REPRESENTATION BY DESIGN

MINING THE SOURCE

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Question: How are individuals represented in contemporary media (past/present)? Does representation mirror or shape cultural ideas and expectations?

- How can “mining the source” of representation influence artistic production and critical thought?

- Specifically ideas regarding:
  - Identity
  - Belonging
  - Marginalized/Centralized
  - Power/Strength/Weakness
  - Similarities/Differences
Examining representation is not an “original” idea. There have been many published studies throughout the 1970’s, 80’s and 90’s. However, it is often overlooked in the contemporary classroom.

This unit of study was imbedded into drawing classes, and has been used to scaffold student inquiry regarding media representation and the construction of identity.
BRIEF OVERVIEW

• Define: Visual culture (seeing versus looking)
• Semiotic overview
• Brief (selected) timeline of representation in media 1900’s through present
• Relevance for deconstructing representation in contemporary society
• Visual Artists as exemplars
• Integration into curriculum
AN INQUIRY
FROM LOOKING TO SEEING

Inquiry based education is a vehicle which can engage students in critical thought.

“The one who is asking the questions and making the choices is the one who is learning”

Students were asked to explore, identify and evaluate representation
DEFINING VISUAL CULTURE

Visual culture a hybrid between anthropology and art history.

It involves the process of examining the **cultural value** over **aesthetic value** of images.

Shift focus from what is seen, and instead focus on the **process of seeing**.

Visual culture is interdisciplinary- and incorporates anthropology, social studies, history, and visual art.

(James D. Herbert Critical Terms for Art History, 1996, pg 454)
Art History: studies culture and artifacts from around the globe

Visual Culture: Interested in examining the impact of material/commodity culture.
VISUAL CULTURE: THE SOURCE

- Photography
- Advertisements/billboards
- Film
- Print
- Television
- Video
- Movies
- Digital images
- World wide web
1.6 trillion photographs are taken annually (compared to 100 billion in 2000)
350 million images are uploaded to Facebook every day.
100 hours of video are posted on youtube every minute

HOW MANY ADS ARE SEEN IN A GIVEN DAY?

It’s difficult to know the number exactly, it depends on who we are, where we live, where we go, and what we do.

Consider labels as you walk through a grocery or department store, the ads that appear when watching television, pop up ads when surfing the internet, billboards when driving down a road, and even the labels on clothing.

On average we view somewhere between 3,000-20,000 advertisements in a given day.

Source: http://www.fluiddrivemedia.com/advertising/marketing-messages/
STRATEGIES

How can we make sense of the saturation of images?

• **Strategy ONE:** plunge deep into the center of commodity culture, examine, identify, and deconstruct visual signs.

• **Strategy TWO:** Select fine artists which respond and exemplify
It’s valuable to examine representation in media as a visual sign which reflects cultural values and expectations.

• Interpreting art and images as a sign, or a text, or even a subtext comes from Semiotics.

• You may ask...what exactly is semiotics?
Semiotics - Semiology is from the Greek word semeion, which means sign. Semiotics consists of understanding the visual signs within a culture, and understanding how they operate.

Signs can be written, verbal, or non verbal

Examples: words (text), pictures, photographs, advertisements, and even behaviors.
**SEMIOTICS**

**Signs** are dependent upon **context** to make meaning.

**Semiotics asks:**
What makes “it” mean something?
What determines the meaning?
What is the sign?
How is it signified?
What is the level of meaning?
The **signifier** is the **sign**, the tangible **denoted** item we see, hear, or experience.

And the **signified** is the message which is **connoted**, suggested or implied

Example: in our culture, the color **blue** is a visual sign which connotes/signifies coolness, sadness or melancholy
A construct is the intellectual, rather than physical product of a culture. (Lois Fichner-Rathus, Understanding Art, 2014)

1. Constructs are the shared sense of the way things should be.
2. Constructs govern the way men and women interact.
3. Cultural constructs can maintain stereotypes, ideologies, and the power of those in control.
STEREOTYPES
SHAPE OR MIRROR CULTURE?

Question: Does mass media, stereotypes, cultural/gender expectations shape our understanding of self or do they mirror reality?

Gender role stereotypes are one dimension for how humans interpret the world.

Concern: Stereotypes start out as abstractions which become crystalized into well defined expectations.

Representations are not neutral

(Macklin, Kolbe 1984)
Deconstruction began as a literary movement in the 1960's it underscores the understanding there is not one unifying truth.

Deconstruction is a philosophy predicated on the idea that forms or images can be understood as signs indicating meaning. However, it’s intent is to separate a form/image from it’s accepted meaning and to challenge or undermine the meaning. It creates conflict which generates multiple meanings or no meaning.
LOOKING AT AND DECONSTRUCT ADVERTISEMENTS FROM “THEN”

It is often easier to see prevailing constructs for males and females when examining advertisements from the past.

The original unit begins with the turn of the 20th century, for the purpose of this submission, I have started with the 1950’s, which is often identified as the pinnacle of gender inequality.

Many of the ads selected are “offensive”, a tool to aid in understanding paradigms.
## Dominant Visual Signs Seen in Advertisements from the 1950’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations of feminine</th>
<th>Expectations of masculine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• She is defined by physical attributes</td>
<td>• He is Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Her body is in need of hygiene</td>
<td>• He holds economic power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• She is the caretaker, homemaker,</td>
<td>• Supports nuclear family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• She is a consumer, empowered by purchases</td>
<td>• He olds the psychological strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nuclear family</td>
<td>• He is an authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dependable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Often detached</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DOMESTICITY
PREDEFINED SOCIAL ROLES

http://wwiiaging.blogspot.com/2011/05/women-in-wwii.html
Look this ad over carefully. Circle the items you want for Christmas. Show it to your husband. If he does not go to the store immediately, cry a little. Not a lot. Just a little. He’ll go, he’ll go.

CIRCLE ALL THE QUALITY DOREMEYER APPLIANCES YOU WANT!

Husbands:
Look this ad over carefully. Pick out what you, wife wants. Go buy it. Before she starts to cry.

Dormeyer

http://www.businesspundit.com/10-most-sexist-print-ads-from-the-1950s/
“PLEASE, DAVE... PLEASE DON’T LET ME BE LOCKED OUT FROM YOU!”

Often a wife fails to realize that doubts due to one intimate neglect shut her out from happy married love.

A man marries a woman because he loves her. So instead of blaming him if married love begins to cool, she should question herself. Is she truly trying to keep her husband and herself eager, happy married lovers? One most effective way to safeguard her daily feminine hygiene is by practicing complete feminine hygiene as provided by vaginal douche with a scientifically correct preparation like "Lysol." It is also a way to banish the misgivings that often keep married lovers apart.

_Germs destroyed swiftly_

"Lysol" has amazing, proved power to kill germside on contact... truly cleanses the vaginal canal even in the presence of mucous matter. Thus "Lysol" acts in a way that makes itself like soap, salt or soda never can.

Applying daintiness is assured, because the very source of objectionable odors is eliminated.

_Use whenever needed!_

Yet gentle, non-corrosive "Lysol" will not harm delicate tissue. Simple directions give correct douching solution. Many doctors advise their patients to douche regularly with "Lysol" brand disinfectant, just to insure feminine daintiness alone, and to use it as often as necessary. No greasy aftereffect.

For feminine hygiene, three times more women use "Lysol" than any other liquid preparation. No other is more reliable. You, too, can rely on "Lysol" to help protect your married happiness... keep you desirable!

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http://www.businesspundit.com/10-most-sexist-print-ads-from-the-1950s/
DOMESTICITY
MOTHERHOOD-MALE AUTHORITY

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**Image 1:**
- A cartoon of a man with a somber look, holding a catcher's mitt, saying, "Why ruin the evening, Mother?"
- The caption reads: "Housework on hot days is bound to leave you tired and cross. To make evenings with your family the Best Part of the Day, try this pleasant treatment for "nerves." Every afternoon, get into the tub with a cake of New Ivory Soap."
AUTHORITY

According to repeated nationwide surveys,

More Doctors Smoke CAMELS
than any other cigarette!

Doctors in every branch of medicine were asked, "What cigarette do you smoke?" The brand named most was Camel!

You'll enjoy Camels for the same reasons more doctors enjoy them. Camels have cool, soft tobacco, pack after pack, and a flavor unmatched by any other cigarette. Make this incredible must-try offer:

Came for 30 days and see how well Camels please your nose. How well they suit your throat. How they soothe your mouth. You'll see how enjoyable a cigarette can be!

THE DOCTORS' CHOICE IS AMERICA'S CHOICE!

For 30 days, test Camels in your "I-Zone" (I for Throat, I for Taste).

www.StrangeCosmos.com
1960’S
NOTION OF FEMININITY
The feminist movement, a CONCEPTUAL movement which aligned with the civil rights movement. Across socio-economic, cultural, and ideological backgrounds women united to share their (similar) concerns.

This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object -- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.”
1970’s
SEPARATE ROLES, BUT EQUAL REPRESENTATION
“THEN” CONTINUED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Younger married</td>
<td>• Continues as voice of authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unemployed</td>
<td>• Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seen in traditional occupations</td>
<td>• Seen in diverse occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Found in home- product users</td>
<td>• Found outside home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frustrated/dependent and in need of assistance</td>
<td>• Product experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Women are expected to be alluring</td>
<td>• Offering help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Males make the important decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Males are expected to protect and provide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Men regard women primarily as sexual objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Journal of Marketing Research, authors, Ahmed and Janice Belkaoui 1976
“A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman's presence . . . defines what can and cannot be done to her.”

John Berger, Ways of Seeing”
http://www.businesspundit.com/10-most-sexist-print-ads-from-the-1950s/
The Chef does everything but cook — that's what wives are for!

I'm giving my wife a Kenwood Chef
Keep up with the house while you keep down your weight.

Don't lose vitality while watching your weight. Like right, eat right. Get vitamins and iron from TOTAL. Now TOTAL has more vitamins than any other cereal. A convenient breakfast gives you 100% of the recommended daily adult vitamin and iron requirements—plus a delicious crunchy taste.

TOTAL watches your vitamins while you watch your weight.

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