

Press. "There is nothing outside the text" is found on p. 158 of this text while the second quote on pg. 139 can be found on p. 168. On pg. 142 the words *Andenken*,

Verwindung, and *Aufhebung* are left standing alone. Their use can be found in Gianni Vattimo's, *The End of Modernity*, Polity Press, 1988. The term *Virwindung* indicates ... a 'going beyond that is both an acceptance [or 'resignation'] and a 'deepening', while also suggesting both a convalescence, 'cure' or 'healing' and a 'distorting' or 'twisting.' (xxvi). Jim Collins, *Uncommon Cultures*, Routledge, 1988. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989 and *Reading the Popular*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. Michel de Certeau *Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984

The notion of the Oikoumenical is something I develop in "The Poetics of Green Esthetics: Situating "Green Criticism" in the Postmodern Condition (pp.32-44), in C. Congdon and D. Blandy's (Eds) *Pluralistic Approaches to Art Criticism*. The Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991. On ecological design I highly recommend Victor Papanek's (1978) *Design for A Real World*. London: Verso Press, 1974. Feldman's AIM statement can be found in *Art Education*, 1982, Vol. 35, #2. Kobena Mercer's quote comes from his article, "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics. In *Identity Community, Culture, Difference*, Edited by Jonathan Rutherford. Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, p. 57. The Nietzsche quote that opens the essay comes from *Twilight of the Idols*, in *A Nietzsche Reader*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, p. 145. For the idea of eco-speak I should like to thank my unknown viewer for this brilliant insight.

that's all folks!

Commentary

Media, Environment, and Art: A New Agenda for Art Education

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Much has been written about what an education in art should be for. We might think more about what an education in art should be against. We live in a world where objects, environments, ideas, and feelings are manufactured for, and merchandized to, people defined as consumers rather than citizens, spectators rather than participants, and users rather than doers. Despite the proclaimed democratic ideals of education and the celebrated independence of the artist's vision, art education has contributed little to the education of independent minded, informed, and empowered human beings.

One premise for this paper is that the mind is neither a passive material to be shaped, nor an empty vessel to be filled. Students begin with active minds, eager to engage and make meaning of the world around them. This capacity is underestimated by a great deal of what is presented to them as education and as art education. They can think in more abstract and complex ways than most education systems make provision for. They are capable of comprehending more sophisticated issues, concepts and images than much current practice now affords. But those capacities can atrophy. Students can become accustomed to pedestrian ideas, gimmicks, and cleverly produced, but uninspired and crassly motivated imagery. They can learn to require little from themselves, and to expect little from the world except entertainment.

Another premise is that, in the latest rush to improve education, attention has been focused on important but incomplete elements of the total responsibility of education. The arts, and the critical sort of literacy that they should promote in a world that is increasingly visual and mediated, continue to receive inadequate attention. The fault is largely ours. To some degree it can be attributed to our obsession with "fine" art (although we do not make this distinction in the art of other cultures). To some degree, it can be attributed to the principled, but tragically mistaken position of "discipline based art education" that art education need not (indeed, should not) extend beyond an education about the subject matter of art itself.

A third premise is that too many of us remain naive and old-fashioned about contemporary media. Our next-of-kin in the performing arts tend to think of media such as video as a means for recording and broadcasting live events. In education, generally, media still have the must connotations of "audio-visual" - extension cords and burnt out bulbs. In art education, the potential remains unrealized in the case of newer art forms, newer technologies, and the mediated environment. Powerful media for creating, manipulating, enhancing, and inventing imagery are there. The potential of these techniques for exploring complexities, abstractions, and subjectivity is largely ignored, unexplored or unrealized. Parenthetically, our unfortunate tendency in education to "field strip" experience into fragments for learning emphasizes knowledge, comprehension, and application of predigested information, but does little to challenge the levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation that need to be developed for an independent exploration and grasp of new experience.

Consider: the influence and the potency of mass-produced and pervasive cultural imagery and forms and the exponential growth of the technologies associated with them. An education in art must include learning to wrest those tools for independent purposes, as a means for creating art, even as a subject matter for art; learning to manipulate, combine, and transform those tools to (re)create images, forms, and events that can represent individual (or ethnic, or cultural) experience and that can enable active participation in a common society and environment.

Consider: the ease with which contemporary media can provide readily available and easily manipulated images. An education in art must move beyond accomplishing and appreciating the traditional hand hewn image, learning to use contemporary media to present (or re-present) personal concepts of the "real" contemporary world.

Consider: how the individual has been overwhelmed by the potent sophistication and the sheer plausibility of the mediated visual experience and the purpose to which it has been put. An education in art must those learning to be more than a passive component in the process; learning to step outside of a mediated experience, appreciating its potency, but attaining a psychic distance from it and a reduced vulnerability to it.

Consider: the discord between the mediated environment and the biological space/time environment that we evolved in. An education in art must include learning to distinguish between the two, identifying consonances, dissonances and resonances between the two environments and the ways that they mingle to influence, enhance, and confound perception, concept development, and the way we grasp the world.

Consider: People adrift in sea-changes of pace in events, complexity of issues, and magnitude of consequences. An education in art should contribute to a capability for understanding the world as multi-dimensional situations and multi-dimensional events within (and among) different perspectived societies.

This barrage of concerns can be organized around two larger and complementary issues for art education:

1. Contributing to a more critical and objective literacy in contemporary media and their uses, and therefore a reduced vulnerability to their potency.
2. Contributing to a multi-dimensional/meta-perspectival grasp of the world, and to the advancement of individual

initiatives and purposes based in that grasp that can be enhanced through the thinking associated with the dynamics of contemporary media.

Sight with greater insight, layered richness, and coherent diversity are cherished characteristics of a capability in art. That capability is possible in all human beings, but it can be suppressed by cultural influences, by the means used for representing and communicating ideas, and (too often) by educational methods. That capability is valued in people who have maintained and developed the ability to perceive the multi-dimensional nature of the world.

Effective strategists, sculptors, decision makers, pilots, problem solvers, architects, scientists, artists, comedians, designers and mathematicians often possess an "outsight", an ability to grasp an apparently insoluble difficulty, a dilemma, a contradiction, an opportunity, or a conflict, by stepping out of, and moving around, the structure of the situation; turning it end-for-end and inside out, not restricted by narrow perspectives, or by the way that they "ought" to see it.

Linear thought may be largely a function of speech and writing. Problem identification, investigation, solving, and decision making are approached as a chain of "if/thens". Typically, thinking is based on a two-dimensional appreciation of a situation, developing patterns from perspectives that may be limited and that may create unnecessary paradoxes and illusions.

In flat plane thinking, appearance can vary dramatically with perspective. Since perspective plays an important role in determining perception, concepts may be formed from inadequate, or inappropriate percepts. In turn, inadequate, or inappropriate concepts may be employed for comprehension. Inadequate comprehension usually results in inappropriate action. We cherish individual perspectives in many aspects of life (this is certainly a tradition in art), but the selection, acceptance, advocacy, forcing, or instrumentation of a narrow perspective can, and usually does, inevitably create conflict with other, similarly limited, perspectives.

Multi-dimensional, meta-perspectival thinking can grasp the integrity, or reality of a form or situation; appreciating, but independent of, mutually exclusive points of view. Perceptions and resulting concepts can be more independent and objective, therefore less easily distorted, or unduly shaped. Comprehension can be, in fact, comprehensive and action can have a fuller, more intelligent base.

The condition, which might be termed a capability for meta-perspectives, transcends the pre-Copernican notion of "both sides" of a question. The range of applications can be manifest in such concrete and immediate situations as a child learning to create clay sculpture that is truly "in the round", or in the comprehension and resolution of complex social situations and political issues.

The ability to perceive the three dimensionality of a form, or a situation is poorly addressed in education (whether it is sculpture in art, or an issue in social studies). That ability represents a challenge to contemporary education as preparation for contemporary experience. And that ability can be transcended by the ability to recognize that a situation, or a form (any "object", in fact) is a four-dimensional event; a flow of form, process, and meaning. What we think of as a situation, or object, is only a "still" in that flow. Recognizing many dimensions is not a new idea. Encouraging the ability to develop multi-dimensional models for thought and action may be. Developing that ability should be a natural outcome of an adequate concept of an education in art.

But, what we consider to be our basic grammar, the principles and elements of composition, does not adequately address elements and principles that are peculiar to, or most significant to, multi-dimensional art (and multi-dimensional experience). For example, a four dimensional artform like video creates visual events, emphasizing time, change, and motion for creative transformation as principal elements of organization. The familiar elements and principles of composition are experienced rather differently in two, three, and four dimensional art. For example, we achieve some success in encouraging a grasp of the mutual influences of colour in simultaneous company on a two

dimensional plane. But their dynamics and significance when they occur on adjacent, or opposite planes of a three dimensional form, and their constant flux in four dimensional art, have received no equivalent attention.

Time, motion, and change, principal elements of our experience of life, also comprise the mediated reality that is represented and manipulated by our electronic environment. This is understood, at varying levels, by those who shape that environment as art, or shape that environment for other purposes.

In multi-dimensional, meta-perspectival thinking, time is plastic. It can be forwarded or reversed, linear or cycled, extended or collapsed, and presented in a "logical or illogical" order. In multi-dimensional, meta-perspectival thinking, motion may be experienced on a two dimensional plane, or in a three dimensional space, at varying paces and rhythms, and from changing perspectives and degrees of proximity. Change may be uniform or relative, abrupt or gradual, occasional or continuous, and with transitions that are objectively "logical or illogical".

A grasp of multi-dimensional art requires an ability to discern and analyze and interpret a flow of imagery and a continuity of form. To develop that grasp, it must be retrievable to the intellect by using facilities for actually re-viewing it, or by enhancing faculties for recollecting it. To analyze a visual situation, it must be possible to manipulate it by retarding it, extending it, or reconfiguring it. To interpret a flow of meaning it must be perceived as an event, however complex, that can be reflected on and reconstructed.

Contemporary media can stimulate diverse ways of perceiving the same phenomenon. They can present several versions for comparison, contrast and comprehension. they can develop rich and complex imagery and ideas in a relatively brief time. They can enhance normal visual experience (and therefore perception, and conceptualization) by the magnification of scale, by the annihilation of space, and by the transformation of time.

Contemporary media can present our surroundings, not just in the way that the physical body can move around in it, but as the eye and mind can experience it. Contemporary media can manipulate, enhance, and invent imagery to explore abstractions and subjective aspects of experience. Of course, this is (or should be) true of all art forms. But, contemporary media provide the ability to capture or construct sophisticated imagery, allowing us to devote precious time to their dynamics and significance.

We assert the fundamental nature and pervasive influence of art. We agree on the importance of teaching cultural contexts for art and for the role that art can, and should, play. But that is usually directed toward the art of other cultures. We teach a very narrow band of the spectrum of the art of our own society of cultures.

We can agree that art writ large is the collective vision of a society and the means developed for creating that vision. One of the dimensions of an education in art is learning about that vision; another dimension is learning to use the means by which that vision is fashioned.

Just as art is impelled to move beyond celebrating the past, to informing the present, and to shaping the future, art education is both a heritage and a legacy. It passes on our collective experience of the world; it can present us with ways to think about our individual experience of the world; and most important, it can provide us with the means for significant participation in shaping the future of the world.