

# ROOTS, REASONS, AND STRUCTURE: FRAMING VISUAL CULTURE ART EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

Tom Anderson  
Florida State University

## Abstract

This paper is an examination of visual culture in its historical context and in relation to art education, including an exploration of visual culture art education's conceptual roots in psychology, the social sciences, and art education, and concluding with an articulation of foundational premises and a structure for teaching and learning in VCAE.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is condensed version of Chapter 3, of *Art for Life*, an art education textbook by Tom Anderson and Melody Milbrandt, to be published in 2004 by McGraw-Hill, New York, New York.

We have become the organic self within a cocoon of artifact. (Susan Josephson)

## Visual Culture

Rather than in nature, we now live most of our lives in the constructed environment. We seldom see the moon, experience the rain without protection, or meet other animals in their natural habitats. We live in a constructed, climate-controlled world, kept consistently and artificially pleasant, in artificial light that greatly extends our days. Our very sense of space is mediated by our constructed milieu: eight feet high at home, ten or more at work, and almost always squared off except in the case of the car: a cocoon that protects us in the outside world when we move from place to place. We overwhelmingly construct our waking, sleeping, breathing, growing, living, and dying world. Cut off from nature, our own constructions become our world.



Juice Stand: Seaside, Florida. Our human constructions become almost the only world we know.

Constant and ubiquitous in this constructed world are the electronic ephemeralizations and vicarious experience brought to us especially on television and on the Internet. Ninety-eight percent of North American households have a TV. That TV is on an average seven and half hours a day. And when it is not on, people are at their computers. The statistics are similar in many other countries around the world. Increasingly, television and the Internet tell us what is real beyond our immediate environment. These electronically generated environments are becoming undifferentiated from our own personal experiences in memory and in the construction of our sensibilities. Americans, in fact, may know more about Ellen DeGeneres or Vanna White than the neighbor next door. They may be more familiar with Ayers

Rock from watching The Discovery Channel, than with the other side of their own town. Likewise, Australians or Taiwanese may know as much about Ben Affleck as they know about their own family.

In this visually constructed world, language and its linear/logical thought are giving way to entertaining visual images having web-like, divergent thought connections. Besides affecting our sense of relationship with people and place, the electronic media also affect our sense of time and history. Snippets, cutaways, sound bites, and instant replays that keep us from boredom are more appealing and entertaining than real time but also and lessen our ability and propensity for sustained in-depth engagement.

The news, for example, comes to us pre-packaged in a predictably controlled format, a news show consisting of theater bits presented by perfectly quaffed talking heads in 30 second segments broken up into sound and image bites. The apparent order and control presented over the chaos of the content (murder, political upheaval, budget approvals, scandals, sports, and the weather) are superficial and predetermined by commercial pressures that dictate format. Elections are won on looks fostered on TV, not on the substance of ideas. As McLuhan (1964) predicted long ago, we are now at the point where the medium is truly the message.

That medium is visual. Even the music videos on MTV rely on slick and suggestive visuals to make frequently questionable musical talent more appealing. And there are visual learning sections in bookstores. Rows and rows of books line the computer sections with titles like Visual Basics for Dummies, chock-full of instruction and advice on techniques for visual communication for selling yourself through Web pages, for advertising, and for business presentations.

## Visual Culture Education

This increasingly visual world, constructed by human beings, is the focus of visual culture studies. It is important for success in contemporary culture that people be able to read the constructed environment and interpret and use the visual signs within it. In the art for life curriculum, then, in addition to teaching the traditional high and fine arts, it is important to include the broader category of visual culture.

Visual culture consists of visual artifacts and performances of all kinds, as well as new and emerging technologies, inside and outside the art museum, and the beliefs, values and attitudes imbued in those artifacts and performances by the people that make, present, and use them. It is a socially grounded approach that recognizes context of making and viewing as being as important as the artifacts and performances themselves. Since the social and ritual meanings of visual forms depend on people's embeddedness in culture for their understanding, visual culture studies primarily take the consumer rather than the producer (artist, architect, designer, cinematographer) point of view. The primary point is to understand artworks and other visual artifacts, performances, and environments for what they do, say, and mean in their authentic contexts rather than to create, attain, or understand the heightened aesthetic experience that centers fine-arts based art education. Many have likened this type of educational pursuit to visual anthropology. In much the same way anthropologists set out to understand societies (their own and others) through understanding their art forms, visual culture critics seek to understand contemporary culture through examining our own visual artifacts.



Performer in a Caribbean Festival in Tallahassee, Florida. In much the same way anthropologists set out to understand societies (their own and others) through understanding their art forms, visual culture critics seek to understand contemporary culture through examining our own visual artifacts.

Visual culture studies are usually interdisciplinary in nature. In colleges and universities this interdisciplinary program usually resides in cultural studies, art history, graphic design, or communications programs. It is also a wide-ranging field politically and may encompass traditional art historical inquiry and traditional graphic design at one end of the spectrum, and popular culture, television and cinema, digital technology, and visual communication through mass media at the other. Cognitively, visual culture studies

ranges from traditional concerns with how and what we perceive to postmodern critique.

It is the scholars interested in the contemporary, popular media and culture who usually employ postmodern critique. Frequently, these critics have a reconstructionist goal. That is, they critique images and performances to understand the social foundations and ramifications of visual culture and to suggest solutions to the problems they find. Their strategy is to examine images, performances, and aspects of the constructed environment to reveal their intent, meanings, and implications; to determine their philosophical premises; to uncover who has what stake in a given expression and why; and finally to understand what the impact of all of this is on individuals and society. Their concerns frequently are with gender, social categories, and their construction (how we see ourselves and others as men, women, gays, lesbians, people of color, people with mental and physical challenges, and so on), who has power and who doesn't and how that's portrayed. Because so much of the visual stimulus we are exposed to on a daily basis comes from commercial interests, an important aspect of visual culture studies is the examination of advertising including its philosophy, goals, purposes, and strategies.

The examination of imagery from the perspective of visual culture studies, then, is not for the sake of aesthetic appreciation, but for the sake of understanding and being able to take intelligent action in the world. In short, we study visual culture for meaning.

## Visual Culture Art Education

This examination of visual culture for meaning centers visual culture art education (VCAE). The primary strategy used by visual culture art educators for ascertaining meaning is critique. Critique normally takes the receiver's perspective but can also be accomplished through making visual images and creating visual performances. The point of critique is not to understand aesthetic response for its own sake, but to incorporate our aesthetic response as part of an emotional/intellectual understanding of the visual environment around us, and to intelligently construct visual meaning of our own. In what follows I explore some of the roots of this quest for meaning and then present my current understanding of VCAE.

## Some Roots of Visual Culture Art Education

Two kinds of understandings have contributed to our current cognitive conception of aesthetically framed visual artifacts and performances, setting the foundational understandings for VCAE. Those understandings are personal (rooted primarily in the disciplines of biology and cognitive psychology) and social (rooted in the social sciences, such as sociology and anthropology). In the personal realm we attend to the act of seeing itself: namely, how we see and therefore what we see. Second, in the social realm, we attend to meanings attached to seeing: namely, the socially embedded nature of visual culture rising from questions about what visual artifacts and performances do and mean in society.

### Psychological Roots: How and What We See

Addressing the personal realm first, from a cognitive psychological perspective, art education in general and VCAE in particular is indebted to a number of researchers who have considered how and what we see. Among them, Jean Piaget (1976), Rudolf Arnheim (1986, 1989), and Howard Gardner (1994, 2000) have examined the roots of seeing from a biosocial perspective, making the case that visualizing is a cognitive activity, a form of intelligence, a form of thinking. This position has wide support in art education (Efland, 2002; Eisner, 1994; Parsons, 1998).

From a cognitive perspective, sensory input is much more than mere reception; seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting are the roots of thinking. According to Arnheim (1989), the sensory system that is the primary source of our cognitive life requires ordering, invention, imagination, pattern-making, and so on for sensory input to make sense. The human eye, our window on the world, has more than 200 million receptors. As evidenced by the chaotic, indecipherable, and overwhelming visions of formerly blind people who can suddenly see, making sense of the huge amount of information delivered by these receptors requires an ordering process: an eye-brain connection.

Beginning with this premise, many art educators have examined how and what we see. June McFee (1961), for example, explored how our concepts (word structures) inform our percepts (visual structures) and vice versa. She

also articulated how word structures (concepts) alter what we see. For example, we may see a table as round even although visually it isn't, because of the (verbal) conceptual constancy provided by the word, round. In the same vein, the conceptual idea of ascribing natural or realistic qualities to a rendering can be argued to be a totally false idea, since what we see is so strongly influenced by what we know. Is Japanese Sumi-e or English landscape painting, for example, more natural? It depends on who is seeing it.

Making meaning in and of visual compositions and structures, according to Arnheim, is a crucial and foundational tool not only for understanding images but for making sense of the larger environment. The initial purpose of this sense making is, of course, survival. Is that a mean dog or friendly dog approaching? Is that truck on collision course with me or not? From this functionalist position, when we are dealing with art and aesthetic visual images, in addition to purely aesthetic concerns, we want to know the meaning of the work and its practical effects on us and on the world we inhabit.

This is the psychological root of contextualist aesthetics, and it is this ideal of contextualism that most informs visual culture art education. At root it, for contextualists and by extension visual culture art educators, is seeing and recognizing form in both its physical and its expressive (connotative) aspects for the purposes of understanding and acting on life, beyond the form itself; they want to know how the visual artifact can inform them about the beyond art, about the world. From Arnheim and others they have drawn upon the notion that seeing is an act of intelligence, that patterns have meanings beyond themselves that impact or potentially impact the world.

#### Culture's Role in the Construction of Seeing

Arnheim and others established the fact that seeing is thinking. Piaget established the fact that there are ways of seeing that are qualitatively different than each other, which he described as being intrinsic to stages of seeing-as-thinking related to our human development. Trying to understand the qualities and patterns of human development in seeing-as-thinking has become a mainstay of art education research. Through the efforts of cognitive researchers in and out of art education, developmental theory has evolved considerably since Piaget, and we now understand that children do not develop in contextless universal stages as he claimed. Rather, they develop

and in different ways and at different times because of the influence of that specific and particular contexts. The environment children grow up in heavily influences development. That environment consists most profoundly of human culture, which frames everything from attitudes to the shape of schoolrooms.

#### Intersubjectivity and Human Development

Kindler's (1998, 1999) research, for example, has shown that when children begin to draw they attach non-visual meanings to the act as well as visual ones. They also engage gesture, imitative noises, and language in a holistic meaning-making quest. This implies that even at the earliest stages children are engaged in the act of making meaning through their work and establishes mark making as communication: from a visual culture perspective, something to be read and understood. It becomes an aspect of dialogue that changes both parties in the conversation: the maker and the receiver.

This frames human development as intersubjective rather than individual and universal. That is, human understanding is achieved over time, through the senses, in a social context. Rather than Piaget's buzzing and booming world of interesting but meaningless colors and forms, Bruner (1986, 1996) says the world of the infant is already one of directed and sustained meaning making. The child wants to make sense of things, even before s/he can speak. And it is in attempts to communicate with others, through cultural activity such as art making, that meaning making is formed and refined.

Development takes place through this process of making meaning. Attempts to communicate through the use of visual symbols are what bring a child's mind to focus and frame the ways of seeing and thinking the child constructs: what s/he ends up calling reality. In their development, a child relies on the knowledge of those already in the culture to give them the feedback they need to understand themselves and the world around them. According to Bruner, through intersubjective interaction, a child gradually comes not only to find his or her own feet and to build an inner sense of self-identity, but to understand others, what they are up to, what can be done in the world, and how it operates.

#### The Objectification of Subjectivity



Another important piece for understanding visual communication was contributed by Suzanne Langer (1980). Langer described art as the practice of creating perceptible symbolic forms expressive of human feeling in a way unreachable by discursive (verbal) language. Artistic symbols, she argued, are "presentational" rather than logical and "discursive", presenting the subjective, affective, feelingful nature of life. Franz Marc's Blue Horses or a Cindy Sherman film still, for example, have the ability to objectify subjective realities, feelings, and affects, by giving them concrete form, making them conceivable and understandable emotionally as well as intellectually. The forms and composition carry the content of the work in a subjective, expressive way that makes them a source of insight, belief, reason, and even spiritual inspiration, so we gain insight into those aspects of our own and others lives.

Langer made the case that the dynamic pattern of human feeling best finds its expression in the arts and that the arts we live with actually do much to not only to reflect, but actually to form our emotive experience. This is a very important understanding for visual culture art education.



Street Art, Barcelona, Spain. Suzanne Langer made the argument that artistic symbols are present the subjective, affective, feelingful nature of life. Visual culture art education takes as a primary task the "reading" of these images.

### Biocultural Development as the Foundation of Symbolic Communication in Art

Extending ideas formulated by Langer and by Nelson Goodman, Gardner (1994) argued that visual communication (including art) is actually a language that relies on intersubjective understandings between makers and receivers of the symbols used and their relationships to each other and to their referents in the world. In making this case, Gardner begins by describing pre-verbal infants as having a world whose communication and perception center on what he calls modes and vectors. Modes and vectors are

body-centered, active ways of understanding. A mode is an affective state of being, a stance toward the world, rising from and understood from our body sense, our sense of ourselves as living, breathing, eating, coughing, defecating, feeling organisms. Modes such as being open, closed, feeling restricted, cut off, passive, retentive, or shut down all rise from our sense of our own bodies. A vector is, essentially, how the mode is carried. It gives form to and modifies the mode. Vectors give boundedness, directionality, spatial configuration, speed, density, force, and so on to the mode. Pursued lips, slouching, bouncing, and a furrowed brow are examples of vectors.

Infants modal-vectoral activity is often analogous or mimicry oriented. They copy. This is significant for human and particularly artistic development because it is the essence of engaging in the quality of something: for example sadness, depth, or blueness. Although mode and vector functioning begins as pre-symbolic activity, it leads to symbolic activity, particularly the kind of symbolic activity that centers expressive visual communication. Sensitivity to general qualitative properties is essential to artistic expression.

As a child develops s/he will continue to feel and respond feelingfully both to direct experience and as an integral part of symbolic expression. The transition to symbolic activity happens as a result of the child assimilating in his or her own body, through imitation, the physical behaviors of another, in the process gradually coming to understand him or herself as a subject, independent and separate of the other and of the world of objects and events beyond him or her. As the child's sense of self grows through imitation, his or her sense of the other grows through a sense of consciousness of the other as similar to him or her self. Eventually this leads the child to understand aspects of the other in the abstract; the voice, the face, the shoes come to stand for mama and daddy or sister. This new skill/understanding then can be projected on stuffed animals, a favorite blanket, and so on. The feelings of relationship gained through modal-vectoral imitation then develop into the first symbolic steps in communicative empathy.

This beginning of symbolic behavior and understanding, based on body consciousness, is a fundamental prerequisite of artistic understanding. In expressive visual communication, it is affectively imbued symbols that carry the message, and we learn the essential affective quality of that at a body

level. We carry that through to the symbolic level when we separate ourselves from others and from the world and recognize that a symbol a picture of a dog is not the dog itself. In this, the essential aesthetic element is empathy for the affective qualities embedded in the symbol. It is not just a dog; it's a friendly dog, a nice dog, a dog we may want to pet. How do we know this? It's embedded modal-vectorally in the picture.

It is precisely this (culturally attained) ability to manipulate affectively imbued symbols that is the heart and soul of artistic performance and which we must understand to interpret the expressive qualities of visual culture.

This understanding of the early and profound influence of culture on human development also supports the idea that creating and understanding visual artifacts and performances can be taught and learned. After we reach the symbolic stage (at ages three to seven depending on the source), growth in expressive visual communication is cultural. It requires exposure to pictures, training in perception and making, education in affective response to images, and guidance as to how these activities connect with the culture's code. Gardner's (2000) research shows that tutelage in these areas enhances children's discriminatory powers, enhancing the way they make images and their ability to pay attention to sensory and qualitative aspects of art. From a visual culture art education perspective the obvious implication is that children need to be taught to make discriminations about what they are seeing in the media and in popular culture as well as in the fine arts. Such discriminations don't come naturally; they must be taught.

Important to understanding that what we see can and should be taught, Berger (1972) established the idea that what we see is determined by what we believe, and even more profoundly, that vision is reciprocal. That is if we see we can also be seen. So seeing is reflexive. It makes us who we are. And the images we make are an extension of this reflexivity. Every image, every photograph, every painting, every advertisement, embodies a way of seeing. There is no such a thing as a neutral image. Every image embodies the point of view and values of its maker. Further, every image-maker is culturally embedded. Every artist and designer lives in and is influenced by some culture(s). So whether or not s/he wants it to, the maker's values, mores, and cultural sensibilities will be reflected in the image s/he makes. Art and design

are cultural artifacts and performance; they are visual culture, and they reflect the society of their making.

#### Some Other Perceptions of Art-as-Culture

Two social scientists who have contributed greatly to the socially based focus in art education are Richard Anderson and Ellen Dissanayake. Anderson (1990), in his book *Calliope's Sisters*, examined ten cultures' aesthetic sensibilities and rationales and uses for art and found that though the impulse to make art is universal, the forms it takes are locally specific and culturally framed. Anderson's definition of art as "culturally significant meaning encoded in an affecting sensuous medium" (p. 238) makes it immediately clear that a meaningful system of symbolic communication is defined, structured, and understood in the group context. Symbolic meanings as Saussure (1966) first alerted us, are not natural or given but assigned through social agreement.

Dissanayake (1988, 1995) approaches visual culture from an etiological perspective (the study of first causes). Her simple and profound driving question is, why is art found everywhere, in all cultures? Her answer is that it is more than just nice; it is necessary. It is a human survival strategy. In simple terms, the case she makes is that we are a successful species because we cooperate in groups. That requires that we share mores and values and ways of doing things. We bond with each other, and form and reinforce these values through ritual behavior (ceremonies, festivals, initiations, religious services and the like), and that is where art comes in. Through aesthetic means (masks, dances, posters, stained glass windows, advertisements) art causes us to pay attention to values, mores, and ways of being promoted through the rituals we engage in. Dissanayake recently stated that the social purpose of art is the creation of mutuality, the passage from feeling into shared meaning.

#### The Bridge from Contextualist Roots to Visual Culture Art Education

Following from the biocultural foundations discussed above, the primary focus of contextualist art educators has been to mine artworks and visual artifacts for meaning, rather than to experience and understand aesthetic response for its own sake. Some of the art educators who have engaged art contextually have been content to merely describe it. Others have taken it a

step further into the realm of social reconstructionism. That is, they have used their critiques of how visual culture reflects social realities as a platform to suggest what's wrong in society and how that can and should be changed. One of the first and most influential of the contemporary reconstructionists was June King McFee (1961; McFee & Degge, 1977). Many of McFee's students, including Kristin Congdon, Doug Blandy, and Graham Chalmers are still influential today in carrying on that tradition, engaging particularly in pluralistic and multicultural approaches to art education, arts administration, and art therapy.

Another art educator who engaged the anthropological method was Edmund Burke Feldman (1970). In his book, *Becoming Human through Art*, Feldman explored the anthropological, social, cultural, and historical dimensions of art in some depth as a foundation for teaching and learning in art. Another art educator to be mentioned is Laura Chapman (1978), who has produced an enormous body of work both for preservice art educators and for K-12 art students, which always has a strong component addressed to understanding the role of art in contemporary society. Many other current art educators also are exploring socially constituted approaches to visual communication including Brent Wilson, Patricia Stuhr, Don Krug, and Terry Barrett, among others. Influenced strongly by this contextualist and socially reconstructionist movement a number of art educators are now focused particularly on visual culture. Notable among them are Doug Boughton, Kerry Freedman, and Paul Duncum.

### Contemporary Visual Culture Art Education

The point of visual culture art education (VCAE) is to read and grasp the meanings of expressive visual artifacts and performances, for personal and social success in the arena of life. As Duncum (2001a, 2001b, 2002) points out, the social categories that separate art from other things in society have collapsed, leaving art not as a special, privileged domain but as a way of communicating that is as common as talking or writing and just as much a part of the basic fabric of everyday life. Visual culture includes all visual artifacts and performances from traditional high art to theme parks and shopping malls and also the popular arts. In the VCAE literature there is a special

emphasis on media and consumer culture.



The author and Julia Roberts. The ephemera of the media sometimes are more real to us than our three dimensional reality, so visual culture art education tries to understand the social, economic, and political embeddedness of artifacts and performances reflecting and constituting social mores, values, ways of being and doing, as well as the values and beliefs about that which is symbolized.

The focus of VCAE is on the artifact within the context of the culture that it is made and used. The object or performance is thought of as representing the society from which it emanates. So visual culture deals in the social, economic, and political embeddedness of artifacts and performances. In this understanding, artworks both reflect and constitute social mores, values, ways of being and doing: the social and political order. Of particular interest, according to Duncum, is second-order symbolization, which beyond reflecting mere information reflects values and beliefs about that which is symbolized: a semiotic search for the meaning of signs. Examples of this would be reflecting on what the clerestory constructed for the roller coaster in the Mall of America represents or signifies, or trying to determine what values are embedded in latest ad for the Gap.

#### VCAE s Point of View

VCAE sees aesthetic experience as informing one s response to visual culture, helping us to understand its not always positive seductiveness and immediacy. But the heart of inquiry is not to attain heightened aesthetic response; rather it is to achieve meaning through the examination of all forms of visual culture. The point of understanding is to achieve a perspective that helps us live more successfully, and ideally in a more democratic way. VCAE takes the stance that meanings lie not only in the qualities of the visual object itself, nor purely in the observer s response, but also in the relationship of the object and viewer in their authentic social context. In visual culture terms, this is called textuality (Duncum, 2001a). Textuality is the combination of the abili-

ty of the symbolized performance or object to convey meaning and the capacity of the observer to receive and understand it in a mutual context. So the (social) conditions in which meanings occur are of as much concern as the conditions of the object and receiver.

Many modernists argued that a visual image should be able to speak for itself, that if it had to be explained it was a failure. Contrary to that view, most contemporary artists and scholars hold the view that visual and verbal communication are increasingly interdependent, that how we label a visual image verbally makes all the difference in the world. Meanings are culturally embedded and determined. The Neo-Nazi's swastika is a very different, for example, than the Hindu's swastika in meaning and social significance, even though the two may look very much alike. A key understanding of VCAE is that while forms themselves may be universal, the meanings that inhere in them are culturally determined and locally specific.

Underlying this understanding is another one, even more basic, that we see what we know and we know what we see. Perhaps you've heard the admonition to be careful what you seek, because that's what you'll find. This homily illustrates the idea that rather than seeing being natural and neutral, our concepts and percepts, as Berger suggested, join with our purposes for looking to determine, literally, what we see. If we are looking for seashells at the beach we'll probably miss seeing the clouds. And at the conceptual level if we're looking for literal meaning, for example in Serrano's *Piss Christ* or in a Dell computer ad, we'll probably miss the connotative meanings.

The point is that seeing is cultural and much of what we see is in fact implied, beneath the surface, invisible to those who don't have the cultural code. Visual culture inquiry tries to get to the heart of this. In this way, VCAE continues the contextualist tradition in art education, examining the contexts of visual artifacts and performances—production, reception, and functions, as well as the technical and compositional aspects of the work.

#### Critique for Critical Understanding

To unearth the meanings from visual artifacts and performances, the post-modern strategy of critique is the primary teaching and learning tool for visual culture art education. Critique may take both verbal and visual form. The point of critique is to make the hidden and invisible in the work visible, that is,

to understand how aesthetically framed images and performances convey meanings as well as to understand the meanings conveyed. Making and visually critiquing artifacts and performances go hand in hand in this.

This critical understanding for the purpose of empowerment is visual culture art education's primary goal. Empowerment means students explore their own meanings rather than passively taking on meanings delivered by a book or the teacher. The starting point for this is students' own cultural experience. So visual and verbal critique should come from examination of critical questions relevant to the students' own lives, in and beyond school.

Because VCAE examines images in their social, political, and historical contexts, it is also inherently cross-cultural. VCAE examines how different cultures create identity through visual culture and how they respond to the increasingly universal corporate imagery. In this way it frames aesthetics as a social issue. It broadens the notion of what is to be examined aesthetically beyond high art to the likes of T-shirts, corporate logos, media campaigns, shopping malls and theme parks, and television.

A frequent end goal of these critiques of visual culture is social reconstruction. That is, the critiques examine the given, socially centered concept that holds the position of social power; deconstructs the assumptions, values, and mores that lie at the heart of these privileged constructions in a quest to find their contradictions, disjunctions, and dysfunctions; and thereby moves them out of their positions of power, centralizing instead values, mores and institutions that were previously peripheralized.

An example of socially reconstructionist critique was engaged by artists Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco (Fusco, 1995) in their installation/performance piece *Two Undiscovered Amerindians*. They dressed themselves in feathers, grass skirt and breechcloth, chest plates, beaded necklaces, and dark glasses, and put themselves in a golden cage, presenting themselves as Amerindians from an island in the Gulf of Mexico that had somehow been overlooked by Europeans for 500 years. In the cage, they performed traditional tasks such as sawing voodoo dolls in half, lifting weights while watching TV, and working on a laptop computer. A donation box was put out front by the description of their habitat, indicating Fusco would dance to rap music for a small fee and Gomez-Pena would tell authen-



tic Amerindian stories (which he did in a nonsensical language). Zoo guards were on hand to speak to the visitors on behalf of the primitives since the performers couldn't understand them, and to take Fusco and Gomez-Pena to the bathroom on leashes. In addition, a peek at authentic Guatinaui male genitals could be had for five dollars.

In this reverse ethnography piece the performers observed the observers observing them. Their performance was intended to be about fetishizing so-called primitive peoples and decontextualizing and destroying indigenous culture through removing its authenticity by means of objectification of the ethnographic gaze and the attendant dominating influence of Euro American culture. It was intended to sensitize people to the distancing and objectification that allows people to commit genocide against others, to enslave them and seize their lands in the name of the king, or Jesus, or national security.

#### A Strategic Overview of the Pedagogy of VCAE

In a National Art Education Association Advisory from Spring, 2002, author Doug Boughton outlines a pedagogical position for VCAE agreed to at a conference on that topic. The pedagogy he outlined is as follows:

1. Focus of curriculum content that is conceptually based, interdisciplinary, and socially relevant through creating and responding to images, artifacts and performances.
2. Encourage students to take responsibility for their learning under the guidance of a teacher who initiates experiences with a full range of visual culture.
3. Expand awareness and use of newer visual media and alternative sites of teaching and learning.
4. Engage the perspectives of artists who create a variety of forms of visual culture to broaden students' imaginations and inform critiques.
5. Encourage learners to reflect on the relationship of visual culture to the construction of identity, the richness of global cultures, and the integrity of natural and human-made environments.

6. Assess student work using long-term reflective methods and criteria developed and refined by ongoing debate among stakeholders (including students, teachers, and community members) to determine the nature of knowledge acquisition and application.

#### Content for VCAE

The content of VCAE is the broad range of visual culture we are all exposed to every day. Since the traditional fine arts play only a small role in our lives today, the primary focus is on the popular arts and culture that drive contemporary society. Carried increasingly by newer media, we are surrounded by popular art, design art (including the built environment), and advertising art, which exert ever more influence over our values and decisions. The majority of created imagery is made for commercial purposes and broadcast on commercial mass media. So it is increasingly in the mass media and the popular arts that we need to look for the causes of our values and decisions.

The culturally constructed environment projects and construes meanings, intentional and unintentional, sincere and manipulative, that constantly communicate something to somebody. Living successfully in this environment requires that we understand what is being communicated. We record our lives and our media interests with digital or video cameras and replay them over and over for ourselves and others until the images become embedded in the collective psyche: the planes hitting the World Trade Towers, the box-cars full of people in Schindler's List, Homer Simpson's selfish and blundering ineptitude. Which of these are real? How can we tell? What does real mean? These are the concerns of VCAE.



Gulliver's Playground, Valencia, Spain. The culturally constructed environment projects and construes meanings, intentional and unintentional, sincere and manipulative, that constantly communicate something to somebody. Living successfully in this environment requires that we understand what is being communicated.

## Conclusion

Paolo Freire (1973) said that perhaps the greatest tragedy of contemporary society is people's domination by the myths and manipulations by modern ideological and commercial advertising. If calculated manipulations of culturally constructed symbols by ideological and pecuniary forces go unchecked it will result in the loosening of the associative structure of society. Symbols' disassociation from shared traditional meanings would be cultural schizophrenia. Likewise Sontag's (1980) critical analysis of fascist art as having a predisposition to control a populace through emotionally manipulative means and through a self-conscious repudiation of the intellect with the end goal of affecting behavior sounds alarmingly like the major characteristics of advertising art.

In this context, it is vital that students are given tools and the depth of sensibility to make informed decisions about their choices in life and their choices in society. If the role of art education is to help students develop the critical ability to go beyond accepting the prescriptions and recipes of established institutional powers, then an understanding of visual culture is crucial. Within the venerable tradition of contextualism, built on the biosocial foundation that visual communication is a cognitive, symbolic act, the ability for students to critically engage the major themes of the times through VCAEA may be crucial for not only the students as individuals, but for the society as a whole.

## References

- Anderson, R. (1990). *Calliope's sisters: A comparative study of philosophies of art*. Upper saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Arnheim, R. (1986). *New essays on the psychology of art*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Arnheim, R. (1989). *Thoughts on Education*. Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for Education in the Arts.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin.
- Boughton, D. (2002). *Art education and visual culture*. NAEA Advisory, Spring, 2002, Available at [naea@dgs.dsys.com](mailto:naea@dgs.dsys.com).
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chapman, L. (1978). *Approaches to art in education*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
- Dissanayake, E. (1988). *What is art for?* Seattle, WA: University of Washington.
- Dissanayake, E. (1995). *Homo aestheticus: Where art comes from and why*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Duncum, P. & Bracey, T. (2001). *On knowing*. Christchurch, NZ: University of Canterbury Press.
- Duncum, P. (2001). *Visual culture: Developments, definitions, and directions for art education*. *Studies in Art Education*, 42 (2), 101-112.
- Duncum, P. (2002). *Clarifying visual culture art education*. *Art Education*, 55 (3), 6-11.
- Efland, A. (2002). *Art and cognition*. Reston, VA: National Art education Association.
- Eisner, E. (1994). *Cognition and curriculum reconsidered (2nd Ed.)*. New

- York: Teachers College.
- Feldman, E. (1970). *Becoming human through art*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Seabury.
- Fusco, C. (1995). *English is broken here*. New York: The New Press.
- Gardner, H. (1994). *The arts and human development*. New York: Harper/Collins.
- Gardner, H. (2000). *The disciplined mind*. New York: Penguin.
- Josephson, S. (1996). *From idolatry to advertising: Visual art and contemporary culture*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Kindler, A. (1998). Culture and development of pictorial repertoires. *Studies in Art Education*, 39 (2), 147-167.
- Kindler, A. (1999). From endpoints to repertoires: A challenge to art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 40 (4), 330-349.
- Langer, S. (1980). *Philosophy in a new key: A study in the symbolism of reason, rite, and art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McFee, J. (1961). *Preparation for art*. San Francisco: Wadsworth.
- McFee, J. & Degge, R. (1977). *Art, culture, and environment*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Parsons, M. (1998). Integrated curriculum and our paradigm of cognition in the arts. *Studies in art education*, 39 (2), 103-116.
- Piaget, J. (1976). *The child and reality*. New York: Penguin.
- Saussure, F. (1966). *A course in general linguistics* (Trans. W. Baskin). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Sontag, S. (1980). *Under the sign of Saturn*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux.

## Other Resources

Adbusters: <http://www.adbusters.org/home/>

Bowers, C. (1974). *Cultural literacy for freedom*. Eugene, OR: Elan.

Evans, J & Hall, S. (1999). *Visual culture: The reader*. London: Sage. The most comprehensive and scholarly source of visual culture on this list.

*The journal of multicultural and cross-cultural research in art education*, 18.

(2000). Volume 18 is a theme issue devoted to visual culture art

education, with articles by Kevin Tavin, Brent Wilson, Paul Duncum, and Keny Freedman. An excellent resource.

Mirzoeff, N. (1999). *An introduction to visual culture*. London: Routledge. A good overview, particularly strong in analyzing photographic images as culture.

# 根源、理由與結構 視覺文化藝術 教育之架構<sup>1</sup>

湯姆·安德森

佛羅里達州立大學

## 摘要

本文探討視覺文化之歷史背景，以及與藝術教育的關聯，包括視覺文化藝術教育在心理學、社會科學、藝術教育方面的理論基礎；最後提出視覺文化藝術教育中，教與學的根本前提及結構。

「我們已成為包圍在人為製品之繭中的有機自我。」(Susan Josephson)

## 視覺文化

我們現在的生活，大多已經脫離了自然環境，都處在人為的環境裡，很少看到月亮、在戶外吹風淋雨，或在野外見到動物。我們生活在人為控制的世界，天氣總是舒適宜人，用的是人工照明，大大延長了每天可用的時間。連

---

<sup>1</sup> 本文取材自筆者與Melody Milbrandt 合著之藝術教育教科書《為生活而藝術》第三章；該書訂於2004年由紐約 McGraw-Hill 出版。

我們的空間感都受到人為環境的制約：住家挑高約2.5公尺，工作場所3公尺以上，幾乎所有的空間都是方正的，只有車子例外。車子像個繭，從一處移動到他處的時候，保護著我們與外界隔離。不論醒、睡、呼吸、成長、生、死，都有無數的人為干預，脫離了大自然，我們自己的建構成了我們的世界。（圖1）



圖1：人為建構物似乎已成為我們世界的單一樣貌（圖為美國佛羅里達州海灘旁的某一果汁攤位）

這個建構的世界中，透過電視與網際網路，快速汰換的電子商品與間接經驗，無時無刻不呈現在我們面前。北美家庭98%都有電視機，而且每天開機時間平均達 7.5 小時。不開電視的時候，就開電腦。全球其他地區的許多國家，統計數字也相去不遠，我們愈來愈依賴電視和網際網路告訴我們身邊環境以外的一切。這些電子環境，漸漸與我們記憶中、與我們感受中的個人經驗難以區分。事實上，美國人對影星 Ellen DeGeneres 或電視節目主持人 Vanna White 可能比隔壁鄰居還熟悉；在「探索頻道」上看到澳洲奇景艾爾斯岩的介紹，比自己居住的城市還清楚；同樣的，澳洲人或台灣人也許對影星 Ben Affleck 比自己的家人更瞭解。

在這個視覺建構的世界，語文及其線性／邏輯的思維不再是主導，取而代之的是娛樂導向的視覺影像與發散式的網狀思維。電子媒體除了左右我們對於人、地的關係感受，也影響了我們的時間觀與歷史觀。精彩集錦、片斷的資訊、口號，怕觀眾無聊而立即重播的畫面，都比真實的時間有趣好看，但也減低了我們持久深入的能力，愈來愈不喜歡專注思考。

例如新聞都經過編輯，以人人熟悉的格式呈現，新聞也成了「節目」，包含戲劇的成分，主播穿戴得光鮮整齊，先唸上30秒鐘稿頭，其中盡是聲音和影像的零碎片段。相對於新聞內容的混亂（謀殺、政治動亂、預算審查、醜聞弊案、運動、天氣），看似條理分明的形式其實只是表象，而且深受商



業壓力宰制，商業考量決定格式；選舉勝負取決於電視上的形象，而非實際的理念政見。正如McLuhan (1964) 早有預言，到我們這個時代，媒介真的變成了訊息：

而這個媒介是視覺的媒介。甚至MTV的音樂片，也是靠巧妙包裝的視覺影像，為沒什麼音樂才華的歌手加分。書局裡還出現了「視覺學習區」，電腦書籍區一排又一排《視覺入門完全傻瓜手冊》一類的書，談的盡是視覺溝通的原理建議，告訴你在網頁、廣告、商業簡報中怎麼推銷自己。

## 視覺文化教育

今天的世界愈來愈視覺化，由人類所建構，也是視覺文化研究的焦點。當代文化若要成功，民眾必須能夠閱讀這個建構的環境，解讀及使用其中的視覺符號。因此，在「為生活而藝術」的課程中，除了教授傳統的精緻藝術之外，也必須包含範圍更廣泛的視覺文化。

視覺文化的內涵，包括各式各樣的視覺作品及演出，以及新興的技術，不論是在美術館內或美術館外，同時也包含這些人為作品、演出的創作者與使用者所持的信念、價值觀與態度。這樣的方法以社會為基礎，重視創作與觀賞的背景脈絡，認為背景脈絡與人為作品、演出本身是同樣重要的。而視覺形式的社會與儀節意義，乃深受個人所處之文化的左右，因此視覺文化研究主要是從消費者的觀點出發，而非生產者（藝術家、建築師、設計師、電影攝影師等）的觀點。研究重點在於從真實的背景中瞭解藝術作品及其他視覺作品、演出、環境，而不是為創造一個以精緻藝術教育為中心、強化了的美學經驗，也不是為瞭解這樣的經驗。許多人將這樣的教育比喻為視覺人類學。人類學家研究各地社會的藝術形式，以瞭解社會；同樣的道理，視覺文化批評家檢討我們自己的視覺作品，以瞭解當代的文化。

視覺文化研究的本質通常是跨學科的，在大專院校中，這種科際整合課程通常屬於文化研究、藝術史、平面設計、溝通等課程。視覺文化研究也會包含各種政治立場，內容可能從傳統的藝術史研究、平面設計到流行文化、電視與電影、數位科技、傳媒視覺溝通，都包括在內。在認知上，視覺文化研究探討的議題，包括傳統的認知到後現代批評：

對當代流行媒體及文化感興趣的學者，通常會採取後現代的批評。這些批評通常都有社會重建的目標，也就是批評影像及演出，以瞭解視覺文化的

社會基礎及影響，並就所發現的問題提出解決之道。這些批評的策略是檢驗人為建構環境中的影像、演出及面向，以找出其意涵、意義及影響；判斷其哲學前提，找出特定的表達對於哪些人有什麼關聯；以及這一切最終對於個人與社會有何衝擊。學者關切的通常是性別、社會範疇及建構（我們如何看待自我及他人身為男性、女性、同性戀、有色人種、智障或肢障人士等等角色）、誰掌握權力、誰沒有權力，以及這一切如何呈現。由於我們日常接觸的視覺刺激，多半來自商業來源，因此視覺文化研究的一大層面就在於對廣告之檢驗，包括廣告的哲學、目標、目的、策略等等。

也就是，從視覺文化研究的觀點來探討影像，並不是為了美學賞析，而是為了了解，以期能夠採取明智的行動。簡而言之，我們研究視覺文化，是為探討意義。

## 視覺文化藝術教育

探討視覺文化的意義，是以視覺文化藝術教育為中心，而視覺文化藝術教育人士判斷意義時，採取的策略主要是批評。批評通常是從接受者的角度，但也可以透過視覺影像、視覺演出之創作。批評目的不在於為美學反應本身而瞭解美學反應，而是在瞭解我們身邊的視覺環境時，將美學反應整合於感性／知性的理解中，明智地建構我們的視覺意義。下文我要探討這種意義之追尋的一些理論根源，其次再說明我目前對視覺文化藝術教育的瞭解。

## 視覺文化藝術教育的一些理論根源

對於美學架構的視覺作品與演出，我們目前的認知概念來自於兩種理解，也是視覺文化藝術教育的理解基礎。這兩種理解就是個人的（主要基於生物學與認知心理學）以及社會的（基於社會學科，例如社會學與人類學）（圖2）。

在個人領域，我們著重在「看」的行為本身，也就是我們如何觀看，因此也就影響我們看到什麼。其次在社會領域，我們著重於「看」的意義，也就是視覺文化的社會本質，關係到視覺作品與演出在社會中做什麼、具有什麼意義等問題。



圖2：視覺文化透過藝術形式、藝術批評等面向，檢視當代藝術的豐富內涵；此與人類學家考掘社會文化性的意圖雷同。（圖為美國佛羅里達州所舉辦之嘉年華會中的表演者）

### 心理學的基礎：我們怎麼看，又看到什麼

首先談到個人領域。從認知心理學的角度，藝術教育，尤其是視覺文化藝術教育，其理論基礎特別要歸功於幾位學者的研究。例如 Jean Piaget (1976)、Rudolf Arnheim (1986, 1989)、Howard Gardner (1994, 2000) 等人都曾以生物社會的觀點，探討看的根源，他們主張視覺化是一項認知活動，一種智能、一種思維。這樣的立場，得到藝術教育界普遍支持 (Efland, 2002; Eisner, 1994; Parsons, 1998)。

從認知的角度，感官訊息遠不只是接受而已，視覺、聽覺、嗅覺、觸覺、味覺，都是思考的根源。據 Arnheim (1989) 指出，感官系統是認知生活的主要來源，感官所接受的訊息需要經過組織、創新、想像、歸納等等，才能夠產生意義。雙眼是我們看世界的窗口，佈滿了兩億個以上的受器。失明的人突然恢復視力之後，所看到的影像一片混亂、無法解讀，這種情形正足以證明，眼睛受器所傳遞的大量訊息，必須經過組織的過程才能夠產生意義，也就是眼－腦連結。

根據這個假設，很多美術教育人士致力於探討我們怎麼看，又看到些什麼。例如 June McFee (1961) 研究人的概念（語文結構）與感知（視覺結構）之間如何互相傳遞訊息。她也說明了語文結構（概念）會改變我們之所見，例如圓桌即使不圓，我們仍可能看成圓形，因為「圓」這個字有其恆定的概念。同樣的，將一件作品視為自然或寫實，這樣的概念也可能完全不實，因為人之所見深受我們之所知影響。例如，日本水墨畫與英國風景畫，哪一個更接近自然？這完全要看觀者是誰。

Arnheim 指出，找出視覺構圖與結構的意義，是一項根本而關鍵的工

具，不但可用於瞭解影像，更有助於解讀大環境。解讀的最初目的當然是爲了生存，走過來的那隻狗是兇惡還是友善？那輛卡車會不會撞上我？從這種功能的立場而言，我們處理藝術與美學視覺意象時，除了純粹的美學考量之外，還希望知道作品的意義、作品對我們與身邊的世界又具有什麼實際的影響。

這就是背景脈絡論美學的心理學根源，也就是這樣的背景脈絡論理想，最能成爲視覺文化藝術教育的立論。對於背景脈絡論者，以及視覺文化藝術教育人士，這個立論的根源即在於從實體與表達（隱含）兩方面來看形式、辨識形式，進而超越形式本身，能夠瞭解人生、採取行動。學者希望知道，視覺作品對於我們瞭解藝術之外的世界有何幫助。Arnheim 等人援用「視覺乃一智能行爲」的觀念，認爲模式有其本身之外的意義，可能影響世界。

### 「看」之建構中，文化所扮演的角色

Arnheim 等人指明了觀看即思考的事實；兒童心理學家 Piaget 研究指出，觀看有許多方式，其本質各不相同，取決於與人類發展有關的「觀看即思考」之階段。因此，瞭解人類「觀看即思考」的發展特質與型式，乃成爲藝術教育研究的重心。由於藝術教育相關的認知研究，發展理論自 Piaget 之後已有長足的進展，現在我們知道，兒童的發展並非如他所說，都依循相同的階段而與背景無關。事實上兒童的發展，深受其生長背景影響而有不同的方式與速度。兒童成長的環境，對發展有深遠的影響，而成長環境主要即爲人類文化，從態度到教室的形狀，都與文化息息相關。

### 主體互動與人類發展

例如 Kindler (1998, 1999) 的研究顯示，兒童開始畫圖時，畫圖的行爲具有視覺及視覺以外兩方面的意義；兒童也會加上手勢、模仿聲音、語言，以全面的方式來表達意義。也就是說，兒童自最初的發展階段，就已經透過作品來表達意義，畫圖乃是一種溝通行爲；從視覺文化的觀點，兒童的圖畫是要讓人閱讀、瞭解的東西，成爲對話的一個層面，創作者與接受者雙方都會因此改變。

這樣的立論將人類發展視爲主體之互動，而非個人與普遍的。也就是說，人的理解是經過時間、透過感官、在特定社會背景中所形成的。Bruner (1986, 1996) 認爲嬰兒的世界並非如 Piaget 所謂只有熱鬧的色彩形狀而不具

意義，其實嬰兒期就已展開明確、持續的意義建構過程。孩子甚至在學說話以前，就已開始瞭解事物。人希望與他人溝通，透過各種文化活動例如藝術創作，也就形成了意義。

發展就是出現在這個意義建構的過程。應用視覺象徵以與他人溝通，讓孩童的心智有了焦點，決定了觀看與思考的方式，也就是孩童所知的現實。孩童的發展要依賴文化中既有的知識給予的回饋，以瞭解他們本身及周遭的世界。Bruner 認為，透過主體之間的互動，孩童逐漸建立起自己的身份認同，同時也能瞭解他人，瞭解這個環境中允許的行為、世界如何運作。

### 主體之客觀化

有關視覺溝通的另一項重要研究，來自 Suzanne Langer (1980)。Langer 認為藝術是創造可辨知之象徵形式的一種作為，以表達言語所無法表達之人類情感。她說，藝術象徵是「表象」而非邏輯論述的，代表我們主觀、情意、感性的本質。例如動物表現派畫家 Franz Marc 的《藍馬》或攝影大師 Cindy Sherman 的作品，能夠將主觀的現實、情感、感受客觀化，賦予具體的形式，使之在情感上、智識上都能夠讓我們瞭解。形式與結構將作品的內容做主觀的呈現，使我們產生看法、信念、理由，甚至心靈的啓發，因而能夠瞭解我們本身與他人生活中的各個層面。

Langer 說明人類情感的動態模式，在藝術中得到最充分的表達，我們生活中的藝術實際上不只是反映我們的情感經驗，更形塑我們的情感經驗。這個瞭解，對於視覺文化藝術教育極其重要。（圖3）



圖3：Langer曾質疑藝術符徵是否能再現生活本質的主體性、情感性。或許我們可從視覺文化藝術教育中，尋找影像辨讀的答案。（圖為西班牙巴塞隆納的藝術街）

### 以生物文化發展做為藝術之象徵溝通的基礎

Gardner (1994) 根據Langer 與 Nelson Goodman 的觀念再做延伸，提出視覺

溝通（包括視覺藝術）實際上是一種語言，有賴於主體之間（象徵符號的創造者與接受者）能夠互相瞭解，有賴於主體及指涉對象之間的關係。Gardner 首先說明不會講話的嬰兒也有溝通、感知的世界，其中心他稱之為模態與向量。模態與向量是以身體為中心的主動瞭解模式。模態是一種感情狀態，一種對待世界的立場，來自於身體感官，人對於本身活著、呼吸、吃飯、咳嗽、排泄的種種自覺。例如開放、封閉、覺得受限制、孤立、被動、記憶等等模態，都來自於我們的身體感受。向量基本上就是模態如何呈現出來，賦予模態形式，也予以修正。向量給予模態界限、方向、空間結構、速度、密度、力量等等；翹嘴、皺眉、低頭垂肩、蹦蹦跳跳，都是向量的例子。

嬰幼兒的模態／向量活動，往往是模仿而來，學習別人的動作。這一點對於人類發展，尤其是藝術發展非常重要，因為這是參與、介入事物之本質的根本條件，例如悲傷、深度或憂鬱。雖然模態與向量的功能一開始是不具象徵的活動，但會逐漸發展為象徵活動，尤其是以視覺溝通為中心的象徵活動。對事物之本質特性的敏銳度，是藝術表達的基本要件。

隨著孩童逐漸發展，對於直接經驗與象徵表達兩方面，都會持續有所感受與反應；轉變為象徵活動，是孩童透過模仿，將他人的肢體行為內化為本身行為的結果，在過程中逐漸瞭解自己是一個主體，不同於他人、不同於外界的事物及事件。孩童透過模仿而逐漸建立對自我的認識之際，也會發現他人與自己的相似之處，而建立起對他人的認識；最終能夠瞭解他人的抽象層面，聲音、臉孔、鞋子成為媽媽、爸爸、姊姊的代表，進而將這個新的技巧／理解投射到玩具、最喜歡的毯子等等。透過模態／向量模仿而形成的關係感受，又會逐漸發展為溝通之移情作用的最初象徵步驟。

這種基於身體知覺所得到的初步象徵與理解行為，是藝術理解的根本要件。在表意的視覺溝通中，正是由這些帶有情感的象徵來傳遞訊息，而我們是在身體的層次學會了根本的情感特質；等到我們將自己與他人、自己與外界分開，能夠明白象徵符號（例如一張狗的照片）並不是狗本身，也就進入了象徵的層次。這其中，根本的美學要素，是對象徵符號所內含的情感特質能夠產生移情作用。照片中不只是一隻狗，更是一隻友善的狗，讓人想要帶回家當寵物。我們怎麼會知道的呢？因為照片中就含有這樣的模態／向量。

這種從文化中獲得的能力，能夠操縱象徵符號所內含的情感，正是藝術

演出的靈魂所在，也是解讀視覺文化的表達特質時所必須瞭解的一點。

文化對於個人發展的影響既如此之早、如此之深，那麼視覺作品、演出的創造與理解，也就可以教導、可以學習。進入象徵階段後（約在三歲到七歲，因人而異），表達的視覺溝通就是透過文化而成長，需要大量接觸圖片、感受與創作的訓練、對意象產生情感反應的教育，以及學習這些活動與文化中的編碼如何關聯起來。Gardner (2000) 的研究顯示，這些領域的陶冶能夠提升兒童的鑑別力，強化其創作影像的能力，對感官與藝術的本質也會更加敏銳。從視覺文化美術教育的觀點而言，明顯的意義就在於兒童需要接受訓練，以鑑別他們在媒體、流行文化、精緻藝術中所看到的種種影像。這樣的鑑別力不是與生俱來的，必須經過學習。

觀看是可以學習、也應該學習的，Berger (1972) 更提出一個觀念，認為人之所見乃是取決於我們的信念，甚至更深入而言，視覺所見是「互惠」的；也就是說，如果我們看到別人，別人也會看到我們。所以觀看是反思的，使我們成為現在的我們，而我們所創造的意象，就是這種反思的延伸。每一個意象、每一張照片、每一幅圖畫、每一則廣告，都體現了一種觀看方式，絕對無所謂中立的意象，每個意象都會呈現創作者的觀點與價值觀。此外，每個意象的創作者都有其文化背景，每位藝術家與設計師必然都處在某一（某些）文化中，也受其影響。所以創作者無論有意或無意，其價值觀、道德觀、文化態度必然都會反映在所創作的意象中。藝術與設計是文化的製作與演出，屬於視覺文化，反映所處的社會。

### 藝術即文化的其他一些概念

有兩位社會學家對於強調美術教育的社會面向貢獻良多，亦即 Richard Anderson 和 Ellen Dissanayake。Anderson (1990) 在其著作《Calliope's Sisters》一書中，探討十個文化的美學態度與理論，以及藝術的用途，結果發現藝術創作的衝動雖是普遍的人性特徵，但創作形式卻各地不同，深受文化影響。Anderson 對藝術的定義是「蘊含於情感、感官媒介的重要文化意義」（238頁），明白顯示有意義的象徵溝通體系，必須在群體環境中定義、建構及瞭解。正如語言學家 Saussure (1966) 所率先指出，象徵意義並非自然存在或外來的，而是透過社會共識所指定。

從原因論的角度來看視覺文化，她提出一個簡單而深刻的問題，亦即為

什麼所有的文化中都有藝術？她的答案是藝術不只令人娛悅，更是必要的需求，是人類的生存策略。簡單的說，她認為人類這個物種能成功演化，原因就在於我們能夠集體合作，而合作的前提是必須建立共同的道德觀、價值觀及行事方式。我們彼此之間密切連繫，透過儀式行爲（典禮、節慶、宗教儀式等等）形成共同的價值觀，不斷強化，這也正是須借重藝術的地方。透過美學手段（面具、舞蹈、海報、彩繪玻璃、廣告），藝術引發我們注意典禮儀式中的價值觀、道德習俗與行事方式。Dissanayake 最近指出，藝術的社會目的在於建立共通之處，從感受轉變為共同的意義。

### 從背景根源到視覺文化藝術教育

基於上文討論的生物文化基礎，強調背景脈絡的藝術教育人士，首要關注一直在於探究藝術作品與視覺作品的意義，而非只為體驗、瞭解美學反應本身。有些藝術教育人士對於藝術背景的探討，僅止於描述；有些則更進一步涉及社會重建論，也就是針對視覺文化如何反映現實，以此批評為平台，找出社會的問題，以及可行的解決之道。當代重建論學者中，June King McFee (1961; McFee & Degge, 1977) 是知名的人物，影響深遠；他的許多學生，包括 Kristin Congdon、Doug Blandy、Graham Chalmers 等人，迄今仍有其影響力，尤其是著重於藝術教育之多元教學法與多元文化教學法、藝術行政、藝術治療等。

另一位致力於藝術教育之人類學教學法的學者是 Edmund Burke Feldman (1970)。Feldman 在其著作《Becoming Human through Art》一書中，探討藝術的人類學、社會、文化、歷史等層面，做為藝術之教與學的基礎。

另一位是 Laura Chapman (1978)，她為藝術教育師範生及中小學視覺藝術課程編寫了大量教材，對於瞭解藝術在當代社會中的角色，有許多精闢的看法。目前也有許多藝術教育人士，繼續致力於視覺溝通之社會面向，包括 Brent Wilson、Patricia Suhr、Don Krug、Terry Barrett 等。受到這種背景論與社會重建運動的影響，許多藝術教育人士如今特別專注於視覺文化，其中最知名的包括 Doug Boughton、Kerry Freedman 與 Paul Duncum。

### 當代視覺文化藝術教育



視覺文化美術教育的重點，在於解讀視覺作品及演出的意義，使個人及社會生活能夠更圓滿。Duncum (2001a, 2001b, 2002) 指出，社會上區分藝術與其他事物的社會類別已經崩解，藝術如今已不是特別的領域或專屬於少數精英分子，而是一種溝通方式，正如說話、書寫一樣平常，是日常生活中不可或缺的根本要素。視覺文化包括各種視覺作品與演出，從傳統的精緻藝術、主題樂園到購物中心，也包括流行藝術。視覺文化藝術教育的文獻特別強調媒體與消費者文化，（圖4）



圖4：浮光掠影的媒體，有時似乎比真實世界更為真實，視覺文化藝術教育即試圖瞭解藝術作品所置放的社會、經濟、政治脈絡，以呈現當代的價值、作為與信念（圖為本文作者與 Julia Roberts 的影像）

視覺文化藝術教育的焦點，在於從文化脈絡中瞭解創作與使用的背景。作品或演出是為呈現其社會背景，所以視覺文化是探究作品與演出的社會、經濟、政治等背景環境，從這個觀點來看，藝術作品反映社會的道德觀、價值觀、行事方式，同時也構成這些價值體系，也就是社會與政治秩序。Duncum 認為，特別值得注意的是第二層的象徵，也就是不只反映訊息，更反映象徵背後的價值觀與信念，這是對符號之意義的探究。例如思考「美國購物中心」裡面的雲霄飛車，為什麼要做天窗，代表什麼意義？或是 Gap 最新的廣告呈現哪些價值？

### 視覺文化藝術教育的觀點

視覺文化藝術教育將美學經驗視為瞭解自己對視覺文化的反應，幫助我們更清楚視覺文化並不一定都是正面的吸引力或直接可懂的。但是探討的核心並不是為了獲得強化的美學反應，而是檢視視覺文化所有的形式以獲致意義。瞭解的重點是為建立一個視角，幫助我們生活得更完滿、更民主。視覺文化藝術教育的立場是意義不僅存在於視覺作品本身的特質，不全然在於觀看者的回應，同時也存在於真實的社會背景中，作品與觀看者的關係之間。以視

覺文化的術語來說，這就稱為「背景論」(Duncum, 2001a)。「背景論」是在共同的背景脈絡中，一方面象徵的演出或作品能夠表達意義，另一方面觀看者能夠接收、瞭解這個意義。所以意義所發生的(社會)條件，與作品、接受者的條件同樣重要。

許多現代派人士主張視覺意象的意義應該能夠自然浮現，如果需要解釋，就是失敗了；然而當代藝術家與學者則持不同的觀點，認為視覺與語文溝通愈來愈互相依賴，我們如何用語文來描述一個視覺意象，有極大的差異。意義存在於文化中，由文化所決定。例如新納粹主義的「卍」符號，與古印度的吉祥標誌，雖然看起來非常類似，卻具有截然不同的內涵與社會意義。視覺文化藝術教育的一大觀點是，形式本身也許是舉世皆然，但內含的意義卻因不同文化、地區而各不相同。

這個觀點背後還有一個更根本的出發點，也就是我們只看見我們所知，只知道我們所見。有句話勸人許願要小心，因為許了願常常可能成真。這句俗諺正可說明，「觀看」不是中立、自然的行為，而是如 Berger 所說，帶著我們既有的目的，也就決定了我們會看到什麼。如果我們在海灘上找貝殼，很可能就會對天上的雲視而不見；如果在概念上我們只想著字面上的意義，例如 Serrano 的《Piss Christ》或是戴爾電腦的廣告，可能就會看不到言外之意。

也就是，「看」是文化的行為，而我們所見的一切，就深層意義來說，若是跟我們沒有共同文化編碼的人，大多是看不見的。視覺文化的探討，就是要找出「觀看」最深層的意涵，因此視覺文化美術教育延續美術教育中背景脈絡的傳統，檢視視覺作品、演出的背景，包括其創作生產、接受與反應、功能，以及技巧與結構等層面。

### 為求批判理解而批評

為找出視覺作品與演出深層的意義，視覺文化藝術教育的教與學，以後現代的批評策略為主要的工具。批評可以包括語文與視覺兩種形式，其目的是為了找出有形的作品背後隱藏、看不見的內涵，瞭解美學架構的意象與演出如何傳遞意義，同時也能夠瞭解所傳達的意義。創作與從視覺上批評作品與演出是息息相關的，

這樣的批評瞭解以達到「掌握知識」的目的，是視覺文化藝術教育最重

要的目標。掌握知識是指學生能夠探索他們自己的意義，而不是被動接受課本或老師告訴他們的意義。而探索的起點就是學生自己的文化經驗，所以視覺與語文的批評，應該從學生切身的重大問題著手，不論是校園內或校園以外的生活，對學生都極其重要。

由於視覺文化藝術教育從社會、政治、歷史背景等探討意象，所以本質上也必然是跨文化的；視覺文化藝術教育探究不同的文化如何透過視覺文化來建立本身的認同，對於愈來愈全球性的企業影像，又如何因應。因此，在視覺文化藝術教育中，美學成爲社會議題，擴大了美學的探討範圍，不再只限於精緻藝術，更包含了 T恤、企業識別標誌、媒體廣告、購物中心、主題樂園、電視等等。

這些視覺文化的批評，一個常見的目標是社會重建，也就是檢討既有的、主流的概念，深入分析這些社會上普遍接納的假設、價值觀、道德觀，將之解構，找出其中的矛盾衝突、分裂、行不通的地方，最後將這些觀念逐出主流的地位，讓原本非主流的價值觀、道德觀等規範成爲主流。

社會重建式的批評，一個例子是 Guillermo Gomez-Pena 和 Coco Fusco (Fusco, 1995) 兩位藝術家所創作的裝置藝術／演出《Two Undiscovered Amerindians》。他們身穿羽毛、草裙、腰布、胸甲，戴著珠子項鍊和墨鏡，把自己關在金色的籠子裡，說明自己是墨西哥灣某個小島上的印地安人，歐洲人過去 500 年來不知道爲什麼一直沒注意到這個小島，直到現在才發現。他們在籠子裡做些傳統的印地安活動，例如將巫毒木偶鋸成兩半，一邊還舉重、看電視，使用筆記型電腦。籠子外面有個捐獻箱，旁邊的說明描述了他們原有的生活環境，還說只要花一點錢，就可以看 Fusco 隨著饒舌音樂跳舞，Gomez-Pena 則會說一段真正的印地安故事（他真的用別人都聽不懂的話說了一段）。因爲這兩個「原住民」與遊客言語不通，所以由旁邊的「動物園管理員」向遊客解說，兩人上廁所時，還繫著皮帶由管理員拉著去。此外，只要付 5 美元，就可以看到 Guatinaui 男人貨真價實的命根子。

在這場人種誌的逆向演出中，兩位演出者觀察著他們的觀眾，表演的目的在於諷刺社會上盲目崇拜所謂的原住民，同時卻又摧毀原住民文化，人種誌的研究將「原住民」客體化，以及歐美文化的強勢影響，使原住民失去了原有的背景脈絡。演出者希望凸顯這種疏離、客體化的問題，過去有太多的例子，以國王、上帝、或國家安全之名，實際上卻是滅絕種族的暴行。

## 視覺文化藝術教育教學法的策略

2002 年春發表的《全國藝術教育協會報告》中，Doug Boughton 列出視覺文化藝術教育的教學法，這是經大會討論後共同的決議，內容包括：

- 1 課程內容應探討意象、作品、演出之創作及回應，專注於以概念為基礎、科際整合，且與社會議題相關。
- 2 鼓勵學生為自己的學習負起責任，教師從旁引導，提供學生豐富完整的視覺文化經驗。
- 3 介紹新的視覺媒材及教、學管道，提升學生對其瞭解及使用。
- 4 介紹各種不同形式之視覺文化的創作者，讓學生瞭解不同的觀點角度，擴展學生的想像力、提升批評能力。
- 5 鼓勵學生思考視覺文化與認同之建構之間的關係，全球各文化之豐富多元，以及自然環境與人為環境的完整性。
- 6 評量學生的作品時採用長期的思考反省辦法及標準，透過相關各方（包括學生、教師、社區成員）持續的辯論，以判斷學生習得之知識及應用情形。

## 視覺文化藝術教育的內容

視覺文化藝術教育的內容，就是我們每天所接觸的視覺文化全部的範圍。而傳統的藝術在我們的日常生活中只佔一小部分，因此主要的焦點是在當代社會的流行藝術與文化。透過愈來愈普遍的新媒體，我們身邊到處是流行藝術、設計藝術（包括建造的環境）、廣告藝術，對我們的價值觀及決定，產生愈來愈大的影響。人為創造的影像，大部分都是為了商業目的，透過商業媒體而傳播，所以我們愈來愈需要從大眾傳播媒體和流行藝術中，探討我們的價值觀及決策如何形成。文化建構的環境會構成意義、投射意義，包括有意和無意間、誠心與操縱的意義，永遠都在傳遞，永遠都有某個傳遞對象。要充分適應這樣的環境，必須瞭解環境中所傳遞的訊息。我們以數位或傳統相機、攝影機，記錄我們的生活與媒體興趣，一再播放給自己看、給他人看，直到這些意象深深烙印在我們心中，成為集體心理；例如飛機撞毀紐約世貿雙子大樓、電影《辛德勒名單》中載滿了人的貨車、動畫《辛普森家庭》中自私笨拙的 Homer Simpson。這些影像，哪些是「真實」的？我們要如何辨別？「真實」究竟是什麼意思？這些都是視覺文化藝術教育的內容。

(圖5)



圖5：文化建築、慣用意義、人為景觀與操作物等，均有意或無意地將訊息持續傳送給人們。在此環境之下生活，我們必須掌握訊息的傳遞為何。（圖為西班牙Valencia一處遊樂場）

## 結論

Paolo Freire (1973) 曾表示，也許當代社會最大的悲劇，就是人都被現代意識形態及商業廣告的迷思、操縱所主宰了。如果我們任由意識形態與商業勢力對文化所建構的象徵如此設計操縱，毫無自覺，終究會導致社會的組成結構逐漸鬆動；象徵一旦脫離了共通的傳統意義，就會導致文化上的精神分裂症。同樣的，Sontag (1980) 對法西斯藝術的批判分析，認為法西斯藝術傾向於以煽情的手法、自覺地拋棄智識，藉此控制民衆、影響民衆的行為，這番批評實在太類似廣告藝術的主要特徵。

從這個角度來看，我們必須教導學生必要的工具，以及敏銳的感受能力，讓下一代在個人生活及社會活動中，能夠做明智、經過思考的抉擇。如果美術教育的角色在於幫助學生培養批評能力，能夠不只是接受既有的主流觀念與價值，那麼瞭解視覺文化就是不可或缺的關鍵；背景脈絡論脆弱的傳統，是建立在生物社會基礎上，認為視覺溝通是一項認知、象徵的行為；在這個傳統中，透過視覺文化美術教育培養學生的批評能力，獨立反省當代的種種主題，不但對學生個人非常重要，對於社會整體也同樣關係重大。

## 參考文獻

- Anderson, R. (1990). *Calliope's sisters: A comparative study of philosophies of art*. Upper saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Arnheim, R. (1986). *New essays on the psychology of art*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Arnheim, R. (1989). *Thoughts on Education*. Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for Education in the Arts.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin.
- Boughton, D. (2002). *Art education and visual culture*. NAEA Advisory, Spring, 2002, Available at [naea@dgs.dsys.com](mailto:naea@dgs.dsys.com).
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chapman, L. (1978). *Approaches to art in education*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
- Dissanayake, E. (1988). *What is art for?* Seattle, WA: University of Washington.
- Dissanayake, E. (1995). *Homo aestheticus: Where art comes from and why*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Duncum, P. & Bracey, T. (2001). *On knowing*. Christchurch, NZ: University of Canterbury Press.
- Duncum, P. (2001). *Visual culture: Developments, definitions, and directions for art education*. *Studies in Art Education*, 42 (2), 101-112.
- Duncum, P. (2002). *Clarifying visual culture art education*. *Art Education*, 55 (3), 6-11.
- Efland, A. (2002). *Art and cognition*. Reston, VA: National Art education Association.
- Eisner, E. (1994). *Cognition and curriculum reconsidered (2nd Ed.)*. New York: Teachers College.

- Feldman, E. (1970). *Becoming human through art*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Seabury.
- Fusco, C. (1995). *English is broken here*. New York: The New Press.
- Gardner, H. (1994). *The arts and human development*. New York: Harper/Collins.
- Gardner, H. (2000). *The disciplined mind*. New York: Penguin.
- Josephson, S. (1996). *From idolatry to advertising: Visual art and contemporary culture*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Kindler, A. (1998). Culture and development of pictorial repertoires. *Studies in Art Education*, 39 (2), 147-167.
- Kindler, A. (1999). From endpoints to repertoires: A challenge to art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 40 (4), 330-349.
- Langer, S. (1980). *Philosophy in a new key: A study in the symbolism of reason, rite, and art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McFee, J. (1961). *Preparation for art*. San Francisco: Wadsworth.
- McFee, J. & Degge, R. (1977). *Art, culture, and environment*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Parsons, M. (1998). Integrated curriculum and our paradigm of cognition in the arts. *Studies in art education*, 39 (2), 103-116.
- Piaget, J. (1976). *The child and reality*. New York: Penguin.
- Saussure, F. (1966). *A course in general linguistics* (Trans. W. Baskin). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Sontag, S. (1980). *Under the sign of Saturn*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux.

## 其他資源

Adbusters: <http://www.adbusters.org/home/>

Bowers, C. (1974). *Cultural literacy for freedom*. Eugene, OR: Elan.

Evans, J & Hall, S. (1999). *Visual culture: The reader*. London: Sage. The most comprehensive and scholarly source of visual culture on this list.

*The journal of multicultural and cross-cultural research in art education*, 18.

(2000). Volume 18 is a theme issue devoted to visual culture art

education, with articles by Kevin Tavin, Brent Wilson, Paul Duncum, and Keny Freedman. An excellent resource.

Mirzoeff, N. (1999). *An introduction to visual culture*. London: Routledge. A good overview, particularly strong in analyzing photographic images as culture.