "ideal" versions reflect characteristics of belonging to or siding with a particular group (dominant, subordinate and acquiescent, subordinate and resistant, or iterations thereof)? With these understandings, students questioned if these were ideologies they wished to support. In doing so, students were able to privilege their minds and cognitive critical analysis over bodily aesthetic appeals when relating to these items.

Media proliferation and dissemination of ideology. In addition to their societal macro-level investigations, with their cognitive examinations of these items, students peeled back the layers of carnivalesque aesthetic appeal to excavate the ideas conveyed by these objects as consumer items themselves, and as items carried by themselves, at an individual micro-level. They critiqued what these items said about themselves as the constant carriers (and with their constant display of these items, as endorsers and marketers – in a sense, extensions of media vehicles) of these consumer goods, beyond mere utility. Students were guided to reflect : What did each individual student's personal ownership and constant display of each item connote about him/her? What messages of privilege-or challenge to privilege-did they seek consciously, and in some cases inadvertently, to connote through their possession and showcasing of these items. Issues underscoring the creation of disparities in perceived affluence, "coolness" and popularity as superiority and power, greed, selfishness, and conformity abounded in their discussions, and were interrogated.

Expanding aesthetics. Through this visual culture investigation, students were empowered to become aware of the carnivalesque appeals of these artifacts, the tactics of seduction used to solicit desire in the consumer body. With this awareness and cognition, students were able to negotiate and potentially resist or negate these aesthetic appeals by evaluating the underlying messages reinforced by them. They were empowered to choose to endorse particular ideologies, or challenge them. Through these cognitive exercises and participatory discussions, they were empowered as critically thinking consumers, rather than aesthetically acquiescent bodies.

Empowerment and Taking Action through Art Making

Though "critical understanding and empowerment-not artistic expression-are the primary goals of VCAE [Visual Culture Art Education]" (Duncum, 2002a, p. 6), suggestions for implementation of visual culture studies in the art room extend beyond critical reflections. Students means of expression via artmaking is crucial as well. Duncum (2002a) underscored that visual culture art education "sees making and critique as symbiotic" (p. 6). He elaborated, "Critical understanding and empowerment are best developed through an emphasis on image-making where students have some freedom to explore meaning for themselves" (p. 6). Hence, the research and selection of pop art as the genre for representation of students' materialistic objects was important to the understandings that students took away from the art lesson. As Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, and Knight (2003) espoused, "From a postmodern social theory perspective, creativity is intertwined with critical reflective consciousness aware of the context from which the creative act arose and is intended" (pp. 48, 50). In this sense, the context from which pop art arose was significant and ideologically well aligned with students' artistic portrayals of their consumer goods.

Through their artmaking for this visual culture lesson, students learned "about art as a practitioner; they learn[ed] about how artists think" (Duncum, 2002a, p. 6). As noted by Taylor and Ballengee-Morris (2003), the work of pop artists was "meant as a commentary and critique on the consumeristic society of the post World War II era" (p. 21). Just as these pop artists of the past were "using images from visual culture to critique the values and beliefs of their viewers" (p. 21), so too did the students in the "Make Your Mark" class aim to encourage these same critical reflections for the viewers of their pop art paintings. These were paintings that depicted their critically investigated consumer items. During students' selections of popular culture objects for their content, with their reflections, and in their creations of artworks, as artists these students also critiqued these consumeristic ideologies. Like pop artists, these students "explored U.S. culture's effect on both personal and societal levels" (p. 21).

Conclusion

Chapman (2003) declared, the aim of visual culture is to "enhanc[e] students' personal agency in assessing the significance" of aesthetic forms (p. 233), and "make the process of perceiving more self-conscious and deliberative" (p. 236). In our world of constant media bombardment and mindless materialistic consumption, the objective of visual culture studies in the artroom is to teach students how to rip the aesthetic pleasure mask off of such carnivalesque capitalist communications and appeals, and to recognize and critically negotiate the often unsavory ideologies hidden beneath.

As explored in this article, preservice art teachers can be guided to understand why visual culture studies are important to integrate into their curricula, and how to integrate it effectively into their curricula. Following these understandings, Zoe, a preservice art teacher, integrated a visual culture art lesson into her k-12 art curriculum. Her approach in practice mirrored the path leading up to (approaching) visual culture in theory. Her students embraced and experienced an expanded definition art to include consumer items of popular culture. They analyzed the ideologies surfing beneath the layers of aesthetic appeal of these items, and excavated narratives of privilege and oppression associated with their circulation. They investigated what these items connoted about themselves, as carriers and hence promoters of these consumer items, which dually served as ideological vehicles. They put cognitive examinations at the forefront, and resisted the seductive aesthetic appeals to the desires of their bodies as consumers. And, in what might be interpreted as a form of resistance to passive acceptance of the oppressive ideologies associated with consumerism, they took action in their creation of pop art depictions of their selected consumer items. These pop art depictions were aimed at expanding the reach of their resistance, and spreading a critique of consumerism amongst the breadth of viewers of their art.

In doing so, students undermined the power of the omnipresent consumer visual culture in which they were engulfed, and were empowered to not only resist as individuals, but also to spread the resistance through creation of visual artworks critiquing said visual culture.

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