Essays on Aesthetic Education for the 21st Century

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Essays on Aesthetic Education for the 21st Century, co-edited by Tracie Costantino and Boyd White, brings together an international collection of authors representing diverse viewpoints to engage in dialogue about the ongoing critical relevance of aesthetics for contemporary art education. Inspired by a conference symposium in which the four authors in the first section of the text, titled Initiating a Dialogue, explore a range of concepts including aesthetic experience, beauty, wonder, and aesthetics, this book enlarges the dialogue with eight additional chapters by authors from North America and Europe. In addition to chapters that address issues of social awareness, curriculum theory and research, and applications to practice with pre-service teachers, there are several chapters that acknowledge historical influences on current notions of aesthetics as a basis on which to open the gate into the twenty-first century. This book will be a valuable resource for graduate students in art education and curriculum studies, as well as practicing art educators, pre-service teachers, and anyone interested in the significance of aesthetics, not only in contemporary art education but the wider field of general education as well.
Essays on Aesthetic Education for the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century
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Edited by

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Richard Siegesmund is Associate Professor and co-chair of Art Education at the Lamar Dodd School of Art, University of Georgia. His most recent book, which he co-edited with Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, is Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice. Before focusing on arts education, he had a fourteen-year career in museum administration. His positions included Director of The Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia, and Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Dr. Siegesmund earned his Ph.D. and MA from the Stanford University School of Education as well as a B.A. from Trinity College, Hartford. In addition, he studied graduate painting and printmaking at the University
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This volume is the outcome of a group presentation by four members of the Arts & Learning Special Interest Group at the American Educational Research Association conference in New York, 2008. While our presentation was well attended, the room was relatively small and the audience, therefore, limited. We wanted to extend the dialogue beyond the confines of those conference room walls and beyond our initial group of four. So it is that we invited educators to join with us in putting together a text that would present a multitude of viewpoints. The only stipulation was that the subject of discussion had to be aesthetics and should address, directly or by implication, art education for the twenty-first century. Those of us who presented at the meeting in New York are all teaching at various institutions in the United States and Canada. We wanted to enlarge upon that North American perspective and are pleased to include in this volume the views of three European authors.

Our focus is on education for this century—current practice and implications for the future. At the same time, it was not our intention to ignore contributions from the past. In fact, early in our musings about the directions to be taken in this volume, the editors became intrigued by the model proffered by the ancient Roman god Janus.

According to Roman mythology, Janus was the god of gates and doorways. He was represented, usually, with two faces, back to back (Sometimes he was represented with four, but two do for our purposes). That is, Janus looked both forward and back, just as doorways and gates operate in both directions. Thus Janus represents beginnings—transitions—because one must enter through a door to enter a new place. (The designation “January” derives from this principle).

With Janus in mind, we felt it important to have, as part of this volume, some acknowledgement of historical influences on current notions of aesthetics as a basis on which to open the gate into the twenty-first century. Chapters by Barrett, Fróis, jagodzinsky, Seigesmund and White perform this function admirably. Each in his own way shows how the past informs the present, while also offering ideas for the future.

The present is a time of uncertainty and turmoil in much of the world. And an education that did not acknowledge that fact would beg for irrelevancy. So it is that several of the authors specifically address issues of social awareness; see chapters by Barrett, Costantino, jagodzinski, Seigesmund, and White. As an aside, we should note that Janus was also considered to be a guardian of peace. The goal of social awareness is surely, ultimately, peace oriented.
No volume that derives from a conference on research could ignore writings on the significance of research findings for art education practice in varied settings, including the museum, the public sphere, the classroom, and at home. The chapters by Œmond, Illeris, Lachapelle, and Lindström fill this role in elegant fashion.

Educational theory is addressed, at least in part, in most of the chapters in this volume. Those for whom theory is the central issue in the essay include the co-authored chapter by Urmacher, Conrad and Lindquist, and chapters by jagodzinski and Fröis.

Then too, theory and research should be balanced with practical application. Costantino’s discussion of work with pre-service teachers falls into this category, as does the MacIntyre Latta and Baer chapter, which describes curriculum development with graduate students. White’s contribution takes a different tack. For him, aesthetics-as-applied leads to art criticism. His chapter addresses the problematic nature of certain imagery in popular culture and in the more rarified artworld. Barrett gives us examples of “aesthetics in action” as he facilitates conversations about art with diverse age groups, both children and adults.

In all, there are twelve chapters in this volume. Two are written by co-authors; the others are individual voices. Together, we believe they make an important contribution to an understanding of the place of aesthetics in contemporary education.

BOYD WHITE

In the first essay of the book Boyd White takes on the highly contested concept of beauty in contemporary aesthetic discourses. Once a definitional focus of aesthetics, the study of beauty had become controversial in the latter twentieth century, which White attributes in part to the seeming contradiction of studying beauty during a century in which so much sociopolitical ugliness had been widespread. However, White makes a case for its profound importance, astutely opening the chapter with a quotation from the art theorist Arthur Danto, a leading voice in the twentieth-century critique of beauty, which asserts the importance of beauty in life, despite its optional status in art. As if in dialogue with Danto, White explores in this chapter how beauty might be relevant in both life and art, situating his discussion in examples from contemporary popular culture and the artworld that exhibit a beauty with a “nudge of discomfort,” and reflect the complexity of contemporary life. This approach relates to White’s interest in the longstanding relationship between aesthetics and values, as he articulates in his thesis, “With the following examples I attempt to show how, when beauty and ethics intersect, we have interesting educational potential for increased understanding of our society and of ourselves in relation to the world around us, in other words, for meaning making that has aesthetics at its core.”

In accord with our Janus analogy for this book, no discussion of beauty in aesthetics would be complete without addressing Kant. White describes Kant’s concept of disinterest and the difference between free beauty and dependent beauty and explains why it is now so contested, referencing the postmodern critique of
formalism, and importantly, contemporary understanding of the role of feeling in cognition and the essential embodied nature of understanding. Contemporary aesthetics now recognizes a context-bound beauty that is perceived through a feeling-infused embodied cognition. White then references the poet Seamus Heaney in his discussion of poetic form, which White uses as a springboard for his applied discussion of the relationship between form and content in the realm of beauty and value in visual images.

For his examples, White has chosen three images, all photographs that depict a beauty that is also disquieting. From popular culture, he discusses two men’s underwear advertisements depicting celebrities, as White quips, in almost all their masculine glory. From the artworld, he discusses a self-portrait with child by Catherine Opie. White explores the relationship between form and content in his analysis of all three photographs and persuasively demonstrates the role of feeling and embodied understanding in viewers’ responses to these images. A central part of this analysis revolves around situating these examples of disquieting beauty in contemporary social contexts. It is here that White makes important educational distinctions between the advertisements and the Opie photograph that get back to the relationship of beauty and ethics in aesthetics.

In his chapter Between aisthetics and aesthetics jagodzinsky explores the ramifications of what he refers to as designer capitalism. That is, he debates a current tendency in education generally to put an emphasis on instrumentalism. In the main, this tendency boils down to the refrain: If it doesn’t lead ultimately to increased economic wellbeing, it doesn’t belong in the curriculum. Art education has not been immune to such sentiments; and aesthetics, as a component of art education, has tended to be used in public school education as a tool for shaping the visual language of art, which, in turn, is valued for its extrinsic (read economic) potential. One reason for the marginalization of art education is the difficulty proponents have in making the case for such potential.

One component of analysis for any discipline’s potential is its compatibility to assessment. Art education, however, does not lend itself easily to standardization and quantitative assessment. Indeed, one’s capacity to deviate from “the standard” is generally applauded in the arts. We call that deviation by another term—creativity. But how are we to measure the value of creativity, by what standard? With an excursion into European history since the eighteenth century, jagodzinsky suggests that western society has succumbed to bourgeois standards that have led us today to an emphasis on what he refers to as designer capitalism, the “aestheticization of things”.

In opposition to this societal predilection, jagodzinsky espouses more attention to Schiller’s Spieltrieb, or ‘play drive’, an activity that has its beginnings in the unconscious and proceeds under its own impetus, for its own sake—”aisthetics as a force”. Such a force is always in the process of becoming, as opposed to having a finite destination in some representational (marketable) object.
B. WHITE AND T. COSTANTINO

To support his thesis jagogzinski draws upon writers such as Lacan, Deleuze, Guattari and others, all of whom have influenced directions in the study of aesthetics/aisthetics as critical theory. Aesthetics thus formulated takes on distinctly political overtones and, as such, provides a refreshing antidote to the consumerist model that currently dominates Western education and the political climate.

ANNE-MARIE ÉMOND

In her chapter Anne-Marie Émond shares findings from a compelling research agenda that seeks to understand the role of consonance and dissonance in museum visitors’ experiences with art. This is a research agenda Émond has built upon and made significant contributions to with her colleague Andrea Weltzl-Fairchild. In the study presented in this chapter Émond queries the oft-expected discomfort visitors feel with contemporary art, specifically investigating whether participants will have more dissonant experiences with contemporary art than with traditional art. Or put positively, will visitors have more consonant experiences with traditional art seen in museums, such as religious, portrait, genre, and landscape paintings, sculpture, and so forth? Émond draws from cognitive theory, especially Piaget’s theory of assimilation and accommodation, to explain consonance and its related terms of congruence and coherence as “cognitions that match or fit well together.”

In addition to the surprising findings, Émond’s chapter makes an important contribution by modelling an effective method for collecting data on museum visitors’ experiences, called the “thinking aloud” method in which a visitor’s verbalizations about a work of art are tape recorded by a researcher who stands next to the visitors without interacting with them. Émond also shares a framework for data analysis that she and her colleague have used effectively, looking at the degree of consonance expressed in the visitor’s comments in relation to knowledge, self, artwork, and artist.

Émond’s findings confirm the working of Piaget’s theory in that consonance is best achieved when a visitor is able to accommodate and assimilate meaning from a work of art with previously developed schemata. Somewhat surprising, however, is that visitors experienced consonance only 14% more often with traditional art than with contemporary art. These findings dispel stereotypes of visitors finding contemporary art alienating and difficult, and provides encouragement for including contemporary art more often in museum visits and in art education curricula.

TRACIE COSTANTINO

In this volume Tracie Costantino explores the value of wonder within the context of aesthetic experience. That value rests in its capacity to elicit transformation of one sort or another in the individual interacting with artworks. That is, Costantino maintains, one of the responses essential to the initiation of aesthetic experience is wonder, and the point of such experience is that it is more than hedonistic pleasure; it is educationally valuable as a vehicle for emotional, intellectual and social growth,
a transformation of the individual. While Costantino addresses the encouragement of wonder and aesthetic experience mainly within the framework of art education, the implications for education in general should be apparent. Her reference to Eisner’s argument, that aesthetic engagement fosters qualitative reasoning, makes the link clear, for such reasoning is not exclusive to the art classroom. Costantino reinforces this assertion through specific reference to scientifically oriented wonder. At the same time, where the art classroom is concerned, Costantino walks a fine line between various art curricular foci, between those who see art education as a sociopolitical vehicle for change and those for whom change centres more on the individual. Through attention to wonder Costantino attempts to bring the opposing views together. In other words, no matter what our political convictions, we all have, or should have, the capacity for wonder.

Costantino refers extensively to Dewey’s writings, and to more contemporary authors who follow in his footsteps, to support her argument. So it is that Costantino draws attention to self-understanding, the focus of the latter group referred to in the previous paragraph. But that self-understanding is not an end in itself; it is the starting point for empathic understanding of others. Thus does Costantino accommodate the former group, the more politically oriented educators. Doing so sometimes requires fine distinctions—between feelings and emotions, or wonder and curiosity, for example. In regard to the latter, citing Dewey, Costantino argues that the phenomenon of wonder is highly relevant to art education programs oriented to social engagement.

Costantino’s distinction making ultimately leads her to an investigation of the linkages between the distinctions, between wonder and emotion and thinking, for example. So it is that Costantino delves into the work of contemporary scientists who have similar concerns. She cites the work of Immordino-Yang and Damasio on their concept of emotional thought, and elaborates on the implications of that concept for art education. She argues, for example, that it is important to classify wonder as an emotional thought. That classification provides a basis for empirical investigations into components of aesthetic experience, into, for example, “the emotional and social contexts of learning”.

Having established the theoretical grounding for her position, Costantino concludes her essay with examples from the classroom. The first discusses a high school teacher who uses art to engage his students with ecological issues. The two other examples, which include one of Costantino’s own, concern the education of pre-service teachers. These are concrete applications of curriculum theory in which wonder plays a significant role, until now, an under-stated one.

RICHARD SIEGESMUND

Richard Siegesmund’s chapter makes an explicit plea for a kinder approach to education than is currently on offer with our ‘standards-based’ models. More specifically, Siegesmund draws a link between aesthetics and caring. He takes, as one reference point, Foucault’s turn away from art as a static object, external to the self, and towards the “shaping of the self” through engagement with artworks.
Siegesmund sees a parallel between Foucault’s position and the writings of Nel Noddings. Noddings began her working life as a teacher of mathematics and later branched out into curriculum development. So for those unfamiliar with Noddings’ work the pairing of the two writers may seem surprising. But Siegesmund has made a good choice. For Noddings, after all, the establishment of a curriculum of caring is more important than a focus on academic standards or any particular disciplinary focus, including mathematics. Clearly, Siegesmund sees a link between a shaping of the self, caring and aesthetic response. That is, as Siegesmund reminds us, Noddings breaks down the act of caring into the one doing the caring and the one (or object) being cared for. This is a reciprocal relationship. Even an object, such as an artwork, in some sense speaks to us as we turn our attention to it. Thus the self is shaped through interactions with others.

So where does aesthetics enter the picture? Siegesmund draws our attention to the early Greek terms for sensory perception, such as aisthesis and the verb aisthanesthai. For those of us for whom a working knowledge of the Greek language is not one of our notable strengths, Siegesmund offers a helpful guide to his take on aesthetics. He notes that “in Greek, verbs conjugate in one of three ways”: We perform an action on something; it performs one on us; or thirdly, the two actions “blend”, thus forming a reciprocal action. It is the reciprocity of this third form that Siegesmund seizes upon for its relevance to education.

Having made this point, Siegesmund then takes the reader on a brief historical journey, touching on Baumgarten, Kant, Hegel, Schiller and others, with the intent of showing how the sense of reciprocity has threaded its way through the history of aesthetics and influences some current directions in education today, including art education. Siegesmund makes an eloquent argument on behalf of art education’s capacity to increase public understanding of “participatory citizenship” through attention to aesthetic response operations.

Margaret MacIntyre Latta and Stephanie Baer

In their chapter Aesthetic Inquiry the authors Margaret MacIntyre Latta and Stephanie Baer discuss curriculum design influenced by a focus on aesthetics. (See also the chapter by Uhrmacher, Conrad and Lindquist, which has a similar focus.) The chapter describes a graduate-level course they teach entitled Curriculum as Aesthetic Text in which participants from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds learn to consider curriculum design in their areas of specialization largely from a Deweyan perspective. Or, more precisely, they attempt to apply to their own teaching and learning practice Dewey’s concept of aesthetic experience, as he explains it in Art As Experience. Thus the term “aesthetics”, as applied by the authors, is bodily and experientially oriented. While there is extensive discussion of theory that takes place during the course, inspired by authors such as William Pinar and Liora Bresler, that theory pertains to curriculum design rather than discussions about what constitutes art, or similar questions that the term “aesthetics” engenders in some quarters. Because the participants in the course are
primarily interested in their own areas of specialization—physical education, mathematics, science, and so forth—definitions of art are not of immediate concern.

Nonetheless, participants are introduced to the work of the contemporary artist Andy Goldsworthy. An examination of some of his work, as seen on a documentary film presentation, provides a clear illustration of how one person applies Dewey’s philosophy. That is, it is not evident from the film that Goldsworthy is familiar with Dewey’s writings, but he exemplifies the spirit of Dewey’s philosophy in his approach to his life and artistic endeavour. Participants in the course are encouraged to search for parallels between Goldsworthy’s manner of approaching the challenges he sets for himself and their own particular interests. The point that the authors want to get across to their students is that “[t]he significances the aesthetic holds for learning, teaching, and researching are found within...ontological reciprocity.” The potential for learning inherent in the interplay between oneself and others, between the external world and one’s interior self is manifested in Goldsworthy’s art. He draws our attention to the immediacy of the moment and the opportunities it presents. As well, Goldsworthy demonstrates the advantages of an acceptance of momentary failure, which he sees as a natural and necessary part of learning, an opportunity rather than an irremediable mistake. The underlying message of the authors is on attention to process and the often-unpredictable directions it takes us rather than on some pre-ordained, imposed product.

The final section of the chapter consists of comments taken from participants’ self-reflective notes. They provide evidence that participants embraced the concepts presented in the course. For example, one notes how she attempts to see her classroom environment in a manner comparable to the way in which Goldsworthy interacts with his landscapes. The comments are a moving tribute to the course and the authors.

In his chapter on the contributions of Lev Vygotsky to twentieth century aesthetics João Pedro Fróis provides insights into Russian and Eastern European psychology and philosophy from around the time of the Russian Revolution, into the 1950s, when Vygotsky’s work was first introduced to Western readers. Frois introduces us to the historical context of Vygotsky’s education and brief but highly influential academic career. (Vgotsky died at age thirty-eight, of tuberculosis.)

While educators outside the field of art education are familiar with Vygotsky’s theories on language development, less familiar is his work on aesthetics. Thus, in The Psychology of Art, (1926/1971) the result of his work over the years 1915–1922, Vygotsky addressed the following questions: “What is the relation between aesthetic response and all other forms of human behavior? How do we explain the role and importance of art in the general behavioral system of man?” (p. 240). His text is an investigation into those questions.

Frois’s chapter draws our attention to what Vygotsky considered to be key elements of human behavior. These include imagination, creativity, and Vygotsky’s particular interpretation of catharsis as it emerges from aesthetic response.
As Fróis points out, Vygotsky’s work was not only influential in his day, even anticipating the work of some of his contemporaries, but continues to have an impact on writers in the fields of education, psychology and aesthetics today. What is unusual about Vygotsky’s work is the breadth of his influences and interests. Thus Fróis introduces us to Vygotsky’s early studies of literature, particularly of Hamlet, and shows how Vygotsky branched out from literature to incorporate the other arts into his spectrum of interests. Indeed, the arts seemed to provide Vygotsky with the grounding for his theory development from three perspectives—instrumental, cultural, and historical. Revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia was a fertile ground for cultural and societal self-examination, after all, and the arts lent themselves to such examination.

But Vygotsky’s interests spanned the human sciences as well as the arts. In particular, Vygotsky began to examine the psychology of the day and to bring it to bear on his study of the arts. Thus, his *Psychology of Art* (1926) draws heavily on his earlier critiques of Hamlet. It is in this text that Vygotsky draws analogies between perception and artistic creation, from the perspective of psychology. That is, he sees creativity as emerging from “those sensations that arise in the nervous system”, in other words perception, but that these only hint at possibilities there for development. Vygotsky’s assertion that “our capacities exceed our activity” foreshadows his theory of the zone of proximal development, a theory that educators today still find compelling.

Perhaps the most surprising component of Vygotsky’s work, however, was his insistence upon a focus on the artwork as opposed to the viewer, in order to arrive at an understanding of aesthetic response as a general principle, as opposed to an isolated instance of idiosyncratic behavior. This gives Vygotsky’s work a distinctly empirical flavour, one with which Fróis obviously sympathizes. Fróis does an admirable job of guiding us through Vygotsky’s thinking in this regard. The point of being able to arrive at some kind of general principle of aesthetic experience is, as Fróis points out in his conclusion, that then aesthetic responses are capable of not only individualized meanings but of shared realities as well. The capacity for shared meanings puts aesthetic experience firmly within the educational realm.

**TERRY BARRETT**

Implicitly referencing the current debate in the field regarding the relevance of aesthetics to contemporary art education, Terry Barrett asserts at the outset of his chapter the difficulty and unnaturalness of *not* addressing aesthetic issues when teaching art. His chapter complements those by Siegesmund, White, and Jagodziński in his confrontation of the discourses surrounding contemporary aesthetic theory, and helps to elucidate them. For example, early in the chapter Barrett provides a clear explanation of the difference between aesthetics and art theory as used in contemporary practice. Aesthetics in the Western tradition refers to a philosophy of art, which pursues questions including those of beauty, taste, judgement, the experience of art, or aesthetic experience, and how to define art. Barrett also suggests that art education could pay more attention to helping the layperson articulate personal aesthetic philosophies.
Art theory, on the other hand, reflects the influence of French postmodern thinkers, such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva, and addresses some of the questions of traditional aesthetics, but from critical, deconstructionist, and typically sociopolitical perspectives.

After a helpful and thorough discussion of the various concepts of aesthetics in current use, Barrett shares with the reader examples of what he calls, “aesthetics in action”, drawing from his extensive experience teaching about art criticism and facilitating discussions about works of art. In Barrett’s words, aesthetics in action is “philosophical conversations among groups of people of various ages in different situations about art and life.” Barrett demonstrates through these examples how these kinds of conversations about art can be quite powerful and transformative. He uses different art media, including paintings, photographs, and installations, drawing in this chapter mostly from modern and contemporary art, some controversial and others less so, although each artwork provides rich interpretive potential. He also employs a variety of prompts for discussion and writing that effectively elicit insightful and candid comments from viewers that reveal deep thoughtfulness and moving self-reflection. To support his opening thesis for the chapter reflected in the title, that conversations about art can promote social change, Barrett organizes his discussion of these conversations in sections focused on aesthetic preference and values, the self, life, knowing others, and caring about others (which provides an example for the connection between caring and aesthetics discussed in Richard Siegesmund’s chapter). In this progression, Barrett moves the reader through an awareness of the power of conversations about art to cultivate both a self-understanding and an understanding of others that can have significant implications, no less than, as Barrett concludes, the development of communities of understanding that can encourage peace in the world.

RICHARD LACHAPELLE

In his chapter Richard Lachapelle moves us out of the museum, the gallery, and the classroom and into the public sphere. With his focus on public art, Lachapelle expands the realm within which aesthetic education may occur and challenges arts educators and public arts administrators to consider and utilize the educational potential of public art. However, as Lachapelle demonstrates, public art can provoke controversy and there are more and less productive ways of handling it. As Lachapelle explains at the beginning of the chapter, public art is essentially political, as it resides in the public arena, an important fact distinguishing public art from other forms of contemporary art, and one that many artists have been reluctant to accept. Lachapelle walks us through lessons learned from both well and lesser-known cases of public art and shares research he has conducted that may provide guidance for educators wanting to incorporate public art in their teaching or add educational materials to their public art exhibition.

Lachapelle organizes his extensive discussion around popular expectations for public art. An understanding of these expectations can help artists and arts administrators create successful works of public art that productively engage their
audiences. Within each section discussing an expectation, Lachapelle gives an example of public art that either met, challenged, or disappointed that expectation. Perhaps the hallmark of controversial public art is Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc,* which Lachapelle analyzes within the expectation that public art be recognizable as an object. On the other end, Lachapelle discusses Anish Kapoor’s *Cloud Gate* as a successful work of public art because it encourages active audience participation and engagement with the artwork.

This example comes after Lachapelle’s presentation of research he conducted to investigate how much time viewers spent looking at a work of public art. He found that when participants spent more time with fewer (one or two) artworks their responses to the artworks were more thoughtful and extensive. Accordingly, Lachapelle recommends that educators and arts administrators develop strategies and educational tools that encourage active engagement and dialogue with works of public art, in an effort to promote, as Lachapelle persuasively concludes, “harmonious relationships between artists and publics.”

**LARS LINDSTRÖM**

This chapter by Lars Lindström provides a good illustration of the Janus analogy. Lindström looks back—at the tension within the creative self-expression movement, led by Viktor Lowenfeld, regarding children’s practice of copying coloring books. He then looks forward—at the relevance of graphic images to children, as inspiration for their artistic development. He focuses specifically on the significant role comics may play in children’s “home art” and considers how a better understanding of this influential practice might contribute to more formal art education settings and curriculum. The chapter gives central attention to a case study Lindström conducted on a Swedish boy named Per, examining over 300 comic drawings he created during his preadolescent and adolescent years.

Lindström begins with the polemic, articulated by Rudolf Arnheim, whether students should be allowed to copy or left unhampered by another’s creative influence. Importantly, Arnheim makes the distinction between a mere “copycat” and a “free spirit” who chooses what to assimilate, adapt, or reject. Lindström will use Arnheim’s distinction as a guiding theme throughout the chapter, taking the stance that comics can be a positive influence on children’s artistic development, providing repertoires for their “worldmaking.”

After challenging Lowenfeld’s claim about the danger of children’s copying by re-evaluating the data on which Lowenfeld based this assertion, Lindström explores the special characteristics of comics as a narrative art. Refuting Lowenfeld again, Lindström emphasizes that comic art should be judged according to its particular aesthetic principles, and not be based on a Modernist aesthetic derived from works of painting and sculpture, for example. Within this discussion he relates the superhero category of comic art backwards and forwards, to early heroic myths of diverse cultures and to the twentieth century development of three-dimensional characters in the comic arts.
Since this chapter primarily aims to provide a more nuanced examination of the relevance of comic art in children’s artistic development, Lindström devotes, appropriately, significant discussion to his case study of Per’s artistic development through the comic arts medium, providing several helpful examples of Per’s drawings to demonstrate his points. He then compares Per’s artistic practice to four other prominent case studies of comic artists, including the well-documented study of J. C. Holz, by Brent and Marjorie Wilson and their colleagues. Through this comparative analysis, Lindström derives and presents, in the conclusion, insightful characteristics of artistically creative individuals, which demonstrate that immersing oneself in comics art during periods of artistic development may actually, in Lindström’s words, “apply to the emancipation of “copycats” as well as to the “free spirits”."

P. BRUCE UHRMACHER, BRADLEY CONRAD AND CAITLIN LINDQUIST

In the chapter by Uhrmacher et al, they, like Jagodzinsky and Siegesmund, provide an alternative emphasis within classroom practice. Where Jagodzinsky’s and Siegesmund’s chapters specifically discuss art education, Uhrmacher et al consider aesthetics within the broader framework of the curriculum as a whole. Further, while they acknowledge that there are a considerable number of approaches to curriculum design, many would fit under the umbrella of two types. Thus they begin their chapter with a brief analysis of two approaches to curriculum design—the Fidelity and the Adaptive models. The authors describe the strengths and limitations of these two approaches through an analysis of the purpose, origin, methods, outcomes and images that each entails. Those descriptions then provide a basis for comparison to the Aesthetic Transformative model. Discussion of this third approach constitutes the final section of the chapter.

Thus, for example, the Fidelity-oriented curriculum is usually designed by policy makers operating outside the classroom. That is, the model does not take into account the context of individual schools or classrooms. The focus is on measurable objectives, like national or state standards for test scores. Teachers are not expected to or encouraged to deviate from the suggested curriculum.

In contrast, the Adaptive model takes a more bottom-up approach and is more contextually oriented and collaborative. That is, the teachers have a voice in what takes place in their classrooms; and they adapt their teaching according to evolving conditions and results.

With extensive discussion of those two approaches in place, the authors move to a discussion of the Aesthetic Transformative approach. Like Jagodzinsky, Uhrmacher et al question the current tendency in education to justify every classroom activity in terms of its utility-potential. Will it increase reading comprehension or math scores? Will it lead to increased competitiveness in the marketplace? As an alternative, the authors describe activities that aren’t easily defended in instrumentalist terms—a visit to the school by a sports figure or well-known author—and ask what it is that students are likely to gain from such experiences. They then argue that the reason children like such out-of-the ordinary events is that
they frequently have an aesthetic quality, in the Deweyan sense of the term aesthetic. It is that aesthetic quality and the uniqueness of the event that separates it from the day-to-day focus on routine tasks and standards. The authors argue that such events can be transformative and life enhancing, and that such experiences provide “aesthetic capital”, a term they borrow from Bourdieu. Such capital is intrinsically rewarding.

Unlike the previous two models, the Aesthetic-Transformative one cannot be said to be either top-down or bottom-up in its construction. Rather, its image/metaphor is that of a rhizome, in that the impetus for the event can come from any direction and make unforeseen connections—unforeseeable but perceivable and understandable as an experience, in the Deweyan sense of the term. As the authors note, “all educational undertakings need not be measurable in order to be of value.”

HELENE ILLERIS

In her chapter, Helene Illeris both respects and challenges young people’s attitudes about contemporary art. Illeris weaves theoretical discussions with examples from several research studies to explain how museum and art educators may facilitate aesthetic experiences for young people that attend to their generational characteristics, called “new forms of consciousness”, reference the contemporary theory of “relational aesthetics”, and also support youth in considering a variety of works of art through the concept of “performative visual events.”

According to research conducted by Illeris, which has supported findings from other studies by her Danish colleagues, and the theoretical work of Thomas Ziehe, young people exhibit a “new form of consciousness” that is characterized by personal reflection and a reliance on personal attitudes, values, and choice. Drawing from Bourriaud’s concept of relational aesthetics, where contemporary art is situational and participatory instead of a self-enclosed object, Illeris has found that young people are especially drawn to multimedia art works that invite viewer involvement that is self-directed according to personal interests. Supported by illustrative quotes from high school students, Illeris asserts that young people do not want to be told facts about works of art, but to experience the artworks “in a personal rather than an intellectualized manner.”

In order to provide some guidance to educators who want to both respect and challenge young people’s attitudes towards contemporary art through the educational potential of aesthetic experience, Illeris draws on the pragmatist aesthetic philosophy of Richard Shusterman, as well as Bourriaud, and offers her own framework for aesthetic engagement through “performative visual events.” Borrowing from the theatre, Illeris suggests that the educator, student, and artwork take on different roles and positions in the performative event of engaging with and interpreting a work of art. Seeing education as a performance may help students to distance themselves from their internal focus, trying on what Illeris terms “positive forms of otherness.” In her conclusion, Illeris further outlines this promising framework for facilitating transformative relationships with contemporary art for young people.
SECTION I: INITIATING A DIALOGUE
1. A BEAUTY CONTEST(ED)

In search of the semi-naked truth

Beauty is an option for art and not a necessary condition. But it is not an option for life. It is a necessary condition for life as we would want to live it. (Danto, 2003, p. 160)

INTRODUCTION

A focus on beauty met with rather surly disdain in many art circles during much of the past century. No doubt awareness of social injustices and an almost unimaginable scale of violence suggested that a moral stance against these conditions would have difficulty accommodating notions of beauty. Such a stance would have contributed to that disdain. Despite that orientation, a handful of writers have concerned themselves with beauty in recent years (Brand, 2000; Danto, 1994, (a), 1999, 2003; Devereaux, 1998; Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999; Lakoff & Scherr, 1984; Matthews, 1997; Nussbaum, 2001; Scarry, 1999). The focus of these writers varies considerably one from the other, but the underlying message is that there is a human instinct for the pursuit of beauty, even in the face of continuing injustice and violence. As Silvers (2000) insists, “Beauty matters, as does its absence, for moral as well as aesthetic reasons” (p. 198). What follows, therefore, is an investigation into beauty, but a beauty that acknowledges the world as it is, with the moral implications that such acknowledgement entails. That acknowledgement frequently results in a sense of unease. Images that intrigue me combine beauty and the nudge of discomfort. With the following examples I attempt to show how, when beauty and ethics intersect, we have interesting educational potential for increased understanding of our society and of ourselves in relation to the world around us, in other words, for meaning making that has aesthetics at its core.

First, however, it might be useful to review briefly some difficulties with the concept of beauty, much of which we have inherited from Kant (1790/1957). Postmodernism’s rejection of a Kantian aesthetic results largely from Kant’s concept of disinterest. Kant saw disinterest as the human capacity for abstraction, away from an emphasis on one’s particular needs and feelings, and towards an emphasis on that which is more universally shareable, that is, to judgements that we might call common sense.
Kant’s notion of disinterest emerges from his definition of “free” beauty, that is, a beauty unaligned with contextual considerations. Kant’s concept of “dependent” beauty is another matter. That is, Kant sees art as a dependent beauty, one determined “…by conformity to standards set by the human intellect, rather than its own ontological integrity” (Crowther, 1985, p. 63). As Crowther (1984) notes elsewhere, “The pleasure of dependent beauty ...arises from our appraisal of how well the particular object exemplifies the kind of thing it is…” (p. 443). But, as Crowther (1985) also notes, the significance of an artwork lies in the converse; that is, our attention is drawn to what is special about the work. The state of disinterestedness, upon which free beauty relies, is merely an initial, preparatory stage, a momentary bracketing of one’s previous experiences and prejudices in order that the artwork may be experienced as purely as possible. The second stage takes place in the discernment of the work’s essential specialness, its variations from the norm. Kant does not take this latter step. He, in effect, denies the possibility for strangeness or variation from the usual in his concept of beauty. In doing so he misses the value of the unique. What this does is create a system for the appreciation of art that, in the past century led ultimately to the formalism exemplified in the writings of Fry (1920) and Bell (1913). Any designation of beauty that emerged from such a focus would, of necessity, be of a rarefied nature, desiccated, unfeeling, unconnected with the practical and political world around it.

Kant was not unaware of the importance of feeling, however. As Matthews (1997) notes, while initially dismissing feelings as incapable of playing “a direct role in our rational activities”, Kant subsequently came to the conclusion that feeling is “central in making sense of rational activities for beings that are rational and sensible” (p. 2). Matthews elaborates further on this point: “As a uniquely human capacity, our feeling for beauty resolves difficulties that arise because of our unique nature, a nature that is both rational and sensible” (p. 1).

As Johnson (2007) points out, however, there is an inherent mind/body dualism in Kant’s conception of cognitive functioning that prioritizes the rational. As a result, feelings remain a tool at the service of the “higher” faculty of cognition. Johnson’s contribution to the current discussion rests in his reminder that the supposedly separate faculties of the mind that generate human experience—reason, understanding, sensation, feeling—do not operate separately. They are embodied in synthetic acts of cognition. I emphasize this point because aesthetic response exemplifies such synthetic acts. Meaning making is fundamentally aesthetic and embodied.

We owe an acknowledgement to Kant for bringing to the forefront of philosophic discussion issues pertaining to aesthetics, feeling, and beauty. But we also acknowledge the limitations prescribed in Kant’s philosophy. Today, as Eaton (2000) observes, “increasing numbers of aesthetic theorists and practitioners are persuaded ...that beauty is a contextual property deeply connected to factual beliefs and moral attitudes ...” (p. 27). In other words, for those of us disinclined to adopt the idea of disinterest, the idea of a context-bound beauty, one initiated by feeling, is more compelling than Kant’s depiction of these matters.
Thus, for example, Berleant (1984) in his text, *Art and engagement,* writes, “With increasing insistence over the past century, artists have been moving toward producing work that denies the isolation of art from the active involvements of daily life” (p. 26). Given the date of Berleant’s text it is understandable that he doesn’t pursue the topic of media influence. But we find ourselves increasingly in a visually oriented information age, in which the concrete nature of the presentation appeals not only to our senses, private emotions and reflective capacities, but to our awareness of the influence of context upon our perceptions as well. Engagement therefore seems to be an appropriate response orientation.

I also argue, however, that engagement does not mean doing away with attention to form, or aesthetic qualities—as long as we understand that these qualities extend beyond the ‘elements and principles’ charts that we studied in bygone art methods classes. Danto (2003) notes “… how wide and diverse the range of aesthetic qualities is” (p. 59). He mentions, as examples, cuteness, tastelessness, the disgusting, and, most pertinent to this discussion, beauty. But the key point that Danto makes is: “The difference between beauty and the countless other aesthetic qualities is that beauty is the only one that has a claim to be a value, like truth or goodness” (p. 60).

I think Danto is wrong in his isolation of beauty as a value. To find an image disgusting is to designate a value, for example. Nonetheless, Danto is on to something. Beauty, as a value, carries moral implications. This leads us to possibilities for exploration of the intersection of aesthetics and ethics.

In light of this broadening of the concept of form to include a wide range of qualities I turn now to the conclusion of Seamus Heaney’s Nobel Lecture (1995). In one passage Heaney seems in sympathy with the general direction I have been taking, and his words provide a springboard for further discussion. Heaney states:

Poetic form is both the ship and the anchor. It is at once a buoyancy and a steadying, allowing for the simultaneous gratification of whatever is centrifugal and whatever is centripetal in mind and body. … it touch[es] the base of our sympathetic nature while taking in at the same time the unsympathetic nature of the world to which that nature is constantly exposed. The form of the poem, in other words, is crucial to poetry’s power to do the thing which always is and always will be to poetry’s credit: the power to persuade that vulnerable part of our consciousness of its rightness in spite of the evidence of wrongness all around it, the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values… (n.p.)

Heaney appears here to be talking about more than rhyme and meter. Indeed, Heaney seems to be conflating form and content. Certainly, contextual influences are implied. But if what Heaney says is true of poetry, the general tenor of his observations applies across the arts. In what follows, therefore, I attempt to see how Heaney’s commentary might apply to visual images.

I have chosen, first, two related images that I find beautiful and at the same time disquieting. Not all images do this, of course, but when they do, they make certain demands on us, demands that compel us to consider formal, contextual and ethical
questions simultaneously. When we address such demands we move art education away from Kantian disinterest toward engagement with the contemporary world. Qualifying works for such engagement need not always come from the officially recognized art world. In fact, I chose the quotation by Danto at the beginning of this chapter because it captures the sense of importance he puts on beauty as essential to an Aristotelian sense of the good life while at the same time not insisting that beauty become part of a definition of art. This is helpful because I’m not sure how to classify the initial images that I intend to address here.

So, for the current exercise, I have chosen images from current popular culture, from, to be more specific, competing underwear advertisements. The images are available on the web, in newspapers and on neighbourhood billboards. One image portrays Djimon Hounsou, the Hollywood actor and Oscar nominee, in all, or almost all, of his masculine glory. The other is that of David Beckham, the British soccer star, similarly attired, or more accurately, unattired.

Let me begin by addressing the question of beauty. Are the photographs themselves beautiful, or can we separate photographic skill from the subject matter? I looked at the first seventy-five of hundreds of comments on the web about the Hounsou photograph (concreteloop.com). None discussed the photograph itself or the photographer. The general sentiment is expressed in one of the more polite comments, “He’s a beautiful specimen of a man.” Others refer to specific body parts: From a woman: “The thighs, the thighs!” And of course there are the
predictable references to “the package”. In short, discussion of form, as demonstrated in the viewer comments, refers to Hounsou’s form. Similarly, none of the comments about the Beckham image discussed photographic issues. Nonetheless I will return to the issue of photographic form in due course.

Meanwhile, perhaps the first item to be laid to rest that the ‘thighs’ comment illustrates is any pretence at disinterest. These viewers are definitely engaged, or, to use Heaney’s term, gratified; and the action seems centripetal, that is, towards the bodies of these many viewers. The contextually initiated engagement in this case has to do with sexual fantasy.
At the same time, there is, on the part of some viewers, myself among them, a sense that something is not quite as it should be. As one woman notes, “This is wrong on all levels.” Unfortunately web sites of the sort I was viewing don’t make room for extended analysis, so we don’t know what this woman finds wrong here. But in a *Montreal Gazette* article, a journalist had more room to explore the issue. Janice Kennedy (2008) asks:

The photos show two outrageously handsome men with the kind of muscled sleekness most guys can only dream of. So what is it about the images that tugs at my consciousness—just why it is, exactly, they make me uncomfortable? (Section D, p. 3)

Kennedy reinforces her entitlement to discomfort with a quotation from “Robin Givhan, Pulitzer Prize-winning fashion editor of the Washington Post”, who similarly asks, ‘And after you’ve finished enjoying the view, you can’t help but wonder: Isn’t that loving, lustful gaze problematic?’ Kennedy proceeds to analyze why this might be so. For a start she refers to the objectification of these people and reminds us that this is “a process feminists have long railed against when women were the sexual objects. Except that there’s a huge difference.” The difference, as Kennedy sees it, rests in the fact that these men do not appear about to be used, as a female similarly posed would be, particularly in the case of the Beckham pose. Instead, these men suggest a readiness “to do the using” (p. 3). That is, there is no sense of victimhood here. This raises the question, if the men are not victims, why the discomfort?

Part of the answer may be, paradoxically, the lack of victimhood. That is, as Bordo (2000) reminds us, some ads deliberately challenge us.

Many models stare coldly at the viewer, defying the observer to view them in any way other than they have chosen to present themselves; as powerful, armored, emotionally impenetrable…Overall, these ads depict what I would describe as “face-off masculinity” (p. 129).

Beckham, with his glower, would seem to fit that category. Hounsou, on the other hand, his eyes closed, appears to be lost in his own thoughts. At the same time, his obviously powerful physique might well be considered challenging enough, even without the gaze.

Another part of the problem seems to have to do with ambiguity. That is, to whom do these images appeal? As Bordo (2000) notes:

Images of masculinity that will do double…duty with a variety of consumers, straight and gay, male and female, are not difficult to create in a culture like ours, in which the muscular, male body has a long and glorious aesthetic history. That’s precisely what Calvin Klein was the first to recognize and exploit—the possibility of what is known in the trade as a “dual marketing” approach. (p. 124)

As Kennedy reminds us, “… the underlying sex-sells message clearly operates on a cleverly broad scale” (p. 3). But it is not the use of sex appeal in advertising that bothers Kennedy unduly. Rather, it is the combination of blatant masculinity with
“...a suggested denial of it in the unnatural smoothness of both men’s bodies, the scrupulous hairlessness, the carefully applied glistening” (p. 3). In other words, although Kennedy doesn’t say so, there’s a degree of dishonesty in the way these bodies are portrayed. This does not go unnoticed by some viewers other than Kennedy. In regard to the Beckham image, one Web viewer notes, “It’s quite obvious they’ve PhotoShopped his upper body” (theinsider.com). And with respect to his underwear, here are a few more viewer comments: “Looks like the male equivalent of the padded bra”, “So that’s where Victoria’s implants went!” “He’s stuffed like a Christmas turkey”. These commentators are having fun. At the same time, the tone of their comments does not denote respect. If it is true, as Giorgio Armani insists, that Beckham is a “modern day icon”, such iconography definitely has a mixed and troubling message. As Kennedy observes:

When we accept the overlay of quasi-porn on celebrities like Beckham and Hounsou, we reinforce our cultural acceptance of it. Implicitly, we encourage people with strong identities to subjugate those identities, to reduce who they really are to the sum of their body parts. There is at the heart of all this self-exposure a core of tackiness that is off-putting. (p. 3)

Such a judgement, in turn, prompts a question: What exactly is it about self-exposure that merits the judgement ‘tacky’? I suggest that the tackiness rests in the artificiality and superficiality of the whole enterprise, which nevertheless draws us in. The images are entertainment and we are not supposed to take them seriously. None of the comments I read discussed the quality of the cotton in the underwear, for example.

The ‘drawing in’ to which I have just referred would seem to correspond, nonetheless, to Heaney’s reference to “our sympathetic nature”. But Heaney insists on an essential connection between sympathy and the “unsympathetic nature of the world”. Given the overwhelming number of positive comments on these two images, it is apparent that most viewers are in sympathy with the men, as exemplified in, “Dammit … I’m headed to the gym right now” (concreteloop.com).

At the same time, the fact that the Calvin Klein marketing people have chosen an African American has brought the racial context to the fore. Even a woman’s positive endorsement “dark chocolate ...yummy!!!” carries connotations of the racial divide that exists in the American context (concreteloop.com). In fact, the majority of the comments regarding the Hounsou image I read referred to the colour issue. This is not the case with the Beckham image where apparently no one saw fit to comment on Beckham’s Caucasian heritage. Although it is difficult to be sure, since Web comments are anonymous, chances are that most of the people responding to the Beckham advertisement are white. I say this because it is also obvious that most respondents to the Hounsou one are black. (Many volunteered their own portraits along with their comments.) So when Heaney speaks of the “unsympathetic nature of the world” it is apparent here that the black respondents are celebrating their African heritage in the face of a history of oppression, a history fresh in memory and an oppression that many still feel. As hooks (1995) notes, “The black body has always received attention within the
framework of white supremacy” (p. 203). Thus black celebration of Hounsou is a political statement: “I’ll be the first to admit I’m a bit ethnocentric. Anything or anyone that reminds me of Africa makes my chest swell …” (concreteloop.com). That swelling chest is a manifestation of a value. It confirms hooks’s (1995) assertion: “the vision of radical black male subjects claiming their bodies will stand forever in resistance, calling us to contestation and interrogation…” (p. 212).

It is evident in both the above examples, but perhaps more obviously in the case of the Hounsou image, that viewers demonstrate clearly Heaney’s assertion that we are hunters and gatherers of values. And it should be obvious that in the comments I quoted above, judgements, aesthetic and otherwise, are implicit if not explicit. The world outside the frame of the imagery, experienced as values, imposes itself within the frame.

In other words, it is apparent that Heaney’s concept of form, his aesthetic sense, goes far beyond a cataloguing of shapes and colours, or words and lines in his case. His value-gathering art is a culmination of visible (form) and invisible (context), disparate contributing entities.

A reading of any of Heaney’s poetry, however, makes clear that he spends considerable time and effort on the mechanics of his lines in order to support and reinforce his imagery and ideas. By the same token, the photographers’ of the two images that I have introduced did so with due consideration for the fundamentals of design. I will mention only a couple of those considerations, just to make the point. For example, in the Hounsou image, the black body is juxtaposed dramatically against an all-white background, with lighting from the left. This results in a strong shadow behind and underneath the figure, its flatness, like a grey paper doll, serving to accentuate Hounsou’s powerful three-dimensionality. The lighting that bounces off the “glistening” to which Kennedy refers further enhances that dimensionality. And, of course, the contrasting whiteness of his underwear, with its own teasing dimensionality, draws attention to itself.

In the case of the Beckham photograph, the figure is surrounded with white sheets, which contrast against a dark background. Beckham’s figure is placed diagonally. The line from center chest down across the belly, paralleled by the arms, leads one’s eye inevitably to Beckham’s crotch.

In both images, this attention to form reinforces the message. There is no question in my mind that the photographers intended to make beautiful images, to celebrate the bodies of their models. Like their female counterparts of decades past, these models are manipulated. Further, because these are advertisements, and advertisements fail unless they are clearly understood, it is quite likely that the added messages, as exemplified by the above comments of viewers, were also intended. These are indeed, signifiers of our consumer culture.

To put the foregoing into another perspective, I want to turn now to another image of our time, one from the officially sanctioned art world. The image doesn’t fit the norms of beauty that I have just been discussing. I will argue that the image has a certain beauty nonetheless. It is another photograph, this time by Catherine Opie. The work is titled Self Portrait, Nursing.
I first saw this image in 2007, in the company of a group of young women university students. In a room full of photographs this was the one that drew the attention of most of the class. They were puzzled, unsettled, both alienated by and attracted to the photograph. On a recent visit to the same photograph I had similar conflicted reactions. In what follows I pursue the reasons for those responses.

Figure 3. Catherine Opie, Self Portrait Nursing, 2004. C-print 40 x 32 inches (101.6 x 81.3 cm). Ed. Of 8 Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles, © Catherine Opie
The image depicts a seated woman, nursing her child. The topic has a long history, recalling countless images of Madonna and child. But this is no religious allegory. Here, Opie is portraying herself—fleshy, naked, at least from the waist up. We can see the effects of sun on her body: tan on her right forearm and hands, sunburned face and upper chest, around her collarbone. Her hands suggest strength and manual labour. There are tattoos on her right shoulder and upper arm. Only faintly visible across Opie’s chest, just above her breasts, is some old scarring that spells out the word “pervert” in cursive writing. The texture of Opie’s skin is in stark contrast to the ivory smoothness and paleness of the child. Opie’s dark hair is short, unfussy. The child is blond. Opie’s substantial arms and hands cradle, almost horizontally, the naked child, who suckles her breast. The child, a boy, is quite large, a year old at the time of this portrait (Salisbury, 2006). The chair in which mother and child are seated appears to be unpretentious, with a black canvas backrest and a black armrest. Behind them a red damask cloth imparts a feeling of warmth to the overall image. At the same time it brings our attention back to Opie’s sunburned face and her expression of quiet contemplation as she looks at her child.

Reasons for the conflicted responses of both my students and myself emerge from the brief description in the foregoing paragraph. That is, we have become accustomed to, some might say inundated by, images of nude females. But Opie doesn’t fit the category of females usually depicted in such photographs. She’s not slim; her complexion is not flawless. There is no suggestion here of PhotoShop manipulation. In short, Opie has steered away from the conventionally pretty. As Stevens (2007) notes, the portrait is

…steeped in the culture of stereotype and transgression. But she doesn’t use the customary devices. There is no shriek of the victimized, no crudely ironic takedown of the cliché. Instead, the carefully composed image is vital, even joyous in the wise and melancholy manner of all great Madonnas…Opie’s picture comes to no conclusions about mother and child, innocence and experience, beauty and beast. It challenges convention by insisting upon a renewed feeling for the mysterious (nymag.com).

Reilly (2001) adds, “Catherine Opie is a social documentary photographer of international renown whose primary artistic concerns are community and identity—gender, sexual, or otherwise” (p. 83). Since the early 1990s Opie has gained notice for, among other topics, depiction of the gay and lesbian community. In an interview with Reilly (2001), Opie notes that she has “…this intense desire to catalogue and archive the people and the places around me” (p. 87). In so doing, Opie proceeds to question gender stereotyping, and meanings underlying the term “community” especially as it applies to American socially marginalized subcultures. For example, a Modern Museum of Fort Worth press release (2006) states:

In Self-portrait, Opie adds a layer to the complexity of identity by representing the altered family. In the image, a scar reading “pervert” is still slightly legible on the artist’s chest, the result of her cutting the word into her skin for an earlier self-portrait in which she acknowledged American societal prejudice against lesbianism. (themodern.org)
That same press release goes on to mention the combination of “blunt honesty and tenderness” that Opie’s photography captures.

Opie is also influenced by the history of photography and art. In her interview with Reilly (2001), Opie mentions the appeal of the “…traditional, formal portrait motif. That’s where Holbein comes in. He’s the influence behind the colour and the gaze, too” (p. 90).

Certainly the gaze is important in the photograph I’m discussing here. However, it is not directed at us. The object of her attention is her child, and there is an intimacy in that interaction that excludes the viewer; at the same time that intimacy is invitational. Opie offers her portrait to the viewer after all. In doing so, she invites dialogue, and empathy—for a woman, a mother, a member of a frequently stigmatized minority, and for a child thus far innocent of the complexities of the world into which he has been born.

In an interview of Josefina Ayerza by Cathy Lebowitz, Lebowitz pursues the question of intimacy (lacan.com). In response to Lebowitz’s question as to why she thinks Opie chose to show this “intimate moment”, Ayerza responds: “With Jacques Lacan intimacy ex-sists, that is, it has a representation outside or it doesn’t exist at all. He even has a word for it, ‘extimacy.’” (lacan.com). Ayerza links that intimacy/extimacy with transgression; that is, the non-conformative nature of the photograph is transgressive.

But if the photograph is transgressive, it is not aggressively so. In conversation with Opie, Reilly observes, “There is an omnipresent vulnerability and sweetness about your portraits that belies the transgressive nature of what’s presented” (2001, p. 90). In that thought Reilly captures the essence of Opie’s simultaneous appeal and discomfort. If Plato’s equation of truth and beauty is at all justified, I suggest that it is in the vulnerability and truthfulness of Opie’s photograph that the beauty rests.

In contrast, the Beckham and Hounsou images that I used at the beginning of this essay rely on a superficial beauty that has little to do with who the men are in their everyday lives. Furthermore, we can’t even trust that what we are presented with is the real McCoy. What we have, however, might fit Kant’s definition of dependent beauty that I discussed earlier. That is, the underwear advertisements exemplify the stereotypical man’s perfect body. The message is immediately understood. Whatever ambiguity exists hinges largely on one’s sexual orientation while posing no real challenges to one’s perceptions.

In contrast, Opie’s self-portrait tells us how she lives, what at least some of her aspirations are. The image is honest. It is simultaneously tough and tender, even vulnerable. This characteristic brings me back to Heaney’s lines. The image “touch[es] the base of our sympathetic nature while taking in at the same time the unsympathetic nature of the world to which that nature is constantly exposed”. Therein lies its truth and its beauty, however unconventional that beauty may seem. But it is that very unconventionality that makes interacting with Opie’s self portrait educationally worthwhile insofar as our experiential, cultural and intellectual boundaries are expanded, and our capacities for empathy are nurtured. The image takes that step beyond which Kant was willing to go in his definition of dependent beauty. The portrait invites us to see what makes it special.
CONCLUSION

Although the topic of beauty has been around since at least the time of Plato, reached prominence with Baumgarten, and declined in importance in the twentieth century, what I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is that beauty still concerns us. I have attempted, through a comparison of images, an exploration of the insignificance and significance of contemporary notions of beauty. Both the first examples and the last provide occasions for the experiencing of beauty and discomfort. The experiences are categorically different, however.

The beauty in the men’s bodies is obvious; the discomfort emerges more subtly, unless one fundamentally disapproves of bodily display in the first place. Ultimately, I suggest that the discomfort arises, not because of any significant transgression. We have become accustomed to images of nearly naked bodies, male and female, after all. Rather, the discomfort arises because, despite the apparent realism of the photography, the images strike a false note. They do draw us in, invite our fantasies. We may enjoy them, but we don’t quite believe them. Our stance towards them is likely to be one of irony. The Armani and Klein advertisements are prime examples of what jagodzinski would call ‘capitalist designer aesthetics’ (See his chapter in this volume for a broader discussion on this topic).

If, frequently, learning takes place on the basis of our ability to make comparisons, then the genuinely transgressive Opie image provides a challenge to that consumerist model. Her transgression may result in initial viewer discomfort. But if the viewer makes room for it, gradually a sense of beauty does emerge; it does so because of—in stark contrast to the underwear ads—the honesty that is the essence of the work. Such honesty invites a reciprocal response. In doing so it encourages educational dialogue on issues of counter cultures, minority rights, biological urges, traditions (remember Opie’s Holbein influences), tolerance, empathy, and a host of topics that surely belong in the art classrooms of the twenty-first century. Aesthetics and its offshoot, criticism, foster such discussion.

NOTES

1 For Calvin Klein, the photographer of Djimon Hounsou is Bruce Weber. For the Beckham/Armani ad, the photographers are Mert Atlas and Marcus Piggott.

REFERENCES


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the implications of possible connections between morality and beauty. Illustrate with examples outside those provided in the chapter.
2. Are there occasions when Kant’s concept of disinterest might be appropriate? What would be the advantage of such a stance? In other words, when is context an unnecessary consideration?
3. Discuss the implications of the statement: “Meaning making is fundamentally aesthetic and embodied.”
4. Should artists feel an obligation to reflect daily life in their work? Does such reflection negate the possibility for individualism?
5. Discuss the significance of form in contemporary art.
6. Is a distinction between popular culture and ‘Art’ desirable? Why or why not?
7. Discuss the role of ambiguity in the arts.
8. The word ‘transgressive’ is frequently applied to Opie’s photography. What is the point of transgression and what are the limits to artistic transgression?

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2. BETWEEN AIESTHETICS AND AESTHETICS

The Challenges to Aesthetic Education in Designer Capitalism

ART, AESTHETICS, DESIGN

What should be happening in art and education in the context of our designer capitalism today? The rhetorical question is meant to gloss the general claim that institutions of education today desire to produce a *flexible subject* for the global capitalist market where “learning to learn” has become the hegemonic form of schooling. Against this continued development of designer managerial curriculum, I offer an exploration of this rhetorical question that will make a distinction between aesthetics and *aisthetics*, calling on radical psychoanalytic developments of Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari to help articulate what I have in mind, and to offer a direction that at least begins to disturb this capitalist hegemony. What follows is a justification for writing my *Mondofesto* and should be read with it in mind. It is mainly a thought experiment and should be taken as such.

There is a *fundamental antagonism* that every teacher must face—a choice that really is no choice. In the designer capitalism of a digitalized information society, it has become imperative to put art and aesthetics to *use*. For art programs to survive, the demand is that their utility be manifest. Any number of possibilities can be given for art’s usefulness: art is useful to other subject areas—as a supplementary activity for other subject areas, social studies, drama set design, English and so on; art is useful when it aestheticizes the school, when art tracks around its premises showing that a ‘viable’ art program is in place; art is useful if it can be correlated to boost grades in other subject areas, such as math; art is useful when it is sold as a form of graphic communication, enabling the transference of knowledge through accessible diagrams—the rhetoric of form, structuring how we can read anything from graphs to complicated electronic circuitries and architecture blueprints; art is useful for parents when they see that their children’s interests have been sparked, perhaps, at last in a subject that they can enjoy through forms of self-expression; and finally, art is useful as well, when graduating art students from high school to attend one of the myriad art schools of art and design where they will train to find a job related to a design industry—from fashion, computer graphics and industrial design to communications—even architecture; in the academy art has become useful as arts-based education.

Within this climate of accountability, “Art & Design” is an expression that has lost much of its currency. The ampersand between them recognizes their affinity as much as their ch(i)asm; the implication was always that ‘art’ was more ‘free’, more
‘explorative’, more ‘open’ and more ‘ill-defined’. Design, on the other hand was more ‘practical’ and ‘applied.’ School curricula reflected this division between the ‘fine’ and ‘vocational’ arts, but this tension between what is ‘useless’ and ‘useful’ can no longer be so easily sustained in information societies. Art needs as much justification as design always did. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007) have made that abundantly clear in their work, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, as has Beatrice von Bismarck (2005) through her work in Leipzig /D/O/C/K-Project bereich.

Art & Aesthetics is another pairing that is often seen as being interchangeable in the vast literature, with ‘aesthetics’ generally bearing the weight of criticism and judgment. But here too, aesthetics has no object that is necessarily ‘art.’ And, hence uncoupled from ‘objects,’ it also raises questions concerning everyday life. But it too has been instrumentalized—as designer aesthetics or as the ‘visual language’ of art. Most often aesthetics simply becomes a theory of perception. As forms of feeling that explore existential questions, aesthetics might survive in philosophy departments, but rarely as separate programs in high school art programs. The average high school program does not separate out a special category of aesthetics. Rather aesthetics is reduced to the task of interpretation often based on some simplified model of analysis such as that of Edmund Feldman (1970).

Art, design and aesthetics—three master signifiers of art and its education—are put ‘hard’ to work to make them useful concepts so as to retain the viability of art programs, to continue to keep them funded. (I just read that only 4% of New York City’s elementary schools meet the state’s requirement for arts education, according to the results of a city survey according to the *New York Times* (Mendina, 2008). Again, this is a choice without a choice. Because we have to evaluate and *count* in our schools to maintain quality control, art has to be counted as well, and because we must be ac(countable) for the programs we initiate, it is important that our projects be criterion-based, accompanied by their customary evaluative managerial matrix; this has been the way to maintain a level of ‘fairness’ since creativity cannot be counted—which is precisely the point.

**CREATIVITY**

Creativity marks the point of the *fundamental antagonism* through which these three terms circulate in arts programs. Creativity is the supplementary *excess* to the system of art and its education. *It is its surplus value*, presupposed but impossible to assess. We do not *count* it based on fairness, equality, skill level and the like. To do so begins to worry the democratic ideal of equal justice for all, and hence all sorts of clever ways are found to reward it. An ‘obscene supplement’8 to the system provides for its recognition—the artist of the month, contests, special projects, after-school classes, special classes and so on, so that distinction and excellence are conferred. The system is *perverted*, but nevertheless it works. Yet, it is precisely this realm of creative ‘freedom’ that underwrites the three master signifiers (art, design, aesthetics), which is continually being evacuated in the name of ‘utility’
and measurement. In art & design schools, creativity is reduced to innovation of products to further consumer fantasies. In this political environment creativity is unlikely to take place in the classroom. It remains the exception and not the rule.

Creativity is certainly a loaded term. It is nebulous and ephemeral, making it an ‘empty signifier’\(^7\), and this is precisely my point. Creativity and the realm of ‘freedom’ it signifies are \(\text{extimate}\)\(^8\) to the current edifice of designer education. Creativity lies at the heart of the enterprise of art and its education and at the same time it is that which remains unacknowledged and repressed, forming the \textit{fundamental antagonism} of art and its education as art teachers toil to ‘count’ within the broader educational edifice. To identify its significance for re-orientating our endeavors as teachers requires a very brief historical detour so that I might come back to what is at issue here—where should art and its education proceed in a designer world of control societies of modulated movement?

\textbf{HISTORICAL DETOUR}

The first point to be noted is that German Idealism, beginning with Baumgarten but paradigmatically articulated by Kant, established the philosophical claims for an autonomous artistic and aesthetic sphere. Kant formulates two irreconcilable and contradictory claims on aesthetics within his three \textit{Critiques}: (1) From Baumgarten, he maintains aesthetics is a science of sensibility or sense perception given to the subject in the \textit{a priori} forms of time-space as \textit{transcendental categories}\(^9\) (\textit{Critique of Pure Reason}), and (2) aesthetics as feelings of pleasure and displeasure, as judgment of beauty and the sublime in both art and nature (\textit{Critique of Judgment}). Under the first formulation \textit{art} is identified by Kant as a work of \textit{genius} that is able to \textit{add} to Nature. Under the second formulation, the category of art disappears, forwarding the creativity of Nature itself. We have the formulation Art & Aesthetics presented as an antinomy, or in more contemporary terms—‘feeling and form’ as phenomenologically articulated once by Susanne Langer in the 1950s. We also have the kernel of the complex relationship between Man (\textit{sic}) the creator and God (Nature the creator). Whether idealist (as in this case) or materialist philosophies, I will dwell on the implications of what underwrites their complex: creativity.

Schiller, Shelling and Hegel were each to emphasize Kant’s antinomy of form and feeling, of art and aesthetics differently. So, the second point I wish to emphasize is that this artistic and aesthetic idealism should be \textit{politically} understood as the aspirations of a \textit{failed} German bourgeois consciousness (as opposed to the French revolutionary context of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century), of a class \textit{an sich} (in-itself)\(^{10}\) in the Marxist sense, which did not have state power. Friedrich Schiller put the Kantian antagonism in the form of an educational wager, integrating the two possibilities as the aspirations of a rising bourgeoisie. At the end of the fifteenth of his letters from \textit{On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a series of letters} Schiller (1794) states the paradox and makes a promise: “Man…is only completely a man when he plays” [a ‘play drive’-\textit{Spieltrieb}] and that this ‘play’ is capable of bearing “the whole edifice of the aesthetic art and the still more difficult
art of life” (Retrieved from the XV letter, para. 9. Italics in the original). In other words, a specific sensory experience exists, the aesthetic, which holds the promise of both a new world of Art and a new Life for individuals and the community. Art & aesthetics are linked for the transformative power of society. Art as politics and politics as art are intimately related from the start. The fantasy is to maintain a separate sphere of ‘free play,’ outside of ideology, that can be the driving force of change. It is the ‘play drive’ (Spieltrieb), which is capable of constructing the complex of art as well as the complex of life.

Notice that (1) aesthetics as Spieltrieb is the force that is put into play before the creation of art, and (2) that with such a play drive (Trieb), art and society are intimately bound together. This means the questions of politics cannot be escaped. The interrelations of aesthetics, art and politics were always part of this originary contract of Schiller’s educational fantasy to capture the driving desire of this class. In a nutshell, aesthetic play becomes a transformative work of aestheticization, thereby promising to transform the world into its own sensorium as form subjugates matter. Fundamentally, something is transformed, giving it a “form of life.” Life, as it is derivative of Naturphilosophie will become significant to the continuation of this thought experiment.

Let me now lay the claim that Spieltrieb is creativity itself. Furthermore, that this life force is common to (that is, it underwrites) both Man (sic) and God (Nature). This force is the place of ‘becoming’ and not Being. This is creative life as zoë. I shall get back to this crucial point, for this is where Lacan (1977), Deleuze (1983, 1990) and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, 1987) intervene to rethink subjectivity as “it thinks.” For now, however, I need to make the point that creative life must be understood in two forms (as recently theorized by Foucault (1980) and Agamben (1998, 2005) as a corrective)—namely, besides zoë there is bios. To recall, Foucault’s point is that biopower11 is a political technology that regulates life (bios) within designer capitalism, while, as Agamben further argues, there are ‘states of exception’12 where only nuda vita (the bare life of zoë) survives.

As creativity that belongs to form, life is bios. This satisfies Kant’s first proposition and one side of Schiller’s educational program; namely, art becomes life. On this side of the fundamental antagonism, art takes a life of its own by way of the Idea (spirit). As form, it embodies a truth. This is the direction Hegel took, historicizing art as the unfolding of Geist,13 a development that eventually reaches an ‘end of art’—when form is emptied of Spirit. It is ‘dead’ or pedestrian—we can call it a form of kitsch (even degenerate) and Hegel puts this as the artist simply affixing to paper or canvas a trademark. In the Hegelian synthesis, God and Man’s (sic) creativity is reconciled as the unfolding of ‘Spirit’ through Man (sic), politically reconciled as the aspirations of the bourgeoisie. Again, contained ‘spirit’ is bios—Being. Art is harnessed as Nature through the sensibility of form. Heidegger paradigmatically articulates this hermeneutic tradition by way of his summative claim of alethia as the truth of art where Being is revealed by way of a ‘clearing’ (Lichtung). This hermeneutic Romantic trajectory has dominated art and its education through various formalisms developed throughout the 20th century.
Schelling’s Romanticism, his Naturphilosophie, took the opposite tack by dwelling on the creativity of Nature—emphasizing aesthetics rather than art. Nature is harnessed as Art. The bios of aesthetic activity unites the ideal world of art and the real world of objects. Life becomes art, thereby addressing Kant’s second proposition of the antagonism. The revolutionary and emancipatory possibility of the aestheticization of life as a form of renewal leads dangerously towards the possible totalitarian Gesamtkunstwerk. All the arts become integrated so that a myth and a behavioural way of life might be led, as exemplified by Richard Wagner. In distinction, the Hegelian aesthetic led to the “purity” of each art (as exemplified by Horace’s dictum ut pictura poesis (as painting, so poetry), and illustrated by Gotthold Lessing’s Laocoön). Designer capitalism offers a ‘soft’ totalitarianism through the aestheticization of life in consumer and entertainment societies, in the direction of Schelling; that is to say Schelling’s Naturphilosophie presented an uneasy complementarity between Nature and spirit, stressing Nature as the sight of creativity, but the ambivalence is already there with Schiller. There is a danger that corporate networks will continue to integrate the arts toward a more enforced totalitarianism where it becomes increasingly more difficult to hear and see alternative views and representations as the major networks (Bloomberg, CNN, FOX News, TBS, TNT) tend not only to monopolize the news but also reduce it to its lowest common denominator.

MY THESIS THUS FAR

So, in my reading of history, I am maintaining that the fundamental antagonism bequeathed by ‘modernity’ that ran through various revolutions (bourgeoisie and communist) was the antinomy of form (art) and feeling (aesthetics), which played itself out as an impossible ‘synthesis’ (not dialectical) as art becomes life and life becomes art. These two positions do not form a binary, nor can some sort of organicism, through a dialectical resolution, overcome them; rather they are heterogeneous to one another in the form of a ‘disjunctive synthesis’. They are two failed strategies of artistic and aesthetic socio-political incorporation, what Rancière (2004) refers to as “the modern regime of art.” Both positions, stemming from the Kantian antinomy, stress the incorporation of bios as an expression of Being, as forms of representation. These ultimately have political ramifications, in Rancière’s formulation as the “politics of aesthetics” and the “aesthetics of politics” since they distribute who can be seen and heard, and when and where as the symbolic order is aestheticized in a particular way.

So, the first form of art and its education—art becomes life, places the stress on art; it retains its object and hence there is always a struggle for demarcation as to what is and isn’t art and when is it or isn’t it exhausted—dead. While the second form of art and its education—life becomes art, with the stress placed on life, has the opposite problem—the struggle is to have such action (installation, performance, Earth art, most recently ‘relational art’ (see Bourriaud, 2002) and so on) recognized as art, since its form is indiscernible, most often left by traces. The animation of things with ‘life’ leads in the direction of the ‘inhuman.’ There is
‘something’ in the object more than itself that resists full transparency; a moment of uncanniness is reached. *Life becomes art* presents us with a designer world, the revolution of the new, the aesthetization of things; the uncanniness of the ‘inhuman’ is reached in the recesses of digitalization. The limit point of either direction (inhuman/nonhuman) is reached when *life as bios is no longer contained as representation* that functions within the hierarchy of ordered time and space that has dominated the Art & Aesthetics of Being since the Enlightenment. Something else is reached—*life as zoë*, which is the theoretical ground of the Lacanian Real, the place of *jouissance* (enjoyment); transposed into what Deleuze & Guattari term the place of ‘becoming’, of the *affirmative sense of desire*, affect and the *BwO*. All these conceptualizations are *immanent* rather than transcendent *apriori* categories as bequeathed by the Kantian paradigm and its various representational forms based on difference and sameness that have dominated, not only (in) the arts, but continue in their hegemony. I would argue that *complexity theory* is the most advanced in this regard, necessary for designer capital, where the *singular* and the *exceptional* are subsumed under probability theories.

**END OF DETOUR—BACK TO THE QUESTION**

I want now to backtrack, only to recover something so as to grasp it differently. The creativity that cuts across Man (*sic*) and God (Nature) is precisely Schiller’s *Spießtrieb*. It is the dimension of the *Spießtrieb* (of the ‘play drive’), which is of the utmost importance since its time is the *future anterior*—its affects always *follow* experience. *Spießtrieb* is the site of ‘becoming’, the intensities of the drives (Trieb*) and *jouissance*. The mechanics of becoming are therefore material forces, the interplay of matter and energy, the ebb and flow of intensity, literally at the molecular level. *Spießtrieb* should be understood as zoë; that is in its Greek zoological sense of ‘bare life, detached from all particular life forms. Strictly speaking, I am maintaining (following Deleuze) that there is a *heterogeneity in our experience* that is prior to the “I think” (*Critique of Reason*) and to the “I judge,” (*Critique of Judgment*) and therefore to the unities to seeing and saying and the ideas of time and space that the Kantian or transcendental subject presupposes. This pre-subjective ‘heterogeneous sensible’ can be identified as the body of *aisthetics* (this term has variant spelling of its original Greek sense, *Aisthetik*). In Deleuze and Guattari this is theorized as the ‘body without organs’ (*BwO*), which can be linked with the idea of as yet “unthought” in thinking and to an “aesthetic” notion of an “unconscious” element in sensation prior to any Kantian “unity of apperception” in a thinking subject. Hence, *singularity* and *immanence* that identify difference (without the need of sameness since this immediately plunges us into pure difference or difference in-itself) are the new parameters that would answer the rhetoric of my question concerning designer education that remains hegemonically representational.

In Kant, the transcendental, as the play of faculties, is located on the conscious level—the mistakes, doubts and hesitations have been purified and conceptualized. They have lost their ‘becoming’ as it were. It remains at the level of representation.
So, Deleuze calls his endeavor ‘transcendental empiricism’ to suture the failed antimony that Kant laid out, which Schiller (I believe) put into play. He relocates the play of faculties to a transcendental field, which is co-extensive with consciousness in a particular way. He names this “a pure plane of immanence” where the dominance of life—as zoë or as Spieltrieb or as affect or as jouissance—for me these concepts do the same work in different systems of thought—exist in its immanent state of aisthetics as a force. This is where the BwO dwells as ‘bare life’. There is no subject and no object that has dominance over this ‘field of immanence.’ (Sometimes, this immanent field is called “individuation” following the work of Gilbert Simondon (1992, 2007)).

Rather than working from within the subject, we work within the anonymous life of an immanent field. This is precisely how ‘creative’ artists do work. Let me be clear, this is not a ‘creative imagination’ of representation (especially of Romanticism). This already suggests a ‘humane’ level, whereas I have been pointing already to its limits—the inhuman and the nonhuman as uncanny dimensions of human experience. Creative imagination as it is usually thought of in aesthetics is already framed, already working at the level of signification, already interpreting. The ‘world’ is already closed to experience at this level. Deleuze is talking about an a-signifying realm of immanence. Deleuze and Guattari roll out and explore a number of ‘logic of sense’, which continually thwart the usual logics of representation. Rather than either/or, binarism, or conjunctions, they explore a number of disjunctive syntheses where paradoxical formations become possible (and…and…and; either …or …or …). The imagination remains a psychological image of thought, whereas the ‘logic of sense’ throws us into the paradoxes of the unconscious captured by the gerund of verbs that denote ‘becoming.’ Hence, Deleuze uses a ‘logic of images’, which comes closer to the way the chaos of the unconscious might work. So, logic has nothing to do with ‘rational’ thought, rather with the potentiality of multi-logics. At this level it is the intensities and forces of the percepts and affects that are at play. The imagination as a supreme faculty, as Lacan would say, remains at the level of the ego, and is not to be entirely ‘trusted’. It always misrecognizes (méconnaissance). Thus, for Deleuze & Guattari, the work of art has to retain its autonomy and stand on its own—there is a ‘logic’ about it. It is a block of sensations in itself, existing in space and time and in accordance to our experience with it. We have to ‘encounter it’ in our own way. Creativity is therefore not to be found between content and form—that is already representation, but in the contradiction of the unformed and formed. The unformed always returns—eternally. It is the between of becoming that is continually evacuated in our schools, or its surplus value used up in other ways. This is to say, processes always vanish and we only ever pretend that we can evaluate them as part of the product/process rhetoric. Creative becoming is the act of arting. It is ‘useless’ in this sense.

CAN DESIGNER CAPITALISM BE HIJACKED?

What is required is the ‘ruin of representation;’ that is, the overturning of the ordered hierarchy of time and space that governs art, aesthetics and design as we know it by way of an affirmative notion of desire. At the level of representation,
creativity is constantly being evacuated since it does not exist within its parameters. Our field needs to go beyond representational Art & Aesthetics. It needs to leave behind representation as a system of thought based on One and its multiple—the system of counting and aesthetics as a theory of perception, that is of designed form. This refusal has nothing to do with resemblances or likenesses but more to do with the politics of policing the codes that govern a system up to the levels of complexity theory, which are unable to deal with the exception. That said, there is nothing to say that a reorientation towards the actual experimentation of the potentialities of the virtual body (BwO) can happen in our classrooms, but there is also nothing to say it can’t.

Throughout my writings, I have been drawing on the work of Lacan (post-Lacanians like Žižek (1989) and Joan Copjec (1994) who dwell on the psychic register of the Real) and Deleuze and Guattari as sources of a renewed way to escape representation and identity (a bibliography of my work is on my website). Aisthetics as Spieltrieb is assigned a significant capacity for political agency as it did when Schiller had the aspirations of the bourgeoisie in mind. It should not be surprising that the affirmative notion of desire, as a force of life, is best put forward by Nietzsche’s “will to power” as Deleuze re-reads him. In Deleuze’s reading Nietzsche was the artist-philosopher par-excellent who was gripped by a need to invent new possibilities for existence. As a thought-artist, thinking through a “method of dramatization” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 78), he praised art for its ability to magnify falsehood, to raise the world of pure appearance and open ended truth. Nietzsche’s proposition is that art is a ‘lie’ of the highest order (in my Mondofesto I talk about the “powers of the false” in art, the power of the simulacra as Deleuze defines it). Deleuze and Guattari say of Nietzsche that he realized the project Kant had “betrayed at the same time he conceived it” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 52), namely, how to critique faculties from the inside, where aesthetics would have a certain autonomy from Enlightenment thought.

By eliminating a determinate concept (criteria, counting), the creativity of the Spieltrieb enables the potentiality of singularity and its repeatability (in difference). An absence of the determinate concept gives rise to infinite sessions of incomplete determinations, the Nietzschean ‘eternal return.’ We do not know what an art work can do (in advance). And, this is why aisthetics is always operating in the future anterior—what we will have been. The count initially is always deferred. In the Deleuzian-Nietzschean formulation, creativity, experimention and the possibility of transformation happens at the level of the unconscious—what I have been calling in my work the virtual Real (jagodzinski, 2008a, b). The potentials of difference lie here at the ‘virtual’ level, the swarming of images, memories and sensations in chaos. Artistic creativity operates here self-reflexively.

In my work the attempt is to begin to grasp this conception of ‘creative life’ as informing the Lacanian unconscious virtual Real formulating the notion of self-reflexivity, where the “X” stands for the encounter of creativity with art and/or the ‘world.’ I believe that this would introduce a new “aesthetics of politics” and “politics of aesthetics” (Rancière, 2004). Politically the state, in its current neoliberalist form, through its regulations of biopower (as theorized by Foucault, 1980) has led to various
‘states of exemption’ (Agamben, 1998, 2005) where bare life must fend for itself—and here I am referring to a vast body of youth: the dropouts, the at-risk kids, the drugged body, the depressed and suicidal kids and so on.

I end with the political promise of shifting to *aisthetics* and the creative experimentation that Deleuze and Guattari call for. First and foremost is the release of affirmative desire, a desire for more connectivity from the repressive apparatus of representation. This is a call for a different kind of politics whose individual mapping attempts to escape the societal limitations of designer capitalism. In my *Mondofesto* I have called on creative hacking, the disruption of the coding machine—a “jamming style” as one such strategy. Deleuze and Guattari speak of politics as the practice of a *minor art*, as a “becoming minor” in the sense of producing a moment ‘within’ the major. This is, I feel, what the Social Theory Caucus, an organization I helped to found, has accomplished in the larger body of the National Art Education Association. A minor art practice is not political in the usual sense of ‘politics’—it doesn’t necessarily involve itself with politics; rather it works to connect up the different aspects of life, be they individual or social—inhuman and nonhuman—so as to produce new pathways, new relationships for affirmative experimentation but not as forms of resentment. Deleuze and Guattari use the figure of the rhizome as the non-lineal mapping of such connections.

Politics in this sense is a style of life, the way we operate in it and the attitude we have toward it. The self-reflexivity suggests an engagement with what is an ‘ethics of the Real’—an encounter with Otherness of creativity. Political art practice is not just institutional and ideological critique. It involves the active production of one’s own subjectivity with the engagement of our unconscious Real. This is the concept of *self-reflexive artistic creation*, what Guattari once called the process of *chaosmosis*, which I am currently trying to articulate as a way to rethink creativity back into the classroom.

**NOTES**

1. **Designer capitalism**: This is my term for a society of control as initially described by Deleuze and Guattari in different contexts. Please refer to my *Mondofesto* that can be found on my website ([http://www.ualberta.ca/~jj3/](http://www.ualberta.ca/~jj3/)).
2. **Learning to learn**: By this I am referring to the development of school improvement that draws on the rhetoric of the active self-initiated and self-regulated learner exploring in a learning environment where the teacher is a facilitator. ‘Learning to learn’ is meant to enable the student to adapt to the information society. Happiness and well-being are considered part of the permanent communication needed for the social learning process.
3. **Designer managerial curriculum** refers to the rhetoric of “learning to learn” as explicated in footnote 2.
4. **The Mondofesto** is available at ([http://www.ualberta.ca/~jj3/](http://www.ualberta.ca/~jj3/)). The reader is encouraged to read this for a fuller account of the background of this essay.
5. **Fundamental antagonism**: By *fundamental antagonism* or “pure” antagonism, I follow Lacan’s logic of an impossible Real, a *traumatic* kernel of an irreconcilable difference (as further developed by Žižek and Laclau/Mouffe in their work) that has no resolution, but offers two ways to avoid the deadlock of difference as such. It is nuanced from an antinomy and an aporia in the sense of its ontological importance shaping the contradiction of reality as such.
By obscene supplement I am referring to the unseen and hidden illegitimate ways any system can be subverted. In this case, although the democratic rhetoric is that all students are equal, special ways have to be found to reward those who are ‘more’ talented so that a career path might be established early in their schooling.

Empty signifier: This is developed by Lacan and borrowed liberally by Ernesto Laclau (1996); the idea being there is a ‘master signifier’ that ties a system together, but it is ‘empty’ in the sense that it is not questioned, or just the opposite, it can absorb all questions. The paradox of being both full and empty is like a ‘perfect vacuum’ in physics. An ‘empty’ or ‘floating signifier’ is variously defined as a signifier with a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent signified. Such signifiers mean different things to different people: they may stand for many or even any signifieds; they may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean.

Extimate: This is Lacan’s term for appearance of the Real (see Real) in the Symbolic. Jacques Lacan coins the term extimate by applying the prefix ex (from exterieur,) to the French word intime (intimacy). The resulting neologism, “extimacy,” neatly expresses the way in which psychoanalysis problematizes the opposition between inside and outside, between container and contained. The real is just as much inside as outside, and the unconscious is not a purely interior psychic system but an intersubjective structure (“the unconscious is outside”), “Again, the Other is ‘something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me.’” (Lacan, S7, 71). The center of the subject is outside: the subject is ex-centric. The structure of extimacy is perfectly expressed in the topology of the torus and moebius strip (see Evans, 1996, p. 59).

By transcendental categories Kant referred to faculties that are inherent to mind that enable the formation of conceptual knowledge; the way we can know objects before we experience them.

An sich, Für sich, Für Alle: These are the stages of consciousness Marx borrows from Hegel to chart the rising aspirations of the bourgeoisie as they free themselves from the fetters of Church and Royalty. The progress is from in-themselves (still in the shadow of Church and Royalty), to for-themselves (achievement of the state), finally, for all (the hegemony of ideology).

Biopower: For Foucault, biopower is a technology of power, which is a way of exercising various techniques into a single technology of power. For Foucault (1980), the distinctive quality of this political technology is that it allows for the control of entire populations.

State of Exception (Giorgio Agamben): The state of exception invests one person or government, with the power and voice of authority over others extended well beyond where the law has existed in the past. “In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without logos claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference” (Agamben, 2005, p. 40).

In the Hegelian system Geist refers to ‘spirit’, which is simply another name for God. There is a teleological movement of all knowledge towards Absolute knowledge where paradoxically knowledge becomes transparent to itself, as if we have arrived at full understanding of Nature; that is God or Spirit.

Gesamtkunstwerk refers to the possibility of a totalitarian creative state where all artworks lose their specificity, becoming one integrated organic whole. The term is attributed to the work of the German composer Richard Wagner, who attempted this “complete artwork” through his music. The danger of the totalitarianism of such thinking is preserved today by online cyber art projects facilitated by the new technologies that try to be all encompassing by integrating not only various media but also artists and audiences. The best example of this is The Telematic Manifesto: A Hypertextual Collectively-Generated Net Document organized by Randall Parker, available at http://www.zakros.com/manifesto/index.html.

This famous statue has a prestigious place in the history of art, for it was Lessing who argued that artists were unable to realistically depict the physical suffering of victims, an element of ‘beauty’ was always desirable so that the true effects of such suffering would be shielded from the viewer. Poetry and painting each approached this problem differently, the former within the context of time, the latter within the context of space.

Disjunctive synthesis (Deleuze, 1990). This refers to the ‘compossilites’ as the co-existence of paradoxical formulations, for example either...or...or...or; neither...nor; both/and.
BETWEEN AESTHETICS AND AESTHETICS

17 Modern Regime of Art (Jean Rancière, 2004): In his Politics of Aesthetics, Rancière develops three regimes of art: the ethical regime where works of art have no autonomy. They are viewed as images to be questioned for their truth and for their effect on the ethos of individuals and community. Plato’s Republic offers the paradigm example. In the representational regime that followed, works of art belong to the sphere of imitation, and so are no longer subject to the laws of truth or the common rules of utility. They are not so much copies of reality as ways of imposing a form on matter. As such, they are subject to a set of intrinsic norms, a hierarchy of genres, adequate of expression to subject matter, and correspondences between arts. Finally, the aesthetic regime overthrows this normativity between form and content. Works of art are now defined as autonomous, belonging to a specific sensorium that stands out as an exception from the normal regime of the sensible, which then presents us with an immediate adequacy of thought and sensible materiality.

18 Real: This is one of three registers; the other two being Imaginary and Symbolic. This realm is beyond the imagination and language as such. The Real (capitalized) marks the state of nature from which we have been forever severed from our entrance into language. Only as neo-natal children were we close to this state of nature, a state in which there is nothing but need. A baby needs and seeks to satisfy those needs with no sense for any separation between itself and the external world or the world of others. For this reason, Lacan sometimes represents this state of nature as a time of fullness or completeness that is subsequently lost through the entrance into language. The primordial animal need for copulation (for example, when animals are in heat) similarly corresponds to this state of nature. There is a need followed by a search for satisfaction. As far as humans are concerned, however, “the [R]eal is impossible,” as Lacan was fond of saying. It is impossible in so far as we cannot express it in language because the very entrance into language marks our irrevocable separation from the Real. Still, the Real continues to exert its influence throughout our adult lives since it is the rock against which all our fantasies and linguistic structures ultimately fail. The Real for example continues to erupt whenever we are made to acknowledge the materiality of our existence, an acknowledgement that is usually perceived as traumatic (since it threatens our very “reality”), although it also drives Lacan’s sense of jouissance (see footnote, 19).

19 Jouissance. This is one of Lacan’s key terms. It refers to the energy of the libido, but in excess. It is ‘beyond’ the pleasure principle. The hallmark of jouissance is excess, which is why I see this as the life force of Zoë. It is an expression of drive energy—erotic and/or aggressive—that goes beyond the limits of social rule and restraint, that goes beyond the rational calculus of the subject’s interest, beyond pleasure and even beyond self-preservation.

20 Desire (affirmative): In Deleuze (1990), the drive is given a positive valence as in Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’.

21 Body without Organs (BwO): In Deleuze’s (1990) work, the term initially refers to the “virtual” dimension of the body. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), every “actual” body has (or expresses) a set of traits, habits, movements, affects, etc. But every “actual” body also has a “virtual” dimension, a vast reservoir of potential traits, connections, affects, movements, etc. This collection of potentials is what Deleuze calls the BwO. To “make oneself a body without organs,” then, is to actively experiment with oneself to draw out and activate these virtual potentials. These potentials are mostly activated (or “actualized”) through conjunctions with other bodies (or BwOs) that Deleuze calls “becomings.”

22 Immanent (Immanence) refers to becoming ‘within’ a system; that is an emergent category within that system. A priori refer to the Kantian categories of mind as explained in footnote 7.

23 Complexity Theory: Complexity system is a system composed of interconnected parts that as a whole exhibit one or more properties (behavior among the possible properties) not obvious from the properties of the individual parts. A system’s complexity may be of one of two forms: disorganized complexity and organized complexity. In essence, disorganized complexity is a matter of a very large number of parts, and organized complexity is a matter of the subject system (quite possibly with only a limited number of parts) exhibiting emergent properties. Examples of complex systems include ant colonies, ants themselves, human economies, climate, nervous systems, cells and living
things, including human beings, as well as modern energy or telecommunication infrastructures. Indeed, many systems of interest to humans are complex systems. (Cybernetics and chaos theory would be variants.)

24 Triebe (Drives): There is no easy summation here. I have pulled two statements that give the sense of the drive, which exists in the space between Nature and Culture, mediating through the body of biology (as instinct) and the symbolic order that serves as a ‘civilizing’ function. The relation of the subject to jouissance, to the satisfaction produced by the drive, is for Lacan a very intimate one, and on an unconscious level it is often a relation the subject wants to know nothing about, let alone change. Let us recall Freud’s image of the mind as the site of an ongoing archeological excavation, the deepest layers being all but inaccessible to consciousness. We might speak of a subject ‘in thrall’ to, and ‘enthralled by’, the drive. This notion of servitude, ‘thralldom’, indexes the degree of attachment that bonds the subject of the drive to the Other. The subject is happy. The want-to-be is on the side of desire. But on the side of the drive, there is no want-to-be. What Freud calls the drive is an activity, which always comes off. It leads to sure success, whereas desire leads to a sure unconscious formation, namely, a bungled action or slip: ‘I missed my turn,’ ‘I forgot my keys’, etc. That is desire. The drive, on the contrary, always has its keys in its hand (see Jacques-Alain Miller, 1996).

25 Singularity and immanence refer to the “plane of immanence” in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). By this they mean the plane of activity that goes on prior to any categories of mind that Kant had hypothesized. The difference, as they put it, is between the “molecular” and “molar” levels of human consciousness; the molar being the apriori Kantian categories of the mind.

26 Simulacra (Gilles Deleuze, 1990). The notion of the simulacra has become a prominent concept in a postmodern digitalized culture as the question of representing reality has become more and more of a contested zone, i.e., the belief that a sign can refer to and be exchanged for guaranteed meaning. However, the notion of the simulacrum is an historical phenomenon predating our society, always centering upon the image and its efficacy. Stemming from the Latin root simulare, “to make like, to put on an appearance of,” simulacra raises the worth of the copy in relation to the original. An image, having internalized its own repetition, begins to call into question the authority and legitimacy of the original model. In a social order where the reproduction of images and goods has become a standard economic practice, the meaning of simulacra has become crucial when questions emerge what is and is not the genuine article, like the knockoff designer goods sold in various parts of Asia. It was Ridley Scott’s 1982, now classic sci-fi film, Blade Runner, based on Philip Dick’s Do Androids Dream of Electric Sleep, that popularized the idea of simulacra and simulation. In the Los Angeles of 2019 it has become virtually impossible to distinguish fake from real, nature from its technological manufactured replication, including human beings (the Replicants), in contrast to Star Trek’s replicator machine that was still confined to reproducing inanimate matter as opposed to living organisms. On a more profound level, the off-world Replicants in the Blade Runner return not to mingle with earthlings but to free themselves from their pre-programmed deaths. As simulacra they wish to assert their difference, and not their sameness. Their imitation, or mimickry acts as camouflage to enable them to reach a higher state. Their journey is only a stop over to an unmasking so that they might take over the earth or leave it behind to see things, which no human can ever hope to. These forms of the simulacra raise all kinds of profoundly aesthetic, political, and ethical issues. Such futuristic projections already bring us to the tensions the postmodern age that simulacra bring.

REFERENCES


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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of education can be generated that helps push back designer capitalism with its colonization of the eye?
2. What are the possible ways teachers can open creativity that is not being hijacked by the task of instrumentalism in our education system?
3. What artistic events (installations, performance pieces, video art) exemplify strategies that open up new worlds other than a capitalist designer aesthetic?
4. How much are you as artist and teacher of art willing to throw your weight to change the way art and its education is being colonized today by corporate global interests?

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