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Visuality in Teaching and Research: Activist Art Education

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This article explores the role that visuality plays in critical thinking. Starting with the role of language in art criticism, this paper traces the ever-growing role that visual communication is playing in everyday communication. It is argued that 21st century critical thinkers in teaching and research need to be opened to visual communication as a significant aspect of academic and educational work. Classroom examples of art criticism and sociological research where visual strategies were emphasized are offered as first efforts to implement the author's theoretical position. It is argued that challenging schools and the academy to question their basic reliance on words and numbers is a form of activism and an essential contribution that art educators can make to learning and research.

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Prologue

The images that introduce this article are representations assembled by the author. They are based on visual works of critical analysis produced by students exploring social issues or art paradigms. They are placed before the written text to encourage the reader to engage with them as mindful communication before they are framed by the text that follows.

Introduction

A glancing survey of art education research publications reveals something significant about the field. While publications with a readership focused on the classroom teacher are highly visual, those publications that present cutting edge research in art education rarely present images. The subject matter of the academic publications clearly focuses on "issues and research in art education" (*Studies in Art Education*, 2000) but does so almost exclusively in the form of words and numbers. On those occasions where images are employed they typically serve as illustration or simple evidence (as in the cases of children's drawing associated with research in child development), or as decoration (as in the case of most cover art). Schematic representations in the form of conceptual maps and diagrams are a third typical use of images in art education publications.¹ While illustration and the graphic representation of the spatial relationship between written concepts or statistics are certainly a legitimate aspect of visual communication in research, I am not alone² in wondering about the role that more complex and fundamentally visual forms of communication can play in research. This paper explores the possibility that the critical, visual work that we have learned to do as artmakers, is precisely the appropriate tool for the 21st century research method.

¹For a study that documents the increasing use of graphic representations in research see: Elmore, P., & Woehlke, P. (1998).

²See, for example: Kosslyn, S. (1994); Solso, R. (1994); Stafford, B. (1996); Strømnes, F. (1980); Tufte, E. (1990); Taylor, L. (1994) for inquiry into the role that visuality plays in disciplines ranging from cognitive psychology, and mathematics through architecture, to anthropology and art history.



Figure 1. Student visual criticism of Hans Haacke's *Safety Net*
© Hans Haacke / VG BILD-KUNST (Bonn) / SODRAC (Montreal) 2000



Figure 2. Student visual criticism of Eugene Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus*, Giraudon/Art Resource, NY



Figure 3. Student Self-portrait

I'm just an ordinary country boy, content with my life not having to worry about being stereotypes. I chose to look this way, because I feel confident in myself and like to project that to other people. By taking away the chair with wheels it takes away the, "Oh! I wonder what happened to him?" It makes me look independent rather than relying on a mobile chair!



Figure 4. Student Self-portrait

When people look at me, I want them to look up at me - not because I think that I am better than them but because I have earned respect throughout my life. I want people to see me and say, "Wow - there's someone who did something with their life." In this picture I am portraying a proud, white, upperclass American woman in a respectable, powerful position.

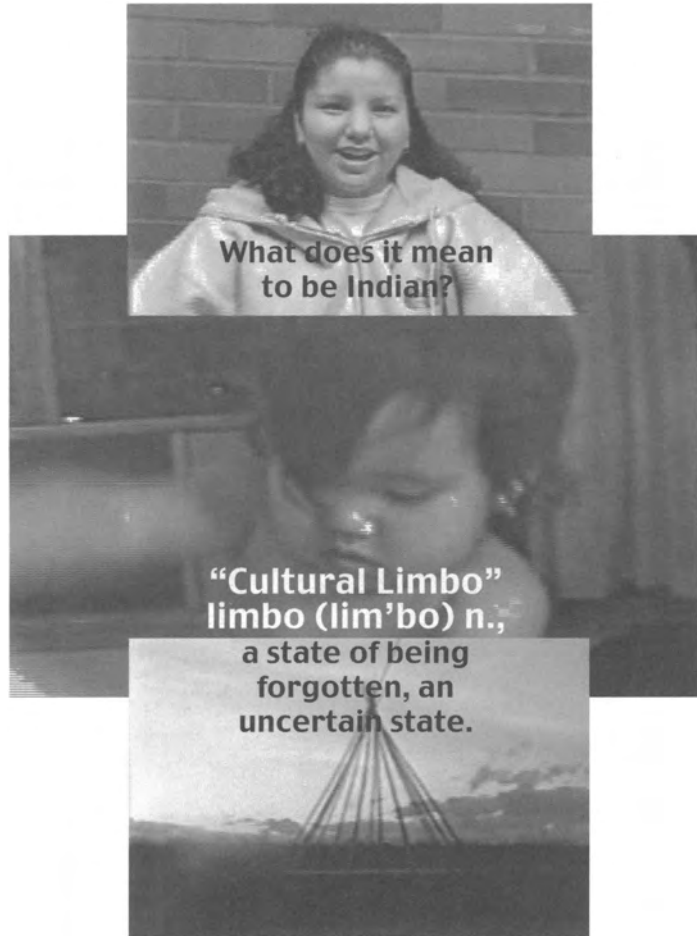


Figure 5. Scenes from *Cultural Limbo*

Art Criticism, Visuality, and the Interpretation of Images

Ever since Plato (1994) barred artists from his utopia, people have used language to communicate their perceptions of the meaning and significance of works of art. Over the centuries both the form and content of art criticism evolved in ways that paralleled the developing conventions of discourse. Stafford (1993, 1996) argues that the move toward rationality and the structuring of knowledge so that it conforms to the rule of language as epitomized in the Enlightenment projects of categorization, had an inverse consequence—the reduction of images “to misleading illusions without the guidance of discourse” (Stafford, 1993, p. 2). While the romantic notion of the individual’s capacity for insight and creativity can be traced throughout European modernism, Winckelman’s project (Potts,

**1 in 4 college
women will be a**



**the RED ZONE
is the period between the first
day of class and thanksgiving**



**have committed acts
that met the legal definition
of rape**

Figure 6. Scenes from *A Thousand Shades of Grey*

1994) of bringing system to art through the study and writing of its history, though grounded in part in an impulse to make art accessible to more people, is nonetheless a product of the dominant rationalism that Stafford describes. It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the literature of the past several hundred years surrounding the concept of the aesthetic experience (Reimer & Smith, 1992), and the practice of criticism (Barrett, 1996) has been aimed at trying to frame our experience of the visual within the rule of language. Cromer (1990) represents the ongoing

tradition of art criticism well when he states that, “art criticism has become the storytelling aspect to art and aesthetics and transforms visual experiences into the verbal expressions that can be shared with others” (p. 9).

Like educators generally, art educators have taken the important, but somewhat conservative path of adapting well-established critical strategies for the classroom. Feldman’s seminal chapters on art criticism in *Varieties of Visual Experience* (1987); Cromer’s (1990) tracing of Stephen Pepper’s world hypotheses and its four holistic critical processes (p. 37); and the body of work over the past decade and a half in response to the notion of Discipline-Based Art Education (Wolff & Geahigan, 1997) have all contributed to the structure and perceived significance of “*talk* [my emphasis] about art” (Feldman, 1987, p. 453) as a fundamental part of art educational practice.

There is, however, a shift evident that has significance for art education and the academy at-large. Berland, Straw, and Tomas (1996) suggest that “within cultural life, a tension between theoretical work and artistic practice has long been observed. Indeed, the desire to resolve these tensions has been a principal impulse shaping the history of artistic work and criticism over the last century” (p. 4).

Stafford (1993, 1996) describes an early modernist struggle to manage the messiness of the visual in medical and scientific research that resonates with contemporary teaching and research traditions. She describes an 18th-century search for system and “science” that seemed possible through the order and elegance of numbers and words. Stafford writes about the enlightenment because of her interest in the present, her recognition of the social history behind current tendencies in research and education. In part, Stafford uses her explication of an earlier time as a series of parables aimed at offering the contemporary reader the opportunity to reflect on the possibility of reconciling our burgeoning, technologically enhanced visuality with traditions of critical knowing and communication. Since at least the appearance of semiotic and feminist theory as they were applied to film in the mid ‘60s,³ the blending of epistemology and politics in the critical analysis of images has been under consideration. In the academy, post-positivist discourse has led to a focus on difference, particularly in qualitative research, that has been empowering in acknowledging the details of diversity in the people, images and objects that have been studied and, to some extent, in those conducting studies. Stafford, however, is critical that “after thirty years of mining the theories of Foucault and Derrida... those theoretical veins have thinned” (Stafford, 1996, p. 202).

In drawing connections between the 18th- and 21st-century visuality, Stafford focuses on current brain research⁴ into the role imagery plays in discovering analogy. For Stafford, developing a comfort with analogy is the bridge to reconciling the empirical positivism of the enlightenment with the politicized relativism of the postmodern period. For her, visual images are the “place” where analogy flourishes.

Analogy...makes visible things desire to be together. Simultaneity is its stock in trade, achieved by inlaying a collage of equivalences

³ See *Screen* magazine as a foundational source for tracing the application of semiotic, psychoanalytic, and feminist critical paradigms to the visual aspects of film.

⁴ “Only now, with the integrative neuroscientific philosophy of Paul and Patricia Churchland (pp. 11-19), “the body-minded brain” of Antonio Damasio (1994, pp. 223-244), or Owen Flanagan’s insistence on “the missing shade that is you,” (1992, p. 102) is the iron grip of a univocal language-like prototype for cognitive activity starting to erode. (Stafford, 1996, p. 8)

rather than violently inserting foreign material into an equally impermeable matrix. A sort of pictorial haiku, the mosaic technique invites comparisons, since recognizing differences forms a prelude to discovering likenesses. From the suturing graphics of Callot, Rembrandt, Goya, Blake and Bewick to the intarsia of Netscape, discovering connections involves just such a balancing of internal tensions with evident contradictions. (Stafford, 1996, p. 209)

Ladwig and Gore (1994) identify two foci in activist research. One is research that seeks out knowledge and positive change in support of groups experiencing systemic oppression because by race, gender, or class. The second kind of research activism involves critical questioning and exploration of alternatives to the existing academic/research culture. This second form of activism is less about solving a specific problem (applied activism?) and more about sustaining a healthy criticality toward research culture (basic activism?).

I would argue that Stafford's linking of early modernism and postmodernism, combined with the growing cross-disciplinary literature on visuality lays a foundation for what I consider "activist" inquiry into art educational research culture and teaching. This fundamental shift toward the visual in our modes of communication is increasingly important in art criticism, education and research in general. Anticipated by the printing press, the past 50 years have seen a communication explosion resulting from the burgeoning systems of mass, electronic and visual media. While the beginnings of these media often emphasized text or dialogue, the more complex task of reproducing and distributing images has been mastered to the extent that today the mass media are dominated by the image. The nature of this change is technological, cognitive and political. Arguably the media give us "new eyes" which

scan much like our old eyes do, accumulating fragments that we construct into a world view, but our new eyes have millions of sockets and the scanning, while often familiarly unconscious, is largely ordered by the many institutions and social forces that produce the mass media. (Emme, 1999, p. 35)

Can we afford to continue to relegate images to the intellectual margin as merely emotional self-expression when it is clear that they play a significant role in daily communication? The purpose of this paper is not a reductionist variation of an Orwellian slogan, "images good, words bad!" Quite to the contrary, visual communication, whether it is art criticism, or cultural analysis, is a messy and unstable form of knowing which functions most effectively as an adjacent and sometimes overlapping "other" form of expression and cognition. It is in that complexity that visual sociologists (Prosser, 1998), and visual anthropologists (Sherman, 1998) find a potential for new insight. In the case of research on human subjects, the possibility of achieving a level of validity through triangulation by investigating across the communication modalities of language and image (Prosser, 1998) is encouraging researchers to go beyond our current emphasis on language-based description and analysis.

The Politics of Interpretation in Teaching and Research

While in current usage *criticism* implies the use of language, the most forceful and commonplace connotation of the word “criticism” is that it describes a negative judgment. In his text on photographic criticism, Barrett (1996) assembles an array of well-known critics such as Rene Ricard, Lucy Lippard, and Michael Feingold, to argue that most criticism is really directed at the more positive goal of appreciation. Unsupported judgments, or judgments that are presented as carrying so much authority that they are above analysis, are pedagogically destructive. At the same time, the opposite extreme, striving for a Disney-like “happiest place on earth” appreciation of visual culture, even at an elementary level, closes the door to using criticality in the classroom to engender a constructive activism that must be at the heart of education in a democracy (Beyer, 1996).

Much of contemporary critical discourse moves beyond the simplistic notions of criticism to theories of representation that combine visual means of knowing and expression with an awareness of the socio-political function of images. Mitchell (1994), explains:

Suppose we thought about representation, not in terms of a particular kind of object (like a statue or a painting) but as a kind of activity, process, or a set of relationships? Suppose we de-reified the thing that seems to “stand” before us, “standing for” something else, and thought of representation, not as that thing, but as a process in which the thing is a participant ...Representation understood, then, as relationship, as process, as the relay mechanism in exchanges of power, value and publicity...[In this context] our responsibility toward representation is relatively well defined. We know it to be interpretation. (p.420-422)

By simple extension, this article calls for the process of visual representation to be acknowledged in research. This destabilization of some of our assumption about knowledge, meaning and thus about research is argued to be politically significant enough to be considered a form of activism.

The student projects that follow were developed, in part, to explore the viability of teaching art criticism and critical sociology as visual processes. In both cases, the student critics respond to images and ideas by either manipulating those objects of study, or by producing visual works that were intended to serve as complex and carefully analyzed critical responses to ideas, objects and lived experience. Neither cluster of projects is research per se. The visual criticism works are an exploration of critical paradigms in the tradition of the theoretical discourse that is so central in the art world today (Berland et al. 1996). The ISM projects (described later), in various ways, use visual variations of methods derived from participatory action-research (PAR) which “strives to end the monopoly of the written word, [by] incorporat[ing] various styles and procedures for systematizing new data and knowledge” (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991, p.9). While the ISM projects fall short of authentic participatory action research because of the power inequities built into a classroom environment, the issues explored and methods are instructive.

The literature of critical pedagogy describes an education that is linked with student engagement in social change. Johnson (1993), for example, anticipates

an education that is critical... self-conscious, revisional, creatively open to the different and unknown. Which is not to say that the traditional/past/known of any culture should be forgotten or abandoned-an undesirable and, really, impossible goal-but that it should be reread, reframed...and reinvented in relation to the nontraditional/present/unknown. (p.253)

In considering visual criticism I share Johnson's (1993) sense of urgent necessity. This is partially because of the growing role that visuality plays in structuring society. It is also because of the institutional resistance to the meaningful, critical engagement with images as communication within, not just as the subject of, academic research.⁵ As Cunat (1996) suggests, democratic teaching "invites reflection on all the structures, systems, and routines in which the learning community finds itself engaged" (p. 149). bell hooks (1994) and others focus on the reification of a traditional knowledge base in the academy's current form. She calls upon the professorate to acknowledge "the nature of knowledge as process" (Florence, 1998, p. 100). I have argued elsewhere (Emme, 1999) that in the conceptually three-dimensional environment of the mass media and world-wide web, linear arguments about "rationality" will be supplanted by more "navigationally" appropriate concerns with "viability." The productively critical destabilization of concepts like "research," "teaching," and "learning" requires a meaningful alternative conception of mental and social processes⁶, not just an anarchistic poke.

The Visual Criticism Project

It seems to me that a natural beginning place for the problematization of exclusively verbal representations of critical thought is in the practice of art criticism itself. Does criticism directed at art objects or images in the mass media need to be limited to words? Is it possible that the habits of mind developed in the practices of image making can serve as viable tools for the considered analysis of visual culture both in the gallery and in society at large? Does a curriculum have to be sequential and bear the authorial stamp of the instructor to be educationally significant?

While engaged in my first extended post-secondary teaching position at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, I had the opportunity to teach a course that explored issues surrounding the assessment of student artwork. Assuming that authentic assessment should at least in part be grounded in the practices of art criticism, a significant portion of this class involved an introduction to the many strategies associated with contemporary art criticism.

Toward the end of the course, I wanted the students to bring their visual literacy and their recent readings in criticism together to explore the potential for meaningful response to visual work. In designing this assignment I was inspired by the appropriative and recontextualizing strategies

⁵See for example: Alexander, K. (1991); Ballesteros, S. (1994); Greeson, L., & Zigarmi, D. (1985); Kosslyn, S. & Osherson, D. (1995); and West, T. (1991) for further inquiry into imagery and cognition.

⁶Lather (1994) offers a unique example of visual research in her analysis of Agee and Evan's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. "Fifty years after its original publication [Lather claims] that their self-scrutinizing, non-normalizing production of knowledge is generative of research practices that, by taking the crisis of representation into account, create texts that are double without being paralyzed and that implode controlling codes." (Lather, 1994, p. 42). Fittingly, *Let us Now praise Famous Men* is a portfolio of images followed by a highly reflexive ethnographic essay.

of Sherrie Levine (1987) and Krystof Wodiczko (1999). In Levine's case, her photographic reproduction of Edward Weston's photographs and Ludwig Kirchner's paintings (Levine, 1987) not only extended Duchamp's critique of the artworld but also commented on her place in relation to the canon of Western art. Wodiczko's projections onto monuments such as the sculptures of Washington and Lincoln in the U.S. capital suggested the strategy of projection as a means of recontextualizing artwork and the critical potential of visual commentary on existing works. With these critical manipulations in mind, I selected slide reproductions of artworks with individual students' aesthetic and critical affinities in mind. In a sense I was engaging in a form of visual criticism myself by selecting images that I felt would prove most provocative for each individual. The images were distributed with the instruction that they should be projected. The instructions further specified that the students use one of the critical paradigms we had studied and that the projection should serve as an act of visual criticism based on key assumptions from that form of criticism.

One student, an experienced teacher as well as a successful nonrepresentational painter, was given a slide of *The Safety Net* by Hans Haacke. Haacke's image juxtaposed an appropriated news photo of Ronald Reagan with a statement attributed to Reagan in response to a reporter's question about poverty in the American capital. I anticipated that for my student, Haacke's image would represent everything that was wrong with art in the early '80s and '90s. The image was dominated by text. Where there was a visual element, it was figural, and not even original. In the juxtaposition of text and image the clear motivation was political rather than traditionally aesthetic. In puzzling over his response to the image, the student chose to project the slide onto a piece of raw canvas. By choosing to re-present the Haacke work on one of the primary symbols of traditional fine art, the student both acknowledged his formalist critical assumptions and left open the opportunity for viewers of his criticism to consider both the student's modernism and Haacke's ideological/aesthetic strategies (Figure 1).

A second student was given a slide of *The Death of Sardanapalus* by Eugene Delacroix. This graphic representation of the mass execution of a sultan's concubines, or, depending on your perspective, this striking, exotic study of the female nude, has been extensively critiqued. It was, however, new to the student. This student had also struggled with the very personal, critical implications of feminist criticism we read in the class. Disturbed by the image but uncomfortable with her critical choices, the student and I discussed possible approaches. I would like to be able to tell you that we had a detailed discussion about the concept of the male gaze as discussed in feminist criticism, but ultimately I left her with the question, "Who made it and who was his audience?" This student projected *The Death of Sardanapalus* on a baseball cap, right where you would typically put the patch with your favorite ball team, truck, beer, or lewd slogan (Figure 2). In one deft move, this student had amplified the

Delacroix nudes' status as object, commodity, trophy and spectacle to be shared by the cap wearer and friends. While this student may have struggled with the specific language of feminist criticism, as well as being uncomfortable with its implications in her life, she was able to recognize and visually communicate a compelling critical position.

Fiske (1989) makes a distinction between popular culture and consumer culture. Where consumer culture is what we buy, popular culture is what we do with what we buy. He represents as both common and important the act of treating commodities, "not as... completed... to be accepted passively, but as a cultural resource[s] to be used" (pp. 10-11). Fiske further describes the way we use objects, particularly when that use transgresses the uses intended by the manufacturer or owner, as a kind of cultural guerilla warfare. The traditional "art-in-the-dark" approach to viewing images, typical of many art history classes, sustains the distanced preciousness of the image, and the authority of the artworld. By making the reproduction of an artwork an object of critical play, as described above, the authority of the work, the critic and, ultimately both the academic and economic branches of the artworld are opened up to critical review.

ISM⁷

A more complex experience in visual criticism was carried out at Central Washington University, a rural comprehensive university in the American Pacific Northwest. An (ISM) grant, sponsored by the Center for Public Media, allowed me to work with colleagues from the English and Sociology departments to develop a yearlong interdisciplinary course. The course was designed so that students and faculty could explore social issues (ISMs) from three distinct academic perspectives (American sociology, rhetoric, and media studies/art education). The grant required two significant video projects with the goal of encouraging students to effectively use visual and rhetorical means to communicate critical social insights. A significant secondary goal of the project was to challenge university faculty to question the self-imposed disciplinary and administrative limitations placed on interdisciplinary study at their institution. Both the class and the faculty were a diverse group in every sense. From the perspective of participatory action-research, the students were not a cohesive community. The power relationships between the students, faculty and the university were not balanced and the program was not designed to shift those relationships. Like PAR, however, the challenges to both student and faculty were intended to research, document and communicate insight into the problems of power within and around the class as a community.

From a pedagogical viewpoint the course was a special challenge because it was genuinely team-taught. All three instructors were in the class and involved throughout the course. My role was to introduce a group of first-year university students to visual processes and criticism. My colleague from Sociology was to introduce students to basic sociological concepts as they apply to American society. My colleague from the

⁷The -ISM (N.) Project was conceived in 1994 by the "Roads Scholars", six full time field consultants who traveled around the country for the Campus Outreach Opportunity League, Inc. offering technical assistance, training and consulting to college community centers. During their site visits the Roads Scholars discovered that diversity was the most important and volatile issue on students' minds, and that the number one need was for new, more engaging approaches of addressing diversity. It was out of these insights, and based on the experiences of students, that the -ISM (N.) Project was born and has now become an independent project of the Institute for Public Media Arts. (<http://www.ibiblio.org/ism/>)

English department was to introduce rhetorical strategies to help the students effectively communicate a critical position based on the visual and sociological concepts being explored in the class.

Self-portraiture

Our first visual work, which followed discussions on the sociological concepts related to identity, involved each student creating a photographic "ideal self-portrait." From my perspective the assignment was inspired in part by Cindy Sherman's early film stills series (1990), where she created black & white self-portraits representing stereotypical images of women. The assignment was also influenced by Jim Goldberg's portrait series *Rich and Poor* (1985) where he photographed residential hotel tenants and the upper class of San Francisco. Each of Goldberg's portraits included handwritten comments by the subjects about themselves and their lives. The juxtaposition of text, image, and culture in the final series, while pointedly ironic, was a rich environment for viewer response. This approach was also influenced by the visual ethnography of Sprague (1978) who used self-generated images to visually represent and compare his and the Yoruban culture.

The weeks preceding this self-portraiture assignment had focused on personal identity as an aspect of sociology. How we come to understand ourselves, our "potential," and our place in society because of individual experience and socially imposed categories such as race, class, gender and ability were discussed. Students were encouraged to collect stereotypical images from the media that represented or misrepresented them as preliminary to creating a self-portrait that would show these individuals the way they wanted to be seen.

Having been encouraged to dress according to their ideal and bring props if they wanted, individual students posed themselves in a studio style environment. Using a video monitor to preview their portrait and fellow classmates as crew to adjust lighting and camera angles, the student became both the subject and the photographer. When the images were processed the students were asked to write briefly about the self-representations they had created. In particular they were encouraged to keep in mind the language associated with identity that had been explored in the introduction to sociology.

One student, who had become a paraplegic in the year before the course, created an image of himself that "predated" or subverted his accident (Figure 3). Posed in a chair with no indications of his physical challenges, he wanted people to see him as being like anyone else. In viewing the photograph with the text, we are thrown into self-critical imbalance when our first visual impressions are undermined as the student, in the last lines of his writing, reveals his handicap. We are tricked into recognizing that both impressions of the student contain some truth about him, and about our assumptions about him.

A second student had herself photographed in a formal black dress with the camera at about knee height looking up. She positioned an

American flag behind her and in her writing explained that as an upper middle-class White woman, she believed she was deserving of respect (Figure 4). Her unambiguous and somewhat startling declaration was a challenge to the vaguely liberal assumptions dominant in the class. In the content and composition of the image and her comments, this student clearly identifies what she perceives as her birthright. In both these examples the students both consciously visually represented themselves, but also positioned us, the viewer. These visual choices should be understood as rhetorical strategies designed by the student to communicate a clear and forceful message.

Video Diaries

These self-portraits were followed by video diaries, a requirement of the grant that were intended to serve as extended explorations of identity. In this second project some students explored the ways in which they fit into sociological categories such as race, gender or physical ability while others chose to do very personal explorations about relationships within their family. Methodological antecedents for this include the phototherapy work by Spence (1986), Bach's (1998) use of photography in her research with adolescent girls, and the autobiographic videos of Sadie Benning (1990).

A First Nations woman (Figure 5) produced a particularly powerful video diary. She blended images of a pow-wow she had attended accompanied by traditional singing with images of her daughter, her home, and her own image as she talked to the camera. In her tape she revealed that she had native heritage that could be traced across six different peoples. She described feelings of being an outsider at pow-wows because she could not speak the language of that tribe even though her childhood home was in that community. She also described how she felt like an outsider when she was with her husband's Hispanic family even though she could speak that language. She concluded by talking about how she hoped she could instill pride in her daughter for all the parts of her heritage. For me, the most powerful moment in this student's work was when her mother, who had traveled from a reservation 40 miles away went into the editing suite with her daughter so she could be the first person to view the finished tape. That moment spoke very powerfully of the traditions that this student and her mother shared.

This piece reveals some of the complexity of the relationship between words and images. The images and words in Figure 5 were selected and composed by me from five frames from the student's video. They are intended to represent the balance between the visual and verbal elements in the student work. The balance between primarily visual moments such as scenes from the pow-wow or the student's infant daughter at play are juxtaposed with images of her simply facing the camera and talking. Each shot sequence is also framed by text screens with definitions, questions or credits. One of the powerful qualities of video is its capacity to simultaneously communicate on multiple levels. The brain's capacity to simultane-

ously perceive and analyze information in a variety of sensual forms (Solso, 1994) is at the heart of current developments in cognitive research that carries with it important implications for the role visuality can play in learning and research.

Video Exposition

The students' final video projects, influenced by the traditions of action research (Greenwood, 1994), were collaborative efforts. Each student was guided through an initial exploratory process intended to help him or her identify and clarify a personal concern related to a social issue. After the students presented their initial ideas the group self-selected into three production teams each of which was committed to producing a video on a specific issue that had been generated by one of its members. One of the goals of the class was to establish a functioning critical community.

Two of the final videos focused on gender, the first on women, body image and the media, the second on date rape as an aspect of the university experience. The third video focused on the connections between the blatant racism of the past and what the students called the "subtle racism" of the present. The students who produced the video on date rape, along with including text-based and voice-over information about the issue, also commissioned a performance by two students from the University's drama department. The male and female student performers each created a "getting ready for the date" scene where their expectations for themselves and their date are represented (Figure 6). The students avoided any depiction of the actual date and its consequences, not out of prudishness, but because they felt that adding another depiction of sexual violence, even as part of a critical exploration, would be counter-productive.

Each group was mixed in terms of race and gender. In some cases the diversity of the groups clearly became a challenging aspect of the group dynamic in the video production process. The fact that the group who produced the tape *Racism Yesterday and Today* shared in the process despite very different degrees of "ownership" of the issue probably represents an important outcome for the course. In every case, students blended an exploration of sociological research on-line and in the library with analyses of visual media in print, on-line and in film. Their finished works might well be described as expository video in that they each presented a point of view on an issue using both images and words as their evidence.

From a visual perspective the first still-image work and the video diary were an introduction to a visual vocabulary that the students used for their last and most complex video project. While some students, particularly those who had a lifetime of experience of the consequences of discrimination, were somewhat cynical about the potential for their videos to "change the world" most acknowledged that they had found the experience personally challenging and exciting. The videos were shown to students on campus as well as to other students across the country who

were also involved in the ISM project. The tapes continue to be presented to students and faculty by the three instructors as a way of helping others to both consider the ISM topics presented, but also to revisit their own assumptions about how activism and visuality might play a role in a good education.

My representations of the students' work need to be considered here. While the self-portraits are very similar to the students' original works, the composite images of the diary and expository works each involved significant decision-making on my part. In each case I focused on the edits as evidence of student decision-making. I captured editorial decisions as stills and combined those fixed pieces in a collage form that is intended to communicate visual sequence and narrative. While media educators recognize the moments of juncture in film editing as "jolts" (Morris, 1985) that play a significant role in visual communication, feminist film theorists would describe them as "signs of suture" (Silverman, 1986) or signs of the constructedness of the film message that are normally hidden in classic Hollywood cinema. From either perspective it is in those editorial moments that meaning is made and communicated. I would argue that the collage-works presented here, because they focus on the students' editorial moments, function as meaningful visual analysis and interpretation of visual data and represent an innovative methodological strategy.

Implications for Art Education

The classwork described in the second half of this article is my initial effort at addressing some questions that should be fundamental for art education. In what ways are knowing, analyzing, understanding and theorizing visual? The 18th century's

chief aesthetic theorists—Dubos, Caylus, Diderot, Falconet, Addison, Shaftesbury, Hogarth, Reynolds, Winckelmann, Lichtenberg—drew an important distinction that is largely forgotten by twentieth-century verbally shaped disciplines. With great sophistication, these thinkers differentiated between imagery used as equivalents to discourse (or as illustration) and as an untranslatable constructive form of cognition (or as expression). (Stafford, 1996, p.27)

By remaining, as much as possible, in the perceptual domain, the visual criticism assignments described earlier attempted to directly approach the materiality of the artworks. Both in the artworks as slide reproduction and in the students' visual response, the challenge was to represent the embodiment of theoretical paradigms. These works beg the question, "In what ways does our capacity to communicate visually allow for patterns of thought that are cumbersome or impossible as words or numbers?"

The ISM projects called on students to visually research, represent and reflect on their identity. Much like the typical thematic development in an elementary social studies curriculum, these students moved from a focus on self to society producing representations that triangulated around their identity. While the course was not strictly participatory

action-research, the work of self-portrayal certainly produced the kind of insight and movement toward change that PAR is designed to support.

In *Power and Method* (Gitlin, 1994), an anthology of essays focused on political activism and educational research, Ladwig and Gore (1994) are given the somewhat unusual task of writing a closing chapter that critiques the collected works that precede it. In their critique they point out that the various authors, focused as they are on research designed to describe and support positive change for various oppressed communities, largely neglect any critical analysis of their research methodologies.

If a wider community of educational researchers is to help legitimate and encourage these newer forms of research, however, the challenge remains [to] extend understandings of power and specifying methodologies in ways that make them even more persuasive and useful to new communities of scholars and activists. (1994, p. 237.)

Along with legitimating art education by being attentive to the research traditions in education, it is our activist task to challenge the educators to learn to look.

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